



Building School Communities for Students Living in Deep Poverty

Peter W. Cookson Jr. and Linda Darling-Hammond

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Executive Summary

Every year the federal government establishes poverty thresholds for families and individuals. Currently, the poverty threshold for a family of four is \$27,750. If a family's annual income is below the poverty threshold, the family is considered to be living in poverty. If a family's annual income is 50% below the poverty threshold, the family is living in deep poverty. Deep poverty is the result of economic and social policies that inhibit the life chances and opportunities of children experiencing material hardship. These barriers to success are compounded when children are discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, English learner status, religion, dis/ability status, and immigration status.

Because their needs are often ignored, children living below the poverty line have been called the “invisible Americans.” But, of course, they are not invisible. In too many instances, policymakers, and society at large, have turned a blind eye to how material hardship results in suffering and loss of opportunity for generations of children.

The purpose of this report is to make what is “invisible” visible and to suggest three evidence-based strategies that have the capacity to enable educators, in collaboration with the families and the communities they serve, to create learning environments in which students living in deep poverty are supported and successful. While education alone cannot eliminate childhood deep poverty, it is a key component for a comprehensive approach to building an enduring equal-opportunity society.

Background

Today, more than 5 million children in the United States—roughly 7% of all American children—are living in deep poverty. Children of color are more likely to live in deep poverty than white children. Children living in deep poverty can be found in every state in the union. Many children living in deeply poor households live in communities of concentrated poverty, where 30% or more of individuals and families live below the poverty line.

Deep poverty is part of the structure of American society. It is socially created and maintained by policies and laws that fail to guarantee a living wage to workers and fundamental social supports to families, such as child care and health care. Families living in deep poverty face profound material, social, and emotional hardships: They suffer from food shortages, unemployment, unstable housing, inadequate medical care, electrical shutoffs, and, often, isolation. These hardships typically impact Black and Indigenous families more profoundly than white families, due to a long history of discrimination that has deprived Black citizens and Native Americans of property, education, and services.

Deep poverty is a multidimensional social ecology; families are confronted by continuous experiences of vulnerability, marginality, and often violence, which are acute, compounded, and persistent. Recent research shows that deep poverty is associated with the reemergence of diseases thought to be eradicated, declining life expectancies, and nearly constant food and housing insecurity—including a recent spike in visible homelessness.

Past efforts to reduce deep poverty were only temporarily successful in the 1960s: From the 1970s to today the rates of deep poverty have essentially remained the same. Recently, the elimination of poverty gained some political and legislative momentum with the passage of the American

Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which is estimated to have cut child poverty in half during 2021. The Biden administration’s Build Back Better Framework would extend the ARPA tax credit through 2022, along with housing supports and health care supports that would begin to rebuild a safety net. However, the failure of the Senate thus far to pass this bill has left in limbo the future of this anti-poverty agenda.

Creating Deep Poverty–Responsive Schools

The research of Richard Milner and colleagues has provided a framework for how schools can become “poverty-responsive.” Becoming poverty-responsive requires educators to take three steps:

1. Shift deficit-based conceptions of students in poverty to those that are asset-based, using strategies that can see and build on students’ strengths.
2. Develop partnerships with communities to respond to a range of out-of-school issues.
3. Accept the reality that many students living in poverty are “school dependent,” and that it is important to create schools they can depend on.

The report extends these insights to describe how “deep poverty–responsive” schools might be created based on research evidence starting with adequate and equitable funding, which can help create schools that students living in poverty can depend on. It then shows how community schools can develop those partnerships with communities that respond to a range of out-of-school issues, as well as creating productive in-school learning conditions. Finally, it presents evidence that developing a whole child teaching and learning culture is a proven way of creating an asset-based approach for developing and sustaining programs and pedagogies that build on the strengths of all students.

Key to creating deep poverty–responsive schools is acknowledging the root causes of deep poverty, which are historical and structural. Rather than a focus on “fixing” students, it is important to understand how social structures and school organizations need to be reformed to serve them well.

Findings

1. Adequate and Equitable Funding Supports Student Success

Recent analyses of data prepared for school equity cases in more than 20 states have found that on every tangible measure—from qualified teachers and reasonable class sizes to adequate textbooks, computers, facilities, and curriculum offerings—schools serving large numbers of students of color and students from low-income families have typically had significantly fewer resources than schools serving more affluent students.

Fair funding has two basic components: a sufficient level of funding for all students and increased funding for children living in poverty, as well as those with other needs (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities). By this standard, most states do not have fair school finance formulas. In addition to the fact that districts serving more low-income children receive less money per pupil in most states, schools serving low-income children often receive less funding than those serving more affluent students within school districts.

This is a challenge that has a solution. Newly available data sets and methodologically sophisticated statistical approaches show that, in states that have undertaken reforms creating more adequate and equitable funding, the investments in low-income schools have had a

significant positive impact on student school outcomes, including higher achievement and graduation rates, and lifelong success, including stronger employment and wages, as well as reduced rates of adult poverty. Resource equity is essential for allowing all students living in deep poverty to thrive. Foremost, this means that states should provide funding based on specific student needs—as, for example, California, Massachusetts, and New Jersey do—and take into account the costs districts face when they have concentrations of such students. To meet the needs of students living in deep poverty, districts must then implement equitable funding policies across all their schools.

2. Community Schools and Partnerships Promote the Learning and Well-Being of Students From Deep-Poverty Households

Community schools represent a place-based strategy in which schools partner with community agencies and allocate resources to provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and family and community engagement. Many operate on all-day and year-round schedules and serve both children and adults. Community schools are academic and social centers where educators, families, and neighbors come together to engage in innovative learning, recreation, health care, and social services. Community schools are associated with positive student outcomes, such as reduced absenteeism, improved academic outcomes, and student reports of more positive school climates.

A growing number of communities are moving beyond a single school to a broader geographic area, as deep poverty can be found throughout regions in a county or state. At least 100 school districts have taken the community schools strategy to scale. Case studies of districtwide community school plans in Oakland, CA, Hartford, CT, New York City, NY, and Tulsa, OK, have yielded promising results in terms of academic achievement, attendance, and improved school climate; to date, these experiments in taking community schools to scale have been sustained. One recent study indicated that every \$1 invested in community schools affiliated with Children’s Aid in New York City delivered an additional \$12 to \$15 in social value. A Rand Corporation study of the New York City Community Schools Initiative found that it had a positive impact on student attendance, grade progress, math achievement, and students’ sense of connectedness to peers and school. Building on these successes, California, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, and Vermont have all launched statewide community school initiatives.

3. Whole Child Teaching and Learning Cultures Build on Students’ Strengths

Learning requires secure attachments and affirming relationships. Such an environment reflects a whole child approach to education, seeking to address the distinctive strengths, needs, and interests of students as they engage in learning. Evidence from the science of learning has found that strong relationships and supportive conditions can offset the effects of trauma on learning and behavior and can support growth. Educational success for children from households living in deep poverty is best achieved when educators know their students and their families in depth. Many students living in deep poverty experience trauma. Schools serving students from deeply poor families should develop practices that focus on healthy attachments, understand and address trauma, build on children’s strengths, and access community resources.

Creating a supportive school environment involves building a safe and caring learning community, with consistent routines that allow students to be well known and well supported in an environment that is culturally responsive and inclusive, providing both physical and

psychological safety. Furthermore, school designs that are trauma- and healing-informed include structures and practices to support attachment and to recognize children’s strengths and needs by ensuring that every student is known and supported by adults. When adults in the school have opportunities to learn about the lives and experiences of their students, they are better able to marshal assistance when needed.

Some strategies include advisories—small groups that provide every student with a caring community and a school advocate—and looping, which is the practice of keeping students with the same teacher or team for more than 1 year so that they know each other well and develop positive relationships. In addition, schools can train educators and staff to recognize students who are experiencing trauma in their lives and respond to them with caring instead of frustration or punishment. They can increase outreach to families to gather information, support parents, and co-create collaborative approaches to support student health. They also can integrate strategies to reduce stress and promote physical and emotional well-being for all students, such as mindfulness and breathing practices; breaks throughout the day that offer physical movement; lessons on brain science, growth mindset, stress, and healthy lifestyles; and acknowledgment of emotional issues in students’ lives.

Working in high-poverty schools where children and families experience so much stress can be difficult. There is growing evidence that ongoing professional learning in a collegial environment, along with distributed models of school leadership, helps create and sustain teachers’ morale and commitment, reducing teacher attrition and enhancing effectiveness. It is critically important that high-poverty schools support teachers’ mental health and wellness, which, not surprisingly, is strongly associated with students’ success. This includes creating positive working conditions and reasonable pupil loads, providing adequate materials and supplies, and giving teachers the ability to access wraparound services for their students; teachers need to be able to help children rather than experience the ongoing distress of their students’ unaddressed needs.

The Time Is Now

Education alone cannot end child poverty. But education is an essential ingredient in eliminating childhood poverty because it can transform lives from the inside out. All children, including those who come from deeply poor families, have a right to develop their talents and to fully participate in democracy. This report makes the case that by educating the whole child in caring, inclusive school communities with resources that address the full range of children’s needs, the trauma related to living in conditions of deep poverty can be mitigated and, to some extent, healed. By building on the strengths of deeply poor families and communities, schools can fulfill their historic commitment to equality of opportunity, including the opportunity for all children to learn, thrive, and follow their dreams.

Introduction

Every year the federal government establishes poverty thresholds for families and individuals. Currently, the poverty threshold for a family of four is \$27,750.¹ If a family's annual income is below the poverty threshold, the family is considered to be living in poverty. If a family's annual income is 50% below the poverty threshold—\$13,875 per year or less—the family is living in deep poverty. Today, more than 5 million children in the United States—roughly 7% of all American children—are living in deep poverty, in conditions that often deprive them of food, safe shelter, health care, and many of the other basic necessities of survival.² Children of color are more likely to live in deep poverty than white children.³

Today, more than 5 million children in the United States are living in deep poverty, in conditions that often deprive them of food, safe shelter, health care, and many of the other basic necessities of survival.

Deep Poverty and America's "Invisible" Children

Children living in deep poverty can be found in every state in the union. They live in cities; in the hills and valleys of rural America; and, increasingly, in the suburbs. Many children living in deeply poor households live in communities of concentrated poverty, where 30% or more of individuals and families live below the poverty line.⁴

Deep poverty is the result of economic and social policies that inhibit the life chances and opportunities of children experiencing material hardship. These barriers to success are caused (and compounded) when children are discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, language, immigration status, religion, dis/abilities, or gender identity.⁵

Fundamental to a just and fair society is the commitment that all children be given the opportunity to grow and thrive so that they can live successfully and contribute to society. The first step in achieving this social and ethical imperative is to identify childhood poverty and deep poverty so they can be reduced and, ultimately, eliminated.

In the spring of 2021, an analysis by the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University concluded that the American Rescue Plan Act's "relief package containing enhanced Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, unemployment benefits, family and child care tax credits, as well as direct cash payments could cut child poverty by more than half in 2021."⁶ Indeed, these investments did dramatically reduce child poverty in that year. However, the continuation of these benefits was not secured because the administration's Build Back Better Act was not passed. In early 2022, a follow-up policy update reported:

The monthly child poverty rate increased from 12.1 percent in December 2021 to 17 percent in January 2022, the highest rate since the end of 2020. The 4.9 percentage point (41 percent) increase in poverty represents 3.7 million more children in poverty due to the expiration of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments. Latino and Black children experienced the largest percentage-point increases in poverty (7.1 percentage points and 5.9 percentage points, respectively).⁷

As the data above and later in this report make clear, poverty and deep poverty can be reduced and eliminated when governments commit to a sustained effort to put in place policies that support the needs of families who struggle financially. Without these policies, more children, particularly children of color, will live in conditions of material hardship; for those children living in deep poverty, these hardships will be acute and persistent. Because their needs are often ignored, children living below the poverty line have been called the “invisible Americans.”⁸ But, of course, they are not invisible. In too many instances, policymakers and society at large have chosen to turn a blind eye to how material hardship results in suffering and loss of opportunity for generations of children.

The purpose of this report is to make what is “invisible” visible and to suggest three evidence-based strategies that have the capacity to enable educators, in collaboration with the families and the communities they serve, to create learning environments in which students living in deep poverty are supported and successful. The report begins by documenting the human cost of deep poverty and how past policy decisions have contributed to the persistence of deep poverty. Based on this background, the report focuses on three promising strategies for meeting the learning and social-emotional needs of all children, including those living in deep poverty:

1. Begin with funding adequacy and equity.
2. Develop community schools and partnerships.
3. Develop a whole child teaching and learning culture.⁹

The report’s conclusion acknowledges that while education alone cannot eliminate childhood deep poverty, it is a key component for a comprehensive approach to building an enduring equal-opportunity society. To truly meet the needs of families living in deep poverty, a suite of policies that include access to adequate housing, health care, safe and nontoxic living environments, and employment will be required.¹⁰

This report is centered on deep poverty and education in the United States, but it is important to note that this is a global issue that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹ We are hopeful that the strategies discussed in this report will be useful for policymakers, educators, and communities in and outside of the United States.

The Depth of Deep Poverty

Families living in deep poverty face profound material, social, and emotional hardships: They suffer from food shortages; unemployment; unstable housing; inadequate medical care; electrical shutoffs; and, often, isolation. These hardships typically impact Black and Indigenous families more profoundly than white families, due to a long history of discrimination that has deprived Black citizens and Native Americans of property, education, and services. Deep poverty is a multidimensional social ecology; families are confronted by continuous experiences of vulnerability and marginality, which are acute, compounded, and persistent.¹² Recent research shows that deep poverty is associated with the reemergence of diseases thought to be eradicated, declining life expectancies, and nearly constant food and housing insecurity—including a recent spike in visible homelessness.¹³

In a study by the National Center for Children in Poverty, the authors outline some of the many challenges young people raised in deep poverty face:¹⁴

- The percentage of young children in deep poverty who have elevated lead levels is 3 times higher than the percentage for poor children and over 17 times higher than the percentage for non-poor children.
- Parents of 6- to 9-year-old children living in poverty report about double the prevalence of child stress as non-poor children.
- Less than 50% of deeply poor children age 6 months to 5 years are viewed by their parents as “flourishing.”

For households living in deep poverty, material deprivation is extreme and is a gateway to a host of other economic, social, and personal challenges that can lead to increased isolation and marginalization. The desperation that often accompanies deep poverty can lead to extreme measures for survival; for instance, it is not unusual for adults living in deep poverty to sell their blood plasma for money. While conducting research for their study of deep poverty, authors Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer noted a type of physical scar from poverty prevalent in the United States:

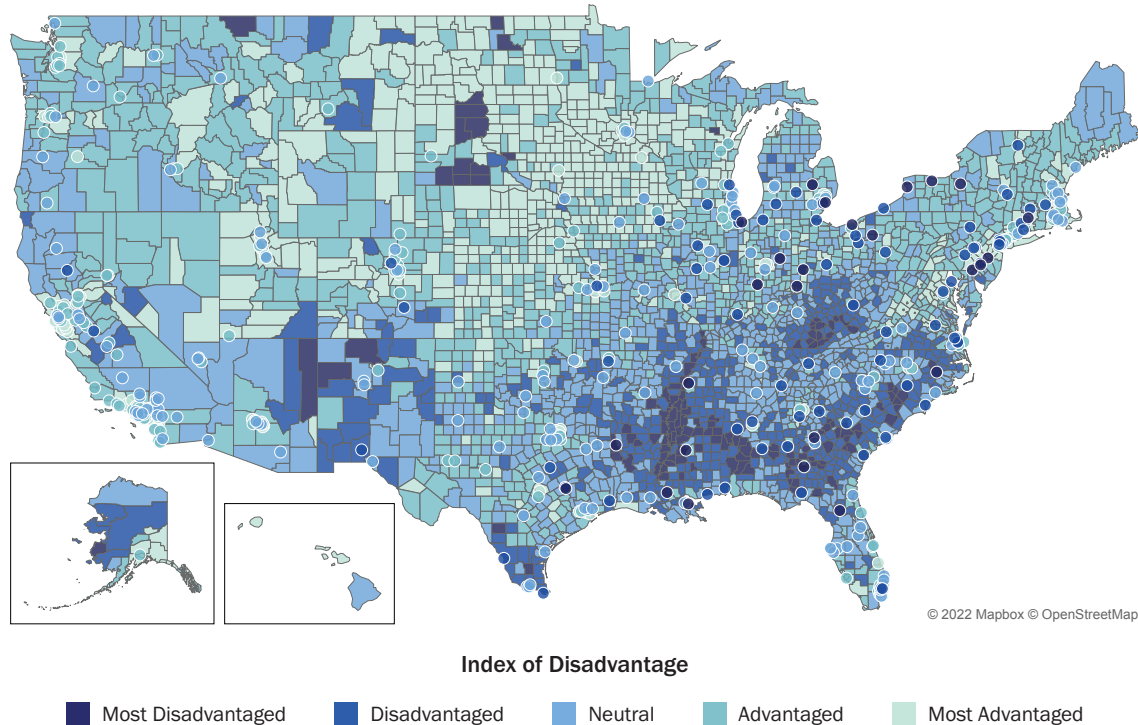
As we got to know the families in our study, we often noticed small divots on the inside crease of a parent’s elbow. We found that these were scars from selling blood plasma to generate cash during spells without any money. We subsequently learned that the United States is one of the few nations where someone can sell plasma up to twice a week (8 times per month), for roughly \$30 each time.... Plasma sales in the United States have more than quadrupled since 2006, the first year a reliable count became available, skyrocketing to over 48 million in 2018. Some call the United States the “OPEC of blood plasma” because it is the source of 70 percent of the world’s supply.¹⁵

Deep poverty is part of the structure of American society. It is socially created and maintained by policies and laws that fail to guarantee a living wage to workers and fundamental social supports to families, such as child care and health care.¹⁶ Communities of deep poverty are the result of long-term social dynamics, legal decisions, and economic policies, ranging from lenders’ redlining decisions creating community disinvestments to discriminatory real estate practices and unfair systems of funding for schools, hospitals, transportation, and other public services. Research makes evident that the causes of deep poverty are not due to individual shortcomings, but rather to economic and political structures based largely on the distribution of political, social, cultural, and economic power.¹⁷

The causes of deep poverty are not due to individual shortcomings, but rather to economic and political structures based largely on the distribution of political, social, cultural, and economic power.

Families living in deep poverty are not randomly distributed among communities in the United States. As Figure 1 illustrates, there are many entire communities throughout the United States, primarily in the South, that are deeply poor.¹⁸

Figure 1
Disadvantage Mapped Across the United States



Source: Adapted from Shaefer, H. L., Edin, K., & Nelson, T. (n.d.). *Multidimensional index of deep disadvantage*. Poverty Solutions. University of Michigan. <https://poverty.umich.edu/projects/understanding-communities-of-deep-disadvantage/> (accessed 05/19/22).

In their study, H. Luke Shaefer, Kathryn Edin, and Tim Nelson built a measure of “disadvantage” that could be applied consistently to communities all over the country. They constructed a multidimensional Index of Deep Disadvantage for all counties and the 500 largest cities in the United States drawing on census and administrative data to examine vulnerability in three interconnected domains: (1) income, using poverty and deep poverty rates; (2) health, using life expectancy and low birth weight; and (3) social mobility, using new social mobility estimates for counties and cities.¹⁹

A 2017 United Nations report noted that despite the wealth, power, and technological innovation of the United States, these assets were not being harnessed to address the needs of the millions of Americans who continue to live in poverty.²⁰ To successfully mobilize the required social, economic, and educational assets needed to reduce and eliminate poverty and deep poverty, a suite of equity-based policies will need to be forged to replace those that have come and gone and to extend opportunity where it has not yet ever been present in the United States.

The Policy Landscape

Since the New Deal in the 1930s, policies designed to alleviate poverty and deep poverty have taken different approaches, with uneven results. The most important and lasting anti-poverty law to emerge from the New Deal was the Social Security Act of 1935.²¹ In 2019, Social Security lifted 15 million Americans age 65 or older out of poverty and also lifted 1 million children out of poverty.²² Although Social Security benefits are not intended to alleviate child poverty, the Social Security Act established a provision called Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which enables states to provide cash payments for children who had been deprived of parental support due to unemployment, death, or incapacity.

Until the 1960s, though, addressing child poverty was not a top priority for policymakers, who assumed that a growing economy would lift all families out of poverty into the middle class.

In 1962, author and social activist Michael Harrington published the landmark book *The Other Americans*, which, in the words of poverty scholar Sasha Abramsky, “chronicled the lives lived of those excluded from the Age of Affluence.”²³ Harrington’s portrayal of American poverty was a wake-up call, confirming that many Americans were being left behind in the postwar economic boom. His book struck a chord with many policymakers and politicians. After reading Harrington’s book, Senator Robert Kennedy toured the Mississippi Delta region in 1967 and returned to Washington with these words: “I believe that, as long as there is plenty, poverty is evil. Government belongs wherever evil needs an adversary, and there are people in distress.”

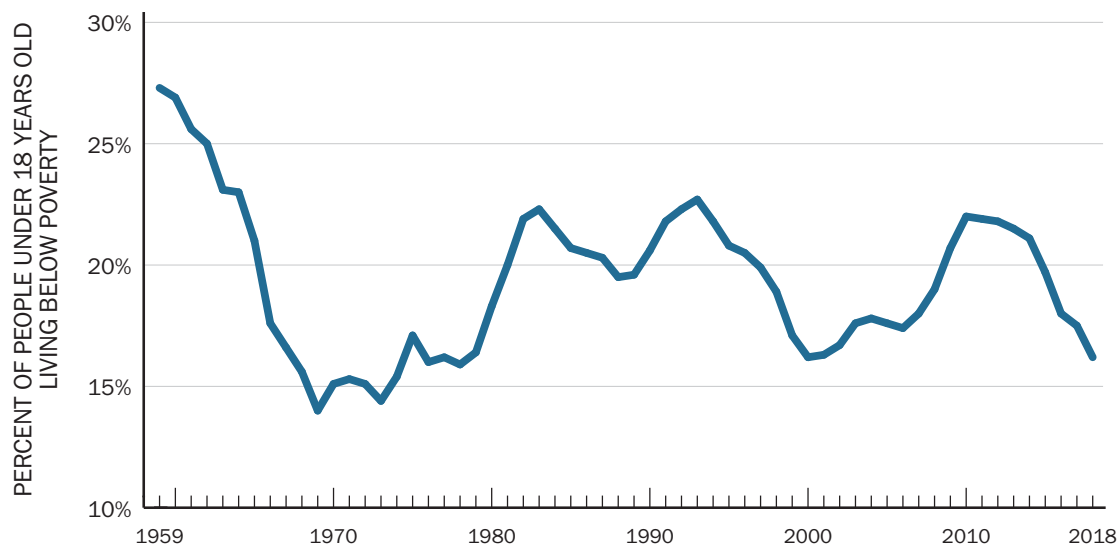
Senator Kennedy’s tour took place in the context of a war on poverty declared by President Lyndon Johnson in his 1964 State of the Union address, in which he said:

Many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity.²⁴

At that time, Martin Luther King Jr. argued that ending poverty was essential to the success of the civil rights movement and helped to establish the Poor People’s Campaign. The war on poverty was sweeping in its scope. It included the Civil Rights Act (1964), Economic Opportunity Act (1964), Food Stamps Act (1964), Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), establishment of Medicare and Medicaid (1965), Voting Rights Act (1965), Higher Education Act (1965), and Child Nutrition Act (1966), among others.²⁵

As Figure 2 indicates, a result of these efforts was a drop in child poverty rates by nearly half during the 1960s, from roughly 27% in 1959 to 14% in 1969. Beginning in the 1970s, however, the child poverty rate began to inch back up during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, and when many anti-poverty programs were ended or dramatically reduced during the Reagan administration in the 1980s, it increased more steeply again with sharp cuts in many War on Poverty programs, including Medicare, child-nutrition programs, and student financial aid, to name a few.²⁶ This rollback was enabled as poverty became highly politicized throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. It became a political trope among some politicians to mock “welfare.” President Ronald Reagan commented that “some years ago, the federal government declared war on poverty, and poverty won.”

Figure 2
Trends in Child Poverty Rates, 1959–2018



Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Historical poverty tables: People and families—1959 to 2020*. [Table 3. Poverty status of people, by age, race, and Hispanic origin.] U.S. Department of Commerce. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-people.html> (accessed 04/05/22).

As these cuts indicate, during the 1980s very little attention was paid to alleviating the struggles of the poor and deeply poor. As a caseworker for the New York City Department of Social Services in the late 1960s, report co-author Peter Cookson had a caseload of more than 50 families. The services provided to the department’s clients were minimal and were subject to termination for any number of real or imaginary regulatory violations. But this fragile and inadequate safety net, while flawed, kept families from becoming destitute and homeless.

These were the conditions on the ground, but much of the political rhetoric continued to claim that “welfare” caused a permanent dependency on government. Although President Bill Clinton restored some federal funding for family supports in his first term of office, and child poverty fell during the early 1990s, political pressure to reduce benefits to the poor continued. As he was preparing to run for a second term, he pledged to “end welfare as we know it.” In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The slogan of this act was “Welfare to Work.” In effect, government support of the poor was radically reduced—people living in poverty and deep poverty were expected to find jobs, which were rarely available, and when they were, paid lower-than-subsistence-level wages. In 1996 the minimum wage was \$4.75.²⁷ Aid to Families with Dependent Children was replaced by a system of temporary, time-limited aid to be administered by states, and federal funding was reduced by \$54 billion over the next 6 years.²⁸

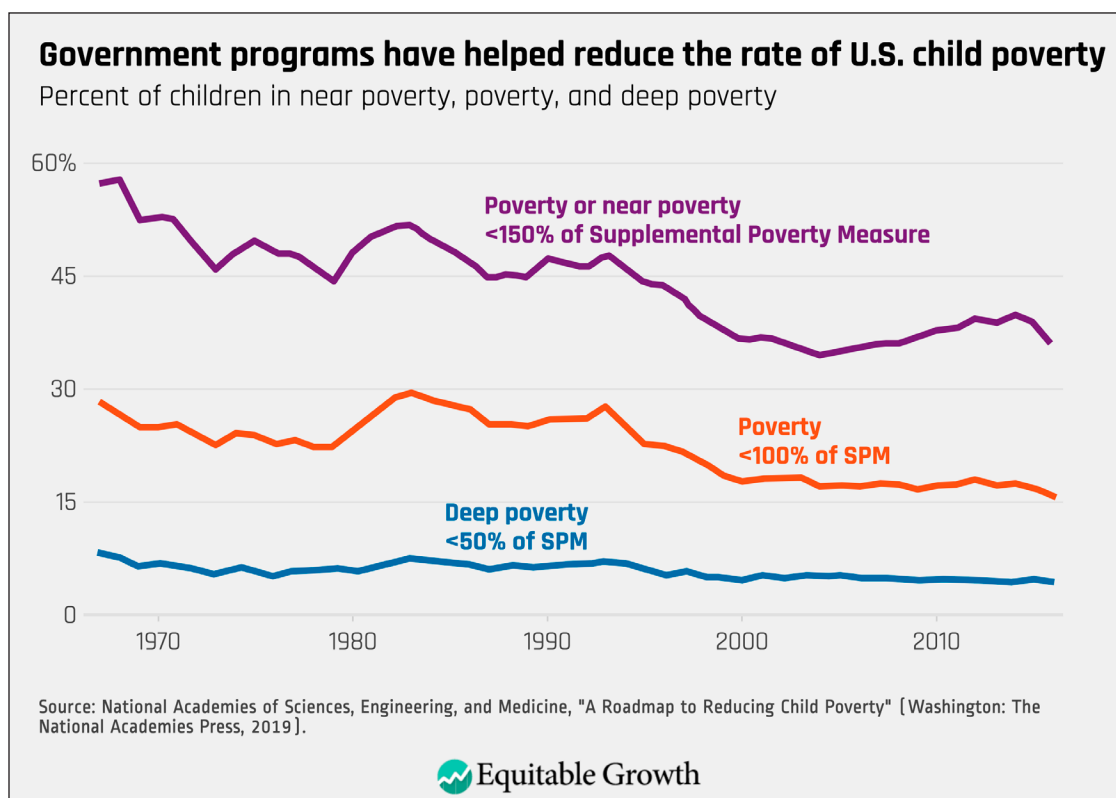
The social safety net was effectively shredded. Three high-ranking officials in the Clinton administration’s Department of Health and Human Services quit their posts over the passage of the law. In his letter of resignation, Peter Edelman, Acting Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, stated, “I have devoted the last 30-plus years to doing whatever I could to help in reducing poverty in America. I believe the recently enacted welfare bill goes in the opposite direction.”²⁹

Poverty researchers have found that for those living in deep poverty, the social safety net basically disappeared. As the authors of one research review noted:

Virtually all gains in spending on the social safety net for children since 1990 have gone to families with earnings, and to families with income above the poverty line. These trends are the result of welfare reform and the expansion of in-work tax credits. We review the available research and find that access to safety net programs during childhood improves outcomes for children and society over the long run. This evidence suggests that the recent changes to the social safety net may have lasting negative impacts on the poorest children.³⁰

Figure 3 reinforces this conclusion. From the 1970s to today, even as the proportions of children who are nearly poor have somewhat declined (though they remain at high rates by the standards of other industrialized nations), the rates of deep child poverty have essentially remained the same.

Figure 3
Percentage of Children Whose Families Experienced Near Poverty, Poverty, and Deep Poverty, 1967–2016



Source: Currie, J. (2019, March 27). *We can cut child poverty in the United States in half in 10 years*. Washington Center for Equitable Growth. <https://equitablegrowth.org/we-can-cut-child-poverty-in-the-united-states-in-half-in-10-years/> (accessed 04/22/22).

In addition to the virtual disappearance of the social safety net for the poorest families, most of these families live in communities of concentrated poverty.³¹ These communities typically have few, if any, social services; little access to the basic necessities of life; housing that is inadequate

and sometimes dangerous; and schools that are too often underfunded.³² A recent analysis of the educational opportunities available to students of color and students who live below the poverty line concluded:

Recent analyses of data prepared for school equity cases in more than 20 states have found that on every tangible measure—from qualified teachers and reasonable class sizes to adequate textbooks, computers, facilities, and curriculum offerings—schools serving large numbers of students of color and students from low-income families have significantly fewer resources than schools serving more affluent White students.³³

For example, in 2001, the plaintiffs' brief in the *Williams v. State of California* lawsuit included this description of a school serving low-income students of color in San Francisco:

At Luther Burbank, students cannot take textbooks home for homework in any core subject.... Some math, science, and other core classes do not have even enough textbooks for all the students in a single class to use during the school day, so some students must share the same one book during class time.... For homework, students must take home photocopied pages, with no accompanying text for guidance or reference, when and if their teachers have enough paper to use to make homework copies.... The social studies textbook Luther Burbank students use is so old that it does not reflect the breakup of the former Soviet Union.

Luther Burbank is infested with vermin and roaches, and students routinely see mice in their classrooms. One dead rodent has remained, decomposing, in a corner in the gymnasium since the beginning of the school year. The school library is rarely open, has no librarian, and has not recently been updated. Luther Burbank classrooms do not have computers. Computer instruction and research skills are not, therefore, part of Luther Burbank students' regular instruction in their core courses....

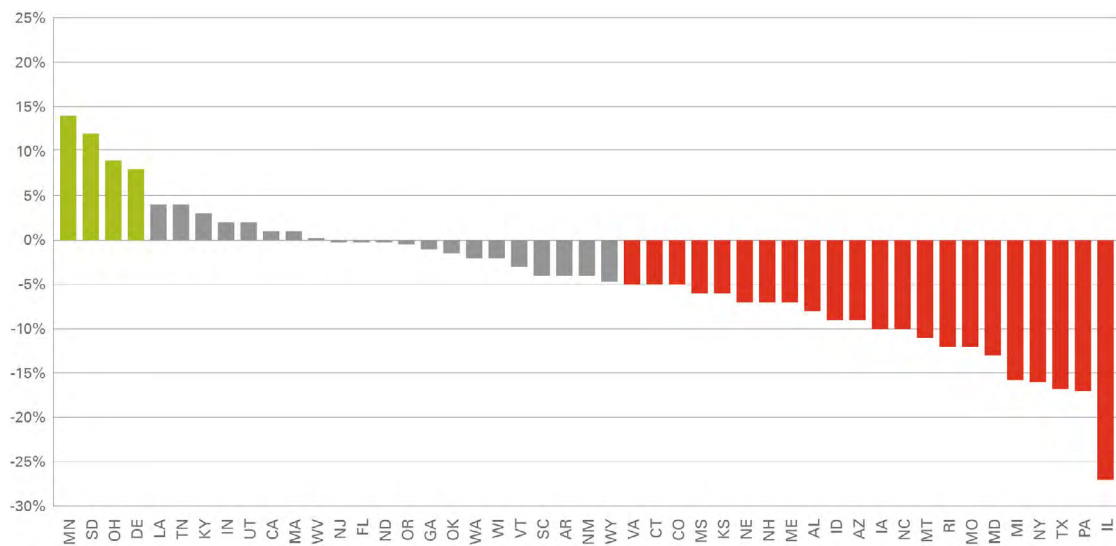
Two of the three bathrooms at Luther Burbank are locked all day, every day. The third bathroom is locked during lunch and other periods during the school day, so there are times during school when no bathroom at all is available for students to use. Students have urinated or defecated on themselves at school because they could not get into an unlocked bathroom.... When the bathrooms are not locked, they often lack toilet paper, soap, and paper towels, and the toilets frequently are clogged and overflowing.... Ceiling tiles are missing and cracked in the school gym, and school children are afraid to play basketball and other games in the gym because they worry that more ceiling tiles will fall on them during their games....

Eleven of the 35 teachers at Luther Burbank have not yet obtained regular, nonemergency credentials, and 17 of the 35 teachers only began teaching at Luther Burbank this school year.³⁴

The difficulties families living below the poverty line face in their communities and in their schools have been brought into sharp focus by the school site closures that occurred during the COVID-19 crisis. When the pandemic began, roughly 30% of students attending public schools lacked access to high-speed internet or devices for easy access to digital learning at home.³⁵

These conditions were magnified for families living below the poverty line; nearly 60% of these families lacked a computer or reliable internet service at home. Some of these conditions have been alleviated, but access to the tools needed for distance learning, as well as in-person learning, remains problematic.³⁶ A 2015 report from Education Trust³⁷ examined the extent to which states were acknowledging student poverty in their funding of local districts. Only four states spent at least 5% more on the education of children in their highest-poverty districts than on those in their lowest-poverty districts, while 22 states spent at least 5% less—and sometimes more than 25% less—on children in high-poverty communities. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4
Gaps in State and Local Funding per Student for Districts Serving the Greatest and Fewest Students in Poverty (Adjusted for Pupil Needs)



Source: Education Trust. (2015). *Funding gaps 2015: Too many states still spend less on educating students who need the most.* https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FundingGaps2015_TheEducationTrust1.pdf (accessed 02/21/22).

It is evident that to meet the needs of students living in deep poverty, schools need to go beyond marginal, temporary “fixes.” Schools need to be reimagined, building on the courage and strengths of deeply poor families and communities.

Creating Deep Poverty–Responsive Schools

Richard Milner and colleagues’ seminal article “Supporting Students Living Below the Poverty Line” outlines how schools can become “poverty-responsive.”³⁸ The article states:

Although students living below the poverty line may face challenges, it is essential that we (as educators) recognize the potential, intellect, talents, creativity, resilience, and overall knowledge these students possess and bring into schools and classrooms. To be clear, supporting students living below the poverty line requires that we seriously rethink our mindsets and beliefs, and actions about them, and their capacity, and reject deficit conceptions—negative views, mindsets, and worldviews—and consequently practices that influence students.³⁹

The authors remind us that to successfully educate students living below the poverty line, educators need to reject deficit conceptions of students’ capacities and instead recognize their many assets and talents as a way of creating poverty-responsive schools. Becoming poverty-responsive requires educators to take three steps:

1. Shift deficit-based conceptions of students in poverty to those that are asset-based, using strategies that can help identify and build on students’ strengths.
2. Develop partnerships with communities to respond to a range of out-of-school issues.
3. Accept the reality that many students living in poverty are “school dependent,”⁴⁰ and that it is important to create schools they can depend on.

These three steps form the organizational backbone of this report. We expand on these insights by extending them to describe how deep poverty–responsive schools might be created based on research evidence. We address the three steps in reverse order, beginning with adequate and equitable funding because money matters if we are to create schools of excellence for all children. Second, we discuss research that has shown how a comprehensive, wraparound approach to school organization exemplified in community schools can create community partnerships that act as a strong foundation for ensuring the capacity and longevity of community schools. Third, we present evidence that developing a whole child teaching and learning culture is a proven way of creating an asset-based approach for developing and sustaining programs and pedagogies that build on the strengths of all students.

Key to creating deep poverty–responsive schools is adopting a strong conceptual framework focused on the root causes of deep poverty, which are historical and structural. Rather than a focus on “fixing” students, it is important to understand the ways in which social structures and school organizations need to be reformed in order to serve them well. As we have discussed, children in deep poverty live in a world of extraordinary hardship. While educators should recognize with compassion the challenges children face every day, they should also recognize their assets as they create and redesign curricula and programs that allow them to flourish. Children raised in deep poverty want to be successful like other children. Every child has talents, skills, and dreams. Neuroscience research demonstrates that the brain is always developing as a function of relationships and experiences, and new pathways and connections are always being made. There is no static moment when the brain is “stuck.”⁴¹ Strong, secure attachments and relationships are the most important antidote to trauma.

At the same time, when creating deep poverty–responsive schools, educators, community members, and policymakers need to acknowledge and take into account the challenges of hunger, lack of health care, unstable and often unsafe environments, violence, and abuse many children experience, embracing each challenge as an opportunity for expanding the mission of public education to build inclusive democratic schools in partnership with neighborhoods, communities, and families.⁴²

With these considerations in mind, what resources would a deep poverty–responsive school community have, and what would it look like? While there is no single model of a highly effective deep poverty–responsive school, we have learned there are some promising policies and practices we can employ to build school communities for students living in deep poverty.

Begin With Funding Adequacy and Equity

As the quote below makes clear, the mission of deep poverty-responsive schools requires an enlightened and generous understanding of the importance of a funding system that provides the resources students living in deep poverty need for academic success and a sense of well-being.

As the fate of individuals and nations is increasingly interdependent, the quest for access to an equitable, empowering education for all people has become a critical issue for the nation as a whole. No society can thrive in a technological, knowledge-based economy by starving large segments of its population of learning. The path to our mutual well-being is built on equal educational opportunity. And such opportunity begins with an equitable, purposeful school funding system that allows all schools to support high-quality teaching for each and every child.⁴³

Adequate and equitable funding is the bedrock of an effective, efficient, and just system of public schools. Yet at times the discussion of school finance can seem confusing, abstract, or distant from the lives of students, teachers, families, and communities. Unfortunately, this discussion has often been sidetracked by a debate over whether school spending impacts student academic outcomes.⁴⁴ This debate should be over. Newly available data sets and methodologically sophisticated statistical approaches show money spent well has a direct positive impact on student outcomes.⁴⁵

Adequate and equitable funding is the bedrock of an effective, efficient, and just system of public schools.

For example, a 2016 study by economists Kirabo Jackson, Rucker Johnson, and Claudia Persico examined the long-term outcomes for a national sample of children born between 1955 and 1985 who were followed through 2011, linking data about their school experiences and life outcomes to that of school spending and school finance reforms that some of them experienced. The authors found that “a 10% increase in per-pupil spending each year for all 12 years of public school leads to 0.31 more completed years of education, about 7% higher wages, and a 3.2 percentage point reduction in the annual incidence of poverty; effects are much more pronounced for children from low-income families.”⁴⁶

They also found that inadequate and inequitable school funding is likely to impact students of color most directly. In reflecting on the data, Johnson noted:

School districts with the most students of color have about 15 percent less per pupil funding from state and local sources than predominantly White, affluent areas, despite having much greater need due to higher proportions of poverty, special needs, and English language learners. Teacher quality is often the missing link that people don’t consider directly when thinking about school resource inequities. For example, schools with a high level of Black and Latino students have almost two times as many first-year teachers as schools with low minority enrollment. And minority students are more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers than experienced ones in 33 states across the country.⁴⁷

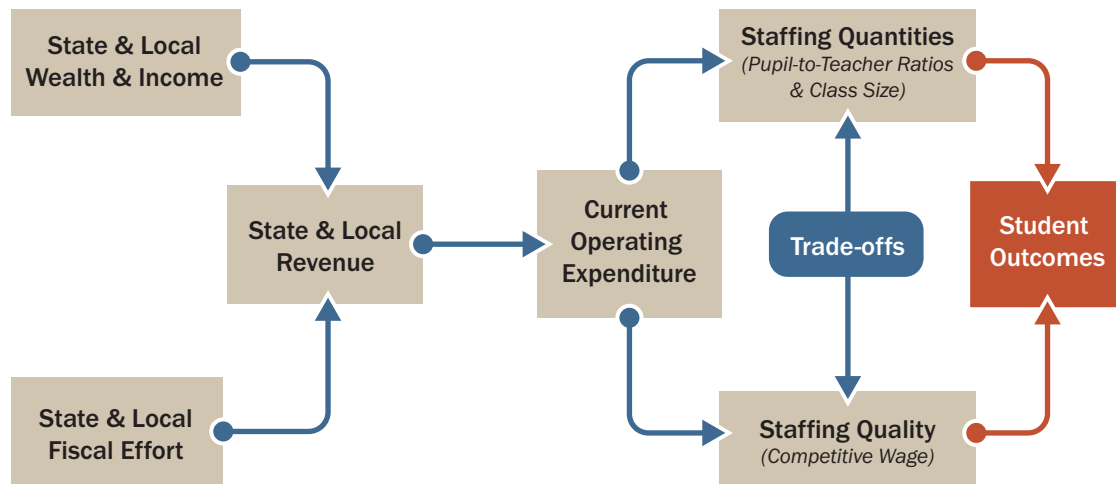
Similarly, a 2018 study of the academic outcomes resulting from the 2013–14 Local Control Funding Formula reform in California found that students who experienced a \$1,000 increase in district per-pupil revenue from the state in grades 10–12 had a 5.3 percentage-point increase in high school graduation rates, on average.⁴⁸ Many other state studies reinforce these findings. For example, Massachusetts climbed to its No. 1 status in student achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the 1990s after it enacted school funding reforms that added money for students in poverty, English learners, and those identified for special education—coupled with investments in new standards, assessments, extensive teacher training, and preschool for students from low-income families.⁴⁹ In independent studies, three sets of researchers found that this comprehensive approach to funding had positive effects on student performance,⁵⁰ and the state has maintained its top-ranked status for student achievement since the late 1990s.

A study of the outcomes of funding reforms that enhanced adequacy and equity in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and North Carolina during the 1980s and 1990s found that, while using different funding strategies, all of these states increased achievement and reduced learning gaps:

Each of these states has taken steps to address severe funding inequities, a necessary precondition to support the kind of teaching needed for a quality 21st-century education. These states have taken approaches that substantially increase funding to students from low-income families and students of color—through equalizing formulas addressing teacher salaries in Connecticut, weighted student formulas in Massachusetts, a parity funding approach in New Jersey, and investments in the foundation formula and state salary schedule in North Carolina.⁵¹

How this happens is not a mysterious process. Figure 5 shows the relationship between schooling resources and student achievement outcomes.⁵² The level of school resources largely determines both the quality and quantity of educators who can be hired—a key determinant of student achievement⁵³—as well as the quality and availability of instructional resources (ranging from computers to science equipment and textbooks) and the nature of educational programs (including the range of courses and extracurricular activities). When schools need to offer free meals, health care services, and other supports for children who would not otherwise receive them, this funding has to come from the same sources of revenue, which are largely state and local, since federal funding has declined over time.⁵⁴

Figure 5
Conceptual Map of the Relationship of Schooling Resources to Children’s Measurable School Achievement Outcomes



Source: Baker, B. D. (2017). *How money matters for schools*. Learning Policy Institute. (p. 2). <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-report> (accessed 04/20/22).

The revenue that comes into school districts is a function of both local wealth (typically reflected in property values, since property taxes remain a central source of school funding) and taxing efforts, as well as state and federal contributions. These have often been modest and only mildly equalizing. A fair school finance formula would provide the funding needed to enable schools to design and implement programs that serve students from households living in deep poverty. According to the Education Law Center, “Fair funding has two basic components: a sufficient level of funding for all students and increased funding for high poverty districts to address the additional cost of educating students in those districts.”⁵⁵ By this standard, most states do not have fair school finance formulas. And within school districts, poor schools often receive less funding than those serving more affluent students.⁵⁶

It is also the case that per-pupil funding varies among states.⁵⁷ Furthermore, school funding levels are not adequate to meet the high levels of pupil need in many states. In 2021, average per-pupil funding levels adjusted for regional cost differentials ranged from \$9,800 in Arizona to over \$27,000 in Vermont.⁵⁸ Many of the low-spending states also spend less on schools serving concentrations of students living below the poverty line, leaving them without a wide range of needed services both in and out of the classroom and, typically, with a revolving door of underprepared teachers whose lack of training and high attrition rates depress students’ achievement levels further.⁵⁹

Equity of opportunity is essential for establishing policies that allow all students living in deep poverty to thrive. Foremost, this means that states should provide funding based on specific student needs—as California, Massachusetts, and New Jersey do—and take into account the costs schools face when they have concentrations of such students. For example, California allocates 20% more funds to districts for each student who is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, who is an English learner, or who is in foster care. In recent legislation to address pandemic needs, the state also

added \$1,000 for each student experiencing homelessness. In addition, the adjusted base grant is increased by an additional 65% if the percentage of targeted students in the district is 55% or greater.⁶⁰ This kind of approach begins to provide districts with the resources needed to address students' actual needs and can further extend equity when additional funding—such as that from the recent federal COVID-19 relief acts—is also distributed with an eye toward investments in areas with the greatest need.

In addition to state funding, districts need to implement equitable funding across all their schools, which in turn means that schools with a large number of students from deep poverty backgrounds should receive more funding than schools that have a low percentage of students from poverty backgrounds.⁶¹ This has implications for how data are collected and reported for calculating appropriate levels of funding. As one study noted:

To determine appropriate subsidy levels and the types of services needed by children and families, policymakers need detailed data about the depth of family poverty. Studies have shown that simply classifying people as “in poverty” or “not in poverty” is not sufficient.⁶²

As we saw above, students living in deep poverty households often need social and physical supports above and beyond what is allocated for academics in a school or a school district. There is ample evidence of this need and considerable research on how additional funds can be wisely used to support students. Investments in a well-prepared, stable educator workforce that are equitably distributed across schools are key.⁶³ Other critical investments include early childhood education that addresses the learning gaps that occur before kindergarten, expanded learning time both after school and in the summer, smaller class sizes, and tutoring. All of these address acute learning needs of students and the physical and mental health care and social services that allow students to be supported and to thrive.⁶⁴

Deeply poor families also require more widely available transportation and modern technology to facilitate schoolwork and provide access to a huge range of services and supports. Meeting these needs requires investments in both connectivity and computers for deeply poor families.⁶⁵

Ideally, to address these needs, school finance systems would begin to allocate additional differential, equitable funding based on the number of students living in deep poverty. Research consistently shows that, for historical and structural reasons, students of color are typically least well served and benefit most from investments in a range of resources, from high-quality preschool to better-qualified teachers. Because all students living in deep poverty need more support than simply going to classes, their schools need to be organized to provide wraparound services and continuous care. Fortunately, we have a well-researched model of this type of school—the community school.

Develop Community Schools and Partnerships

Schools are far more than buildings with books, computers, and classrooms. They are living environments in which the drama of life and learning is played out every day. There was a time when researchers thought of the interior life of schools as a black box beyond the reach of social science. That has changed considerably in the last 20 years. Today, we know quite a bit about what makes for an inclusive, high-quality learning environment and an environment that is poverty-responsive. Schools that are deep poverty-responsive do not operate on a 9-to-3 schedule for 9 months of the year; they care about students and families before and after traditional school hours, and they embrace a whole child philosophy of education. One model for this type of environment is the community school. According to the Partnership for the Future of Learning:

Schools that are deep poverty-responsive care about students and families before and after traditional school hours, and they embrace a whole child philosophy of education.

Many community schools stay open year-round, from dawn to dusk, and on weekends. The most comprehensive community schools are academic and social centers where educators, families, and neighbors come together to support innovative learning and to address the impact of out-of-school factors, such as poverty, racism, and violence, which can undermine the effectiveness of in-school opportunities. For example, a health clinic can deliver medical and psychological treatment, dental care, as well as glasses to nearsighted children, and inhalers for asthma sufferers. Extending the school day and remaining open during the summer enables the school to offer additional learning opportunities and supports, as well as co-curricular activities like sports and music—all of which are important enrichment experiences that can prevent summer learning loss; that is, the widening of learning gaps that happens when school is not in session. Community schools engage families as learners as well.⁶⁶

This expansive way of thinking about the education of students and their families opens the door to successful strategies built on equity, inclusion, and community.

Build Strong Community Schools

I think what makes us a community school is ... acknowledging that the things that happen outside of our doors will also happen inside of our doors.... We have a responsibility to interact with the world outside of the campus, being not only a resource for the entire community and for the families that are here, but also looking to them as a resource, because we know that the best knowledge and the best practices that will help a community solve its issues are probably also in the community.⁶⁷

As this quote from a staff member at the Social Justice Humanitas Academy (Humanitas) in Los Angeles Unified School District demonstrates, a deep poverty-responsive school needs to be embedded in its community.⁶⁸ Serving a population of students that is 93% low-income and 96% Latino/a, with many living in deep poverty, Humanitas maintains many partnerships, including with

Mission City Community Network, a mobile health clinic that offers a range of physical and mental health services on a weekly basis; Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services, which provides crisis intervention and individual, group, and family therapy; EduCare Foundation, which organizes services for health, college access, and social-emotional learning; and a range of community organizations that provide culturally connected clubs and after-school activities.

These efforts are managed through a student-focused advisory system that supports students in feeling empowered as individuals with unique needs and normalizes the practice of soliciting supports. One student shared how these supports have made a lifelong difference for him:

I lived in really bad poverty and never saw myself even going to high school or college.... That wasn't in the plan for me. Orientation [at Humanitas] really got my attention, and it made me believe in myself. The teachers and mentors were working with me one-on-one. I became very good at reading, [got] high test scores, and began doing [well] in school, but they were not only focusing on my academics but what I was going through. I was going through very emotional hard stuff. The counselor[s] took their time talking to me and making sure I was OK.... It really stuck with me, knowing that I can seek out help and that I'm not going to be shamed.⁶⁹

These supports, along with family connections and an engaging, community-connected, project-based approach to learning, have supported high levels of success for students. In 2018–19, 97% of Humanitas students graduated from high school, and 95% of students completed the course sequence required for eligibility to California's public university system—double the district and the state averages—with most going on to college. On the rigorous state assessment, 72% of Humanitas students met or exceeded standards for English language arts, compared to a district average of only 53%. In addition, survey data suggest that Humanitas students hold a growth mindset, feel connected to school, and are socially aware and self-efficacious at higher rates than their peers in other district schools.⁷⁰

To meet students' needs, effective deep poverty-responsive schools should be more than academic buildings; they should serve as community hubs offering a supportive learning experience and extended services to neighborhoods, families, and students. A leading voice for school, family, and community collaborations, educational researcher Joyce Epstein describes the core value of family and community partnerships:

If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development.⁷¹

Community School Features and Outcomes

Building on this essential insight, a major research review of the outcomes of community schools by Learning Policy Institute researchers describes them as:

A place-based strategy in which schools partner with community agencies and allocate resources to provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement. Many operate on all-day and year-round schedules, and serve both children and adults.

Although this strategy is appropriate for students of all backgrounds, many community schools arise in neighborhoods where structural forces linked to racism and poverty shape the experiences of young people and erect barriers to learning and school success. These are communities where families have few resources to supplement what typical schools provide.⁷²

While community schools' programs and operations vary depending on their local context, four features—or pillars—appear in most community schools and support the conditions for teaching and learning found important in the research:

1. Integrated student supports
2. Expanded learning time and opportunities
3. Family and community engagement
4. Collaborative leadership and practice⁷³

Figure 6 captures what the four pillars look like in action. In many ways, the four pillars rest on a foundation of collaboration between community schools and the communities they serve. This partnership is especially meaningful in communities of deep poverty, where schools are often the only viable service organizations available.

In their comprehensive review of the evidence from more than 140 studies, Anna Maier and colleagues found that, collectively, these features make the community school model an effective school improvement strategy associated with positive student outcomes, including reduced absenteeism, improved academic outcomes, and student reports of more positive school climates.⁷⁴

Researchers note that when all the pillars are in place, community schools have a greater capacity to disrupt inequitable systems that produce and contribute to poverty effects:

Taken individually, each of these four pillars has a positive impact on student outcomes ranging from attendance and behavior to educational achievement and attainment; when all pillars are present and well-implemented, their impact on schools, teachers, students, and families is multiplied.⁷⁵

An illustration of this principle is the work of the Children's Aid Society (now Children's Aid), which was founded in 1853 and has been a consistent advocate for families living in deep poverty. It provides a program of support for students and families, including home visits with expectant parents, high-quality preschools, a focus on the whole child, after-school programs, social work support, and mentorship for students in the transition to college and career.⁷⁶ A 2013 evaluation of the impact of the Children's Aid programs on student outcomes in two community middle schools in the Washington Heights neighborhood in Manhattan found there was a notable improvement in math scores, attendance, and engagement with learning over a 2-year period.⁷⁷ A Center for American Progress 2018 report noted the strong returns on these investments:

There are roughly 5,000 community schools in the United States today, and a social return on investment study indicated that every \$1 invested in community schools affiliated with Children's Aid in New York City delivers an additional \$12 to \$15 in social value.⁷⁸

Figure 6
What the Four Pillars of Community Schools Look Like in Action



Source: Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report> (accessed 02/24/21).

A Rand Corporation study of the New York City Community Schools Initiative found that it had a positive impact on student attendance and grade progression in elementary, middle, and high schools. Math achievement improved and disciplinary incidents declined for elementary and middle school students. Also, there was a positive effect on students' sense of connectedness to adults and peers for these students in the second year of the study.⁷⁹

Genuine Partnerships

As Milner and his colleagues point out, an important step to becoming a poverty-responsive school requires strong family and community partnerships, something that “factory-model” schools designed in the early 20th century were not organized to do:

The second step in becoming poverty-responsive is for educators to deepen their knowledge of community context by working closely with local communities from which students enter school and to which students return after school. Effective engagement of students, families, and communities necessitates a participatory approach to community engagement that includes a willingness to learn *from* and *with* communities. From an asset perspective, communities with large portions of families living below the poverty line are more than simply collections of poor people. Rather, these communities are sources of knowledge that can inform educators about the realities that many students living in poverty face.⁸⁰

For educators working with students from deeply poor households, it is important to witness the compounding effects of deep poverty firsthand. Internalizing the hardships students from deep-poverty households endure reinforces commitment to change. For example, in Hoke County, NC, where all the district's schools enroll students from poor and deeply poor families, many principals and teachers travel to the homes of their deeply poor students. One middle school principal captured the need for firsthand observation:

One day you get out there and see actually where the children you serve on a daily basis come from. Several teachers came back after delivering food and broke down in tears telling me what they saw. A student was living in a home with no roof; they've got a tarp for a roof kept on by bricks and tires. Homes didn't have doors.⁸¹

Understanding the out-of-school conditions that students living in deep poverty face every day can be transformative for a teacher's grasp of their students' needs and can foster new respect for students' courage, tenacity, and determination to succeed no matter the barriers.

Across the country, at Oakland International High School (OIHS) in California, students and family members lead community walks to introduce teachers to their lives. All of the students in this school are recent immigrants or refugees, representing more than 30 countries, and about one third have arrived as unaccompanied minors and live on their own or with relatives, often in conditions of deep poverty. Lauren Markham, OIHS Community School Program Manager, says:

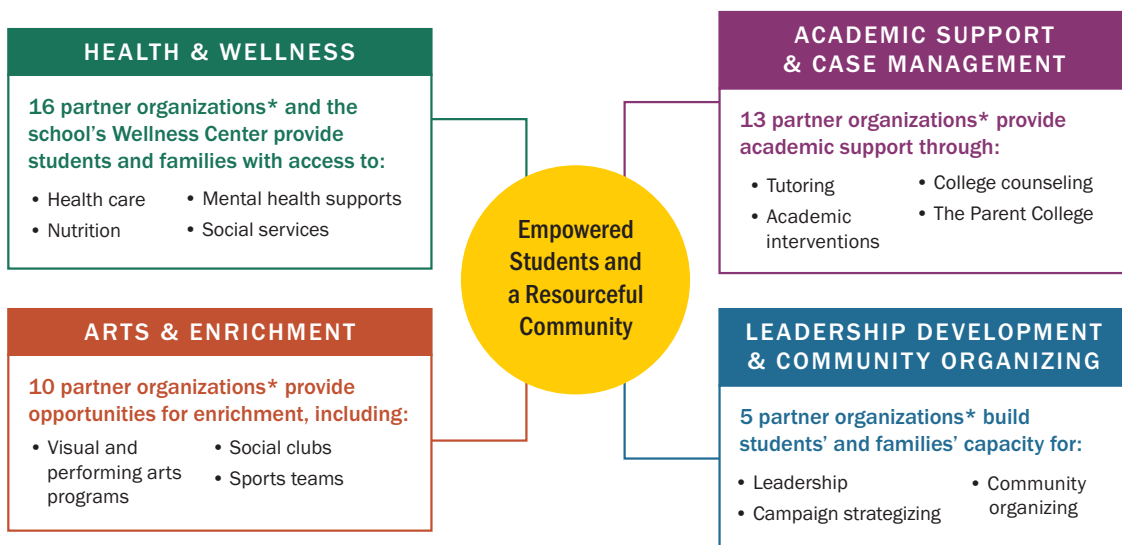
[Community walks are] professional development sessions [that] educate teachers about students' backgrounds, challenges, community and cultural assets, and the educational concerns of OIHS's diverse students and families. They also serve to immerse teachers in the home environments of their students and give students and family members the opportunity to serve as leaders, inverting roles such that our teachers become the students, and our students and families become the teachers.⁸²

Community walks also provide an opportunity for school staff to meet with families in their homes or another community gathering place to discuss families’ questions, concerns, and hopes for their students and the school. By organizing a wide range of other community partnerships, OIHS is able to sponsor an on-site Wellness Center that functions like a one-stop shop for students to access a variety of supports, from emergency housing and food to legal assistance or mental health services. For medical, counseling, and health education services, OIHS partners with Oakland Technical High School (Oakland Tech), just five blocks away. Students from both schools are served by a health clinic managed by La Clinica de la Raza, making the provision of services more attainable through yet another partnership. OIHS’s many partnerships and supports enable extraordinary outcomes for students, with 93% graduating within 5 years and 59% completing the rigorous coursework required for admission to California colleges and universities, far above state and district averages.⁸³

Similarly, the staff at Mendez High School in East Los Angeles—also succeeding against the odds in a low-income, immigrant community—understand that it takes a village to support their students and families with opportunities and services that can mitigate the impact of the challenges they face.⁸⁴ In this case, the “village” comprises more than 30 community partners that offer students and their families the health care, nutrition, mental health supports, social services, and learning opportunities that help them to be successful. (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7
Partnerships and Priorities at Mendez High School

Mendez cultivates deep and lasting relationships with its partners as part of its community school model. School staff leverage these partnerships to serve the school’s goal to empower its students and support a resourceful community.



* Many partners provide services in multiple categories.

Source: Thompson, C. (2021). *Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School: A community school that honors its neighborhood's legacy of educational justice*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/shared-learning-mendez-brief> (accessed 04/20/22).

Annual assessments of student, family, and staff needs inform these partnerships. At monthly meetings, staff from each of the participating organizations identify students in need of support; provide updates on how students are doing academically, socially, and emotionally; and ensure that they are not duplicating resources. Meanwhile, the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools builds the

capacity of the adults on campus through instructional coaching and Parent College, and InnerCity Struggle supports students and families in developing leadership and organizing skills that can advance systemic change to address structural inequities and racial injustice. As the principal notes, “We see the community and the school as one. What happens in the school impacts the community, and what happens in the community impacts the school.”

These impacts have been positive. As a recent study found:

By 2020, just 11 years after the school’s establishment, the graduation rate had reached almost 90%, and the school had a 90% college-going rate. The school has had zero expulsions since 2011, and in 2021 over 75% of students reported feeling safe and happy at Mendez. They are also engaged as leaders in their school and in their community.⁸⁵

Take Community Schools to Scale

The community school model is one example of how schools and school districts can create caring communities for all students, including those from deeply poor backgrounds. Building on that model, it may be time to expand our thinking beyond a single school to a broader geographic area, as deep poverty can be found in all parts of a county or state. About 100 school districts have taken the community school strategy to scale.⁸⁶ Case studies of districtwide community plans in Oakland, CA, Hartford, CT, and Tulsa, OK, have yielded promising results in terms of academic achievement, attendance, and improved school climate, and to date these experiments in taking community schools to scale have been sustained.

In West Virginia, a countywide approach is underway that illustrates how community school efforts can also serve as a transformation strategy. McDowell County suffers from the shifts in the American economy and its impact on communities in the heart of coal country. In 2021, nearly 32% of its population lived in poverty. A recent census of the McDowell community from 2016 to 2020 found that 23% of the population under the age of 65 had a disability.⁸⁷ The county was declared a food desert by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.⁸⁸ And the county school district—which operates 10 schools—was under state control from 2001 to 2013.

Reconnecting McDowell, a public–private partnership, was launched in December 2011 as a long-term effort to improve public schools and address the unmet needs of the students in the county. McDowell County Public Schools, the American Federation of Teachers, and other partners developed a districtwide school improvement plan based on community engagement and the needs of students living below the poverty line.⁸⁹

Reconnecting McDowell created a “Covenant of Commitment” that characterized the work to be done to create a whole child approach to education:

Expanding opportunities for McDowell County children must be the driving force behind every activity of the Reconnecting McDowell partnership. To accomplish this, we must first work to enhance achievement and well-being for all McDowell County public school students and their families. This will require a well-rounded curriculum based on high standards, as well as the support and enrichment services students need. These academic and support services and programs must prepare McDowell County children to succeed in the 21st-century knowledge economy. We

must rethink the education system and reinvigorate the community to overcome the impediments that are denying too many McDowell kids their right to a quality education that provides the skills, tools, and knowledge they need to succeed in life.⁹⁰

The district reached out to all members of the community to form partnerships and organized a wide range of services on school sites, as well as hiring a community coordinator to find and orchestrate these services. After only 5 years, a performance audit by the McDowell County Office of Education in 2016 found substantial reductions in dropout rates and gains in graduation rates (from 74% in 2011 to 80% in 2015), increases in Advanced Placement course-taking (45% of students), and improvements in test scores. Along with the provision of services through community partnerships, these gains were attributed to:

- the use of data to improve student performance, with continuous reflection and data review to ensure students' academic, social, and emotional needs are addressed;
- shared decision-making that includes both students and teachers in developing improvement strategies; and
- engagement of families, including student-led parent-teacher conferences and inviting grandparents to provide reading and writing support throughout the school day.

Other states are considering the community school model as a way to educate students with high levels of need.⁹¹ California, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, and Vermont have all launched statewide community school initiatives to tackle a range of needs that differ across states and communities.

For example, the majority of students served by community schools in the Cuba Independent School District in New Mexico are American Indian (68%) and Latino/a (24%) from low-income families, 14% of whom live in deep poverty.⁹² The district combines state funding for community schools with a grant funded through the Indian Education Act. In addition, the district has formed a partnership with New Mexico Appleseed, an anti-poverty, nonprofit, and philanthropic support program, to design, implement, and evaluate an effective intervention to improve academic and social-emotional outcomes of students who are inadequately housed.⁹³

California's recent \$3 billion commitment to expand its existing group of successful community schools is meant to serve all of the state's schools with 80% or more of students from low-income families—more than 3,000 schools, or one third of the total—in a manner that not only coordinates health and social services, but also offers expanded learning time and ensures social-emotional learning and restorative practices that keep students in school.⁹⁴ Districts or counties will serve as technical assistance providers and organizers of services supporting networks of schools that can share knowledge and resources with one another.

In a number of states, local schools and school districts connect with organizations like Communities In Schools (CIS) to share information and resources. This can help schools broaden their networks of support and increase their effectiveness and impact. For example, in North Carolina, where CIS works with 249 schools serving 121,000 students and engages with 36,000 parents, CIS's mission is to “do whatever it takes to connect community resources, enhance educational success, and give every student a bright future.”⁹⁵

When schools and school districts break away from their geographic silos, they are in a position to form countywide and/or statewide partnerships that will reach more families living in deep poverty. In its 2018 report, *Building Community Schools Systems*, the Center for American Progress concluded:

The community schools strategy is an important component for schools and school systems that want to provide a high-quality education to children in low-income communities. School districts serving communities of concentrated poverty should adopt this strategy, and state and federal governments must help them make it a reality. A community schools strategy is essential to delivering the high-quality, thorough public education system that most state constitutions require.⁹⁶

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child; to extend this insight further, it could be said that it takes an adequately funded community school to educate a child living in deep poverty.

Not only are such investments the right thing to do; they are also good social and economic policy. Economist Henry Levin concluded after an extensive review of the costs and benefits of these investments:

Overall, investment in adequate education for all children is more than just good public investment policy with high monetary returns. A society that provides fairer access to opportunities, that is more productive, and that has higher employment, better health, less crime, and lower dependency is a better society in itself. That the attainment of such a society is also profoundly good economics is simply an added incentive.⁹⁷

Develop a Whole Child Teaching and Learning Culture

In recent years, we have discovered a great deal about how humans develop and the conditions that promote learning. One recent synthesis of this research concluded:

New knowledge about human development from neuroscience and the sciences of learning and development demonstrates that effective learning depends on secure attachments; affirming relationships; rich, hands-on learning experiences; and explicit integration of social, emotional, and academic skills. A positive school environment supports students' growth across all the developmental pathways—physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional—while it reduces stress and anxiety that create biological impediments to learning. Such an environment takes a “whole child” approach to education, seeking to address the distinctive strengths, needs, and interests of students as they engage in learning.⁹⁸

Learning and development take place in social contexts that can enable or inhibit learning. For children living in deep poverty, a whole child approach should embrace the communities and cultures that are home to them. Building on the strengths and cultures of communities is key for educating children living in deep poverty.

An example of a school district that is building on the strengths of its families is the Cuba Independent School District, a rural district located on the Navajo Nation in New Mexico. The COVID-19-induced crisis disrupted the district's normal operations, but instead of closing itself off from families, it doubled its outreach. To build community in the face of the potentially isolating effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the district has sent families books, materials to weave a Navajo rug, and seeds to plant a “Three Sisters” garden of corn, beans, and squash, the three crops that have been at the center of Native American agriculture and culture for centuries.⁹⁹

Schools can strengthen connections with members of their community by recognizing and reinforcing their cultures and traditions. And schools that utilize principles from the science of learning to engage with students and families in culturally affirming ways are better able to build positive relationships that can mitigate the effects of trauma.¹⁰⁰

A summary of key lessons from the sciences of learning and development includes the following six principles:

1. Development is malleable. The brain never stops growing and changing in response to experiences and relationships. The nature of these experiences and relationships matters greatly to the growth of the brain and the development of skills.
2. Variability in human development is the norm, not the exception. The pace and profile of each child's development are unique.
3. Human relationships are the essential ingredient that catalyzes healthy development and learning.
4. Learning is social, emotional, cultural, and academic.

5. Children actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, relationships, and social contexts.
6. Adversity affects learning—and the way schools respond matters.¹⁰¹

These insights are foundational. Children living below the poverty line need the same research-based approach to teaching and learning that all children need if they are to develop their talents.¹⁰² But adversity affects learning. When children experience significant trauma, both their brains and their bodies are affected by the biological mechanisms of stress. This stress can become toxic when threats are constant. The surge of cortisol and adrenaline that is part of the stress response triggers hypervigilance and anxiety, reducing working memory and focus and sometimes creating hair-trigger responses to events. Unless other supportive relationships and contexts are available, this process can affect the developing neural architecture that is critical for learning and behavior.

The good news, however, is that responsive, affirming relationships are the most effective antidote to trauma. When adults know how to recognize the effects of trauma and how to create means for calming, skills for self-expression, and spaces for healing, children can become resilient and succeed despite the odds they may face. Fostering affirming relationships means investing in the professional

When adults know how to recognize the effects of trauma and how to create means for calming, skills for self-expression, and spaces for healing, children can become resilient and succeed despite the odds they may face.

development of school staff, hiring social workers and counselors, and ensuring that schools are safe at all times. A positive school climate is not the result of chance but is intentionally created based on a whole-school commitment to support all students with empathy and systemwide supports.¹⁰³

Becoming Deep Poverty–Responsive: Bearing Witness

There is a growing body of literature establishing the close link between whole child education and the success of students. For instance, educational researchers Sean Slade and David Griffith, in their study *A Whole Child Approach to Student Success*, found that:

Schools that work purposefully toward enhancing the mental, social, emotional, and physical health of both their staff and students frequently report results [including] ... improved academic achievement, reduced absenteeism, reduced risk-taking behavior, and the development of a school-community culture that promotes and enhances student growth.¹⁰⁴

Many students experiencing deep poverty come to school in need of acceptance and support. As a principal leading a high-poverty school noted:

Everybody doesn't wake up in the morning and get greeted by two parents and sit down and have breakfast. A lot of my teachers have experienced that, and so [they] wonder why a child is upset when it's first thing in the morning... When I talk with children, I know where they're coming from, and I know I have to talk with the teacher. You don't understand all of what children come from. You just

see what you see when they're sitting in your classrooms looking at you and you don't have a clue what happened before. So, we need to be mindful of that. When you build relationships with children, it changes everything. Relationships change everything.¹⁰⁵

Educating the whole child means getting to know students and their families in depth and gaining an understanding of why many deeply poor families are alienated from schools. As former Hoke County Schools in North Carolina Superintendent Freddie Williamson noted:

A lot of parents had a bad experience in school. I work with principals and teams to understand that. I tell them, "Don't be upset. They're not mad at you. They're mad at something that happened in the past. That's why they don't trust us, and our job is to build that trust." A lot of our parents never finished school. But that gets the child an opportunity to take the lead, to engage the parents, and the parents begin to ask those questions.¹⁰⁶

One means of establishing stronger relationships and learning about children is to learn from their parents. Research has consistently shown that home visits by teachers are a powerful tool in strengthening parent involvement—and in developing a common vision with parents about how to support children together—which in turn is associated with school success.¹⁰⁷ In a 2017 study of home visits, the researchers found the following:

- Creating opportunities for families and educators to meet outside of school and to get to know each other breaks down traditional barriers to partnerships.
- Providing individuation strategies, a particularly powerful element of home visits, helps families and educators focus on one another's unique qualities and reduces the tendency to invoke group stereotypes.
- Making home visits voluntary and scheduled helps to reduce anxiety and stress about cross-group interactions between educators and families and builds trust and acceptance.
- Providing training and supports for educators can build self-awareness of biased mindsets as well as motivation and skills to counteract such mindsets.
- Focusing on hopes and dreams for the first visit, rather than on academics and/or student performance, is a particularly powerful core practice for decreasing implicit biases, as it builds understanding and trust, reduces anxiety and stress, and fosters positive cross-group interactions.¹⁰⁸

Developing Trauma-Informed and Healing-Oriented Schools

Schools serving children in deep poverty need to promote wellness through practices that include strong relationships, means to learn about students' experiences so they can be understood and addressed, and mindfulness to help students center and achieve calm. Not all children living in deep poverty experience trauma, but many children from deeply poor households bring to school socially produced traumas that arise from living in conditions in which the basic supports for health and well-being are frequently absent.

It is important for educators to understand the effects of trauma, how to recognize student needs, and how to support students to get those needs met while attaching to school in the process. School practices should also be informed by the best methods for reducing the effects of chronic material hardship. This may include making breakfast and snacks available in the classroom every day, having clothing options available in a known place, providing supplies for classwork or projects, eliminating fees, and employing other means to ensure access to the human and material resources students need to be healthy, safe, and successful.

Becoming a trauma-informed and healing-oriented school involves providing administrators, educators, and other school personnel with the knowledge and preparation to recognize and respond to those impacted by traumatic stress within the school community and to promote wellness. As Joshua Kaufman, a school mental health specialist with Los Angeles Unified School District, describes:

Ultimately, trauma-informed schools understand and recognize that children’s behavior is a developmental response to past experience, so that instead of wondering what’s wrong with a child or immediately beginning to label, we start to ask the question, “What might have happened that explains this child’s behavior?” And all of a sudden, when we do that, understanding can manifest, and we can begin to address the underlying needs that the child may have.¹⁰⁹

The experience of trauma can disrupt the development of neurobiological integration in ways that can affect mood, skill development, learning, emotional well-being, and relational trust. Trauma can be an individual experience that occurs as a function of chronic stressors associated with poverty—such as food or housing insecurity, lack of child care, lack of health care—or any number of other traumatic events, such as illness, loss of a family member, abuse, or bullying. Trauma can also be a collective experience—and may frequently be felt in marginalized communities in which families may have to contend with daily challenges of survival; frequent incidents of discrimination; or violence associated with gangs, police shootings, or other causes.

The experience of trauma can cause students to become withdrawn, angry, disruptive, inattentive, or unable to focus. They may lose confidence in themselves and in the ability of those around them to handle their needs. They may be unable to complete classwork or homework and may have less capacity to handle other stressors calmly, losing composure at seemingly small events or challenges. Attention to individual trauma, while important, may not by itself provide insight into the root causes of trauma in communities that are disproportionately affected by negative economic and environmental conditions. And a focus on trauma alone runs the risk of focusing on intervention and treatment of trauma rather than fostering the overall well-being of the individual who has experienced adversity and harm. Both the individual and collective experience of traumatic events are important. Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the impact of trauma on learning, it is critical that administrators, teachers, and school personnel also implement practices that center healing on both an individual and collective level.

One framework for trauma-informed school practice notes that it is:

1. **Attachment-focused:** Educators engage in attunement, mentoring, and a consistent ethic of care to allow students to feel safe and cared for. This promotes neural integration, which is the key to resuming healthy development and achieving success in the academic environment. Efforts within attachment-focused learning communities are more likely to be healing, allowing students to increase resilience.

2. **Neurobiology-informed:** Trauma-informed practitioners rely on their understanding of the neurobiology of development, stress, and trauma. This knowledge base makes it clear that students struggling in the school setting may be experiencing stressors that are school-based as well as caused by out-of-school factors. Significant stress and trauma are caused by implicit and explicit social values related to aspects of social identities that are either privileged or marginalized, such as race, class, language background, dis/ability status, sexual orientation, and more. Our understanding of stress and the brain requires educators to continually reexamine existing school practices to change those that may exacerbate trauma. These can include disciplinary practices, grouping and tracking practices, and other sources of stigma.
3. **Strengths-based:** A strengths-based trauma-informed approach looks for the capacities students have developed and acknowledges the ways in which they—and often their family members—are seeking to engage, adapt, and develop resilience to adverse circumstances. Insight into broader system factors reminds trauma-informed educators not to blame caretakers, but to view each other as partners in problem-solving and healing.
4. **Community-driven:** Trauma-informed practice is ultimately a commitment to being in a community in a manner that provides a welcome and inclusive environment fostering relational safety and well-being, the basic ingredients we all need to thrive throughout our lives. A consistent ethic of care means that the relational values educators extend to students are offered to each other as well. Caring about educator well-being is a central value, since attuned and supportive interpersonal relationships nurture educators’ resilience and well-being, which is necessary for them to attend to student well-being.¹¹⁰

Importantly, school designs that are trauma- and healing-informed include structures and practices to support attachment and recognize strengths and needs by ensuring that every student is known and supported by adults. When adults in the school have opportunities to learn about the lives and experiences of their students, they are better able to marshal assistance when needed. Some strategies include advisories—small groups that provide every student with a caring community and a school advocate—and looping, which is the practice of keeping students with the same teacher or team for more than 1 year so that they know each other well and develop positive relationships. In addition, schools can:

- train educators and staff to recognize students who are experiencing trauma in their lives and respond to them with caring instead of frustration or punishment;
- increase access to school counseling—one-on-one and in small groups for students dealing with similar kinds of trauma—as well as to a broader system of supports;
- increase outreach to families to gather information, support parents, and cocreate collaborative approaches to support student health;
- create quiet spaces in classrooms or in the building for cooling down or restorative time where students can defuse and reflect, followed by opportunities for conversation; and
- integrate strategies to reduce stress and promote physical and emotional well-being for all students, such as mindfulness and breathing practices; breaks throughout the day that offer physical movement; lessons on brain science, growth mindset, stress, and healthy lifestyles; and acknowledgment of emotional issues in students’ lives as a normal part of the school culture.

The use of restorative practices that avoid exclusionary discipline and strongly attach students to the community is also essential to a trauma-informed approach that promotes healing. Restorative practices are “processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing.”¹¹¹ Relationships and trust are supported through universal interventions such as daily classroom meetings, community-building circles, and conflict resolution strategies, all of

which are also part of many social-emotional learning programs. These strategies are supplemented with restorative conferences, often managed through mediation by trained staff or peers, when a challenging event has occurred. In addition to explicit conflict resolution training for students and staff, a restorative justice approach deals with conflict through systems that allow students to reflect on any mistakes, repair damage to the community, and receive counseling when needed. Research has found that creating a restorative environment in which students learn to be responsible and are given the opportunity for agency and contribution can transform students’ social, emotional, and academic behavior and their academic outcomes.¹¹²

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Creating Safe Havens in Schools and Classrooms

Research on contexts that support learning and development consistently finds that a positive school context in which adults and students are dedicated to a shared vision of holistic student success is a core feature of a successful educational experience. Cultivating a supportive school environment that instills a sense of safety and belonging also involves building a safe and caring learning community, with consistent routines that allow students to be well known and well supported, and fostering culturally responsive and inclusive learning experiences through which all students feel valued.¹¹³

Students living in deep poverty often do not have access to the larger culture in which schools are embedded, and so they may experience a sense of apartness and alienation. And when race and class biases are widespread, students living in deep poverty can be stereotyped by educators and other students as less than competent learners. Earlier, we described how learning is undermined when children experience a sense of threat. A particularly salient threat in our society and education systems is social identity threat, which can be triggered whenever a member of a group that is stigmatized in society feels they are at risk of being mistreated or misperceived in a given situation.¹¹⁴

Both in and out of school, students often receive messages that they are less valued or less capable as a function of their race, ethnicity, family income, language background, immigration status, dis/ability status, gender, sexual orientation, or other status. When those views are reinforced and internalized, they can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Stereotype threat, which occurs when one fears being judged in terms of a group-based stereotype,¹¹⁵ has been found to induce the body’s stress response, leading to impaired performance on school tasks and tests that does not reflect students’ actual capacities.

Teachers can reduce stereotype threat, at least as it occurs inside the school, by affirming students’ value and their ability to learn, viewing their experiences as assets, and bringing their voices into the classroom. These efforts can create an identity-safe and engaging atmosphere for learning to take place.¹¹⁶ Below is a summary of how best to create identity-safe classrooms.

Identity-Safe Classrooms

Identity-safe classrooms promote student achievement and attachments to school. The elements of such classrooms, found to support strong academic performance for all students, include:

- **Teaching** that promotes understanding, student voice, student responsibility for and belonging to the classroom community, and cooperation in learning and classroom tasks.
- **Cultivating diversity as a resource** for teaching through regular use of diverse materials, ideas, and teaching activities along with high expectations for all students.
- **Classroom relationships** based on trusting, encouraging interactions between the teacher and each student, and the creation of positive relationships among the students.
- **Caring, orderly, purposeful classroom environments** in which social skills are proactively taught and practiced to help students respect and care for one another in an emotionally and physically safe classroom, so each student feels attached to the others.

Source: Adapted from Steele, D. M., & Cohn-Vargas, B. (2013). *Identity Safe Classrooms: Places to Belong and Learn*. Corwin Press. Reproduced from Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/145.655> (accessed 04/20/22).

Helping teachers learn to engage all students in the classroom with respect, empathy, and support—including those who live in deep poverty—is critically important. Relationships matter. As one recent literature review documenting the effects of engagement on achievement around the world noted:

Significant research indicates that the teacher has a direct role in levels of student engagement through classroom environment, student support, student-teacher relationships, classroom organization, planned curriculum, and pedagogy. Results from the PISA study indicated that the student teacher relationship is highly relevant to the level of psychological engagement in the classroom.¹¹⁷

Working in high-poverty schools where children and families experience so much stress can be difficult.¹¹⁸ There is growing evidence that ongoing professional learning in a collegial environment, along with distributed models of school leadership, helps create and sustain teachers' morale and commitment, reducing attrition and enhancing effectiveness.¹¹⁹ In addition, it is critically important that high-poverty schools support teachers' mental health and wellness, which, not surprisingly, is strongly associated with students' success.¹²⁰ This includes creating positive working conditions and reasonable pupil loads, providing adequate materials and supplies, and giving teachers the ability to access wraparound services for their students; teachers need to be able to help children rather than experience the ongoing distress of their students' unaddressed needs.¹²¹

Finally, helping educators learn stress management skills, as well as other social-emotional skills, reduces burnout and turnover while supporting teacher effectiveness. In particular, studies find that mindfulness training can reduce teachers' stress and emotional distress; help them regulate emotions; and lead to greater social-emotional competence and well-being, a sense of self-efficacy, improved instructional practices, and the ability to provide emotional support for students. Mindfulness-based programs that support educators in implementing positive coping mechanisms when dealing with stressors can also mitigate the impacts of chronic emotional stress, a particular job hazard in education when caring educators are continuously concerned about trauma that impacts their students' lives.¹²²

The Time Is Now

In announcing his pandemic recovery budget in May of 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom noted:

We’re doing more than just fully reopening for the upcoming school year; we’re proposing historic investments in public schools to create new opportunities for every student, especially for our neediest students, so that every child can thrive, regardless of their race or zip code. To achieve this goal, we’re going big—targeting \$20 billion of investments to transform our public schools, including the creation of universal pre-k and the establishment of college savings accounts for 3.7 million disadvantaged kids for higher education pursuits or to start their own business.¹²³

The investments being made in California to provide needed services to students living in poverty and deep poverty are aligned with the legislative agenda of the Biden administration. Not since the 1960s has the elimination of poverty been so high on the recovery agenda of at least some of the nation’s leaders. At the national level, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) includes policies aimed at reducing poverty and eliminating deep poverty. One analysis estimated ARPA would reduce poverty dramatically across the board and cut child poverty rates in half in 2021, with the greatest benefits for Black and Latino/a children and families (Table 1).¹²⁴

Table 1
2021 Poverty Projections Under the American Rescue Plan Act

Demographic	Poverty Rate, 2021			Poverty Impact, 2021		
	Without 12/20 relief	Baseline (with 12/20 relief)	With American Rescue Plan (to baseline)	Percentage Point Reduction	Percent Change	Number of People Moved Out of Poverty
All	13.6%	12.3%	8.5%	-3.8%	-30.8%	12,250,000
Under age 18	5.1%	13.5%	5.9%	-7.5%	-56.0%	5,550,000
Age 18–64	12.7%	11.3%	8.2%	-3.0%	-26.9%	6,000,000
Age 65+	14.6%	14.2%	12.7%	-1.5%	-10.4%	780,000
Asian	13.6%	12.8%	9.7%	-3.1%	-24.2%	650,000
Black	21.9%	19.2%	12.1%	-7.1%	-37.1%	3,050,000
Hispanic	21.8%	18.9%	11.4%	-7.5%	-39.8%	4,510,000
White	9.2%	8.6%	6.7%	-1.9%	-22.4%	3,770,000
Asian Children	12.7%	12.1%	6.5%	-5.6%	-46.1%	220,000
Black Children	24.8%	21.5%	9.7%	-11.8%	-54.8%	1,190,000
Hispanic Children	22.3%	19.5%	9.2%	-10.3%	-52.9%	1,940,000
White Children	9.0%	8.3%	3.1%	-5.2%	-63.0%	1,900,000

Data source: Parolin, Z., Collyer, S., Curran, M. A., & Wimer, C. (2021). *The potential poverty reduction effect of the American Rescue Plan* [Fact sheet]. Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University. <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/2021/presidential-policy/biden-economic-relief-proposal-poverty-impact> (accessed 05/31/21).

The Biden administration's Build Back Better Framework would extend the tax credit through 2022, along with housing supports and health care supports that would begin to rebuild a safety net. However, the failure of the Senate thus far to pass this bill has left in limbo the future of this anti-poverty agenda.

The ARPA initiative comes on the heels of efforts to sound the alarm about the harms caused by poverty and deep poverty and how deep disadvantage damages all of us. In the last several years the need to reduce and eliminate child poverty has gained support in the U.S. House of

Representatives and the U.S. Senate. In 2020 Senators Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, and Sherrod Brown of Ohio introduced a bill to establish a federal interagency working group to develop a national plan to reduce the number of children living in poverty by half in 10 years.¹²⁵ Whether these kinds of efforts can move forward in the current political climate is an open question. Education alone cannot end child poverty, but if it is accompanied by school-based supports for whole child development, it can help to undo the harm of poverty and deep poverty because it can transform lives from the inside out. Most state constitutions recognize that children have a right to a “sound basic” or “thorough and efficient” or similarly described level of education.

Education can help to undo the harm of poverty and deep poverty because it can transform lives from the inside out.

These concepts are laudable, but their interpretation by the courts often does not go far enough. All children, including those who come from deeply poor families, should have a right to develop their talents and to fully participate in democracy. This requires continuing investments in a comprehensive approach to education that attends to all aspects of a child's development.

By educating the whole child in caring, inclusive school communities with resources that address their full range of needs, the trauma related to living in conditions of severe deprivation can be mitigated and, to some extent, healed; and by building on the strengths of deeply poor families and communities, schools can fulfill their historic commitment to equality of opportunity, including the opportunity for all children to learn, to thrive, and to follow their dreams.

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