

Poverty Statistics Shock Rural Educator

With fall comes the inevitable phrase “Back to School!” As an educator in a rural school district on the edge of Appalachia, I immediately think of students who do not have the resources (financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems and relationships/role models) to succeed in school. Many of the children come to us from generations of poverty. As a school district, we tackle these challenges because their academic success affects their prospects for the future. While we experience the effects of poverty everyday in our jobs, the statistics stunned us. The National Center for Children in Poverty rolls them out for every state. In my own state:



- ❖ 21% of children younger than 6 live in poor families.
- ❖ 68% of children in poor families live with a single parent.
- ❖ 48% of children whose parents do not have a high school degree live in poor families.
- ❖ 23% of children whose parents have a high school degree, but no college education, live in poor families.
- ❖ Only 9% of children whose parents have some college or more live in poor families.

Find statistics for your own state at www.nccp.org.



Children
in Poverty



Staggering Reality Calls for Action

The direct relationship between level of education and economic condition surprised us most when we saw statistics for children living in poverty in our school district (reverse side). When a child's parent has a high school education or less, 71% live in substandard conditions in our state. That is a staggering reality. Did you know that the United States' child poverty rate is substantially higher — often two to three times higher — than that of most other major Western industrialized nations?

What can educators do? We neither excuse nor chastise students for their situation. We must carry out our primary mission of providing them with an education. Undergirding that education, we provide the support and resources within our means for them to succeed in life. Perhaps most important is that we hold up high expectations for our students.

What can we do in our churches?

- ❖ Begin by downloading the Bible study sessions from our American Baptist Women's Ministries Web site (www.abwministries.org) written by the Rev. Karen Selig. Use them in adult study groups, Sunday school, youth Bible studies, women's meetings or other settings, where people want to learn about Christ's call to serve the poor. In addition to Bible study, they provide questions for discussion, reflection and action steps.
- ❖ Get involved, whether by participating in school supply drives sponsored by local charities, serving as a mentor to a young person, volunteering in your local school, or another project to match your gifts and talents.
- ❖ Most importantly, we must see these children and we must pray that others do so as well!

Let's make it “Back to School!” for all of us.

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