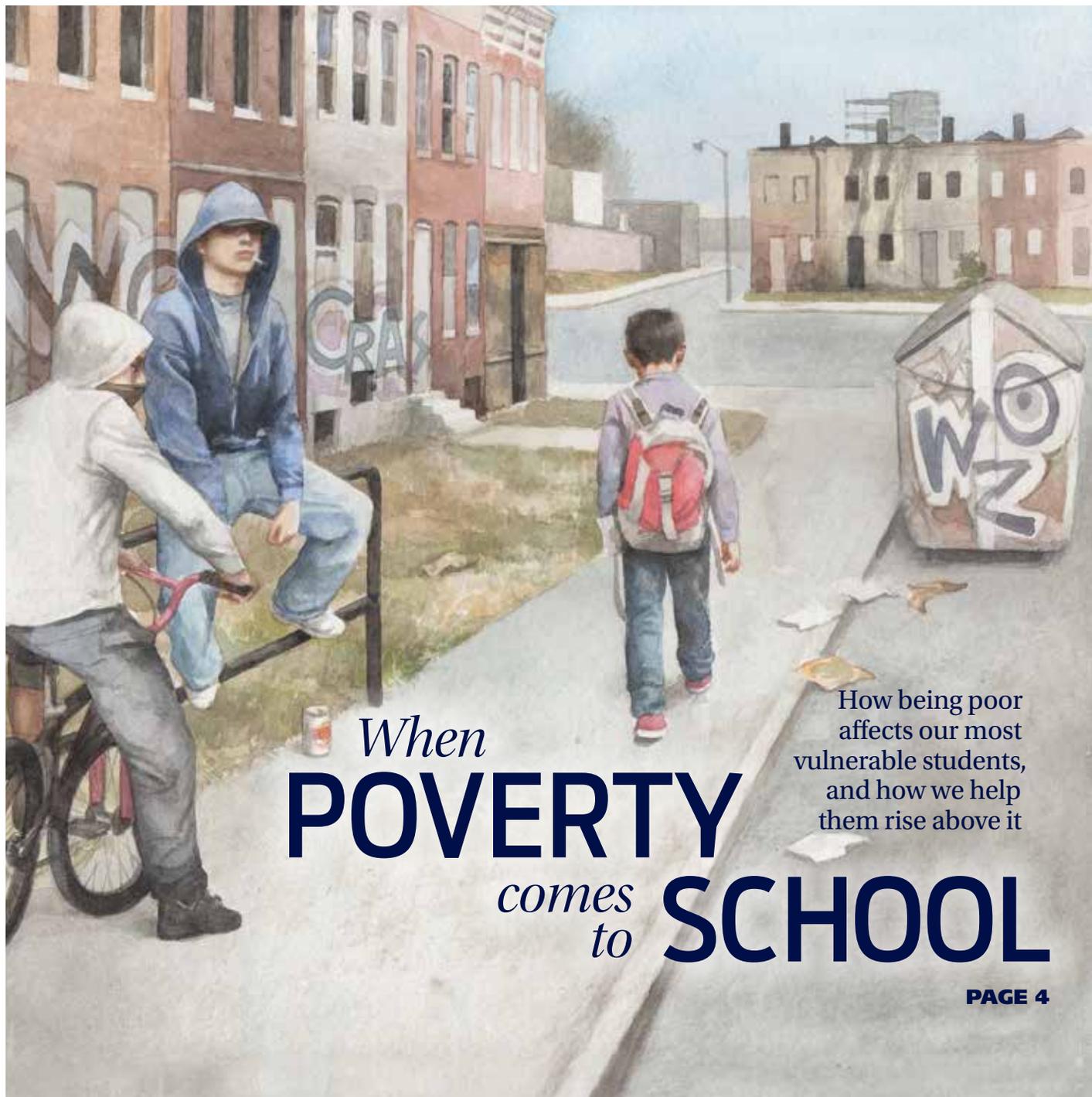




PSRP Reporter

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PARAPROFESSIONALS AND SCHOOL-RELATED PERSONNEL



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OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Cover illustration: ENRIQUE MOREIRO

First Book event a big hit in upstate New York

HOSTING A FIRST BOOK event, in which books are distributed for free to children and families who may not have access to them otherwise, is a great way to build community. But members of the Saratoga Adirondack BOCES Employees Association in New York took the event a step further and involved their students in the giveaway, extending the lesson beyond reading and into team building and collaboration.

The BOCES event was held at the Myers Center, a vocational, technical and special education center for students from 31 school districts in upstate New York. More than 500 students attend classes there in everything from culinary arts to heavy machinery operations, but they have few opportunities to interact beyond their individual programs. At the Sept. 20 book giveaway, however, they worked together with staff to unload, sort and distribute the more than 40,000 books.

Sandie Carner-Shafran, a PSRP member and New York State United Teachers board member, helped organize the event with support from her local, SABEA President Ruth Shippee and Superintendent James Dexter, who together registered 2,000 educators and staff to host the book truck. Participating students were involved in every aspect of the giveaway, getting hands-on experience in team-

work and problem solving. And educators used the event as a teachable moment: A graphic design instructor, for example, created a lesson plan asking students to design an eye-catching book cover that also conveyed the book's plot.

Educators and staff noted that there were no disciplinary issues while the kids were working, and many special education students who have difficulty interacting with others really came out of their shells, even volunteering for extra shifts. A nursing program student who doesn't often interact with many students noted that this was the first time she really felt part of the school.

The community came out as well: Navy personnel volunteered and delivered books to military families on a nearby military base, and a local police officer chose books to keep in his patrol car for the children he encounters on the job. The whole community came together to reclaim the promise of public education and instill a love of reading.

"Books make your brain strong!" says a young boy at the Sept. 20 First Book giveaway, below. Top right, a police officer takes books for his patrol car; bottom right, a soldier carries books to distribute at a military base.



PHOTOS BY LESLIE GETZINGER



Worth fighting for

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

FROM CONNECTICUT TO ALASKA, Florida to Pennsylvania, our union engaged in the midterm elections big-time. I was proud to stand with our members as we knocked on doors, made calls, talked to our friends and neighbors, and cast our ballots on behalf of our schools, our kids, our families and our communities.

As the results came in on Nov. 4, we watched as many of the candidates we worked for lost. It was hard to see but, upon reflection, not hard to understand.

National elections inevitably turn on the choices voters make between the economy and national security, between hope and fear. This one turned on the economy, particularly people's fear and uncertainty about their future. Despite the fact there's been 54 months of private sector job growth, median family income has fallen during the Obama presidency, just as it did during both Bush presidencies and the Carter presidency. As *New York Times* columnist David Leonhardt said: "When incomes, the most tangible manifestation of the economy for most families, aren't rising ... Americans don't feel good about the state of the country. When they don't feel good about the country, they don't feel good about the president, and they tend to punish his party."

According to exit polls, 63 percent of voters believe that our economic system generally favors the wealthy, yet virtually the same percentage voted with the party that is known to represent the interests of the wealthy. Those exit polls also showed that people want more public school funding and a higher minimum wage, yet they voted for candidates that oppose those things—out of frustration or a desire for change, or because they felt the Democrats didn't have a compelling economic message or solutions.

While voters want an economy that works for everyone and not just the wealthy few, in many of the highly contested races they

didn't believe that those we endorsed would get them there. They didn't see that the candidates we supported were the ones who are in it "for the nurse on her second shift, for the worker on the line, for the waitress on her feet, for the small-business owner, the farmer, the teacher, the coal miner, the trucker, the soldier, the veteran," as Hillary Clinton famously said in 2008.

It's critical to remember that, in these elections, not everything was washed away. In fact, in places where voters were given the chance to weigh in directly on their values, they resoundingly sent a message that they are on the side of working families and public education. Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, Nebraska and South Dakota increased the minimum wage. Massachusetts granted workers paid sick leave. Missouri rejected an initiative that would have abolished due process for teachers.

In California, voters re-elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson over a candidate backed heavily by Wall Street interests intent on gutting teachers' union rights and worker protections. In Pennsylvania, anti-education and union-busting Gov. Tom Corbett lost badly after battling a multiyear community groundswell resisting his attempts to destroy the state's public schools.

Poll after poll has shown us that people actually want public schools. People actually love their teachers and support staff. People believe that a strong public education system fills an essential role as an anchor of democracy, a propeller of our economy and the vehicle through which we help all children achieve their dreams.

But we face a new reality where right-wing, anti-worker interests won big, and their No. 1 target will be unions. We know their playbook. We know that even though the labor movement doesn't have the density or power by ourselves to change the trajectory

of our economy, we are still the firewall that thwarts complete control of our economy and democracy by the anti-union, free-market ideologues and oligarchs. And they will do everything in their power to take us out, dismantle our infrastructure, divide us from the community and consolidate their power.

We are going to face some real attacks and challenges, but we can't just go into defensive mode. We faced a lot of these attacks in 2010, but we didn't hunker down; instead, we were solution-driven and community-engaged, and we became a stronger union.

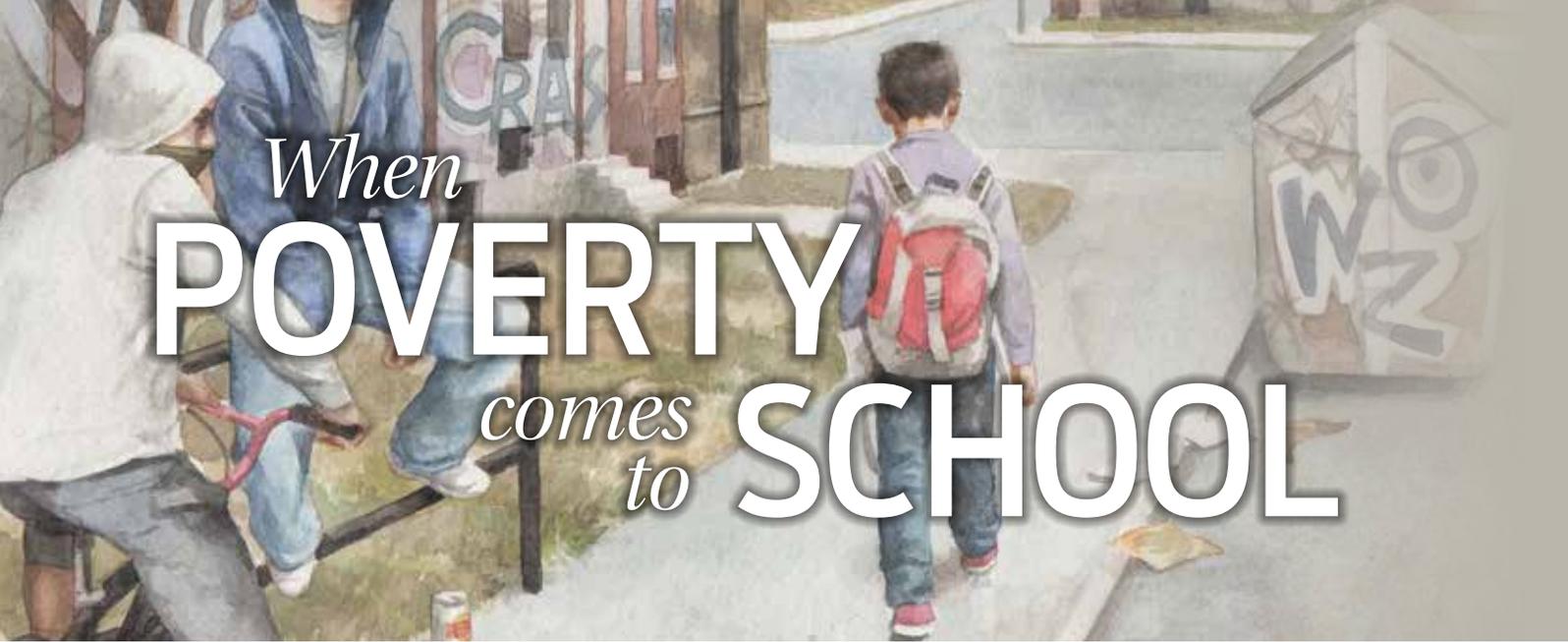
We need to think about everything we do through the lens of whether it's good for kids, schools, working families and our communities. And our job is to keep communities and voters with us on the values, issues and solutions we share.

We must engage more of our members—because our members are the union.

We must be solution-driven, by being willing to solve problems, to innovate to make things better, to find common ground when possible, and to engage in conflict when necessary. We must connect with our community and make community our new density. And we must engage more of our members—because our members are the union.

The next few years won't be easy. If there's one thing we know, it's that power never yields without a fight. To change the balance of power, we must fight harder and smarter, and stand together.

We will never stop fighting to reclaim the promise of an America where, if you work hard and play by the rules, you can support your family and ensure that your children will do better. I think we can all agree that is a promise worth fighting for.



When POVERTY *comes to* SCHOOL

AN APPALLING NUMBER of American children live in poverty. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 14.7 million, or nearly 20 percent of children under age 18, live below the poverty line—that is, in households with incomes less than \$23,550 a year for a family of four.

And these children bring the debilitating effects with them to school every day.

Bernard Washington, a cook in Syracuse schools since 1993, has seen homeless children scavenge for food to bring home on weekends.



LAUREN LONG

Poverty climbs the steps of the school bus in the morning, when a child comes in from the cold with no jacket. PSRPs see it again at the end of the day when there is no one to meet that bus—in an unsavory part of town—because parents are busy working too many hours at low wages. We see it at lunch, when children ask for second helpings because they are not getting enough to eat at home.

Teaching assistants see it in children unable to focus on fractions and percentages because they are afraid they’ll have no food over the weekend, when no school meals are available—or because they are sick and there is no money for medical care. It’s on the playground and in the school halls, where custodians sweep around children sitting outside the classroom as punishment for acting out in class, mimicking the negative behaviors they witness in their low-income, sometimes gang-infested neighborhoods. And we see it in the school office, where the administrative staff can’t record a student’s permanent address because the child lives at the local homeless shelter.

Besides these heart-wrenching consequences, poverty also affects academic progress, the very heart of a school’s mission. Research shows that the distractions of poverty, including poor nutrition, lack of sleep and stress, are clearly linked to brain development, working memory and attentional control.

Poverty by the numbers

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 1 in 5 children in the United States lived in poverty in 2013. The year before, 31 million children were enrolled in the fed-

eral free and reduced-price lunch program, indicating that their families needed help providing nutritious food. But schools feel the impact far beyond the cafeteria.

By the time children living in poverty are 4 years old, they lag 18 months below what is “normal” cognitive development for their age group. By third grade, their vocabulary is one-third that of their middle-income peers: about 4,000 words to their peers’ 12,000. Poor parents are typically less educated and often too stressed making ends meet to engage their kids in challenging verbal exchanges.

Children from low-income, poverty-stricken neighborhoods are behind from the start, with less preparation and more risk for developmental delays and learning disabilities. Because of environmental factors like lead poisoning—which has been related to poor working memory, difficulty linking cause and effect, and health-related issues such as untreated ear infections that limit hearing and asthma triggered by poorly ventilated buildings—attention, reasoning, learning and memory can be diminished.

Seeing beyond the numbers

Sandy Thompson, an administrative assistant at a Title I school and the vice president of the TOTEM Association of Educational Support Personnel, the AFT’s local in Anchorage, Alaska, describes what poverty looks like at Creekside Park Elementary School: A child as young as 7 wakes up alone, because her single mother already has gone to work one of her several jobs. The girl must get out of bed on time, wash herself, get dressed, remember her homework and walk nearly a mile to school—maybe with an older child, maybe not. If she

A refugee crisis in our schools

BY THE END OF 2014, more than 90,000 children are expected to have crossed into the United States at the Southern border without a parent or guardian. These unaccompanied minors are undocumented, but because of court backups, they must wait months and sometimes years for their cases to be resolved.

In the meantime, many of them attend our schools.

These children speak English as a second language, or not at all. They may have had some schooling in their home country—or not. Some have experienced trauma or violence. Most are living in poverty. Many have been separated from their immediate family. For some, school is the most stable place in their lives—but it is also one of the most challenging.

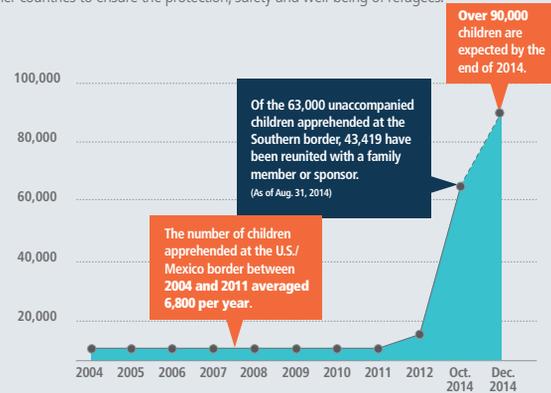
The path of the unaccompanied minor begins for the most part in Central American countries—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—that are overrun with organized crime, violence, human trafficking and persecution, and where homicide rates are the highest in the world. They come to escape violence (often gang-related), to join family members already living in the United States or to find work to support their families.

Once the children arrive, they are taken to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shelter until they can be released to a family member, relative or friend. Sometimes their already difficult situation is complicated by overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at the shelter, and allegations of abuse while in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The AFT has strongly condemned such abuse, and called for adequate protections and legal services, culturally sensitive mental and physical health assessments, and greater access to human rights, civic, labor and faith groups while these children are in the system.

After being released from the shelters, the children have the right to attend public school—and that is where our members first meet them. They are often still vulnerable and usually need services beyond the classroom—anything from counseling to language assistance, help from the food bank or hints about American culture. For example, children who have never attended school in the United States may not clear their lunch trays in the cafeteria; rather than scold a child for leaving a tray on the table, a custodian or lunch monitor could gently explain the routine. “Everybody needs to be part of helping the child socialize and be comfortable in the school,” says Kristina Robertson, a national trainer and member of the AFT’s Educator Cadre advisory committee.

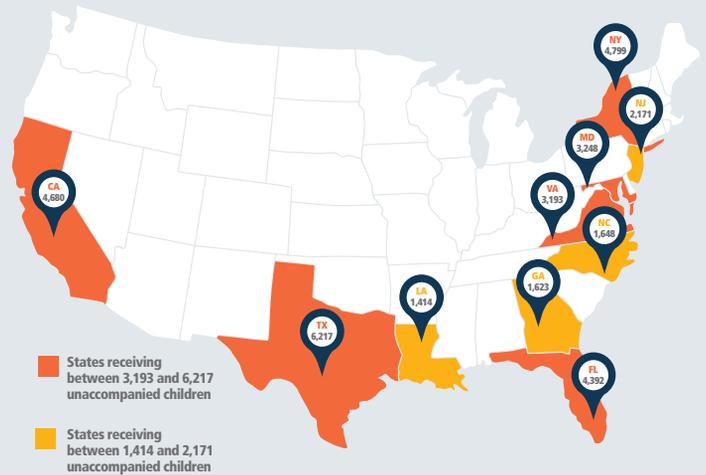
Robertson is featured in an informational video from Colorín Colorado, just one of the many resources on unaccompanied minors available on the AFT website. You’ll also find fact sheets, statistics and other resources that help explain the problem and provide tools you can use to welcome unaccompanied minors to your school. See go.aft.org/bordercrisis to learn more.

Unaccompanied children* have been entering the United States for decades. In fact, the United States has entered into numerous treaties with other countries to ensure the protection, safety and well-being of refugees.

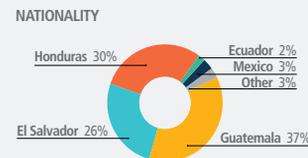


* An unaccompanied child is a child who has no lawful immigration status in the United States; who is under the age of 18; and who has no parent or legal guardian in the United States, or has no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody. See 6 U.S. Code § 279(g)(2).

Top-receiving states of unaccompanied children. (2014 data)



Who are the unaccompanied children entering the U.S. Southern border? (2013 data)



Reasons why these children are seeking refuge in the United States include, but are not limited to, the following:

- To escape violence, abuse, persecution and communities overrun by crime, corruption, endemic poverty and human trafficking.
- To find family members already residing in the United States.
- To seek work to support themselves, their family or their own children.
- Were brought to the United States by human smugglers.



THOMPSON

JENNIFER NICOLELLO

arrives at school early enough, she’ll get breakfast; if not, she’ll be hungry until lunch.

“We have those students who are tardy frequently, and a lot of times it is because their parents have worked late into the night,” says Thompson.

Kids rely on cellphones as alarm clocks, and often the phones are not charged. “We’ve gone out and purchased alarm clocks and snow pants and winter

gear,” says Thompson, noting that yes, even in Alaska, some children come to school without a winter coat. School employees sponsor a winter gear swap and keep extra boots, gloves, snow pants and coats on hand.

In Syracuse, N.Y., Syracuse Teachers Association PSRP leader Bernard Washington, who works in the cafeteria, notices the details of poverty: Poor kids keep their heads down, he says. They come to school with their hair uncombed, in pants that are too short and with shoelaces that don’t reach the tops of

their shoes. They ask for more food (“I’m really hungry,” they’ll say, and Washington might slip them money for an extra piece of pizza). Last year, one boy regularly stuffed milk and fruit other children left behind into his backpack. Washington learned the child was homeless.

In McDowell County, W.Va., coal mines are shutting down and there’s not much employment beyond the local grocery store, says Margaret Beavers, who was a pre-K in

Continued on page 6

When POVERTY comes to SCHOOL

Continued from page 5

structional assistant there before her recent retirement. Many parents are drug-addicted or imprisoned, and their children come to school dirty and unfed. Beavers was moved by one particularly troubling case: A 6-year-old girl came to school with makeup meant to hide bruises from physical abuse. The father was a drug dealer, and his girlfriend, arrested for severely beating the child, later committed suicide. “Some of what these children live through, it’s heartbreaking,” says Beavers. Recently elected to the school board, she hopes to continue to serve them, their teachers and other support staff.

Just getting to school can be a challenge in rural Harney County, Ore., where Monica McCanna is a paraprofessional in a life-skills class. Some families must drive 10 miles to reach the bus stop, and if the car breaks down, the child may simply skip school. With no free breakfast for the upper grades, one 16-year-old student “is too busy asking,

‘What’s for lunch today, when is lunch, how long is it to lunch?’” to concentrate on his work, says McCanna. Another boy couldn’t participate in gym class because the only shoes he had were donated in the wrong size and made blisters on his feet. “I know some people in town who are working four and five jobs just to keep food on the table and the kids in clothes,” she says. That leaves little time to help kids with homework.

Other families face exposure to toxins, illnesses and injuries from unsafe living conditions and play areas; tardiness caused by staying back to get younger siblings to school; and stress over violence in the family or neighborhood (that gang-related murder might have taken place right outside your student’s door). Homelessness presents a host of issues, from sleepless nights and dangerous shelters to keeping it all a secret from schoolmates. A 14-year-old Los Angeles boy living with his mother and three siblings in a station wagon described brushing his teeth at a McDonald’s before heading off to school (in an interview with National Public Radio); his friends wondered why he wore the same shirt every day, and his 9-year-old sister complained that her homework was sloppy because she wrote it on the back of the car seat.

What we can do

While the statistics may feel overwhelming, addressing poverty is something many AFT PSRPs do every day. In Anchorage, TOTEM holds a food drive every Labor Day, collects soaps and other personal hygiene items at its holiday social, and participates in Graze to Raise, earning money for charities during a 5K walk with donated restaurant tastings along the way.

In New York, Cincinnati and Massachusetts, community schools provide crucial services, including tutoring, after-school programming and school-based health clinics. Vision tests at one New York community school showed that more than 40 percent of the children needed glasses right away, and the school was able to deliver them, free, without parents having to take time off work, or children having to be pulled from class. Community schools are “a commonsense approach for the common good, and one that I truly believe will reduce the barriers to education,” says Karen Alford, a United Federation of Teachers vice president.

Alford heads the UFT’s Community Schools Learning Initiative in New York City, which is modeled after Cincinnati’s success. In Cincinnati, every school is a community school, and services range from psychiatry to dental care, healthcare, food assistance, tutoring, nutrition, mentoring, peer mediation and vocational guidance for older students. There are groceries for families who need them over the weekend and daycare connections for high school girls ready to drop out because they’ve just become young mothers.

Thinking big, changing policy

Duplicating these sorts of programs and policies could make all the difference for individual families struggling with poverty. But addressing broader policy issues is also essential to bridging the deep economic divide between the haves and the have-nots. The AFT is working hard, for example, to protect the SNAP program, the government food assistance once known as food stamps, currently being threatened by Congress. We are building on our success during the 2014 election, raising the minimum wage state by state. We will continue to fight beside people like Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) for financial reform and income equality. And we will push for affordable, high-quality early childhood education—one of the most effective ways to improve educational and ongoing economic outcomes for all Americans.

In short, we will work to bolster systems that support our most vulnerable families, and elect officials who understand the urgency of taking care of this population, not only because it is the humane thing to do, but because it will help us build a country of strong, smart, prosperous people who can take care of themselves and their families and who are able to contribute their talents—and their tax money—to the common good.

Poverty is a discouraging backdrop in McDowell County, W.Va., where decent housing is so scarce, it’s difficult to recruit school staff to fill vacancies in the schools. To help, the AFT-led Reconnecting McDowell partnership is building an apartment complex specifically designed for educators and other professionals moving to the area.



SRP OF THE YEAR STEPS UP Margie Brumfield, president of the Rochester Association of Paraprofessionals, has been named School-Related Professionals Member of the Year by the New York State United Teachers. Twelve years ago, she rescued RAP, re-establishing her local's connection with members, then elevating teacher aides by creating a professional development program that led to certification as teaching assistants. The result: more respect for the profession. One-third of RAP members are certified now, and Brumfield also persuaded the school district to reimburse college expenses for members who want to become teachers. Salaries have risen steadily as well.

Brumfield began as a classroom volunteer but “fell in love with the kids” and became an employee. She was recruited as a building representative for RAP and became a delegate for NYSUT, the AFT, the NEA and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, among other union positions. She retires as RAP president in January, but recently joined the AFT's PSRP program and policy council and will remain active in the union.

“I always spoke my conscience, always supported [my members], and always encouraged them to use their voice,” she says of her

time as president. “With a small group behind me, that made me feel very empowered.” She calls herself “the encourager.”

“If you don't do it, who's going to do it?” she says. “We need to do it. We need to be united together.”

TRUTH TO POWER Members of the AFT PSRP division visited Capitol Hill in September to urge legislators to support school nutrition programs and summer meals for low-income children. It was all part of the American Association of Classified School Employees' 12th annual legislative conference in Washington, D.C.

Free and reduced-price lunches make a big difference for the 14.7 million children living below the poverty line, and the Summer Meals Act that members were advocating extends the helping hand beyond the school year, providing meals at summer schools, parks, recreation centers and other services located in low-income areas.

Members reached more than two dozen congressional offices during the two-day conference.



STEVE JACOBS

Margie Brumfield

SPEAKING UP FOR RESULTS When Hillsborough (Fla.) School Employees Federation members heard the school board was considering privatizing school bus services, they packed the board meeting to protest. The school board listened, and kept bus drivers in-house. Soon after, a conversation about how deteriorating buses increase maintenance costs and cause delays on the routes convinced the board to order 100 new buses a year, for the next 15 years.

“The purchase of these new buses will help drivers perform their job 100 times better than they were before,” says Stephanie MacNeel, a bus driver and business agent for the local.

After-school instructors raise a RAP band

THESE CHILDREN are serious: the two little girls holding tubas nearly as tall as they are, the group of boys standing ramrod straight with their snare drums, and the line of kids with clarinets and saxophones tucking their chins and carefully placing their fingers on the keys of their instruments. There is no fidgeting or whispering. The William Green Elementary School RAP Marching Band in Lawndale, Calif., a group of third-, fourth- and fifth-graders, is ready to perform.

And wow, can they play! Under the baton of Jason Farr, a member of the Lawndale Federation of Classified Employees, these miniature musicians outshine many middle and high school bands.

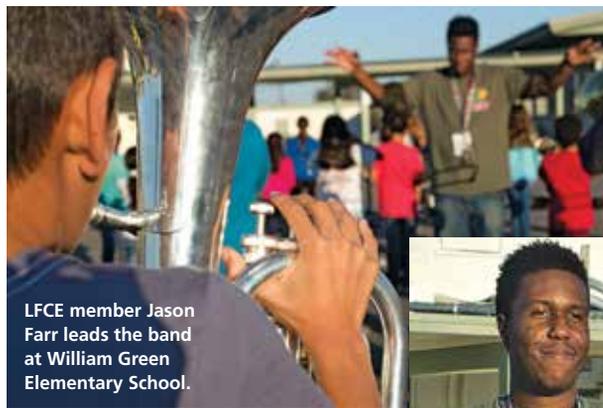
Members of the AFT's PSRP division were lucky enough to hear the RAP band—for Realizing Amazing Potential, the school district's after-school program—at the AFT's convention last summer, but the real story is in the ongoing program these children attend. Farr, along with his colleague Ariceli Guzman, teaches more than 50 children during the school year on instruments obtained through grants and donations (the AFT contributed a \$500 honorarium).

The band has won several awards marching in local holiday parades, and they've even played for the mayor. In 2013, the RAP program won a Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association.

Along with musicianship, Farr and Guzman insist on discipline and focus. “If your parent comes up to you and tries to take a picture, or people tell you you're adorable, you can't let that break your zone,” Farr tells them. “You're a musician.” He also teaches them to be responsible for an instrument, respect others, be on time and look their best.

Farr, Guzman and close to 90 other classified employees who teach RAP classes, such as Mexican dance, skate club and flags, joined the AFT in 2012—the first group of educators to be represented from this sort of after-school program. Considering their level of performance and dedication, “they are at the level of a certified teacher,” says Carl Williams, president of the Lawndale Federation of Classified Employees, which he helped organize. “Our members are on the frontline. These are the people who engage the children every day.”

Farr, who is working his way through community college and hopes to become a full-time music educator in the future, is simultaneously thrilled to see his students' progress and modest about his own success. “If I was able to inspire one kid,” he says, “if I am able to get that ‘aha’ moment in those children, that keeps me going.”



LFCE member Jason Farr leads the band at William Green Elementary School.

PHOTOS BY ARMANDO ARORIZO



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