



NCCP National Center for
Children in Poverty

Columbia University
MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH



Urban Poverty and Student Achievement: Facing the Challenge

Nancy K. Cauthen, PhD

Deputy Director

Council of Urban Boards of Education: Issues Forum

Washington, DC

February 4, 2006

National Center for Children in Poverty

Who We Are

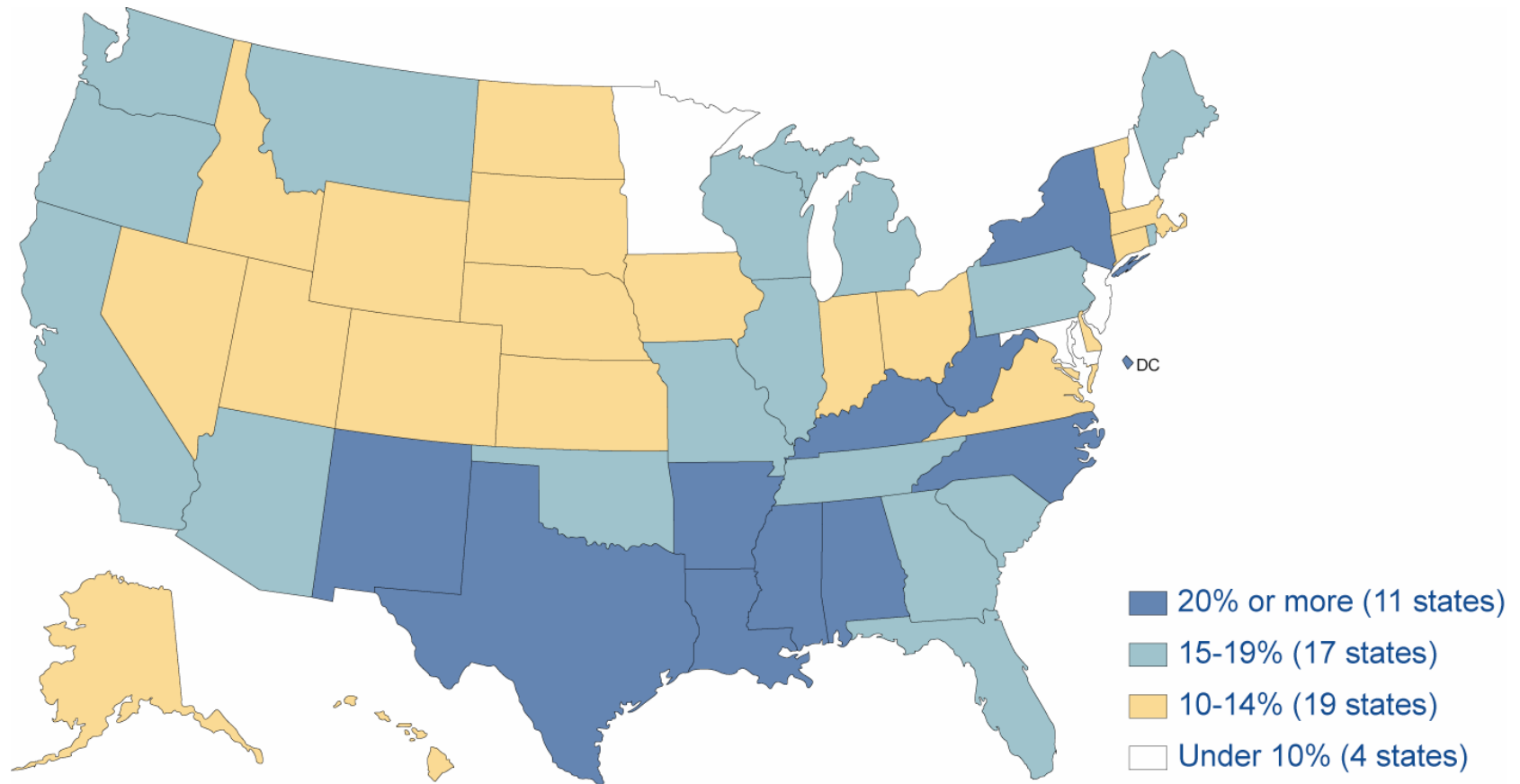
- NCCP is a non-partisan, public interest research organization at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.
- NCCP uses research to promote the economic security, health, and well-being of America's low-income children and families.

Overview of Child Poverty in the U.S.

National Statistics

- Federal poverty level: \$20,000 a year for a family of 4.
- 18% of children nationally—nearly 14 million—live in poverty.
- But child poverty rates vary dramatically by state—from 7% in New Hampshire to 25% in Arkansas.

Child Poverty Rates Vary By State



Source: Estimates prepared by the National Center for Children in Poverty from the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2005.

Overview of Child Poverty in the U.S.

Urban Areas

- Not surprisingly, child poverty rates are higher in urban areas.
- 27% of children in urban areas—5 million—live in poverty (compared to 18% overall).
- Variation by city is just as dramatic as variation by state.

Overview of Child Poverty in the U.S.

Cities with the Highest Child Poverty Rates

1. 48%: Atlanta
2. 48%: Detroit
3. 45%: Long Beach, CA
4. 41%: Miami
5. 41%: Milwaukee
6. 41%: El Paso
7. 39%: Memphis
8. 38%: New Orleans
9. 36%: Philadelphia
10. 35%: Baltimore
11. 34%: Oakland
12. 34%: District of Columbia
13. 33%: Newark
14. 32%: Cleveland
15. 32%: Buffalo
16. 32%: Stockton, CA
17. 32%: Fresno, CA
18. 31%: Chicago
19. 31%: New York
20. 31%: Kansas City, MO

Overview of Child Poverty in the U.S.

Official Poverty Rates Understate the Problem

- The federal poverty measure is widely agreed to be inadequate.
- It does not account for work-related expenses, e.g., child care & transportation.
- It does not adjust for variation in local living costs.
- Research shows that it takes, on average, an income of about twice the FPL to cover basic family expenses—it takes more in most urban areas.

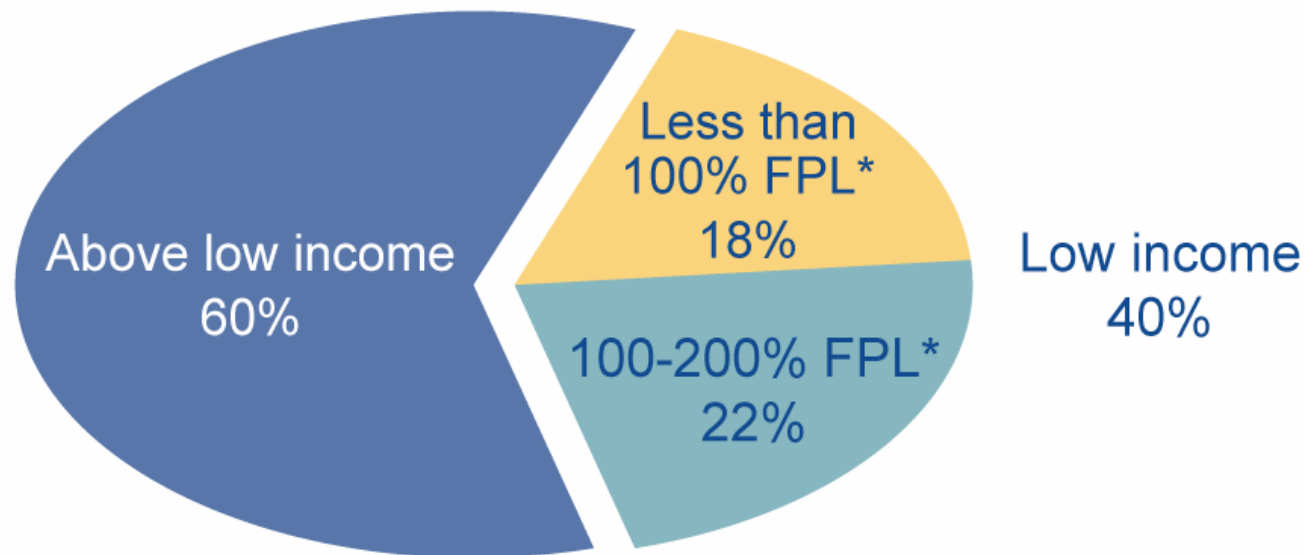
Children Living in Low-Income Families

Low Income is a Better Proxy for Need

- Low income is defined as having an income below *twice* the FPL, i.e., \$40,000 for a family of 4.
- 40% of children nationally—29 million—are low income (compared to 18% who are poor).
- 52% of children who live in urban areas—nearly 10 million—are low income.

Children Living in Low-Income Families

Children by family income, 2004



* The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is determined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Source: Estimates prepared by the National Center for Children in Poverty from the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2005.

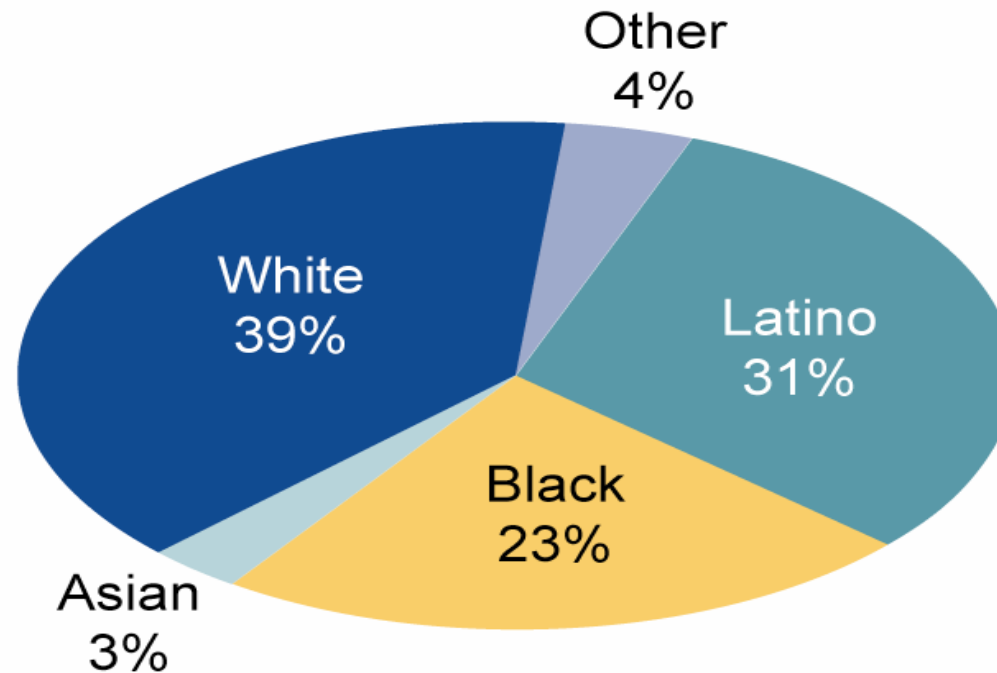
Children Living in Low-Income Families

Low Income Rates Vary By Race/Ethnicity

- 63% of Latino children—8.9 million—live in low-income families.
- 61% of black children—6.6 million—live in low-income families.
- 30% of Asian children—0.9 million—live in low-income families.
- 27% of white children—11.7 million—live in low-income families.

Child Low Income Rates Vary By Race

**Children living in low-income families,
by race and ethnicity, 2004**



Source: Estimates prepared by the National Center for Children in Poverty from the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2005.

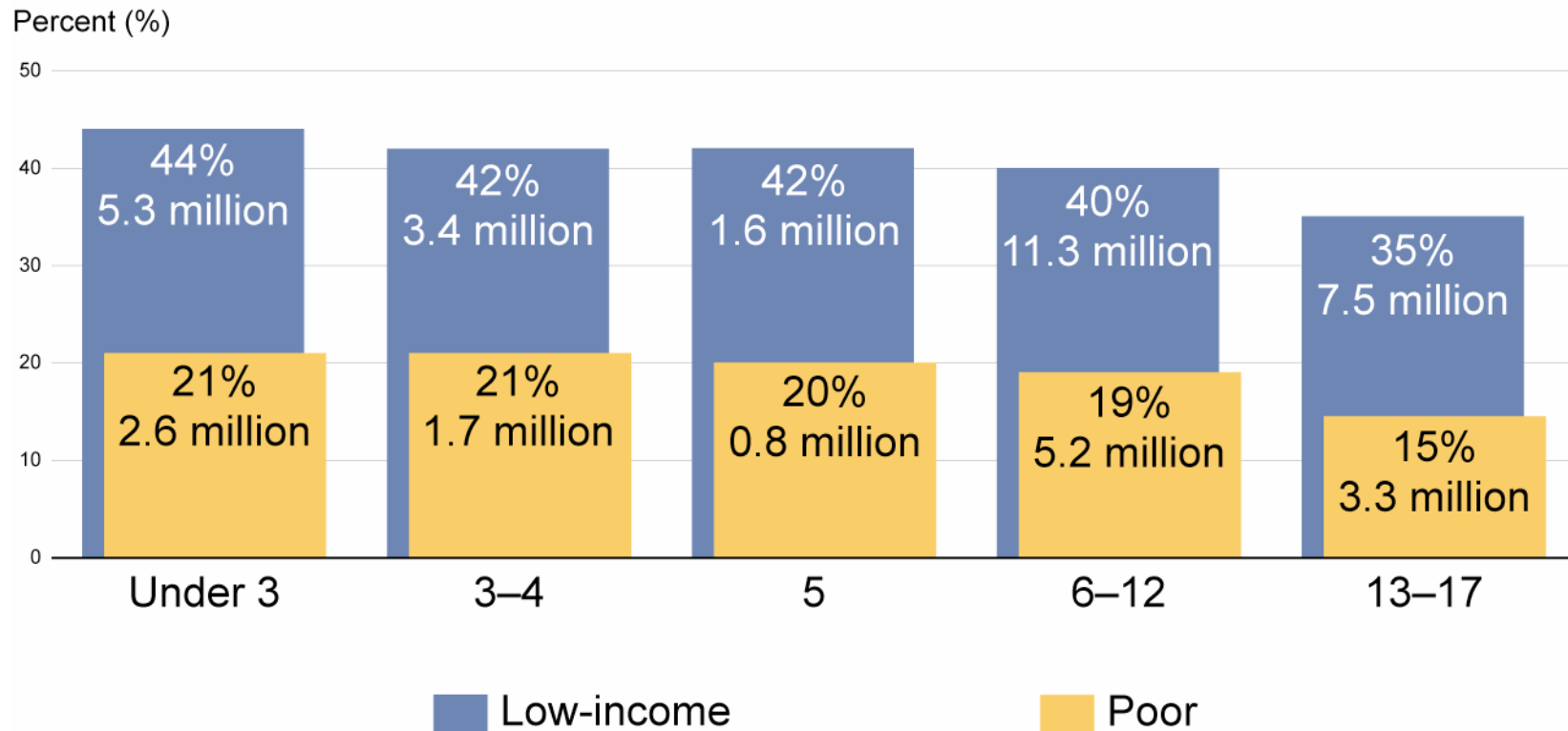
Children Living in Low-Income Families

Low Income Rates Vary By Age

- The younger the children, the more likely they are to live in poor or low-income families.
- 43% of children under age 6 are low-income, compared to 35% of teenagers.
- The younger the children, the more harmful poverty is to developmental outcomes

Child Low Income Rates Vary By Age

Children living in low-income and poor families, by age group, 2004



Source: Estimates prepared by the National Center for Children in Poverty from the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2005.

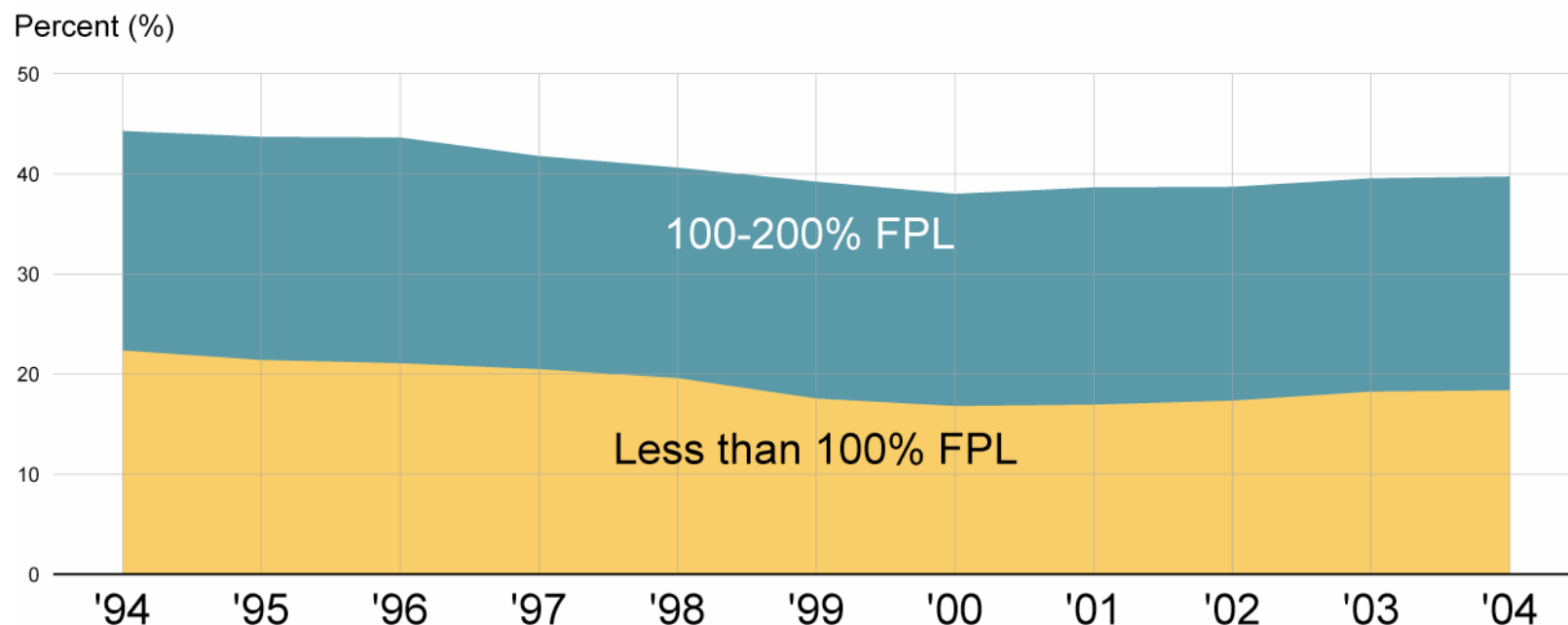
Children Living in Low-Income Families

The Situation is Getting Worse

- Child poverty and low-income rates have increased each of the last 5 years.
- Child poverty has increased by 12% since 2000.
- Real median household income has decreased every year since 2000.

The Situation is Getting Worse

Children living in low-income families, 1994-2004



Source: Estimates prepared by the National Center for Children in Poverty from the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

What this Means for Urban School Boards

How Low Incomes Hold Children Back

- Low family income can impede children's cognitive development and ability to learn.
- It can also contribute to poor health, and social, emotional, and behavioral problems.
- Low-income parents are more stressed and have fewer resources—emotional, educational, and financial—to provide their children.

What this Means for Urban School Boards

Public Policies Matter

- The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) supplements the wages of low earners with children.
- Medicaid and SCHIP provide no-cost and affordable health insurance.
- Food stamps supplement what school breakfast and lunch programs can do.
- Child care subsidies can cover before- and after-school care.

What Urban School Boards Can Do

Address the Needs of Preschoolers

- Child development—and the seeds for early school success—starts at birth.
- Yet, children under age 6 are disproportionately low income compared to older children.
- Support early enrichment services for low-income children—Early Head Start, Head Start, and pre-k with comprehensive services.

What Urban School Boards Can Do

Address the Needs of Parents

- Maternal education is the top predictor of children's school success.
- Support national, state, and local efforts to expand access to post-secondary education for low-income parents.
- Educate state and local leaders about the importance of support services for parents—quality child care, services for mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence.

What Urban School Boards Can Do

Maximize Non-School Resources

- Get state and local policymakers to increase outreach efforts for public benefits that assist low-income families.
- Base family support services in the schools or use schools to link families with services and benefits.
- Solicit support of the private sector—employers and corporate donors.

What Urban School Boards Can Do

Looking Toward the Future

- Poverty is the single biggest obstacle to improving student achievement.
- Educate national, state, and local leaders about the importance of family economic security for healthy child development and positive school success.
- Income integration of our schools is the wave of the future.