

10 Things You Can Do In Your School to Address Child Poverty

Prepared by the Eastern Ontario Child Poverty Resource Network, through the generous support of the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation

1. Recognize that poverty is an issue in every school.

Certainly poverty is a concern for schools which serve low income neighbourhoods. Did you know, even schools in affluent communities normally have some low income children attending? Families circumstances change due to circumstances such as unemployment, illness, or family disruption.

2. Inform yourself, your staff and your parent association.

Good sources of information on poverty and its' impact on children are easily available. See the following to get started:

- Eastern Ontario Child Poverty Resource Network at www.spcottawa.on.ca/EOCPRN
- Campaign 2000 at www.campaign2000.ca

3. Create a plan to address the impact of poverty in your school.

The Canadian School Board Association has material to help with this task. Visit their website at www.CdnSBA.org.

4. Consider how school related fees in your school and your board affect low income families and seek solutions to ease the burden on low income families.

The Eastern Ontario Child Poverty Resource Network has some materials on their website to get you started on this task.

5. Establish policies in your school which ensure your school addresses the needs of low income students.

Work with your school board to encourage board -wide policies that will benefit low income students across the board.

6. Put in place supports and programs which help low income children get the most out of their educational experience.

Examples from other schools include breakfast, snack and lunch programs, clothing and sports equipment exchanges, fundraising for extracurricular activities and trips, school supply programs. For information on school feeding programs see the Canadian Living website at www.canadianliving.com.

7. Encourage your staff to consider how their classroom and curriculum plans could differentially impact low income students in the classroom.

Some staff have found it helpful to use a "filter" similar to an anti-racist filter. "Would this activity be offensive or create particular difficulties for a low income child in my class?" For example, activities which require buying supplies, travelling, or phone contact may be a problem for low income children.

8. Be sensitive to different times of year, which may be more stressful for low income children and families.

Some times of year are commonly more stressful for low income families, for example:

- Major holidays (if they involve any activities that cost extra such as feasting, giving gifts, travel, etc.)
- the second month after such major holiday times (eg. February is a time when many very low income families face evictions, if they chose to give their children a few gifts at Christmas),
- September (due to school related costs),
- any month where heating bills would be high.

To the extent you and your staff are able, avoid scheduling stressful school activities and events at the same time as stressful times in the children's family life.

9. Research indicates that a key issue in working with low income children is to develop resiliency.

Support your staff to be encouraging of the children, to put in place opportunities for success, and to encourage the children to do well. Keep school a place where the children want to come. Do not permit an atmosphere in the school in which low income children and families are considered "deficient". Create an environment where the children are encouraged to think forward to attending university or college.

10. Develop working relationships with local services that address issues affecting low income families.