



Get Schooled



Kids are getting poorer. Are they also getting harder to teach?

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The Georgia Budget & Policy Institute issued a report today on the rising poverty in the state. As I read the figures — one out of every five children was poor in 2008 — I wondered about the implication for schools.

The state's job losses have stung every economic strata, so I am sure that all schools, urban, suburban and rural, are feeling the impact. It ranges from flagging fund raisers — some schools are reporting anemic wrapping paper sales this year — to students losing their homes.

Are these family stresses spilling into classrooms? I know many families in which one or two parents are jobless, and it's changed what they can do with and for their children. Fewer summer camps, no more travel soccer.

Are you seeing a change in students? Is there more acting out in school as students react to troubles at home? Are parents less involved? Are calls for donations and field trip fees going unheeded?

According to the policy center report:

-Georgia's 2008 median household income is \$50,861.

-The number of individuals living in poverty in 2008 grew by 57,104 from 2007.

-Georgia's overall poverty rate rose to 14.7 percent in 2008, well above its 2001 level of 11.7 percent during the last recession.

-Roughly one in 7 individuals lived in poverty in 2008. The state's poverty rate is 14th highest in the country.

No matter how hard parents try, I think kids pick up on financial strains. (Explaining to her twin brother why their pal brought \$20 to spend at a carnival this weekend, my 10-year-old daughter said, "He's an only child and his parents don't have to pay for their older children's colleges.")

On top of this, teachers are dealing with financial strains as well since many of them have spouses without jobs.

Is everyone more anxious this year and does it impede learning?