



Communications Now

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Supporting children who are in difficult financial circumstances

Difficult economic times translate into students whose families are struggling to pay the bills. Many of these families thought this could never happen to them, and their children are totally unprepared for the trauma of giving up familiar possessions and surroundings or living with the despair of their parents.

Attending the same school every day may be the only constant in students' lives. For these students, school is a refuge, a warm place full of familiar faces that offers a routine that can be depended upon. For some, school lunch and breakfast are the major source of nutrition and school might be the only place they are warm.

Schools that serve disadvantaged students face the problem of finding ways to meet student needs while sheltering the personal identity of the students. Since most schools are dealing with tight budgets, providing services these students need is challenging.

As with any problem there is also an opportunity to explore and implement creative programs that bring many community members and groups together to show profound caring for students in distress.

Partnering with the community

Making community individuals and groups aware of student needs can open the door to building partnerships between schools, various businesses and community organizations that provide valuable services for students and engage community members in meaningful work with schools. For example, members of a church or community center that provides homework help, food, and/or a safe place for kids to go before or after school may gain a deeper understanding of the problems faced by schools as they work to overcome obstacles to student learning.

Designate staff to help

Some school jurisdictions designate a staff person to work with disadvantaged students and their families. The staff member connects people with needed jurisdiction services and is aware of legal requirements for assisting homeless and other children who may need support.

The staff member also works with schools to establish partnerships with local social service, health, religious, service and other organizations to provide basic services that help children cope with difficult circumstances by providing for some of their basic

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needs. These organizations furnish school supplies, shoes, clothes and other physical necessities. Some gather warm coats, gloves and mittens for the students. Others provide caring, committed tutors and adult friends. Still others open their doors to before and after school programs.

The ripple effect

Although these programs are primarily designed to meet the needs of students, the ripple effect results in increased respect for schools and their dedication to helping students.

Community members involved in these programs use a powerful public relations tool — word of mouth from those ‘who know’— to tell other community members about the deep caring for kids and dedication of school staff. Volunteers in this kind of effort often recruit others to help, thus increasing the number of supportive voices in the community.

Best of all, an entire community comes together around the needs of kids and helps kids and their families survive a difficult situation.

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