The New P.E. station, where individual students can instructor demonstrate those poses. French Road teachers and their yoga to help children focus, get energy, or just positions. “A teacher can pull out a pose for response, students raise their arms releasing one finger at a time as they take a long breath, and do the reverse as they breathe out. One of their favorites, Liu continues, is called the Volcano, in which they place their palms together at their chest, breathe in deeply, and then “explode” as they exhale, raising their hands over their heads then returning them to their sides. Good Results Educators who’ve taken advantage of the new P.E. are more than happy with the results. “Kids are really incorporating yoga into who they are,” says Rabidoux, who tells the story of one student recently stuck in an elevator during a visit to New York City. While the adults surrounding her were starting to panic, the youngest took some yoga breaths to calm herself down. “More teachers are recognizing that students cannot sit for very long and are putting in short movement breaks,” adds Theresa Cone, an assistant professor of health and exercise science at Rowan University, who together with her husband, Stephen, has coauthored several books on new approaches to physical education. “I had one student teacher who convinced the entire school to stop every afternoon and do two minutes of exercise,” she recalls, explaining that the student teacher delivered instructions for simple movements over the school’s intercom. “The teachers and students loved it!” Cone also insists that the same movements—such as twisting side to side, circling arms, reaching up and down, marching forward and backward—can be practiced in any classroom by students standing next to their desks. She also suggests having small groups of students take turns devising and leading a one-minute activity break every day. “The results will be pleasantly surprising,” she promises, “and they’ll be using the 21st-century skills of collaboration, problem solving, and creativity.”

Schools to the Rescue Educators are finding ways to make the lives of poor students and their families better every day. By Samantha Cleaver

When Theresa Kiger arrived at Roy Clark Elementary in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as the assistant principal in 2001, she met teachers who were paying students’ electric bills. In December, the hallways were jammed with teacher-bought gifts, from hand-me-down bikes to new mattresses. “Teachers understood that basic needs had to be met,” says Kiger, “but there was no way to take care of those needs and teach math and reading.” In 2002, Kiger took over as principal and began to re-envision how the school could serve families. She partnered with the University of Oklahoma and converted a lounge into a health clinic. A full-time behavioral health therapist was hired to address students’ emotional needs. Now, a community service coordinator connects families with community services. The ultimate goal, though, is to impact student achievement. “As a partner,” says Jane Quinn, director of the Children’s Aid Society’s National Center for Community Schools, “we come in with a set of services that are designed to remove barriers to learning.” Since 1999, community schools have expanded to 49 states and Washington, D.C. Districts from Evansville, Indiana, to Oakland, California, are focusing reforms around the community school

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In 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that 22.5 percent of U.S. children live in food insecure households. The number of people who live with “very low food security” doubled from 2000 to 2008. In response, some schools are opening up summer meal programs. During the summer, Earl Boyles Elementary in Portland, Oregon, serves hot lunches to area families. This year, SUN will be working to expand the summer meal program so families can eat on holidays and conference days, too.

Reducing Absenteeism

Obviously, students who consistently miss school lose learning in the process. It’s estimated that 10 percent of kindergarten and first-grade students can keep kids in school.

At a rural Missouri school, one family wasn’t able to send their kids to school regularly because they didn’t have clean clothes. In response, KC LINC bought a washer and dryer for the school. Now, the kids pick up clean clothes when they arrive. Washers and dryers “are small things that nobody’s going to campaign for,” says Schondelmeyer. “but if you’re the teacher it makes a difference.”

Schools as Education Centers

Engaging parents who are dealing with concerns at home or learning English is challenging, so schools are making use of resources to educate parents. Twice a week at Greenview Park Elementary School in Northfield, Minnesota, parents join their children for breakfast. When the bell rings, the kids go to class and parents attend an ESL class. Eventually, says Hannah Puckaro, community education director of the Northfield Public Schools, he hopes that parents will become classroom volunteers.

SUN also hosts a parenting class that discusses child development, healthy meals, and community green markets such as the one pictured above.

As part of the efforts of the Children’s Aid Society in Harlem, New York, some schools offer community green markets such as the one pictured above.

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Schools to the Rescue

relationships, and child-rearing techniques. After a 2009–10 class, 67 percent of the participants scored higher on a nurturing scale, and 64 percent of parents were more confident in their ability to help their child learn.

Schools as Enrichment Centers

Linda Lanier, CEO of the Jacksonville Children’s Commission, insists that low-income children need access to the same experiences as middle-class peers if they are to succeed. That’s why 42 of the Children’s Commission’s 62 after-school programs are targeted at kids who are in danger of retention, says Lanier. Through community partnerships, 10,000 kids a day experience chess club, sports, leadership activities, and more.

In general, students who attend after-school programs have better school-day attendance than kids who aren’t involved, which usually translates to academic benefits. At Bailey Elementary, students attend after-school programs that start with reading or math intervention and end with enrichment, from karate to gardening. Every student who attended the programs dramatically improved their reading scores. The key, says Principal Picchione, is making after school a seamless extension of the school day. A smooth transition between school and enrichment means greater achievement for students.

Connecting With Community: The Results

When students are getting their basic needs met, they’re ready to learn. No surprise, then, that a study by the Children’s Aid Society found that, in New York City, teachers reported that having community service professionals in their building “enabled them to teach.” In many ways, bringing community services into schools is a way of reconnecting teachers and students. “Teachers can’t be social workers and good teachers,” says Peggy Samolinski, SUN Community Schools program administrator, but connecting families with services “is creating opportunities where children can leave their worries at the classroom door.”

THE TEACHER’S ROLE

Whether or not you work in a “community school,” you can play a vital role when it comes to connecting students with resources. Here’s how to maximize your role.

Find Out Who’s in Charge If your school has a community services coordinator, or community services office, learn about the existing resources and partnerships.

Collect Resources If there is a resource guide for your district, keep it handy for quick referrals.

Act Early Teachers are the first source of referrals for students, says Peggy Samolinski, SUN Community Schools program administrator. You’re the attendance taker who notices who’s not sleeping well, who’s hungry, who can’t see the chalkboard.

Start the Conversation Community school partnerships often start with a conversation between a teacher, a principal, and a community organization, says Ira Harkavy, director of the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, and teachers need to be on board for any service partnership to work.

Know Your Neighborhood Get to know the families you’re working with by doing porch visits in the weeks before school starts. Visit the family with the sole goal of building a relationship, before there’s an academic or behavioral problem.

Assess Your Needs The first step, according to the Harvard Family Research Project, is to figure out what your school needs. It will be more effective to connect your school with resources once you know what your community lacks.

Connect With Your School’s Programs Teachers can work to make the transitions between class, after school, and even the next grade level as seamless as possible simply by communicating with after-school personnel, working with an after-school program, or meeting with teachers who will work with their students next year.