

Poverty is defined as a lack of monetary resources necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Poverty is a pervasive problem that has devastating consequences for children and is associated with physical, emotional and mental health issues that persist into adulthood. Living in poverty creates trauma for children and makes it extremely difficult for them to focus on school. Students from low-income families often go to underfunded/high-poverty schools and have access to fewer of the resources they desperately need to mitigate the effects of poverty. All children deserve a high-quality, equitable education and the opportunity to reach their full potential. It is a critical issue concerning children's health and must be addressed in the context of public education.

The most recent Census data show a small decrease in the poverty rate among the overall U.S. population, from 12.3 percent in 2017 to 11.8 percent in 2018. Poverty rates were highest among infants and toddlers (birth through age 2). The Census Bureau uses a set of income thresholds that vary by family size to determine federal poverty levels (FPL). The FPL is determined using food cost estimates from the 1960s and recent research suggests that most families would need twice the FPL to pay for their basic needs. For 2020, the poverty threshold for a family of 4 is \$26,200 for the contiguous 48 states. These numbers, however, do not tell the whole story. There are large disparities in poverty rates among racial and ethnic groups. Poverty rates among African-Americans and Hispanics remain above 24 percent, over double the poverty rate of 9.1 percent for the white, non-Hispanic population.

A September 2018 NYT article analyzed the Census Bureau's 2017 annual report on the poor and suggested that the national recovery that has helped many Americans increase their earnings has, unfortunately, bypassed a large number of the 40 million to 45 million Americans estimated to be living below the federal poverty level. Further, the NYT argued that poor are getting poorer. The poverty threshold in 2017 was \$24,858 for a family of four. The percentage of families of living on half that income, in constant dollars, has nearly doubled since 1975, to 5.7 percent from 3.5 percent.

Poverty is always oppressive, but can be even more of a hardship in areas where the cost of living is high and/or local levels of resources and support are low. In many cities where housing costs are exorbitant, housing consumes more than 30-40% of a family's budget and there is little money left over for food, health care, clothing, and educational resources. At this time, in most cities, minimum wage workers cannot cover the cost of basic necessities such as housing, food and other expenses.

While urban areas often have high rates of concentrated poverty nationally, it is important to acknowledge that poverty exists across the landscape. A recent report found that "Forty-seven percent of urban counties have high rates of child poverty compared with 64 percent of rural counties. A higher percentage of rural students face extreme poverty—when family income is less than half of the poverty line—compared with urban students."

- Impoverished families in rural areas have less access to essential services, such as education programs for students with disabilities.
- Chronic underfunding of rural public schools contributes to low salaries, benefits, and lack of access to professional development. In addition, having to prepare multiple subjects for various grade-levels means that teachers cannot provide as much individual attention.
- Rates of rural poverty are on the rise. Currently, over half of the rural student population comes from a low-income family.

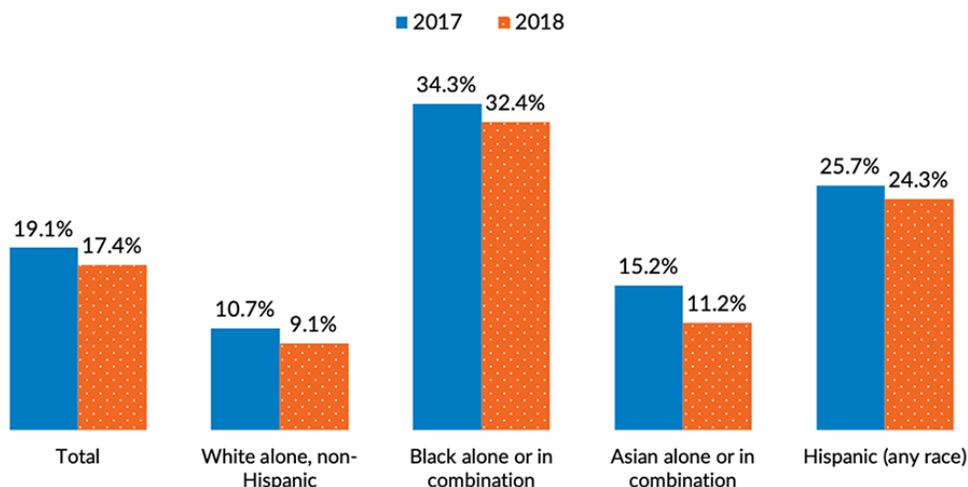
Children continue to be one of the most poverty endangered groups in the nation, with approximately 18% classified as poor, or from families with incomes at or below 100% of the poverty threshold. While it manifests itself in all age groups, poverty disproportionately affects children. Twenty-two percent of children are classified as near poor, or from families with income levels between 100% and 199% of poverty thresholds. Troubling disparities in poverty rates exist amongst America's children.

A recent report from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, found “As a result of generational inequities and systemic barriers, children of color face hurdles to success on many indicators. African-American children were significantly more likely to live in single-parent families and high-poverty neighborhoods. American Indian children were three times as likely to lack health insurance and more than twice as likely to live in neighborhoods with more limited resources as the average child. Finally, Latino children were the most likely to live with a head of household who lacks a high school diploma and to not be in school when they are young. Latinas also have the highest teen birth rate.”

A deeper dive of child poverty demonstrates that poverty rates are even worse for the nation’s youngest kids, with a high rate of racial and ethnic discrepancy. A report from Child Trends found that while poverty rates remained the same or decreased slightly from 2017 to 2018 for all racial and ethnic groups, the poverty gap between young Black and Hispanic children and their white peers under age 6 increased. Despite an overall decline in poverty rates from 2017 to 2018, nearly 1 in 3 Black children (32.4%) and 1 in 4 Hispanic children (24.3%) were living in poverty in 2018, compared to less than 1 in 10 white children (9.1%).* In 2017, young Black and Hispanic children experienced poverty at rates 3.2 and 2.4 times higher, respectively, than their non-Hispanic white peers; in 2018, young Black and Hispanic children lived in poverty at rates of 3.6 and 2.7 times higher than their non-Hispanic white peers.

Poverty rates remain disproportionately high for Black and Hispanic children

Poverty rates among children from birth through age 5 in 2017 and 2018, and by race and ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2018 and 2019 Annual Social and Economic Supplement

childtrends.org

Additionally, it is important to remember that poverty estimates do not include individuals experiencing homelessness because census surveys are sent to households and therefore exclude those without permanent housing. One recent report suggests that the US census failed to count almost 1 million children younger than 5. The census historically undercounts children of color as well as low-income and immigrant families. Not only does this skew our view of poverty in this country, **but it drastically under funds vital services that rely on accurate counts.**

Further, census numbers are used to draw legislative districts, which impacts what policies and issues are addressed and funded. This is important to keep in mind with the upcoming 2020 Census “could put more than 4 million people at risk of being undercounted and could hit some of the country’s most difficult to count populations the hardest,” according to new projections by the nonpartisan think tank at the Urban Institute.

Clearly poverty is a distressing problem with major implications for the nation’s youngest residents. The effects of poverty begin early and can last a lifetime.

How Does Poverty Impact Children?

Children born into poverty are statistically likely to suffer from a lack of education and resources with effects that continue through adulthood. Children from low-income homes are more likely to experience food, housing and energy insecurity. They are more likely to suffer from poor nutrition and inadequate healthcare. When they do become ill, it takes longer for them to recover. Poverty tends to be concentrated in neighborhoods where stress and social isolation are prevalent and there is also likely to be a lack of much-needed social resources. Children in low-income and minority neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to toxic stress, such as witnessing or experiencing violence, the death of a parent, or having a parent who is incarcerated. Prolonged exposure to toxic stress increases risk for mental and physical health risks that continue through their adult lives. A report from Child Trends found that “Neighborhoods whose residents are predominately poor or from a minority racial or ethnic group are more likely to have environmental conditions that pose a risk to children’s health. These include risks outside the home, such as poor air quality from nearby industrial sources or proximity to highways. And they include hazards associated with older and deteriorating housing, such as mold, pest infestations, peeling lead paint, and lead pipes.” They are also less likely to have access to a safe place to play, a critical component of child development.

The toxic stress these kids suffer affects their school performance and their very ability to learn. This transfers to their academic setting and can cause educators to experience secondary traumatic stress. Because poverty tends to be geographically concentrated, the effects of poverty are compounded by being surrounded by peers also experiencing high levels of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These factors negatively impact children’s well-being. Childhood trauma reduces a child’s ability to come to school ready to learn, engage and work towards graduation and a productive future. Eric Jensen, author of *Teaching With Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids’ Brains and What Schools Can Do About It* notes “A large number of students coming to school from poverty live in a chronic state of stress, with symptoms mimicking those of ADHD...They get labeled as discipline problems, **when really, they are living under chronic stress.**”

Impacts of poverty that directly affect a child’s performance in school.

- According to recent research, the cognitive, emotional, mental, and physical consequences of food insecurity and poor nutrition, follow children into the classroom, often resulting in poor academic performance.
- Researchers have linked housing instability with poor educational achievement, caused by prolonged absenteeism, changing schools frequently and disruption of a child’s environment.
- Chronic under nutrition harms the cognitive development of young children during critical periods of rapid brain growth, actually changing the fundamental neurological architecture of the brain and central nervous system.
- Children experiencing food-insecurity have worse educational outcomes and achievement scores.
- Children experiencing food insecurity have more social and behavioral problems because they feel poorly, have less energy for complex social interactions, and cannot adapt as effectively to environmental stresses.
- Observing violence and family conflict is correlated with increased depressive symptoms during high school and lower educational achievement and lower attendance rates.

- Racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by poverty and neighborhood violence. Schools with a high percentage of low-income students and/or students of color tend to have fewer resources, spend less on salaries of school staff, lack adequate instructional materials, and have worse physical building conditions.
- Students with the least access to health care are 2.2 times less likely to achieve education goals than their more affluent peers.
- Children from low-income backgrounds tend to have less access to healthcare and worse health outcomes than their wealthier peers. This can result in chronic absenteeism and a higher likelihood of repeating a grade.
- Further, a UCLA study of educational opportunities in California high schools noted, “teachers reported that 3-4 times more students in High Poverty Schools than in Low Poverty Schools experience a variety of economic and social stressors that impact learning time, such as unstable housing, hunger, and lack of access to medical or dental care. On any given day, there is a 39% chance that these stressors affect learning time in a **High Poverty School** classroom compared to a 13% chance in a **Low Poverty School** classroom.”

How does poverty affect school funding?

While low-wealth counties receive supplemental school funding, it is woefully inadequate in meeting the challenges of poverty’s impact on learning. The complex funding formula for North Carolina’s public schools demonstrates the disparity in county revenue across the state. While some counties, like Wake and Mecklenburg exceed the state’s average wealth, other counties, like Edgecombe and Bertie, fall far below.

The Public School Forum of NC’s 2019 Local School Finance Study found that the ten highest spending counties spent on average \$3,200 per student compared to \$755 by the ten lowest spending counties, with a gap of \$2,445 per student. That gap is the largest since the Forum began tracking this figure in 1987.

In the 2018 North Carolina Budget Adjustments, Section 38.8 authorizes cities in North Carolina to use local property taxes to fund any public school located within their localities. This could include charters, lab schools, and any other publicly funded entity. It appears to address a deficiency in HB 514, a bill that allowed for the creation of charters in the suburbs of Charlotte. HB514 will drastically alter the way schools could be funded. It could further the divide between have and have not schools by allowing cities to supplement funds for certain schools. High poverty areas will not be able to provide supplements.

What does child poverty look like in North Carolina?

- Almost half of North Carolina’s children live in poor or low-income households
- North Carolina is ranked 40th in the US in terms of Child Poverty according to the most recent estimates
- The Child Poverty rate in North Carolina is 20.9 percent
- An estimated 585,000 Black and Hispanic Children live below 200% percent of the federal poverty level.
- 36 percent of single-parent families with related children live below the federal poverty level
- 1 in 5 children live in food insecure households
- North Carolina was found to be one of the states in which children had the lowest chances of rising out of poverty
- One third live in households that spend more than 30% on housing
- There is a high degree of geographical disparity in poverty rates, from a low of 11% to a high of 43%
- 14% live in high-poverty neighborhoods and therefor are more likely to experience violence, crime and other adverse childhood experiences

- Students living in poverty or homelessness, or with other social vulnerabilities, are significantly stressed and traumatized
- African American children were twice as likely to live in poor or low-income homes as white peers
- One in three children live in homes with a high housing cost burden, defined as more than 30% of monthly income spent on housing expenses.
- According to the North Carolina Child Health Report Card, one in seven children live in high poverty neighborhoods (14%). African American, American Indian, and Latinx children are more likely to live in concentrated poverty than their non-Hispanic White peers. Children who live in high poverty neighborhoods are more likely to suffer poor physical and mental health outcomes and to be exposed to violence and crime

What does child health look like in NC?

According to the North Carolina Child Health Report Card 2018:

- North Carolina ranks 42nd in the nation for infant mortality
- Only 50 public NC school districts met the recommended school nurse ratio of 1:750 children
- There is one school nurse for every 1,072 children in North Carolina public schools
- 43.5% of children are covered by public health insurance
- 22.6% of children live in food-insecure households
- Hispanic and American Indian parents are less likely to have health insurance than other races
- 96% of children in NC have some type of health insurance coverage
- Low-income students and students of colors are much less likely than their white and more affluent peers to attend and complete college.

According to the North Carolina Child Health Report 2019

- Youth suicide nearly doubled from 2008-2017
- 71% of Hispanic or Latinx children live in poor or low income households
- Poverty impacts child mental health because it increases barriers to obtaining mental health services

How does poverty impact education in North Carolina?

While a number of challenges accompany low-income households, here are some of the most glaring physical problems: substandard housing, inadequate nutrition, unsafe neighborhoods, lack of access to health care and lack of support at home. Recent studies have shown “Students in high poverty schools have less experienced instructors, less access to high level science, math, and advanced placement courses, and lower levels of state and local spending on instructors and instructional materials.” This puts these students, who are coming to school with higher needs, at a distinct disadvantage from their more affluent peers. Students from high poverty backgrounds need support and extra resources to make up for the educational resources and opportunities they are not afforded, and often just the opposite occurs. About two-thirds of students in North Carolina receive free or reduced-price school lunch. Additionally, schools in North Carolina are becoming increasingly segregated by race, ethnicity and economics, which further compounds problems by concentrating high-needs populations.

The NC General Assembly passed the Excellent Public Schools Act as part IX of its Appropriations Act of 2013. Section 9.4 of this Act calls for the annual awarding of individual A – F school performance grades based on test results (end-of-grade, end-of-course, graduation rate, college/workplace readiness measures) and school growth as measured by SAS EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System). Eighty percent of the school grade is based on test result and the remaining twenty percent is based on school growth. The most recent results show that these school grades continue to be strongly correlated to family income levels. Schools with greater poverty earned fewer A/A+NG’s and B’s and earned more C’s, D’s, and F’s than schools with less poverty. Nearly ninety-eight percent of schools that received an F grade had 41% or more poverty. In schools with more than 81% low income students, 69% received a D or F grade. Only 1.7% of schools with less than 20% low income student populations received D or F grades.

Can high-quality pre-K make a difference for children who live in poverty?

Evidence overwhelmingly supports high-quality pre-Kindergarten programs as a means of preparing the highest-risk children for success in grades K-12. There are numerous benefits to high-quality pre-K; 123 studies across four decades of research found that by third grade, **one-third of the achievement gap can be closed by early education**. Children who attend preschool gain confidence by learning the expectations and routines of school through close communication with other children. Pre-K is a place where children learn to socialize, make decisions, interact with others, and negotiate—all of which are important to child development and children who attend Pre-K programs are more self-sufficient in the future. Children who went to preschool were consistently employed, more likely to have full-time jobs, less likely to rely on public assistance, resulting in overall more positive future outcomes. They are also more likely to have a savings account, and own a house and a car.

Recent data shows that 52% of young children, ages 3 and 4 are not in school. When children start school at a disadvantage, it can be very hard for them to catch up later.

Solving the problem of child poverty.

Public education cannot alone solve the problem of poverty. But clearly, schools have a significant role to play in helping children living in low-income families to excel—in school and in life. In the report, Ending Child Poverty Now, the Children’s Defense Fund suggests that it is possible to reduce child poverty by as much as 60 percent by investing in programs “that increase employment, make work pay, and ensure children’s basic needs are met, and level the playing field for poor children.” The report further suggests **“To reduce child poverty long term, children also need access to affordable, comprehensive physical and behavioral health care, affordable high-quality early development and learning opportunities, high performing schools and colleges, and families and neighborhoods free from violence.”**

Research suggests that it is critical to mitigate the effects of child poverty as early in life as possible. Income-related gaps in cognitive skills can be seen in children as young as nine months of age, and without intervention, will persist for a lifetime. By age four, children living in low-income households are less likely to recognize letters, count, or write their name than their wealthier counterparts. As previously mentioned, ensuring that all children have access to high-quality NC pre-K is one piece of the solution.

In grades K-5, adequate funding for teacher assistants—particularly in the lower (K-3) grades—is needed to provide critical one-on-one instruction time to ensure that at-risk children are reading by third grade. In addition, schools that serve low-income students should be staffed with critical support personnel, including guidance counselors, psychologists, nurses, social workers and literacy specialists who are experts in helping children deal with the challenges of poverty that impact their success in school. Finally, many children living in low-income households do not have access to technology and other support structures at home. It is therefore imperative that textbooks and other instructional resources be made available to low-income students. A study by the Urban Institute notes, “Compared with people never poor as a child, those poor for half their childhoods are nearly 90 percent more likely to enter their 20s without completing high school and are four times more likely to have a teen premarital birth (controlling for race, parents’ education at birth, family characteristics, and other factors).” Children living in poverty need support at all stages of school, especially in regard to helping kids stay in school and increasing graduation rates.

Barriers to addressing poverty in schools in NC.

Continued underfunding by the state legislature severely limits the ability to provide the support and assistance children living in poverty so desperately need. The average teacher salary in NC according to the Rankings and Estimates from the NEA was \$53,975 for 2018-19, \$10,168 less than the national average of \$64,143. Legislators have yet to pass a budget for 2019 and little investment was made to expand school

resources with the 2018 budget adjustments. For 2019, per-pupil funding was estimated at \$9,907, \$3,013 less than the national average. Allotments for teaching assistants, textbooks, At-Risk student services and more are still below 2008-2009 levels when adjusted for inflation. **We cannot address poverty without proper resources inside the school building and community resources such as health care and livable wages. Further we must have adequate staffing and fair compensation for our teachers and other support staff/educators. It should be noted that our state has experienced several natural disasters recently.** Poverty, as a preexisting condition, significantly impacts how families living in poverty can deal with a natural disaster. Natural disasters also push families who are on the edge of the economy into poverty as they lose their jobs or access to their jobs during a weather-related disaster and often miss a lot of school and become further behind academically.

A variety of privatization schemes take valuable, vital resources from traditional public school and siphon them away to charter and voucher schools. Privatization of public schools refers to efforts by policy makers to shift public education funds into the private sector. Many think of privatization as the “corporate takeover” of our public schools because well-funded corporations and business leaders are driving this four-decade long coordinated effort that is altering how America’s children are educated. Tax dollars that would otherwise be invested in local public school systems are instead being spent on private schools or for-profit entities. In the 2008-09 school year, approximately 90 percent of North Carolina’s students were attending a traditional public school. That figure by the end of 2017-18 was about 80 percent. Legislative leaders have invested less in traditional public schools and increasing amounts in privatization measures.

A 2018 report by the Schott Foundation shows how far the damaging privatization movement has progressed across the nation. The report **gives North Carolina a grade of F** for its commitment to public schools and public school students “by holding it accountable for abandoning civil rights protections, transparency, accountability, and adequate funding in a quest for “private” alternatives.” Children who are harder to serve, whose families are not capable of advocating for them, and who are the most expensive to educate may be the only students left in traditional public schools if the current trends to privatize continue. Enriching private interests at the expense of our neediest children is the natural outcome of the privatization movement, and it is undermining our democracy and the civil and human rights of children to a sound, basic education.

North Carolina is one of 14 states that has not yet passed legislation to expand Medicaid. Current estimates suggest approximately 1 million people, many of whom are employed, are without healthcare coverage. If they were to enact legislation, approximately 500,000 more people would be covered. As it stands now, an adult without children is not eligible for Medicaid. This lack of coverage contributes to the high number of pregnant women who do not receive prenatal care and subsequently give birth Low-income adults who do not have children are not currently eligible for Medicaid. As a result, many expectant mothers do not receive appropriate prenatal care. Consequently, the infant mortality rate in North Carolina is increasing.

Summary: Studies show, being poor at birth is a strong predictor of future poverty status. Thirty-one percent of white children and 69 percent of black children who are poor at birth go on to spend at least half their childhoods living in poverty. We have an obligation to fund the programs and resources that are demonstrated to help all children realize their fullest potential and bring equity to education and beyond.

- Poverty has been increasing in areas of concentrated ethnic and racial minorities
- Poverty’s impact in rural areas is even greater, due to lower local tax revenue
- Out of the 100 counties in NC in 2014, the 20 highest poverty rates in the state were all in rural counties
- Overall, schools with higher poverty had the lowest school achievement grades
- Participation in high-quality pre-K significantly improves a child’s chance of success in school; the state funds approximately 29,000 NC Pre-K spots annually; around 7,000 children remain on the waiting list each year.

Physical factors including substandard housing and inadequate nutrition directly affect a child's performance in school

- A quality public education can make a significant, positive impact on children living in poverty
- Parents with untreated medical conditions are not able to properly care for their children. Children from homes with healthy parents tend to be healthier themselves. We support Medicaid expansion to help children and their families. Healthier families help children come to school ready to learn!

Conclusion: The effects of childhood poverty can last a lifetime. Children living in poverty are exposed to significantly more adverse childhood experiences such as delayed brain development, violence in the home and/or community, hunger and homelessness, school failure and have more negative interactions with the criminal justice system. Children born into poverty are likely to remain in poverty. They struggle to ever attain the educational and economical tools needed to move up and out of poverty. This is a moral imperative for our State.

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