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Use of Poverty Funds: Research

The study team examined the effects of poverty and effective interventions from three perspectives: (1) community; (2) school; and (3) student. The research included examining the broader research-based strategies for serving poverty students and the specific research-based programs/curricula.

Effects of Poverty on Learning

Community Level: Studies show that poor children growing up in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty face greater challenges than poor children growing up in lower-poverty neighborhoods. Students face communities with social and economic isolation, lack of employment, and health risks. Children in poor neighborhoods suffer from higher rates of social-emotional problems.

Student Level: Students from poverty backgrounds experience early language gaps caused by lower levels of child-directed speech among low income parents. They face higher summer learning loss due to fewer enrichment opportunities during the summer. Students tend to have lower attendance rates due to greater incidence of illness and other interruptions. They also show lower engagement and motivation due to a sense of alienation and lower perception of the link between education and success in life.

School Level: Research shows academic performance correlates negatively with concentrations of poverty in schools. Higher concentrations of poverty seem to impact all students in a school, not only poor students. The factors influencing school performance may include lack of positive peer influences, low teacher motivation/morale, diluted curriculum, less parental involvement. Some research suggests school effects could start at concentrations between 25% and 50%.

Strategies and Adjustments for Improvement

No single approach is assured of working in all situations. Effectiveness varies by: The specific context of the community, school, and student; capacity and motivation of district and school staff to implement with fidelity; availability of necessary resources and supports; and ability to assess progress and make necessary adjustments.

Addressing Community Effects

Wrap around services, e.g. providing non-academic supports for addressing physical health, mental health, economic stress, or family instability, may help to offset some of the effects of community and school-wide poverty. Community schools are one strategy for coordinating the provision of wrap around services. They are designed to bring together community resources to support social-emotional needs as well as academic needs. Schools and districts partner with

community organizations and agencies to provide expanded services to students. Four key components of community schools include (1) wraparound services, (2) full-time coordinator embedded in the school, (3) expanded learning time programs, and (4) engaging adults with the school. Research indicates community schools can improve student attendance, increase graduation rates, increase academic achievement, and reduce racial and economic achievement gaps. Cost-benefit research indicates ROI of up to \$15 for every \$1 invested in wraparound services for community schools.

Addressing Schoolwide Effects

Research into the characteristics of effective schools, including “beating the odds” schools, dates back to the 1970s. Studies have highlighted the following common characteristics of effective high-poverty schools: (1) effective leadership; (2) strong teacher workforce; (3) high-quality curricula and instructional practices; (4) use of data to drive instruction with frequent formative and summative assessments, within a continuous improvement framework; (5) high expectations for all students; (6) emphasis on building personal relationships – among staff, among students, and between staff, students, and parents; and (7) ample opportunities to learn and relearn content.

Research-Supported Strategies and Programs

Research has consistently found a number of strategies, or school features, effective in improving student outcomes, especially among at-risk, low income students, including:

- **Prekindergarten programs:** longitudinal studies find that high-quality, full day prekindergarten programs lead to higher academic achievement over a child’s school career, higher college attendance rates, and higher earnings as an adult.
- **Full-day kindergarten** has a positive effect on academic achievement compared to half-day programs, especially for low-income students.
- **Small class sizes:** having no more than 15:1 in grades K-3 have been found to have a significant positive effect on student learning, particularly for low income/at-risk students. There is no evidence that class sizes as small as this have statistically significant effect on achievement beyond 3rd grade.
- **Tutoring:** research supports tutoring programs that: a) employ certified teachers as tutors; b) work with students one-on-one or in very small groups; and c) are focused on the same content as in the classroom are among the most effective interventions.
- **Extended learning time:** while some studies have found positive effects of extended learning time, others show mixed results, possibly because extended day programs often have multiple goals, including academics and enrichment. Programs may be under-resourced, poorly implemented, or of poor design quality.
- **Effective social-emotional learning programs:** have been found to increase academic performance, improve classroom behavior, and better attitudes.

One source of program effectiveness ratings, based on rigorous methodological standards, is the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) supported by the U.S. Department of Education, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/> The WWC rates the effectiveness of programs for literacy, math, science, English language learners, children with disabilities, behavior, and other areas.