

# *Educating the Total Child*



## The Total Child Needs Our Total Attention

**W**e have reached a tipping point in American education. Consensus is growing that it's time to get back to the basics of supporting the total child — from physical and mental health to the development of fundamental learning skills.

To educate the total child, schools need support from the entire community: from parents to teachers, from principals to central-office administrators, from superintendents to school board members, and from business leaders to policymakers.

The mission of the American Association of School Administrators is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. AASA's 13,000 members include superintendents, senior-level school administrators, cabinet members, professors and aspiring school system leaders from every region of the country, in rural, urban and suburban school settings.

AASA members are involved in educating the total child every day, and the association is committed to developing initiatives that will help our members create the conditions necessary for students to become successful, lifelong learners.



# Why Educate the Total Child?

**AASA** believes that a high-quality public education is a civil right. AASA advocates an education approach designed to effect real change by addressing key factors that determine our children's academic achievement, including

- The devastating impact of poverty on our students;
- The lack of universal early childhood education; and
- The need for cooperation and collaboration across agencies and organizations.

## How do these factors affect our mission to educate the total child?

### 1. The many and varied effects of poverty form the single greatest factor limiting student achievement.

The most prevalent and persistent gaps in student achievement are a result of the effects of poverty. Children of poverty tend to live in low-income neighborhoods and attend schools that have limited resources. They also are more likely to complete fewer years of formal education and face more health issues than do children from higher-income families. Poor children may be hindered in their cognitive development by weak social, emotional and behavioral skills and poor nutrition.

Professors Valerie E. Lee and David T. Burkam, authors of the 2002 study "Inequality at the Starting Gate," reported math and reading scores for new kindergartners from the lowest socioeconomic group are 60 percent and 56 percent lower, respectively, than those of students at the highest end.

According to "Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children," a 1995 study by professors Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, by the time children from economically advantaged families are 3 years old, they have a substantially more varied vocabulary than do children from low-income families.

Current efforts at education reform were created based on the assumption that toughening accountability would close achievement gaps and resolve learning problems that, in many cases, actually result from children struggling against disadvantages caused by poverty.

The impact of poverty on student achievement is especially significant given the current economic downturn. Indications are that, with higher unemployment rates, a greater number of Americans will be pushed into deep poverty. The rise in childhood poverty caused by the recession likely will reduce student achievement and increase the number of dropouts. It also will widen the achievement gap between the haves and have-nots.

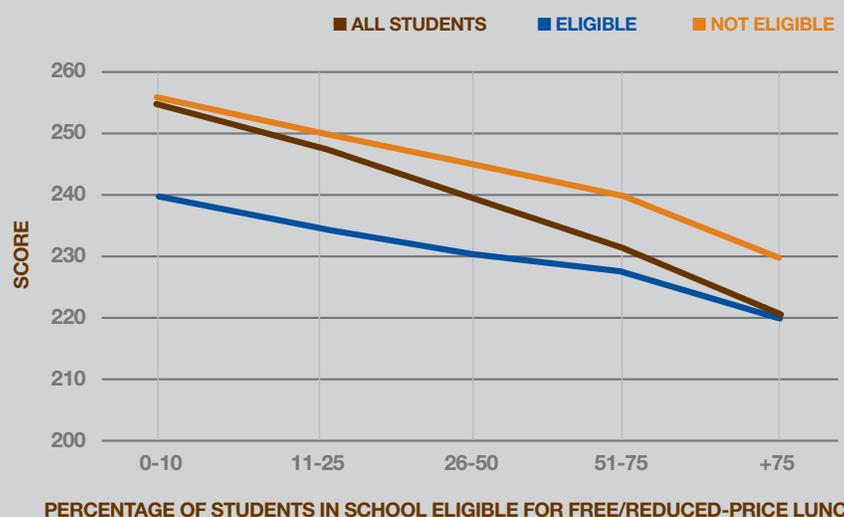
## BY THE NUMBERS

- 1 in 6 U.S. children are poor.
- 500,000 more U.S. children (now 13.3 million) lived in poverty in 2007 vs. 2006.
- 5.8 million U.S. children live in extreme poverty.

Source: Children's Defense Fund

To mitigate the disadvantages poverty brings to the classroom, AASA advocates for local, state and federal funding for human services to address childhood poverty. Focusing education funding where it is needed the most — on schools serving children of poverty — significantly increases the chances that those dollars will actually help close the achievement gap.

## Data Connecting Poverty and Student Achievement: 2005 NAEP Data





**2. Achievement gaps among students of different socioeconomic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds are noticeable by age 3 and must be addressed by early childhood education programs that ensure each child begins school prepared to learn.**

Children from lower-income families who participated in an intensive early childhood education program showed higher rates of educational achievement and lower rates of depression and criminal activity, according to “Effects of a School-Based, Early Childhood Intervention on Adult Health and Well-Being,” a 2007 study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, part of the National Institutes of Health. However, as is expected, the likelihood that a child will attend preschool is tied largely to socioeconomic status, according to data from the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University.

All but a dozen states now offer some form of state-funded prekindergarten. However, researchers at NIEER say prekindergarten quality varies widely from state to state and from program to program. Eight states — Arkansas, Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon and Tennessee — fund preK on a par with K-12 schooling (based on spending per child enrolled) and only one state, Oklahoma, offers universal prekindergarten for all 4-year-olds.

AASA believes federal support for early childhood education is a crucial link to reducing the achievement gap. The association supports President Obama’s “Zero to Five” plan to provide critical support to young children and their parents, and the Obama Administration’s proposal to help states move toward voluntary, universal preschool.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

- 78 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds from families with incomes over \$100,000 attend preschool
- < 50 percent of children from families with incomes below \$50,000 attend preschool

*Source: National Institute for Early Education Research*

**3. Students achieve to higher levels when organizations work with public education to coordinate delivery of health and child development services.**

The effects of poverty cannot be erased in the classroom. Research from the Children’s Defense Fund shows the direct link between children’s physical and mental health status and academic performance. Reading scores and school attendance of uninsured children improve dramatically after the children gain access to health care.

Factors such as prenatal care, health services available to a child after birth, parenting education and support, the quality of child care, and the availability of preschool programs and full-day kindergarten all affect children’s ability to learn. Addressing each factor long before a child sets foot in the classroom is critical to eliminating the achievement gap.

Community organizations must work together to ensure that our students have access to adequate health and human services so the students can focus on academic achievement. Only when children have support for all their needs will schools have a real chance of helping every student master required education concepts and skills.

AASA believes that overcoming the devastating effects of poverty on children’s lives and educational outcomes requires fulfilling their need for safety, health, shelter and nurturing environments, while also providing high-quality opportunities to learn. Schools serving larger concentrations of low-income and minority children should be eligible for every federal program aimed at the development, health and general well-being of children.

In addition, the 93 disconnected programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act should be linked to create a more systemic, focused continuum of services and supports based on need.

# Call to Action

The American Association of School Administrators is committed to developing initiatives that will help superintendents, central-office staff, principals, teachers, parents and others educate the total child. To demonstrate that commitment, AASA has joined nearly 100 other organizations representing all aspects of child development in calling for a new White House Office of Children and Youth.

America's political leaders rely on the frontline experience of AASA members to provide policy guidance and model programs to replicate across the country. AASA has the experience and prestige to forge ahead in transforming America's school systems. AASA's legislative agenda supports

- A health care system focused on serving all children from low-income families, including prenatal care and school-based, school-linked and community health clinics
- Continued Medicaid reimbursements for school-based administrative and transportation claims for health care.
- Provision of federal funding and access to mental health care and dental care.
- Federal support for children in their first five years of life, including social intervention and full funding for and alignment of Head Start to public education.
- Access to high-quality child care for families in poverty, including the working poor.
- Compiling research and best practices that will help schools educate the total child.

As school system leaders, AASA members set the pace for academic achievement. They help shape policy, oversee its implementation and represent school districts to the public at large. Become part of the strong voice of experience in Washington advocating for the issues that will help prepare each child to begin school healthy and ready to learn.



## AASA Resources

AASA Legislative Agenda  
[www.aasa.org/policy](http://www.aasa.org/policy)

AASA Research on Schools  
and the Economy  
[www.aasa.org/policy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=11033](http://www.aasa.org/policy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=11033)

AASA Children's Programs  
[www.aasa.org/focus](http://www.aasa.org/focus)

AASA Toolkits  
[www.aasa.org/publications/toolkits](http://www.aasa.org/publications/toolkits)

Look for AASA's  
Educating the Total Child Toolkit  
available Spring 2009



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