

Executive Directions

by Kathy Clayton

Literacy... In today's world, there are many ways a person can be considered literate, including the common understanding of literacy related to reading and writing. It really comes down to the 21st century skills needed to become a productive person in life. Thinking in terms of mathematical literacy, computer literacy, social literacy and so many others, it seems that when it comes to literacy of any type, children who live in poverty are at an extreme disadvantage for becoming literate individuals.

We know that working with children living in poverty requires educators to be involved in every aspect of their lives, both academic and personal. Due to their lack of experience with poverty, educators often fail to acknowledge the influence that poverty can have on academic achievement. Students who are living in poverty are not always given the foundation they need to succeed in school.

As educators, we know that children's brain development is influenced by life experiences. Poverty is a life experience that causes the kind of stress that interferes with how parents and children interact with each other and can undermine a parent's efforts to create the kind of positive learning environment that all parents want for their children. This, among a myriad of other reasons relative to poverty, contributes to illiteracy related to every 21st century skill.

Educators can learn more about how to transform schools into places that better meet the needs of children of poverty. Developing awareness in our schools begins with school personnel who are unequivocally committed to equity. This commitment starts with a better understanding of the meaning and influence of poverty in the lives of the students they serve.

It is this reality that motivated the Washington State ASCD Board of Directors to begin providing more professional learning opportunities related to understanding poverty. For many years, WSASCD has focused on a whole child approach to learning and teaching, so it is

no surprise that with the increased level of poverty in our state, there is more to learn about what it really means to ensure that children are healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged.

Throughout this school year, WSASCD will offer learning opportunities related to increasing our understanding of poverty in our schools and what can be done to support our students.

- The Washington Teachers' Conference on November 5th will serve as the first venue related to this theme. Co-authors Dr. Kathleen Budge and Dr. William Parrett will serve as keynote speakers and share their expertise related to their book entitled, *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools*.
- WSASCD will then co-sponsor a 2-Day ASCD Institute entitled, *Disrupting Poverty: Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools* on Tuesday-Wednesday, November 29-30. Kent School District will host this event at the Kent Phoenix Academy.
- Beginning in February, WSASCD will offer schools and districts the opportunity to be involved in a Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS), which is a unique tool that helps people to begin to understand what life is like with a shortage of money and an abundance of stress. We hope to help educators develop an understanding of the day-to-day reality of poverty to increase awareness and better understand our students and families.

We, as Washington State ASCD, believe that becoming literate in all 21st century skills can be improved with a better understanding and support for our students who live in poverty. Join us this year, as we endeavor to learn more about how to support and influence learning for children of poverty.

