

Supporting Teaching and Learning



At the heart of any great school is, of course, great teaching. But great teaching doesn't simply spring forth—it isn't just a matter of getting the right person into the right classroom.

Great teaching is cultivated by carefully coordinated education systems that include supportive administrators, knowledgeable and accessible peers, relevant and ongoing professional development, a rigorous curriculum, coherent and focused textbooks, aligned assessments, and so forth. *American Educator* addresses these core educational issues regularly. They are critical for school improvement, but they are not always sufficient for increasing student learning.

Some students come to school hungry or with a toothache or worried about where they will sleep that night. Solving such problems may not be the school's responsibility, but such problems hinder learning all the same.

So while great schools tend to all the educational issues just mentioned, they also ask important questions: What else do our children need? And who can meet those needs?

In this special issue of *American Educator*, researchers, historians, educators, and service providers explore ways to address the nonschool factors that prevent students from achieving their potential. The school plays a key role, but school staff members neither run nor deliver nonacademic services. The school provides community-based partners access to both students and facilities. These partners, whether they are colleges or food banks, health clinics or rec centers, share in the goal of having all students enter class ready to learn. While some services are available during the school day (especially in an emergency), most are provided before and after school, on weekends, and

over the summer, so that students are rarely, if ever, pulled out of class.

This issue of *American Educator* begins with research showing the dramatic differences in home life and health

between our poor and middle-class children. But we don't dwell on these discrepancies for long; they are well known. The rest of our summer issue is devoted to providing examples of successful school-community partnerships and to highlighting lessons learned. In particular, experience and research have shown that it's important for an external organization to take the lead in assessing needs, securing funding, and developing partnerships. Having a point person who coordinates the services and knows the students' schedules is also crucial. As one social worker told us, "You don't want a partner to arrive when the students are on a field trip."

Finding the funds for this work may seem daunting, so it's important to note that much of what is described here does not consist of new services. A great deal can be accomplished just by coming up with new ways of delivering existing services. Many communities already have health clinics, counseling services, food banks, shelters, adult literacy classes, GED programs, etc. But all too often, these services are not centrally located, so low-income families have to spend the whole day on buses crisscrossing the city just to meet a few of their needs. Clearly, bringing these services to the school makes more sense. The children are there, the family is nearby, and the facility is available once school lets out. By wrapping services around the school, school-community partnerships make better use of the school buildings, make community services more accessible, and make students more likely to reach their potential. —EDITORS