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Educator Perceptions of Self-Efficacy and Preparedness to Work in High Poverty Schools

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Poverty adversely affects academic and non-academic educational outcomes due to unfavorable conditions in the home, school, and community (United States Government Accountability Office [USGOA], 2018). Additionally, impoverished students face homelessness, hunger, trauma, and chronic stress, all of which negatively impact academic success. These factors impact a child's ability to learn and process information, and therefore, impoverished children are the least likely in our nation to become educated (Parrett & Budge, 2020). Furthermore, the way educators perceive and define poverty is important because it influences how they respond to students and families living in poverty (Robson et al., 2021; Steinberg & Krumer-Nevo, 2022).

Of any school-based factor, teachers have the most significant effect on student achievement (Stosich, 2016), and there is a need for access to highly qualified and credentialed teachers to close the equity gap (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). Educators often feel unprepared to teach students who come from impoverished backgrounds, and 40-50% end up transferring to schools with higher socioeconomic status within the first five years of teaching (Bazemore-Bertrand & Handsfield, 2019). In their first few years, teachers working in high-poverty schools are 6% more likely to leave these schools than are those working in low poverty schools (Bettini et al., 2021). Additionally, the most effective teachers who transfer from a high poverty school often choose to move to a low poverty school, consequently intensifying inequalities in access to effective teachers in high poverty schools.

Educators' perceptions of preparedness to work with children who live in poverty are critical to student academic success because these perceptions affect the ways in which educators meet the needs of students in high poverty settings. A significant gap, though, has been identified in the literature regarding educators' perceptions of their own preparedness to work in high poverty schools, specifically related to teacher self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy has the greatest impact on student achievement (Yoon & Kim, 2021). Teacher self-efficacy is the "belief in their own capabilities to facilitate desired student outcomes" (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 3). Often, educators' perceptions of preparedness to work in a high poverty setting do not align with the needs of the actual students who live in poverty (Wronowski, 2018). However, research on educators' perceptions of their own effectiveness in high poverty schools and what professional learning is needed to best support these teachers and their students is lacking.

The purpose of this study was to determine to what degree educators felt prepared to work in high poverty schools. This study sought to determine the type of professional learning educators need to prepare them to support students who live in poverty. The overarching research question that guided this study was: To what degree do educators perceive they are prepared to work in high poverty schools? The following sub-questions guided this study: 1. What is the level of self-efficacy of educators who work in high poverty schools?; 2. What is the relationship between the self-efficacy of educators and their perceptions of their own preparedness to work in a high-poverty school?; 3. What is the relationship between educators' years of experience, role in education, highest degree level, content area taught, and their perceived level of preparedness for working in high-poverty schools?; and 4. In what areas (curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment) do educators perceive themselves as well prepared or not well prepared?

Review of the Literature

Theoretical Framework: Transformational Leadership and Deficit Theory

The study of educator perceptions of preparedness to work with students who live in poverty was grounded in both transformational leadership and deficit theory. Transformational leadership theory is based on the emotions, ideals, ethics, standards, and longstanding goals of the leader (Northouse, 2018). Additionally, this theory focuses on empowering others and leading for change. Furthermore, a transformational leader has a clear vision, is a great role model, and is adaptable to the needs of the individuals in the organization. Transformational leadership involves an explicit sense of purpose, the use of strategies that provide opportunities to work through difficult problems, and accountability through measurable success indicators (Fullan, 2001).

An organization cannot change unless the individuals within it change (Hall & Hord, 2006). Transformational leadership is paramount to making sure positive change occurs within an organization by developing leadership goals, providing ongoing training, and conducting frequent check-ins with teachers and support staff. Transformational leaders integrate creative insight, remain persistent, are sensitive to the needs of others, and have the ability to inspire others (Duraku & Hoxha, 2021), and research shows that school leaders have the greatest impact on teacher efficacy and their work performance (Hartinah et al., 2020). Seminal work, which still holds true, indicates that school leaders with a transformational leadership style need to provide specified individual support for professional learning to positively impact teachers' sense of competence and self-efficacy (Geijsel et al., 2003).

Deficit theory suggests that educators may blame a child's socioeconomic status when a child fails in school instead of supporting the child and finding ways to help them succeed (Valencia, 2010). Deficit theory was defined as "the idea that minority students labor under intellectual handicaps because of their family structure, linguistic background, and culture" (Valencia, 2010, p. 10). Teachers often believe that students who come from impoverished backgrounds are less likely to graduate compared to their more affluent peers (Lombardi, 2016). For example, teachers often believe impoverished students who do not have access to the internet and a computer in the home, a place to study, and parents whose income is above the poverty line are less likely to perform in school. This form of thinking around students in poverty does not hold educators accountable for the performance of impoverished students. Rather, it places the blame for academic failure entirely upon a child and their economic status. Teachers who have high expectations and high standards for their students are more likely to have a positive impact on students. Through transformational leadership, teachers are more likely to break free of the deficit theory thinking model regarding their impoverished students by developing the ability to inspire students and their families to raise their academic expectations despite the adversity of poverty (Duraku & Hoxha, 2021).

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can influence one's ability to set goals, make decisions when faced with challenging situations, and persevere in certain situations (Woodcock et al., 2022). Self-efficacy is based on an individual's belief in their capability to organize and perform action required to produce desired outcomes (Woodcock et al., 20223). More specifically, teacher self-efficacy is the "[teacher's] belief in their own capabilities to facilitate desired student outcomes" (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 3). Teachers with high self-efficacy are confident in the success of their strategies for classroom management and instruction, and they enjoy more job satisfaction

while displaying a positive impact on colleagues and students in their workplace. Teacher self-efficacy becomes stronger when teachers are provided with a climate that is supportive and conducive to innovative risk-taking in the school setting, which can be strengthened by evidence-based practices such as professional learning communities (Liu et al., 2021). Teachers display more innovation when they have higher levels of self-efficacy, and teachers with more years of experience often possess higher levels of self-efficacy than those with fewer years. Thus, it is important to foster professional development to support teachers in maintaining high levels of self-efficacy.

Professional Learning for High Poverty and High Achieving Schools

Excellence and equity have been discovered as aligned goals for high-performing, high poverty schools, where excuses are never made or accepted for a student's level of performance (Calkins et al., 2007). "Leaders and educators in high performing, high poverty schools were willing to examine data and asked questions in order to peel back the layers of the ways in which schools systemically perpetuated underachievement" (Parrett & Budge, 2020, p. 66). In the United States, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program measures the concentration of low-income students within a school (The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020a). High-poverty schools are those where more than 75% of the students are eligible for FRPL (The NCES, 2020b). When educators work together, they can eradicate destructive policies and practices, such as inequitable funding, to improve student achievement (Gorski, 2017). Student achievement is also made more feasible when educators work to provide an environment where families feel they belong, thereby extending the support that students enjoy on their way to academic success (Epstein, 2018). Professional learning is the means by which many of these ideals can be made into a reality for educators and their work environment.

Professional learning has been a topic of great importance amongst educators for years; however, such efforts often have failed to prepare educators for what they face in the classroom (Moore et al., 2021). Furthermore, effective professional learning is a fundamental component in making changes to school practices and student learning because "the most effective professional development activities for increasing teachers' knowledge and skills include those that [provide] teachers with opportunities to actively engage with each other around curriculum and instruction" (Moore, 2021, p. 3). This means that effective professional learning should be well planned, organized to benefit teachers, and ongoing rather than a one-time event. Professional learning must be at the forefront of building learning communities for teachers to deliver high-level instruction to students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Effective professional learning is positively changing the professional and classroom practices of high poverty school personnel if the work is collaborative, purposeful, and sustainable in nature (McBrayer et al., 2018). Therefore, school leaders should intentionally plan for others to provide instructional support for teachers, especially new teachers (Hopkins et al., 2018). Continuous improvement should be the goal of every educator so that student needs are addressed, instructional strategies are shared, impact is regulated by rigorous program evaluation, and professional learning becomes embedded within the ordinary fabric of the institution.

Effective professional learning should focus on specific teaching and learning strategies relevant to the teacher, the content area, and the type of students in the classroom (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional development standards for educators have been implemented in many professional learning curriculums, and in these standards, the quality of

staff development is based on administrators being knowledgeable about instructional practices, the school culture being led by administration with a coaching mindset, and learning communities having access to needed resources (Moore et al., 2021). Yet, professional learning can be hindered by the following barriers, "inadequate resources, lack of a shared vision, lack of time for implementation, failure to align state and local policies, dysfunctional school cultures, and inability to tackle and assess the quality of professional development" (Moore et al., 2021, p. 6).

Professional learning needs to be focused on student learning and engagement, which include curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment (McBrayer & Melton, 2018). Instruction should have a "direct, systematic approach" no matter the student's socioeconomic status, and when assigned the appropriate instruction level, all students can demonstrate success (Carter, 2000, p. 29). Differentiated instruction in the classroom is critical to student success. A teacher must be knowledgeable of each student's strengths, needs, and interests to best plan for differentiation (Goddard & Kim, 2018). Differentiation must be implemented with purpose and must be adaptable to student needs. Differentiated instruction requires time and reflection to be implemented with fidelity (Tomlinson, 2022), and assessment initiatives should guide instruction to impact student achievement (Cunningham, 2006). Additionally, administering and examining appropriate assessments is a way to uphold the schools' goals and promote high-quality instruction because it ensures students are on the correct instructional level and demonstrates mastery of the standards as well as provides alignment for instruction (Carter, 2000). High-quality assessments and evaluations of the assessments' output demonstrate the level of implementation and fidelity in which a curriculum was taught. Because of this, it is imperative that teachers monitor assessment initiatives and that administrators take ownership to disaggregate the data in an effective manner.

Teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement, which indicates a need for professional learning to provide educators with the knowledge and skills needed for meaningful instruction. Poverty negatively impacts academic performance due to the challenging conditions in children's homes, schools, and communities. One of the most important factors in raising student achievement is a highly efficacious teacher who is well-trained in their content area and understands the unique needs of impoverished students. To help curb teacher attrition rates, all teachers in high poverty schools should be provided with professional development opportunities that are purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable to best serve the unique needs of students in poverty.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study included school leaders, teachers, and support personnel employed in the four-county Target School Districts (TSD), a pseudonym, at the elementary, middle, and high school levels during the 2022-2023 school year. Approximately 235 school leaders, 3,127 teachers, and 400 support personnel were invited to participate, with a participation rate goal of 30%. A recent study found that the average response rate for online empirical studies utilizing a survey was 34.2% (Poynton et al., 2019). Personal demographic information was not collected.

Instrument

This descriptive quantitative study merged a modified version of the Perceptions of Preparedness Survey (PPS; Darling-Hammond, 2006) coupled with The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to create a single instrument, the *Educator Perceptions of Preparedness and Self-Efficacy in High Poverty Schools*. Overall, the survey included a total of 53 questions and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. *The Educator Perceptions of Preparedness and Self-Efficacy in High Poverty Schools Survey* (based on the original work of Darling-Hammond, 2006) and in a rendition of a similar study (McBrayer & Melton, 2018), was categorized into three parts to include Section One-Part A, curriculum and pedagogy (C), Section One-Part B, differentiation (D), and Section One-Part C, assessment (A). The question stems from Darling-Hammond's (2006) survey were adapted to reflect the perceptions of preparedness of educators in the high poverty school setting rather than in a generalized manner as was with the original survey. For all survey items, the portion of the stem reading "the teacher is prepared" was replaced with "the educator perceives themselves as prepared to," and each item was modified to refer to students in high poverty settings. For example, one item reads, "*The educator perceives themselves as prepared to help high poverty students in a K-12 setting to present the concepts, knowledge, and skills of the discipline in ways that enable high poverty students to learn".* A 4-point Likert scale was utilized for the survey, with 3 meaning very well-prepared with strong supporting evidence, 2 meaning well-prepared with limited supporting evidence, 1 meaning need more preparation, and 0 meaning not evident.

Section Two of the survey was used to determine the level of self-efficacy of educators in high poverty schools. This section of the survey contained 10 questions about self-efficacy to work in high poverty schools. A 4-point Likert scale was utilized from GSES with 3 meaning exactly true, 2 meaning moderately true, 1 meaning hardly true, and 0 meaning not at all true in regards to perceptions of their own level of self-efficacy for each question in the section. This section yielded a final composite score with a range from 10 to 40, with 40 showing the highest level of self-efficacy and 10 showing the lowest level of self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

Section Three of the survey contained demographic information, which included years of experience, grade level range, highest level of education, current employment role, content area, and district in which the educator was employed were collected. To provide evidence of internal consistency of the survey, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha which showed excellent reliability for all scales.

Survey data were collected using Qualtrics via a link sent by email. Participants were invited to respond (with informed consent) and were then sent three follow-up emails over a period of four weeks. Three hundred and two participants completed the survey in its entirety, and of the 302 respondents, 16 participants were school leaders (5.05%), 237 were teachers (79.29%), and 47 were support personnel (15.66%), which included speech-language pathologists, special education specialists, instructional specialists, behavior specialists, media specialists, guidance counselors, parent liaisons, and sign language interpreters. Of these, 75% were at the elementary school, 18% at the middle school, and 7% at the high school. Years of experience ranged from 0-3 (11%), 4-9 (15%), 10-19 (40%), and 20+ (33%). Lastly, of these demographic questions, 22% held a bachelor's degree, 38% a master's degree, 33% a specialist degree, and 5% a doctoral degree.

Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were reported for each section of the survey. The overall mean for Section One, preparedness of student learning and engagement, as well as the mean for each subsection, fell between 2.0 and 2.06 out of a scale of

3.0, indicating educators felt well-prepared with limited supporting evidence. For Section Two, self-efficacy, the mean was 2.16 (*SD* = 0.548) out of 4.0, which indicated educators felt they had a moderate level of self-efficacy.

The lowest rated question in Section One, Part A, curriculum and pedagogy had a mean of 1.48 (*SD* = 0.827) out of 3.0, which indicated educators felt they needed more preparation to effectively teach English Speakers of Other Languages in the K-12 setting for high poverty students. The lowest rated question in the survey based on the identified parts in Section One, Part B was differentiation, with a mean of 1.74 (*SD* = 0.852) out of 3.0, which indicated educators felt they needed more preparation to create an interdisciplinary curriculum in a K-12 setting for high poverty students. The lowest rated question in the Section One, Part C assessment had a mean of 1.91 (*SD* = 0.905) out of 3.0, which indicated educators needed more preparation to assume leadership responsibilities in the school in a K-12 setting for high poverty students. The mean rating of items 1-37 across all students was 2.04 (SD = 0.61). This indicates that educators generally felt well-prepared with limited supporting evidence to work in high poverty schools. Self-efficacy for working in high poverty schools was measured in the second section of the survey. The mean rating of items 38-47 was 2.16 (*SD* = 0.548). Response means ranged from a high of 2.32 (SD = 0.68), for educators' perception of being able to think of a solution when in trouble, to a low of 1.67 (SD = 0.79) for indicating educators' perception of being able to find the means and ways to get what they want when opposed in the high poverty setting is hardly true. See Tables 1-4.

Table 1
Reliability Analysis Results

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Preparedness of Student Learning & Engagement	37	.977
Curriculum & Pedagogy	21	.964
Differentiation	8	.937
Assessment	8	.924
Self-Efficacy	10	.923

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of Preparedness by Survey Section

Variable	M	SD
Preparedness of Student Learning & Engagement (Q1-37)	2.04	.605
Curriculum & Pedagogy (Q1-21)	2.04	.612
Differentiation (Q22-29)	2.00	.680
Assessment (Q30-37)	2.06	.675
Self-efficacy (Q38-47)	2.16	.548

Note. $n = 30$

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Rating Scale Percentages of Perceptions of Preparedness by Survey Question

Variable	M	SD
Section 1: Preparedness of Student Learning & Engagement		
Curriculum & Pedagogy		
The educator perceives themselves as prepared to help high poverty students in a K-12 setting to…		
1. present the concepts, knowledge, and skills of the discipline in ways that enable students to learn.	2.26	0.757
2. understand how different schools are learning.	2.18	.757
3. set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance.	2.14	.807
4. achieve academic high standards.	2.13	.780
5. relate classroom learning to the real world.	2.20	.796
6. understand how students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development influence learning.	2.04	.860
7. identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.	1.99	.870
8. teach in ways that support English Speakers of Other Languages.	1.48	.827
9. become self-motivated and self- directed in a K – 12 setting.	1.89	.820
10. use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide student learning and behavior.	2.06	.807
11. use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning.	2.10	.790
12. develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility.	2.13	.814
13. develop student's questioning and discussion skills.	2.07	.757
14. engage high poverty students in cooperative work as well as independent learning.	2.09	.764
15. help high poverty students learn to think critically and solve problems.	1.97	.779
16. encour**a**ge high poverty students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives.	1.93	.799
17. understand how factors in the students' environment outside of school may influence their life and learning.	2.14	.818
18. give productive feedback to high poverty students to guide their learning.	2.15	.787
19. help high poverty students learn how to assess their own learning.	1.97	.831
20. evaluate the effects of their actions and modify plans accordingly.	2.12	.800
21. conduct inquiry or research to inform their decisions.	1.87	.843

Differentiation		
22. develop a curriculum that builds on high poverty students' experiences, interests, and abilities.		.854
23. evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for high poverty students.	2.02	.796
24. create an interdisciplinary curriculum.	1.74	.852
25. use instructional strategies that promote active student learning.	2.23	.762
26. choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes and to meet high poverty student needs.	2.17	.809
27. integrate instructional technology into the classroom curriculum and pedagogy.	2.07	.846
28. present curriculum and pedagogy to high poverty students from a multicultural vantage point.	1.83	.862
29. use knowledge of learning, subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction.	2.16	.757
Assessment		
30. provide a rationale for teaching decisions to high poverty students, parents, and colleagues.	2.05	.830
31. work with parents and families to better understand high poverty students and to support their learning.	2.10	.809
32. use a variety of assessments (e.g., observation, portfolios, tests, performance tasks, anecdotal records) to determine student strengths, needs, and progress.	2.19	.821
33. resolve interpersonal conflict.	1.99	.835
34. maintain discipline and an orderly, purposeful learning environment.	2.11	.865
35. plan and solve problems with colleagues.	2.22	.818
36. assume leadership responsibilities in the school.	1.91	.905
37. Overall, how would you rate the preparation you received to be successful in a K – 12 setting in working with high poverty students?	1.98	.801

Note. n = 302

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Scale Ratings for Perceptions of Level of Self-Efficacy

Level of Self-Efficacy	M	SD
Self-efficacy (38-47)	2.16	.548
38. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough in the high poverty school setting.	2.13	.680
39. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want in the high poverty school setting.	1.67	.787
40. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals in the high poverty school setting.	2.00	.684
41. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events in the high poverty school setting.	2.20	.712
42. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations in the high poverty school setting.	2.22	.705
43. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort in the high poverty school setting.	2.25	.751
44. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities in the high poverty school setting.	2.28	.741
45. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions in the high poverty school setting.	2.27	.725
46. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution in the high poverty school setting.	2.32	.677
47. I can usually handle whatever comes my way in the high poverty school setting.	2.27	.660

Note. $n = 302$

Correlations among overall preparedness, self-efficacy, preparedness in curriculum and pedagogy, in differentiation, and in assessment were examined using Pearson's r correlation statistic. The results indicated there is a moderate to strong correlation ($r = .62$) between overall educator perceptions of preparedness and perceptions of self-efficacy. Similarly, there is a moderate to strong correlation between educator perceptions of preparedness in assessment and self-efficacy ($r = .65$), with other correlations falling in the moderate range. See Table 5.

Table 5
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Overall Perception of Preparedness of Student Learning & Engagement to Perception of Self-Efficacy

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Preparedness of Student Learning & Engagement (Q1-37)	---				
2. Self-Efficacy (Q38-47)	.616**	---			
3. Curriculum & Pedagogy (Q1-21)	.974**	.572**	---		
4. Differentiation (Q22-29)	.899**	.531**	.808**	---	
5. Assessment (Q30-37)	.915**	.653**	.837**	.789**	---
M	2.04	2.16	2.04	2.00	2.06
SD	.605	.548	6.12	.680	.675

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Note. n = 302

Correlations among the various demographic variables, years of experience, role in education, highest degree level, grade level assignment, content area taught, and level of preparedness to teach in high poverty schools were examined using Pearson's r. Positive correlations existed among the demographic variables of school level, position, number of years in education, degree level, and content area taught and the curriculum and pedagogy scale (items 1-21), the differentiation scale (items 22-29), and the assessment scale (items 30-37) with all correlations significant (p = 0.01). Though all correlations were statistically significant, they were nevertheless weak correlations with the strongest correlations existing between the number of years in education and perceptions of preparedness in curriculum and pedagogy (r = .214), the number of years in education and perceptions of preparedness in assessment (r = .254), the highest degree held (bachelor's, master's, specialist, doctorate) and perceptions of preparedness in curriculum and pedagogy (r = .223), and the highest degree held and perceptions of preparedness in assessment (r = .289). See Table 6.

Table 6

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Data and Survey Subsection Data

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Curriculum & Pedagogy (Q1-21)	---							
2. Differentiation (Q22-29)	.808**	---						
3. Assessment (Q30-37)	.837**	.789**	---					
4. Elementary, middle, high school (Q49)	.078**	.079**	.084**	---				
2. School leader, teacher, support staff (Q50)	.076**	.005	.075**	.045**	---			
3. Number of years in education (Q51)	.214**	.189**	.254**	.052**	.286**	---		
4. Highest degree: Bachelors, Masters, Specialist, Doctoral (Q52)	.223**	.184**	.289**	.056**	.222**	.490**	---	
5. Content area (Q53)	.064**	.048**	.066**	.266**	-.306	-.005	-.006	---
M	2.04	2.00	2.06	1.27	1.28	2.86	2.11	1.71
SD	.612	.680	.675	.609	.802	1.068	.945	1.375
Scale Min/Max Values	0 to 3	0 to 3	0 to 3	1 to 3	1 to 3	1 to 4	1 to 4	1 to 5

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note. $n = 302$

Discussion

This study focused on educator perceptions of preparedness and self-efficacy to work in high poverty schools. The aim was to determine in which areas educators did not feel prepared in order to use these data to develop professional learning agendas to foster student learning and engagement in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment. Additional questions were posed to determine relationships between levels of self-efficacy and preparedness and student learning and engagement, as well as among various demographic variables. High poverty schools struggle with teacher turnover more often than more affluent schools (Podolsky et al., 2019). This turnover impacts these schools' ability to retain highly competent teachers, which are needed to improve the level of success for students in high poverty schools. Providing professional development for teachers who do not feel very well prepared to work in high poverty schools has the potential to help retain these highly competent teachers. Additionally, this type of professional development instills a higher level of self-efficacy, because teachers are supported and encouraged to do what works best for students and are provided with opportunities to collaborate with others (Podolsky et al., 2019).

Results of this study indicated that the responding educators have a moderate level of self-efficacy, indicating a need to support educators in finding resources that are applicable to their curricular needs. Teachers need to be involved in continuous improvement where student needs are addressed, instructional strategies are shared, impact is determined through data analysis, meaningful lessons are developed, and professional learning is job-embedded (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This could also indicate a need to evaluate the leadership of the school

and determine if the leader has a transformational leadership style, as transformational leaders have a clear sense of purpose and are able to lead an organization toward change (Northouse, 2018). Educators in high poverty schools are challenged with managing problems or accomplishing goals, and they may not be able to deal with unexpected events, be resourceful, solve problems, remain calm when faced with difficulty, and/or handle whatever may come their way in the high poverty setting.

The relationship between the self-efficacy of educators and their perceptions of their own preparedness to work in a high poverty school was examined in this study, and it was determined there is a moderately strong correlation between self-efficacy and perceptions of preparedness. Because educator self-efficacy is related to the ability of an educator to encourage and motivate students to learn, having a high level of self-efficacy is imperative (Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). Furthermore, high self-efficacy has a direct correlation to instructional practices in the classroom, along with educators wanting to remain in the profession.

Importantly, educators from a strong preparation program and with access to professional supports are more likely to remain in the teaching field and have a higher level of self-efficacy (Podolsky et al., 2019). Of equal importance, evidence suggests that educators with a higher level of self-efficacy face fewer difficulties in working with students who live in poverty (Barni et al., 2019). Additionally, higher levels of self-efficacy among educators improve job satisfaction and in turn, student success in the classroom. To better understand the relationship between educators' years of experience, role in education, highest degree level, content area taught, and their perceived level of preparedness to work in high poverty schools, correlations were utilized to test for any significance between these variables. However, low correlations were found between each area, so no significant findings were reported.

To determine the areas in which educators perceive themselves as well prepared, curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment, descriptive statistics were examined. The results showed educators perceived they were well-prepared to work in high poverty schools ($M = 2.04$; $SD = 0.605$). Additionally, curriculum and pedagogy resulted in a mean of 2.04 ($SD = 0.612$), differentiation resulted in a mean of 2.00 ($SD = 0.680$), and assessment resulted in a mean of 2.06 ($SD = 0.675$). Evidence suggests that teachers have the most significant effect on student achievement of any school-based factor (Stosich, 2016). In addition, this effect was especially pronounced for high poverty students who relied on schooling to develop academic skills as opposed to their more affluent peers. Assessments may be used to support teachers in making decisions on how to best support students based on their level of understanding (Kaushik, 2021). Professional learning must be tailored to the needs of each teacher and must provide opportunities for teachers to reflect and implement change in the classroom (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

A limitation of this study was that the majority of educators who participated were elementary school teachers. Only 5% of the respondents were school leaders. An additional limitation was that the response rate, however, each of the counties surveyed had an equitable representation of participants. It is possible that the level of responsibility and lack of time that comes with working in a high poverty school could have impacted the participation rate. An assumption was that the participants in this study would provide honest answers and feedback accurately reflecting their current perceptions of the questions posed.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study indicate that for educators to be successful in high poverty schools, they need to have a high level of self-efficacy and a perception of being well-prepared to have a positive impact on student success. In high poverty schools, educators must understand the importance of differentiating lessons and finding ways to meet the needs of all students (Podolsky et al., 2019). Yet, educators who are early in their career are more likely to be faced with challenges such as being able to assess student needs, provide differentiated instruction, and understand the emotional and social needs in the classroom, indicating a need for strong professional development options. Furthermore, respondents noted they felt well-prepared in curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment, as well as had a moderate level of self-efficacy. The researchers recommended that new teacher induction programs must be well-designed to prepare teachers for the challenges of today's classrooms and in turn, to remain in the profession and have a positive impact on student performance. Moreover, attrition rates are higher in high-poverty schools due to a lack of administrative support, poor facilities, and less access to quality resources (Podolsky et al., 2019) and this needs to be addressed.

The implications of this study indicate a need to ensure educators' perceptions of preparedness to work in high poverty schools are at a high level, and educators with a high level of self-efficacy have a positive impact on student success. To establish professional development that is meaningful and ongoing, it is important to focus on the areas of weakness as indicated in the survey results and provide professional learning that is purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable (McBrayer et al., 2018). As an example, educators need relevant professional development in working with English for Speakers of Other Languages and students with special learning needs in the high poverty setting. Professional development needs to be provided for educators in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment in order for educators to feel very well-prepared with strong supporting evidence. Specifically, educators need support when helping students become self-motivated, self-directed learners, as well as helping students think critically and conduct an inquiry to inform their decisions.

Educators with fewer years of experience need mentors who have a high level of self-efficacy, and are well-prepared to work in high poverty schools to model the attributes needed to be successful in the classroom. One way to identify effective mentors would be to administer a survey to find out their level of self-efficacy and perceptions of their own preparedness to work in a high poverty school. School leadership plays a major role in teacher and student success and determines how long a teacher may remain at a given school and their level of success (Luyten & Bazo, 2019). Transformational leadership should be considered as a key factor in implementing effective professional development and supporting educators. Transformational leaders encourage educators to change within an organization and to work together to build a community of learning (Luyten & Bazo, 2019). Transformational leadership has been considered the most "influential theory of leadership" in education through influencing educators' level of motivation, commitment, and goals" (Usman, 2020, p. 97). With deficit theory thinking being prevalent in many high poverty schools, transformational leaders can change the mindset from thinking children are not able to perform to having high expectations for all students. The way educators think about poverty is critical to student success, and it influences how they respond to students and their families (Parrett & Budge, 2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

While the perceptions of educator preparedness to work in high poverty schools indicated an overall perception of being 'prepared', when drilling down to each question in the survey, it

was evident there were areas of need and weakness for educators within student learning and engagement. Future research should be conducted to pinpoint specific areas of need within student learning and engagement to determine how to best develop professional learning around curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment. It would also be beneficial to gather data from a larger range of educators. The majority of the responses came from elementary teachers. It would be beneficial to obtain more responses from middle and high school teachers as well as school leaders and support personnel.

Leadership styles should be considered when determining levels of self-efficacy and perceptions of preparedness of educators. Additional research should be conducted to determine if teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy and perceptions of preparedness are related to the leadership style of the school leader in place. Research should also be conducted to determine what specifically makes the educator feel a higher level of self-efficacy in the high poverty setting. It may also be beneficial to research educators in high-achieving, high poverty schools to determine their continued motivations for teaching in high poverty schools.

Conclusion

Poverty impacts children's academic success in negative ways; therefore, educators who have a high level of self-efficacy and positive perceptions of preparedness should work with children in high poverty schools. Transformational leadership is key to helping educators become more successful in the classroom. Providing professional learning that is well-designed and meaningful is critical to the success of educators and students in high poverty schools. Professional learning should be designed with student learning and engagement in mind to include curriculum and pedagogy, differentiation, and assessment. Professional learning should be ongoing throughout the school year and build on previous sessions so that it is purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable.

Educators need opportunities for collaboration and professional development that are tailored to their needs to feel well-prepared. Because educators often come to the education platform with their own norms and expectations of how students should perform and behave in school, many educators need exposure and/or knowledge of teaching children of poverty. Children who live in poverty must have their basic needs met before being successful academically. Without proper training, such as ongoing professional learning, teachers will not meet the needs of children who live in poverty. Educators' perceptions of preparedness to work with impoverished children are critical to a student's academic success. The information obtained from this research may be utilized in high poverty school systems to determine what types of professional learning needs should be provided by the district and individual schools. Transformational leaders are needed to lead the charge for change in high poverty schools. If better training opportunities are implemented, educators' perceptions of preparedness in student learning and engagement, and self-efficacy may increase, resulting in educators' preparedness for the challenges they face in high poverty schools to retain teachers in the profession and positively impact the students in our classrooms.

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