

DIVERSE LEARNERS

FALL 2019 | BRIEF 2

WHO ARE CHILDREN IN POVERTY?

In Oklahoma public schools, 60% of our students are economically disadvantaged. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program based on their family income.

All children in poverty are not alike. Several factors impact poverty, including, location (urban, rural or suburban), family structure, duration and intensity. Families in poverty can include two parents, one parent, no parent, an incarcerated parent, grandparents or foster parents. Poverty can be **situational**, related to specific events such as, divorce, job loss, health issues, weather or be **generational** poverty that has existed in families for decades. The **intensity** of poverty may include daily food scarcity, homelessness or frequent trauma.

In “Teaching Students from Poverty,” Eric Jensen identifies how students are different due to **acute and chronic stress, cognitive challenges and emotional support needs**. “Acute stress is caused by aversive events such as trauma, loss and abuse. Chronic stress can be triggered by persistent economic, social and health insecurity or cultural stressors. Students from poverty often begin kindergarten one to three years behind middle-class peers in vocabulary acquisition.”

WHY IT MATTERS

The majority of children in Oklahoma public schools are economically disadvantaged.

- Poverty adversely affects student learning in probable and identifiable ways.
- Inequitable conditions in schools and classrooms further disadvantage students who live in poverty.
- Educators need training to develop the knowledge and skills to recognize the conditions that too often deny students in poverty equal access to educational opportunities.
- Stereotypes about people in poverty are deeply embedded in our society and influence how we respond.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Listen and learn from families and students.
- Let students know you will not give up on them.
- Actively engage students in learning experiences for authentic, relevant purposes, which can help them envision their futures and foster hope.
- Personalize learning to support learner needs, interests and aspirations.
- Be a “warm demander”: insistent and supportive.
- Teach routines, provide structure and develop executive-functioning skills.
- Foster creative and critical thinking.
- Create a sense of extended family and community.
- Foster belonging and create a bond between students and school.

Himmele, P. & Himmele, W. (2017). Total participation techniques: Making every student an active learner. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How well do we understand the adverse poverty-related influences on our students?
- How can we help each other address myths and stereotypes related to students who live in poverty?
- What resources are available in our school, district and community to support our efforts to better understand and confront inequities our students face at school and home?
- How do educators develop relationships with families in poverty?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Poverty exists across all student groups including minority students (Black or African American, American Indian, Hispanic or Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic White), English learners and students with disabilities.

What are ways to attend to equity?

- Developing relationships is the first, best strategy.
- Know what your students need.
- Expect success: it matters.
- Meet basic needs to clear the way for learning.
- Recognize families/caregivers as key resources.
- Use daily affirmations.

Budge, K.M., Parrett, W.H. (2018). Disrupting poverty: Five powerful classroom practices. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.