

Offering Help and Hope

CESA 6 H.O.P.E. Center helps districts across the state support low-income families and students

SESSION *High Expectations and Opportunities for Poverty in Education*

Presenters CESA 6 HOPE Center: Tere Masiarchin, coordinator; Jackie Schoening, coordinator



Responding to calls from districts concerned about how to help their students and families living in poverty, staff at CESA 6 decided to offer hope. Literally.

The High Expectations and Opportunities for Poverty in Education (H.O.P.E.) Center is now open at CESA 6 to help districts across the state respond to and support the growing number of families and students who live in poverty. The center's coordinators, Jackie Schoening and Tere Masiarchin, discussed the issue of poverty and the ways they can help schools cope.

According to Schoening, statistics show that one in five children in the U.S. live in poverty. Poverty levels are defined by the federal government and change each year. For a family of four, the 2016 poverty level is having an

annual income at or below \$24,036.

Poverty frequently leads to low achievement in school. Because they don't have the same resources as their more affluent peers, children in poverty start school with fewer verbal skills.

"They start school behind already," Schoening said.

Dropout rates are higher because students may have to go to work or provide child care for their siblings.

Poverty can be linked to other issues as well. Schoening noted that in the geographic area served by CESA 6, the youth suicide rate is more than double the state rate, which is already high. Suicide is now the number two cause of death among children, behind accidents.

Schoening said that they aren't sure why the youth suicide rate is so high in the CESA 6 area. But she recounted

a tragic story of a teen from an immigrant family with six children. The parents had lost their jobs. The teen killed himself by stepping in front of a train, leaving a note explaining that he wanted to make more money available to provide for his siblings.

"Kids listen to what we talk about. He knew they didn't have money," she said.

In 2014, as poverty rates began to rise and they were starting to hear more districts identify poverty as an issue, CESA 6 decided to find some way to help. Schoening and Masiarchin went through the Total Trainers program developed by Eric Jensen, the author of "Teaching with Poverty in Mind" and "Poor Students, Richer Teaching."

Jensen said the stresses caused by poverty mean the brains of students in poverty are different than their peers. She offered strategies for engaging students and helping them achieve.

A key to helping families in poverty is understanding what their life is like. Schoening and Masiarchin recommended exercises such as the online simulation at playspent.org or a half-day workshop simulation offered by the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

The H.O.P.E. Center offers staff development, online book studies, reviews of district services to identify gaps and develop an improvement plan, coaching, and suggestions for ways to engage families. By joining the center, districts can also take part in a quarterly review where they can compare efforts with other districts.

For more information about the H.O.P.E. Center, visit cesa6.org. ■

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