

# Educational Attainment & Poverty Levels in Southside Virginia, 1980-2010

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## Background Information

In the 1950s, Prince Edward County's public school system closed in protest to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. While the effects of the closings have been studied by researchers during the time of the closings, little research has been addressed to how graduation rates have changed over time (Brown 2010, Hackman 2010, Losen 2004, Brookover 1993). In studies with educational attainment as a focal point, correlations between median education and poverty were made (Nitardy 2015). Researching the association between educational attainment and poverty rates is important due to the fact that previous studies have claimed that increased education can result in a raised income (Berry 1980). In order to observe how Prince Edward County is currently influenced by the public school closings, the graduation rates/educational attainment of students within Prince Edward County can be compared to surrounding counties and Virginia as a whole.

## Objectives

- Observe the change in educational attainment from the earliest attainable, comparable data 1980 to 2010.
- Observe the change in poverty from the earliest attainable, comparable data 1980 to 2010.

## Methodology

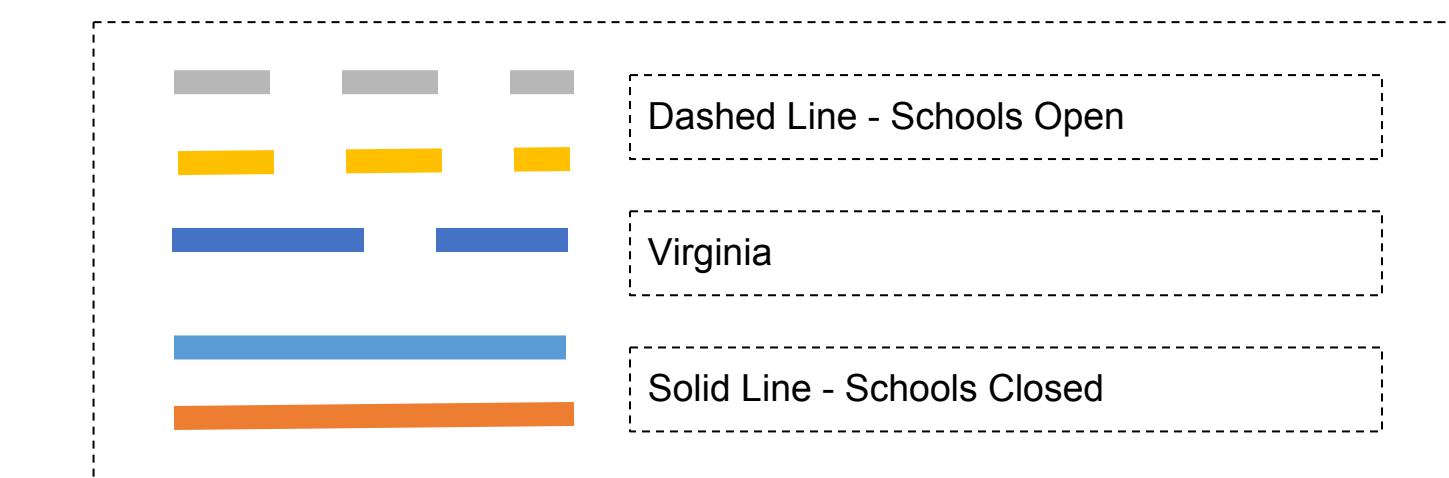
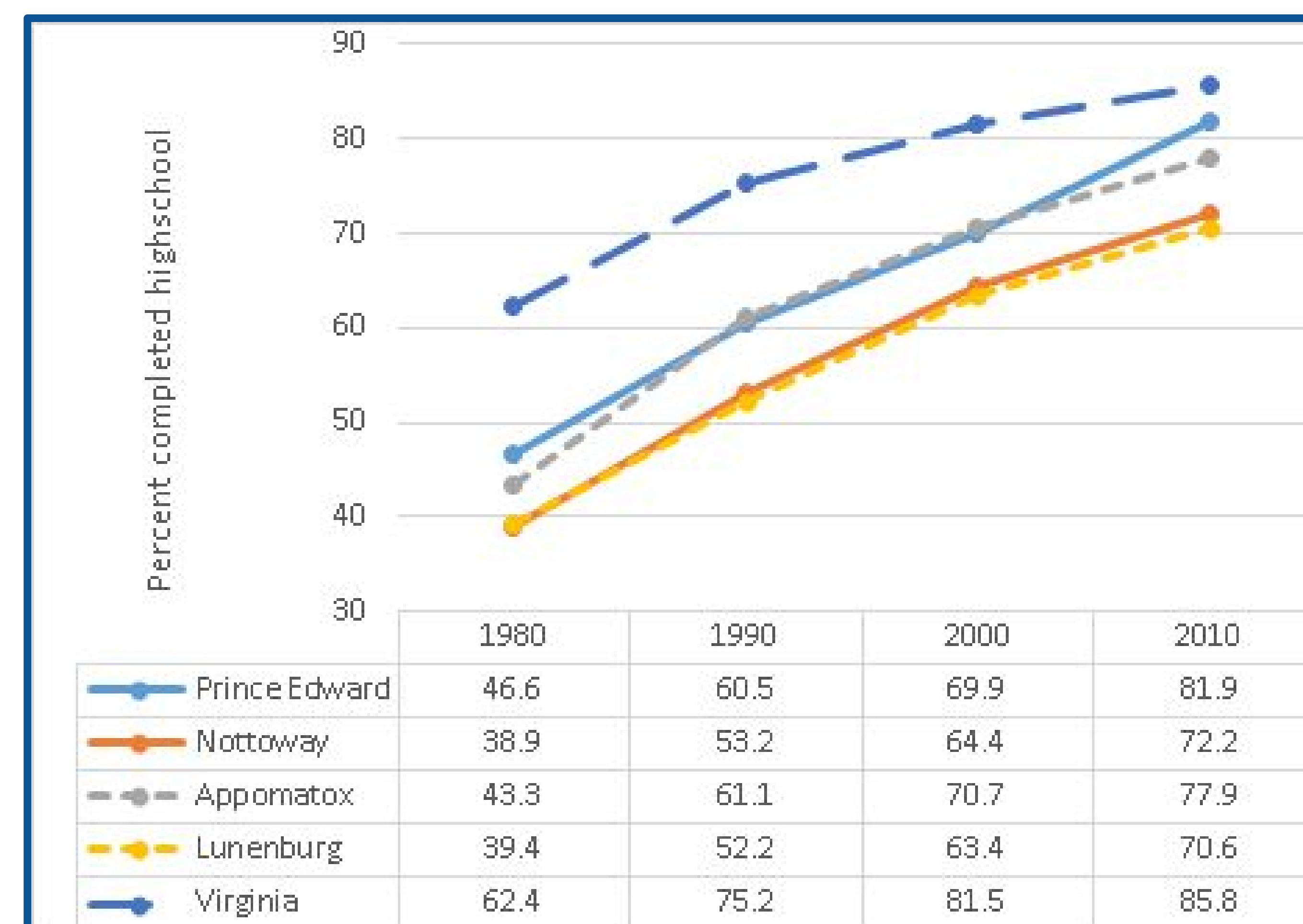
Data for this study comes from the United States Census focusing on individuals 25 years of age and older. Counties for comparison in this study were chosen using the typology found in Brown (2010). This typology was created based on whether or not school closings occurred after the *Brown V. Board of Education* decision. The counties that closed their schools included: Prince Edward County and Nottoway County. The counties that were less resistant to integration included: Appomattox County and Lunenburg County. In addition to comparing counties, this study also makes the comparison with the state of Virginia to see trends in relation to the state. For this study, educational attainment is operationalized as obtaining a high school level education, this includes a GED. Poverty is defined by federal guidelines.

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## Results

Figure 1: Educational Attainment



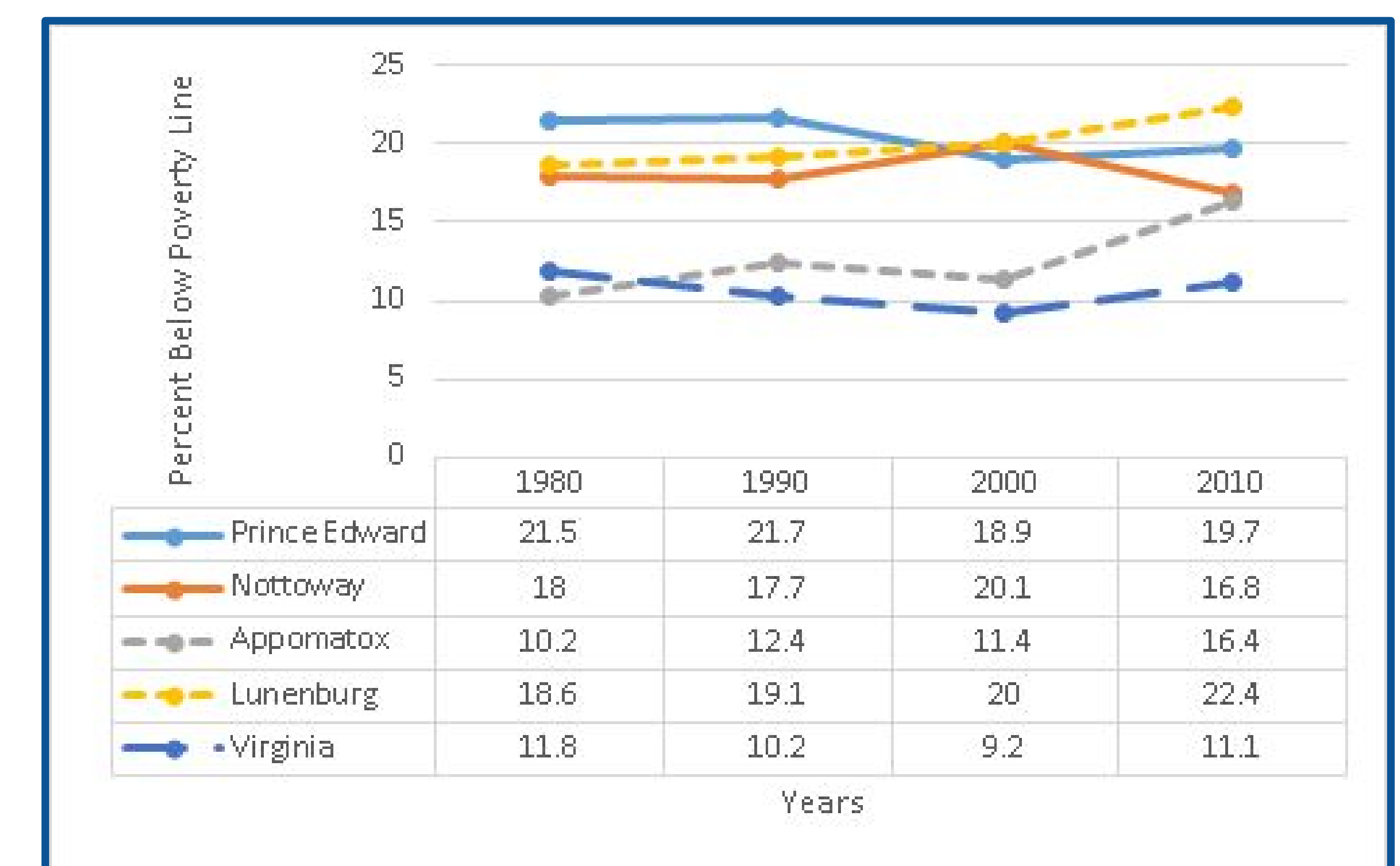
## Figure 1 Results

Figure 1 represents the percentage of people in all four counties who have graduated high school or obtained a GED. The graph has a positive trend, showing that the percentage of students who have obtained a high school level of education has increased, and has begun to close the graduation rate gap within Virginia as a whole.

## Figure 2 Results

Figure 2 represents poverty rates. All of the counties have stayed about the same with minor fluctuations. However, if we look at the data, Virginia as a whole is lower. This could possibly be caused by the economic differences between Northern and Southern Virginia.

Figure 2: Poverty Rates



## Conclusion

According to the data there is a clear increase in educational attainment at the high school level between 1980 and 2010 for all localities. However, we were surprised by Figure 2 since poverty levels remained somewhat consistent over time. This was unexpected because we thought the increase in educational attainment would result in poverty decreasing.

School closings initially had a negative impact on the percentage of people who attained a high school level education. As time has progressed, the damage has begun to reverse itself resulting in higher educational attainment in Prince Edward County and surrounding counties. Unfortunately, the earliest attainable data utilized in the study dates back to the 1980s due to differing federal calculations of poverty rates. Additional research on the poverty in these counties would be interesting because of the stagnation in spite of increasing educational attainment. One possible reason for the difference in poverty rates, between the state as a whole and the southern counties is the difference between the economies in Southern and Northern counties of Virginia. No evidence was found supporting the idea that there is a link between educational attainment and poverty rates. This could be because of a possible time lag between the increase in educational attainment and poverty rates. Future research could be done to find a possible link between educational attainment and poverty rates; by conducting a similar research project that compares these variables across different areas in the country.