Connecting People

Communication
Across Barriers

Leadership that makes a difference-

Students living in poverty are the least likely to become educated in the nation. Deep inside, we know our classrooms, our curriculum, our teaching and learning strategies, our community partnerships, and even our leadership in our schools do not serve students who live in the crisis of poverty.. An effective leader does not deny crisis they illuminate it so real solutions can be found" (Sharif Abdullah, The Power of One). We can not keep doing what we have always done and expect different results. ***Now is the time for action.***

10 Commandments For Educating Students Who Live In Poverty

1. Power and Responsibility are connected. If you do not personally take the responsibility for educating students in poverty, you can not have the power to close the achievement gap. It's in your hands. As Harry Truman said, "The Buck Stops Here."
2. Recognize that your interest are connected to interest of the students and families in poverty. Understand students and families in poverty are not "other." They are people living in the context of poverty.
3. Be willing to consider what is best for the students and families in poverty first. Consider their perspectives and experiences when making leadership decisions.
4. See students and families in poverty as people who want to learn and have quality lives, but may not know how or have the supports to make that happen.
5. Ensure knowledge and partnerships are available to keep staff from being overwhelmed by the impacts of poverty on learning.
6. Describe the difficulties and impact of poverty on learning and illuminate for staff how inaction or status quo, heightens the challenges for educating students who live in poverty.
7. Call upon staff to examine their comfort zones and to implement new ways of reaching out sand of educating students who live in poverty. If an educator believes a student can not learn because of the impacts of poverty, they do not have a chance.
8. Leaders must walk the walk to create a school culture committed to educating students in poverty-Actions speak louder than words. What behavior do you exhibit that says every child can learn and every student will have the education supports to reach their highest potential? Do you visit classrooms? Do home visits? Do you select students for special jobs?
9. If a leader can justify writing off one student, we all lose. We can make a difference, but only when we believe it, and our actions show it.
10. Policy is supposed to serve, not punish. Examine policy and school rules to ensure students are not being punished for poverty conditions.

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Mobilize the Power of People on Your Staff:

1. Increase awareness of the root problem—If you do not know the problem, you can not come up with a workable solution.

2. Professional development—Once staff have the awareness, they need tools and practice.

3. Create a system that supports implementation of the new teaching and learning strategies-including, a feedback loop, partnerships and resources, and accountability.

BUILD SKILLS:

1. Conceptual skills–for ensuring poverty impacts are considered in problem solving, policy development, and daily routines.

2. Dialectical skills–for understanding how poverty impacts the various parts of the organization and how this both/and perspective can serve to reduce dropouts and improve achievement;

3. Collaboration skills–for comprehending how the external environment impacts education and building partnerships and resources to eradicate poverty impacts on learning.

Practical Ideas For School Leaders:

EDUCATING STAFF

- Provide training and support for all staff and parents.
- Clarify policies like homework & how students without homes need support. Don't fail kids who have no hope getting homework completed.
- Target three staff leaders to participate in poverty training, and recruit them to help with the process of educating the other staff members.
- Make staff aware of how students in poverty effect the NCLB statistics and how support strategies can benefit.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- Build empathy and awareness among staff and encourage them to find some way of connecting personally with students and families.
- Facilitate mentoring and building networks of support.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

- Place family involvement as a high priority. Parents in poverty know their kids best and can provide keys to educating them.

- Facilitate an in-service meeting among all local agencies that provide support to low income families and see how their resources can eradicate the impacts of poverty on learning.
- Encourage home visits by staff.

PROGRAM

- Change tardy slips to we're glad you are here and deal with basic needs like food and when they arrive at school
- Develop a new student orientation program with student leaders as mentors. Create a peer-mentoring program.
- Maximize the opportunities for students to be successful each free moment of the day. Look at your referrals and times you receive the most are times you can use. Capture the time for mentoring and support.
- Create a new student/parent interview process asking parents for key relationship information.
- Address the issue of transportation. Dial a Ride volunteers. Keeping in mind insurance and board policy.
- Implement student led conferences. (Phoenix Talent model.)
- Compile a list of help we need at school and recruit volunteers from the poverty community.
- Create a data bank on students at risk and share with staff. (Recognizing confidentiality issues.)
- Revisit eligibility for activities and athletics and provide support rather than discipline.
- Recruit police, fire, & security to work with students on basic skills.
- Develop a "buddy" phone call system. When a friend isn't at school, they can call the home from the office and update the student on assignments.
- Sponsor a community night. Food and Day care provided. Make sure parents in poverty are involved in planning.
- Expose students to people who have benefited from education. (e.g., survey your community to those leaders that have an alternative school background.)
- Have the school nurse, or community agencies, develop a program to focus on health issues.
- Provide snacks and water before assessment sessions.
- Use Title II money to support for staff training.
- Be creative –use Medicaid money, tap local business, build supports and programs for tutoring, before and after school programs and other supports to ensure capacity for students in poverty to succeed in school.