A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION:
Leading High Poverty Schools to High Performance

Foster a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment

• Are we working to eliminate mindsets, policies, structures, and practices that perpetuate under-achievement?
• Have we ensured safety?
• Have we developed an accurate understanding of the influence of poverty on student learning?
• Have we fostered caring relationships and strengthened the bond between students and schools?
• Have we made an authentic effort to engage parents, families, and our community?

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Eliminate Practices That Perpetuate Under-Achievement

• School is Unsafe
• Blaming Students / Families
• Mis-use of Suspension & Expulsion
**Tools for Schools**

- Are we perpetuating underachievement: What have we eliminated?

- Do we have structures and process for fostering a healthy, safe, and supportive learning environment?

**Fostering a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment**

**Strategy 1**
Establish a Physically and Emotionally Safe Environment

“We had to establish law and order…”

“These kids aren’t going to begin school in a place where you can smell the bathrooms when you come in the front door.”

**Dramatic Increase in Childhood Poverty**

Rates of Increase in 4th Grade Subsidized Lunches

Since 2007, the proportion of fourth graders eligible for free or reduced-price lunches through the federal government’s school meals program has increased nationwide to 52%, from 46%.

Change in percent from 2007 - 2011

0% (2)
1-4% (14)
7-10% (31)
≥11% (4)


**Video Viewing Guide**

As you watch the video, jot down your thoughts on these questions:

What significance does the information have for you/your school?

What questions does it raise for you?
**Confronting Common Myths**

**Fact or Fiction...**

- People in poverty are unmotivated and have weak work ethics.
- Education, as a way out of poverty, is readily accessible to everyone.
- People living in poverty are uninvolved in their children’s education because they do not value education.
- People living in poverty tend to abuse drugs and alcohol more than people in other socioeconomic classes.

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**Understanding Mental Maps/Mind-sets**

- Images, assumptions, and stories carried in our minds that shape behavior and attitude
- Usually tacit until we examine
- Limit our ability to change
- Leader’s task is to “identify/expose” through reflection and inquiry

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**Challenging Our Mental Maps / Mindsets**

**Mental Maps**

- **Expose Beliefs/Assumptions**
  - School attendance is important.
  - Rules must be followed.
  - Tardiness is not allowed.
  - Parents are responsible forexcusing their child.

- **Tactic Beliefs/Assumptions**
  - Parents don’t care about education.
  - Parent and student are lazy.
  - Parents probably aren’t home or are sleeping off a hangover.

**Action / Strategy**

- Set policy and require parents to sign in.
- Tell it all home.
- Send letter home via U.S. mail.
- Give letter to student.
- Warn about impending suspensions.
- Send letter home with teacher.

**Consequences**

- Student still truant and flunking class.

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**Challenging our Mental Maps/Mindsets**

They challenged their own mind-sets...

But BEHAVIOR...

CAME BEFORE BELIEFS

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**Foster a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment**

**Strategy 2**

Do EVERYTHING Possible to Level the Playing Field

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**Sticks and Stones...**

How do we talk about poverty in schools?

- The dangers of a deficit perspective
- Separating children’s developing sense of self from their living conditions
- The words/labels we use matter
Given what we know about poverty...

Five suggestions you can begin today!

- Review your homework policies
- Analyze who is and who is not accessing higher-level curriculum and address.
- Keep stocks of supplies/basic necessities
- Continue to reach out to parents even when they are unresponsive
- Learn more / challenge your biases!

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Strategy 3
Develop Meaningful Student Advisories

What at-risk children want at school more than anything else...

...a caring relationship with an adult.

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Strategy 4
Engage Parents as Authentic Partners

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Build Relationships with Families
- Engage Parents as Authentic Partners
- Hold Frequent Meetings with Food/Childcare
- Offer Parent Education
- Support Learning at Home
- Conduct Home Visits / Caring Outreach
- Join the National Network of Partnership Schools
  www.csos.jhu.edu