

# Poverty in Schools:

## How It Affects Learning and School Performance

A total of 1 in 7 school-age children lives in poverty, which has a major impact on their education. Many children from low-income families show up on the first day of kindergarten unable to meet school-readiness guidelines. Also, only half of students who graduate from schools with the highest percentage of students living in poverty, known as high-poverty schools, head to college — with just a quarter of those college-bound students earning a degree within six years.



### Poverty in School by the Numbers

In 2023, nearly

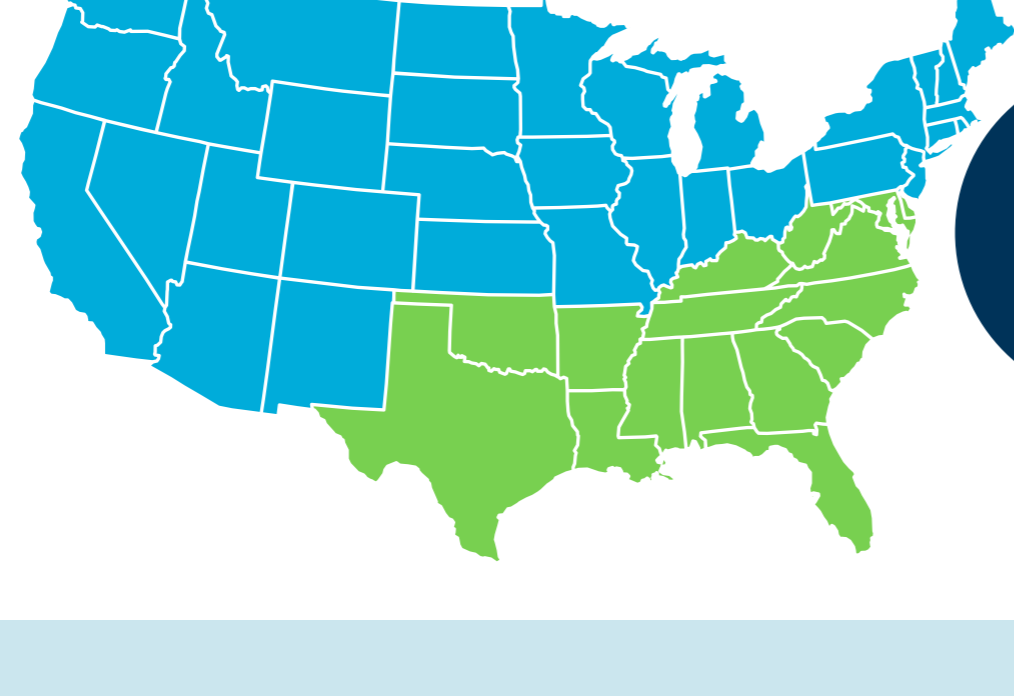


of children ages 5 to 17 lived in poverty.

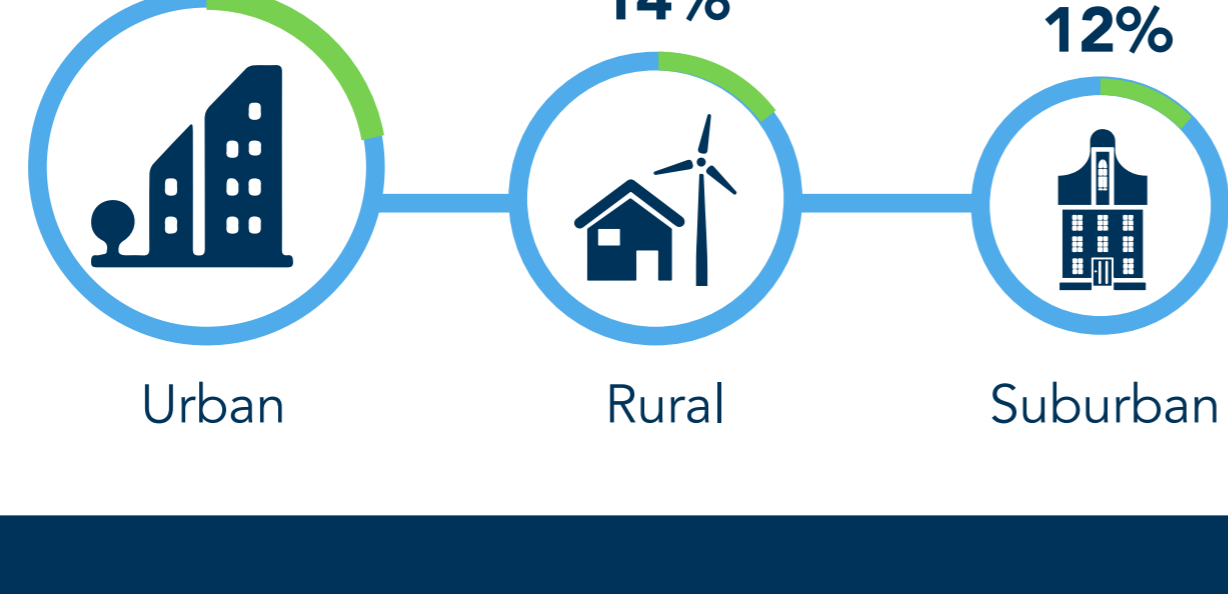
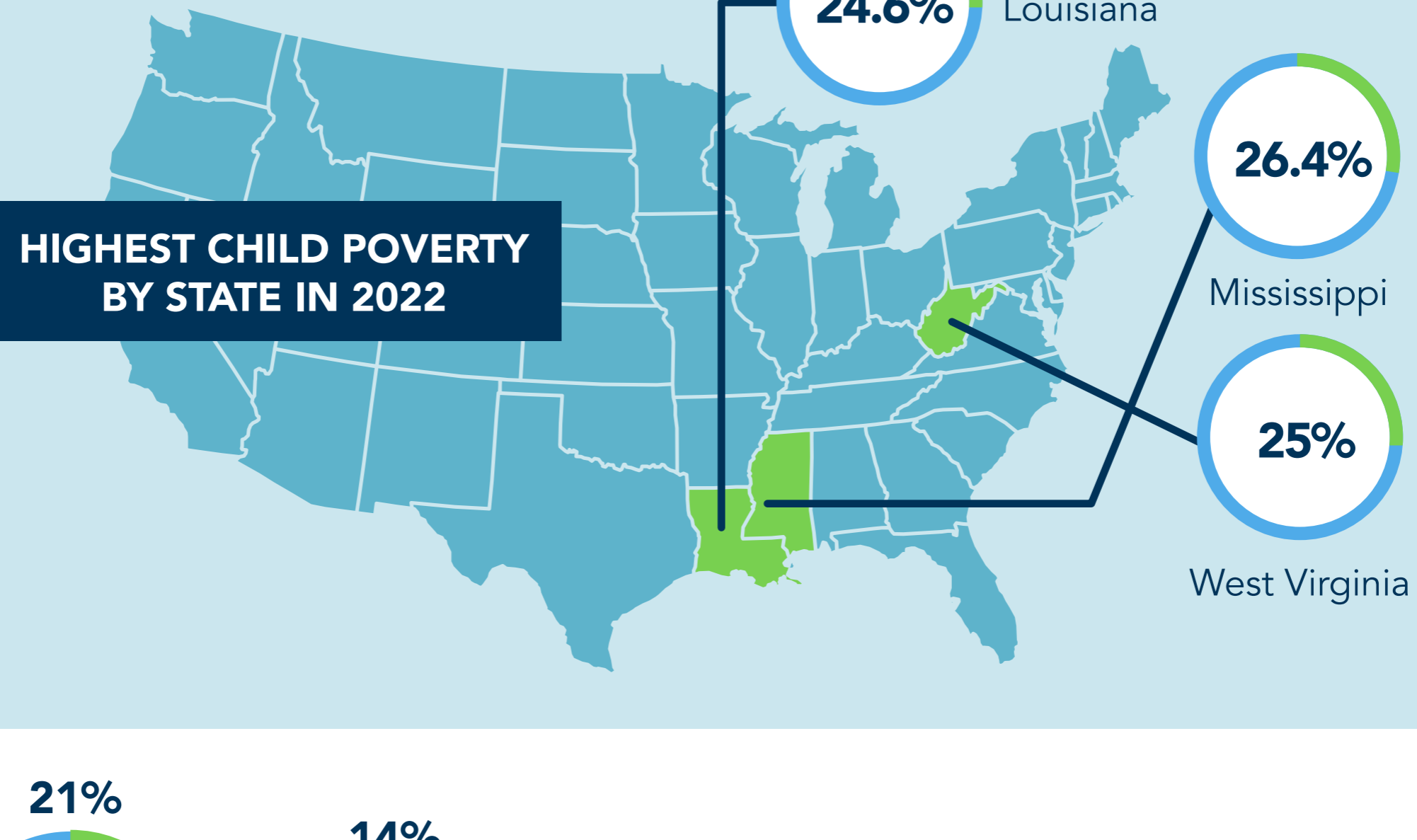


**Hispanic and Black** students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools than other students, while students in urban areas and the South experience poverty at higher rates.

#### PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ATTENDING HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS IN 2021



Southern states had a child poverty rate of over **18% in 2022**, compared with only one state each in the Midwest, Northeast and West.



#### CHILD POVERTY BY SETTING IN 2021

### Learning, Performance and Poverty

Poverty affects children's readiness for school, learning and school performance. Fewer than half of 5-year-olds from low-income families are ready for school. Moreover, only a fraction of graduates of high-poverty schools earn a college degree.



#### POVERTY AND SCHOOL READINESS

Low-income children ready for school at 5 years old **48%**

Moderate- and high-income children ready for school at 5 years old **75%**

#### HOW DOES POVERTY IMPACT SCHOOL READINESS?

- Lack of financial resources
- Parents with lower levels of educational attainment
- Higher rates of single or teen parenthood
- Poorer health

#### BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Conditions outside of school can impact children's learning and development.

**Resources at home**

Low-income students often struggle to complete homework or study because they lack access to computers and high-speed internet service.

**Parent support**

Low-income parents often work long hours, which means they often can't provide their children with as much schoolwork assistance as they need.

**High stress**

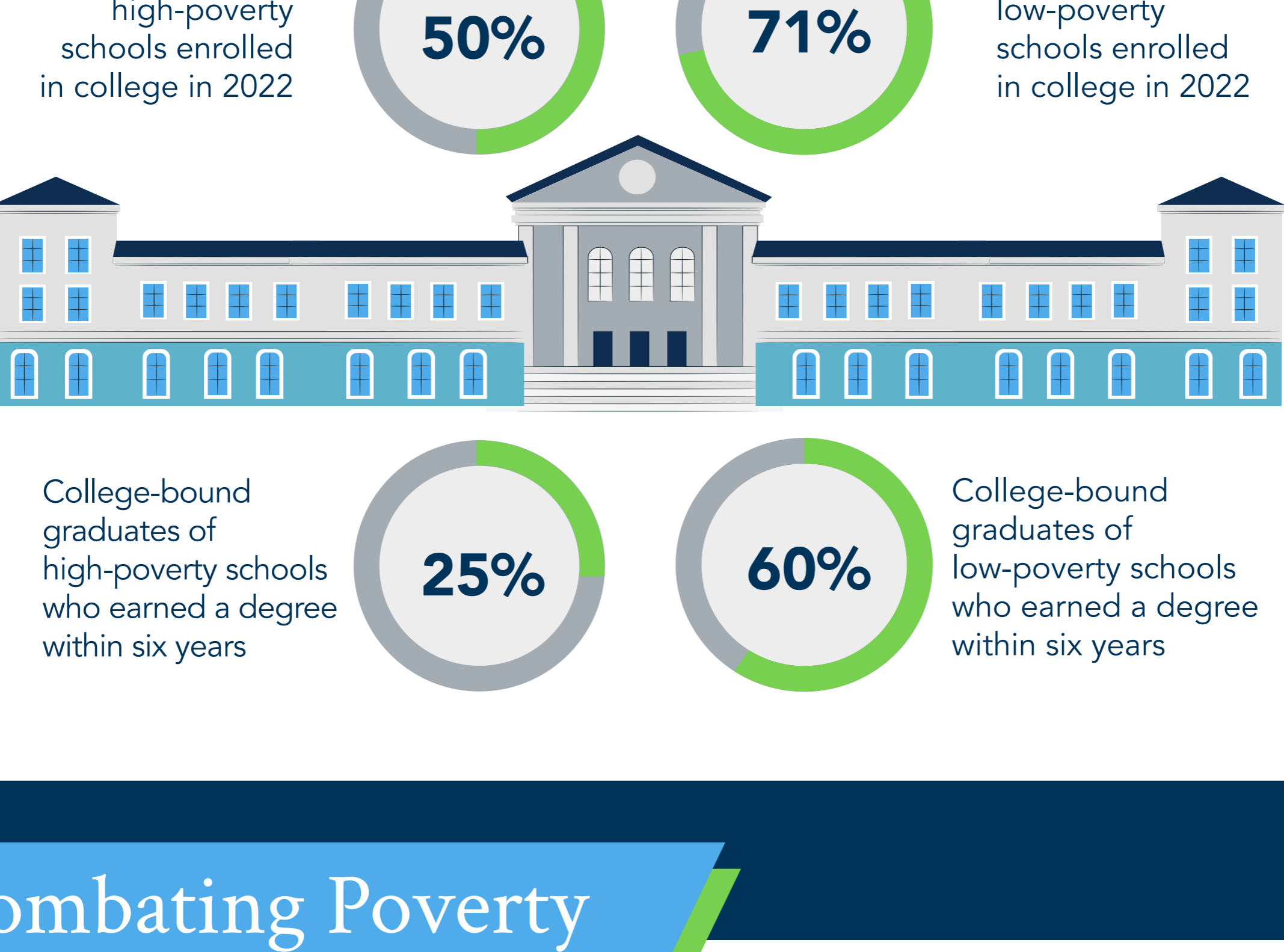
Low-income children are more likely to experience stress, which can harm their executive function and emotional regulation skills.

#### LONG-TERM IMPACT OF POVERTY

More than **1 in 3 children** raised in low-income families in the 1980s failed to make it out of poverty by their 30s. If those numbers hold true for today's children, over **24 million** Americans could remain impoverished into adulthood.

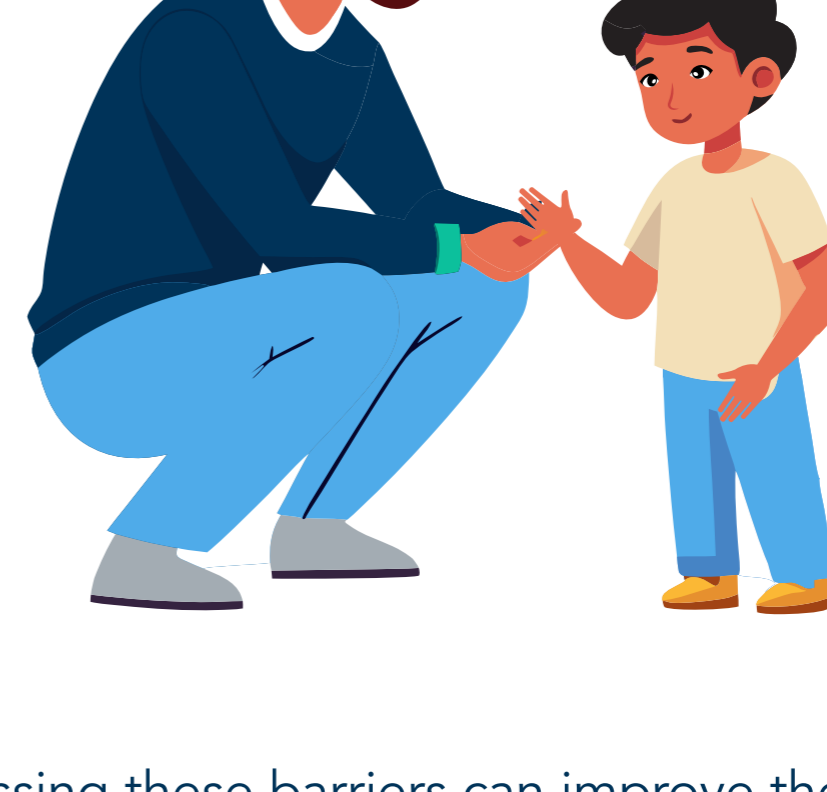


Graduates of high-poverty schools are less likely to attend college and less likely to earn a college degree than other graduates. This can affect their lifelong earning potential.



### Combating Poverty in Schools

How can schools, community organizations and policymakers combat poverty in schools? Poverty is a complex social problem, but research indicates there are some effective ways to support low-income students.



#### ELIMINATE BARRIERS



Identifying and addressing these barriers can improve the educational outcomes of students from low-income families.

- Charging fees, presuming students have the resources they need and assigning excessive homework can all unintentionally make school harder for low-income students.
- School assignment policies that push low-income students into high-poverty schools can disadvantage low-income students.

#### PROVIDE RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Students can't learn without basic resources and services.

Launching a snack program or opening a food pantry at school can help address food insecurity among students.

Addressing the digital divide by providing low-income students with technology and internet access can help them keep up with their peers.

Providing health care services on campus results in healthier students and lower absenteeism.

#### FOCUS ON EARLY LEARNING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Poverty doesn't start when students enter kindergarten and end at graduation. By expanding early learning for low-income students and encouraging them to pursue higher education, schools can address poverty's large impact on students' success.

Partnering with pediatricians and child welfare agencies to help low-income preschool-age children develop the early literacy and numeracy skills they'll need in school can help increase the number of children who are ready for kindergarten.

Partnering with colleges to provide low-income students with scholarships, academic advising and other support services can help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

### Conclusion

**Combating poverty in schools requires community support, school resources and educators committed to fostering an inclusive learning environment. By understanding the challenges that students from low-income families face, educators can support these learners and improve their school performance.**

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