The Statistical Picture of Poverty
In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson declared “war on poverty.” These beliefs became the U.S. poverty threshold definitions and formula were established. The definitions and formula were established by Mollie Beaman G. Macauley of the Social Security Administration. The formula calculates the income needed to provide the least nutritious, nutritionally sound diet for everyone in household and multiplies it by three. Each year the formula is adjusted for inflation, but the method has remained virtually unchanged for over 40 years. [http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/poverty/papers/hptgsiv.htm]

The statistics cited are based on this formula.

More than one-third of children in the United States live in low-income families meaning their parents earn up to double what is considered poverty in this country. The federal poverty level (FPL) for a family of four (2004) is $18,850.

• 16% of American children—more than 11 million—lived in poor families in 2002, meaning their parents’ income was at or below the federal poverty level. These parents are typically unable to provide their families with basic necessities like stable housing and reliable child care.

• 37% of American children—more than 26 million—lived in low-income families in 2002. Their parents made less than 200% of the federal poverty line (FPL). These families often face material hardships and financial pressures similar to those families who are officially counted as poor.

After a decade of decline, the rate of children living in families with low-income is rising again, a trend that began in 2000.

Percent of children in low-income families, 1990-2002

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FPL 100-200%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 100% FPL</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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Two out of three children in low-income families live in either the South or the West.

• In the Northeast and Midwest, children in urban areas are more likely to live in low-income families.

• In the South and West, children in rural areas are more likely to live in low-income families.

Heterogeneous Learner

Social Capital | Explanation | Academic Initiative | Many students lack a school work ethic; good study habits, and a high level of self discipline. Academic success is not perceived as relevant to their future lives.

Sens of Knowing | Students do not have a solid foundation upon which to build success in school. They do not have opportunities to thrive, which include pre-school attendance, travel, summer camps, home computers, tutors, music lessons, exposure to the arts, and visits to colleges.

Sens of Connectedness | Students feel alienated and do not have a sense of belonging to their community, neighborhood, or school. They do not feel that they belong at school and do not perceive schoolwork to be of great value.

Sens of Well-being | Students feel emotionally and psychologically insecure. Worries about the future, low levels of self confidence and self respect negate a feeling of well-being.

In Georgia, the statistics are:

Low-Income Families: 34% (382,754) of families with children are low-income (National: 54%).

Insecure. Worries about the future, little hope and low levels of self confidence and self respect. Low personal expectations and low self efficacy perpetuate low achievement and failure. Teachers have an unconscious middle-class mindset about how students should talk, behave and dress. Any departure from that paradigm reflects negatively on the student’s ability and potential. High mobility, low education level of parents, job instability, number of persons in the home, and lack of basic necessities result in students being detached from learning and focusing their thoughts on survival. The school culture is viewed by students as being un-supportive and unchallenging. Students do not feel they are wanted and valued in the learning environment. Bamburg suggests that new thinking is needed to educate children who are in poverty. NCOREL Monograph: Raising Expectations to Improve Student Learning, 2000. [www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educators/leadship/le0bam.htm]

Perspectives on Poverty
A different and interesting approach to characterizing children from poor homes is that children from poor homes lack four types of social capital. They do not have a sense of academic initiative, knowing, connectedness, and well being.

Some researchers believe that the poor adopt belief systems that make their lives tolerable while living in an affluent society. These beliefs become the U.S. poverty threshold definitions and formula were established. The definitions and formula were established by Mollie Beaman G. Macauley of the Social Security Administration. The formula calculates the income needed to provide the least nutritious, nutritionally sound diet for everyone in household and multiplies it by three. Each year the formula is adjusted for inflation, but the method has remained virtually unchanged for over 40 years. The statistic cited are based on this formula.

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Public School: Key to Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Poverty is one of America’s most persistent problems and impacts learning and achievement in school perhaps greater than any other single factor. Success in raising achievement in high diversity, low income, low-achieving schools and school systems can be accomplished if it is acknowledged and understood that students must learn even though poverty is present and persistent. For schools and school systems to break the cycle of poverty, it means that teachers and administrators must have some understanding of the many dimensions of poverty, its effects and be trained in techniques and skills to help high-risk students achieve and free themselves from the limitations of poverty. Requiring all children to learn has been mandated by the U. S. government, but most of the country have become the passion and the voice of conscience for school administrators and classroom teachers because the public school system has been and remains the most available and inclusive means for helping children break the cycle of poverty.

New technology and statistical methods are providing data to school systems that will be beneficial in targeting funds, designing instructional activities, and tracking progress. Data systems are now improving which will help schools systems track achievement by school and by subgroups. Census data are also available to help define the level and scope of poverty in the community.

The research on the effects of poverty has used become more sophisticated and is helping teachers and administrators understand the effects of poverty on learning, behavior. Poverty is the strongest predictor of student success with the exception of a student's prior achievement. Poverty does not mean that students can't learn, but it does mean that teachers and schools must do more and do it differently to help these students achieve.

Poverty

Poverty is a generic term for describing many conditions in which students and their families live. It usually means that a person or family has insufficient income and resources to sustain healthy living. Poverty can predictably be identified when there is a coalescence of factors such as low educational level among significant adults, significant number of minority/racial group(s), lack of job skills, one or more parent(s) on low income. These factors combine and interact to form an environment often worsened by the involvement of drugs and crime.

Poverty is generally divided into two types: generational poverty and situational poverty. Generational poverty is when the economic level of a family drops and stays in a low economic state for more than two generations. It is very likely that the 25 million generational poverty individuals will remain there and be passed on to their children. Many researchers and public health and social service providers think that generational poverty creates a belief in children that they cannot change their circumstances. Moreover, they become comfortable in their culture and do not want to change (Victims of Generational Poverty May Use Hidden Rules of Conduct, California Educator, 8 (8) May, 2004.


www.cta.org/CaliforniaEducator/v08/5HTC.htm. Donna Beegle, author and lecturer on poverty and a generational poverty product, says that poverty creates a student that teachers don’t always know how to teach. (Donna Beegle, Overcoming the Silence of Generational Poverty, Talking Points, 15 (1) October 2003, 11-20).

Situational poverty is the decline in resources because of the loss of a job, a death, a divorce or other catastrophic event that forces a family to change their style of living temporarily—one to five years. Children usually rebound from situational poverty, but their self-esteem, self efficacy and confidence usually need attention and reparation. Specific attention must be paid to a student's coping skills and academic progress during this stressful time. Failure to help a student cope with this new and demanding situation can result in generational poverty for the student and his/her future children.

Further Reading

The publications and websites below contributed to the information presented in this issue brief and provide additional information to readers.


Holloway, John H. How the Community Influences Achievement, Educational Leadership, 63 (8), May 2004, 39-90.


Vol. 7 No. 2                 May 2005

Issue Brief

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

It has been 50 years since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law for the purpose of offsetting the disadvantages students from poor or impoverished neighborhoods and families bring to the classroom. Since the 1960s a variety of federal and state programs have been designed and implemented to help the slow learner, the high risk student and the low socio-economic student to have more equity in the classroom. Title I, the major program of ESEA has shown some decrease in narrowing the achievement gap between students from higher income and lower income families, but the gap remains too wide.

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