

Figure 9.4. Poverty and Classroom Engagement: Issues and Classroom Actions

Issue	Action
<p>Health and Nutrition Students living in poverty generally are in poorer health and have poorer nutrition than their middle-class peers. Poor health and nutrition affect attention, cognition, and behavior.</p>	<p>Ensure students have daily opportunities for physical activity and that they and their families are aware of free and reduced lunch programs and medical, including mental health, services offered in the community.</p>
<p>Academic Language Students living in poverty generally have limited experience with the kind of language highly valued in school—academic language—than their middle-class peers. Academic language includes general academic and domain-specific vocabulary, discourse practices, and understandings about how different text types are structured.</p>	<p>Attend to academic language development in all areas of the curriculum and in classroom routines. As noted throughout this <i>ELA/ELD Framework</i>, academic language, which includes vocabulary, is a crucial component of ELA/literacy programs and disciplinary learning (as well as all aspects of life and learning). Provide rich language models, prompt and extend responses, and engage the student in discussions.</p>
<p>Effort Some students living in poverty may appear to lack effort at school. This might be due to lack of hope or optimism, depression, or learned helplessness.</p>	<p>Recognize the critical role that teachers and schools play in students’ willingness to exert themselves academically. Strengthen relationships between the school and students.</p>
<p>Hope and the Growth Mind-Set Low socioeconomic status is related to low expectations and a vision of a negative future.</p>	<p>Ensure that students know that their futures and their abilities are not fixed. Provide high-quality feedback that is task-specific and actionable. Support students’ beliefs in their potential (not their limitations) and the rewards of effort.</p>
<p>Cognition Students living in poverty often demonstrate lower academic achievement than their middle-class peers. They may have lower attention spans and other cognitive difficulties. This may result in problem behavior or giving up.</p>	<p>Break content into smaller, manageable components. Ensure that all students receive a rich, engaging, and intellectually stimulating curriculum. Encourage students and provide positive feedback.</p>
<p>Relationships Students living in poverty face considerable adversity, often in the form of disruptive or stressful home relationships. They may become mistrustful or disrespectful; they may be impulsive and respond inappropriately at school.</p>	<p>Ensure that adults at school are positive, caring, and respectful. Make expectations clear. Above all, treat students living in poverty, as well as their families, with dignity, and convey the attitude that all students are welcome and capable of achieving to the highest levels.</p>
<p>Distress Students living in poverty often live in acute chronic distress, which impacts brain development, academic success, and social competence. They may demonstrate aggressive and inappropriate behavior or exhibit passivity.</p>	<p>Recognize the cause of the behavior. Build positive and respectful relationships. Teach coping skills. Seek advice from other school or district professionals, when appropriate.</p>
<p>Source Summarized and adapted from Jensen, Eric. 2013. “How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement.” <i>Educational Leadership</i> 70 (8): 24–30.</p>	