

ACTION AGAINST POVERTY:



SCHOOL BOARDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Project Report
November 2001



Canadian School
Boards Association

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Canadian School Boards Association

The Canadian School Boards Association, comprised of provincial school boards associations, is the national voice of school boards, whose mission is to exercise leadership by advocating excellence in public education and promoting the value of locally elected school boards through collaboration, research and information sharing with other partners.

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In Memoriam

In memory of Jos Scott, who guided the various phases of the Canadian School Boards Association's poverty intervention project and who cared passionately about mobilizing communities.

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Executive Summary

One in five children in this country live in poverty. We know that poverty has an impact on readiness to learn, the ability to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the public education system, and eventual school success. Although school boards cannot tackle the root causes of poverty on their own, as policymakers at the local level, they can help reduce its impact and make a positive difference in the lives of these children and their families.

Over the past five years, the Canadian School Boards Association has been undertaking a comprehensive national campaign to assist school boards, in cooperation with other partners, in carrying out specific actions to address the issue of child poverty and its impact on school readiness and eventual school success.

Towards Awareness

Recognizing that awareness and a common base of information is an essential starting point for any action, CSBA released a resource book, *Students in Poverty: Toward Awareness, Action and Wider Knowledge*, in 1997. The handbook provided data on the pervasiveness of child poverty, summarized existing Canadian literature on the issue, profiled a number of innovative programs that have been launched by school boards across the country, and suggested strategies for school boards to undertake an assessment of the situation in their communities.

Intervention Profile

Although the face of poverty differs from region to region, CSBA recognized that there are common responses schools and school

boards can undertake to counter its negative impact. Through a review of existing school-based programs, and with the assistance of a team of advisors, CSBA developed the *Poverty Intervention Profile*. The purpose of the profile, a board assessment tool, was to:

- Help boards evaluate their efforts in establishing interventions for students in poverty.
- Improve existing intervention programs to better help students in poverty.
- Provide a model for the development of intervention programs in school boards that do not yet have them.

Mobilizing the Community

The development of the Profile was only the first step; encouraging boards to utilize it and assessing whether it really worked were the next. To achieve these goals, CSBA assisted ten school boards across the country in using the profile to mobilize their communities in support of students living in poverty.

The goals of the Mobilizing the Community project were to:

- Raise awareness about the importance of holistic interventions as described in the *Poverty Intervention Profile*.
- Support the mobilization of school boards, communities and other agencies in using a holistic approach.
- Establish pilot intervention sites across the country.
- Share the findings of the sites.

The results of this endeavour, the latest phase in CSBA's national poverty initiative, are summarized in this report. It provides an overall assessment of the project as well as an evaluation of the activities carried out at each of the ten sites. The sites were

- Lethbridge School District Number 51, Alberta
- Burnaby School District Number 41, British Columbia
- Coquitlam School District Number 43, British Columbia
- St. Boniface School District Number 4, Manitoba
- Avalon East School Board, Newfoundland and Labrador
- Halifax Regional School Board, Nova Scotia
- Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, Nova Scotia
- Eastern School District, Prince Edward Island
- Parkland School Division Number 63, Saskatchewan
- Kawartha Pine Ridge School District, Ontario

What Have We Learned?

An outstanding commitment and effort were made by those involved in the pilot sites.

The goals of the project were met and exceeded, and we learned that:

- The fact that CSBA, a national education organization, was involved in the project fostered a sense of commitment among the different school boards and leveraged other financial support. The attention and

support of national agencies such as CSBA assist schools and boards in maintaining momentum regarding poverty intervention.

- Trustee involvement is critically important. Interest shown by trustees can offset the inability of senior staffs to focus on preventive activities when besieged by crisis.
- Long-term commitment will be necessary for boards to put in place a comprehensive approach to poverty intervention.
- The *Poverty Intervention Profile* does not seem to overlook any major area of poverty intervention. Even when the profile is not actually administered, it serves as a thorough outline of the elements necessary for poverty intervention.
- The experience and background of staff and principals assigned to schools serving students in poverty is important.
- Relatively small amounts of money can create leverage in school systems and communities.
- The role of schools in community development is little understood and is not widely accepted.
- Community agencies provide feedback and encouragement to schools in building and sustaining interventions.
- Evaluation is not widely understood as a means of demonstrating the worth and efficacy of programs when tight budgets threaten their continuation.
- Making progress on poverty intervention can be achieved only by keeping the issue on the table.

In addition to these general insights, specific

suggestions for trustee action are outlined. The key role of school boards in developing policy is recognized and a poverty policy template based on the interventions profile is provided.

Detailed profiles of each of the ten pilot sites are included in the report. It is hoped that making information available about what some school boards are doing, about what worked and what didn't work for them, will encourage other boards to meet the leadership challenge and to mobilize their communities to both address and redress the impact of child poverty.

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Introduction

Over twenty per cent of children live in poverty in this country. We know that poverty has an impact on readiness to learn, the ability to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the public education system, and eventual school success. Although school boards cannot tackle the root causes of poverty on their own, as policymakers at the local level, they can help reduce its impact and make a positive difference in the lives of these children and their families.

Over the past five years, the Canadian School Boards Association has been undertaking a comprehensive national campaign to assist school boards, in cooperation with other partners, in undertaking specific actions to address the issue of child poverty and its impact on school readiness and eventual school success.

Phase I - Towards Awareness

Recognizing that awareness and a common base of information is an essential starting point for any action, CSBA released a resource book, *Students in Poverty: Toward Awareness, Action and Wider Knowledge* in 1997. The handbook provided data on the pervasiveness of child poverty, summarized existing Canadian literature on the issue, profiled a number of innovative programs that have been launched by school boards across the country, and suggested strategies for school boards to assess the situation in their communities.

Phase II - Intervention Profile

Although the face of poverty differs from region to region, CSBA recognized that there

are common responses schools and school boards can undertake to counter its negative impacts. Through a review of existing school-based programs, and with the assistance of a team of advisors, CSBA developed the *Poverty Intervention Profile*. In addition to being a self-evaluation tool, the profile was designed to serve as an aid to decision-making, as a snapshot of where school boards stand in their growth toward implementation of poverty intervention, and as a means by which school boards could take pride in their efforts and progress.

Accompanying the profile was an annotated bibliography of Canadian writing on poverty and education.

Phase III - Mobilizing the Community

The development of the profile was only the first step; encouraging boards to utilize it and assessing whether it really worked were the next. To achieve these goals, and with financial assistance from the Population Health Fund of Health Canada, CSBA worked with ten school boards across the country to use the profile to mobilize their communities in support of students living in poverty.

During this phase, a research study on social inclusion was also undertaken with funding from the Laidlaw Foundation. The study, *Social Inclusion: the Role of School Boards*, was designed to support school board efforts by providing a broader based framework for their poverty related activities.

Through these and other efforts, CSBA has kept the issue of child poverty on the educational and political agenda.

Project Overview

The project “Mobilizing the Community in Support of Students in Poverty” exists to further community action toward effective use of the *Poverty Intervention Profile* approach in selected locations across Canada.

This report includes an assessment of the overall project as well as an evaluation of the activities carried out at each of ten sites across Canada.

Goals of Mobilizing the Community in Support of Students in Poverty

The goals of the mobilizing the community project were to:

1. Raise awareness about the importance of holistic interventions as described in the *Poverty Intervention Profile*.
2. Support the mobilization of school boards, communities and other agencies in using a holistic approach.
3. Establish pilot intervention sites across the country.
4. Share the findings of the sites.

Poverty Intervention Profile

Fundamental to the goals of the project is the *Poverty Intervention Profile*. The Profile is a holistic self-evaluation tool designed to help boards evaluate their efforts in establishing interventions for students in poverty, improve existing intervention programs to better help students in poverty and provide a model for the development of intervention programs in school boards that do not yet have them.

The profile contains 24 statements, or indicators, of what school boards can do to intervene to combat the effects of poverty. For each indicator, six levels of implementation are described.

The indicators, listed below, are grouped into four main areas: preschool; policies, expectations, and understandings; programming practices; and community involvement.

Preschool programs

1. Trustees educate themselves about the nature of child development.
2. The school board builds partnerships to share funding and experience in operating preschools and child/family centres.
3. There is a smooth transition from preschools to the regular school system.

Policies, expectations and understandings

4. There are district policies and procedures for action addressing poverty and education.
5. The school board lobbies provincial and federal governments to support schools in educating students living in poverty.
6. Additional funds are allocated to schools with a high percentage of students living in poverty.
7. Coherent and sustained funding of programs is available for schools serving students living in poverty.
8. Policymakers and educators ensure that their actions lead to inclusion of the poor.

9. Those who serve on the school board and its committees are representative of the populations served by the board.
10. All those concerned with children and youth work in partnership.
11. The school board's policies ensure that there is a highly effective leadership serving in schools with students living in poverty.
12. The stress of serving in schools with students living in poverty is recognized through support and renewal programs for staff.
13. There is a staff person with responsibility for educational poverty programs.
19. High school programs are designed to enable students living in poverty to finish.
20. Professional development regarding poverty and education is a priority for all.

Community involvement

21. School services and community services are integrated to serve students better.
22. Before action is taken, all those who will be affected are consulted.
23. The school board uses local schools as a hub for preschool and child/family centres.
24. Outreach programs enable families, neighbours and local businesses to be part of the school community.

Programming practices

14. There is a cohesive and comprehensive vision of how the school program serves the needs of students living in poverty.
15. Early literacy is emphasized in the beginning grades.
16. Intervention programs begin at birth and continue at least through high school graduation.
17. Programs at all levels emphasize excellence.
18. There is a systematic process for collecting data about the program needs and progress of students living in poverty.

Project Sites

CSBA's member associations were notified in the spring of 2000 that applications were being invited from school boards interested in carrying out a poverty intervention project. Ten sites were selected from approximately 25 applications. Selection was based on geographic distribution, use of the *Poverty Intervention Profile*, school level, establishment of partnerships, and the health and background of students. The following chart summarizes the location and program characteristics of each of the selected sites.

Site Characteristics

School Board	Poverty Intervention Profile				Level	Geography	Partners	First Nations
	Preschool	Program	Community	Policy				
AB-Lethbridge			✓	✓	District, elementary	Urban	Police, Health	✓
BC-Burnaby	✓	✓	✓		District, elementary	Urban, rural	Citywide coalition, Health	
BC-Coquitlam			✓		Elementary	Suburban	Business	
MB-St. Boniface	✓	✓	✓	✓	District, elementary	Urban	Community groups, Health	✓
NF-Avalon East	✓	✓	✓		Elementary	Urban		
NS-Halifax Reg.			✓		K-5	Rural	Mount St. Vincent	
NS-Acadien	✓		✓		K-8	Rural		
ON-Kawartha		✓	✓	✓	District	Urban, rural	Service clubs	
PEI-Eastern S.D.		✓	✓		Elementary, junior high	Town	Red Cross, UPEI, business	
SK-Parkland		✓	✓		Elementary, high school	Rural	Social services, Health	✓

Site Expectations

The expectations of the sites were that they would:

- Take a holistic approach to intervention for students in families living on low incomes.
- Use the to create an initial snapshot of both the site's strengths and the areas to be addressed through the interaction of the school system, community and local agencies.
- Involve the community in refining the initial proposal and in developing and implementing a plan.
- Ensure that these elements are included in long-range planning: health, evaluation, interagency involvement, preschool, policies, programming, community involvement, building toward integrated services, an inclusive approach, consideration of establishing child/family centres, outreach to neighbours and community.
- Keep detailed records of the use of funds and share this information with the site facilitator.
- Welcome the site facilitator and work with the facilitator to ensure the project stays within these guidelines.
- Work with the facilitator to connect with resource people.
- Share information and experiences with other educators across the country.
- Be open to visits from those interested in the pilot sites.
- Be willing to discuss and make presentations about the project being carried out at that site.
- Help develop an assessment plan for the site.
- Participate in the assessment process and ensure that the community is involved in the overall assessment of the project led by the principal consultant.
- Use the pilot period to develop means of sustained funding for interventions.
- Ensure that the board(s) are kept informed.
- Provide signatures of the appropriate board person and the site principal concerning participation in the project.
- Keep in touch regularly with the facilitator following the progress of the project.
- Make suggestions for future activities.
- Review any writing that was done about the site for the final report.

Supports Provided

It was recognized that the pilot sites would require a network of support if they were to achieve their identified goals. The following were provided to the sites during the project:

- Facilitators.
- Names of resource people.
- Links to other educators across the country.
- Opportunities to share information with other sites.
- Assessment planning.
- Carrying out assessments.
- Resource materials e.g. guidelines.

Role of Facilitators

Three facilitators assisted sites in carrying out their activities. Each site was assigned a facilitator, whose role included the following:

- Facilitate initial planning.
- Visit sites.
- Convey expectations and information to site participants.
- Get necessary signatures on site/CSBA agreements.
- Facilitate connections between site and others, as appropriate.
- Facilitate an understanding of the holistic intervention model of the profile.
- Become familiar with participant evaluation information provided by Health Canada.

- At the outset of the project, assist sites in self-evaluation and make appropriate plans using the *Poverty Intervention Profile*.
- Facilitate the identification of specific goals that can be used by sites to assess progress.
- Participate in assessment, as necessary.
- Facilitate the overall project assessment process.
- Encourage sites to understand and mobilize community involvement.
- Work with sites to establish sustained funding for intervention.
- Facilitate a Canadian support network for educators working in communities with families living on low incomes.
- Interact with other researchers/facilitators.
- Keep notes on activities, progress, difficulties, successes.
- Write a final report according to guidelines.
- Collect information on how site funds are used.
- Give workshops or locate presenters, if requested.
- Participate in advisory group meetings as appropriate to agendas.
- Participate in debriefing.
- Submit invoices and expenses, as required.

Role of Principal Consultant

The principal consultant, as well as the site facilitators, had responsibilities to the sites. The consultant acted as team leader in coordinating the interaction of the facilitators with their assigned sites, and was available to discuss site assessment plans. Finally, the consultant developed and carried out an overall project assessment.

Role of Project Director

The project director, a CSBA staff member, bore overall responsibility for the project, its staffing, its budget, and its contractual agreements.

Advisory Group

A panel of experts in poverty intervention issues served the mobilizing project as advisors. They provided general support for the project as well as insights into what indicators to look for in assessing progress at the sites and for the overall project. The

advisors also assisted, as needed, with individual sites and with the overall project. The advisors were

- Maureen Dunne, PhD, Memorial University of Newfoundland
- Alva Jenson, Vancouver School Board, District Learning Services
- William Maynes, PhD, University of Alberta
- Lynn McIntyre, MD, Dalhousie University
- David Osborne, EdD, Coquitlam School District No. 43
- Glynis Ross, Halifax Regional School Board, Professional Development
- Ann Vibert, PhD, Mount St. Vincent University

Assessment Approach

Evaluation Goals

The funding proposal for this project stated that the overall goal of the evaluation process was to determine effective ways to enable all partners to continue to move towards their goal of eliminating the effects of poverty on students.

A threefold evaluation strategy was planned. The plan was to (a) gather and integrate information through periodic observations and interviews; (b) measure changes in awareness and perceptions as a result of activities, and provide suggestions for future activities; and (c) provide written feedback to those involved in activities.

The ways in which these goals were met and the evaluation strategies implemented are described throughout this project report. The process of overall project assessment is described in the following section.

Assessment Approaches

Assessment took place on two levels, site assessment and overall project assessment. For the overall project assessment, the principal consultant visited eight project sites. The Saskatchewan site was visited by its facilitator.

The project assessment was carried out through interviews, meetings, and focus groups with site participants. Participants varied from site to site, depending on the particular program. The participants included students, parents, administrators, teachers, trustees and community agency staff.

The purpose of the overall assessment was to determine how well the goals of the project were met. The following outline served as a basis for discussions with site participants.

- Use of *Poverty Intervention Profile*
- Mobilization of community
- Sustainability
- Use of funds
- Support for sites
- Change
- Suggestions for future activities

Site assessment was based on the goals established by the individual sites in collaboration with the facilitator at the onset of the project. The site self-assessment reports are located after the overall project assessment. In addition, facilitators wrote case studies for each of their sites.

The writing of the case studies was guided by the following outline, developed through consultation with the facilitators, their sites, and the CSBA poverty intervention advisory committee.

- Background
- Site goals
- Project context
- Process
- Outcomes
- Sustainability

Project Assessment

The involvement of CSBA, a national educational organization, had a tremendous impact on all the sites by underscoring the value placed on their activities. This involvement in turn leveraged cooperation and support from many organizations and led to increased funding for site projects. Those interviewed for this report strongly believed that CSBA's involvement was a key factor in their site's progress in poverty intervention.

The ten project sites were all marked by significant achievements. The level of commitment on the part of the sites was remarkable and reflected both determination and a huge investment of personal time. The sites succeeded in taking the project well beyond its original goals of raising awareness, mobilizing school boards, establishing interventions and disseminating information.

The Vigour of the Poverty Intervention Profile

CSBA's *Poverty Intervention Profile* was being used in concrete ways for the first time in the project Mobilizing the Community. Indeed the first goal of the project was to raise awareness of the *Poverty Intervention Profile* with its emphasis on holistic interventions.

The various sites used the profile to different degrees and to different ends. In some cases the sites made the *Poverty Intervention Profile* the centrepiece of their intervention activities. In other cases the profile was not administered, but was used to both structure and evaluate activities. The profile proved highly adaptable and was adjusted by individual sites to fit their particular needs.

One site conducted extensive analyses of the findings, using the responses of over 600 school board personnel. Some sites focused on one particular aspect of the profile, such as preschool education.

A few sites reviewed the profile at the outset of their project and never returned to it. By and large, however, the ten sites used the approach implicit in the profile.

Participants noted that the profile does not explicitly mention feeding programs. In fact, breakfast and similar programs were deliberately excluded as there is a tendency for schools to believe that such programs are all that are needed to intervene for students in poverty when a whole range of interventions is actually necessary. The profile does not name any specific programs, such as reading or feeding programs.

One board found some of the profile's nomenclature problematic when used with non-educators. They solved this problem by producing a video explaining the profile and by having a facilitator, using overheads, lead respondents through the profile.

The fact that some parts of the profile measured perception, and not concrete information, was a stumbling block for some users. As the sites familiarized themselves with the data, this issue became less important.

Thus the *Poverty Intervention Profile* served the intervention process well and does not appear to need readjustment, especially since boards have demonstrated its flexibility throughout the project by adapting the profile as they felt necessary.

Mobilizing Communities

For all the sites involved in this project, there was an increased understanding of the connections between poverty and education. A frequent comment was that it was helpful to have an outline of the ways that education can assist students living in poverty.

During the course of the project, trustees, school boards and their various committees were repeatedly confronted with the issue of poverty intervention. Some trustees became actively involved in their site project, moving away from their passive roles as receivers of information. Trustees participated by sitting on board poverty intervention committees, by helping to draft poverty intervention policies, and by assisting in the hiring of project personnel. Several boards established ad hoc poverty intervention committees. It is expected that these committees will eventually become standing committees of the board.

Trustee Involvement

The involvement and interest of trustees played a key role in the success of site projects. In cases where many board senior staff were unable to devote sustained attention to poverty intervention issues, trustee support was invaluable. Many sites reported that senior staff, despite initial intentions to fully participate in poverty intervention, were unable to provide sustained, direct guidance to the site projects. Typically, the initial attention of senior staff to the project was not sustained due to more immediate concerns, such as budget cutbacks. The demands on their time limited their ability to stay in close contact with staff closest to the projects. As a result, many site managers were left feeling abandoned in the

middle of their projects. This was especially true of new personnel. Parents, teachers, and some community agencies all noted this problem, and frequently expressed the opinion that the principal (or other site manager) seemed to be going it alone.

The inability to make use of advisory expertise because of time constraints remains a concern, and may be a limiting factor in future efforts to sustain long-term commitments on the part of school boards in poverty intervention. A long-term approach on the part of schools and communities that can synergistically combine the commitment and energy of both is needed. When school systems are involved in community mobilization, they can become the catalyst that brings the community together on behalf of children and youth. Recognizing this, many of those interviewed suggested that a reallocation of funds from federal, provincial, and municipal budgets to school systems might be appropriate and that these funds could be targeted for community development.

Community Agencies

Community agencies and the interest they showed in poverty intervention activities were also a source of encouragement for those involved in the site projects. Agency representatives, interviewed for this assessment, encompassed a full range of experience, from a first time involvement with schools to longstanding familiarity and interaction. The community agency representatives were unanimous in their endorsement of school efforts aimed at poverty intervention and viewed the activities of the sites as highly appropriate in assisting students experiencing familial poverty. It was

generally thought that schools have been slow in recognizing the need to support these students in the educational setting.

The mobilizing project has encouraged schools and school boards to reach out to community agencies with the goal of fostering increased interaction and cooperation. Parents who were aware of this increased cooperation among agencies expressed relief that they did not have to approach one agency, only to be referred to another. Indeed parents and students were particularly grateful that a number of sites were able to locate and approach appropriate agencies on their behalf. New Canadians, unfamiliar with community organizations and their services, were especially appreciative. Aboriginal parents and students found it easier to access community agencies when referred and assisted by a trusted member of the aboriginal community present at their local school.

Involvement of the Poor

A lack of confidence on the part of those living in poverty often hinders them from taking active roles in school and school board matters, such as educational committees. Many sites had to work hard to convince parents and youth to be interviewed for this report. Those who are comfortable taking part tend to be called on so frequently they may feel overburdened rather than uplifted by the experience of being heard. Nevertheless, many of the sites have taken steps to involve those living in poverty in meaningful ways in their projects. When those living in poverty do take part in school activities as part of site projects, steps can be taken to provide

encouragement. Some found it helpful to have a guide beside them to explain things and/or to be briefed before meetings about the proceedings. Most important was that expectations concerning their participation should be adjusted to their comfort level. These first steps at involving the poor in school affairs may lead to increased numbers being involved in the future. Over time the poor may become fully active participants in the politics of education, but this will depend in large part on the attitudes and beliefs of those within our school systems.

Parents, youth and some agency representatives felt that schools have not traditionally seen it as their role to develop communities. Indeed a few of the sites did not see it as their role and did not know how to use the school system as a stimulus for community change and growth. These sites tended to focus on what they could do for those living in poverty and to limit their community engagement to interaction with other agencies.

Those involved in the site projects encountered a fair degree of hostility from many quarters at the suggestion that ingrained processes need to change. Taking a long view and working through each issue as it arose were the main strategies site participants used to reverse attitudes of bias, prejudice, and racism. All those involved thought that there was less suspicion of schools, programs, and their objectives as a result of their projects.

Use of Funds

Funds provided to underwrite the costs of the mobilizing projects at the different sites created considerable leverage within the local school systems and communities. Among the factors contributing to leverage at the sites were:

- The belief that if trustees were interested in poverty intervention then it must be an important issue.
- The attention given to the issue at the board tables through presentations by participants and through the tabling of reports regarding site projects.
- The stimulus for other sources to contribute. In effect, initial funding acted as “seed money” attracting further contributions. One site manager estimated that initial funds attracted three times the original amount.
- The dialogue created by the need to plan the use of the funds supplied. Planning brought people together around the issue of poverty intervention and thus encouraged discussion and a sharing of information and resources.

The fact that CSBA, a national organization, was involved in the mobilizing project also created momentum for the site projects. Parents, school personnel, and community agencies reported that recognizing that poverty intervention was not an exclusively local issue created and sustained interest in site activities and in learning more about issues and solutions. Some of those interviewed said that a new sense of hope had been created.

A review of the specific areas in which funds were used showed that the main areas were:

- Transportation to and from school programs.
- Professional development/release time for teachers.
- Resources and materials for carrying out programs.
- Honoraria for those conducting and organizing programs.

The areas in which funds were spent reflect some of the difficulties in working with impoverished students. For example, preschool programs had to include transportation because most families had no way of getting their children to the site. Staff development was another major area of spending. Parents, students and agency representatives all voiced concerns that the problems faced by families living in poverty need to be better understood by educational staff. This in turn will lead to interactions between students, families and school personnel that encourage rather than discourage the impoverished. According to those interviewed, such training is needed for all school personnel, including office and custodial staff. Thus, sites used funds to create programs to foster understanding and awareness. Staff development funds were also used by one or two sites to train school personnel involved in community development efforts.

Establishing and expanding preschool and kindergarten programs is a major area that schools see as a focus of poverty intervention. Preschool is accepted as a legitimate area of intervention spending, largely because of increased awareness of the long-term results of early childhood development.

The need to use funds to secure quality materials reflected two factors. One factor was that schools are hard-pressed to keep learning materials up to date in these times of budget cuts. This is especially important for students from low-income families where access to learning materials may be limited. Frequently materials acquired during this project were lent to parents and shared among them. Parents (and students) saw these new materials, limited as they were, as a bonanza and, especially with young children, resulted in more guided learning and enrichment activities at home. New Canadian families particularly appreciated these learning materials and the guidance provided in how to use them. Through the mobilizing project, donations of books and other materials were obtained for a number of communities. Despite this success in securing learning materials and educating parents in child development, it is clear that there is a shortage of stimulating learning materials in schools with high levels of community poverty. Teachers repeatedly reported that they were maintaining their classrooms partly at their own expense.

The other factor that resulted in sites using funds to purchase learning resources is a lack of expertise in moving outside traditional areas of educational spending. In some cases materials seem to have been purchased due to a perception that education funds could not be spent on other things. However, successfully serving students in poverty requires accepting an expanded role for schools that moves beyond their traditional activities. The need to use funds to buoy up school resources may, in some cases, reflect difficulties in accepting non-traditional roles for schools, ones that actively engage in

community development. The lack of time and school board acknowledgment of such roles are other variables in the level of school/community involvement.

Another major area of spending was securing people to carry out various aspects of site activities. The level of funds used for staffing varied considerably from site to site, and only two sites employed someone living in poverty. The reason more sites did not channel funds directly to the poor is likely because mobilizing activities are in their initial stages and the sites were unfamiliar with the skills of those in the communities being served. In addition, as mentioned previously, the confidence to take part in educational affairs is just being developed in parents and students in the project sites. Another reason is that school personnel do not tend to see schools as a provider of income to those in the community. Nor do they see it as their role to assist the poor in acquiring confidence and job skills. Nevertheless, considerable creativity was used in finding help in carrying out site programs. One site chose recently graduated teachers, thus providing invaluable experience that would later help them to secure teaching positions in their communities. Another site chose university students to assist in organizing their program.

Most people working at the various sites received only token payments, and were essentially volunteers. Those working in the programs believed that the experience they acquired and the contacts they made would serve poverty intervention efforts well in the future. Parents and students were also aware of the invaluable contributions made by these workers and felt that they had drawn closer together through their efforts.

The matter of hiring additional staff to carry out site programs relates to the issue of sustainability and is discussed in the next section.

Sustainability

The *Poverty Intervention Profile* takes into account the need for coherent and sustained funding for programs in schools serving students living in poverty. As well, the profile recognizes the stress on school administrators, due in large part to the need to repeatedly secure funding to keep programs operating. With this in mind, both the mobilizing handbook and the facilitators, in working with their sites, stressed that it was imperative that the sites find the means to sustain their interventions. It was stated at the outset that part of the funds supplied to each site be used to bring communities and schools together to plan for a program of sustained interventions.

Although difficult, many sites have found the means to sustain and even expand their activities. With shrinking school budgets, more schools are looking for additional funds to operate a wide variety of programs. As agencies receive more applications, schools find themselves in competition for resources that do not exist.

While all sites were appreciative of the funding they received, they naturally hoped that another year of funding would become available. Many participants believed that if their project clearly demonstrated the need for a specific service or program, school districts or other sources would come forward with funds to continue the program. The ability of school districts to respond depended on their own budgetary situation. There was

disgruntlement on the part of some site managers and other participants when continued funding was not forthcoming. It appeared that some sites either did not heed the cautions about sustainability or did not believe them. This was particularly true for sites that used their funding, in whole or in part, to hire a person to carry out tasks related to the project. This issue is of prime importance in establishing and maintaining intervention programs. As one site manager put it, “Do you try and hope or is it better not to raise expectations in the first place?” To one project facilitator, this issue developed as a series of questions that school boards must answer. Who do schools approach? How much time do administrators spend writing proposals? How do schools avoid donor fatigue in small regions? How do schools avoid competing with one another?

Site managers also reported that space was a factor in program sustainability. Programs, from breakfast programs to English-as-second-language classes for parents, were all in jeopardy if space could not be found. It is therefore necessary to consider the space needed for intervention programs before closing schools with declining populations.

Despite concerns about sustained funding, most sites were able to develop and transfer skills that would continue to serve students and communities. One example is teaching parents skills they can use in working with their preschoolers and kindergarten age children. Parents were aware that these new skills would benefit new members of their families in the future and would serve as models for their children’s upbringing of their own children.

Feedback Regarding Site Support

The supports available to sites were fully described in the opening sections of this report. The facilitators and the principal consultant provided a variety of supports, including advising, coordinating and active assistance with funding issues. During the interview process for this overall assessment, participants were asked about the value of the contribution made by facilitators to their efforts. All sites reported that their facilitators were valuable in helping them carry out their projects and in providing encouragement through rocky periods. Participants were reassured that they were on the right track through contacts with their facilitators. Most sites described their relationships with the facilitators as warm and supportive. Facilitators' many years of experience in school systems and their willingness to share their expertise was acknowledged and appreciated by the sites, even by one site that had originally questioned the use of funds for facilitators. From the point of view of the overall project, the role of the facilitators was essential in keeping the project on track and in providing feedback in a timely manner.

Without continued contact with facilitators, it seems likely that evaluation of site activities would have been abandoned by many sites. Because an initial meeting of all those involved in the project was not possible, the role of the facilitator was critical to consistency across sites and adherence to project aims. Educators do not seem to regard evaluation as an important element in carrying out intervention projects. It is

possible that evaluation takes place informally, through conversations or individually by participants themselves. Nevertheless, a failure to maintain systematic written evaluations like those instituted by the sites makes programs susceptible to being cut when budgets are decreased. The importance of evaluation in demonstrating the efficacy of programs is neither fully understood nor accepted.

The role of the principal consultant was to conduct an assessment of the overall project. However, as she visited the sites, she found she was used as a source of information about poverty intervention efforts across the country. There is a definite need for a national sharing of information on poverty intervention programs. There might even be a need for a national organization whose mandate would be to keep the issue of poverty and education on the front burner. Over the years, several attempts have been made to establish an organization to facilitate information sharing. People are searching for information on issues ranging from policy information to classroom teaching approaches. Such an organization would also provide support and encouragement for its members. The role of facilitators and the principal consultant as sources of information about poverty intervention initiatives demonstrates the need for such an organization. Those interviewed recognized and encouraged the continued involvement of CSBA in poverty intervention efforts. Many felt that the impact of CSBA's work over the past years was just beginning to take root and hoped that the momentum would not be lost.

Poverty Intervention Policy Template

Recognizing the key role school boards play in policy development and the importance of board leadership in the success of poverty intervention activities as demonstrated by the ten pilot sites, the principal consultant, in conjunction with the facilitators, project advisors and project sites drafted a policy intervention template based on the *Poverty Intervention Profile*. After input from CSBA member associations, the template was further refined.

The template (Appendix A) provides general guidance to individual boards developing a poverty intervention policy. Boards are encouraged to adapt the template to the specific needs of their own district.

Social Inclusion

Concurrent with the Mobilizing the Community project, CSBA undertook a research study on social inclusion with funding from the Laidlaw Foundation. Two of the sites in the mobilizing project were also part of the social inclusion study. The purpose of the study was to delineate for school boards the nature of social exclusion and inclusion and the measures that school boards could take to prevent or redress social exclusion. Research findings made it clear that poverty was a factor that places students at risk for social exclusion. Therefore, intervention for students living in poverty is also intervention to create social inclusion. The inclusion study has been published by CSBA under the title *Social Inclusion: The Role of School Boards*.

Summary

An outstanding commitment and effort were made by those involved in the Mobilizing the Community site projects. The goals of the project were met and exceeded. Through the assessment of the project these things were learned:

- The fact that CSBA, a national education organization, was involved in the project fostered a sense of commitment among the different school boards and leveraged other financial support. The attention and support of national agencies such as CSBA assist schools and boards in maintaining momentum regarding poverty intervention.
- The *Poverty Intervention Profile* served intervention projects well. The profile does not seem to overlook any major area of poverty intervention. Even when the profile is not actually administered, it serves as a thorough outline of the elements necessary for poverty intervention.
- Trustee involvement is critically important. Interest shown by trustees can offset the inability of senior staffs to focus on preventive activities when besieged by crisis. There is a failure to capitalize on advisory expertise due to time constraints. Frequent checks by a person with a strong education background ensured that the site interventions stayed on track.
- The experience and background of staff and principals assigned to schools serving students in poverty is important.
- Long-term commitment will be necessary for boards to put in place a comprehensive approach to poverty intervention.
- Relatively small amounts of money can create leverage in school systems and communities. Funds were used primarily for transportation, professional development, staffing, and learning resources. Schools see preschool training as a legitimate area for educational system involvement. Schools can assist parents by acting as sources of information about services and agencies. Schools serving students in poverty lack sufficient learning materials. Some schools lack space to carry out programs. Intervention projects that are dependent on acquiring new staff are difficult to sustain.
- The role of schools in community development is little understood and is not widely accepted. Involving the poor in school board activities is an ongoing process. Schools require support to know how to encourage the participation of those in the community. Many school personnel are unaware or lack understanding of poverty intervention issues. The attitudes and beliefs of school systems need to change if the poor are to become full participants in educational politics.
- Community agencies provide feedback and encouragement to schools in building and sustaining interventions. The attention and support of national agencies such as CSBA assist schools and boards in maintaining momentum regarding poverty intervention.

- Evaluation is not widely understood as a means of demonstrating the worth and efficacy of programs when tight budgets threaten their continuation.
- Making progress on poverty intervention can be achieved only by keeping the issue on the table.
- Work toward involving the poor in board activities.
- Encourage professional development for all those working with students in poverty.
- Expect assessments of the outcomes of intervention efforts.

Implications for Trustees

The implications of these findings are that trustees who want to create interventions for students living in poverty will do the following:

- Use the *Poverty Intervention Profile* as a guide.
- Take an active role in intervention issues.
- Establish poverty committees.
- Keep the issue on board agendas.
- Ensure that senior staff can stay involved and support interventions.
- Press for close liaisons between schools and community agencies.
- Work toward ensuring that schools have sufficient resources to carry out intervention activities.
- Lobby governments to provide funding to school systems for community development.



Site Profiles

This section contains reports from each of the ten sites taking part in the Mobilizing the Community project. The case studies were written by the facilitators in collaboration with the sites. The case studies were guided by the following outline developed through consultation with the facilitators, their sites, and the CSBA poverty intervention advisory committee.

- Background
- Project context
- Outcomes
- Site goals
- Process used
- Sustainability

The site profiles provide a portrait of activities at the individual sites, along with commentary on the process as it unfolded during the school year.

Lethbridge School District Number 51, Alberta

Location

Westminster and Galbraith Schools, Lethbridge, Alberta

Initiative

Making Connections

Background

Located in a city of approximately 70,000 people, Lethbridge School District Number 51 serves about 8,000 students in kindergarten to grade twelve, approximately 10% of whom are aboriginal.

The district provides a broad range of educational programs in seventeen schools and a number of outreach programs. The instructional program is enhanced by the provision of counselling services in all schools. A wealth of partnerships between local agencies, local educational institutions, the business sector and the School District provides many services and opportunities for their students. A strong extra-curricular program is also provided that includes a variety of athletic, fine arts, and student leadership opportunities.

The two schools involved in the CSBA Project, Galbraith Elementary School and Westminster Elementary School, have student populations of 424 and 307 respectively. They are both located on the north side of the city and serve a number of at-risk students and their families.

Project Goals

Many native students have issues that make academic success difficult. In addition to cultural differences, the students and their families experience issues around poverty. Meeting the basic needs of shelter, food and clothing are a challenge for many of the families.

Unfortunately many native families are unaware of the existence of native agencies and organizations in the community and are unsure of how to access basic health services and

supports. In collaboration with District Native Education Coordinator and staff, the following goals for the Making Connections Project were established:

- To provide culturally appropriate support to parents and families of First Nations heritage.
- To improve attendance, behaviour and learning for native students.
- To link the native families in the project with appropriate community services and family wellness programs.

Project Context

With the approval of the Board's application for funding as part of the CSBA Mobilizing the Community Project, both participating schools generously provided space and resources.

Development and management of the project was the responsibility of the District Poverty Committee, a broad-based committee consisting of representatives from a variety of stakeholder groups: teachers, counsellors, trustees, parents, school-based administrators, native education program staff, support staff and central office administrators. The leadership style utilized in the project was collegial and collaborative.

The Board of Trustees was kept informed about the Project through Poverty Committee reports.

The focus of the initiative was the work of the Native Family Support Worker and the service offered by the project is unique in that the worker assisted families of identified children in their homes. The worker helps each family identify the main problems and then works with the family to develop strategies to resolve the issue(s). Part of that plan often includes the coordination of native and non-native services with the family, the school and community groups.

The native organizations and agencies had limited contact with the schools prior to the involvement with the Native Family Support Worker and many other agencies had not worked in collaboration with the schools regarding their native students until this project was initiated.

Process

It was very important to the Committee to keep the District staff and community partners well informed. Information was disseminated via video, the administration of the Poverty Interventions Profile, newsletter updates, presentations/reports, the local media and informal discussions. Several connections were made to community agencies, existing District programs and services, the University of Lethbridge, the parent community and Sun Country Child and Family Services. In addition, one of the Poverty Committee members is also a member of the region's Poverty Coalition, a committee sponsored in part by the Chinook Health Region.

As the project evolved, the Native Family Support Worker was able to work through a number of challenges. She had to gain the trust of the families and the trust and cooperation of school staffs and community agencies, all of which she was successful in doing. In fact, the connections she has made with community agencies and organizations had a positive impact on her ability to help the families in the project.

Outcomes

Initial findings would suggest that when the need for services are all identified, planned, delivered, and evaluated by the native community, there is a greater likelihood for success. Five at-risk native families from two elementary schools were identified for the project. The Native Family Support Worker established a level of trust with these native families and assisted each family in ways that addressed the unique needs of that family in a culturally appropriate manner.

As other schools become aware of the work being done by the Native Family Support Worker, requests to extend the program are being made. In addition, agency personnel who are involved with the Native Family Support Worker are requesting that the worker take on some of their clients with children who are at risk in other District schools.

The community has been mobilized in a number of ways. Widespread participation of stakeholder groups, successful partnerships with community agencies and organizations, interest by the local media in running a series on the issues and heightened awareness of the school community illustrate how the people in the city and region have “connected” to the project. A wide variety of information has been disseminated including Poverty Interventions Profile results, Poverty Committee reports and project updates. These were distributed to all District staff, School Council Chairs, Senior Administration, and CSBA representatives. In addition, a reporter from The Lethbridge Herald, our local newspaper, has been kept informed. Our Committee has also responded to national inquiries about our work, and has shared information requested.

Sustainability

The Board has agreed to support the project through the provision of “in-kind” services. The same is true of the two project schools. A sub-committee of the District’s Poverty Committee has been reviewing funding sources with a goal to attract financial support to continue the project in the next school year. The Committee is optimistic that funding will be found.

The administration of the *Poverty Intervention Profile*, the establishment of the Pilot Project, the development of the District’s policy, the Support Program Inventory, and the momentum created by the Poverty Committee have had a positive impact on the District. There is increased awareness of the social and educational issues related to children and families affected by poverty and fruitful partnerships have evolved.

The Board has agreed to support the work of the District’s Poverty Committee for one more year, both in principle and financially. They have also given first reading to the District’s Poverty Intervention Policy and have agreed to assign a district staff member to take lead responsibility for poverty intervention.

Burnaby School District Number 41, British Columbia

Location

Maywood Community School, Burnaby, British Columbia

Initiative

The Maywood Community School Parents Learning Together

Background

Maywood Community School is located in the heart of a large new business district at Metrotown in Burnaby. It is adjacent to rapid transit stations and surrounded by many old apartment buildings, which provide low cost housing for families. The school has a student population of 520 students with many of the children coming from immigrant and refugee families. It is a relatively transient community and over half the families are low income or on income assistance. As a designated community school, Maywood attempts to meet the diverse needs of its population by providing an informal breakfast program, hot lunch program, community kitchen, bimonthly clothing exchange, a school-age care program, and a special preschool program.

Site Goals

The major objectives of the project were:

- To develop strong bonds between the school and the families of kindergarten children by welcoming parents, grandparents, and preschoolers into the school to participate in meaningful learning activities.
- To respond in a non-intrusive manner to some of the poverty-related issues faced by these families.
- To provide the opportunity for families to develop supportive relationships with each other.
- To consolidate all the initiatives presently underway at Maywood which address poverty.

Project Context

Families living on income assistance or low incomes often face barriers with respect to their child's education. This project sought to minimize these barriers by developing personal relationships between families and school staff, developing support networks between families, and raising awareness of community resources. By focusing this program on kindergarten age children and their families, the school could provide support and encouragement at the earliest stage of their formal education.

Almost half of the 77 children attending Maywood kindergarten also attended the Maywood preschool. It is specifically meant for children who have never had the experience of

attending a preschool due to financial reasons, recent arrival in this country and/or lack of knowledge on the parents' part that preschool is an option for their child.

Adult sessions, attended by a parent or guardian of each child while the children were in preschool, were an integral part of the preschool. Parents who attended the adult sessions made connections with each other and with the school coordinator who participated in some of the sessions. Throughout the program, the families also had access to the range of supports presently in place at Maywood: clothing cupboard, ESL classes for adult refugees, access to second-hand furniture, community kitchen, and settlement service through Burnaby Multicultural Society.

The Maywood Community School Parents Learning Together Project built on the positive experiences and lessons learned in the Maywood Preschool Project.

Process

There were three phases to the project which started with shared reading opportunities for parents and their children, progressed to planned activities reflecting parents' interests and culminated in consolidation of school-based support services in one location.

In the first phase, emphasis was placed on shared reading activities in the four kindergarten classes (77 students total). Parents, grandparents, care givers and preschoolers were welcomed into the kindergarten classes twice a week for 15 minutes to participate in shared reading with their children. Once a week the parents were invited to an informal coffee time after the reading time. In this way families began to feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting. During this time, parents were encouraged to identify topics that they could learn more about in future sessions, for example, nutrition, local community services, and learning activities they could share with their children.

The second phase included half-day sessions with a specific agenda reflecting parents' interests. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the sessions were interactive and fun.

The third phase of the project culminated in the consolidation of school-based support services in a dedicated community facility. After the completion of a building program, space became available which enabled the school to consolidate and expand its supports and services and to bring back some of the programs that moved off-site, due to a lack of space.

Outcomes

A number of significant outcomes and insights into process were identified during the project including the importance of support from central office staff, the vital role of community agencies coupled with informal leadership and consensus-based decision-making, and the leadership role of the school principal in welcoming the community directly into the classroom.

One vital support was the willingness of the school district to turn surplus school space created by renovation into a community facility available to community partners at little cost. The CSBA grant made possible the purchase of consumables and equipment to bring the new space to life and to support programs.

Another important factor was the willingness of the school principal and staff to welcome the community directly into the classroom – especially the kindergarten classrooms. Opening the classroom in this way attracted parents to the school. Thus, the line that frequently exists between educational and community programs was blurred for the benefit of the children, parents and the programs themselves.

Much informal leadership characterized the project. Decisions were made by consensus; generally the partner best equipped to carry out a task assumed the leadership for that phase. Much of the planning for the project was carried out by school district staff or by agencies with community members acting in an advisory capacity. Now that the facility is ready and an initial group of programs is operating, members of the community will assume a stronger leadership role. The planning process used in Phase 2 can be duplicated so that sustainable programs run by community volunteers will fill the new facility and enrich the classrooms. Staff will assume more and more a facilitator role as community-based leadership and initiatives emerge.

Sustainability

The school is in the process of applying for funding to extend the program to primary classrooms especially at the grade one level. Having a full year of operating experience financed by CSBA seed money will help make a convincing presentation to provincial, school district and City of Burnaby funding sources. Having access to a fully equipped community facility will also provide a firm foundation for program growth.

A facility to house community programs has been equipped as a result of this project. The project has given the community and school staff experience with a planning model that will operate at very little cost using community volunteers and resources. It has opened classrooms to the community and provided significant links between classroom programs and community programs. Even with fewer resources the program should be sustainable.

Coquitlam School District Number 43, British Columbia

Location

Seaview Community School, Port Moody, British Columbia

Initiative

Strengthening Community Alliances

Background

Seaview Community School in Port Moody, British Columbia, was originally constructed as a large K-7 facility with space for over 650 students. As a result of district reorganization and population change, the newly renovated building now serves just over 250 K-5 students from the surrounding community. A district Montessori program occupies part of the building.

The school population is mixed: almost 50% of the students live in families whose income is below the poverty line, but there is a sizable group of middle income parents as well. Seven languages other than English are spoken by families in the community with a large proportion of Korean and Romanian speakers. There are also twenty-one students of First Nation heritage.

In January 1996, Seaview was designated a community school by Coquitlam School District 43. As such, it has the half-time services of a Community School Coordinator. The school has an organized parent advisory council, which has built partnerships with local businesses and social agencies. The recent renovation has created a well-equipped community room with kitchen facilities.

Project Goals

The primary goal of the project was to build strong, lasting relations between the school and community members through various programs and initiatives. A secondary goal was to foster extensive parent commitment so that any positive momentum created by the project can be maintained and even increased in the future.

In order to achieve these primary goals, action plans were developed to achieve three specific objectives:

- To expand the school self-evaluation into a full scale community needs assessment to determine how the school and community school programs can better meet the needs of the residents of the community.
- To build an alliance with the National Toybank Foundation.
- To strengthen alliances with locally owned businesses through the development of a Community Business Guide.

Project Context

Prior to direct involvement with the CSBA project as a pilot site, the school had already utilized the *Poverty Intervention Profile* as a self-evaluation tool. The tool identified a number of strengths in areas like programming but also certain weaknesses in the school's relationship with potential community business partners, with the school board and in efforts to lobby for support within the community.

Process

Although the school principal played a key role in the initial preparations for the initiative, the goals of the project soon became part of the Parent Advisory Council's (PAC) mandate.

The PAC assisted in the identification of project goals and objectives as well as the development of specific action plans with identified timelines. The PAC also contributed ideas to the community survey and identified local businesses that might be contacted for the directory.

The needs assessment proved to be a larger task than either staff or the PAC had anticipated. The data collection process was complex and the analysis time was lengthy. As a result, however, the school now has considerable data on community needs and a real sense of which needs it is meeting and where there are gaps that could be filled either by the school or its community partners. For example, the school found that despite its best efforts to make it's work known, many people in the community were not aware of programs already in place.

Outcomes

Completing the needs assessment and identifying gaps both in programs and communication have given the Seaview Parent Advisory Council a firm basis for planning and an opportunity to examine its role especially in the areas of advocacy and response to district policy. The data that Seaview has collected will allow the council to be more proactive in making the school the centre of the community.

The Community Business Guide will be distributed in the fall of 2001. Initial feedback has been positive, but the school will have to wait until it is reviewed in 2002 to determine if a second edition is warranted.

The partnership with the National Toybank Foundation was not successful. Unfortunately, the Foundation required detailed financial income information from each family in order to determine eligibility to belong to the toybank. The steering committee felt uncomfortable asking for such private information, so this goal was revised. Instead, a "White Elephant" sale, selling laundered lost and found items from across the district, has proven successful. Three "White Elephant" sales per year are planned.

The school and the steering committee have achieved a number of concrete objectives:

- Considerable data about the community has been collected and is available in a format that allows decisions to be made.

- The Community Business Guide has been developed.
- Clothing that would otherwise simply disappear is being recycled and made available to the community through a series of “White Elephant “ sales.
- The community is able to plan and apply for new funding in order to fulfill some of its needs as determined by the Community Needs Assessment.

In addition to these achievements, other significant changes have taken place. The community is now more aware of services available at the school and of the existence of the community room. There is less suspicion of the school’s program and objectives.

The leadership and networking base has been expanded. Leadership is now shared and volunteers have assumed important roles. The Parent Advisory Council has been revitalized and now has a coherent set of priorities. Finally, the local business community has been contacted, is more aware of the school and its services, and appears to be very willing to support the school.

Sustainability

Maintaining the momentum will be a challenge for the principal, school staff and volunteers. Common priorities must be identified and joint projects undertaken so that communication does not become just a ritual. Roughly a third of the school’s families move or change addresses in any given year. New leaders and key volunteers must be identified, trained and brought into the organization. A continuing high level of support and communication is necessary. It appears, that the specifics of the project: the use of the survey, the provision of clothing, and the circulation of the community director can be sustained. With good planning, so can the less tangible benefits of trust, communication and shared goal setting.

St. Boniface School Division Number 4, Manitoba

Location

St. Boniface School Division Number 4, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Initiative

Systemic Poverty Intervention

Background

The St. Boniface School Division is located in the southeastern part of Winnipeg. The school division has approximately 6000 students attending its 17 schools. A total of 23.1% of the families within the school division boundaries live below the poverty line with the percentage reaching 34.3% in the North St. Boniface/Norwood region. This area also houses the majority of the community's aboriginal population.

Site Goals

There were two goals for the poverty interventions project:

- To make poverty intervention more systemic.
- To strengthen school/home/community connection.

To achieve these goals, the plan was to have school board members, school administrators and central administration review the indicators in the CSBA *Poverty Intervention Profile* (PIP) and assess where St. Boniface is on the continuum. Using the data from the profile, work would then begin on filling in the gaps.

Project Context

The St. Boniface School Division is committed to creating a community of learners where successful student learning is the concern of all. In pursuit of this mission, in 1996, the division's student services department began collecting data on its aboriginal population. Compared to other students in the division, the aboriginal students did not appear to be as successful in their schools and at the same time were accessing more of their social services.

The release of CSBA's first poverty document, *Students in Poverty: Toward Awareness, Action and Wider Knowledge*, proved useful in helping frame the St. Boniface Aboriginal Awareness document to examine the issue of poverty and education as it related to their aboriginal population.

Process

The CSBA *Poverty Intervention Profile* was given to school board members in January 2000 and to school administrators in May 2000 to review the indicators. Through an analysis of the situation in St. Boniface it was clear that as a school division that there were many indicators that showed we were implementing initiatives that would support those children living in poverty, but that they were uneven in their implementation, not system wide.

Outcomes

A number of key factors were identified as being key to the successful outcome of the project and achievement of project goals:

- The documents on poverty that were distributed by the Canadian School Boards Association gave credence to the process that was already beginning in St. Boniface.
- The Poverty Intervention Indicators and Profile focused the discussion.
- The “Mobilizing the Community” grant gave us money for training, to attend a “network” conference, to provide small amounts of money to help those in poverty in a variety of ways.
- Each of these supports from the Canadian School Boards Association helped move our project along and strengthened our Board’s support.

In order to address some of the identified gaps, specific initiatives were undertaken between January 2000 and June 2001, in each of the four key profile categories: preschool programs, policies, programming practices and community involvement. In the category of preschool programs, for example, two family centres have been established at Archwood and Marion Schools, and a coordinator has been hired. In the area of community involvement, the St. Boniface Child and Youth Poverty Committee has been extremely active in a wide range of projects from supporting the development of a community kitchen to supporting a youth proposal for evening youth programming. An Aboriginal Community Outreach program was also established. Some pre-inventory activities, such as extra staffing at high-risk schools and the Early Identification and Transition Process for special needs students going from preschool to kindergarten have been continued post-inventory.

Sustainability

The comprehensive nature of the profile has enabled the School Division to evaluate its progress on an ongoing basis. As a result, a number of next steps have been identified in both program and process areas.

These next steps include the following:

1. Preschool
 - Continue the implementation of the Family Centres.
 - Implement the Family Literacy Project.

- Strengthen our relationship with the daycares in the school division.
2. Policies, Expectations and Understandings
 - Follow up the recommendations of the Affirmation of Purpose, Values and Beliefs.
 - Begin to develop policies around poverty intervention, inclusion, and equity, based on the data collected.
 3. Programming Practices
 - Incorporate an aboriginal perspective into the new science curriculum.
 - Provide more professional development activities for teachers on inclusion, multicultural education.
 4. Community Involvement
 - Continue work with the Child and Youth Poverty Committee.
 - Continue to provide parent evening workshops.
 - Implement University of Manitoba project that has a large community component.
 5. Review the *Poverty Intervention Profile* Indicators
 - Review where we are now.

Avalon East School Board, Newfoundland

Location

Mary Queen of the World School, Mount Pearl, Newfoundland

Initiative

Create a Bridge

Background

Mary Queen of the World School is a K-6 urban school with a population of approximately 520 students. It is situated in the City of Mount Pearl and is part of the Avalon East School District. The socio-economic backgrounds of families whose children attend the school are varied but there is a high concentration of children from families with low incomes.

Mount Pearl is an independent city. Its population of 26,000 people has been growing steadily since the community's formation and now there is little rural demarcation between Mount Pearl and St. John's.

Although the school's young people do not come from the downtown St John's area, students of Mary Queen of the World School share many of the characteristics of those from an inner-city population. Through development of a school profile based on a variety of indicators, extensive documentation has been compiled to demonstrate the high proportion of children in need and the extremity of their needs.

Project Goals

From the outset, the goal of the project was to support children who lacked necessary skills for success in kindergarten and grade one.

Children who were not ready to enter kindergarten were to be identified as part of a pre-kindergarten orientation process. An early intervention program would be initiated during the kindergarten year to prepare them for entry to formal education. The program was intended to "create a bridge" so that identified children would receive sufficient support to be prepared to engage the curriculum by the time they entered grade one.

This goal was unchanged throughout the project. By January 2001, very specific objectives had been established within that broad outline:

- Early identification of students who do not demonstrate pre-kindergarten readiness skills.
- Through providing four extra hours per week of instruction to selected kindergarten students, to further develop their kindergarten readiness for learning by developing social and fine motor skills as well as academic readiness.

- To acquire top quality resources such as children's literature, teaching aids, educational toys to supply the classroom needs.
- To broaden the approach to involve parents in their children's learning.

The ultimate measure of the program will be the children's success in grade one.

Project Context

In 1999, the school began a kindergarten orientation program, inviting parents of children enrolled for September 2000 to send their child to the school one afternoon a week for five weeks to work with a certified kindergarten teacher. Over 70% of the children who were registered participated in the program and almost 30% of them were assessed as not yet ready for kindergarten using the Avalon East School Board kindergarten readiness scale.

The principal worked closely with School Council members and other parents who were enthusiastic about initiating an early intervention program and willing to engage in fund-raising for its support and continuation. The principal also contacted local media and engaged in extensive community advocacy speaking to local service organizations and municipal government leaders.

Involvement of the community during the initial stages of the project was minimal. As the year progressed, however, other community organizations were contacted to try to establish partnerships for the benefit of the children. Preliminary discussions have also taken place with the local neighbourhood community centre for the school to link their programs with the school's readiness initiative. The public library has also been contacted and has given support by offering read aloud programs and providing a variety of other literacy development opportunities.

The difficulty and time-consuming nature of creating partnerships of this kind highlight the need for school boards to take an important leadership role by making connections and creating partnerships for schools.

Process

The project enabled the principal, in collaboration with Board professional staff, to devise a support program for children who lacked the skills to enter kindergarten. Resources were purchased, a room was made available and a volunteer teacher was found. Parents were consulted. They were supportive and enthusiastic so that every invitation to participate was accepted.

Children who needed extra preparation were invited to attend for a full day twice in each cycle. It was arranged that they would work in small groups with the volunteer teacher during their additional half-days in school. Transportation was provided outside school bus times and every child was able to be at home during lunchtime. A recently qualified, elementary-trained teacher volunteered and received a minimal honorarium but saw this as an opportunity to gain experience and entry to the system.

The two kindergarten teachers continued to see the support-group children during their normal half-days of kindergarten. This allowed them to work closely with the volunteer teacher. They kept her informed about activities in their classes and supplied her with additional materials. As well, they monitored the children's progress. Children were tested on a readiness scale on entering and leaving the program but, because of very different starting points, it was difficult to compare the relative improvement of regular group children with that of support group children. Work is still being done to devise ways of obtaining 'hard data' on the effectiveness of the project but, less formally, teachers and the children's parents noticed considerable improvement in academic ability, motor skills and, sometimes, in behaviour.

As in other projects, the value of board involvement was considerable. The assistance of the Board office by an individual who saw the project's benefit was very helpful in providing guidance and support.

Outcomes

There were a number of direct outcomes from the project including the following:

- Students in the early intervention group are better prepared for entry to grade one. Without intervention, they were at great risk of a failure that could incapacitate them for the remainder of their school days.
- It is probable that an early intervention program will continue in Mary Queen of the World School with financial support from the community. The principal has expanded the project and has allocated four extra 2.5 hour sessions during the September 2001 pre-orientation sessions for children whose parents believe they may not be ready for kindergarten entry.
- The program is unique in Avalon East school district and possibly in the province. A model has been created for other schools where a similar initiative could address the needs of children at grave risk of failure.
- A proposed partnership between the school and the local community centre would provide on-going support and education both for students and their families.
- Parents' awareness of their children's need for pre-literacy has been enhanced as well as their knowledge of necessary skills. If the partnership with the centre proceeds, parents will be better equipped to help their children.

Sustainability

Sustained funding for the project is likely but not certain. For participants who see the extent of many incoming children's needs, there is an imperative to continue to reduce the likelihood that these students will fail grade one and will continue to fail throughout their school years. The Avalon East School Board's support is limited by severe budgetary constraints and a central mandate that is to support school age children; it is given no student allocation for preschoolers. The recently introduced "Getting Ready" program, designed to help children make the transition to school, may have little value for those who are very much unprepared to enter.

The proposed partnership with the local community centre has much to recommend it. The centre's mandate involves the development of young people in the community. Programs for parents and after-school programs for students would support school families while the school's early intervention project would contribute to young people's development. The government funding available to the community could be used to support school initiatives that lie within the centre's mandate. However, it will take time and dedication for the principal and the School Council to negotiate such a partnership.

Halifax Regional School Board, Nova Scotia

Location

Eastern Consolidated School, Moser River, Nova Scotia

Initiative

Early Literacy

Background

Eastern Consolidated School is situated in Moser River, a small rural community on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia, 150 kilometres east of Halifax. The school has a population of 43 children from primary to grade five. In the 2000/2001 school year there were two multi-grade classes, two full-time teachers and a part-time principal. The principal divided her time between the Eastern Consolidated and Sheet Harbour Consolidated schools, half an hour to the west of Moser River.

Historically, Moser River was a gold-mining community. Today it has a population of 500 people and the more recent lobster fishing industry is in sharp decline. There is some work in the lumber trade but local family members may have to commute to places as far away as Halifax in order to find jobs. Many are unemployed and the school is a valued community centre. It is used for meetings of local groups of seniors, craftspeople and musicians. Since there are a number of unused classrooms, some groups meet during the day and may be invited to demonstrate or share their skills with the schoolchildren. Elderly community members, for example, have been asked to show students how to quilt. Usually the Parent-Teachers' Association and the School Council are actively involved in school events and it is always possible to raise money from the community to support school causes.

Site Goals

The project began with an overall concern about improving students' literacy. Later, specific goals were formulated:

- To enhance the reading program for students.
- To motivate students to become better readers as well as independent readers.
- To involve community members in the school and have them feel comfortable about coming in and being part of the school.

The two purposes of enhancing student literacy and increasing community involvement remained constant throughout the project although they were formulated in a slightly different way at the end of the year:

- To provide more resources for early literacy and other types of materials to help students learn to read.
- To have as many volunteers as possible come to the school to help students learn to read and develop a love of reading as well as to promote a bond between students and the community.

Although not explicitly stated as a goal, the professional development of the principal and her teachers became an important objective of the project.

Project Context

In concern for the small rural schools in the District, the area superintendent selected the school in order not only to support the students but to identify new ways of addressing the financial limitations of small schools and the professional isolation of its teachers.

The Moser River community is a two-hour drive from Halifax where board administrators and education faculties are situated. *Per capita* funding gives little financial leeway to the small school. It is a challenge to find money for library and computer facilities or to hire buses that will take students to libraries and museums. At the same time, distance and weather make it difficult for teachers to take advantage of professional development opportunities. Board administrators are limited in their ability to improve the situation by the board's own lack of funding.

The principal of the school expressed enthusiasm for the project and saw it as an opportunity to provide students with resources and educational support. She involved community members from the outset, working first through her School Council and later through a specially appointed sub-committee of parents and community representatives.

Process

When the School Council met in June 2000, it was decided to focus on student literacy and to explore the possibilities of a computerized reading program, a comprehensive, multigrade package listed by the Halifax Board that included computer software and specially written books.

By September, one of the teachers had attended sessions on the materials and their use and it was decided to make a preliminary purchase. The area superintendent agreed to supply a computer from the school board. One factor in the Council's decision was that the software was said to be self-sufficient and graduated so that users could work without a teacher's help. It was thought that this would allow the computerized reading program to be made available as a motivational tool for children in the preschool program and also used by those adults in the community who had little formal education.

Some students had never used a computer. When the materials arrived, a community volunteer came to help them to get started. Later, other volunteers worked with students while they used the software.

Throughout this period, the school board/university liaison person acted as a resource for school staff members. She participated in project-related meetings and suggested a number of ways of increasing community involvement and ownership.

The professional isolation of Moser River teachers limited the number of options available to them when they considered strategies to promote early literacy. In seeing the possibilities inherent in bringing young teachers to the school both in terms of pre-service experience and in reconnecting the school's existing staff with new and current ideas of the educational community, arrangements were made to undertake such placements. Previously, there had never been a practicum placement at Moser River.

The pre-service teachers were boarded in homes in Moser River. They were warmly welcomed into the community and began work in the school in January 2001. Each was assigned to a different classroom teacher. Their approaches to literacy were stimulating and often effective in extending students' range of competencies.

Outcomes

Specific outcomes include the following:

- Students choose to read, and read for pleasure, to a greater extent than before.
- The school and community have been enriched by the purchase and donation of books and other materials.
- There is heightened awareness of the need for on-going professional development opportunities in Moser River and other small rural schools.
- A conference presentation by project participants raised awareness of inequities that affect small rural schools across Canada.
- New materials, including a computerized reading program, are available to community members some of whom have little formal education.
- There is a sense of pride in the Moser River community because their school was chosen for the project, given publicity as a result of the conference presentation, and used as a practicum site.
- The presence of pre-service teachers was stimulating for students, teachers and community members. These young teachers may have acted as models for local students who would not otherwise think in terms of further education.
- The pre-service teachers gained unusual and valuable experience from their work in a small, somewhat isolated rural school.

- A precedent has been set so that student placements from Mount St. Vincent University are likely to continue in other years. Other rural schools have expressed considerable interest.
- The principal and the reading resource teacher have had an opportunity to observe “best” literacy practices. They will continue to provide a valuable local resource. Next year, materials will be purchased and new approaches used both in Moser River and Sheet Harbour.
- A link has been made between literacy initiatives in two provinces and participants plan to continue to communicate and, where possible, collaborate.

Sustainability

A number of challenges still need to be addressed. Distance from Halifax still has a great impact on professional development options available to Moser River teachers. For Halifax-based board and university staff members, visits or workshops or course offerings in Moser River entail the commitment of a full working day and the uncertainties of weather. For the principal and teachers, this is equally true of professionally necessary journeys to Halifax. Teachers, Board staff members and University faculty members are also limited by budgetary restrictions and limitations on the time available to them. Distance education has the potential to eliminate some of these obstacles but a considerable initial commitment of time and effort is needed to plan and prepare distance courses.

Opportunities for teachers to observe in other classrooms are restricted because the funding allocated to a small school under a *per capita* policy does not give much leeway in the employment of substitute teachers. Library book purchases and field trips are also problematic.

Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, Nova Scotia

Location

Ecole Belleville, Tusket, Nova Scotia

Initiative

Preschool program, Jouer et apprendre

Background

Ecole Belleville has a population of 123 students in grades 1 to 8 who come from 100 local francophone families. Thirteen years ago, there were 230 students, but numbers have been dropping steadily and they continue to decline. This is partly because some families choose to send their children to anglophone schools.

The school's nearest community is Tusket, which lies 13 kilometres from Yarmouth in a traditional lobster fishing area in the southwest corner of Nova Scotia. The lobster industry continues to be the mainstay of the area. Families are therefore dependent on seasonal work, or travel to do unskilled work in Yarmouth. Family income is generally low. The school's community is mainly comprised of French Acadians, although many do not use their first language in everyday conversations.

Site Goals

The initial goals were to:

- Offer a good learning environment to children who might not otherwise have this opportunity.
- Offer advice and help to parents who come to school with their children.
- Provide parents with the opportunity to borrow resources such as books, videos etc. to help them help their children at home.
- Increase interest in the school as a community centre.
- Stimulate interest in the community as to the use and importance of the French language.
- Accent the importance of the Acadian heritage and culture in the school's area.

These goals did not change over the life of the project but there was an increased emphasis on parental and community involvement as the project evolved.

Project Context

Ecole Belleville was selected for the project because the economic base of many of its families is severely eroded. This has had financial and cultural effects as families struggle to make a living and often find that this requires them, and their children, to function in a primarily anglophone economy.

A member of the board staff of Conseil scolaire acadien provincial was involved in the selection of Ecole Belleville. Although her involvement was limited for a variety of reasons, the value of ongoing board staff involvement was readily apparent.

The school's teaching principal was committed to the project. He saw a need to help children who would not otherwise attend preschool and to make young Acadian children aware of their heritage. As well, he believed that it was important for Belleville's parents to create a school community that would promote their children's well being. Ecole Belleville serves a population that is scattered across eight villages, often with little communication from one village to another. The school, likely the only common ground for residents of the area, has the potential to act as a centre in which people come together in the interest of their children.

Process

In collaboration with one of his teachers, the principal provided facilities within the school, found and employed a teacher, and informed parents and community members about the school's program. It was decided that a family member had to accompany and participate in the program with their child. The program was first advertised in August 2000 and by the time of its inception in late September eight parents had expressed interest. A classroom was set up and stocked with toys, games and other resources found at garage sales. An experienced preschool teacher was employed one day a week.

Payment was on a voluntary basis and family members could drop in to the school on any Friday morning with children from the ages of two to four years. There was no need for prior arrangement or long-term commitment. The teacher kept an ongoing record of each child's progress. Often, grandparents came with children because both parents were working but attendance tended to vary with weather and travelling conditions. Parents and grandparents tended to linger after a session to talk to the teacher or other adults.

French was the language of conversation and teaching. The children's very different language abilities and the broad age range of ages (two to four years old) created a challenge for the teacher since it was difficult to find a satisfactory level for each child. Over time, resources were purchased so that books, videos and other materials could be loaned or rented to adults for use at home on a one-to-one basis with their children.

Ways to increase community involvement were discussed in February and an Open House was proposed. This was intended to inform more parents about the preschool program, bring parents from different local communities together, promote the school's Parent-Maitre, showcase student talent, and display (and sell) reading materials and videos.

When the Open House was held in the third week of April, more than a hundred people attended. Entertainment was provided by students and a local family of singers. School age children's work was displayed. Parents and preschoolers were invited to view and manipulate materials at a *Jouer et apprendre* booth where a good deal of interest was expressed by prospective participants in the program.

Outcomes

- Children were able to attend *Jouer et apprendre* who might otherwise have had no preschool experience.
- Children who attended the program are now familiar with the school environment and better prepared to enter kindergarten.
- Thirty-two different parents and grandparents assisted in classes with their children. For many, it was a first visit to the school.
- Some *Jouer et apprendre* parents have started reading with their children and helping them with journal writing.
- A sense of community was generated at the school's Open House that may have a continuing effect on participation in l'Association Parent-Maître. Some parents are doing preliminary work to establish an association in the year 2001/ 2002.
- Parents have commented on the value of the program and asked whether it will continue.
- A number of new parents have expressed interest in bringing their children in the year 2001-2002.
- The principal has canvassed local businesses for support and is very hopeful that money will be found to sustain the program.
- The preschool teacher plans to upgrade her license and will continue with the *Jouer et apprendre* program. As a well-qualified francophone preschool teacher, she will be a valuable resource for the school and community.

Sustainability

The Open House was a good beginning but it has proven difficult to create a sense of school community among parents from scattered villages. The former unity of francophonie is being eroded by many parents' perception that employment opportunities are greatest when children have been educated in an anglophone environment.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Ontario

Location

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Peterborough, Ontario

Initiative

Developing and Implementing Policy Procedures and Programs in a Diverse School District

Background

Located northeast of Toronto, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board serves an area of 7000 square kilometers with 101 schools. Although much of the population lives in the towns of Port Hope, Coburg, the municipality of Clarington, and the city of Peterborough, 41% of the board's students live in rural areas. The board's schools also serve three First Nations communities.

Project Goals

The overall goal of the project was to raise school board awareness and commitment to supporting students living in poverty in an inclusive, non-marginalizing manner in collaboration with community partners.

The committee's objectives at the beginning focused on collating information, sampling perceptions, and developing principals to guide future activities. Eventually, it settled on a series of key activities:

- Policy development
- Advocacy
- Linking actions to performance evaluation
- Promoting the school as the hub of community services
- In-service and curriculum support
- Community partnerships
- Resource development
- Rural outreach
- Communication

As the project evolved, policy development, in-service support, community partnerships and the encouragement of local initiatives became the key initiatives.

Project Context

The project had its origins in the desire of several trustees and members of senior administration to focus on the poverty issue. On December 16, 1999, the board approved a Program Advisory Committee on Poverty. By March 2000, the committee had developed a set of objectives and an initial approach. It decided to include representatives from social agencies across the board's jurisdiction as well as from teachers and school staff. It also chose to use the board's successful equity and diversity policy and program as both framework and foundation.

It also began to use the Canadian School Boards Association's *Poverty Intervention Profile* to organize the information collected.

Process

During the July 1999 CSBA conference, the current board chair heard a presentation about the CSBA profile and recognized its usefulness in structuring an overall direction without interfering with local initiatives.

The project involved inviting schools and other agencies to participate, validating their strengths and honouring people who might not otherwise speak out. Nineteen of the original twenty-two members of the committee remained actively involved throughout the project.

Funding from the CSBA and the sense that a national organization was supportive encouraged the Kawartha Pine Ridge Board to make some central program funds available. In addition, the board agreed to funnel some of the profits from cafeterias in its fifteen secondary schools back to those schools to support local action proposals. To sustain the enthusiasm of the schools, the board has agreed to continue the process for at least one year.

Outcomes

By November 2000, the committee had begun to see solid progress. Instead of creating a stand-alone policy concerning poverty, new language was added to the board's Equity and Diversity policy. A set of expectations for principals in the district was created and was added to criteria by which principals were evaluated. A counselor with the Social Work Services of the board created a handbook, titled "The Educational Implications for Students Living in Poverty". The committee also created a compendium of strategies for individuals, schools, and total communities.

The committee also realized that in a district as geographically diverse as Kawartha Pine Ridge, activity had to be concentrated at the school or school council level. Therefore, board staff was assigned to conduct in-service sessions using the project handbook. Some of the sessions were part of the planned Professional Development programs, while others were shorter overviews presented at staff meetings or noon hour sessions.

To mobilize parents in the community, familiarization presentations were made at school councils or neighbourhood groups of school councils. Between February and June 2001, a substantial number of committees in the jurisdiction were reached, and the handbook was circulated to all schools.

The final step in the action plan was to devote the remaining project funds to the creation of resource kits, primarily for elementary schools. Individual needs in secondary schools had been addressed through the proposal writing and grant process and through a parallel program called “Teachers for Kids” which saw direct support given to identified students to provide field trips, enrichment opportunities and summer camp experiences targeted to reach identified individuals. To support the teachers of younger children, the kits provided materials from Health Canada, commercial publishers and various other anti-poverty agencies. While the manual “The Educational Implications for Students Living in Poverty” was intended to raise overall awareness among professionals, most of the kit materials were intended to support classroom implementation of program. Unfortunately, neither resources nor time will permit in-service sessions supporting this material.

In summary, the project has achieved:

- A policy commitment by the school board to address the issue of students in poverty that is integrated with the board’s commitments to equality and diversity issues.
- A direction to principals to ensure the inclusion and support of students living in poverty.
- A personal commitment to the issue by a significant group of trustees and administrators.
- A complex network of interagency contacts involving professionals and community members focused on the issue.
- A parent awareness/in-service program supported by a locally produced handbook and a compendium of practical intervention strategies.
- Resources to support school implementation.
- A series of school board projects ranging from breakfast programs to enrichment support.

Sustainability

Communication in a district as large and varied as Kawartha Pine Ridge with no dominant urban centre and many overlapping jurisdictions is an ongoing challenge. Making it possible for an individual teacher or a school staff whose awareness has been increased to formulate a local plan and carry it out is also a challenge. The right combination of pressure and support will be difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, there are encouraging signs.

The intense work of the central committee is drawing to a close. In the future, it will act as a clearinghouse for new information and materials, and will focus on encouraging interagency communication, monitoring activities in the schools and supporting local initiatives. What will be sustained from the project are the local initiatives in schools and communities, the improved communication between the board and agencies with similar interests and the monitoring process called for in policy and administrative direction.

Eastern School District, Prince Edward Island

Location

Birchwood Junior High School, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Initiative

Dine and Shine Breakfast Stop Program

Background

Students in grades 7 to 9 attend Birchwood Junior High School in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The school has a population of 440 students. Approximately half of the students, who come from a central area of the city, walk to school and half are brought by bus or car. In this downtown catchment area, 16% of adults over twenty-five are unemployed and 70% of families rent their homes.

Birchwood is one of only four schools in the Eastern School District (ESD) whose population consists of grades 7 to 9 exclusively although nineteen schools have a junior high component. The total student population of the Board is approximately 15,000 and the geographic area is such that Board Office staff can maintain close involvement with the schools.

Project Goals

The breakfast initiative was undertaken because of a 1999 School Health Survey carried out in Birchwood JHS and Prince Street Elementary School. Less than half of the grade 7 and 8 students at Birchwood JHS reported eating breakfast daily. One third of the students said that they “rarely” or “never” ate breakfast. There was a sense of urgency about addressing students’ needs especially because of the well-documented effect of poor nutrition on students’ ability to learn.

As a result, the overall goal was to “reduce hunger in schoolchildren by providing a healthy breakfast at school in a supportive environment”. Specific aims were to:

- Improve the nutritional quality of diets of schoolchildren.
- Promote healthy eating habits.
- Provide opportunities for socializing and support for school children.

As the project developed, the overall goal was refined to work collaboratively with school staff, parents, students, volunteers and community organizations to develop, deliver and evaluate a participatory school breakfast program.

Sociability, always an aim, emerged as a significant goal. To avoid stigmatisation, the breakfasts were intended to be inclusive and to provide a meeting place for all students in the school.

Project Context

Birchwood JHS was involved in the project because of the Health Survey findings and also because of a very supportive and concerned administration both in-school and at the Board office. From the outset, the school principal and the district principal were members of the steering committee. Each was convinced of student need and was energetically committed to the project.

The school principal created a vital link between committee members and students, teachers, non-teaching staff members and parents. He used a monthly newsletter to describe happenings in the project, negotiated the in-class administration of surveys, and dealt with the many logistical challenges of the program.

The district principals promoted the project at board office level and conveyed their own enthusiasm and sense of urgency. They were actively engaged in planning and problem solving, and maintained ongoing communication with trustees and board-level administrators. As well, because the district principal was also the board's link to local media, a great deal of positive publicity was given to the project.

Representative parents from the School Council became members of the committee, and were able to bring with them their children's experience with the program, as well as the concerns of other parents.

In an unusual partnership, representatives from University of Prince Edward Island and the Canadian Red Cross became steering committee members; each was able to make invaluable contributions to the project.

Process

A part-time coordinator was hired and a pilot program was put in place in June 2000. Approximately 375 students were served breakfast over a three week period (approximately 25 students a day). Steering committee members, with the help of the coordinator, found donors for food and equipment, ran a "name the program" competition for students and obtained publicity through the ESD. Further publicity was planned using information letters to various local groups, including the Home and School Association, and through a successful breakfast program launch, held in October 2000.

Once the logistics for the program were in place, mechanisms were established to allow ongoing consultation with parents and students. In a school-wide competition, students chose the name, "Dine and Shine". Parent representatives were invited to become part of the steering committee and a student advisory committee was formed. Over the course of the year, more than 60 volunteers helped to serve breakfast. Parental, student and volunteer support was important for the success of the project and vital for its sustainability.

The monthly school newsletter remained a regular avenue of communication with parents. As well, information booths were set up during 'Meet the Teacher' evenings. A visioning session in October 2000 included committee members, parents and students. It aimed to guide future

directions and to increase student and parent participation in the program. A student advisory committee was established in December 2000 consisting of five students from participating schools and the program coordinator. A volunteer was invited to sit on the steering committee.

The leadership style was relaxed throughout the project. In a very diverse steering committee, members readily assumed responsibilities within their areas of professional and personal strength. As well, school district involvement and support were critical for establishing and operating the program.

Outcomes

In May 2001, when the breakfast program had been in place for one school year, a year-end survey was completed. Provisional results are promising and suggest that the program has been helpful in addressing initial aims and goals. Approximately 31.1% of the 326 student respondents had attended the breakfast program. Anecdotal evidence from them, and from several teachers, suggests that there is improvement in learning and in energy levels.

- More students are eating more nutritional breakfasts more often.
- The breakfast area has become a meeting place and there seems to be very little stigmatisation.
- Helpers for serving breakfast have come from the community, university, and technical college.
- The extensive publicity has increased community awareness and acceptance of the value of school breakfast programs.
- Five PEI schools are conducting a needs assessment and expect to introduce breakfast programs next year. Other schools have expressed interest. The success of the Birchwood program has been a significant factor.
- Administrators and steering committee members have gained experience and expertise with which to support other PEI schools.
- Although it is still evolving, an inclusive, participatory model is now available to island schools.
- The CSBA resource network has enabled individual steering committee members to make nation-wide connections and access relevant information. For some members, and therefore for the island, this is a continuing positive outcome of the project.
- A partnership has evolved and seems likely to continue between members of the University, Red Cross and Eastern School District where participants combine their very different strengths for the benefit of students. Other jurisdictions have expressed interest in the model.

Sustainability

The Birchwood program will be sustained next year by funding from the Canadian Living Foundation and the Eastern School District Educational Foundation as well as by continuing donations from local businesses.

Other schools are taking the initiative by applying to community organisations and local businesses for donations in cash or in-kind. As more schools establish breakfast programs in this small province, however, there is a likelihood of creating business and donor fatigue. Similarly, as applications to funding agencies multiply, schools may find themselves competing for the same money.

The Red Cross volunteer network has contributed to stable staffing of the breakfast program. The assistance of Dietetic Interns from the University has also been valuable. Students and parents are already playing a significant part but organising committee members believe that it is important to find ways to increase their involvement during the 2001 to 2002 school year.

Parkland School Division Number 63, Saskatchewan

Location

Parkland School Division Number 63, Shellbrook, Saskatchewan

Initiative

Working with Specific Native Families to Encourage School Attendance

Background

The primary community for the pilot site is Big River with two schools, one K-6 serving 192 students and one high school serving 262 students in grades 7-9. Over 50% of the students are of First Nations background.

Site Goals

Initially the project Mobilizing the Community involved Parkland School Division, the local school board, an interagency group, and the coordinator of the project. They attempted to meet the diverse needs of one family with four children and another related family with two children. The families considered themselves to be sovereign Dene living a traditional lifestyle in a settlement off reserve and as a result made their own laws regarding the education of the children. It was clear to the educational authorities in the area that the circumstances in the settlement placed the children at great risk and that efforts must be made to return them to school.

Project Context

The children had not attended school for two years. The road conditions between the settlement and the school were nearly impassable, and it was very difficult to get out to the main highway, about five kilometres away.

Towards the end of August the principals from the high school and the elementary school visited the families. The purpose of the visit was to find out from the families what they would need in order for the children to attend school. The families told them that the road needed to be improved so that it was passable.

The decision was made to use funds from the project to repair the road. The school division arranged for the students to be driven to school. It also paid for a used van on the understanding that \$200 would be deducted from the driver's pay until the total amount of the van was recaptured.

The road was repaired and made passable. The work was completed during the first week of September 2000.

Process

The children began attending school the second week of September. Testing was done by the professional staff, and it was decided that more staff would be needed to meet the diverse needs of the children. One additional full-time teaching position was approved by the school division.

A full-time teaching assistant worked with the students for about two weeks. The high school students were able to join the soccer team. The children needed lunches from time to time, and a clothing depot was planned.

In October the girls disclosed abuse, and all the children were removed by Social Services and placed in other areas.

When the facilitator in the mobilizing project went to Big River in October to discuss the project, the focus of the project became the well being of the children. While attempts were made to have the different agencies and school divisions work together on the children's behalf, this proved exceedingly difficult, as some of the agencies felt that school district personnel should not be involved. Nonetheless every effort was made to ensure that the children's needs were met and that they were dealt with fairly by everyone.

Beginning in January 2001, students in four additional families were included in the mobilizing project. At various times during the remainder of the year funds from the mobilizing project were used to ensure that the additional students were able to participate in school activities such as home economics, field trips and holiday festivities.

Outcomes

- All the children in the original target families now attend school on the reserve on a regular basis.
- Funding from the mobilizing project enabled local agencies to come together to provide services to the project's original families. The agencies involved include the following:
 - Tribal Council, Big River Band
 - Whitefish School, principal and director of education
 - Parkland School Division, principals, director of education and superintendent of school services
 - Social Services
 - Health care, doctors and mental health professionals
- Personal living conditions of the original families improved because of the constant involvement of project coordinator in the well being of the children.

Sustainability

Saskatchewan Education has approved the designation of community school for the 2001–2002 school year. This designation means that the school will provide food, a clothing depot, and a pre-kindergarten to address problems and begin early intervention. This approach is used in communities where there are children at risk because of financial or other social disadvantages.

Poverty Intervention Policy Template

About the Poverty Intervention Policy and Procedures Template

The template provides general guidance to individual boards developing a poverty intervention policy. Boards are encouraged to adapt the template to the specific needs of their own district. To further assist boards in their efforts, suggestions have been made for procedures that will support their poverty intervention policy.

Some of the more concrete issues and practices have not been included in this policy and procedures template. For example, a board may wish to add specific guidelines for managers responsible for poverty

intervention. The board may wish to incorporate accountability into procedures for performance evaluation. The Procedures section of this template contains ideas from a variety of boards and experts on poverty issues. Again, individual boards will want to choose the procedures most appropriate to their situation.

The issues covered in this policy template are in keeping with an understanding of research findings and professional opinions on school-mediated poverty intervention programs, and have been developed through the various phases of the Canadian School Boards Association's activities on student poverty. Relevant documents are listed in the References/Documents sections.

Poverty Intervention Policy Template

1.0 OBJECTIVE

To provide a framework for poverty intervention activities in the school district in support of the board's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

2.0 DEFINITION

In this policy, the term *poverty intervention* refers to programs and perspectives that enable students living in families with low incomes to receive the full benefit from their education.

3.0 RATIONALE/PHILOSOPHY

The goal of education is to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds experience inclusion, equity, and support from the

school system. The role of education is to enable all students to reach their potential.

Poverty has profound effects on the education of students. Poverty impacts the physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual development of students. Poverty intervention must be holistic in nature and cannot be achieved by a disconnected series of programs alone. Although school boards are not responsible for the causes of poverty, there is much that boards can do to address the negative effects of poverty.

4.0 POLICY

4.1 The _____ School Board is committed to ensuring that all students including those living in poverty receive full benefit of the education to which they are entitled.

- 4.2 To create awareness and understanding of the responses that can be made for students living in poverty, the Board will specify the components of poverty intervention in its procedures. The procedures will cover preschool programs; policies, expectations, and understandings; programming practices; and community involvement.

5.0 REFERENCES/DOCUMENTS

Board policies and procedures on poverty, equity, diversity, and inclusion, numbered _____

Canadian School Board Association Documents:

Poverty Intervention Profile: Partners in Action

Poverty Intervention: Partners in Action, Annotated Bibliography

Students in Poverty: Toward Awareness, Action, and Wider Knowledge

Poverty Intervention Profile brochure

Social Inclusion: The Role of School Boards

Canadian Teachers' Federation:

Children, Schools and Poverty

PROCEDURES CONCERNING THE POVERTY INTERVENTION POLICY TEMPLATE

- 1.0 Administrators shall develop holistic approaches to the support of students living in poverty.
- 2.0 Administrators shall examine and periodically review practices to ensure the support of students living in poverty.
- 3.0 The Board shall review its actions and policies to ensure that appropriate interventions and supports for students living in poverty are in place.
- 4.0 There will be an annual report on significant indicators of educational attainment in schools serving students living in poverty.
- 5.0 An annual report to the board on the progress made in implementing the framework described in section 13.0 will be tabled with the _____ Committee.

- 6.0 A committee will be struck to deal with the issues of poverty. Parents and students representing those living in poverty will be included on the committee. The committee will establish an action plan to address poverty issues in the board. The plan will set out specific goals, actions, time lines, and responsibility centres. A report on progress in meeting the goals will be made annually.
- 7.0 Parents and students representing students living in poverty will sit on the following committees: _____.
- 8.0 Funding for schools with high levels of students living in poverty will be carried out in the following manner: _____.
- 9.0 Feeding programs will be offered in schools with high levels of poverty.

- 10.0 On behalf of its students the Board will lobby governments to support laws, regulations, and policies to ease the impacts of student poverty.
- 11.0 The Board will publish an inventory of programs and services to address poverty.
- 12.0 The Board will maintain an inventory of best practices for poverty intervention.
- 13.0 The following structure will serve as the model for poverty intervention.

13.1 Preschool Programs

Trustees educate themselves about the nature of child development.

The school board builds partnerships to share funding and experience in operating preschools and child/family centres.

There is a smooth transition from preschools to the regular school system.

13.2 Policies, Expectations, and Understandings

There are district procedures for action addressing poverty and education.

The school board lobbies provincial and federal governments to support schools in educating students living in poverty.

Additional funds are allocated to schools with a high percentage of students living in poverty.

Coherent and sustained funding of programs is available for schools serving students living in poverty.

Policymakers and educators ensure that their actions lead to inclusion of the poor.

Those who serve on the school board and its committees are representative of the populations served by the board.

All those concerned with children and youth work in partnership.

The school board's policies ensure that there is a highly effective leadership serving in schools with students living in poverty.

The stress of serving in schools with students living in poverty is recognized through support and renewal programs for staff.

There is a staff person with responsibility for educational poverty programs.

13.3 Programming Practices

There is a cohesive and comprehensive vision of how the school program serves the needs of students living in poverty.

Early literacy is emphasized in the beginning grades.

Intervention programs begin at birth and continue at least through high school graduation.

Programs at all levels emphasize excellence.

There is a systematic process for collecting data about the program needs and progress of students living in poverty.

High school programs are designed to enable students living in poverty to finish.

Professional development regarding poverty and education is a priority for all.

13.4 Community Involvement

School services and community services are integrated to serve students better.

Before action is taken, all those who will be affected are consulted.

The school board uses local schools as a hub for preschool and child/family centres.

Outreach programs enable families, neighbours, and local businesses to be part of the school community.

14.0 References/Documents

Board policies and directives on poverty, equity, diversity, and inclusion, numbered _____.