

Poverty in Our Schools

Resource Kit

Overview

As of 2017, 17% of South Dakota's children lived in poverty (SD Kids Count). However, the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) states that the United States measures poverty level by an outdated standard developed in the 1960s.

The NCCP research suggests that, on average, families need an income of about twice the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs. Children living in families with incomes below this level—\$48,678 for a family of four with two children in 2016—were referred to as low income. At that time, 39% (79,037) of South Dakota's children lived in low-income families.

South Dakota Kids Count data reveals that in 2017, 57% of Native American children lived in poverty while 9% of non-Hispanic White children lived in poverty.

Of the students living in poverty, research shows that 50% to 80% have also experienced some additional form of trauma that extends beyond their family's economic status.

Data Sources: [National Center for Children in Poverty \(NCCP\)](#) and [South Dakota Kids Count](#) and the NEA's [Teaching Children from Poverty and Trauma](#) by Ernest Izard.

WHAT WE KNOW

4 Factors Affected by Poverty

While the elements that culminate in poverty may vary in degree, intensity and occurrence, poverty affects four essential factors needed for healthy living and learning.

- **Health and well-being:** These factors influence and build on each other. For example, if a child lacks medical care, lives in substandard housing and suffers from poor nutrition, the child may struggle in academic settings. These factors can influence the learner's ability to achieve.
- **Literacy and language development:** Children who live in poverty often enter school behind in terms of literacy and language development. Research shows that, when compared to more affluent peers, these students struggle to build their vocabulary and comprehension skills.
- **Material resources:** Poverty at home often results in a lack of physical resources available to learners. Internet resources may be limited. Students may be limited in their ability to complete out-of-class projects. Their homes may not have a quiet area where they can study.
- **Level of mobility:** Poverty often results in families faced with substandard housing. Students often move from one location to another. Frequent moves almost always have a negative academic and social impact on students.

Adapted from [Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools](#) by William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge.

Keeping Poverty in Mind

What Doesn't Work?

- **Lowered learning expectations** often stem from good intentions--educators don't want to put too much pressure on students who might be overburdened in other areas of their lives. However, research shows that learners tend to meet expectations rather than exceed them.
- **Overuse of direct instruction and rote lessons** does not result in deep learning. For example, while increased direct instruction on reading skills can improve reading mechanics, it fails to improve reading comprehension.
- **Teaching to the test and using increased test scores as the only measure of student success** too often results in schools cutting back on the activities and subjects that most engage and motivate students, such as music, art, and physical activities.
- **Tracking or ability grouping** can often lead to increased gaps in rates of student achievement and instruction for students who struggle, including students who live in poverty. Since these students are most frequently placed in the lower tracks, they end up missing out on learning opportunities that promote higher level thinking skills.

Adapted from [Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty](#) by Paul C. Gorski

What Does Work?

Eric Jensen, speaker and writer on student poverty and brain-based learning, suggests 7 educational mindsets that can enrich the learning of students in poverty.

1. The **Relational Mindset** says we're all connected. Before any other strategies can work with learners, teachers need to demonstrate that they care for their students.
2. The **Achievement Mindset** goes beyond test scores. This mindset "bundles" components of "right attitude, gutsy goals, actionable feedback and persistence with grit."
3. The **Rich Classroom Climate Mindset** fosters important student needs in the classroom. Teachers give students a voice but also explicitly and implicitly show students that they are cared for and capable.
4. The **Engagement Mindset** occurs when a student can say, "I'm engaged, I'm buying into it, I care about it, it's relevant, and I get to not just learn it but process it, talk about it, try it out, do it."
5. The **Positivity Mindset** says, "I am an optimist and grateful ally who helps students build a successful narrative for their future." Research shows teachers who foster a positive mindset in themselves and their students increase student potential for academic success.
6. The **Enrichment Mindset** acknowledges that brains can change. Teachers believe they can grow and change and by doing so can help students build powerful cognitive skills."
7. The **Graduation Mindset** occurs when both educators and students believe graduation is the ultimate and achievable goal. As a result, every teacher focuses on helping students achieve this goal.

Sources:

Rea, D. W. (2017). Interview with Eric Jensen: Enriching Mindsets for Teachers of Students in Poverty. *National Youth-At-Risk Journal*, 2(2)
<https://doi.org/10.20429/nyarj.2017.020202>

[Poor Students, Rich Thinking](#) (2016) & [Poor Students, Richer Thinking](#) (2016) by Eric Jensen

Family & Community Resources: *Poverty in Our Schools*



Read

Running Strong for American Indian Youth, a nonprofit organization, provides information on poverty on America's reservations and shares ways that some communities are working to improve their communities and their children's futures in "[Poverty Cycle.](#)"

Talk Poverty, a project of the Center for American Progress, provides year-by-year [South Dakota poverty statistics.](#)

A February 6, 2019 article by **Bart Pfankuch, of the nonprofit news organization South Dakota News Watch**, titled "[Thousands of South Dakota Children are Trapped in Poverty.](#)" reports that more than 40,000 South Dakota children, from infants to teenagers, live in families with incomes low enough to qualify for the federal food stamp program, creating challenges for a fruitful childhood and a prosperous adult life.



Listen

In "[Information Access and Student Achievement.](#)" **Peter Bergman & Cassandra M.D. Hart, Center of Poverty Research at the University of California-Davis**, discuss how access to timely, actionable information about how students are performing in school can help parents keep their kids on track.

In "[To Break Cycle of Poverty, Teaching Mom and Dad to Get Along.](#)" **Jennifer Ludden** and guests analyze the importance of family in the battle against poverty. The All Things Considered podcast from NPR emphasizes the role of a strong family support system when it comes to helping youth move out of poverty.



Watch

In [A Conversation with Donna Beegle](#), **Dr. Donna Beegle**, President and Founder of Communication Across Barriers shares her research and life experience about poverty in America. Dr. Beegle, a product of generational poverty, talks about the stereotypes, the causes, and impact of poverty and the importance of educating others and understanding the issue.



Do

Fight poverty in your community. The Community Action Services and Food Bank offers ways communities can strive to fight poverty in "[Ways You Can Fight Poverty.](#)"

School Resources: *Poverty in Our Schools*



Read

Eric Jensen's ["7 Factors of Engagement In Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind,"](#) describes factors that correlate with engagement and are strongly tied to socioeconomic status. To keep students in school, staff must make classrooms relevant, engaging, and full of affirming relationships. Jensen asserts that there are no failing students, only schools which are failing to reach students.

Staff from the Momentous Institute, a nonprofit Dallas learning center focused on addressing the social, emotional, and learning needs of students affected by trauma, report that ["For Kids, Living in Poverty is Living with Chronic Trauma."](#)



Listen

This **We Love Schools** podcast, ["Effect of Poverty on Learning,"](#) features the steps one school district in Ohio has taken to help fight the impact of poverty on learning.

On **Angela Watson's** Truth for Teachers podcast, two educators share ["Three Things to Focus on in High Poverty Classrooms"](#) & ["How to Earn Trust with Families in Poverty."](#)



Watch

In this YouTube video interview, **Eric Jensen** discusses his [Brain-Based Learning](#) approach to working with students in poverty. Jensen offers strategies that educators can use in the classroom.

In this [PBS Face-to-Face](#) episode, **Dr. Donna Beegle** discusses the effects of poverty on education and her thoughts on ways to break the cycle of poverty so that young people are able to lead productive lives in their communities.



Do

Provide choices to students. Alex Shevrin Venet suggests educators integrate ["8 Ways to Support Students Who Experience Trauma."](#)

Keep expectations high. M. McClain works with students affected by generational poverty which is defined as a family having lived in poverty for at least two generations. She sees new teachers struggling with ways to help these students and offers ["5 Ways to Help Students Affected by Generational Poverty."](#)

Engage families. William Parrett & Kathleen Budge answer the question: ["How Can High-Poverty Schools Engage Families and the Community?"](#)

All links can be found at <http://bit.ly/Poverty-Links>