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11-1-2018

## Teacher Perceptions of Quality Student-Teacher Relationships

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation

By

Cecilia Wilken

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Leadership

Under the Supervision of Dr. Tamara Williams

Omaha, Nebraska

November, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

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University of Nebraska, 2018

Advisory: Dr. Tami Williams

Student-teacher relationships are a critical component of the classroom environment, and are unique for each relationship that exists between a teacher and the students in a class. Within a relationship, different amounts of closeness, dependency, and conflict influence the significance a student-teacher relationship can have on student success. Likewise, mobile students experience school in a different way than a nonmobile student does as they miss the intentional, classwide opportunities to interact and build a quality student-teacher relationship. Since mobile students experience school differently, schools need to respond to the mobile populations' needs differently.

This study explored how teacher's perception of quality student-teacher relationships in the classroom vary by mobility through a 28 item survey. The Student Teacher Relationship Scale by Robert Pianta (1995) was completed by teachers for 104 students in an urban school that were mobile and nonmobile. An analysis of teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship, enrollment, behavior, and academic performance was completed. The study provides recommendations for further research and may provide insight to schools and teachers on considerations for strategies that might support mobile students in the classroom.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel incredibly blessed to have the support and encouragement of so many incredible individuals over my journey in education. I would like to thank these people for all they have done for me along the way.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my husband, Josh Wilken, and my two vivacious children, Brody and William. I am incredibly grateful for your positive encouragement and belief in me. William, I will always remember you asking me how many papers I had left to write and your eyes getting big when I gave you my updated status. Brody, it will forever be in my mind the day you told me I was, “Good at writing papers.” Josh, thank you for believing in me, and encouraging me when I needed it most. Thank you for keeping our household running, whether that meant making sure we had a hearty meal to eat or entertaining the boys. You help me to be the best version of myself I can be.

Thank you to my mother, father, sister, and brother. When I was in high school, I never thought that I would have earned a college diploma, let alone a doctorate. This journey has been many years in the making, and words do not express how thankful I am to have had and still have such a strong support system.

Thank you to Dr. Tami Williams. You have taught me to think differently about leadership and research, and I am incredibly grateful for this gift. I am grateful for the guidance, feedback, and insight you have provided me along the way.

Thank you to Dr. Kay Keiser, Dr. Elliott Ostler, and Dr. Dick Christie for inspiring me in leadership and evaluation. I have found attending the University of

Nebraska at Omaha to be a wonderful experience because of the expertise and passion each of you bring.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Abstract   | <i>ii</i>  |
| Acknowledgements   | <i>iii</i> |
| Table of Contents  | <i>v</i>   |
| CHAPTER ONE  |            |
| <i>Introduction</i>  | <i>1</i>   |
| <i>The Summer Excitement</i>                                 | <i>1</i>   |
| <i>The Nervous Jitters: A Student &amp; Teacher Vignette</i> | <i>2</i>   |
| <i>The Value of the Student-Teacher Relationship</i>         | <i>4</i>   |
| <i>Student-Teacher Relationship Impact Outcomes</i>          | <i>5</i>   |
| <i>A Growing Need</i>  | <i>9</i>   |
| <i>Purpose of the Study</i>                                  | <i>10</i>  |
| <i>Research Questions</i>                                    | <i>11</i>  |
| <i>Significance of the Study</i>                             | <i>11</i>  |
| <i>Contributions to the Practice</i>                         | <i>12</i>  |
| <i>Contributions to Research</i>                             | <i>12</i>  |
| <i>Assumptions</i>   | <i>12</i>  |
| <i>Limitations</i>   | <i>13</i>  |
| <i>Delimitations</i>   | <i>13</i>  |
| <i>Operational Definitions</i>                               | <i>13</i>  |
| <i>Outline of the Study</i>                                  | <i>14</i>  |
| CHAPTER TWO  |            |
| <i>Review of the Literature</i>                              | <i>15</i>  |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <i>Student-Teacher Relationship Impact Outcomes</i>     | 15 |
| <i>Attachment within a Student-Teacher Relationship</i> | 15 |
| <i>Attributes of a Student-Teacher Relationship</i>     | 17 |
| <i>Closeness in the Student-Teacher Relationship</i>    | 17 |
| <i>Dependency in the Student-Teacher Relationship</i>   | 18 |
| <i>Conflict in the Student-Teacher Relationship</i>     | 19 |
| <i>Why Teacher Perceptions Matter</i>                   | 20 |
| <i>Creating a Culture for Learning Matters</i>          | 21 |
| <i>Defining Mobility</i>                                | 22 |
| <i>Prevalence of Mobility</i>                           | 22 |
| <i>Mobility Across the Grade Level Continuum</i>        | 23 |
| <i>Causes of Mobility</i>                               | 24 |
| <i>Mobility &amp; Associated Risk Factors</i>           | 25 |
| <i>Collective School Performance</i>                    | 26 |
| <i>Academic Outcomes for Mobile Students</i>            | 27 |
| <i>Academic Outcomes for Nonmobile Students</i>         | 29 |
| <i>Behavior Outcomes for Mobile Students</i>            | 30 |
| <i>Behavior Outcomes for Nonobile Students</i>          | 32 |
| <i>The Mobile Students' Perspective</i>                 | 32 |
| <i>Summary</i>  | 33 |

### CHAPTER THREE

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| <i>Methodology &amp; Procedure</i>    | 35 |
| <i>Purpose and Research Questions</i> | 35 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Participants</i>                      | 36 |
| <i>Sampling Procedures</i>               | 36 |
| <i>Data Collection Procedures</i>        | 37 |
| <i>Measure</i>                           | 38 |
| <i>Data Analysis</i>                     | 41 |
| <i>Data Analysis Suggestions</i>         | 41 |
| <i>Summary</i>                           | 43 |
| CHAPTER FOUR                             |    |
| <i>Results</i>                           | 44 |
| <i>Central Question #1</i>               | 44 |
| <i>Supporting Question #2</i>            | 45 |
| <i>Supporting Question #3</i>            | 49 |
| CHAPTER FIVE                             |    |
| <i>Conclusions &amp; Discussion</i>      | 50 |
| <i>Summary</i>                           | 50 |
| <i>Review of Literature</i>              | 51 |
| <i>Research Design</i>                   | 52 |
| <i>Conclusions</i>                       | 53 |
| <i>Implications for Further Research</i> | 56 |
| <i>Discussion</i>                        | 57 |
| <i>Recommendations for Practice</i>      | 58 |
| <i>References</i>                        | 62 |

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Student-teacher relationships serve as a foundation for creating a positive classroom environment for learning. Therefore, it is critical that the teacher perception of the student-teacher relationship is explored in order to consider how we can best serve and support all students that walk into the classroom at any point in the year. Each student-teacher relationship has its own unique characteristics that have the potential to enhance or hinder student outcomes. Within each student-teacher relationship, different amounts of closeness, dependency, and conflict exist that influence the significance a student-teacher relationship can have on student success. These characteristics are developed through the interactions and experiences that the student and the teacher have together. Each of these moments has the potential to strengthen or hinder the student-teacher relationship, which will ultimately impact student learning outcomes. It is essential for educational practitioners to have a sense of how the student-teacher relationship impacts student growth and outcomes, in order to serve students to the greatest extent possible.

#### **The Summer Excitement**

Families and students wait in nervous anticipation for the class list or their schedule to come out in the summer, curious who will be their teacher. For the next year, this teacher will be the person who greets them each morning, discover their talents, teach them new skills and concepts, and guide them in a journey towards lifelong learning. This connection is a key component of the student-teacher relationship that provides a

strong foundation for growth to occur (Liu & Meng, 2009; Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016; Blum, 2005).

### **The Nervous Jitters: A Student & Teacher Vignette**

Fast forward to the middle of the year, when a new student enters the classroom. A young boy is going to his second third grade classroom this year, in a new state where he does not know anyone. His mother recently lost her job, so they had to move in with the students' grandmother to make ends meet. The student had been to a few different elementary schools in kindergarten and first grade, but had stayed in the same second grade for the entire year. He had made friends with two boys who he liked to ride his bicycle with after school, and was pleased to get to stay in one place for a year and a few months. What crushed him most was that his second grade teacher that he stopped by and said hello to each morning would no longer be part of his morning walk to his classroom. The friendships and connection with his teacher from the last year were one of the best parts of his day amidst all the struggle his mother and him were experiencing at home. This would be gone.

As he walked into his new classroom for the first time, he saw students reading to themselves around the room and the teacher was meeting with a small group of students at the kidney table. The students seemed to know what they were supposed to be doing. There were names tags meticulously taped on each desk with their work posted around the room. He was walking into a classroom without a space of his own, unsure who he would meet, and was leaving behind the sense of belonging he had felt at his old school. He took a deep breath, walked in, hoping that the year would end alright.

As his teacher heard the door open, she looked up only to find a young boy standing in the doorway collecting his hands and swaying back and forth. He looked as nervous as could be. The teacher got up from the kidney table, and with the biggest smile she could muster up she walked over to him and knelt down to greet him. She stuck out her hand, told him how much she had looked forward to meeting him, and explained what a great year they were going to have together. She showed him where he would sit and introduced him to the student that would help him to learn about the routines and the expectations in the classroom. She kept smiling and reassuring him in the calmest voice she could, all the while she was nervous too. Her students knew the way the classroom worked, and she had gotten to know them all so well. She had spent time at the beginning of the year getting to know each student personally and teaching the students how the classroom worked. This young boy was coming in during the middle of the year. He would need to be caught up on the procedures of the classroom, and most likely a few areas where the curriculum might have been taught in a different sequence. She needed to learn all about him, and she did not have the same time that she did initially to get to know him like she did the other students. The teacher knew she needed to make it a point to know her new student better, and invited him to have lunch with her that day. She had plenty that needed to be done, but she also knew how important it was that this young boy get started on a good note.

The young boy was immediately relieved. The teacher wanted to get to know him, and she even invited him to lunch with her that day. At lunch time, he nervously took his tray to the classroom where she was grading papers and eating her lunch, glad he had not gotten lost. As he walked in, she invited him over and they talked about his

recent move, his interests, and talents. They played a card game as they talked, making the conversation feel relaxed. As lunch wrapped up, the student walked his tray back downstairs to the lunchroom and sighed in relief. He had a teacher that cared about him at this school too. It was all going to be okay.

### **The Value of the Student-Teacher Relationship**

This vignette is not uncommon. Students and teachers are constantly navigating new student-teacher relationships on a daily basis. Systems and processes can help new students transition smoothly and efficiently to a new learning environment. However, student-teacher relationships take time and intentionality to develop (Liu & Meng, 2009; Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins, 1995). As students grapple with the experiences that impact their perceptions and current reality, teachers are simultaneously adapting to balance the needs of the new student as well as the nonmobile students who each have different social, emotional, and academic needs. Through exploration of the student-teacher relationship from a teacher perspective, we can identify how to best serve and support all students that walk into the classroom throughout the year. The role of a teacher is important and personal as it drives the success of each individual in their classroom.

John Hattie's (2003) meta-analysis on the influence a teacher can have on student learning brings further light to the importance of the student-teacher relationship. In his research, he explains that instead of focusing on home life, buildings, intervention structures, or policies, "The answer lies elsewhere – it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act –the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with

students during their 15,000 hours of schooling” (Hattie, 2003, pg. 2). Hattie (2003) continues with explaining that what a student brings with them accounts for about 50% of the variance in achievement. However, teachers make up the other 30% of variance in a student's academic performance which is greater than other aspects of a child's life including their home life, administrators, peers, or the school. Therefore, the most important place to focus on is teachers and what they know, do, and emphasize in their classroom on a daily basis. As the understanding of the role that a teacher plays in student success has grown, the focus on strong research-based practices in the classroom has been at the forefront. In conjunction with Hattie's research, other researchers have identified the importance of the student-teacher relationship as a foundation to learning. Specific attributes such as closeness and dependency are critical in developing positive student-teacher relationships (Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Birditt, Miller, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2010; Mahan, 1969; Liu & Meng, 2009).

### **Student-Teacher Relationship Impact Outcomes**

Significant learning occurs when a significant relationship exists; therefore, the student-teacher relationship is key to student success (Comer, 1995). Having a strong relationship established between students and teachers creates the opportunity for meaningful learning to take place. A growing body of research suggests that one of the most effective ways to increase the academic outcomes of students is through a quality student-teacher relationship. In *Visible Learning* (2009), John Hattie synthesized the research of 229 studies regarding quality student-teacher relationships. From these studies Hattie found that the student-teacher relationship has an effect size of  $d = 0.72$ . An effect size is a standard measure that indicates the magnitude or size of an effect

(Research Rundowns, 2009). An effect size between 0.5 to 0.8 is considered to have a moderate effect. An effect size above 0.8 is considered to have a large effect. Based on this effect size of .72, it is evident that student-teacher relationships have a strong effect on learning outcomes. Similarly, in Robert Marzano's research on the student-teacher relationship, he found a -.87 effect size, indicating a significant decrease in the number of disruptions when a student-teacher relationship exists (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). In this study of upper elementary to high school students, he found that the student-teacher relationship yielded the greatest effect on middle school students.

Other researchers have dug deeper into what impacts a positive student-teacher relationship to find what the key components of a quality relationship involve. Marzano expresses that teacher behavior...is the language of relationships" (Marzano, 2007, pg. 152). The way a teacher interacts with a student has the potential to cultivate or stifle the student-teacher relationship. Brophy and Evertson (1976) identified emotional objectivity as a critical influence on the student-teacher relationship. They found that limiting extreme reactions both positive and negative had the greatest impact on creating a healthy student-teacher relationship. In another study focused on effective student-teacher relationships, the researchers compared dominance versus submission, and opposition versus cooperation (Wubbels & Levy, 1993). The study found that having extreme levels of dominance and cooperation while important, has the potential to tarnish the student-teacher relationship. Wubbels and Levy (1993), explain that having a balanced combination of dominance and cooperation is what leads to effective student-teacher relationships. Having extreme overreactions of affection, anger, cooperation, or dominance can influence the composition of the student-teacher relationship. Healthy

student-teacher relationships involve emotional objectivity from the teacher, that promotes a balanced emotional atmosphere in the classroom.

In a study by Harris and Rosenthal (1985), the interaction between the student and teacher was studied to see what behaviors influenced the student-teacher relationship. Encouragement had a .90 effect size and the length of interactions between the student and teacher had the greatest impact on student learning, with an effect size of 1.07. Interactions that incorporate praise, eye contact, and touch yielded low effects on the student-teacher relationship. Smiling, gestures, and more frequent opportunities to interact yielded moderate effects on the student-teacher relationship. Each of these influences on the student-teacher relationship would typically be seen as positive behaviors. Therefore, it is important to consider that the amount of time teachers spend interacting with students and encouraging them has the most significant influence on the student-teacher relationship. Non-verbal gestures and actions do grow the student-teacher relationship. However, the strength in the relationship comes from time together and encouragement.

While quantitative results indicate the positive impact student-teacher relationships can have, it is evident in qualitative research as well. Hattie refers to the work of Russell Bishop, who surveyed students, teachers, principals, and parents to identify what they perceive to have a significant influence on student achievement. The student, parent, and principal populations all identified the student-teacher relationship as a major influence on student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009). Additionally, in another research study a moderate correlation was found between the perceived care by teachers and students academic achievement (Finn, Schrodt, Witt, Eledge, Jernberg, & Larson,

2009). This research shows the importance of how students perceive the connection with their teacher and how it impacts their learning. When students have positive perceptions of their relationship with the teacher, it results in positive learning outcomes.

In another study completed by Cornelis White (2007), a correlation between positive student outcomes for behavior and academics was found in relation to specific aspects of the student-teacher relationship when looked at separately and combined together. The positive factors included person-centered variables such as warmth, empathy, and encouragement. Overall, a slightly higher correlation between positive student outcomes and student-teacher relationships was found when academics and behavior were evaluated jointly. These correlations show the significant impact that a positive student-teacher relationship can have on students academic and behavior outcomes. Research indicates that positive student-teacher relationships as a whole yield even greater results in terms of positive student outcomes. It is clear that in isolation student-teacher relationships can have benefits to academics or behavior. However, in the classroom, these variables are not separate and isolated. The fact that an even greater correlation exists between positive student-teacher relationships and overall positive student outcomes, indicates that the student-teacher relationship is a critical element of the classroom environment.

Each of these research studies indicate the significant influence student-teacher interactions have, and the impact student-teacher relationships can have on student learning and behavioral outcomes (Brophy and Evertson, 1976; Harris and Rosenthal, 1985; Hattie, 2009; Cornelis-White, 2007; Finn, Schrod, Witt, Eledge, Jernberg, & Larson, 2009; Marzano et al., 2003; Marzano 2007; Wubbels and Levy, 1993). From the

various perspectives of students, parents, and principals, it is clear that the relationship that exists correlates to student outcomes. A significant body of research shows the important role positive student-teacher relationships have in the classroom. Once a quality student-teacher relationship is established, the foundation for learning is created and considerable learning can begin.

### **A Growing Need**

With the transition to No Child Left Behind in 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016, the disaggregation of data has led to a focus on the different collective subgroup assessment results, including the collective performance of students who are mobile. As highly mobile schools faced the growing proficiency demands of Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act, researchers studied the academic proficiency levels of schools with significant populations of mobile students (Offenberg, 2004 & Thompson & Meyers, 2011). Results indicate that the performance standards set for schools by Adequate Yearly Progress were negatively impacted and the data may create an inaccurate representation due to the high levels of student mobility (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). From this, further attention was drawn to the mobile population to further explore the role mobility may have in impacting student achievement.

In Nebraska, state assessment results indicate a gap between mobile students and all students in the general population. In 2016-2017, approximately 4% of students in Nebraska were highly mobile. Of this specific group of students, only 29% of students who were highly mobile reached proficiency on the english language arts assessment. Conversely, 51% of all third to eighth grade students attained proficiency on the state

assessment. Similarly, in math only 45% of students who were highly mobile achieved proficiency on the state assessment, whereas 72% of students who took the state assessment attained proficiency (Nebraska Department of Education, 2017). This assessment information brings to the forefront the importance of zooming in on the needs of mobile students so we can identify how to best serve and support the needs of this subpopulation of students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Mobile students experience the school and classroom environment differently. Therefore, educational professionals need to be responsive and explore how to support mobile students and close the achievement gap that exists for this subgroup of the student population. The purpose of this study is to gain insight and understanding of how teacher perceptions of their relationship experience vary by student mobility. This information may help educational practitioners to better understand how mobility may potentially influence student-teacher relationships so that teachers and schools can better adjust their practices to meet the needs of mobile students. Since research indicates that student-teacher relationships have an impact on student achievement, this insight may have a positive influence on the individual mobile students academic performance as well as the mobile population at large.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions frame this study:

#### **Central Question.**

1. Do teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary by student mobility?

**Supporting Questions.**

2. How do teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary in relation to academic or behavioral outcomes?
3. Are there patterns or trends that emerge in relation to conflict, closeness, or dependency of mobile and nonmobile students?

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the practice and research related to student-teacher relationships and student mobility. The studies findings would be of significant interest to teachers, school, and district leaders with mobile populations. This study adds to the research on student-teacher relationships in connection with a specific subgroup of the student population. Currently, there is limited research that explores the mobile student population in conjunction with teacher perceptions of student-teacher relationships. Research is limited to the impact mobility has on student achievement, behavior, and mobile students perception. This study focused on teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship in relation to academic and behavioral outcomes.

**Contribution to the Practice.** For teachers and administrators of mobile students, this research provides further insight and understanding regarding how teacher's perceive the student-teacher relationships with mobile students in comparison to nonmobile students. Student-teacher relationships serve as a foundation for creating a positive classroom environment for learning. If teacher's perceive student-teacher relationships to be impacted by student mobility, it provides practitioners an opportunity to identify what can be done differently to address the development of a positive student-teacher relationship with mobile students. Furthermore, this information supports district

and building administrators in identifying structures and systems that may potentially support teachers in cultivating positive student-teacher relationships.

**Contributions to Research.** This study contributes to the current research on student-teacher relationships, by providing insight into how teachers perceive student-teacher relationships within a smaller subgroup of the student population. Likewise, there is limited research on teachers' perceptions of the student-teacher relationship with mobile students. Thus, this exploratory research provides initial insight and understanding for future research.

### **Assumptions**

The study has several assumptions that the research process has been built upon: (a) all student data was drawn from the information management system of the school district participating in the study, (b) accurate records have been maintained at the school district, (c) teachers provided authentic perceptions of individual student-teacher relationships, and (d) 75%% to 85% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch making the sample population comparable. Poverty is an associated risk factor of mobility that impacts learning. With a large number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch within the research school, the assumption can be made that the mobile and nonmobile population are likely to be experiencing poverty.

### **Limitations**

1. This research cannot be generalized to everyone.
2. Student mobility in this study does not take into account the student who transfers over the summer between academic calendar years.

### **Delimitations**

1. Participants in the study would be from one school in one district, and their perceptions may be different from the greater teaching population.
2. Research sites in this study have experienced mobility at a rate of approximately 15% to 20%. Their perceptions may differ from those with larger or smaller mobile populations.
3. Participants are employed at the elementary level and may be different than that of the secondary educators.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Teacher Perception* -- is the way that teacher's interpret or experience the state of things, which in this case would be the student-teacher relationship.

*Mobile Student (local)* -- is the student that enrolls in two or more schools during an academic calendar year between the second week of school and the end of the district's academic calendar year.

*Highly Mobile Student (Nebraska)* -- is any student who enrolls in two or more public schools during an academic year. If a student's initial public school enrollment for the year is after the State's official membership day (last Friday in September), it is considered the second public school enrollment occurrence for the school year (Nebraska Department of Education, 2017).

*Nonmobile Student* -- is the student that maintains enrollment in one school for the duration of the academic calendar year

*Student-Teacher Relationship* -- the manner in which a student and teacher experience a connection between each other

### **Outline of the Study**

Chapter two of this study includes a review of the professional literature related to student-teacher relationships and the impact it has on student achievement. Additionally, chapter two includes information the impact of student mobility on academic and behavior outcomes. Chapter three outlines the quantitative research design and methodology for this study. Chapter four includes the results of the statistical analyses along with an interpretation of the research results. The final section, chapter five contains a summary, conclusion, discussion of the results, and implications for future practice and research.

## **Chapter II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter provides an introduction to research surrounding quality student-teacher relationships, the characteristics and traits of student-teacher relationships, and the important role teacher perceptions have in student-teacher relationships.

Additionally, this chapter defines and reviews the research on student mobility in relation to prevalence, causes, and associated risk factors. Literature surrounding academic and behavioral outcomes for the collective student population, mobile and nonmobile subgroups, and individual student perspective was reviewed.

#### **Student-Teacher Relationship Impact Outcomes**

Student-teacher relationships have a significant impact on students' academic and behavioral outcomes (Brophy and Evertson, 1976; Harris and Rosenthal, 1985; Hattie, 2009; Cornelis-White, 2007; Finn, Schrod, Witt, Eledge, Jernberg, & Larson, 2009; Marzano et al., 2003; Marzano 2007; Wubbels and Levy, 1993). Strong relationships between students and teachers create the opportunity for meaningful learning to take place. Relationships begin, grow, and thrive through teacher behavior that is balanced, and involves quality interactions between the student and teacher (Wubbels & Levy, 1993; Brophy & Evertson, 1976). Healthy student-teacher relationships result in positive student outcomes in relation to academics and behavior.

#### **Attachment within a Student-Teacher Relationship**

Positive, healthy relationships possess attributes that promote a positive and healthy environment for students to thrive and grow. These positive, healthy relationships that promote development are built upon the Attachment Theory in which

relationships are initiated, grown, and maintained (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Attachment Theory is the connection that exists between a child and an adult. It is developed through the interactions that the child and adult have and can lead to healthy or unhealthy relationships. For instance, when an infant cries and an adult picks the baby up and speaks calmly to her, attachment is established. When a child goes to school, a teacher may help a child get their lunch or speak to them about experiences they have had, which in turn builds an attachment between the child and the teacher.

Research on attachment theory has focused primarily on mothers; however, researchers have expressed that it can be any caring adult or individual that provides this type of adult-child relationship (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). When children feel secure, cared for, and safe within an environment due to the relationship with an adult, they are able to psychologically and emotionally develop (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bretherton, 1992; Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins, 1995).

Attachment theory has strong implications for the classroom environment and the student-teacher relationships that are developed. Secure attachments allow students to feel comfortable leaving their caregivers to attend school, feel comfortable participating in the classroom environment, and feel comfortable communicating with others in social environments. Teachers play a key role in helping students to feel secure in the classroom environment so they can learn and grow. As teachers coach and teach students how to regulate their emotions as well as apply academic skills and strategies, opportunities for relationship building emerges. Therefore, when a healthy attachment between a student and teacher exists, the opportunity for psychological and emotional development increases. The interactions that exist between students and teachers create a

relationship that has the potential to grow or hinder students feelings of security, care, and safety. This in turn can lead to a strong or weak foundation for student learning.

### **Attributes of a Student-Teacher Relationship**

Some research has been completed to identify if specific attributes exist within a quality student-teacher relationship. Within this research, key themes emerge that can impact the student-teacher relationship and in turn can cultivate or inhibit student outcomes. The attributes that exist within a student-teacher relationship center around closeness, dependency, and conflict. Each of these attributes is an important element of the student-teacher relationship: closeness, dependency, and conflict.

### **Closeness in the Student-Teacher Relationship**

Closeness is a critical attribute of a positive student-teacher relationship that can support student outcomes within the school community (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016; Blum, 2005; Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins, 1995). Closeness is developed through interactions between the student and teacher. In a study completed by Liu & Meng (2009), students reported that having a positive student-teacher relationship was one of the strongest qualities a teacher can have. Students provided examples of equal treatment, responsibility, kindness, and knowledge that helped to grow a positive student-teacher relationship. Each of these attributes leads back to the student feeling cared for through the manner in which a teacher speaks to them, and the way the teacher asks the student questions to learn about them. In a connection between a student and teacher, care acts as the accelerator that enables the connection to grow.

Similarly, Hajdukova, Horby, and Cushman's (2014) research focused on the perceptions of boys with social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties, the students

indicated that the teacher qualities that build a positive student-teacher relationship primarily include fair treatment and being a skilled teacher. Students indicated that qualities such as being nice, fair but tough, caring, and supportive created the strongest student-teacher relationships (Hajdukova, Hornby, and Cushman, 2014; Liu & Meng, 2009; Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins, 1995). Again, students noted the way in which they connect to the teacher. Teachers typically have many students to care for each day, and students feeling as though they are treated fairly speaks to the connection that exists within a relationship. Fairness is a perception of how an individual views a situation. In this case, fairness has to do with the perception of the student and how they interpret the decisions being made by the teacher. When a student feels they are being treated fairly, the connection between the student and teacher is further enhanced. This results in a stronger foundation for learning.

### **Dependency in the Student-Teacher Relationship**

Dependency is another attribute that exists in a student-teacher relationship. Dependency is considered to be a human behavior in which individuals seek help and nurturing from one another. It is considered to be one of the most significant human behaviors that occur within relationships beginning at birth (Mahan, 1969). Initially, an infant is completely dependent on their caretaker to meet their basic needs. As the child grows and develops, dependency occurs within the interpersonal relationships with others. Like all attributes, dependency exists on a continuum and can be at different levels within different relationships. Having too much dependency on an individual or too little can have a positive or negative impact on the student-teacher relationship. In the student-teacher relationship, dependency can be observed through a student seeking

out attention, recognition, proximity, physical contact, or help from a teacher (Mahan, 1969). In a study completed by Murdock (1999), perceived support from teachers was found to have a significant impact on student participation and behavior in school. This perceived support is an example of how student dependency within a relationship helps them to grow and develop. Dependency is an important attribute that takes shape in a relationship, and can be at a variety of levels based on the child's needs. Having support and being dependent on an individual to a certain degree helps to establish a positive-student teacher relationship.

### **Conflict in the Student-Teacher Relationship**

Lastly, conflict within a student-teacher relationship can interfere with the development of a strong foundation. Conflict within a student-teacher relationship can be developed through negative interactions such as repeated disciplinary action, feelings of anger, or a lack of predictability in behavior. Research studies have found that conflict within the student-teacher relationship has resulted in lower achievement and negative attitudes towards school. In one study by Ahmad and Rehman (2014), students who were taught in a more disciplined and strict way, were found to have lower scores on the assessment than those taught by a teacher exhibiting friendly behaviors during their instruction. Disciplinary action is often a teacher response to a negative behavior that a student exhibits. These interactions can lead to tension within a relationship, which in turn has the potential to impact the emotional closeness, trust, and respect within a student-teacher relationship (Birditt, Miller, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2010; Ahmad & Rehman, 2014). Likewise, conflict within a student-teacher relationship has been found to have a negative impact on a student's attitude toward school. One study found that

early elementary students were more likely to exhibit problem behaviors if there was a greater level of conflict within the student-teacher relationship (Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins, 1995). The research on student-teacher relationships clearly indicates that a positive relationship can impact student learning. On the other hand, if a student-teacher relationship has a great deal of conflict, it can have adverse effects on a student's learning.

### **Why Teacher Perceptions Matter**

Perception is how we interpret information and what occurs in our interactions (Saylor Academy, 2012). As previously discussed, research has studied how students perceive the student-teacher relationship as we look to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for students. Perceptions from specific individuals help to guide and inform the thinking behind research, and what inputs and outputs are integral in achieving the desired outcomes. Thus, when looking at the student-teacher relationship it is vital to consider teacher perception since relationships involve the connection between two individuals, the student and the teacher. Perceptions are the driving force to how one reacts to a situation, and can automatically influence an individual's' behavior (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004, Saylor Academy, 2012). Teacher perceptions matter because they are the other piece of the student-teacher relationship and provide insight into the student-teacher relationship from a different point of view.

### **Creating a Culture for Learning Matters**

At the beginning of the school year, one of the most important steps of setting up the classroom is creating a culture for learning. A culture for learning consists of relationship development between students as well as the teacher and students,

establishing high expectations for student learning, and identifying clear routines and procedures (Danielson, 2007; Marzano et al., 2003). During the first couple weeks of school, teachers provide students with the opportunity to get to know each other through planned activities. These activities provide the opportunity for students and the teacher to connect and learn about one another (Wong & Wong, 2001). Additionally, the teacher facilitates a conversation regarding the expectations of the classroom. These expectations are what guide the tone and expectations for interactions amongst students, and the responsibilities that exist (Wong & Wong, 2001; Jones, F.H., Jones, P., Lynn, & Jones, F., 2007). Additionally, students learn about the routines and procedures in the classroom through clear, direct instruction on activities such as sharpening pencils, how to select reading stations, or how to walk through the lunch line (Jones, et al., 2007). The first two weeks of the school year are key in establishing the culture for learning within a classroom. As we consider the time that teachers invest in preparing and planning for these two weeks, it shows how critical these tasks are in setting the tone for the entire year. Having students experience this progression and development of the culture allows for a strong culture for learning to be established and maximizes the opportunity for learning to occur.

### **Defining Mobility**

In general, student mobility is defined as a change in schools within a given year for reasons other than a grade promotion (Sparks, 2016). While this definition provides the broad context of what student mobility means, there are other factors related to the timing of mobility and statistical representations that make the concept much more complex. For instance, the type of mobility can vary across different situations as

students may move within a school district, from one school district to another, or over the summer months. In many states, mobility statistics are limited to transitions during the school year and do not include moves over the summer break (Beesley et al., 2010; Rumberger, 2015). Likewise, student mobility can be caused by school changes without a transition in the student's residency, or school changes that are a secondary result of a change in residence. Depending on the parent or guardian's communication with the school, residential mobility may be inconsistently reported to keep updated records on the timing related to a student's mobility. While complex in nature, for the purposes of analyzing qualitative and quantitative data for this research study, the term student mobility is defined as a student who has withdrawn from one school building and enrolled in another school building within the same academic year beyond the first two weeks of school.

### **Prevalence of Mobility**

In 2007-2008, a brief shared by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance compiled student mobility rates for several midwestern states. The information provided indicates that, in the state of Nebraska, slightly more than 9% of all students in the state were considered mobile. Furthermore, the brief indicated that mobility exists everywhere, with rural Nebraska having a student mobility rate of 9%, while the city suburbs have approximately 12% of students considered to be mobile (Beesley, Moore, & Gopalani, 2010). With student mobility existing in a variety of pockets of the United States, researchers have begun looking deeper into the impact that mobility may have on students.

While there are not federal requirements to collect information on student mobility, a growing focus on studying trends in student mobility exists. In a report by the National Education Policy Center, data from a longitudinal study indicated that approximately 34% of students in the study stayed at the same school between kindergarten to fifth grade. These research studies indicate that mobility is a part of the majority of students educational experiences across the country. For most students, at some point within their years of schooling, they will transition to a different school at least one time.

### **Mobility Across the Grade Level Continuum**

Mobility varies across the elementary grade level continuum. While the percent of students who are mobile increases overall as students progress through the grade levels, the frequency of mobility begins to decrease as students move to the secondary level of schooling (Ingersoll, Scamman, & Eckerling, 1989; Parke and Kanyongo 2012; Rumberger 2015). In one study of student mobility, approximately 42% of students made one change and 20% made two changes in schools between their kindergarten and fifth grade year. Another 4% of the students surveyed moved more than three times during these grades. This accounts for 63% of the students surveyed had moved between kindergarten and fifth grade (Rumberger, 2015). Similarly, in a study completed by Parke and Kanyongo (2012), the percentage of students who were mobile in first grade was approximately 12%, with an additional 40% of students being mobile by grade five. The elementary years of schooling experience a higher level of student mobility than the later grades. These grades are typically where foundational skills and strategies for reading, writing, and math are developed, as well as social emotional competencies.

Transitioning from school to school has the potential to create gaps within student learning and development as content is taught using different scopes and sequences in different school districts and states.

### **Causes of Mobility**

Student mobility is caused by a variety of factors and can further exacerbate the concern of how students are performing academically, behaviorally, and socio-emotionally. Mobility is often associated with other factors such as poverty, stressful life events such as divorce, and poor performance in the initial years of schooling. This adds additional layers of complexity related to identifying the impact mobility plays on student success in the classroom (Engec, 2006; Gruman, Harachi, Abbott, Catalano, & Fleming, 2008; Han, 2014; Scherrer, 2013; Titus, 2007). Family life events such as a divorce can lead to a residential move, as well as a school move for a child. Financial constraints or a caregiver losing a job may uproot a family to temporary housing or living with a relative. This in turn may result in a school move for a child.

Each of these associated risk factors can have other implications that have the potential to impact student outcomes. For instance, students who live in poverty typically have access to less vocabulary and limited story and language structures (Payne, 2003; Quinn, Wagner, Petscher, & Lopez, 2015). Having less access to vocabulary and limited story and language structures, has the potential to impact a student's reading comprehension. With mobility having similar implications on student reading achievement, it adds a layer of complexity to identifying if the result of student outcomes is due to the associated risk factors or student mobility itself.

At the same time, student mobility can be caused by other factors that may be positives for children and their families. A growing family that has a new baby may move into a larger house to make space for more individuals in the home. Likewise, a parent or caregiver may get a promotion and need to relocate due to the location of the new position. Student mobility can be caused by a variety of factors, that can be positive or negative based on the specific situation.

### **Mobility & Associated Risk Factors**

Due to the nature and the causes of student mobility, researchers have considered the variables that may contribute to student mobility to determine if the associated risk factors or mobility itself are related to student outcomes. There is conflicting research in this area. Some studies have concluded that student achievement is not impacted by student mobility but instead by other factors. One study concluded that, “Children who move are performing poorly, on average, before they move, because they are disproportionately low-income, minority youngsters” (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996, p. 9). Similarly, another study determined that students were more likely to be at risk of low achievement due to pre-existing low performance, socio-economic disadvantage, newly acquiring English, or having a need for special education supports (Strand & Demie, 2006). The research explains that individuals that exhibit these factors may also be mobile; however, the individual’s mobility did not lead to low levels of performance. The research on associated risk factors conflicts with other research shared later in the literature review. However, it is important to note that student mobility can be associated with other risk factors which adds complexity to researching and evaluating student mobility in relation to student outcomes.

## **Collective School Performance**

Collective school performance has been studied in relation to student mobility following the educational policies and practices initiated with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These studies focused on understanding the implications of mobility on the school as a collective, instead of on an individual student. Results indicate that the performance standards set for schools by Adequate Yearly Progress were negatively impacted by student mobility. In a study completed by Offenbergl (2004), he explains that inferring school success based upon statistics may yield invalid results due to student mobility. Depending on when students move, they may or may not be counted in a school's performance data even if they moved during the calendar year to a new school. Thus, schools that have highly mobile student populations may have a number of students omitted or added to the school's achievement data depending on when students transfer or withdraw from the building. In a different study, trends and patterns related to which schools met versus those that did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind were studied. The study determined that there were no significant differences in mobility rates in schools that met or did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (Thompson & Meyers, 2011). This comparison illustrates that student mobility is not indicative of a school's overall academic performance. As school and district achievement data is utilized, it is important to consider how the mobile population may impact the picture of proficiency created. Mobile student results may or may not be counted in performance data, depending on when they transfer or withdraw from a school. At the same time, it is important to note that just because a school has a highly mobile student population it does not automatically mean the school is a low performing

school. Schools with highly mobile populations may be high or low performing schools as a collective entity.

### **Academic Outcomes for Mobile Students**

The current research that exists on academic outcomes for students who are mobile has mixed results as some research studies have isolated variables and found that the risk factors that are often associated with student mobility are the underlying factors related to student learning. However, there is research that indicates that student mobility as an isolated variable does impact student achievement outcomes. In a research study conducted by Parke and Kanyongo (2012), findings indicated that mobility has a negative impact on students math performance on state tests, after controlling for other factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender.

A body of research indicates that the academic outcomes of students who are mobile in the elementary years has a great degree of impact on student learning outcomes (Demie, 2002; Gruman, 2008; Ingersoll et al., 1989). In an earlier study completed by Demie (2002), results indicated that students who spent their entire educational experience in one school did much better than those who joined the school later in their educational career. With over half of the student population being mobile in their elementary years, this study provides valuable insight into the ramifications of student mobility as many students are experiencing at least one move during their school experience.

Additionally, a study conducted to evaluate the impact of mobility on achievement found that mobility had a negative effect on student performance on a norm referenced assessment, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores. Again, these

findings identified that there was a larger negative impact on students at the elementary or earlier levels than later years of school (Ingersoll et al., 1989; Rumberger, 2015). Gruman et al. (2008) research on student mobility of students in second through fifth grade also identified mobility as a negative effect on academic achievement. This study found that the more frequent the moves, the higher level of negative impact the mobility had on student achievement outcomes.

In addition to the impact on student academic outcomes in the short term, there are also academic implications in the long term for students who are mobile. Ross (2016) completed a study of graduation rates in New Jersey. In this study he found that student mobility was a statistically significant predictor of graduation rate, similar to socioeconomic status, English proficiency, and teacher mobility. This study's findings indicate the lasting influence that student mobility may have on student learning beyond the elementary years. Additionally, it addresses the idea that student mobility and associated factors such as socioeconomic status impact student learning outcomes.

A number of studies indicate a negative effect on student achievement due to mobility, while controlling for associated risk factors such as poverty. The findings suggest that mobility in the elementary grades can have a more significant educational impact on student learning that may be both short and long term. However, the effects of student mobility in the elementary grades does not just impact a student's achievement in the short term, but has a significant, lasting impact on the likelihood that a student would graduate from high school. Knowing the negative impact that student mobility can have on student learning in both the short and long term, it is essential that schools look at

what can be done to address the achievement gap for mobile students. This has the potential to positively impact the graduation rates of mobile students.

### **Academic Outcomes for Nonmobile Students**

While several researchers have explored the impact student mobility has on the mobile student, less research has been completed on the nonmobile student and the schools that serve mobile students. Much like the research related to the academic impact on mobile students, the research findings related to nonmobile students are mixed.

In one study, the results indicated a negative impact on nonmobile students achievement in relation to highly mobile classrooms (Scherrer, 2013). Similarly, the results of a study on graduation rates in New Jersey found that high student mobility, “Adversely affects the academic achievement of nonmobile students and the school as a whole” (Ross, 2016, p. 11), citing the pacing of curriculum to be highly problematic when trying to accommodate highly mobile students. When students who are mobile join a new classroom, the teacher needs to adjust the school schedule to teach the student new routines and procedures that were taught at the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, the student may have had content taught in a different scope and sequence, and as a result may have gaps in what curriculum they need instruction in. The teaching of routines and procedures, as well as skill gaps leads to less time focused on the instruction of nonmobile students. Amidst the need for these adjustments to the learning time, research indicates that students in the same classroom that were nonmobile outperformed their mobile peers (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2011). It is important to note that this does not mean that students were proficient in comparison to same age peers across different school settings; however, nonmobile peers did achieve better from being in one

classroom the entire year. The research on this topic is limited to a small number of studies, with contrasting results. Therefore, limitations exist in relation to generalizing the findings.

### **Behavior Outcomes for Mobile Students**

As noted above, the impact of student mobility on academic data yields mixed results. However, the findings related to behavior and social-emotional outcomes yield more comparable results. Overall, findings consistently indicate a correlation between student behavior and mobility (Gruman et al., 2008; Engec, 2006; Han, 2014; Pears, Kim, Buchanan, & Fisher, 2015). In 2006, Engec performed a study which found that suspension rates for students that had been in multiple schools in one year were typically higher. Corresponding results were found in relation to higher levels of insubordination at schools with higher mobility levels (Han, 2014; Engec, 2006; Pears, Kim, Buchanan & Fisher, 2015). Each of these studies indicate that students who are mobile are more likely to exhibit major code of conduct infractions that would lead to removal from the school and/or classroom environment. These types of behavior remove a student from the learning environment for an increment of time that could potentially exacerbate a student's learning gaps and social emotional development.

In addition to finding that students who are mobile are more likely to exhibit negative behaviors, student engagement within the classroom environment is also impacted. Findings indicate that cumulative mobility is a predictor of lower levels of class participation (Gruman et al., 2008; Rumberger, 2015). To maximize learning for mobile students in the classroom environment, students need to be actively engaged in

the classroom environment to acquire new skills, and fill any skill gaps that might merge. This research is important, as it acknowledges that a performance gap exists.

Similar results were found when completing a study of children in the foster care system in regards to socio-emotional competencies. Researchers concluded that the greater the number of school moves a child has, the lower the level of socioemotional competence the child may acquire (Pears et al., 2015; Gruman et al., 2008). When considering the lack of socioemotional competencies a student who is mobile might have, in conjunction with the increased likelihood of behavior infractions occurring in the school environment there are significant ramifications to address for mobile students. Mobile students are likely to lack the skills and strategies to regulate their emotions and interact with peers or adults, which then in turn leads to exhibiting negative behaviors in the school environment. The chain reaction and pairing of these two areas creates a repeated situation that results in little change of student behavior outcomes.

### **Behavior Outcomes for Nonmobile Students**

The research on mobile students has found that a relationship exists between mobility and negative behavior outcomes such as insubordination or suspensions from school. However, there has not been specific research that compares the behavior outcomes of nonmobile students to mobile students. Based on the findings identified above, there is evidence that supports the idea that a relationship exists between mobility and behavior outcomes (Gruman et al, 2008; Han, 2014; Engec, 2006; Pears, Kim, Buchanan & Fisher, 2015).

### **The Mobile Students' Perspective**

Researchers have collected qualitative data to gain insight into the perspective of students who have experienced mobility during their educational career. In one study, data indicated that student mobility does not negatively impact students attitudes towards school (Gruman et al., 2008). Conversely, another study found that students' aspirations were significantly impacted by student mobility (Han, 2014). Thus, students may have positive attitudes about school, but may lack the ambition to pursue future college or career plans due to their prior experiences with mobility.

A variety of findings in relation to mobile students' perspectives have been identified. Some mobile students reported issues with friendships and peer acceptance, especially with initial feelings of loneliness and uncertainty. In contrast, other students reported the fresh start at a new school to be a positive step in their school experience for academic, behavioral, or social emotional reasons (Messiou & Jones, 2015). As students reflected on their experience moving from school to school, a trend of how students perceived themselves emerged. Participants of one study identified themselves as the reason that they were successful, acknowledging their own resilience, self-reliance, and proactive thinking as critical (McHatton, Zalaquett, & Cranson-Gingras, 2006). These student perceptions indicate that even with student mobility having a negative impact on student outcomes, a mobile student's perspective of school may vary based on the individual student's experience.

### **Summary**

Research indicates the impact that a student-teacher relationship has on student outcomes. A positive student-teacher relationship can yield better outcomes, while a negative or combative student-teacher relationship is likely to result in an unfavorable

impact on student learning. When students feel attached to a teacher they feel secure, safe, and cared for which allows for optimal learning to take place.

Research has been completed to study the student-teacher relationship from a student's perspective, and has found specific attributes such as care and closeness that can build a strong foundation for learning to occur. Likewise, a healthy level of dependency can grow a strong student-teacher relationship. On the other hand, conflict can inhibit the growth of a strong student-teacher relationship which can impede the growth of a strong foundation for learning.

In conjunction with the research on student-teacher relationships, a great body of research has identified a relationship between student mobility and increased behavior problems as well as low social emotional competencies. Mixed conclusions have been drawn across multiple studies with some researchers finding no significant differences, and others finding significant differences in the academic achievement of mobile students.

Currently, there is not research that studies the student-teacher relationship specific to mobile students, to explore how mobility might impact the student-teacher relationship. When considering how perceptions influence our behavior and actions, it is important to understand the teacher view of the student-teacher relationship with mobile and nonmobile students. This may enable leaders to be informed on how teachers perceive student-teacher relationships with mobile and nonmobile students, so educators can identify ways to best serve all students. Knowing the impact of mobility on behavior and achievement outcomes, it is critical that leaders understand how student-teacher

relationships may vary for mobile and nonmobile students from the teacher perspective.

The teacher is the key individual in the student-teacher relationship.

## **Chapter III**

### **METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURE**

This chapter includes a description of the methodology for this exploratory research study, that guided the process of data collection and analysis. This section focuses on the purpose, research questions, participants, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, measure, and data analysis.

As part of the research process, the researcher requested approval from the Institutional Review Board through University of Nebraska at Omaha, as well as approval from the participating school district superintendent to access and utilize data related to student-teacher relationships, enrollment/attendance, office referral data, and academic data of students as part of this exploratory research.

#### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship with mobile students. Current research indicates that the student-teacher relationship significantly impacts a student's academic and behavioral outcomes. While a body of research exists that shows the impact of a quality student-teacher relationship on student outcomes, limited exploration of teacher perceptions regarding the student-teacher relationship with mobile students has been completed.

#### **Central Question.**

Do teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary by student mobility?

### **Supporting Questions.**

How do teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary in relation to academic or behavioral outcomes?

Are there patterns or trends that emerge in relation to conflict, closeness, or dependency of mobile and nonmobile students?

### **Participants**

As part of the district's work on addressing mobility, identified classroom teachers at one elementary school located within an urban school district, participated in the completion of a student teacher relationship instrument. The elementary building served approximately 400 pre-kindergarten to sixth grade students, and has higher mobility rates than other schools in the district. This urban school district had a mobility rate of less than 10%, with this specific elementary school having a mobility rate between 15% to 20% annually according to the Nebraska Department of Education Profile. The school had a student population where approximately 75% to 85% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, and a number of students qualify for English Language Services. This instrument was completed by classroom teachers for students who were mobile and nonmobile during the academic calendar year.

### **Sampling Procedures**

The total population of the sample group of teachers who completed the survey was approximately 15 to 20 teachers. Prior to providing staff with the survey tool, a sample population of students was established. A paired sample was used to further

understand what differences might be prevalent between mobile and nonmobile students. A random number generator was used to select nonmobile students for this study. Each nonmobile student in a class was assigned a number between a given boundary. From there, the random number generator function in Microsoft Excel was used to select a random number within the assigned boundary. The student identified with the random number was identified for the sample.

As part of this research study, mobile students were selected and data was accessed through the information management system for the school district. Mobile students within the system included any student that began school more than two weeks after the start of the academic calendar year or left the elementary school to attend a different school within the district, in Nebraska, or outside of Nebraska after the academic year began.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In agreement with the building principal, a staff meeting time was identified to have teachers complete the survey instrument. The survey was provided to staff as a paper document. Each survey was completed on one individual student. When given to staff, the survey had the name of a mobile or randomly selected nonmobile student on it. Teachers were provided the survey tool during a staff meeting, which they completed at that time. Upon completion, the paper survey documents were returned to administrative personnel. In the event that a teacher was absent on the day of the staff meeting, a follow-up meeting with the individual teacher was established to provide the survey for completion. All survey documents were locked in a secure location throughout the

administration process. In addition to the survey results, teachers were asked to provide information on what they did to make students feel welcome within the classroom.

As part of the research study, staff responses on the survey documents were compiled into an excel spreadsheet on a secure server for the school district, in addition to the information on enrollment, attendance, academic, and behavior. Random accuracy checks were completed following the transfer of information from the paper documents into the excel spreadsheet. In addition to survey results, additional information on each mobile and nonmobile student was collected from the current academic calendar year. This included the number of days a student was enrolled, the start or transfer/withdrawal date of the student, the number of days a student was absent, the number of days a student was in attendance, academic data, and office referral data. This information was acquired using the information management system records for the district. Academic information would include the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Rasch unit and percentile results on the winter assessment of the academic calendar year for math, reading, and language arts. Behavior information included the number of office referrals with the infraction date of each referral.

### **Measure**

The survey instrument used to collect information on teacher perceptions was the Student Teacher Relationship Scale by Robert Pianta. The data from this measure was accessed as part of this exploratory study. The survey was comprised of 28 statements regarding a specific student, in which a teacher selected from a five point Likert scale to what degree the statement applies to the student-teacher relationship (definitely does not apply, does not really apply, neutral or not sure, applies somewhat, and applies

definitely). These 28 statements were broken down into 3 subsections: dependency, closeness, and conflict. The conflict subscale score was identified through responses to 12 questions and indicate the teacher's perception of the negativity or conflict in the student teacher relationship. The closeness score was identified through 11 statement responses that reflect on the teacher's experiences of open communication, affection, or warmth with the student. Lastly, the dependency score was comprised of five statements which reflect the degree of dependence on a teacher that exists within the relationship. Table 1 includes the survey item statements listed by subsection. The instrument provided a total raw score and three subsection raw scores.

Table 1  
*Survey Item Statements by Subsection*

| Category   | Statement  |
|------------|--|
| Conflict   | <p>This student and I always seem to be struggling with each other.</p> <p>This student easily becomes angry with me.</p> <p>This student feels that I treat him/her unfairly.</p> <p>This student sees me as a source of punishment and criticism.</p> <p>This student remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined.</p> <p>When this student is misbehaving, he/she responds well to my look or tone of voice.</p> <p>Dealing with this student drains my energy.</p> <p>When this student is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day.</p> <p>This student's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly.</p> <p>Despite my best efforts, I'm uncomfortable with how this student and I get along.</p> <p>This student whines or cries when he/she wants something from me.</p> <p>This student is sneaky or manipulative with me.</p> |
| Closeness  | <p>I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this student.</p> <p>If upset, this student will seek comfort from me.</p> <p>This student is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me.</p> <p>This student values his/her relationship with me.</p> <p>When I praise this student, he/she beams with pride.</p> <p>This student spontaneously shares information about himself/herself.</p> <p>This student tries to please me.</p> <p>It is easy to be in tune with what this student is feeling.</p> <p>I've noticed this student copying my behavior or ways of doing things.</p> <p>This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me.</p> <p>My interactions with this student make me feel effective and confident.</p>  |
| Dependency | <p>This student appears hurt or embarrassed when I correct him/her.</p> <p>This student reacts strongly to separation from me.</p> <p>This student is overly dependent on me.</p> <p>This student asks for my help when he/she really does not need help.</p> <p>This student expresses hurt or jealousy when I spend time with other students.</p>  |

Source: Student Teacher Relationship Scale (1991).

## **Data Analysis**

A quantitative data analysis was completed to identify how teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationships vary in relation to mobility and other factors. A t-test was completed to determine if there was a difference in the total scores and each of the subscale raw scores for closeness, dependency, and conflict of mobile and nonmobile students. A t-score was calculated for the total and subscale scores, to compare the overall, mobile, and nonmobile student results with a two sample t-test.

Additionally, to determine if there was a correlation between teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship and academic achievement, a Pearson correlation was utilized for the total and subscale scores in conjunction with students RIT scores on the Measures of Academic Progress assessment in the areas of reading, language arts, and math. In analyzing the relationship between teacher perceptions of student-teacher relationships and behavior data, a Spearman correlation was used. The number of office referrals and number of days in attendance was used in conjunction with the total and subscale raw scores.

## **Data Analysis Suggestions**

When looking for patterns within the data, the protocol below was used to analyze data.

Table 2  
*Data Analysis Protocol*

| Data analysis        | Purpose  | Data Point 1                       | Data Point(s) 2                       |
|----------------------|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Paired sample t-test | Determine if variance exists   | STRS Total raw score (mobile)      | STRS Total raw score (nonmobile)      |
|                      |  | STRS Closeness raw score (mobile)  | STRS Closeness raw score (nonmobile)  |
|                      |  | STRS Dependency raw score (mobile) | STRS Dependency raw score (nonmobile) |
|                      |  | STRS Conflict raw score (mobile)   | STRS Conflict raw score (nonmobile)   |
| Pearson Correlation  | Determine if a relationship exists for 3 groups - mobile, nonmobile, and all of mobile and nonmobile | STRS Total raw score               | MAP RIT Percentile Reading            |
|                      |  | STRS Closeness raw score           | MAP RIT Percentile Reading            |
|                      |  | STRS Dependency raw score          | MAP RIT Percentile Reading            |
|                      |  | STRS Conflict raw score            | MAP RIT Percentile Reading            |
|                      |  | STRS Total raw score               | MAP RIT Percentile Math               |
|                      |  | STRS Closeness raw score           | MAP RIT Percentile Math               |
|                      |  | STRS Dependency raw score          | MAP RIT Percentile Math               |
|                      |  | STRS Conflict raw score            | MAP RIT Percentile Math               |
| Spearman Correlation | Determine if a relationship exists for 3 groups - mobile,  | STRS Total raw score               | Number of days in attendance          |
|                      |  | STRS Closeness raw score           | Number of days in attendance          |

|  |                              |                                 |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| nonmobile, and<br>all of mobile and<br>nonmobile | STRS Dependency<br>raw score | Number of days in<br>attendance |
|  | STRS Conflict raw<br>score   | Number of days in<br>attendance |
|  | STRS Total raw<br>score      | Number of office<br>referrals   |
|  | STRS Closeness<br>raw score  | Number of office<br>referrals   |
|  | STRS Dependency<br>raw score | Number of office<br>referrals   |
|  | STRS Conflict raw<br>score   | Number of office<br>referrals   |

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## Summary

This study sought to acquire insight and understanding of the following research questions: (a) Do teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary by student mobility? (b) How do teacher perceptions of quality student- teacher relationships vary in relation to academic or behavioral outcomes? (c) Are there patterns or trends that emerge in relation to conflict, closeness, or dependency of mobile and nonmobile students? Insight on this topic was acquired through analyses of a sample of teachers perceptions on quality student-teacher relationships with mobile and nonmobile students. Additional academic and behavior data was compiled and collected to explore if student mobility or other factors have an impact on teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship.

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore and better understand how teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary by student mobility. The study examined how teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary between the mobile and nonmobile student population. Additionally, the study considered how teacher perceptions vary in relation to academic and behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, the study looked at patterns and trends that emerged in relation to conflict, closeness, and dependency of mobile and nonmobile students. The results were drawn through the use of a 28 item survey completed by teachers regarding their perceptions of student-teacher relationships for randomly selected mobile and nonmobile students. A statistical analysis that utilized the results from the teacher completed student-teacher relationship scale in conjunction with student attendance, mobility, academic, and behavior information provided the opportunity to explore differences between mobile and nonmobile students. Surveys were completed on 104 student-teacher relationships, with 52 of the students being mobile and 52 of the students being nonmobile.

#### Central Question #1

Do teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary by student mobility?

**Result.** Teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships showed a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the mobile and nonmobile student population in terms of the overall student-teacher relationship, level of closeness in the relationship, and level of

conflict in the relationship. A significant difference in dependency was not noted between the mobile and nonmobile student population. The results related to this question on included on Table 3.

Table 3  
*T-test Results*

| Survey Section | n   | t-score  |
|----------------|-----|----------|
| Total          | 104 | 0.001206 |
| Closeness      | 104 | 0.008754 |
| Dependency     | 104 | 0.410703 |
| Conflict       | 104 | 0.012578 |

Note: P-value is 0.05

### **Supporting Question #2**

How do teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary in relation to academic or behavioral outcomes?

**Academic Results.** A strong relationship exists between a teacher's perception of the overall student-teacher relationship and the results of the Measures of Academic Progress reading assessment for the entire sample population. There is a weak to no correlation between the teacher's perception of the student-teacher relationship and the Measures of Academic Progress math. A moderate to strong correlation was found in relation to the level of closeness and dependency within a relationship between the teacher and mobile students. However, only a small sample of mobile students completed the math and reading assessment so further information would be needed to understand if this is

representative of the larger mobile population. Table 4 shows the specific results and sample populations included in the research sample population.

Table 4  
*Pearson Correlation Results from the Measures of Academic Progress and Teacher Perception Surveys*

| Survey Scale      | Reading    |          | Math       |          |
|-------------------|------------|----------|------------|----------|
|                   | Result(n)  | Strength | Result(n)  | Strength |
| <b>Total</b>      |            |          |            |          |
| All               | -0.875(52) | Strong   | -0.052(53) | None     |
| Mobile            | -0.271(8)  | Weak     | -0.214(7)  | Weak     |
| Nonmobile         | -0.699(44) | Strong   | -0.033(46) | None     |
| <b>Closeness</b>  |            |          |            |          |
| All               | -0.119(52) | Weak     | -0.146(53) | Weak     |
| Mobile            | -0.557(8)  | Strong   | -0.489(7)  | Moderate |
| Nonmobile         | -0.067(44) | None     | -0.091(46) | None     |
| <b>Dependency</b> |            |          |            |          |
| All               | -0.015(52) | None     | -0.154(53) | Weak     |
| Mobile            | -0.421(8)  | Moderate | -0.392(7)  | Moderate |
| Nonmobile         | -0.124(44) | Weak     | -0.116(46) | Weak     |
| <b>Conflict</b>   |            |          |            |          |
| All               | 0.110(52)  | Weak     | 0.032(53)  | None     |
| Mobile            | 0.101(8)   | Weak     | 0.101(7)   | Weak     |
| Nonmobile         | 0.031(44)  | Weak     | 0.031(46)  | None     |

**Behavior Results.** Within the study, a moderate correlation was found between teacher's perception of the overall student-teacher relationship for the entire sample population in relation to students attendance. This was identified through using the Spearman correlation. When separating the nonmobile and mobile population, either a weak correlation or no correlation existed. Additionally, the statistical analysis indicated a moderate correlation between the teacher's perception of the level of closeness in the student-teacher relationship and a student's attendance. Due to the low number of office referrals for mobile and nonmobile students in this sample, an analysis of the office referral data was not able to be completed.

Table 5

*Spearman Correlation Results for Attendance and Teacher Perception Surveys*

| Survey Scale | Result | Strength  |
|--------------|--------|-----------|
| Total        |        |           |
| All          | 0.312  | Moderate  |
| Mobile       | 0.176  | Weak      |
| Nonmobile    | 0.079  | None      |
| Closeness    |        |           |
| All          | 0.310  | Moderate  |
| Mobile       | 0.218  | Weak      |
| Nonmobile    | 0.179  | Weak      |
| Dependency   |        |           |
| All          | -0.055 | None      |
| Mobile       | 0.033  | None      |
| Nonmobile    | 0.120  | Weak      |
| Conflict     |        |           |
| All          | -0.197 | Weak      |
| Mobile       | -0.104 | None/Weak |
| Nonmobile    | -0.064 | None      |

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**Supporting Question #3.**

Are there patterns or trends that emerge in relation to conflict, closeness, or dependency of mobile and nonmobile students?

**Result.** Several patterns emerged in connection with the different components of the student-teacher relationship. In general, differences between teacher perceptions of the quality of the student-teacher relationship are evident in the overall student-teacher relationships results, as well as the closeness, dependency, and conflict levels that exist within the relationship. For the entire sample population, a correlation between the teacher's perception of the student-teacher relationship and the students attendance and reading assessment scores indicated moderate to strong relationships. Additionally, in the area of closeness, a moderate correlation exists between the overall student population and student attendance. Similarly, a moderate to strong correlation exists between the teacher's perception of the student teacher relationship and academic results in reading and math. The same can be seen in the academic results of students who are mobile in conjunction with the level of dependency within the relationship. On the other hand, a correlation does not exist or is very limited in terms of the level of conflict a teacher perceives within the student-teacher relationship in connection with the attendance and academic results a student attains.

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into five sections: a summary of the study, conclusions, implications, discussion, and recommendations for practice. The first section provides an overview of the study's purpose, a review of literature, the research design, and the findings. The second section shares conclusions that emerged through this exploratory study. The third section includes implications of the study for further research and practice. The fourth section presents a discussion of the implications as well as the conclusions. Lastly, the final section concludes with a list of recommendations for program development to assist school communities, administrators, and teachers in their work towards supporting the mobile student population.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to further explore and understand how teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships vary by student mobility. This included looking at how teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships varied between mobile and nonmobile students, as well as how teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships correlated to academic and behavioral outcomes for mobile and nonmobile students. An analysis of the patterns and trends that emerged in relation to teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships were considered.

To complete this research study, a 28 item survey called the Student Teacher Relationship Scale was provided to classroom teachers from one urban pre-kindergarten to sixth grade elementary school. The Student Teacher Relationship Scale, developed by Robert Pianta (1995), provided an overall score and three subscale scores regarding the

teacher's perception of the student-teacher relationship. The three subscales focused on the level of closeness, dependency, and conflict in the student-teacher relationship.

Classroom teacher's completed a survey on each mobile student and a randomly selected nonmobile student from the same homeroom class. Additionally, student information related to enrollment, academics, and behavior was collected from the research districts' student information system.

**Review of Literature.** Student-teacher relationships are built through experiences the student and teacher have with one another. Student and teacher perceptions of the relationship build a unique connection that may have different levels of closeness, conflict, and dependency. Closeness is built through positive interactions between the student and teacher. Research indicates that students viewed closeness in the care, treatment, responsibility, kindness, and knowledge a teacher exhibits towards them (Hajdukova, Hornby, and Cushman, 2014; Liu & Meng, 2009). Likewise, dependency identifies the willingness of a student to seek out help from their teacher. A study conducted by Mahan (1969), found that dependency could be observed through a student seeking out attention, recognition, proximity, physical contact, or assistance from a teacher. Lastly, high levels of conflict create low levels of trust, respect, and emotional closeness between the student and the teacher while low levels of conflict allow for positive relationships to grow and develop (Birditt, Miller, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2010; Ahmad & Rehman, 2014). Therefore, it is critical that students experience a level of closeness and dependency with their teacher while simultaneously experiencing limited levels of conflict in their interactions with their teacher.

Student-teacher relationships serve as the foundation for learning in the classroom. The body of research surrounding the importance of student-teacher relationships indicates the impact the connection between students and teachers has on academic and behavioral outcomes for students (Brophy and Evertson, 1976; Harris and Rosenthal, 1985; Hattie, 2009; Cornelis-White, 2007; Finn, Schrodtt, Witt, Eledge, Jernberg, & Larson, 2009; Marzano et al., 2003; Marzano 2007; Wubbels and Levy, 1993). Further research has been done to identify what practices and qualities in a student-teacher relationship aid in the development of a positive student-teacher relationship. Marzano's research indicates that teacher actions are the language of a student-teacher relationship (Marzano, 2007). Additionally, other research has found that emotional objectivity is a way to build positive student-teacher relationships (Brophy and Evertson, 1976). In a study completed by Harris and Rosenthal (1985), teacher encouragement and the amount of time spent engaged in interactions was found to yield the greatest impact on developing a quality student-teacher relationship.

**Research Design.** This study used quantitative methods. To acquire information on teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships, a 28 item survey provided statements which teachers rated on a five-point Likert scale identifying to what degree the statement applied to their relationship with the student. The student information system of the school district provided information related to student enrollment, attendance, office referrals, and the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment results to study the relationship between teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship, in connection with academic and behavioral outcomes. A statistical analysis

using a paired sample t-test, Spearman correlation, and Pearson correlation were completed. The findings were presented in Chapter IV.

## **Conclusions**

In this section, the results of the student-teacher relationship scale completed by the teacher regarding relationships with mobile and nonmobile students is presented in four sections. The three sections include: differences in the teacher perception of the student-teacher relationship, behavior outcomes and the student-teacher relationship, and academic outcomes and the student-teacher relationship.

*Differences in Teacher Perception of the Student-Teacher Relationship.* The findings from this study signal a difference in how teacher's perceive the relationships with mobile and nonmobile students. This was found using a .05 value of significance in the paired sample t-test. Additionally, the results indicated that there was a significant difference in the level of closeness and conflict that exists between the student and the teacher for mobile and nonmobile students. However, the level of dependency did not indicate a significant difference between mobile and nonmobile students. Significant differences between the overall relationship nonmobile and mobile students have with their teacher signal the importance of exploring this topic at a more granular level. Further research would provide the opportunity to unpack and find more information about why this might be occurring. Research on the student-teacher relationship indicates that opportunities to interact, encouragement, and teacher disposition play a role in the student-teacher relationship. A deeper look at this difference, while keeping the current research in mind may allow the opportunity to understand why teacher's are perceiving the student-teacher relationship differently for mobile and nonmobile students.

Additionally, when examining this topic at the application level, zooming in on closeness and conflict may assist in providing educators a better understanding of the differences in the student-teacher relationship for the mobile and nonmobile population. In studying this topic further, consideration of what practices and behaviors would lead teacher's to perceive these areas differently for mobile and nonmobile students would be beneficial. This might include a study of the amount and quality of interactions a teacher and student have, what encouragement might look like for students who are mobile and nonmobile, and how the teacher's disposition may play a role in closeness and conflict within a relationship.

*Behavior Outcomes and the Student-Teacher Relationship.* Teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship go hand in hand with attendance. A Spearman correlation was completed to determine if a relationship existed between attendance and teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship. For the entire sample population a moderate correlation was identified when analyzing attendance in conjunction with the holistic student-teacher relationship scale and the closeness subscale scores. Interestingly, teacher's perceptions of closeness again stood out when analyzing the data. Further exploration of the relationship attendance has with the teachers perceived closeness in the student-teacher relationship would be beneficial. Understanding how student attendance and teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship look within the classroom may help to unpack the relationship that exists between these two areas. One might want to explore the interaction or other factors that create this relationship between teacher perceptions of closeness in the relationship and student attendance at a deeper level. When looking at the dependency and conflict subscale scores in correlation

with attendance, a relationship was not identified. Again, patterns in teachers perceptions of dependency did not lead to a correlation or level of significance.

Regardless of student mobility, opportunities to interact matter. When looking at the mobile and nonmobile population in isolation, a correlation did not exist or a weak correlation was found. These findings indicate that as teachers and students have more opportunities to interact, the more likely a teacher is to have a positive perception of the student-teacher relationship. Thus, mobility status did not correlate with attendance. Further research would allow the opportunity to consider the context of the relationship between attendance and teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship.

*Academic Outcomes and the Student-Teacher Relationship.* This study found that teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship are tied to academic outcomes for students. A Pearson correlation was used to identify if a relationship between the students' reading and math performance, and the teacher's perception of the student-teacher relationship existed. Findings indicate that a strong correlation exists between a students overall reading score and the overall results of the student-teacher relationship scale. In reading and math a moderate to strong relationship was found between student academic results and the closeness and dependency scores for mobile students. Teacher perceptions of closeness in the relationship were again present in conjunction with student outcomes. Interestingly, this was the only area where a relationship between dependency and student outcomes was noted. One might want to look further at how dependency looks in practice at the classroom level to better understand why academic outcomes are connected to teacher perceptions of dependency.

Since the sample size for the mobile population was limited in both reading and math, additional research would be necessary to know if this is representative of the greater mobile population. The entire sample population and nonmobile sample group results indicated no correlation or a weak correlation with the overall and subscale scores from the student-teacher relationship scale. A moderate to strong relationship exists between closeness and dependency, in conjunction with reading and math scores for mobile students. These findings tell us that relationships matter in connection with students academic outcomes for the collective student body.

### **Implications for Further Research**

This study explored teacher perceptions of quality student-teacher relationships for a sample of 104 elementary students that included mobile and nonmobile students. This study found that teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship are significantly different between the mobile and nonmobile student population in the sample. This can be seen in the total score, closeness subscale score, and the conflict subscale scores on the 28 item survey teacher's completed regarding their relationship with the mobile or nonmobile student. Since this is a small sample of the population, further research regarding the difference in teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship with mobile and nonmobile students should be considered. Additionally, insight into understanding how the levels of closeness and conflict are impacted by mobility would be beneficial to further explore and understand. It would be beneficial to see if this research study sample population would yield similar results in different regions of the United States and in different types of communities.

The research also identified that a moderate relationship exists between teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship and student attendance for the entire sample population. While a relationship existed for the entire group of students in the study, a correlation between the mobile and nonmobile population did not exist or was weak. Thus, it would be important for further research to explore how the relationship between student attendance at school and the student-teacher relationship is perceived by the teacher. This might help to better understand whether attendance in a classroom leads to a stronger relationship or if a stronger relationship leads to increased attendance.

Lastly, additional research and analysis of the relationship between teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship and students academic outcomes would be beneficial to the exploration of how to best serve different student populations. Due to the limited number of mobile students who had assessment data, further study of teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship and academic outcomes may help to provide additional insight into this topic.

## **Discussion**

Knowing that teachers perceive the relationship with mobile and nonmobile students differently, it is important to consider ways to address this difference within the school and classroom community. Student-teacher relationships take time to grow and develop. When inquiring about how teachers develop relationships, teachers reported very intentional ways that they develop relationships with students. For instance, some teachers greet students by name each morning, while others give high fives when students walk into the classroom. One teacher shared that towards the beginning of the year, students were asked to journal about themselves and what they would want the teacher to

know about them. Another teacher shared how they intentionally talk with students during their morning routine to learn more about them. In thinking about how to welcome students, one teacher referred to the importance of connecting with the family. They explained how the goal of this focus was to help the student and their family feel connected to what was happening in the classroom. Each of these steps indicates the intentionality behind what teachers do to grow and foster positive student-teacher relationships with students as they enter the classroom for the first time and each day following.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The school district participating in this study has experienced a substantial change in demographics over the last decade, including the number of mobile students. Increased student mobility develops a need for thinking intentionally about how the school community approaches the arrival and departure of students, as this impacts how the student-teacher relationship develops. The next section includes a list of recommendations for practices that might support a school community experiencing higher levels of mobility in their growth and further development of positive student-teacher relationships.

*Schoolwide Systems & Structures.* One recommendation the school district may consider is developing structures and systems to assist new students in acclimating to the school. By having consistent schoolwide routines and procedures, students can acclimate to the basic routines and procedures at a faster pace across all classrooms they experience. This may support them in establishing a level of comfort in the school environment at a more efficient rate. Examples of this include the use of routines and

procedures to gaining the attention of a group through a specific quiet signal, or having a consistent routine for transitioning from class to class.

Additionally, schools that experience higher levels of mobility would benefit from having specific time designated to relationship development. When these schoolwide structures are embedded into the daily classroom practice, relationships can be grown and developed at any point in the school year. This might include times for classwide meetings, morning greetings, scheduled conversations, or a combination of these practices. An intentionally, planned system and structure for relationship development may help to cultivate positive student-teacher relationships across classroom and the school community.

Additionally, having schoolwide systems that provide teachers with information regarding a new student quickly may help to build and foster a positive student-teacher relationship with a new student. By providing staff information regarding the student in a timely manner, staff are able to put supports in place early on that encourage and grow positive interactions and experiences with new students. This may include information like how to pronounce a students' name correctly or a nickname they go by. Having this information ensures that the teacher is able to greet the student properly from day one and make them feel they are valued as a member of the school community. Additionally, having information on a students' currently level of performance allows a teacher to respond to student needs more immediately. This allows the teacher to be responsive to a students academic needs, and adjust the content and tasks being asked to what the student needs. Being able to do this increases the positive interactions experienced between the student and their teacher.

*Classroom Systems & Structures.* Another consideration teachers at the research school may consider is how they can systematically and intentionally develop relationships with students. As noted in previous research, interactions between students and teachers are likely to yield positive student-teacher relationship (Harris and Rosenthal, 1985). Teachers may wish to develop a system or scheduled way of ensuring that interactions between students occur in order to build relationships with mobile and nonmobile students if the school as a collective has not developed these structures. Having structured class meetings, morning greetings, or intentional interaction times planned for developing relationships helps to create a classroom atmosphere that is inviting, collaborative, and supportive of student learning.

Additionally, teacher's may consider participating in professional learning experiences that help them to further understand how to support the mobile student in the classroom academically, socially, or emotionally. This may be focused on academic areas such as how to utilize screening and diagnostic assessment data to guide instruction or how to differentiate for diverse learning needs in a classroom. Likewise, professional learning around how to support students social and emotional learning needs in the classroom may assist the teacher in responding to a student who has newly moved and is adjusting to a new location, school, or culture. Through focusing on how to best respond and support student needs in the classroom, teachers may see a positive impact on the development of relationships in the classroom.

Each student-teacher relationship has its own unique characteristics that have the potential to enhance or hinder student outcomes. As evidenced in this study, a difference exists between teacher perceptions of the student-teacher relationship with mobile and

nonmobile students. Therefore it is critical to further explore and understand what can be done to best serve the mobile and nonmobile populations. While each relationship is unique, this research indicates that the school community may need to consider how to approach the student-teacher relationship differently for mobile students as we strive to grow all learners.

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