

# Marketplace from American Public Media

Education



## Tackling poverty along with reading and arithmetic



Fourth-grader Charles Marsh gets a checkup at Oyler School's health clinic. Nurse practitioner Dilruba Rahman treats students at school and bills their insurance or Medicaid.

- Amy Scott/Marketplace

[Marketplace for Thursday, May 10, 2012](#)

- [Transcript](#)

[Part one: It's never too early for a good start in education](#)

**Kai Ryssdal:** Education is the great equalizer. It's historically the path out of poverty in this country. But how do you get poor kids to do well in class if they're not getting enough to eat at home? Or they need glasses? Or their parents can't help them with their homework at night?

What if you took care of a lot of the stuff that's supposed to happen outside school in school?

In the second of two stories on education and poverty, Marketplace's Amy Scott takes us to a school in Cincinnati trying to do exactly that.

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**Amy Scott:** Charles Marsh has a sore throat.

**Dilruba Rahman:** Go ahead and stick your tongue out. Ah.

**Charles Marsh:** Ah.

**Rahman:** Big "ah."

**Charles:** Aaaah.

Charles is a fourth-grader at Oyler School in Cincinnati's Price Hill. And today, instead of leaving school to see a doctor, he's walked down the hall to the health clinic, where nurse practitioner Dilruba Rahman takes a look.

**Rahman:** So guess what Charles...

She tells him he has strep.

**Charles:** I do?

**Rahman:** Yeah, but it's OK. I called in some antibiotic for you, it's going to be at the Walgreens. And as soon as you go home, start taking it and you can come to school tomorrow...

Most of the kids at Oyler are considered poor. Without this clinic a lot of them would get their basic care in emergency rooms. Instead they come to Rahman for vaccinations, checkups and when they're sick. And she bills Medicaid.

Oyler doesn't just have a health clinic. A dental van provides regular checkups. A vision clinic will open next year.

**Craig Hockenberry:** We tried to create this vision of a one-stop shop.

Craig Hockenberry is principal at Oyler.

**Hockenberry:** So if a parent walks through our door right now and has a child that's sick, needs glasses, has a mental health issue, we don't have to send them anywhere else.

The school has three full-time therapists and a psychiatrist who can prescribe medications. Lower Price Hill, where most of the kids live, is one of the toughest neighborhoods in the city.

Hockenberry says children at Oyler are dealing with stresses most of us wouldn't believe.

**Hockenberry:** Rape, murder, incest, incarceration -- anything that you can imagine that goes along with poverty, and a lot of it went untreated. And over time, we were able to get children into counseling, and we saw our suspensions and a lot of our behaviors go down.

In the late 1990s the Ohio Supreme Court found the conditions of public schools in the state unconstitutionally bad. Leaders in Cincinnati decided to rebuild its schools as community learning centers, schools that would be hubs of their neighborhoods, with an array of social services and after school programs.

Today, the district has one of the largest networks of community schools in the country. Darlene Kamine directs the Community Learning Center Institute. She says when she brought the idea to Lower Price Hill about eight years ago, she was floored by the response.

**Darlene Kamine:** The room was packed, standing room only and out into the hallway, with people who were quite angry.

At the time, Oyler only went through eighth grade. Parents wanted a high school. The neighborhood is mostly urban Appalachian -- that is people, mostly white, with roots in the Appalachian Mountains.

Kamine says the culture is so insulated parents didn't want to send their children to high schools outside the neighborhood. So after eighth grade, most students dropped out.

**Kamine:** Children from this neighborhood were in fact not graduating from high school. In the Census data, there was no evidence that anybody in this community had gone to college at the time.

So they decided to rebuild Oyler School as a community learning center that went all the way through 12th grade. Today it has about 750 students. The school serves breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack. After school programs include nutrition and computer classes and dance. Oyler has college and career counselors, hundreds of volunteer tutors.

Most of this is provided by nonprofits that operate rent-free in the school using their own funding. Every obstacle that poverty presents -- absent parents, asthma, hunger -- the school fights back with some service.

**Jami Harris:** Fridays are totally the worst day of my week, because I have to decide which of our kids are hungrier.

Coordinating all of these services is an ex-bank manager named Jami Harris. Bracelets jangling, she walks several miles a day, back and forth down the hallways, corralling kids. On Fridays, she sends the neediest students home with food to get them through the weekend.

**Harris:** We've got some beef stew, we've got red beans and rice, usually cereal, a pudding, a fruit cup.

School leaders say this community approach is making a difference. Students are doing better on state tests. Six years ago, Oyler was considered an "academic emergency" by the state. Now it's making "continuous improvement."

**Rachel Tapp:** I think the biggest impact is that the kids are here.

Rachel Tapp teaches fifth and sixth grade math. She says when she started at Oyler 10 years ago, attendance was phenomenally low.

**Tapp:** And now, if they have a need, it's filled within the school and usually outside of the academic time. So they're in their seats and they're learning so much more of the time.

This spring, Oyler will graduate its third class of seniors. One of them is Matthew Applegate. He didn't think he could afford college. But an Oyler mentoring program taught him how to get financial aid.

**Matthew Applegate:** That's always been a big goal for me, was to go to college. My family has never been real big in college and I want to change that.

Remember just 10 years ago, almost no one from Oyer finished high school. This year, out of 38 seniors, 36 are on track to get their diplomas. All of them have been accepted to college.

In Cincinnati, I'm Amy Scott for Marketplace.

## **About the author**

Amy Scott is Marketplace's education correspondent covering the K-12 and higher education beats, as well as general business and economic stories. Follow Amy on Twitter @amyreports.