



**Q.** What are the effects of poverty on children and their academic performance?

**A.** Many hoped that K-12 education would help eradicate poverty, but it hasn't worked out that way yet. In his latest article about the academic consequences of poverty, Matthew Lynch argues that teachers need to be especially aware of the effects of poverty in their classrooms. Lynch's article states, "Poverty is a major problem in the United States. The middle class seems to be disappearing and the gap is widening between the upper class and the lower class sectors of society. The socioeconomic status of children and their families has a profound effect on the children's education, even in a country that prides itself on equal opportunity and fair treatment of all. Socioeconomic status can be determined by one's level of education, occupation and income. A high socioeconomic status is characterized by a high level of education, and a high status occupation, and a high income. A low socioeconomic status is typified by a lower level of education, a job of low prestige and a low income." "Schools have not been designed to properly serve poor children. They reflect and promote a middle-class way of life."

Teachers must keep in mind that poor children often come from homes that are not adequate in terms of shelter and may be in very dangerous communities. In their neighborhood, they may be exposed to drugs, violent crime and prostitution, and may turn to these types of activities themselves at an early age. Parents of children living in poverty often struggle to provide them with enough quality food and medical coverage.

Children living in poverty often come to school without having had enough sleep, and without having had breakfast. They often experience family violence, abuse, secondhand smoke, neglect, poor clothing and shoes. Even though they have limited experience in the world, they may not be able to pay for field trips and cannot pay for extracurricular activities of any kind that could actually expand their experience base. This is the frightening reality for millions of children, and teachers are very likely to have impoverished students in their class. Teachers need to consider what that means and how they can reach out to these students and help them excel." This article appeared on the [EducationNews.org](http://www.educationnews.org/k-12-schools/matthew-lynch-the-academic-consequences-of-poverty/) website. Visit <http://www.educationnews.org/k-12-schools/matthew-lynch-the-academic-consequences-of-poverty/> for the full article. When you read about the effects of poverty on children, the future looks

bleak however, there are school districts who are meeting the needs of these children and poor districts need to look to similar districts and adopt what works and has been proven to work!

## **The Effects**

The American Psychological Association- [APA.org](http://APA.org) , reports these effects of poverty on academic achievement:

- Poverty has a particularly adverse effect on the academic outcomes of children, especially during early childhood.
- Chronic stress associated with living in poverty has been shown to adversely affect children's concentration and memory which may impact their ability to learn.
- The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2008, the dropout rate of students living in low-income families was about four and one-half times greater than the rate of children from higher-income families (8.7 percent versus 2.0 percent).
- The academic achievement gap for poorer youth is particularly pronounced for low-income African American and Hispanic children compared with their more affluent White peers.
- Under resourced schools in poorer communities struggle to meet the learning needs of their students and aid them in fulfilling their potential.
- Inadequate education contributes to the cycle of poverty by making it more difficult for low-income children to lift themselves and future generations out of poverty.
- Children in poverty may also experience severe behavior problems and psychological effects such as depression and anxiety.

## **Absenteeism**

- Regular attendance at school is important for educational success. Absenteeism has a negative affect on academic achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge. The National Center for Children in Poverty-NCCP has found that among poor children, chronic absenteeism in kindergarten predicts low achievement levels at the end of the fifth grade. Poor families' lack of resources such as transportation, food, and clothing may prevent children from attending school regularly. Illness is another significant factor to consider with regard to absenteeism since 20 percent of low-income infants and toddlers do not have updated immunizations, which may be required for school admittance. [http://www.ehow.com/info/7955115\\_effects-childhood-poverty-education.html](http://www.ehow.com/info/7955115_effects-childhood-poverty-education.html)

## **Emotional Impact**

- Poverty's effects on the emotional development of children has a negative impact on [education](#). According to the Connecticut General Assembly, research shows that children from poor families experience emotional problems more often than non-poor children. As explained on teach-nology.com, emotions are connected to memory, which affect the capacity of children to grasp ideas, think and learn. This lack of emotional development interferes with language development, further preventing the development of higher-order thinking skills that assist with independent problem solving. Children living in poverty may be fearful, which can be converted to aggression, irritability, and apathy, all of which have a negative affect on learning.

The APA.org website reports these psychological effects of poverty on children:

- Children living in poverty are at greater risk of behavioral and emotional problems.
- Some behavioral problems may include impulsiveness, difficulty getting along with peers, aggression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and conduct disorder.
- Some emotional problems may include feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.
- Poverty and economic hardship is particularly difficult for parents who may experience chronic stress, depression, marital distress and exhibit harsher parenting behaviors. These are all linked to poor social and emotional outcomes for children.
- Unsafe neighborhoods may expose low-income children to violence which can cause a number of psychosocial difficulties. Violence exposure can also predict future violent behavior in youth which places them at greater risk of injury and mortality and entry into the juvenile justice system.

## **Health**

Children and teens living in poorer communities are at increased risk for a wide range of physical health problems:

- Low birth weight
- Poor nutrition which is manifested in the following ways:
  1. Inadequate food which can lead to food insecurity/hunger
  2. Lack of access to healthy foods and areas for play or sports which can lead to childhood overweight or obesity

Chronic conditions such as asthma, anemia, and pneumonia

Risky behaviors such as smoking or engaging in early sexual activity

Exposure to environmental contaminants, e.g., lead paint and toxic waste dumps

Exposure to violence in their communities which can lead to trauma, injury, disability, and mortality

## **What Can Schools Do?**

This Critical Issue was researched and written by Mary Ann Costello, a free-lance writer. Districts need to adopt these goals:

- Schools, teachers, and instruction foster [resiliency](#) in children by building on

students' strengths. (Resiliency is the ability to adapt and succeed despite risk and adversity.)

- Administrators provide leadership in managing change to improve learning for all students.
- Administrators and teachers are committed to continued professional development to improve teaching and learning for all students.
  
- Teachers believe all students can succeed. They communicate this belief to their students.
  
- Teachers provide [instruction that connects with the students' culture and prior knowledge](#).
  
- Teachers use a variety of instructional and assessment approaches that reflect the student's capacity for [multiple intelligences](#).
- All students learn an academically challenging curriculum that develops high-level thinking skills as well as basic skills.
  
- Students believe their teachers and fellow students care about their welfare.
  
- Students participate in [meaningful, engaged learning](#) and experience opportunities to succeed at school.
  
- Students construct meaning from content in a [collaborative learning environment](#).
  
- Parents and community members are involved in educating students and have a voice in important school decisions, such as resources and staffing.
- **Consider** adopting or adapting one of the model programs **proven** to help at-risk students on the basis of identified needs and a [collective vision](#)
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- [Success for All](#) is a school wide restructuring program for preschool through grade 5 based on the premise that all students can learn.

- **The [School Development Program](#)** is a school wide restructuring program designed to address the needs of the whole child.
- **The [Accelerated Schools Project](#)** is a school wide program that involves restructuring the school organization, curriculum, and instruction.
- **[Reading Recovery](#)** is a one-on-one tutoring program designed to help low-achieving first graders learn to read.

For the full article visit: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at600.htm>

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