



AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS

Equal Opportunity

FOR SOME OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN, IT'S JUST A FAIRY TALE



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Equalizing Opportunity

How should America, the land of opportunity, define educational equity? Opinions range from equal funding to equal outcomes, but we are failing by either measure. After four decades of rapidly increasing inequality throughout our society, we are at risk: At risk of believing that enormous disparities in income are natural, inevitable, and good. At risk of becoming blind to inequities—like child homelessness and hunger—that we should find appalling. At risk of denying the fact that when children do not have access to clean, safe schools with a rigorous, common curriculum and well-qualified teachers, they do not live in a land of opportunity. At risk of losing our prized position as, in Lincoln's words, "the last best hope of earth." Americans believe in equal opportunity and social mobility. This *American Educator* is a call to action.

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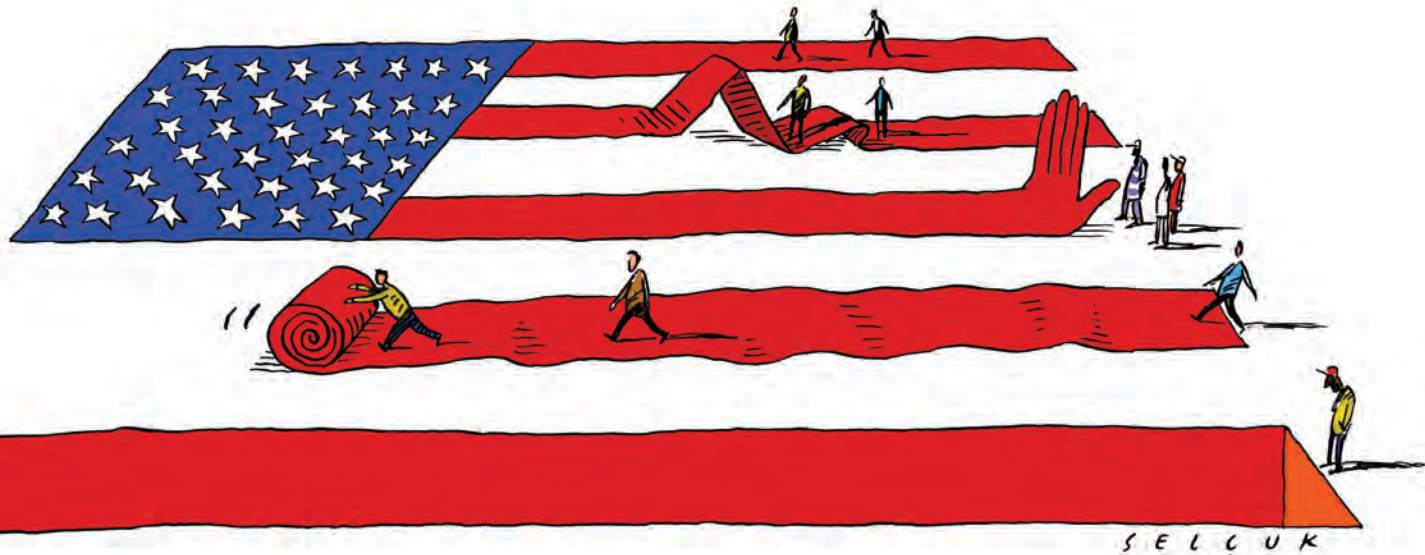
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Preserving the American Dream

A Teacher-Turned-Congressman Starts a National Dialogue on Equity



BY MICHAEL HONDA

We are now more than a year into the economic recovery. While the worst of the Great Recession has passed, it has become clear that persistently high unemployment, coupled with budget woes that stretch from federal to local government, will be a reality for the foreseeable future. Knowing this, Congress, the Obama administration, and our constituents across the country are having a serious discussion about our nation's economy and what needs to be done to keep us competitive in the 21st century.

To make sure that education is where it belongs—at the heart of the conversation—we need to reframe what the president and others have called the civil rights issue of our time. Education is

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not only one of the greatest civil rights issues of our time, but it is also one of the greatest competitiveness issues, making it one of the greatest long-term economic issues, and by extension, one of the greatest national security issues we are faced with today.

The urgency of this eludes us, which is why it is up to each of us to do the pick-and-shovel work of building the political will to motivate our country to recognize this crisis, and act. Let me kick-start that conversation by sharing my vision, what I am doing to build that political will, and what I think we need to do in order to create real equity.

Currently, the United States is confronting two achievement gaps that threaten the future of our communities. The first achievement gap separates our communities by class and ethnicity. This attacks the very principle upon which our nation was founded: a promise of equal opportunity for all. Public education is the tool through which our society strives to deliver on this promise. When public education is inequitable, the foundation of our democratic society is compromised.

The second achievement gap is between the United States and other developed countries. Even though the United States spends more per pupil than any other developed nation, we compare poorly with other developed countries because our

achievement in reading, science, and math has remained stagnant over the last 30 years. Although our per-pupil spending is relatively high, it masks a serious funding gap outside the classroom. In overall social spending, the United States ranks dead last among developed nations. It is not surprising, then, that the United States has the fourth-highest rate of child poverty among developed nations.

All this adds up to threaten our competitiveness and our security because in the global economy, education is the enabler of opportunity and the enhancer of long-term financial stability and prosperity. The only way the United States will remain a world leader in the 21st century is if it ensures that the most competitive economy is built by the most highly skilled, innovative, and agile workforce.

The first achievement gap threatens the authenticity of the American dream by denying each child equal access to realize his or her fullest potential. But the second achievement gap represents an attack on the American dream itself because it threatens the viability of the middle class.

In order to address both of these gaps, we must distinguish

additional resources to address needs that originate outside the classroom. Equalize funding, and we would have only achieved parity of resources, not equity of opportunity.

Only by addressing the individual needs of each child, regardless of cost per pupil, can we attain equity. This will require precision in the way we finance public education and the way we calculate the level of resources we direct toward each child.

Inequity in education has deep historical roots. At its inception, the federal government lacked the capacity and the authority to take responsibility for public education. During the Revolutionary War, the 13 colonies ratified the Articles of Confederation, which severely limited the power of the central government. Because a unanimous vote was required to make amendments to the Articles, each state had, in essence, veto power over changes.

To ensure that the central government would remain weak, it was given no taxing power. Not only was the central government dependent on the states for funding, it was unable to force delinquent states to pay. After the Revolutionary War, when the need



When public education is inequitable, the foundation of our democratic society is compromised.

between equity and parity. In California, for example, while all schools may, in theory, be created equal, not all schools are treated equally. Consequently, any statewide funding cut disproportionately harms low-income communities and high-need students.

California's disparities are representative of funding disparities across the nation. The highest-spending American school district spends roughly 10 times more per pupil than the lowest-spending district. My congressional district in the Silicon Valley region, for example, contains one school district that spends nearly twice as much per student as an adjacent, similarly sized district. Unsurprisingly, the better-funded district has higher teacher salaries, lower student-teacher ratios, higher standardized test scores, and higher graduation rates than the neighboring district, which struggles with half the funding.

Federal funding tries to reduce these gaps and bridge these disparities by supplementing local budgets with additional federal dollars. The thinking here is that it will result in equal per-pupil spending across the system. This is not equity because it fails to take into account the specific needs of each child, including the need to address the achievement gap that develops before children enter school. Poor and minority students often require

for a stronger central government was apparent to many—but not all—state leaders, Rhode Island boycotted the Constitutional Convention and then refused to ratify the new Constitution, preferring the substantial freedom provided by the Articles. To placate states like Rhode Island, the Tenth Amendment ceded broad authority to the state governments.

Consequently, as regions of the country developed their own public education systems, disparities opened up. These disparities became more pronounced and localized as states used local property taxes to finance their own schools. It was not until the civil rights movement that the federal government became actively involved in financing education through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975, in an effort to level the playing field. The Supreme Court, in its 1973 decision in *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez*, effectively removed federal courts from school finance. To this day, federal dollars represent less than 10 percent of public education funding. State governments provide the bulk of the funding, so they are mostly immune to federal efforts to reform education policy.

The current crisis in state budgets has created a historic opportunity to change this paradigm. Most state governments,

mired in long-term fiscal trouble, are willing to accept requirements imposed by the federal government in order to receive desperately needed aid.

Paradigmatic change is already happening. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has altered the political landscape through competitive grant programs like Race to the Top, which provide state and local governments with funding if the recipient agrees to certain educational reforms. The impending reauthorization of ESEA has taken the process a step further: more than 40 states have agreed to the Common Core State Standards so they can qualify for future federal funding. The groundwork has been laid for an increased federal role in education. We need to build on these accomplishments to ensure that federal dollars can continue to be leveraged to produce local successes after the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding runs out.

We need to continue to redefine the federal role in public education. The implications for our democracy, and our role as

policies that will create equity for each child. The great thing about where we are now is that we do not need to reinvent the wheel. Innovation is critical, but it should not come at the expense of ignoring 50 years of research on what works.

We know the game changers. We not only know which children are likely to drop out of school, we know which schools most of them attend. We know when and where the achievement gap typically opens, and we have the tools to close it. We know that teachers are the most important school-based factor in a child's education, but we also know that for best results, students need more class time and a whole range of support services. We know the power of data, and we know how to train teachers to use it. We know where job growth is happening in our economy, and we know that a background in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and higher education are what our children need to achieve their fullest potential. Above all, we know that the single commodity children bring to school each



a world leader, require it. This leaves us with two interconnected questions: First, how do we reform the system of financing public education? Second, what policies should the federal government pursue in order to leverage this expanded role?

To solve the problem of reforming school finance and redefining the federal role in public education, I formed the National Commission on Education Equity and Excellence. The commission is housed in the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, and will bring together some of the foremost experts on education from across the political spectrum in order to conduct a national dialogue on school finance and equity that reaches the needs of each child. It is only by talking with teachers, parents, students, advocates, school board members, counselors, principals, and superintendents invested in each student's achievement that we can understand what is needed to make public education work in every community. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top were well intentioned, but one of many key problems in both cases was Washington lawmakers' failure to hold the kind of dialogue needed to understand the incredible tools at the federal government's disposal to help states, districts, and schools succeed.

This time, we will not make the same mistake. Our national dialogue will not only devise new systems of finance, but new

day is time, and we must properly value it.

We know these things work, and we know how to accomplish them. We need to develop a new system of finance that empowers local community leaders, advocates, businesses, nonprofits, educators, parents, and students to join forces to devise a unique approach that works for their community.

Going forward, I see my work as twofold. First, I will continue to build the political support for the Equity Commission and to encourage this crucial dialogue so that we can organize to act. Second, I will propose and fight for legislation that addresses the critical game changers and uses the tools of the federal government to empower communities to educate their children.

We often hear that there is no silver bullet in education. This is correct. There is no single policy that will close the achievement gap for poor and minority students, but there is an array of policies that if implemented effectively will help us achieve our vision of equity for each child. The international achievement gap will also close as we employ all the tools in our toolbox to ensure that each and every child is successful.

We have a long struggle ahead of us, but right now we can finally say that the tide is starting to turn. For the first time, we are looking through a lens that makes all these complicated issues startlingly clear: what is best for each child? By answering this question, we begin the process of building a 21st-century economy that will work for all our children. □

Greater Equality

The Hidden Key to Better Health and Higher Scores



BY RICHARD WILKINSON AND KATE PICKETT

Let's consider the health of two babies born into two different societies. Baby A is born in one of the richest countries in the world, the United States, home to more than half of the world's billionaires. It is a country that spends somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of the world's total spending on health care, although it contains less than 5 percent of the world's population. Spending on drug treatments and high-tech scanning equipment is particularly high. Doctors in this

*Richard Wilkinson is a professor emeritus of social epidemiology at the University of Nottingham Medical School, honorary professor at University College London, and a visiting professor at the University of York. Kate Pickett is a professor at the University of York and a career scientist with the United Kingdom's National Institute for Health Research. Wilkinson and Pickett are cofounders of the Equality Trust. This article is excerpted, with permission, from *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, published in 2009 by Bloomsbury Press. The Spirit Level will be available in paperback in April 2011.*

country earn almost twice as much as doctors elsewhere and medical care is often described as the best in the world.

Baby B is born in one of the poorer of the western democracies, Greece, where average income is not much more than half that of the United States. Whereas America spends about \$6,000 per person per year on health care, Greece spends less than \$3,000. This is in real terms, after taking into account the different costs of medical care. And Greece has six times fewer high-tech scanners per person than the United States.

Surely Baby B's chances of a long and healthy life are worse than Baby A's?

In fact, Baby A, born in the United States, has a life expectancy of 1.2 years less than Baby B, born in Greece. And Baby A has a 40 percent higher risk of dying in the first year after birth than Baby B. Had Baby B been born in Japan, the contrast would be even bigger: babies born in the United States are twice as likely to die in their first year as babies born in Japan. As in Greece, in Japan average income and average spending on health care are much lower than in the United States.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ENRIQUE MOREIRO

If average levels of income don't matter (at least in relatively rich, developed countries), and spending on high-tech health care doesn't make so much difference, what does? We can't say with certainty, but inequality appears to be a driving force. Greece is not as wealthy as the United States, but in terms of income, it is much more equal—so is Japan. There are now many studies of income inequality and health that compare countries, American states, or other large regions, and the majority of these studies show that more egalitarian societies tend to be healthier.¹ This vast literature was given impetus by a study by one of us, on inequality and death rates, published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1992.² In 1996, the editor of that journal, commenting on further studies confirming the link between income inequality and health, wrote:

The big idea is that what matters in determining mortality and health in a society is less the overall wealth of that society and more how evenly wealth is distributed. The more equally wealth is distributed the better the health of that society.³



Inequality is associated with lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, shorter height, poor self-reported health, low birth weight, AIDS, and depression. Knowing this, we wondered what else inequality might affect.

To see whether a host of other problems were more common

in more unequal countries, we collected internationally comparable data from dozens of rich countries on health and as many social problems as we could find reliable figures for.* The list we ended up with included:

- level of trust
- mental illness (including drug and alcohol addiction)
- life expectancy and infant mortality
- obesity
- children's educational performance
- teenage births

Health and social problems are more common in countries with bigger income inequalities.

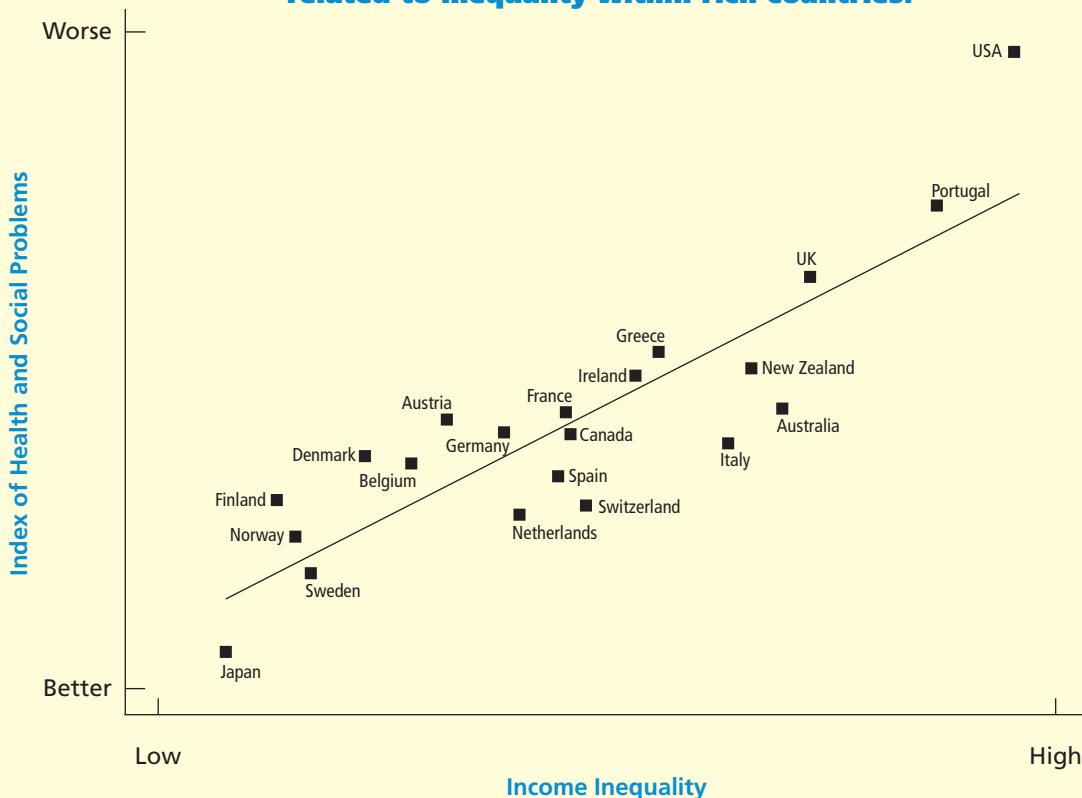
- homicides
- imprisonment rates
- social mobility

Occasionally, what appear to be relationships may arise spuriously or by chance. In order to be confident that our findings were

sound, we also collected data for the same health and social problems—or as near as we could get to the same—for each of the 50 states of the United States. This allowed us to check whether or not problems were consistently related to inequality in these two independent settings. In short, they were—and strongly so.

To present the overall picture, we have combined all the health and social-problem data for each country, and separately for each U.S. state, to form an Index of Health and Social Problems for each country and U.S. state. Each item carries the same weight—so, for example, the score for mental health has as much influence on a society's overall score as the homicide

Figure 1: Health and social problems are closely related to inequality within rich countries.



*All the data come from the most reputable sources—from the World Bank, the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, among others.

rate or the teenage birth rate. The result is an index showing how common all these health and social problems are in each country and each U.S. state. The higher the score on the Index of Health and Social Problems, the worse things are. (Some items, such as life expectancy, were reverse scored, so that on every measure, higher scores reflect worse outcomes.)

We start by showing, in Figure 1 (below left), that there is a very strong tendency for ill health and social problems to occur less frequently in the more equal countries. With increasing inequality (to the right on the horizontal axis), the score on our Index of Health and Social Problems also increases. Health and social problems are indeed more common in countries with bigger income inequalities. The two are extraordinarily closely related—chance alone would almost never produce a scatter in which countries lined up like this.

To emphasize that the prevalence of poor health and social problems in rich countries really is related to inequality rather than to average living standards, we show in Figure 2 (below right) the same Index of Health and Social Problems, but this time in relation to average incomes (national income per person). It shows that there is no clear trend toward better outcomes in richer countries.

The evidence from the United States confirms the international picture. Across states, health and social problems are related to income inequality, but not to average income levels.

It is remarkable that these measures of health and social problems in the two different settings tell so much the same story. The problems in rich countries are not caused by the society not being rich enough (or even being too rich), but by the material differences between people within each society being too big. What matters is where we stand in relation to others in our own society.

Inequality, not surprisingly, is a powerful social divider, perhaps because we all tend to use differences in living standards as markers of status differences. We tend to choose our friends from among our near equals and have little to do with those much richer or much poorer. Our position in the social hierarchy affects who we see as part of the in-group and part of the out-group—us and them—thus affecting our ability to identify and empathize with other people.

The importance of community, social cohesion, and solidarity to human well-being has been demonstrated repeatedly in research showing how beneficial friendship and

involvement in community life are to health. Equality comes into the picture as a precondition for getting the other two right. Not only do large inequalities produce problems associated with social differences and the divisive class prejudices that go with them, but they also weaken community life, reduce trust, and increase violence.

It may seem obvious that problems associated with relative deprivation should be more common in more unequal societies. However, if you ask people why greater equality reduces these problems, the most common assumption is that



Inequality is a powerful social divider, affecting our ability to identify and empathize with other people.

greater equality helps those at the bottom. The truth is that the vast majority of the population is harmed by greater inequality.

Across *whole* populations, rates of mental illness are three times as high in the most unequal societies compared with the least unequal societies. Similarly, in more unequal societies,

Figure 2: Health and social problems are only weakly related to the national average incomes of rich countries.



people are almost ten times as likely to be imprisoned and two or three times as likely to be clinically obese, and murder rates may be many times higher. The reason why these differences are so big is, quite simply, because the effects of inequality are not confined just to the least well-off: instead, they affect the vast majority of the population. For example, as epidemiologist Michael Marmot frequently points out, if you took away all the health problems of the poor, most of the problem of health inequalities would still be untouched. For a more detailed example, let's take a look at the relationship between inequality and literacy.

It is often assumed that the desire to raise national standards of performance in fields such as education is quite separate from the desire to reduce educational inequalities within a society. But the truth may be almost the opposite of this. It looks as if the achievement of higher national standards of educational performance may actually depend on reducing the social gradient in educational achievement in each country. Douglas Willms, professor of education at the University of New Brunswick in Canada, has provided striking illustrations of this.⁴ In Figure 3 (below), we show the relation between adult literacy scores from the International Adult Literacy Survey and their parents' level of

education—in Finland, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

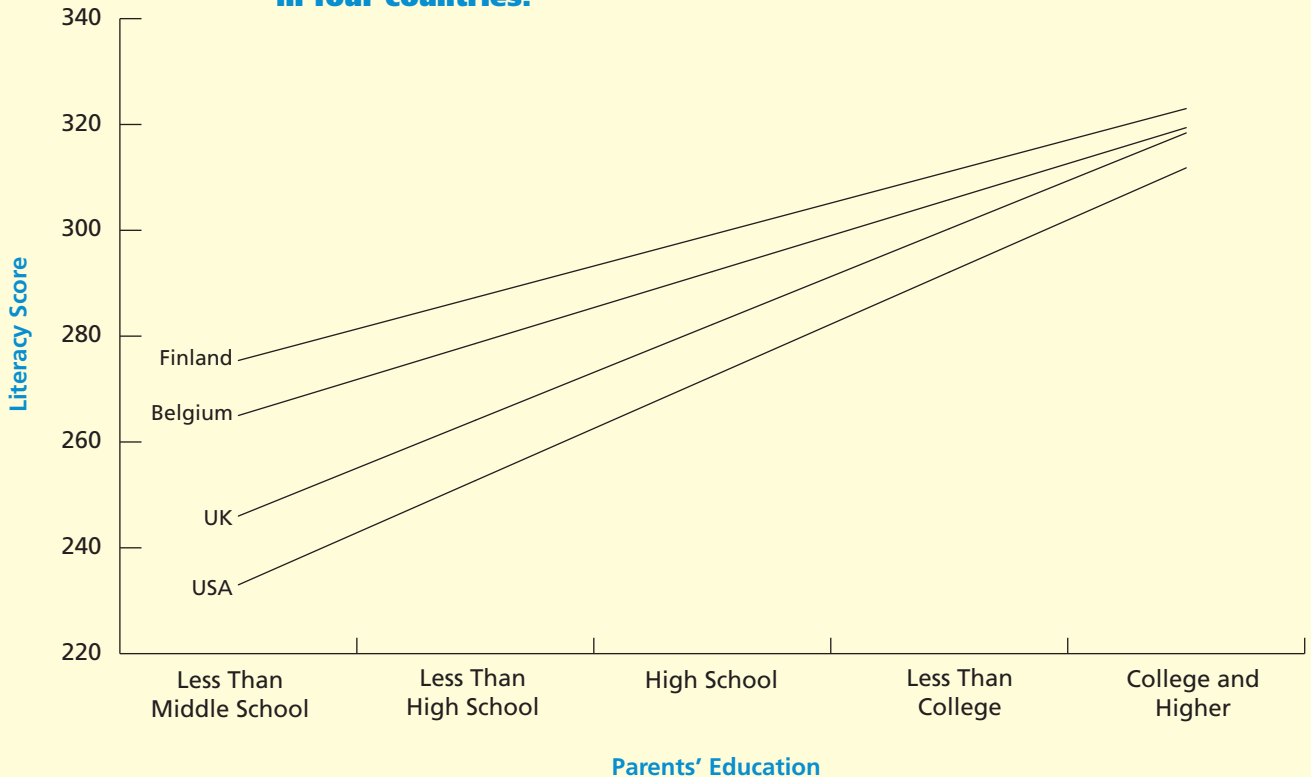
This figure suggests that even if your parents are well educated—and so, presumably, of high social status—the country you live in makes some difference to your educational success. But for those lower down the social scale with less well-educated parents,



Since 1980, income inequality in the United States increased rapidly, and public expenditure on prisons increased six times as fast as public expenditure on higher education.

it makes a much larger difference. An important point to note, looking at these four countries, is the steepness of the social gradient—steepest in the United States and the United Kingdom, where inequality is high; flatter in Finland and Belgium, which are more equal. It is also clear that an important influence on the average literacy scores in each of these countries is the steepness

Figure 3: Adult literacy scores in relation to parents' education in four countries.



DATA SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

of the social gradient. The United States and the United Kingdom have low average scores, pulled down across the social gradient. In contrast, Finland and Belgium have high average scores, pulled up across the social gradient.

Willms has demonstrated that the pattern shown in Figure 3 holds more widely—internationally among 12 developed countries, as well as among Canadian provinces and U.S. states.⁵ The tendency toward divergence also holds; Willms consistently finds larger differences at the bottom of the social gradient than at the top.

What is most exciting about our research is that it shows that reducing inequality would increase the well-being and quality of life for all of us. Far from being inevitable and unstoppable, the deterioration in social well-being and the quality of social relations in society is reversible. Understanding the effects of inequality means that we suddenly have a policy handle on the well-being of whole societies.

Politics was once seen as a way of improving people's social and emotional well-being by changing their economic circumstances. But over the last few decades, the bigger picture seems to have been lost, at least in the United States, the United Kingdom, and several other rich countries in which inequality has increased dramatically. People are now more likely to see psychosocial well-being as dependent on what can be done at the individual level, using cognitive behavioral therapy—one person at a time—or on providing support in early childhood, or on the reassertion of religious or family values. Every problem is seen as needing its own solution—unrelated to others. People are encouraged to exercise, not to have unprotected sex, to say no to drugs, to try to relax, to sort out their work-life balance, and to give their children “quality” time. The only thing that many of these policies do have in common is that they often seem to be based on the belief that the poor need to be taught to be more sensible. The

glaringly obvious fact that these problems have common roots in inequality and relative deprivation disappears from view. However, it is now clear that income distribution provides policymakers with a way of improving the psychosocial well-being of whole populations. Politicians have an opportunity to do genuine good.

Rather than suggesting a particular route or set of policies to narrow income differences, it is probably better to point out that there are many different ways of reaching the same destination. Although the more equal countries often get their greater equality through redistributive taxes and benefits and through a large welfare state, countries like Japan manage to achieve low levels of inequality *before* taxes and benefits. Japanese differences in gross earnings (before taxes and benefits) are smaller, so there is less need for large-scale redistribution.

What matters is the level of inequality you finish up with, not how you get it. However, in the data there is also a clear warning for those who want low public expenditure and taxation: if you fail to avoid high inequality, you will need more prisons and more police. You will have to deal with higher rates of mental illness, drug abuse, and every other kind of problem. If keeping taxes and benefits down leads to wider income differences, the ensuing social ills may force you to raise public expenditure to cope.

There may be a choice between using public expenditure to keep inequality low, or to cope with social harm where inequality is high. An example of this balance shifting in the wrong direction can be seen in the United States during the period since 1980, when income inequality increased particularly rapidly. During that period, public expenditure on prisons increased six times as fast as public expenditure on higher education, and a number of states have now reached a point where they are spending as much public money on prisons as on higher education.⁶

Not only would it be preferable to live in societies where money can be spent on education rather than on prisons, but policies to support families—such as providing high-quality, publicly funded preschool—would have meant that many of those in prison would have been working and paying taxes instead of being a burden on public funds.⁷

Modern societies will depend increasingly on being creative, adaptable, inventive, well-informed, and flexible, able to respond generously to each other and to needs wherever they arise. Those are characteristics not of societies in hock to the rich, in which people are driven by status insecurities, but of populations used to working together and respecting each other as equals. □

The Equality Trust

If reading this article leaves you wanting to do something to help reduce inequality, then please visit the Equality Trust's website at www.equalitytrust.org.uk. There you will find downloadable slides that we hope you will use, a downloadable lecture, short summaries of the evidence, answers to frequently asked questions, and suggestions to campaign for greater equity.

After discovering how seriously societies are damaged by great inequality, we felt we had to do what we could to make the evidence better known. The Trust was set up as a not-for-profit organization to educate and campaign on the benefits of a more equal society.

We hope you will sign the Equality Charter, put your name down to receive the newsletter, make a donation, give us your ideas, and join or form a local equality group. Most of all, we hope you will use the evidence we have started to put together to spread the word and convince others of the need to reduce inequality. In politics, words are action.

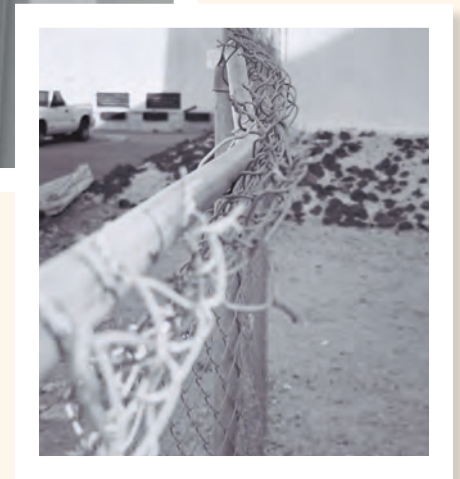
—R.W. and K.P.

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Being Poor, Black, and American

The Impact of Political, Economic, and Cultural Forces



When schools and communities are struggling, some students give up—but others get active. Critical Exposure helps by teaching advocacy through documentary photography. Students in neglected and crumbling schools across the country took the photos on pages 10–23. For more, go to www.criticalexposure.org.

BY WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON

Through the second half of the 1990s and into the early years of the 21st century, public attention to the plight of poor black Americans seemed to wane. There was scant media attention to the problem of concentrated urban poverty (neighborhoods in which a high percentage of the residents

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fall beneath the federally designated poverty line), little or no discussion of inner-city challenges by mainstream political leaders, and even an apparent quiescence on the part of ghetto residents themselves. This was dramatically different from the 1960s, when the transition from legal segregation to a more racially open society was punctuated by social unrest that sometimes expressed itself in violent terms, as seen in the riots that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

But in 2005, Hurricane Katrina exposed concentrated poverty in New Orleans. When television cameras focused on the flooding, the people trapped in houses and apartments, and the vast devastation, many Americans were shocked to see the squalid living conditions of the poor. Of course, the devastation of Katrina was broadly visited upon the residents of New Orleans, black and white, rich and poor, property owner and public housing tenant alike. But while many residents were able to flee, the very poor, lacking automobiles or money for transportation and lodging,

stayed to wait out the storm with tragic results. And through Katrina, the nation's attention became riveted on these poor urban neighborhoods.

If television cameras had focused on the urban poor in New Orleans, or in any inner-city ghetto, before Katrina, I believe the initial reaction to descriptions of poverty and poverty concentration would have been unsympathetic. Public opinion polls in the United States routinely reflect the notion that people are poor and jobless because of their own shortcomings or inadequacies. In other words, few people would have reflected on how the larger forces in society—including segregation, discrimination, a lack of economic opportunity, and failing public schools—adversely affect the inner-city poor. However, because Katrina was clearly a natural disaster that was beyond the control of the inner-city poor, Americans were much more sympathetic. In a sense, Katrina turned out to be something of a

cruel natural experiment, wherein better-off Americans could readily see the effects of racial isolation and chronic economic subordination.

Despite the lack of national public awareness of the problems of the urban poor prior to Katrina, social scientists have rightly devoted considerable attention to



concentrated poverty, because it magnifies the problems associated with poverty in general: joblessness, crime, delinquency, drug trafficking, broken families,

and dysfunctional schools. Neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty are seen as dangerous, and therefore they become isolated, socially and economically, as people go out of their way to avoid them.¹

In this article, I provide a political, economic, and cultural framework for understanding the emergence and persistence of concentrated urban poverty. I pay particular attention to poor inner-city black neigh-

borhoods, which have the highest levels of concentrated poverty. I conclude this article by suggesting a new agenda for America's ghetto poor, based on the analysis I put forth in the following sections.

Political Forces

Since 1934, with the establishment of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), a program necessitated by the massive mortgage foreclosures during the Great Depression, the U.S. government has sought to enable citizens to become homeowners by underwriting mortgages. In the years following World War II, however, the federal government contributed to the early decay of inner-city neighborhoods by withholding mortgage capital and making it difficult for these areas to retain or attract families who were able to purchase their own homes. The FHA selectively administered the mortgage program by formalizing a process that excluded certain urban neighborhoods using empirical data that suggested a probable

A Call for Change

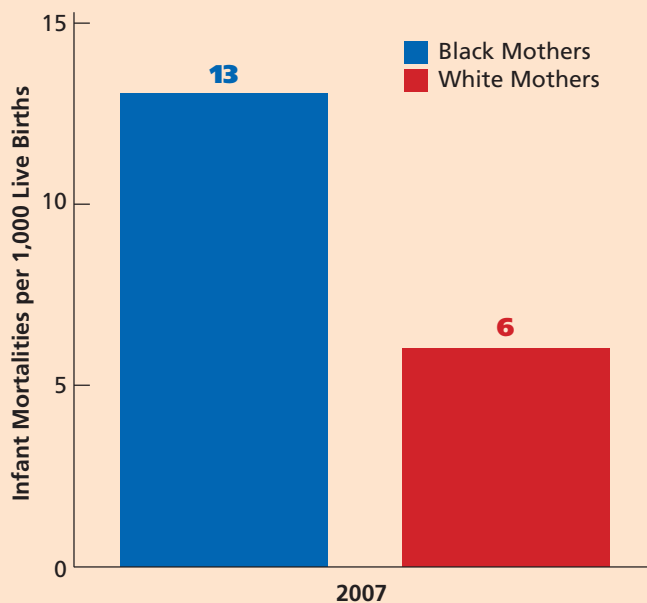
"The nation's young black males are in a state of crisis. They do not have the same opportunities as their male or female counterparts across the country. Their infant mortality rates are higher, and their access to health care is more limited. They are more likely to live in single-parent homes and less likely to participate in early childcare programs. They are less likely to be raised in a household with a fully employed adult, and they are more likely to live in poverty. As adults, black males are less likely than their peers to be employed. At almost every juncture, the odds are stacked against these young men in ways that result in too much unfulfilled potential and too many fractured lives."

—Michael Casserly
The Council of the Great City Schools

In October 2010, the Council of the Great City Schools published *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*, in which it compiled data ranging from infant mortality rates to adult earnings to show the enormous challenges facing America's black children—especially black boys. Throughout this special section, we have reproduced a handful of the report's dozens of charts. We encourage you to read the full report, which is available online at www.cgcs.org/publications/achievement.aspx.

—EDITORS

Calling for Change in the Infant Mortality Rate
In 2007, the infant mortality rate for black mothers was more than twice as high as for white mothers.



SOURCE: A CALL FOR CHANGE, FIGURE 1.1 (DATA FROM THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS).





loss of investment in these areas. “Redlining,” as it came to be known, was assessed largely on racial composition. Although many neighborhoods with a considerable number of European immigrants were redlined, virtually all black neighborhoods were excluded. Homebuyers hoping to purchase a home in a redlined neighborhood were universally denied mortgages, regardless of their financial qualifications. This severely restricted opportunities for building or even maintaining quality housing in the inner city, which in many ways set the stage for the urban blight that many Americans now associate with black neighborhoods. This action was clearly motivated by racial bias, and it was not until the 1960s that the FHA discontinued mortgage restrictions based on the racial composition of the neighborhood.²

Subsequent policy decisions worked to trap blacks in these increasingly unattractive inner cities. Beginning in the 1950s, the suburbanization of the middle class, already under way with government-subsidized loans to veterans, was aided further by federal transportation and highway policies that included the building of freeway networks through the hearts of many cities, which had a devastating impact on the neighborhoods of black Americans. These developments not only spurred relocation from the cities to the suburbs among better-off residents, the freeways themselves also “created barriers between the sections of the cities, walling off poor and minority neighborhoods from central business districts.”³ For instance, a number of studies have revealed how Richard J. Daley, the former mayor of Chicago, used the Interstate Highway Act of

1956 to route expressways through impoverished African American neighborhoods, resulting in even greater segregation and isolation.⁴ A lasting legacy of that policy is the 14-lane Dan Ryan Expressway, which created a barrier between black and white neighborhoods.⁵

Another particularly egregious example of the deleterious effects of highway construction is Birmingham, Alabama’s interstate highway system, which curved and twisted to bisect several black neighborhoods rather than taking a more direct route through some predominantly white neighborhoods. The highway

system essentially followed the boundaries that had been established in 1926 as part of the city’s racial zoning law, although these boundaries were technically removed a few years before the highway construction began in 1956.⁶

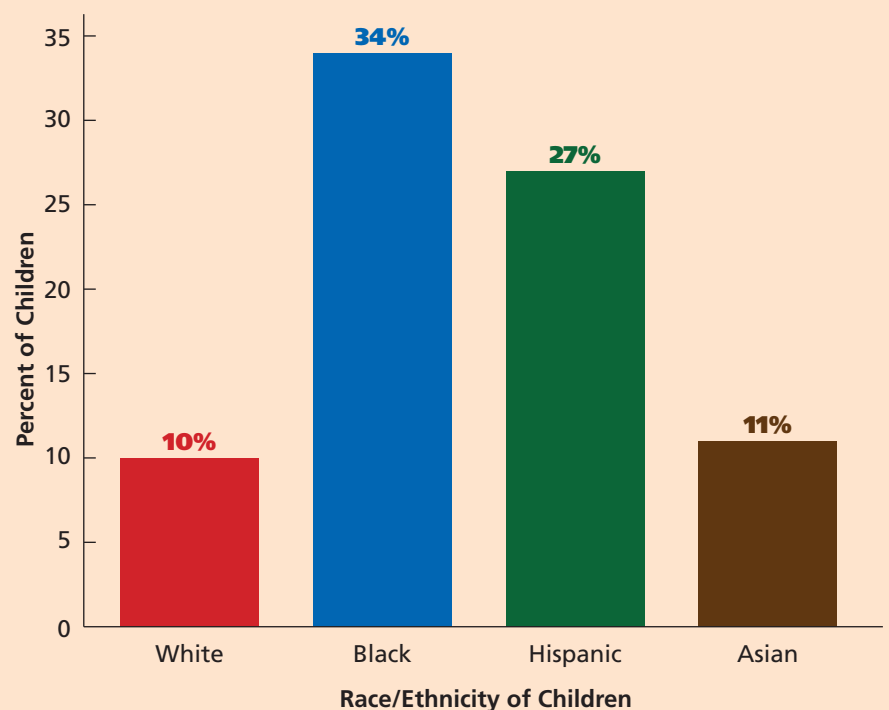
At the same time, government policies such as mortgages for veterans and mortgage interest tax exemptions for developers enabled the quick, cheap production of massive amounts of tract housing⁷ and drew middle-class whites into the suburbs.⁸ A classic example of this effect of housing market incentives is the mass-produced suburban Levittown neighborhoods that were first erected in New York, and later in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico. The homes in these neighborhoods were manufactured on a large scale, using an assembly line model of production, and were arranged in carefully engineered suburban neighborhoods that included many public amenities, such as shopping centers and space for public schools. These neighborhoods represented an ideal alternative for people who were seeking to escape cramped city apartments, and were often touted as “utopian



calling for change in the child poverty rate

Calling for Change in the Child Poverty Rate

In 2007, 34 percent of black children under age 18 lived in poverty, compared with 10 percent of white children and 27 percent of Hispanic children.



SOURCE: A CALL FOR CHANGE, FIGURE 1.9 (DATA FROM KIDSCOUNT; POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU, ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2008 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY).

communities” that enabled people to live out the “suburban dream.” Veterans were able to purchase a Levittown home for a few thousand dollars with no money down, financed with low-interest mortgages guaranteed by the Veterans Administration. However, the Levitts would not initially sell to African Americans. The first black family moved into Levittown, New York, in 1957, having purchased a home from a white family,⁹ and they endured harassment, hate mail, and threats for several months after moving in. Levittown, New York, remains a predominantly white community today. Here, once again, we have a practice that denied African Americans the opportunity to move from segregated inner-city neighborhoods.

Explicit racial policies in the suburbs reinforced this segregation by allowing suburbs to separate their financial resources and municipal budgets from those of the cities. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, strong municipal services in cities were very attractive to residents of small towns and suburbs; as a result, cities tended to annex suburbs and surrounding areas. But the relations between cities and suburbs in the United States began to change following the Great Depression; the centurylong influx of poor migrants who required expensive services and paid relatively little in taxes could no longer be profitably absorbed into the city economy. Annexation largely ended in the mid-20th century as suburbs began to successfully resist incorporation. Suburban communities also drew tighter boundaries through the use of zoning laws, discriminatory land-use controls, and site selection practices that made it difficult for inner-city racial minorities to access these areas because these practices were effectively used to screen out residents on the basis of race.

As separate political jurisdictions, suburbs also exercised a great deal of autonomy through covenants and deed restrictions. In the face of mounting pressure for integration in the 1960s, “suburbs chose to diversify by race rather than class. They retained zoning and other restrictions that allowed only affluent blacks (and in some instances Jews) to enter, thereby intensifying the concentration and isolation of the urban poor.”¹⁰ Although these

policies clearly had racial connotations, they also reflected class bias and helped reinforce the exodus of white working-class and middle-class families from urban neighborhoods and the growing segregation of low-income blacks in inner-city neighborhoods.

Federal public housing policy contributed to the gradual growth of segregated black ghettos as well. The federal public housing program’s policies evolved in two stages that represented two distinct styles. The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937 initiated the first stage. Concerned that the construction of public housing might depress private rent levels, groups such as the U.S. Building and Loan League and the National

urban slums, and therefore was seemingly nonracial. However, the public housing that it created “was now meant to collect the ghetto residents left homeless by the urban renewal bulldozers.”¹¹ A new, lower income ceiling for public housing resi-



dency was established by the Federal Public Housing Authority, and families with incomes above that ceiling were evicted, thereby restricting access to public housing to only the most economically disadvantaged segments of the population.

This change in federal housing policy coincided with the Second Great Migration* of African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the Northeast and Midwest, which lasted 30 years—from 1940 to 1970. As the black urban population in the North grew, pressure mounted in white communities to keep blacks out. Suburban communities, with their restrictive covenants and special zoning laws, refused to permit the construction of public housing. And the federal government acquiesced to opposition to the construction of public housing in the neighborhoods of organized white groups in the city. Thus, units were overwhelmingly concentrated in the overcrowded and deteriorating inner-city ghettos—the poorest and least-powerful

Association of Real Estate Boards successfully lobbied Congress to require, by law, that for each new unit of public housing erected, one “unsafe or unsanitary” unit of public housing must be destroyed.

The early years of the public housing program produced positive results. Initially, the program mainly served intact families temporarily displaced by the Depression or in need of housing after the end of World War II. For many of these families, public housing was the first step on the road toward economic recovery. Their stays in the projects were relatively brief because they were able to accumulate sufficient economic resources to move on to private housing.

The passage of the Housing Act of 1949 marked the beginning of the second policy stage. It instituted and funded the urban renewal program, designed to eradicate

*This mass movement of African Americans was even larger and more sustained than the First Great Migration, which began at the turn of the 20th century and ended during the Great Depression, and had a more profound impact on the transformation of the inner city.

sections of cities and metropolitan areas. In short, public housing became a federally funded institution that isolated families by race and class, resulting in high concentrations of poor black families in inner-city ghettos.¹²

In the last quarter of the 20th century, one of the most significant changes in these neighborhoods was the out-migration of middle-income blacks. Before the 1970s, African American families faced extremely strong barriers when they considered moving into white neighborhoods. Not only did many experience overt discrimination in the housing market, some were violently attacked. Although even today fair-housing audits continue to reveal the existence of discrimination in the housing market, fair-housing legislation has reduced the strength of these barriers. At the same time, middle-income African Americans have increased their efforts to move from areas with concentrated black poverty to more desirable



neighborhoods throughout metropolitan areas, including white neighborhoods.¹³

In addition, beginning in 1980, when Ronald Reagan became president, sharp spending cuts in direct aid to cities dramatically reduced budgets for general revenue sharing (unrestricted funds that can be used for any purpose), urban mass transit, economic development assistance, urban development action grants, social service block grants,

local public works, compensatory education, public service jobs, and job training. Many of these programs were designed to help disadvantaged individuals gain some traction in attaining financial security.¹⁴ It is telling that the federal contribution was 17.5 percent of the total city budgets in 1977, but only 5.4 percent by



2000.¹⁵ These cuts were particularly acute for older cities in the East and Midwest that largely depended on federal and state aid to

Demanding and Supporting Success

Collective Memories of Great Teaching

BY CHARLES M. PAYNE

However ironic it may seem, there is considerable nostalgia just now among many Black Americans for the kind of education they had during the good old days of legal white supremacy. Nostalgia is necessarily selective. The first chapter of *Simple Justice*, a history of *Brown v. Board of Education* by social historian Richard Kluger, draws portraits of two South Carolina Black principals. One is the kind

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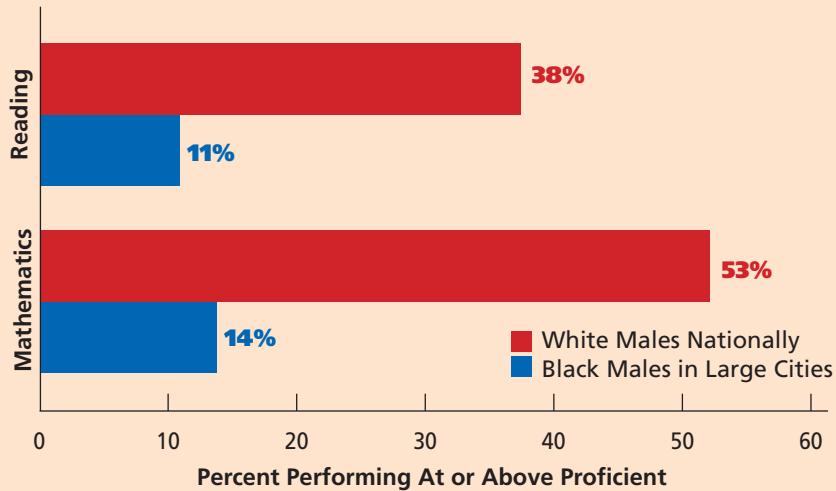
of dedicated, rooted-in-the-community educator around whom current nostalgia centers. The other is craven, incompetent, a servant of the white power structure, as corrupt as the day is long, stealing funds that should have been going to the children. The current longing for the good old days forgets the second type of Black educator—the people W. E. B. Du Bois called “ignorant placeholders.”¹ Today’s nostalgia also forgets that, at times and places, the sheer lack of resources must have overwhelmed good intent. The South, through the first half of the 20th century, generally spent on the education of Black children about one-third what it spent on whites. Some schools were theaters of class antagonisms, and in others the kind of treatment children got could depend on their complexion; many used a level of physical discipline that is discomfiting to read about, even now.²

That said, there is still something about the education they received under these circumstances that many Black adults now wish they could give to their own children, and it clearly has to do largely with how they experienced teaching. Nostalgia should not be confused with history, but collective memories tell us much about how people understand the limits and possibilities in their environment, about what they think made a difference for them, and that can serve as the basis for hypothesizing, at least, about how teaching matters.

Vanessa Siddle Walker’s rich and evocative portrait of North Carolina’s Casswell County Training School reflects the themes one typically finds in these discussions.³ Walker, a historian of African American education, sees the school as an example of institutionalized caring, caring that went beyond how any one individual felt about any other individual,

Calling for Change in the Achievement Gaps

In 2009, among fourth-graders, the gaps between the percentage of black boys in large cities scoring at or above proficient and the percentage of white boys in public schools across the nation scoring at or above proficient were 27 percentage points in reading and 39 percentage points in math.



NOTE: LARGE CITIES DATA INCLUDE STUDENTS FROM ALL CITIES IN THE NATION WITH POPULATIONS OF 250,000 OR MORE. NATIONAL DATA INCLUDE STUDENTS ATTENDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS ACROSS THE NATION.
SOURCE: A CALL FOR CHANGE, FIGURES 2.5 AND 2.23 (DATA FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS 2009 READING AND MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENTS).



from Mexico—and whites steadily moving to the suburbs. With minorities displacing whites as a growing share of the population, the implications for the urban tax base were profound. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000, the median annual household income of Latinos was about \$14,000 less than that of whites. With a declining tax base and the simultaneous loss of federal funds, municipalities had trouble raising enough revenue to cover basic services such as garbage collection, street cleaning, and police protection. Some even cut such services in order to avoid bankruptcy.¹⁶

This financial crisis left many cities ill-equipped to handle three devastating public health problems that emerged in the

fund social services for their poor population and to maintain aging infrastructure.

The decline in federal support for cities

since 1980 coincided with an increase in the immigration of people from poorer countries—mainly low-skilled workers

caring that was reflected in high expectations and strict standards—teachers “didn’t play,” would “bless you out” if they caught you wrong. There was a heavy emphasis on extracurricular activity, with as much as 90 percent of the student body participating in something, as the school recognized students’ need to “learn to speak, to think, to perform” as well as their need for explicit moral instruction. They were, as the principal liked to say, “building men and women.”⁴ Among other things, they took that to require implicitly and explicitly challenging notions of racial inferiority. For them, “Teaching could not be reduced to a job or an occupation; it was a mission.”⁵

Teachers were seen as having a broad interest in children, in their character and in their future. Children felt pressure to succeed; whether or not they were going to take school seriously was a choice that had been made for them by adults. They felt pushed cognitively and socially. There is some disagreement about whether teachers were warm and friendly, but an overwhelming consensus that adults were all on the same page; teachers had the

authority of the whole race behind them.

If we were to abstract a teaching model from this, we might arrive at something like the following:

Authoritative-Supportive Teaching

- High level of intellectual/academic demand
- High level of social demand
- Holistic concern for children and their future; sense of a larger mission
- Strong sense of teacher efficacy and legitimacy

Calling this model authoritative-supportive teaching would seem to capture its most salient aspects. If this is the kind of teaching that many Black people remember as having worked for them, is there any reason at all to think it would transfer to contemporary inner-city communities? Actually, there are several interesting lines of thinking in recent research to suggest that a model of teaching very close to this can have unusually large positive impacts, even among today’s rowdy youth.

One very instructive study tried to assess the impact of social support and

academic pressure.⁶ Researchers with the Consortium on Chicago School Research surveyed 28,000 Chicago sixth- and eighth-graders and more than 5,000 teachers in 304 elementary and middle schools. To measure social support from teachers, students were asked whether their English and math teachers:

- relate the subject to their personal interests (which, of course, implies that teachers know what students are interested in)
- really listen to what they say
- know them very well
- believe they can do well in school

To assess support from parents, students were asked how often their parents or other adults in their household:

- discuss school events and/or events of interest to the student
- help with homework
- discuss with them things they had studied in class
- discuss homework with them

To assess social support from peers, students were asked whether most

1980s and disproportionately affected areas of concentrated poverty: first, the prevalence of drug trafficking and associated violent crime; second, the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic and its escalating public health costs; and third, the rise in the homeless population, including not only individuals, but entire families as well.¹⁷ Although drug addiction, drug-related violence, AIDS, and homelessness are found in many American communities, their impact on the black ghetto is profound. A number of fiscally strapped cities have watched helplessly as these problems—aggravated by the reduction of citywide social services as well as high levels of neighborhood joblessness—have reinforced the perception that cities are dangerous places to live and have perpetuated the exodus of working- and middle-class residents. Thus, while poverty and joblessness, and the social problems they generate, remain prominent in ghetto neighborhoods, many cities have fewer and fewer resources with which to combat them.

Finally, policymakers have indirectly contributed to concentrated poverty in inner-city neighborhoods with decisions that have decreased the attractiveness of low-paying jobs and accelerated the relative decline in the wages of low-income workers. In particular, in the absence of an effective labor market policy, policymakers have tolerated industry practices that undermine worker security—including the erosion of benefits and the rise of involuntary part-time employment.

In sum, federal government policies, even those that are not explicitly racial, have had a profound impact on inner-city neighborhoods. These impacts have been felt in many cities across the country, but they perhaps have been felt more in the older central cities of the Midwest and

Northeast—the traditional Rust Belt—where depopulated, high-poverty areas have experienced even greater problems.

Economic Forces

Older urban areas were once the hubs of economic growth and activity, and were therefore major destinations for people in search of economic opportunity. However, the economies of many of these cities have since been eroded by complex economic transformations and shifting patterns in metropolitan development. These economic forces are typically considered non-racial—in the sense that their origins are not the direct result of actions, processes, or ideologies that explicitly reflect racial bias. Nevertheless, they have accelerated neighborhood decline in the inner city and widened gaps in race and income between cities and suburbs.¹⁸



students in their classes:

- treat each other with respect
- work together to solve problems
- help each other learn

Academic pressure⁷ was measured by both teacher and student reports. The questions asked of teachers included whether their schools:

- set high standards for academic performance
- organize the school day to maximize student learning
- focus on what is best for student learning when making important decisions

The questions for assessing student perception of academic pressure asked students whether their English and math teachers:

- expect them to do their best all the time
- expect them to complete their homework every night

- think it is very important that they do well in that class
- encourage them to do extra work when they don't understand something

This is very close to the authoritative-supportive model, capturing elements of social and intellectual demand, of holistic concern, of adults being on the same page. The main message from the study is that social support and academic pressure each independently make a meaningful difference, but when both are present at high levels, the results can be striking. In reading, children experiencing low levels of both support and pressure averaged a gain of 0.56 grade equivalents (GEs) a year in reading, but students exposed to high levels of both improved 1.82 GEs, *almost two years' growth in a year*. The numbers in math

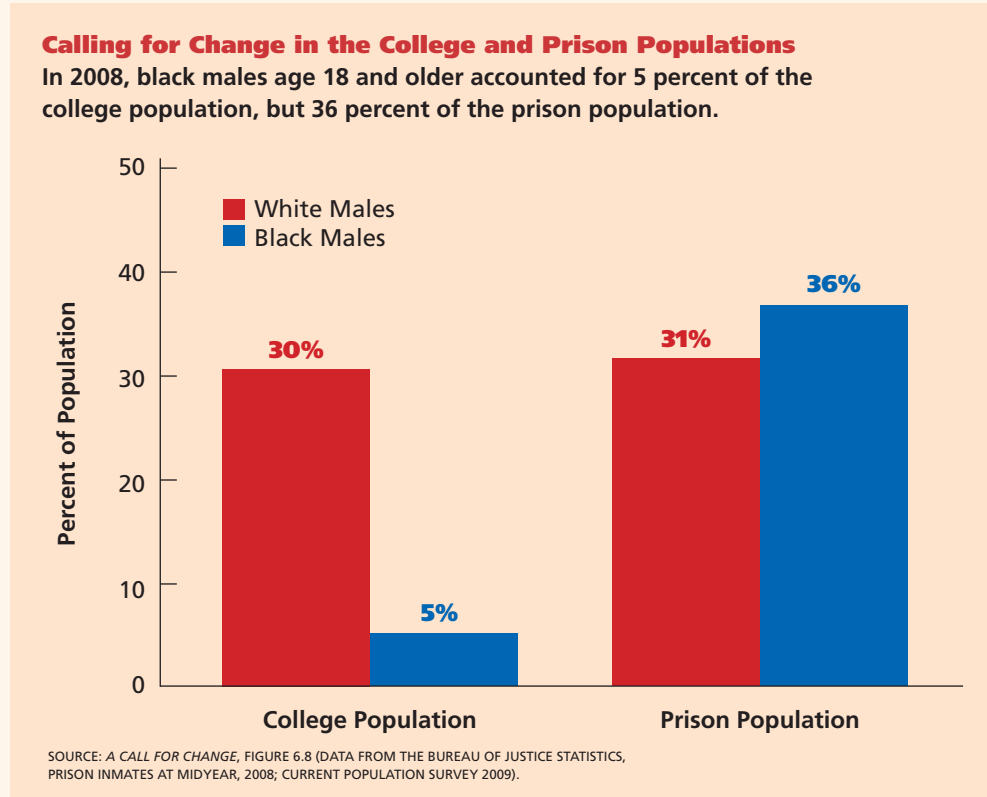
were even more pronounced. While low-support, low-pressure students improved 0.63 GEs, high-pressure, high-support students improved an eye-popping 2.39 GEs. The distribution of high-pressure, high-support schools is very much what one would expect. Racially integrated schools are three times more likely to exhibit both characteristics than predominantly minority schools; schools serving the highest-income-level students are four times as likely to exhibit both aspects than schools serving the poorest students.

These would be impressive numbers under any circumstances, but they are even more impressive considering the population under study—sixth- and eighth-graders. That's a tough crowd. By that age, many students have essentially given up on schools, and schools have

Since the mid-20th century, the mode of production in the United States has shifted dramatically from manufacturing to one increasingly fueled by finance, services, and technology. This shift has accompanied the technological revolution, which has transformed traditional industries and brought about changes that range from streamlined information technology to biomedical engineering.¹⁹

In the last several decades, almost all improvements in productivity have been associated with technology and human capital, thereby drastically reducing the importance of physical capital.²⁰ With the increased globalization of economic activity, firms have spread their operations around the world, often relocating their production facilities to developing nations that have dramatically lower labor costs.²¹

These global economic transformations have adversely affected the competitive position of many U.S. Rust Belt cities. For example, Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh perform poorly on employment growth, an important traditional measure of economic performance. Nationally, employment increased by 25 percent between 1991 and



2001, yet job growth in these older central cities did not exceed 3 percent.²²

With the decline in manufacturing

employment in many of the nation's central cities, most of the jobs for lower-skilled workers are now in retail and service indus-

given up on many of them. Something like the traditional model of Black teaching—supportive but authoritative—still seems to work for a great many children. One might have expected that the sheer magnitude of the results would have attracted a great deal of attention, but this has actually been among the least requested of the studies done by the Chicago Consortium.

Still, there is a growing research base on various aspects of the supportive-authoritative balance problem. For one thing, it helps us understand more precisely the nature of African American educational disadvantage. In Chicago, students attending predominantly African American schools are much less likely than students in integrated schools to be in environments where teachers trust parents (about 42 percent of teachers in predominantly African American schools report strong trust, compared with 72 percent of teachers in integrated schools) and are less likely to be in places where teachers feel a strong sense of collective responsibility.⁸ Another Chicago study shows that in

high schools where student-teacher trust is high (taking that to be an analog for teacher support), students average 2.3 percent fewer absences per term, essentially one additional week of attendance over the school year. In schools with the highest levels of academic pressure, students averaged just under two fewer absences a year.⁹

At the elementary level, Ronald Ferguson, a scholar focused on racial achievement gaps, has found a relationship between how supportive the experience is for children and how they treat one another.¹⁰ If children don't think the teacher both enjoys helping them and holds them to a high standard—what he calls a "high help/high perfectionism" classroom—their engagement and behavior deteriorate, which includes children treating one another poorly.

Clearly, we want to think of support and demand in tandem, but my guess would be that demands are especially important for Black students and for any others who have been branded intellectually inferior. More than 20 years ago, I

studied Chicago's Westside High School, which for a very long time had been among Chicago's most disorganized and dangerous schools.¹¹ At various times, certain parts of the building were virtually ceded to some of the street gangs that infested the schools (and teachers in bad odor with the principal might find themselves regularly assigned to hall duty in those parts of the building). Relationships between the faculty and administration were so dysfunctional that kids could often do pretty much what they wanted. Talking to students who had been in more orderly environments, I found many who preferred more disciplined schools and worked harder in them, but once at Westside they found it hard not to yield to the temptations of being free. Nonetheless, there were individual teachers, teachers who had a "rep," who could clear the halls almost anytime they wanted. Many of these were black teachers and some were coaches, both groups thought to be less afraid of students.

Part of my work at Westside High

tries (for example, store cashiers, customer service representatives, fast-food servers, and custodial work). Whereas jobs in manufacturing industries typically were unionized, relatively stable, and carried higher wages, those for workers with low to modest levels of education in the retail and service industries tend to provide lower wages, be unstable, and lack the benefits and worker protections—such as workers’ health insurance, medical leave, retirement benefits, and paid vacations—typically offered through unionization. This means that workers relegated to low-wage service and retail firms are more likely to experience hardships as they struggle to make ends meet. In addition, the local economy suffers when residents have fewer dollars to spend in their neighborhoods.²³

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the employment balance between central cities and suburbs shifted markedly to the suburbs. Since 1980, over two-thirds of employment growth has occurred outside the central city: manufacturing is now over 70 percent suburban, and wholesale and retail trade is just under 70 percent.²⁴ The

suburbs of many central cities, developed originally as bedroom localities for commuters to the central business and manufacturing districts, have become employment centers in themselves. For example, in Baltimore, Detroit, and Philadelphia, less than 20 percent of the jobs are now located within three miles of the city center.²⁵

Accompanying the rise of suburban and exurban economies has been a change in commuting patterns. Increasingly, workers completely bypass the central city by commuting from one suburb to another. “In the Cleveland region, for example, less than one-third of workers commute to a job in the central city and over half (55 percent) begin and end in the suburbs.”²⁶

Sprawl and economic stagnation reduce inner-city residents’ access to meaningful economic opportunities and thereby fuel the economic decline of their neighborhoods. For example, in Cleveland,

although entry-level workers are concentrated in inner-city neighborhoods, 80 percent of the entry-level jobs are located in the suburbs,²⁷ and there is little public transportation between these neighborhoods and jobs.

In addition to the challenges in learning about and reaching jobs, there is persistent racial discrimination in hiring practices, especially for younger and less-experienced minority workers.²⁸ This racial factor affects black males especially seriously. Today, most of the new jobs for workers with limited education and experience are in the service sector, which includes jobs that tend to be held by women, such as waitstaff, sales clerks, and nurse’s aides. Indeed, “employment rates of young black women now exceed those of young black men, even though many of these women must also care for children.”²⁹ The shift to service jobs has resulted in a greater

School involved trying to understand how students there understood their teachers and how that shaped student behavior. Thus, among other questions, I was asking, “What would a teacher have to be like before you said, ‘That’s a really good teacher’? How can you tell if a teacher is really concerned about students learning something in the course?” In response to the “really concerned” question, students stressed two things: *the really concerned teacher works hard to make the material clear, and, less intuitively, the really concerned teacher is demanding.* Clarity meant that the teacher should check notebooks, encourage questions, ask questions to see whether students understand, and provide students with some indication of their progress. This is again a conception of teaching reminiscent of our authoritative-supportive model; it sees the good teacher as aggressive, as actively making sure students are learning, not just leaving it up to the students. Pedro



Noguera, an education professor and urban sociologist, found the same thinking among a group of students in Berkeley:¹²

They look first for people who care.... Second, they respect teachers who are strict and hold students accountable. Third, they like teachers who teach them something. When they found a teacher who was caring, strict and challenging, they responded really well [despite the fact that] some of these students had criminal records or missed more days than they attended.

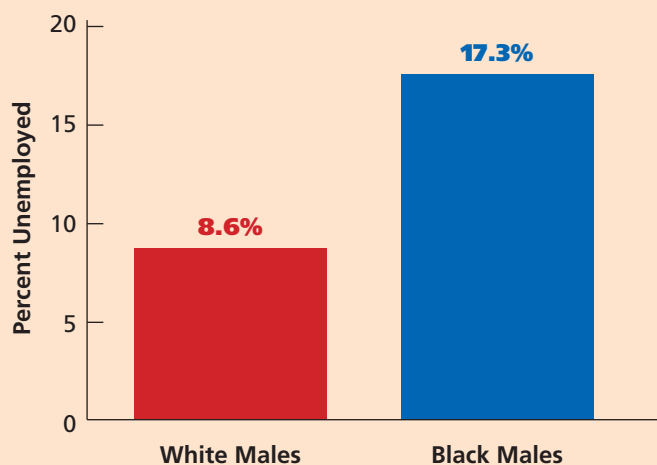
When students at Westside said that the



concerned teacher is demanding, they meant that the serious teacher will make students walk the straight and narrow, stay on their backs about homework and attendance, stop them from fooling around and wasting time in class. Students talked in some detail about what made them think a teacher was “nice,” but they clearly separated that from what made a teacher effec-

Calling for Change in the Unemployment Rate

In the second quarter of 2010, among adults age 20 and older, the unemployment rate of black males was twice as high as that of white males.



SOURCE: A CALL FOR CHANGE, FIGURE 6.2 (DATA FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS).

demand for workers who can effectively serve and relate to the consumer. In an extensive study in Chicago that my colleagues and I conducted, many employers indicated they felt that, unlike women and immigrants (who have recently expanded

the labor pool for service-sector jobs), inner-city black males lack these qualities.³⁰ Instead, low-skilled black males are perceived as dangerous or threatening. In the past, all black men had to demonstrate was a strong back and muscles for heavy

tive. In fact, when it comes to misbehavior, students thought that the teachers who were “too nice” were going to catch more than their share of trouble.

Asked to explain why they cooperated more with some teachers than others—worked hard, paid attention in class, came to class—about half the students said they put out the same level of effort in all classes. The other students overwhelmingly saw themselves as working harder for those teachers who were both more serious about teaching and more insistent on appropriate behavior. It was clearly the perceived quality of teaching in combination with demanding behavior that had the most impact on student behavior. When demands were separated from good teaching (i.e., when poor teachers tried to put pressure on), that could be interpreted as a put-down. Students may respond to demanding teachers, but only if they have somehow legitimated their right to be demanding.

Theresa Perry, a professor who studies high achievement among African American youth, has provided what I

think is the best context for thinking about this: “The task of achievement ... is distinctive for African Americans because doing school requires that you use your mind, and the ideology of the larger society has always been about questioning the mental capacity of African Americans, about questioning Black intellectual competence.”¹³

Whatever intellectual demands mean to everyone else, they mean something more to Black kids and other stigmatized populations because they are in dialogue with a different history. Demanding behavior, properly couched, welcomes you to the table; it signifies your membership in the larger moral and intellectual community. Like the rest of us, kids may enjoy an undemanding environment if they can get it; once they get accustomed to it, it can be a real project to change their habits. At the same time, they can be sophisticated enough to understand, at some level, that it means somebody thinks they can't do better. □

Endnotes

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, “Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?”

lifting and physical labor in a factory, at a construction site, or on an assembly line. They did not have to interact with customers. Today, they have to search for work in the service sector, and employers are less likely to hire them because they have to come into contact with the public. Consequently, black male job-seekers face rising rates of rejection. This may well account for the higher dropout rate and lower academic achievement of black males in comparison with black females. Black males are far less likely than black females to see a strong relationship between their schooling and postschool employment.

With the departure of higher-income families, the least upwardly mobile in society—mainly low-income people of color—are left behind in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and deteriorating physical conditions. These neighborhoods offer few jobs and typically lack basic services and amenities, such as banks, grocery stores and other retail establishments, parks, and quality transit.³¹ Typically, these communities also suffer from substandard schools, many with run-

Journal of Negro Education 4, no. 3 (1935): 328–335.

2. Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

3. Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

4. Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 204.

5. Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 206.

6. Valerie E. Lee, Julia B. Smith, Tamara E. Perry, and Mark A. Smylie, *Social Support, Academic Press, and Student Achievement: A View from the Middle Grades in Chicago* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999).

7. Academics often refer to this as “academic press.” For further reading, see Lee et al., *Social Support*.

8. John Q. Easton, presentation to senior Chicago Public School staff and the Board of Education, Chicago, July 27, 2006.

9. Elaine Allensworth and John Q. Easton, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2007).

10. Nancy Walser, “Recent Research on the Achievement Gap: An Interview with Ronald Ferguson on How Lifestyle Factors and Classroom Culture Affect Black-White Differences,” *Harvard Education Letter* 22, no. 6 (November/December 2006).

11. Charles M. Payne, *Getting What We Ask For: The Ambiguity of Success and Failure in Urban Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984).

12. Pedro Noguera, “The Racial Achievement Gap: How Can We Assure an Equity of Outcomes?” in *Urban Education with an Attitude*, ed. Lauri Johnson, Mary E. Finn, and Rebecca Lewis (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 17–18.

13. Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa Hilliard, *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement among African-American Students* (Boston: Beacon, 2003), 5.

down physical plants. Two of the most visible indicators of neighborhood decline are abandoned buildings and vacant lots. According to one recent report, there are 60,000 abandoned and vacant properties in Philadelphia, 40,000 in Detroit, and 26,000 in Baltimore.³²

Cultural Forces

In addition to racial and nonracial political and economic forces, cultural forces may also contribute to or reinforce racial inequality. Two types of cultural forces are in play: (1) national views and beliefs on race, and (2) cultural traits—shared outlooks, modes of behavior, traditions, belief systems, worldviews, values, skills, preferences, styles of self-presentation, etiquette, and linguistic patterns—that emerge from

patterns of intragroup interaction in settings created by discrimination and segregation and that reflect collective experiences within those settings.

Racism has historically been one of the most prominent American cultural frames and has played a major role in determining how whites perceive and act toward blacks. At its core, racism is an ideology of racial domination with two key features: (1) beliefs that one race is either biologically or culturally inferior to another, and (2) the use of such beliefs to rationalize or prescribe the way members of the “inferior” race should be treated as well as to explain their social position as a group and their collective accomplishments. Today, there is no question that the more categorical forms of racist ideology—in particular,

those that assert the biogenetic inferiority of blacks—have declined significantly, even though they still may be embedded in institutional norms and practices. For example, school tracking, the practice of grouping students of similar capability for instruction, not only tends to segregate African American students but often results in placing some black students in lower-level classes, even though they have the cultural capital—requisite skills for learning—to compete with students in higher-level classes.³³

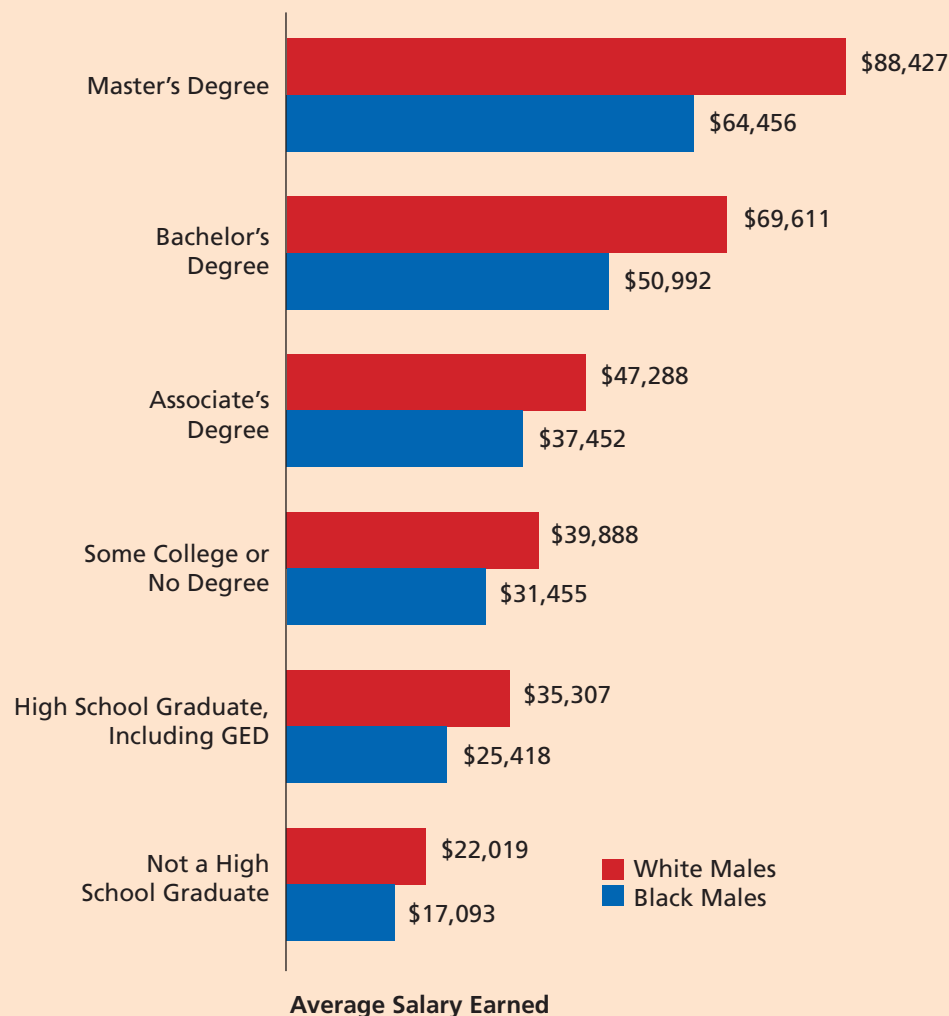
However, there has emerged a form of what some scholars refer to as “laissez faire racism,” a perception that blacks are responsible for their own economic predicament and therefore are undeserving of special government support.³⁴ The idea that the federal government “has a special obligation to help improve the living standards of blacks” because they “have been discriminated against for so long” was supported by only one in five whites in 2001, and has not exceeded support by more than one in four since 1975. Significantly, the lack of white support for this idea is not related to background factors such as level of education or age.

The vast majority of social scientists agree that as a national cultural frame, racism, in its various forms, has had harmful effects on African Americans as a group. Indeed, considerable research has been devoted to the effects of racism in American society. However, there is little research and far less awareness of the impact of emerging cultural frames in the inner city on the social and economic outcomes of poor blacks. Note that distinct cultural frames in the inner city have not only been shaped by race and poverty, but in turn often shape responses to poverty, including responses that may contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. Moreover, an important research question for social scientists is the following: how much of the framing of racial beliefs at the national level is based on the actual observed cultural traits among the inner-city poor and how much of it is the result of biased media reports and racial stereotypes?

In my own earlier work, I have discussed at length how several factors determine the extent to which communities, as areas bounded by place, differ in outlook and behavior.³⁵ These factors include the degree to which the community is socially isolated

Calling for Change in the Income Gap

In 2006, black males age 18 and older earned, on average, lower incomes than white males with similar educational backgrounds.



SOURCE: A CALL FOR CHANGE, FIGURE 6.6 (DATA FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, CENSUS BUREAU, CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY (CPS), OCTOBER, 1967 THROUGH 2008).

from the broader society; the material assets or resources controlled by members of the community; the benefits and privileges the community members derive from these resources; their accumulated cultural experiences from current as well as historical, political, and economic arrangements; and the influence members of the community wield because of these arrangements.

Culture is closely intertwined with social relations in the sense of providing tools (skills, habits, and styles) and creating constraints (restrictions on behavior or outlooks) in patterns of social interaction.³⁶ These constraints include cultural frames (shared visions of human behavior) developed over time through the processes of in-group meaning making (shared views on how the world works) and decision making (choices that reflect shared definitions of how the world works)—for example, in the inner-city ghetto cultural frames define issues of trust/street smarts and “acting black” or “acting white”—that lead to observable group characteristics.*

One of the effects of living in racially segregated neighborhoods is exposure to group-specific cultural traits (cultural frames, orientations, habits, and worldviews as well as styles of behavior and particular skills) that emerged from patterns of racial exclusion and that may not be conducive to social mobility. For example, research has found that some groups in the inner city put a high value on “street smarts,” the behaviors and actions that

keep them safe in areas of high crime.³⁸ Street smarts may be an adaptation to living in unsafe neighborhoods. In this environment, it is wise to avoid eye contact with strangers and keep to yourself. This mindset may also lead someone to approach new situations with a certain level of skepticism or mistrust. Although such an approach is logical and smart in an unsafe



sonal public behavior and regulate violence in Philadelphia’s inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, where crime is high and police protection is low. Anderson argues that the issue of respect is at the root of the code. In a context of limited opportunities for success, some individuals in the community, most notably young black males, devise

alternative ways to gain respect that emphasize manly pride, ranging from simply wearing brand-name clothing, to having the “right look” and talking the right way, to developing a predatory attitude toward neighbors. Anderson points out, however, that no one residing in these troubled neighborhoods is unaffected by the code of the street—especially young people, who are drawn into this negative culture both on the streets and in the schools, as they must frequently adopt “street” behavior as a form of self-defense. As Anderson puts it, “the code of the street is actually a cultural adaptation to a profound lack of faith in the police and the judicial system—and in others who would champion one’s personal security.”⁴⁰

Other concrete examples from the writings of sociologists Elijah Anderson and Sudhir Venkatesh on ghetto experiences might prove to be even more illuminating.³⁹ Each author reveals the existence of informal rules in the inner-city ghetto that govern interactions and shape how people engage one another and make decisions. This decision making is influenced partly by how people come to view their world over time—what we call “meaning making.” It is important to remember that the processes of meaning making and decision making evolve in situations imposed by poverty and racial segregation—situations that place severe constraints on social mobility. Over time, these processes lead to the development of informal codes that regulate behavior.

First of all, Anderson talks about the “code of the street,” an informal but explicit set of rules developed to govern interper-

A related informal but regulated pattern of behavior was described by Venkatesh in his study of the underground economy in ghetto neighborhoods. Venkatesh points out that “the underground arena is not simply a place to buy goods and services. It is also a field of social relationships that enable off-the-books trading to occur in an ordered and predictable manner.”⁴¹ This trading often results in disagreements or breaches because there

*There is mixed evidence for the outcomes of “acting white” as it applies to education. One of the most well-known studies of this concept was published by Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu in 1986. They studied African American students at a high school in Washington, DC, and concluded that the fear of acting white was one of the major factors undermining student achievement. In contrast, Prudence Carter’s studies have not supported the idea that students who avoided “acting white” held lower educational aspirations. Roland Fryer presents yet another perspective. He found that a high grade point average (GPA) presents a social disadvantage for Hispanics and blacks in integrated schools and public schools, but he saw no such effect in schools that were segregated (80 percent or more black) or private. He also noticed a marked difference in this effect among black boys and black girls; black boys in public, integrated schools were particularly susceptible to social ostracism as their GPAs increased, and were penalized seven times more than black students (including both genders) overall.³⁷

are no laws on the books, but “in situations ostensibly criminal and often threatening to personal security, there is still a structure in place that shapes how people make decisions and engage one another.”⁴² In other words, informal rules actually govern what would appear on the surface to be random underground activity. These rules stipulate what is expected of those involved in these informal exchanges and where they should meet. Just as Anderson describes a “code of the street,” Venkatesh talks about a “code of shady dealings.”

Like Anderson in his effort to explain the emergence of the code of the street, Venkatesh argues that the code of shady dealings is a response to circumstances in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, where joblessness is high and opportunities for advancement are severely limited. Furthermore, both Anderson and Venkatesh clearly argue that these cultural codes ultimately hinder integration into the boarder society and are therefore dysfunctional. In other words, they contribute to the perpetuation of poverty.

Anderson finds that for some young men, the draw of the street is so powerful that they cannot avail themselves of legitimate employment opportunities when they become available. Likewise, Venkatesh maintains that adherence to the code of shady dealings impedes social mobility. The “underground economy enables people to survive but can lead to alienation from the wider world,” he states.⁴³ For example, none of the work experience accrued in the informal economy can be listed on a resume for job searches in the formal labor market, and time invested in underground work reduces time devoted to accumulating skills or contacts for legitimate employment.

However, many liberal scholars are reluctant to discuss or research the role that culture plays in the negative outcomes found in the inner city. It is possible that they fear being criticized for reinforcing the popular view that negative social outcomes—poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, crime—are due to the shortcomings of the people themselves. Indeed, sociologist Orlando Patterson maintains that there is “a deep-seated dogma that has prevailed in social science and policy circles since the mid-1960s: the rejection of any explanation that invokes a group’s cul-

tural attributes—its distinctive attitudes, values and tendencies, and the resulting behavior of its members—and the relentless preference for relying on structural factors like low incomes, joblessness, poor schools and bad housing.”⁴⁴

Patterson claims that social scientists have shied away from cultural explanations of race and poverty because of the widespread belief that such explanations are tantamount to blaming the victim; that is, they support the conclusion that the poor themselves, and not the social environment, are responsible for their own poverty and negative social outcomes. He colorfully contends that it is “utterly bogus” to argue, as do by many academics, that cultural explanations necessarily blame the victim for poor social outcomes. To hold an individual responsible for his behavior is not to rule out any consideration of the environmental factors that may have evoked the questionable behavior to begin with. “Many victims of child abuse end up behaving in self-destructive ways,” Patterson states. “To point out the link between their behavior and the destructive acts is in no way to deny the causal role of their earlier victimization and the need to address it.”⁴⁵ Patterson also contends that a cultural explanation of human behavior not only examines the immediate relationship between attitudes and behavior but also looks at the past to investigate the origins and changing nature of these attitudes.

I agree with Patterson that cultural explanations should be part of any attempt

to fully account for such behavior and outcomes. And I think it is equally important to acknowledge that recognizing the important role of cultural influences in creating different racial group outcomes does not require us to ignore or play down the much greater role of social, political, and economic forces that are clearly racial, as well as those that are ostensibly nonracial.

I also strongly agree with Patterson that an adequate explanation of cultural attributes in the black community must explore the origins and changing nature of attitudes and practices going back decades, even centuries. Unfortunately such analyses are complex and difficult.⁴⁶ For example, sociologist Kathryn Neckerman had to conduct years of research to provide the historical evidence to explain why so many black youngsters and their parents lose faith in the public schools. She shows in her book, *Schools Betrayed*, that a century ago, when African American children in most northern cities attended schools alongside white children, the problems commonly associated with inner-city



schools—low achievement and dropping out—were not nearly as pervasive as they are today.⁴⁷

Neckerman carefully documents how city officials responded to increases in the African American student population: by introducing and enforcing segregation between black and white children in the city schools. And she discusses at length how poor white immigrant children—whose family circumstances were at least as impoverished as their black counterparts—received more and better resources for their education. “The roots of classroom alienation, antagonism, and disorder can

be found in school policy decisions made long before the problems of inner-city schools attracted public attention,” states Neckerman.⁴⁸ Clearly, we can more fully understand the frustration and current cultural dynamics in inner-city neighborhoods, in this case with reference to public schools, if we understand the history that work like Neckerman’s uncovers.

Finally, although culture “partly determines behavior, it also enables people to change behavior.”⁴⁹ Culture provides a frame for individuals to understand their world. By ignoring or only investigating culture at a superficial level, social scientists miss an opportunity to help people understand and then reframe attitudes in a way that promotes desirable behavior and outcomes.⁵⁰ However, attitudes must be reframed in conjunction with programs that address structural inequities.

For those committed to fighting inequality, especially those involved in multiracial coalition politics, the lesson from this discussion of key social, political, economic, and cultural forces is to fashion a new agenda that gives more scrutiny to both racial and nonracial policies. Given our devastating recent recession and slow, jobless recovery, it is especially important to scrutinize fiscal, monetary, and trade policies that may have long-term consequences for our national and regional economies. *We must ameliorate the primary problem feeding concentrated poverty: inner-city joblessness.* The ideal solution would be economic policies that

produce a tight labor market—that is, one in which there are ample jobs for all applicants. More than any other group, low-skilled workers depend upon a strong economy, particularly a sustained tight labor market.

This new agenda should also include an even sharper focus on traditional efforts to fight poverty, to ensure that the benefits from any economic upturn are widely shared among the poor and that they become less vulnerable to downward swings in the economy. I refer especially to the following:

- combating racial discrimination in employment, which is especially devastating during slack labor markets;
- revitalizing poor urban neighborhoods, including eliminating abandoned buildings and vacant lots to make them more attractive for economic investment that would help improve the quality of life and create jobs in the neighborhood;
- promoting job training programs to enhance employment opportunities for ghetto residents;
- improving public education to prepare inner-city youngsters for higher-paying and stable jobs in the new economy; and
- strengthening unions to provide the higher wages, worker protections, and benefits typically absent from low-skilled jobs in retail and service industries.

In short, this new agenda would reflect a multipronged approach that attacks inner-city poverty on various levels, an approach that recognizes the complex array of factors that have contributed to the crystallization of concentrated urban poverty and limited the life chances of so many inner-city residents. □

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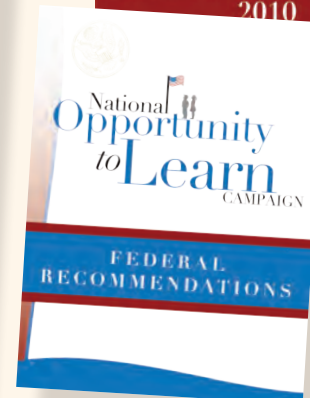
(Continued on page 46)

Campaigning for a Real Opportunity

Founded 20 years ago to ensure that all schools are well resourced and all children are well prepared, the Schott Foundation for Public Education has always been dedicated to increasing educational equity. Today, one of its

top priorities is the broad-based National Opportunity to Learn Campaign. The foundation sees this as a “values-based movement” encouraging reciprocal accountability and calls on all of us—from the federal government to

teachers, from corporations to students and parents—to get involved. Here we show some highlights from the campaign’s website, and we encourage you to learn more at www.otlcampaign.org. —EDITORS





Vermont State Data and Analysis

1st Moderate Proficiency/High Access

93% The chance that a disadvantaged student will have access to a high performing school, compared to a white, non-Latino student.

42% Eighth graders scored proficient or above on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading exam.

\$14 million Total annual economic burden to state taxpayers because of inequity.

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New York State Data and Analysis

24th Moderate Proficiency/Low Access

25% The chance that a disadvantaged student will have access to a high performing school, compared to a white, non-Latino student.

32% Eighth graders scored proficient or above on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading exam.

\$9 billion Total annual economic burden to state taxpayers because of inequity.

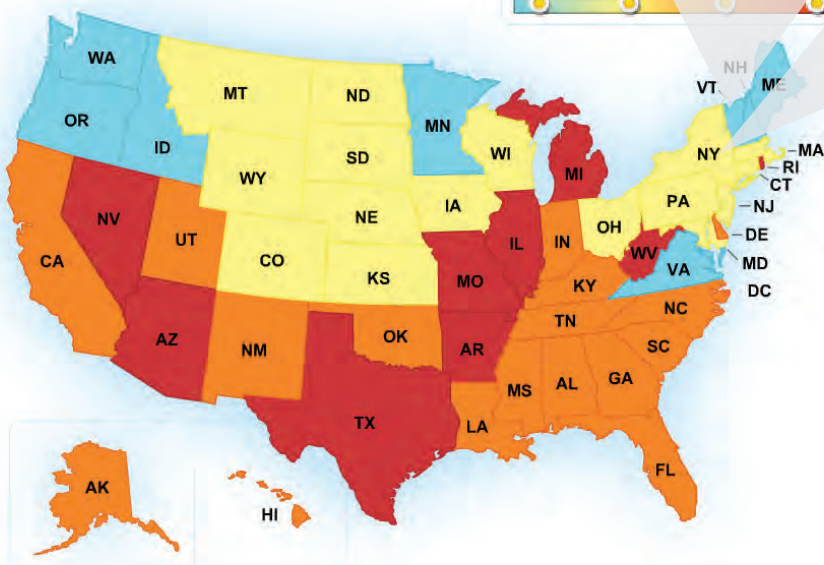
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State Data & Analysis

Click on each state below to view summary data & analysis. Change the map view using the drop down menu to the right.

Overall State Ranking

KEY: Roll over points to view map info.



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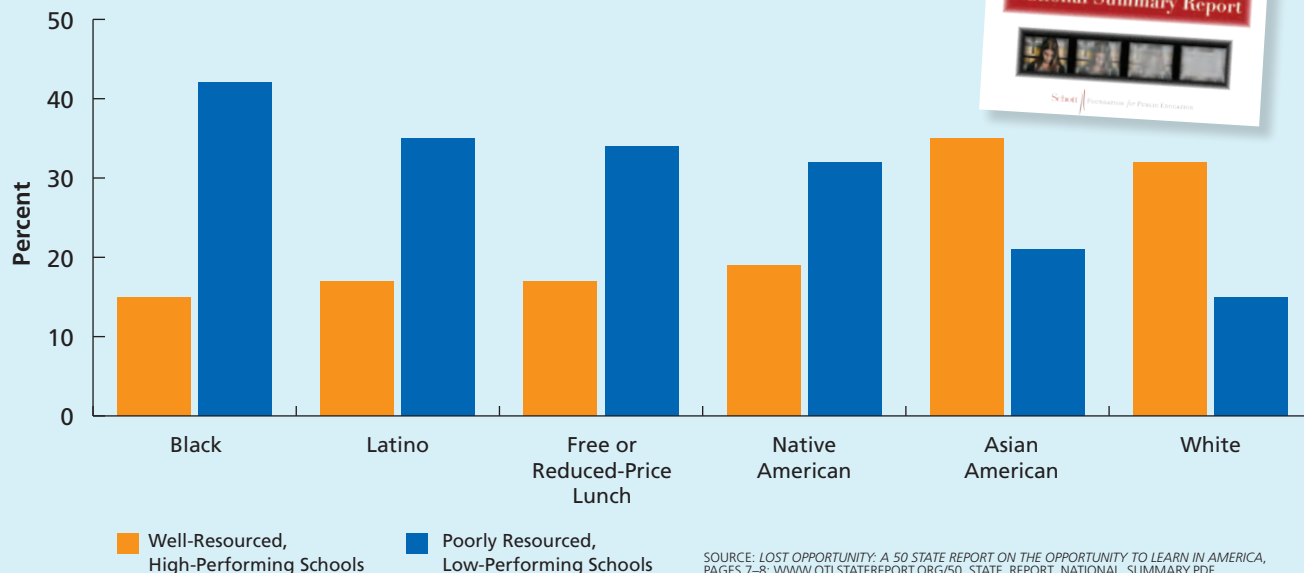
Those states where a moderate number of students achieve national proficiency or above and there is high access to the state's best schools for students from historically disadvantaged groups (African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and low-income students).

Those states where a moderate number of students achieve national proficiency or above and there is low access to the state's best schools for students from disadvantaged groups.

Those states where a low number of students achieve national proficiency or above and there is high access to the state's best schools for students from disadvantaged groups.

Those states where a low number of students achieve national proficiency or above and there is low access to the state's best schools for students from disadvantaged groups.

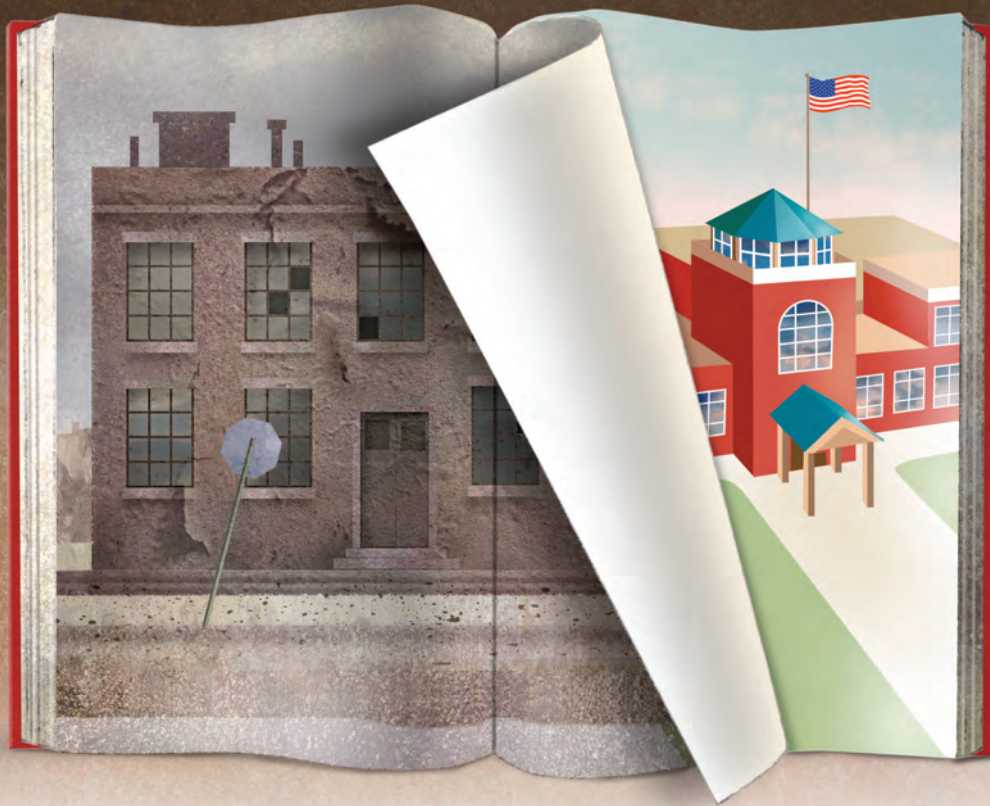
Lost Opportunity clearly shows that the likelihood of attending a well-resourced, high-performing school or a poorly resourced, low-performing school varies dramatically by race and socioeconomic status.



SOURCE: *LOST OPPORTUNITY: A 50 STATE REPORT ON THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN IN AMERICA*, PAGES 7-8; WWW.OTLSTATEREPORT.ORG/50_STATE_REPORT_NATIONAL_SUMMARY.PDF.

Turning the Page on the Equity Debate in Education

How to Give All Children a Real Opportunity



BY RICHARD W. RILEY AND ARTHUR L. COLEMAN

We have entered an era of education reform with an extensive focus on how well we are preparing our students to succeed in postsecondary education and careers in a rapidly changing global economy, as well as to become thriving, contributing members in our

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democracy. Although these aims have recast our national conversation in some important ways, they have not altered fundamentally two of education's timeless questions: What should our education policymakers do to ensure that students of all backgrounds have the same opportunity to succeed? And, what can we do to ensure that our commitment to "education equity" is more than rhetorical flourish?

In this article, we attempt to address these issues with a specific focus on K-12 education, particularly by examining the question of resources—always central to discussions of equity. We do so, however, by urging that the "equity agenda" be understood in light of its potential alignment with the emerging education reform agenda, which is grounded in important principles of shared accountability.

We argue that we need to move from abstract notions of equity devoid of practical application to a world where high expectations and accountability are clear and we are meeting our resource obligations in light of those goals, particularly for students who

are currently underserved by our public schools. To achieve those ends, we believe that states and districts must marry the attention and transparency on student learning outcomes that have characterized much of our national conversation with corresponding attention and transparency on education investments. We highlight the need to ensure that we remain as focused on understanding the structure and flow of our investments as we are on the outcomes those investments produce. This essential attribute of success, we believe, fundamentally requires transparency and alignment of resources with the substantive policy foundations that research and experience suggest will be central to our efforts to drive improved student learning and significant education reform in our nation.*

The Challenges of “Equity” as a Reform Driver

We believe deeply in the idea that *all* children should have the best possible education opportunities and that our commitment is to ensure that each child can find and fulfill his or her potential. To achieve this aim, we believe that, for a number of reasons, a policy focus centered on “education equity” misses the mark.

First, the term “equity”—grounded in concepts of fairness and equality—has become one that is easily dismissed, largely because of its vagueness, as well as the perception among some policymakers that it is code for an unending flow of dollars. Correspondingly, the meaning of “education equity”—used in countless education policy conversations and found in hundreds of education mission statements—can be very different, depending on with whom you’re speaking. Thus, we believe it is important to bring a clarity and coherence to the concept as a way of helping policymakers and others think about what they’re really trying to do (or should be trying to do) when they pursue an “equity agenda.”

Second, as prevalent as attention to equity may be in certain arenas, that attention has not yielded a focus on key operational questions of *investment* anywhere near as intense as the current national focus on education *outcomes*. Investment tends not to garner as much attention in our national dialogue, even though the focus on outcomes often provides a glimpse into key equity issues.

Thus, for our goals associated with equity to have real, practical meaning for educators and the students they teach, we’ve got to do a better job of defining more clearly the operational objectives that will drive improvements in student learning. Especially in this time of shrinking budgets at all levels, we must ensure that federal, state, and local policies reflect key elements that will drive effective action toward these goals. If we’re going to do more with less, we had better be smart about how we’re going to do it.

Thus, to help guide policy discussions and advance more rigorous thinking regarding the strategies and investments we, as a

*Although beyond the scope of this article, this same policy focus also should be the underpinning of comparable early learning and postsecondary efforts—even as the central policy issues are distinct within each of those segments of the education pipeline. Importantly, and despite those key differences, we also must continue the work of breaking down barriers that too long have isolated early learning and postsecondary efforts from K–12 initiatives. We must, in short, work to connect effectively our analysis of investments and outcomes associated with early learning and postsecondary systems with those associated with K–12 reform. Only then will we have met the needs of our children through investments that are truly effective and cost efficient.

nation, should be making in education, we offer perspectives that center on the concept of resource alignment. This concept reflects some important thinking and work that have been under way for decades, while at the same time departing from more traditional equity concepts that often have yielded a simplistic “invest more money” bottom line. We believe that focused attention—and accountability—regarding resource alignment will help ensure that our education funds are spent in ways that are most likely to yield the positive education outcomes that we seek and need for *all* of our nation’s students.

Substantive Policy Foundations

Informed by current education research and experience regarding the strategies and investments that really matter to generate positive education outcomes, a number of policy strands are front and

If we’re going to do more with less, we had better be smart about how we’re going to do it.

center today in conversations about dramatically advancing education reform. The five principles briefly outlined below reflect that growing body of thought.

1. Ensure that every child has highly effective teachers, as well as effective school and district leaders.

All children deserve competent, caring, and qualified teachers in schools organized for success. This means that schools must have effective principals and other administrators who regularly collaborate with teachers, parents, community leaders, and others to improve student achievement—led by school boards who establish the critical policies and operational expectations from which all other actions flow. These are, ultimately, the foundations upon which meaningful education reform will take root, even as other key areas of policy must be addressed.

And those key policies must be focused on our most vital resource—our human capital. Our teachers, principals, and superintendents, and the staff who serve them, are the heart and soul of education. We’ve got to treat them as such—both in expectations and in support.

John Stanford, the late superintendent of schools in Seattle, used to say, “The victory is in the classroom.” For us to declare victory, we’ve got to ensure that our education system is providing the right kind of foundation.

The United States is losing an estimated \$7.3 billion a year to teacher attrition, and billions more are being spent to support teachers who are moving from one school to another in search of

better working conditions.¹ And the turnover with respect to school principals and superintendents is similarly jarring. As a result of the enormous and constant turnover in faculty and school leadership, children—especially low-income children and children of color—are being held accountable for meeting standards that their schools are not prepared to help them reach. The children with the greatest needs are receiving the least. They often are taught by a passing parade of substitutes, their learning suffers, and the cycle of education inequality is repeated from one generation to the next.

We have an obligation to break this cycle. To close the student achievement gap, we must close the teaching-quality gap. But even the best teachers in the world can't do this job alone. In survey after survey, teachers



tell us they leave low-performing schools because of unpredictable teaching conditions, inadequate preparation for the challenges they face, and poor career prospects. To give teachers the support they need, we must focus on support that will develop and maintain school and district leadership; and we must change antiquated school staffing policies, outdated compensation systems, and perverse incentive structures that concentrate inexperienced teachers and unqualified individuals in low-performing schools.

The best teachers tell us that, if we want them to serve in high-priority schools, they need a great principal and at least four to six other talented teachers to work with them as a team in the school. To teach for America's future, we must develop a true profession in which teacher preparation, teaching practice, and the structure of career advancement are seamlessly linked and relentlessly focused on improving student learning.

2. Ensure that every child has access to challenging courses aligned with rigorous standards and the kinds of instructional supports necessary to help them succeed in those courses.

By the time America's youth are supposed to don a cap and gown, a third of them have dropped out—a loss of 1.3 million students a year.² In many low-income high schools, the graduation rate is less than 50 percent. But even when we get young people into college, many of them drop out after their freshman year. We, in fact, have a deep-seated structural crisis in American education—

a crisis that is across the board, from school readiness to high school graduation to college completion.

Our national problem calls for national solutions—and we believe that the adoption by more than 40 states of the internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics reflects one essential step in the right direction. Along with these common core standards, we will need the right mix of summative and formative assessments that tell us not only how each school is performing but, just as important, what each individual child's academic status, needs, and growth are. Upon those important foundations, our state and local leaders then must ensure that we have aligned, rigorous, and supportive curricula that provide the basis for each child to learn to the high standards we have set—and we must make certain that

Our accountability systems must focus more on diagnostic measures to support continuing improvement rather than on punitive sanctions.

the appropriate supports are in place to help each student achieve his or her potential.

It is vital that the movement to raise achievement levels around a core of common standards and assessments not lead to standardization and the stifling of creativity in the classroom. Correspondingly, our accountability systems must focus more on diagnostic measures to support continuing improvement rather than on punitive sanctions. If our efforts promote fear, rather than embrace ways of achieving success, then we will have missed the mark entirely about how to raise standards as a foundation for driving improved classroom instruction and learning.

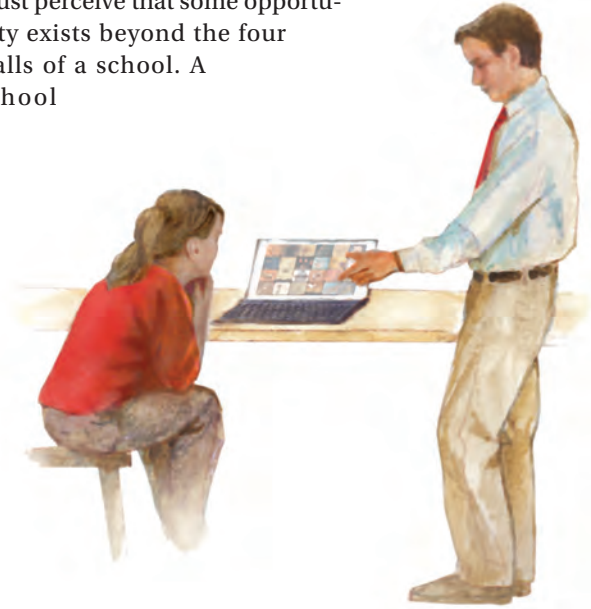
Indeed, our national commitment to raise achievement levels isn't merely about testing and accountability. It also is about raising our expectations for all children early on—and about engaging children in the excitement of learning. Many years ago, the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, in his book *The Aims of Education*, wrote, "the rhythms of education are in three stages: romance, precision, and generalization." "Romance," he says, "makes precision palatable. Without romance, precision dulls the mind and causes the student to focus on inert dead knowledge." We must not take the "romance" out of teaching and learning, even as we embrace an accountability focus that will challenge each of us to think differently and do better.

3. Ensure that every child has appropriate counseling and support to identify postsecondary and career options and how to pursue them.

Teachers and principals can't do it alone, as we all know. School

counselors are an integral part of supporting students in their quest to pursue learning opportunities throughout their K–12 experience and beyond. Alarming, data reveal a national average of one counselor for every 457 students. In four states—Arizona, California, Minnesota, and Utah—the situation is even more dire, with a single counselor, on average, “serving” over 700 students.³ And in most cases, postsecondary education is just a small part of the vast responsibilities of these counselors. Our students deserve better.

Each student, inherently possessing different strengths and interests, must perceive that some opportunity exists beyond the four walls of a school. A school



counselor, whose role is dedicated solely to providing the academic and financial information and guidance to the student and his or her family to navigate postsecondary options, plays a vital role in this conversation. In addition, school counselors collaborate with faculty and other staff members in establishing and following integrated practices that support student success in the school and in postsecondary pursuits.

4. Ensure that every child is educated in a setting that celebrates learning, facilitates positive and challenging student and teacher interaction, and provides a safe, healthy space for all.

The best standards, assessments, teachers, counselors, and curriculum are no guarantee of successful education outcomes, unless those elements come together in a school culture that embraces and celebrates learning (rigor and all) and in an environment in which all students, regardless of their background, feel safe, healthy, and secure.

Although often difficult to capture as a matter of policy or school operations, the essential culture of high expectations is, as we know, a key ingredient in the success of any school and any student. To advance that mindset, our leaders and teachers must ensure that they walk the talk of high expectations, every day and with every student. In today’s increasingly diverse society, where students from multiple backgrounds can be expected to come together under one roof, we must ensure that our teachers and leaders exhibit the knowledge, cultural competence, and com-

mitment to help every student succeed.

Correspondingly, students must walk through the school door feeling safe, healthy, and secure. If they do not, then we cannot expect them to engage or learn, or to reach their individual potential. Whether we turn to the extensive and growing body of research that establishes the link between safe and supportive school environments and learning, or whether we turn to the headlines that make all too real the devastating consequences of school environments in which deteriorating conditions and fear are a reality, the need is obvious. We must work together around proven strategies to create safe, healthy, and welcoming environments and to respond effectively to acts of bullying, harassment,

We must create welcoming environments and respond effectively to bullying, violence, and other disruptions—and do so beginning in the very early grades.

violence, and other behavioral disruptions—and do so beginning in the very early grades.

5. Ensure that schools connect with their families and communities to develop fiscally sound models for providing students with services that can make a positive difference in their education experience: improved parental involvement, health and counseling services, and extended-time opportunities with additional academic support and enrichment, among others.

Finally, even if we have invested wisely and sufficiently in all the elements that are emblematic of school success and that, by extension, are most likely to lead to student success, the reality is that, in today’s world, that still may not be enough for some students. Hundreds of thousands of students come to school each day with needs that require special support—a mental health specialist, medical and dental professionals, someone who can address a family crisis, an adviser who can connect the student with out-of-school education supports, a mature friend or caring adult to talk to, and more.

So, as we consider our education investments, let us not lose sight of the need for that outside-of-the-school support—academic or otherwise—that is indispensable to many students. The good news is that we increasingly see evidence of proven and cost-effective strategies that address the needs of the whole child. This comprehensive approach can help significantly reduce achievement gaps and improve student outcomes. If we are not attentive to our students for whom this kind of support is as vital as an effective classroom teacher, we will have failed in providing the support and enrichment needed to help our youth catch up, keep up, and get ahead.

Key Policy Foundations: Enough?

These points are likely to strike a familiar chord. They reflect much of the thinking, dialogue, and consensus that have developed in education over the past several decades. However, that emerging consensus, particularly with respect to how we as a nation are addressing issues of equity, is not without its detractors.

Some have lodged criticisms that policies framed holistically (as these are) in the name of equity lose sight of the very students who continue to exemplify the greatest needs—low-income and minority students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Our view is that this framing does not diminish that

Systems and Resource Alignment

With this backdrop, we then must ensure that we maintain a systemic focus on resource alignment as a central driver of meaningful education reform.

To elaborate, our experience over time has taught us that investments that are necessary foundations for this vision must include as much focus on the *process* of achieving success as on the substance of what success looks like. Premised upon a belief in the power of public education, well-developed policies will be little more than well-developed policies without: (1) a clear, sustained commitment to action; (2) the capacity to deliver on that commitment at the federal, state, and district levels; and (3)

Often missing from our numbers obsession is the contextualization of performance data. Without it, how do we know what the test scores mean?

focus. To the contrary, we believe that, with its holistic lens, this framework reinforces the attention on the key, systemic education areas (for which there must be, in the end, systemic solutions) that particularly affect these very students in need. This does not mean that there is not more to do as we address the specific needs of specific groups of students. Our point is, simply, that those efforts are unlikely to yield the effective and efficient results we seek if we do not pursue them in the context of a common policy framework that includes a focus on our investments.

At the same time, we recognize that there are policymakers and others who have resisted any mention of more resources for fear that it will lead to an unending stream of money, too much of which is spent in unproductive ways. We agree, as do many, that the question of resources cannot be one simply of dollars. But let there be no mistake: money matters, even though the answer to effective education reform does not lie simply or solely in spending more money. Indeed, with the current budget realities facing our federal government and most of our states, we are faced with the unenviable and undeniable challenge of how to do more with less.

Thus, our conversation must be open to new ways of assessing costs and striving for new efficiencies—all toward yielding better outcomes. In other words, we must frame the resource conversation in light of specific, targeted investments that are educationally sound and based on research and practice. We must do so while embracing meaningful, operational, shared accountability. And, in the end, we must be prepared to spend more in certain areas, even as we spend less in others.



an aligned, operational game plan for effective implementation.

The overlapping, intersecting federal, state, and local roles intrinsic to our system of federalism complicate the overarching questions of whether we are establishing policies in ways that recognize the unique power and leverage of each to advance meaningful reform. In other words, are we establishing, at each level, the correct (aligned) incentives to drive or at least encourage the most efficient and effective behaviors as part of our operational game plan for effective implementation?

Without an effective baseline for assessing the impact of investments in the five areas discussed above, and despite the best of intentions, we've done little but raise the prospect of seeing scarce resources go to waste and of missing opportunities to change the trajectory of so many children in need. Moreover, without a renewed focus on accountability regarding our investments, there is nothing to counterbalance today's (often contextless) focus on outcomes—and nothing to increase the odds of achieving our desired success. So, to ensure that we are meeting as effectively as possible the needs of all of our students, the central question to be addressed, with respect to each of the five areas, is this: *what, based on research and practice, are the key indicators of cost-effective investments that are likely to yield successful outcomes for all students?*

In other words, where and how should we be spending our
(Continued on page 46)

The Economics of Inequality

The Value of Early Childhood Education



BY JAMES J. HECKMAN

Educational equity is often discussed as a moral issue. Another way to think about equity is as a way to promote productivity and economic efficiency. As an economist, I focus on the economic value of equalizing educational opportunities and achievement in order to identify the most effective way to increase the productivity of the American economy. We need a capable and productive workforce that will compete successfully in the global economy. Underdeveloped human potential burdens our economy and leaves us with a workforce that is less than it could be.

James J. Heckman is the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, a Nobel Memorial Prize winner in economics, and an expert in the economics of human development. His groundbreaking work with a consortium of economists, developmental psychologists, sociologists, statisticians, and neuroscientists has proven that the quality of early childhood development heavily influences health, economic, and social outcomes for individuals and society at large. Heckman has proven that there are substantial economic gains to be had by investing in early childhood development. This article is based on "Schools, Skills, and Synapses," which Heckman wrote for the July 2008 issue of Economic Inquiry, available at <http://ftp.iza.org/dp3515.pdf>.

Traditionally, equity and efficiency are viewed as competing goals. One can be fair in devising a policy, but it often happens that what is fair is not economically efficient. Conversely, what is efficient may not be fair. Thus a cut in the tax rate on capital gains promotes economic efficiency by stimulating investment; it is not fair because it mainly benefits the rich.

What is remarkable is that there are some policies that both are fair—i.e., promote equity—and promote economic efficiency. Investing in the early years of disadvantaged children's lives is one such policy.

A large body of data from economics, biology, and psychology shows that educational equity is more than a social justice imperative; it is an economic imperative that has far-reaching implications for our nation. My work has focused on the economic value of human capital development, specifically the value of providing resources to disadvantaged children and their families in an attempt to equalize the children's possibilities for social and economic success.

For many years, Flavio Cunha from the University of Pennsylvania, myself, and colleagues at the University of Chicago, University College Dublin, and other institutions have been synthesizing what is known from the fields of biology, human development, education, psychology, cognitive science, and

economics to answer the following three questions:

1. When does inequality start?
2. Is it worthwhile to reduce inequality by investing in education?
3. How best to invest limited resources to create more productive human capital?

It is important to look at the data and invest wisely. This is an imperative among economists. Our society has finite resources. Taxpayers can and should expect value for their investments in government programs and in their fellow citizens. Taking a hard look at the economic value of efforts to create human capital helps us see where best to invest our resources in education to achieve its ideal—equalizing opportunity to build greater and enduring value for all.

The evidence is quite clear that inequality in the development of human capabilities produces negative social and economic outcomes that can and should be prevented with investments in early childhood education, particularly targeted toward disadvantaged children and their families.

The Data Show a Need for a New Model of Skill Formation

America is using antiquated models of human skill formation in devising policies to educate children for success in the 21st century. My colleagues and I have analyzed many long-term studies of early human development and the impact of early investment on schooling and adult outcomes. We reached the following conclusions:

1. Inequality in early childhood experiences and learning produces inequality in ability, achievement, health, and adult success.
2. While important, cognitive abilities alone are not as powerful as a package of cognitive skills and social skills—defined as attentiveness, perseverance, impulse control, and sociability. In short, cognition and personality drive education and life success, with character (personality) development being an

important and neglected factor.

3. Adverse impacts of genetic, parental, and environmental resources can be overturned through investments in quality early childhood education that provide children and their parents the resources they need to properly develop the cognitive and personality skills that create productivity.
4. Investment in early education for disadvantaged children from birth to age 5 helps reduce the achievement gap, reduce the need for special education, increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lower the crime rate, and reduce overall social costs. In fact, every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education produces a 7 to 10 percent per annum return on investment.¹ Policies that provide early childhood educational resources to the most disadvantaged children produce greater social and economic equity. We can create a more level and productive playing field for all by making wise and timely investments in effective education.

Winning or Losing the Lottery of Birth

Each of us is born into circumstances over which we have no control. Our parents, their genes, education, health status, economic resources, and environment are passed onto us through our families and neighborhoods. These endowments shape the trajectories of our lives.

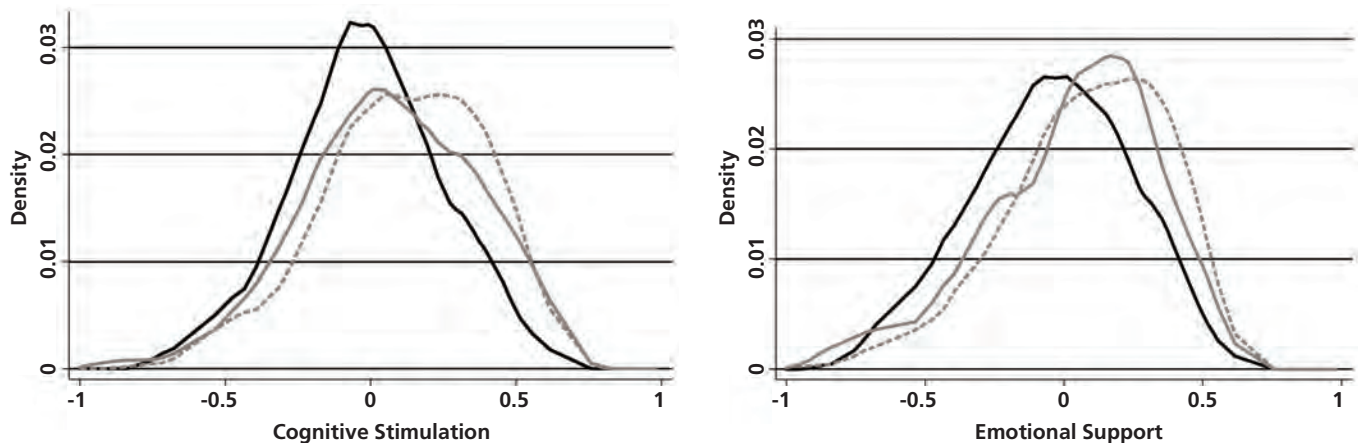
By nature and circumstance, endowments are unequal. At birth, each child inherits different capabilities and different resources to capitalize on them. We can't completely change that picture. But we can change some of it. In particular, we should address the inequity in the resources families have to properly develop their children's potential.

It comes as no surprise that there are significant differences in family environments and the resources invested in children across socioeconomic groups. Gaps in cognitive and emotional stimulation for children from families of different socioeconomic status open up early. Family status makes a substantial difference.

The graphs below show the frequency of cognitive stimulation and emotional support against standardized scales arrayed from the worst on the left to the best on the right. A curve shifted

Cognitive Stimulation and Emotional Support by Family Type

Ages 0–2, female white children, by family type. Cognitive stimulation is measured by how often parents read to children and the learning environment in the home. Emotional support is measured by how often children receive encouragement (e.g., meals with parents).²





rightward indicates more beneficial stimulation or support. Intact families invest greater amounts in their children than do single-parent families, although the exact reasons why are not known. These investments pay off in higher achievement.

There are large gaps in cognitive stimulation and emotional support at early ages. They persist throughout childhood and strongly influence adult outcomes. The evidence on disparities in child-rearing environments and their consequences for adult outcomes is troubling in light of the shrinking proportion of children being raised in intact families. The proportion of American children under the age of 18 with a never-married mother grew from less than 2 percent in 1968 to over 12 percent in 2006. The fraction of American children under age 18 with only a single parent (i.e., never married or divorced) has grown from 12 percent to over 27 percent during this period.

The problem is not just income. Even though income is the standard way to measure poverty, recent research suggests that parental income is an inadequate measure of the resources available to a child. Good parenting is more important than cash. High-quality parenting can be available to a child even when the family is in adverse financial circumstances. While higher income facilitates good parenting, it doesn't guarantee it. *An economically advantaged child exposed to low-quality parenting is more disadvantaged than an economically disadvantaged child exposed to high-quality parenting.*

It is not feasible in a free society to insist that all children be raised by married parents or that individuals pass a parenting test before having children. It is feasible to recognize the trends in our society and make adjustments in social investments to fill gaps and improve social and economic outcomes.

The problem is not just one of single parenting. We currently have a society that makes high-quality parenting difficult. The high cost of living often requires dual careers and incomes. Work

hours and commutes are long, wages are stagnant, and relatively few jobs offer generous parental leave benefits. In addition, we no longer live in intact, intergenerational families where parents are supported in the daily tasks of child-rearing by their parents and siblings.

When asked, a large majority of Americans agree that the interests of children are best served if one parent remains at home with the child. This is a bittersweet affirmation of a family value that is nearly impossible to fulfill for many middle-class families, let alone working-class and working-poor families. Parents need help, and their children will suffer if they don't get it. Society will pay the price in higher social costs and declining economic fortunes.

Poor parenting is an important contributor to life poverty. But parenting deficits can be addressed. An equalizing factor is early access to education, which changes the equation for the parent and the child. Like quality parenting, quality early learning is defined as developing a package of cognitive and character skills.

Cognition and Character Propel Success

Numerous studies have documented that cognitive ability, usually measured by scholastic achievement tests, predicts schooling, wages, participation in crime,

health, and success in many facets of life. Personality traits—often referred to as character—have also proven to be powerful predictors of the same outcomes.³ These abilities are attributes of character: perseverance, motivation, self-esteem, self-control, conscientiousness, and forward-thinking behavior.

Cognition and character work together. They determine future social and economic status. For example, the higher the cognitive and character capabilities, the more likely it is that the individual will choose and succeed in a white-collar job.

This is borne out in my recent joint work on the economic consequences of getting a GED (a high school equivalency credential obtained by scoring high enough on an achievement test). Those who don't graduate from high school but obtain a GED are less successful economically than high school graduates. This has more to do with shortfalls in personality skills—or character—than cognition. The GED test is effective in screening for test takers' cognitive abilities. It completely misses their noncognitive traits.⁴ Individuals who persist in graduating from high school are more likely to have personality traits that help them succeed in life. They show up, control their impulses, work toward a goal, and work with others. Those with GED certificates are as smart as ordinary high school graduates, but they tend to be characters rather than people with character who have greater value and potential for employment. Simply put, cognition and character



drive the educational success that ultimately results in economic success for individuals and society at large.

The same bundle of psychological traits strongly predicts a variety of diverse behaviors, such as smoking, employment, teenage pregnancy, wages, wages given schooling, and many other aspects of economic and social life—all of which affect local, state, and national economies.⁵

Given this fact, it is alarming that our education system primarily values cognitive achievement. Important character traits that promote personal achievement are largely ignored or maligned as “soft” and nonmeasurable skills. Evidence suggests that efforts that focus mainly on closing disparities in cognitive achievement are not as successful as they could be because they neglect the need to close gaps in character development.

Low-quality parenting fails to provide children with cognitive and character development. Low-quality education fails in the same way. High-quality early education can be an equalizing factor.

Targeting Disadvantaged Children Promotes Economic Efficiency

We cannot possibly equalize all the factors that contribute to achievement and personal success. But we can invest wisely to correct disparities that create large and persistent problems that threaten the well-being of our nation.

Gaps in the capabilities that play important roles in determining diverse adult outcomes open up early across socioeconomic groups. The gaps originate before formal schooling begins and persist through childhood and into adulthood. Remediating the problems created by the gaps is not as cost effective as preventing them at the outset.

For example, schooling after the second grade plays only a minor role in creating or reducing gaps. Conventional measures of educational inputs—class size and teacher salaries—that

receive so much attention in policy debates have small effects on creating or eliminating disparities. This is surprising when one thinks of the great inequality in schooling quality across the United States and especially among disadvantaged communities.

My colleagues and I have looked at this. We controlled for the effects of early family environments using conventional statistical models. The gaps substantially narrowed. This is consistent with evidence in the Coleman Report (which was published in 1966) that showed family characteristics, not those of schools, explain much of the variability in student test scores across schools.

Such evidence opens the question of which aspects of families are responsible for producing these gaps. Are they due to genes? Family environments? Family investment decisions? Can the gaps be avoided or surmounted? Evidence from intervention studies, such as the High-Scope Perry Preschool Program⁶ and the Abecedarian Project,⁷ suggests an important role for investing resources in improving family environments in order to produce better education and adult outcomes.* Creating a positive early environment through parental support and/or formal early childhood education shapes abilities, capabilities, and achievement.

Knowing this, it is imperative to change the way we look at education. We should invest in the foundation of school readiness from birth to age 5 by providing early childhood education for disadvantaged children. We should build on that foundation with high-quality elementary and secondary education to sustain the development of successful lives. Providing that kind of equity will build a more productive society for all.

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Enriching Early Family Environments Can Compensate for Disadvantage

The Perry Preschool Program is the flagship early childhood intervention program. Perry enriched the lives of low-income African American children with initial IQs of 85 or below. The intervention was targeted to 3-year-olds and was relatively modest: 2.5 hours per day of classroom instruction, 5 days per week, and 1.5 hours of weekly home visits. Children participated for only two years, and no further intervention was given. But the lives of participants were tracked for decades to see the effect on school and adult outcomes.

Perry did not produce lasting gains in the IQs of its male participants and produced at best modest gains in IQ for females. Yet the program has a rate of return of around 7 to 10 percent per annum for males and females—well above the post-World War II

*To learn more about the Perry Preschool Program, see www.highscope.org. For more information on the Abecedarian Project, see www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc.



stock market returns to equity (estimated to be 5.8 percent before the 2008 meltdown). This evidence defies a strictly genetic interpretation of the origins of inequality.

Even though their IQs after age 10 were not higher on average, participants' achievement test scores were higher. This evidence underscores the difference between achievement test scores and IQ. Achievement tests measure acquired knowledge and are influenced by personality factors.⁸ The principal influence in the Perry Program was its positive effect on non-cognitive (character) skills.⁹



Direct investment in children is only one possible channel for intervening in the lives of disadvantaged children. Many successful programs also work with mothers to improve parenting skills. The two inputs—direct investment in the child's cognition and personality, and investment in the mother and the family environment she creates—are distinct, but they complement each other. Improvements in either input improve child outcomes. Improvements in both are the wisest investment.

The Nurse-Family Partnership[†] intervenes solely with at-risk first-time mothers during pregnancy, sends nurses to the home regularly for the first two years of a child's life, and teaches mothering and infant-care skills. It promotes adult success of the children of disadvantaged mothers. In addition, research documents that perinatal interventions that reduce fetal exposure to alcohol and nicotine have long-term effects on cognition, socioemotional skills, and health.¹⁰

The evidence from a variety of early intervention programs¹¹ shows that enriching the early environments of disadvantaged children has lasting beneficial effects on adolescent and adult outcomes of program participants.

Moving Toward Better Education and Economic Outcomes

Educational equity is often seen as a social movement to bring equal educational opportunities to disadvantaged populations, as well as to equalize educational achievement across a wide range of



people with different backgrounds, skills, abilities, and family resources.

It's a noble cause. But one person's nobility can be seen by another as an entitlement program that provides great value to the receiver and little to the giver. This is why I have not focused my work on the moral aspects of providing equity through early childhood education—even though the case for early intervention could be framed this way. I've focused on its practical value—why it makes sense and how it generates 7 to 10 cents per year on every initial dollar invested.

We can make serious inroads toward reducing inequality, elevating the underclass, and generating more productivity from our investments in people. But to do so requires that we accept the facts and rethink our notions of parenting, education, and the development of human potential.

Achieving educational equity starts by recognizing that nothing is equal and everything is dynamic. People have diverse abilities. These abilities account for a large portion of the variation across people in socioeconomic success. Substantial ability gaps across children from various socioeconomic groups emerge before they start school.

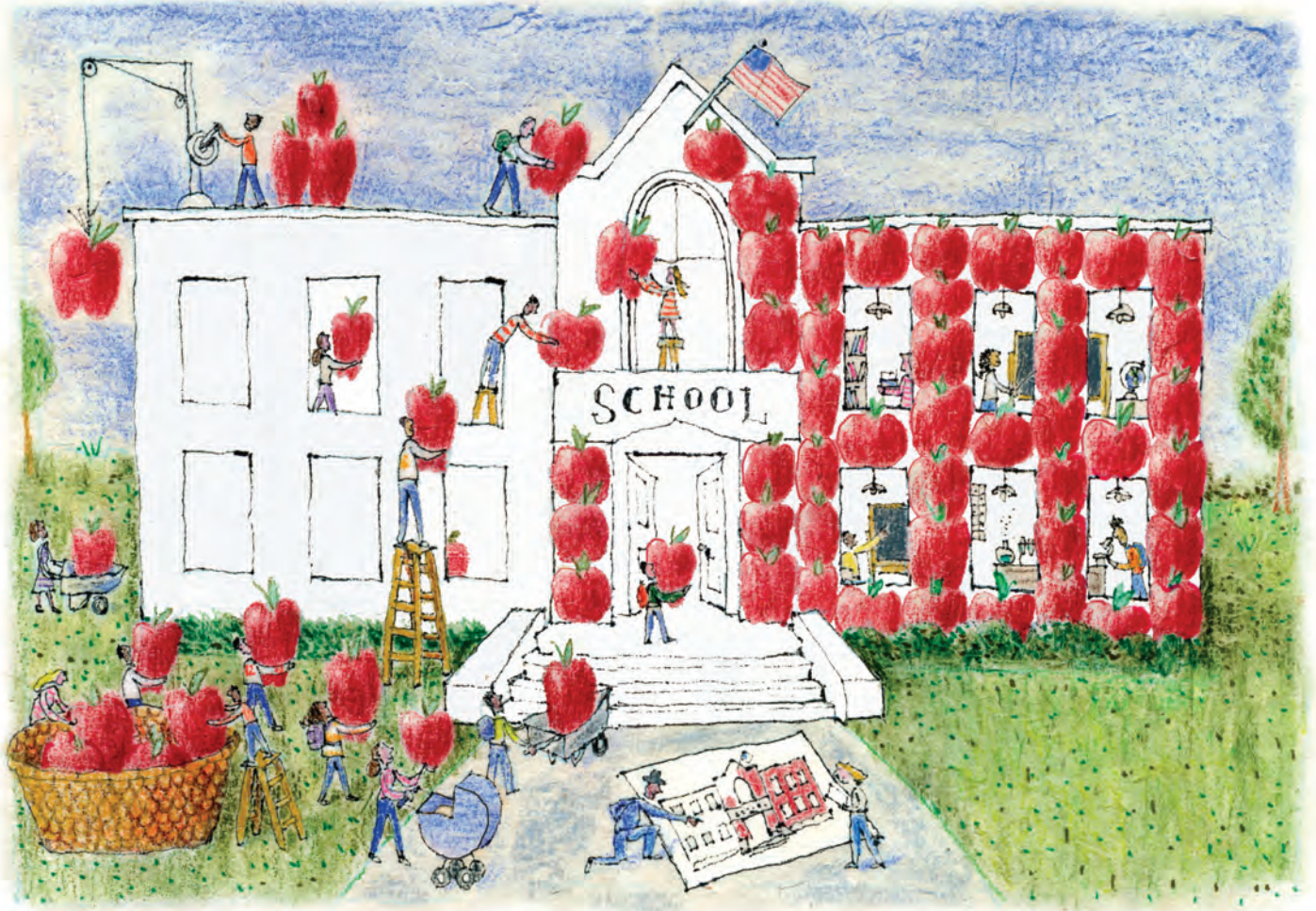
Since inequality starts at or before birth, it can and should be corrected at or before birth with the resource of early childhood and parental education. Evidence shows that supplementing the family environments of disadvantaged children with educational resources is an effective and cost-efficient way to provide equal opportunity, achievement, and economic success. Gains made in early childhood should be followed through with quality ele-

(Continued on page 47)

[†]To learn more about the Nurse-Family Partnership, see www.nursefamilypartnership.org.

Organizing for Equity

Most Policymakers Have Done Little for Our Poorest Schools—Can Parents Fill the Void?



BY MICHAEL B. FABRICANT

At least since the civil rights movement, Americans have documented and decried—but done little to decrease—the achievement gap. This gulf, one of many that divide us by race and class, has festered in part because the larger question of inequitable investment in poor

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communities of color has long been neglected. Demonstration projects of various kinds have been tested in selected communities—but little has been made of the successes. Demonstration projects, if they work, are meant to be scaled up; however, a more ambitious, transformative investment in a cross section of poor communities across the nation has never been attempted.

The reticence to make such an investment has to do with the magnitude of resources required and a lack of political will. Presently, any call for such investment is undercut by both the recession and a political reluctance to tax even the wealthiest citizens. Income inequality in the United States is now at its highest level since the Census Bureau began tracking household income in 1967. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the “top 10 percent of the income distribution has claimed almost two-thirds of the gain to overall incomes since 1979, with the top 1 percent alone claiming 38.7 percent of overall gains.”¹ Child poverty is increasing, the middle class is disappearing, and the wealthy are becoming dramatically wealthier. In 1983, the net worth of the

wealthiest 1 percent of households was 131 times greater than the median family net worth. By 2007, it was 181 times greater—and by 2009, it was 225 times greater.² Such inequality is neither natural nor inevitable: the United States has the highest income disparity among Western industrialized nations.³ And, as the article on page 5 demonstrates, income inequality is highly detrimental. Across whole societies (not just among the poor), income inequality is related to an array of social problems, including poorer health, more stress, higher crime, and lower academic achievement.

Our income inequality is mirrored in our nation's inequitable spending on public education. As the most recent *Quality Counts* report shows,⁴ per-pupil spending (adjusted for regional cost differences) ranges from \$6,525 in Utah to \$17,114 in Wyoming. Within states, the average disparity in per-pupil spending (adjusted for regional costs) between districts at the 5th and 95th percentiles is \$4,286. In 43 out of the 49 states for which data are available, districts with higher property values tend to have higher education revenues (state and local combined) than districts with lower property values. Unlike teachers and administrators in nations that routinely perform well in international assessments—such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea—educators across the United States have vastly different resources at their fingertips. From per-pupil spending to instructional materials, student assessments to professional development, our educational systems are remarkably unequal.⁵

As a professor of social work with a long history of working with schools and communities in New York City, I see a very strong relationship between inequitable investment and academic performance. In our poorest communities, our school systems are overwhelmed with needy students and starved for more resources. Setting aside the family deterioration and community disinvestment that create the achievement gap before children even begin school, the struggles of public schools in inner-city neighborhoods are exacerbated by a lack of strategic investment in teachers, in physical infrastructure, and in rigorous academic programming backed by intensive interventions (such as lengthening the school day for students who are behind). Although encrusted bureaucratic or organizational cultures invariably contribute to listless innovation and anemic forms of practice, larger forces of inequality and underinvestment are having a much more powerful corrosive effect on our schools and communities.

Because the problems in our inner cities are not new, I see little reason to hope that any positive change will emerge from our nation's elite policymaking circles. When it comes to public education, our leaders are far too insulated from the consequences of their choices. Those closest to the disasters of growing inequality, long-standing underinvestment, and new recession-related disinvestment in public education must organize a counterbalancing power to challenge present policymaking trends. Those best able

to mount such a challenge are parents, students, and teachers.

The breakdowns in public systems of education in the poorest communities of color are best described not with cold numbers, but with the language of those who live with those failures daily. In District 9 of the South Bronx, a group of parents has long struggled with the many ways the system is failing their children. At a community meeting, one parent-turned-leader, Ocyntia Williams, a thoughtful and articulate critic of local schooling, talked about the reasons parents needed to organize: "We are doing what we have to do to change a situation that dooms our kids to failure. We have classes that are overcrowded, teachers that leave after a year or two because they don't get any kind of support, buildings that are breaking down, and not enough books. How can anyone in their right mind expect that our kids can

achieve in that situation? We need the city to give our kids what they deserve—investment that can make a difference!"⁶

In most high-performing countries, desperate parents need not be the drivers of educational improvements because equitable investments in skillful teaching, challenging curricula, and assessments that encourage ambitious learning among teachers and students are the norm. Perhaps most critically,

additional resources are directed to those schools and students where the needs are greatest—and the benefits of such investments show up in international assessments. As the most recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report on equity noted, "while most of the students who perform poorly in PISA are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, some peers from similar backgrounds excel in PISA, demonstrating that overcoming socio-economic barriers to achievement is possible."⁷ The PISA report calls these low-socioeconomic status, high-achieving students "resilient" and defines them as coming from the bottom quarter of the distribution of socioeconomic background in their country, but scoring in the top quarter among students from all countries with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. In Finland, Japan, Canada, and Singapore, for example, between 39 and 48 percent of disadvantaged students are resilient. In Hong Kong and Shanghai, 72 and 76 percent are resilient, respectively.⁸ In contrast, in the United States, only 29 percent of disadvantaged students are resilient.⁹ Across all countries in the PISA study, resilient students "are more prevalent in those education systems that PISA indicators show to be more equitable."¹⁰

The devastating impact of systematic inequity is not lost on parents in our poorest communities. Denise Moncrief, a parent leader who works alongside Ocyntia Williams in District 9 of the South Bronx, was very clear on this point when she noted, "We understand that districts with richer, whiter people wind up with more money for their schools. We understand that is the way it has worked. But we aren't prepared to accept that anymore. You see, as long as it keeps going the way it is going, our kids are just not getting what they need to succeed. We are giving up on generations of kids, poor kids, black kids. They call it policy; I call it a

When it comes to public education, our leaders are far too insulated from the consequences of their choices.

crime of willful neglect.”¹¹

Willful neglect is an apt description of the major education reforms over the past decade. Instead of increasing equity, investing in high-quality prekindergarten through grade 12 curricula, developing more informative assessments, incorporating the most rigorous research findings into teacher education, or increasing support for new teachers, we have focused on testing students and blaming teachers. Responding to prominent reformers who mistakenly believe that incompetent teachers are the main cause of low student achievement, education historian Diane Ravitch wrote, “Our biggest problem is not getting rid of deadbeats, but recruiting, retaining, and supporting teachers. We have to replace 300,000 teachers (of nearly 4 million) every single year.”¹²

The powerful churning of teachers in the poorest urban school districts—where as many as half of new teachers leave within five years—is symptomatic of working conditions that are simply untenable. Large classes, lack of classroom support, few experienced teachers in the most demanding classroom environments, lack of high-quality, ongoing professional development, and the decay of physical facilities combine over time to cause young teachers to leave the profession. This migration undercuts the development of growing expertise and continuity of teachers in the classroom, and in turn, the academic achievement of students. Yet, this crisis is barely mentioned in the present policy environment, which Ravitch rightly points out is too often dedicated to teacher bashing and the most constricted understandings of accountability as a basis for both framing and remedying present breakdowns in public education.¹³

As a nation, we are faced with the proverbial fork in the road. But to take the route of transformative investment in public education will not be easy. It will require building the power necessary to change course. That power will not come from centralized policymaking circles, but instead must be built by those closest to the fallout of the present crisis: parents, students, teachers, and community members. We need local and national organizing campaigns to advance a new agenda for public schooling.

Community Organizing to Improve Public Schooling

Relying on stakeholder organizing as the primary strategy for forcing increased investment and redistributive policies is fraught with dilemmas—and filled with potential. The best way to understand both is to get involved; second best is to learn from those involved. I had the honor of participating in and documenting the

work of Ocynthia Williams, Denise Moncrief, and other parent leaders who formed the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools (CC9). For the next few minutes I’d like you to use your imagination and visit the South Bronx with me.

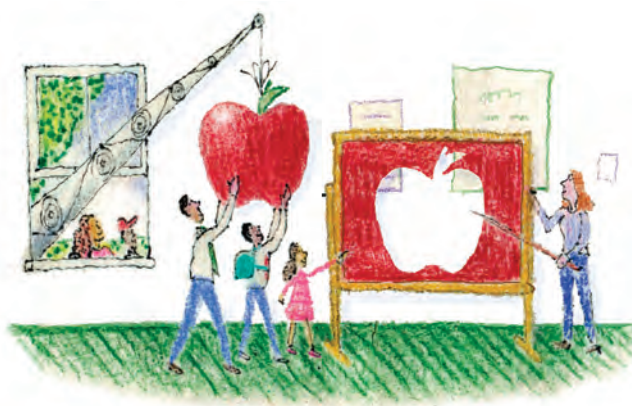


During the summer in the South Bronx, much of the life of the community is lived in public. In Mount Eden on a late afternoon in August 2003, for example, the heat radiating throughout the neighborhood was driving people out of their apartments and onto the streets. To cool off, hydrants were opened, and kids sat under and ran through the intense water streams. Rhythms circulated up and down the street from car radios passing through and boom boxes fixed to the curb. Bright fabrics of every color were worn and used to cover makeshift card tables. Kids ran and played their games while adults sat and played theirs. The sweltering heat seemed to catalyze a swirling kaleidoscope of color, games, and music that cohered into a spontaneously combusted carnival.

The public festival on the street provided a backdrop to a meeting occurring at New Settlement Apartments, a nonprofit agency with deep roots and substantial legitimacy in the community. The meeting was convened by CC9, a group of parents representing various community agencies committed to improving the learning environment and achievement outcomes in neighborhood schools. The informal conversation among seasoned leaders of the group focused exclusively on developing a campaign for the following year. As new parents entered the room, however, the conversation quickly shifted: leaders welcomed new parents, asked about the schools their children were attending, and guided them to the dinner. Stories of neighborhood events, mutual friends, and the failure of the schools were shared. Quickly, this informal conversation ended, and the meeting began. Parent leaders, not the professional organizers in the room, facilitated and led the conversation. Attention was paid to involving the neophyte and the reticent by both providing translation services to everyone in the room—about half of the parents did not speak English—and encouraging parents to speak up. Eliciting participation was not easy, but the safety of weighing in was palpable. When parents spoke, no matter their position, they were never rebuked. Disagreement was offered gently, and leaders consciously laced their comments with affirmation directed to others who had spoken earlier.

These group dynamics created a cascading formal discussion involving at one point or another all of the approximately 30 parents in the room, and a number of informal side conversations.

The churning of teachers in the poorest urban school districts is symptomatic of working conditions that are simply untenable.



Intensity and pain marked much of what parents shared with each other as they revealed the ways in which the local schools had failed their children. That part of the discussion segued into how the schools might be changed. Here, too, passion and energy were evident throughout the room. Parents talked about many needs, including safety, smaller classes, effective professional leadership, and investment in dilapidated buildings. A touchstone to which parents consistently returned, however, was the need to improve classroom instruction: teacher turnover was too high for improvement efforts to take hold. At the conclusion of the meeting, every parent in the room volunteered to work on committees, to begin to more sharply formulate the goals of the next campaign, and to get more parents involved in the organizing work.



What parents recognized throughout the meeting was the relationship between targeted investment in public education and increased achievement in the neighborhood schools serving very poor children of color. Their particular expertise is a product of witnessing daily the failures of local schools through the experiences of their children, yet it is systematically ignored by policymakers. Their voice is notably absent in the discourse about reforming public schools, which is monopolized by academics, policymakers, and politicians with greater power and access to media. The parents of CC9 are engaged in building organizing campaigns that both correct for the imbalance in power and in turn create seats at the table for grass-roots leadership in the negotiation of public school reform.

But, as this glimpse of CC9 hints at, sustained community organizing is tough. To begin with, parents, particularly those from the poorest communities, contend daily with multiple demands. Helping parents—typically single mothers—focus their scarce time on school reform represents a significant challenge for organizers. Equally important, many parents' experience with teachers and local schools has engendered both distrust and cynicism. Additionally, many parents have been divided by racial and ethnic differences. Surfacing these tensions, and staving off their self-destructive consequences, requires significant interpersonal skill and cultural competence, especially in the heat of a campaign.

Other issues that often interfere with mounting powerful organizing campaigns include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Sustaining parent participation after their initial engagement in a campaign. Parent migration back to earlier points of equilibrium after a campaign concludes is a natural tendency, but it undermines the long-term fate of the larger organizing work.
- Finding the funding and local organizational support necessary to sustain an organizing campaign in an increasingly hostile and conservative political environment. Support is particularly difficult to locate because recent policy hegemony has caused a cross section of foundations to disregard invest-

ment and organizing as a serious approach to resurrecting public education.

- Developing a cohort of organizers who remain with the work for an extended period of time. Organizers tend to turn over too rapidly because of low salaries, difficult working conditions, and frustration. As with teachers, their departure creates a tear in the fabric of expertise and continuity so critical to weaving effective campaigns over time.

This summary of dilemmas associated with organizing as a primary strategy for advancing a reform agenda, although realistic, is also chilling. Given the constraints and challenges, can we expect community organizing to offer a way out of the present

morass of misguided public education policymaking? Parents caught in the cross hairs of this struggle see that there is no other way. Ruby Santana, another parent leader of CC9, noted, "Look, we are trying to fix problems that have hurt the schools here for longer than I can remember. I went to the schools in this neighborhood, and now I am a parent sending my kids to the same schools. For years, I have watched and fumed as my kids haven't been given what they need to make it as students. I've tried to talk to the administrators to do it their way.

It hasn't worked—can't get it done by myself with no power. I have to join up with other parents in the same situation to change things. It's the only way. I know it's going to be a long fight, but what other choice do I have? How can I look my kids in the face if I don't give it my best shot? Organizing parents and building power is our best shot."¹⁴

Despite the challenges, educational organizing is growing across the nation, building an increasingly impressive body of work. The diversity of campaigns, their impact on education policy, and the expansive involvement of a cross section of community residents are hallmarks of this incipient movement.

The book *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools* provides details on perhaps the most comprehensive and rigorous research on the structure and impact of eight recent campaigns. At a variety of sites—Austin, Texas; the Bronx; Chicago; Eastern Pennsylvania; Los Angeles; Miami; Milwaukee; and Oakland, California—a team of researchers conducted over 1,000 interviews and surveys, as well as 75 observations of leadership development sessions, public actions, and negotiations.¹⁵ The team also reviewed documents and articles in the local media, and examined district-level data on dropout rates, graduation rates, and demographics.

Discussing the results of their six-year study, the authors note that first, community organizing increased district officials' responsiveness to low-income parents of color. Second, once the organizing campaigns were in full swing, district resource allocations began to reflect the campaigns' calls to preserve or expand equity. These redistributive policies both reallocated existing resources and, in a number of places such as Los Angeles,

These parents' expertise is a product of witnessing the failures of schools through the experiences of their children, yet it is ignored by policymakers.

increased the size of the investment in public education. Third, over time, new district initiatives were increasingly consistent with the community groups' proposals. These platforms for change included, but were not limited to, the following: (a) teacher and principal development to increase parent engagement, (b) teacher recruitment and retention programming, (c) amendments to testing and student promotion policies, and (d) implementing a Direct Instruction literacy program. Although differences in approach and outcome exist across sites, the authors indicate that the findings consistently point to the impact of the organizing campaigns on addressing the needs of underserved, low-income communities of color and immigrants in their districts. In interviews, district leaders indicated that the campaigns provided needed political cover for them to increase equity.¹⁶

When it comes to school-level impacts, and especially student achievement, the effectiveness of the community organizing work is harder to judge. The researchers note that each site won commitments to fix problems, such as inadequate counseling or course scheduling, but the groups knew that their "sporadic and disconnected improvements are rarely powerful enough to stimulate broad improvement in the capacity of schools to support student learning."¹⁷ The main barrier to broad improvement seemed to be the high turnover in school staff, but significant increases in student achievement were documented in Austin, Miami, and Oakland. These sites emphasized building teacher-parent partnerships, opportunities for greater community participation, and instructor capacity.

CC9, which also increased student achievement, had a similar focus. Concerned about the lack of instructional support, and the resulting high teacher turnover, the parents decided to campaign for an infusion of expert teachers into the poorest schools to mentor inexperienced teachers. That very strategic decision was informed by not just their concerns, but also their desire to build an alliance with the teachers' union and to capitalize on the district's stated objective to heighten investment in teacher capacity. Parents expected, and data suggested, that "lead teachers" (as the experts were called) would upgrade all teachers' expertise, decrease turnover, reward lead teachers with higher salaries, and result in higher test scores. In fact, the test scores in each of the 10 targeted schools jumped dramatically two years after the introduction of the lead teachers.¹⁸ District leaders were so impressed that in 2005 they added lead teachers to 100 low-performing elementary schools across the city.

CC9 was able to accomplish all this because of its layered,

nuanced approach to organizing. CC9 emphasized multiple levels of internal organizing to build the power to launch an effective external campaign for educational justice. The threads of this internal organizing work included (a) building a collaborative of community-based agencies as a vehicle for enlarging parent power, (b) promoting university-community collaboration to increase fundraising and technical capacity, (c) establishing community ownership of the lead-teacher campaign through an invigorated democratic decision-making culture, (d) lowering barriers to participation by providing daycare, meals, language translation, and rigorous leadership development, and (e) forging alliances with teachers and their union around issues of common concern.¹⁹

Importantly, the campaign was also strategically choreographed. On one hand, it featured a series of public events that announced the grass-roots muscle and powerful alliances supporting CC9's agenda. These packed rallies were a mélange of speeches by elected officials expressing commitment, exhortations by parent leaders to ignite passions, chanting at ever greater decibel levels by parents, and performances by students to exemplify what the fight was about. Each of these events increased the pressure on district officials to reach a settlement with the community. These public events occurred simultaneously with private negotiations between the district and parent leaders.²⁰

For the parents of CC9, the success of the lead-teacher campaign

did not indicate that their work was done—it gave them the confidence to form more partnerships and take on greater challenges. First, they expanded to all of the Bronx, and then, in 2006, they joined with groups in two other boroughs to form a citywide collaborative called the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ).^{*} Just like the original CC9, CEJ is led by parents and supported by community groups (including the United Federation of Teachers). CEJ has developed a series of successful campaigns resulting in new investments in middle schools, the restoration of school budgets that were slashed, resistance to local school closings producing no clear benefits for affected students, and a new initiative to provide academic supports for struggling students. CEJ's task in the coming years is daunting. While CEJ has achieved substantial success and legitimacy, the crisis of public education has continued to deepen. The kind of redistributive investment and targeted programming necessary to produce system-wide results is far more substantial than what has been achieved to date. CEJ will need to increase its parent base, extend and deepen its alliances, and push state decision makers in ways that may chal-

(Continued on page 47)

^{*}To learn more about the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice, visit www.nyccej.org.

Organizing increased districts' responsiveness to low-income parents of color. District leaders indicated that the campaigns provided political cover for increasing equity.



A Call for Common Content

Core Curriculum Must Build a Bridge from Standards to Achievement

Sign On to Show Your Support

In the last issue of *American Educator*,* several scholars argued in favor of a common core curriculum. By common core, they meant that the curriculum should be broadly adopted (enabling improvements in instructional materials, student tests, and teacher training), but also limited (preserving instructional time for districts, schools, and teachers to address local priorities). Among the many benefits they discussed, the most compelling was the potential for a common core curriculum to increase educational equity. Inequity comes in many forms, but one of the most basic is an unequal opportunity to learn important content, concepts, and skills.

Recognizing that a common core curriculum is an essential means of increasing equity—and excellence—in America's schools, the Albert Shanker Institute has developed the following statement calling for educators, curriculum specialists, cognitive scientists, content experts, and others to create such a curriculum. As you can see on pages 44–45, dozens of prominent educators, policymakers, researchers, and scholars have signed on to show their support for creating a common core curriculum. We hope that after you read the statement, you will go to www.ashankerinst.org/curriculum.html to sign on as well.

—EDITORS

We, the undersigned, representing viewpoints from across the political and educational spectrum, believe that whether children live in Mississippi or Minnesota, Berkeley or the Bronx, our expectations for their achievement should be equally high.

We therefore applaud the goals of the recently released Common Core State Standards, already adopted in most states,



which articulate a much clearer vision of what students should learn and be able to do as they progress through school. For our nation, this represents a major advance toward declaring that “equal educational opportunity” is a top priority—not empty rhetoric.

We also caution that attaining the goals provided by these standards requires a clear road map in the form of rich, common curriculum[†] content, along with resources to support successfully teaching all students to mastery. Shared curriculum in the core academic subjects would give shape and substance to the standards, and provide common ground for the creation of coherent, high-quality instructional supports—especially texts and other materials, assessments, and teacher training.

To accomplish this, our nation must finally answer questions it has avoided for generations: What is it, precisely, that we expect all educated citizens to have learned? What explicit knowledge, skills, and understanding of content will help define the day-to-day work of teaching and learning?

With U.S. education's long history of state administration and local control, the very idea of common curriculum guidance will strike many as overly controversial.

The fear of centralization, institutional rigidity, and narrow-minded political orthodoxy is deeply ingrained in our political sensibility—beginning with our Constitution's implicit delegation of education's governance to the states.

But now, in an era when states are coming to recognize the national importance of a coherent education system, they are working together to find ways to raise expectations for all. They are showing a willingness to trade state-by-state invention and reinvention for a more shared implementation of successful practices together with the possibility of greater economies of scale—in effect, to create a new and more consistent system.

Common curriculum guidance does not represent a straitjacket or a narrowing of learning possibilities. States' use of the

[†]To be clear, by “curriculum” we mean a coherent, sequential set of guidelines in the core academic disciplines, specifying the content knowledge and skills that all students are expected to learn, over time, in a thoughtful progression across the grades. We do not mean performance standards, textbook offerings, daily lesson plans, or rigid pedagogical prescriptions.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL ZWOLAK

*To read the last issue of *American Educator*, go to www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/issues.cfm.

kinds of curriculum guidelines that we advocate in the core academic subjects would be purely voluntary, comprising only about 50 to 60 percent of what is to be taught—leaving room for state, regional, and local variations to reflect student contexts and state and local prerogatives.

The curriculum guides we seek would offer a practical road map for achieving the goals set by standards in the limited instructional time available to teachers. They would illuminate grade-level expectations for teaching and learning progressions for students. They would provide a coherent, substantive, sequential plan that clarifies the knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn in the core academic subjects. They would enable the creation of all kinds of matching resources—technology offerings, texts, and



teacher-made materials, as well as field trips and other outside-of-school resources—which teachers could use, share, and adapt across state and district lines, confident that their students were being adequately prepared for each succeeding grade and for the academic demands of college and career.

While the work before us begins with the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics, we want to stress that a quality education should also include history, geography, the sciences, civics, the arts, foreign languages, technology, health, and physical education. Standards-setting and curriculum development must be done for these as well.

All teachers and students will ultimately profit from thoughtful curriculum guidance—based on the demands of the disciplines and an understanding of how children learn at various stages of their

development. In a society much more diverse than that of our forebears, we expect that this work—deciding what knowledge and skills are most essential for our children to have, and how they can best be acquired—will be challenging. Yet educational quality and equity demand that our schools take on this important task.

Why Common, Rich Curriculum Content Is Key to Systemic Reform

At any age and in any field, what we already know enables us to understand, retain, and employ new knowledge. Knowledge accumulation begins from the earliest days of life. It builds through years of verbal and nonverbal interactions with parents, caregivers, and teachers, who model spoken language and help young children develop vocabulary, concepts, and theories about the world. As might be expected, children from more economically advantaged backgrounds typically have an early start in this process of knowledge acquisition—with a significant advantage in oral language skill and information mastery by the time they enter preschool.

These differences turn out to be crucial: high-quality research demonstrates that disparities in oral language and general knowledge at school entry explain most of the effect of socioeconomic status on elementary school performance.¹ It is not poverty in itself, but poverty's accompanying life conditions that help to explain performance gaps that begin at home and extend into secondary school and beyond.

Today, the information we need to minimize these performance gaps is in our hands, waiting to be used. Thanks to advances in cognitive science, we now understand that reading comprehension—so essential to almost all academic learning—depends in large part on knowledge.² In experiments, when students who are “poor” readers are asked to read about a topic they know well (such as baseball), they do much better on comprehension measures than “good” readers who know less about the subject.³

The systematic effort to establish common, knowledge-building content must therefore begin as early as possible. The younger we start, the greater the hope that we can boost achievement across all schools and classrooms, but especially among our most disadvantaged students.

Further, by articulating learning progressions linked to a grade-by-grade sequence for how learning should build over time, a defined curriculum will better enable each teacher to build on what students have already been taught. Students will also benefit, as they will be much less likely to find themselves either struggling to overcome gaps in their knowledge or bored by the repetition of what they have already learned.

Some will fear that this is a call for an antiquated vision of schooling, centered on the rote memorization of dry facts or the superficial coverage of hundreds of pieces of inert information. It is not. A crucial feature of the common core standards is that they seek to identify a lean set of concepts and ideas that are central to applying knowledge in each discipline. Dozens of studies have found that greater content knowledge enables better critical thinking, problem solving, reasoning, and analysis.⁴ Thus, the goal of teaching students to “think critically” about any particular subject requires a curriculum that builds knowledge upon knowledge.

Others may fear that grade-level curriculum expectations will discourage teachers from attending to the needs of students who are achieving above or below grade level. Yet, when used by well-prepared teachers as a guide to the learning process, a curriculum sequence will allow teachers to see where each student is along a learning trajectory for the discipline, as well as where students are expected to go and how to help them get there.

Finally, some may fear that common curriculum guidance will neglect important cultural referents or ignore the diversity of student experiences. However, as national curriculum standards in several high-performing nations illustrate, a modern conception of curriculum in a diverse nation is explicitly mindful of how to attend to cultural connections, and how to leave room for local adaptations and resources that enable students to connect to the curriculum from their different vantage points.

In nations with core curriculum standards, such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea, this systemic approach—coupled with equitable resources and strong teacher training—has resulted in both very high average achievement and a diminishing gap between high- and low-achieving students. These countries have

demonstrated that a sequential curriculum in the core subjects from school entry through eighth or ninth grade prepares virtually all students for college or careers—whether in a set of required courses or in electives tailored to students’ various interests and postsecondary goals. This kind of support is at least as necessary in the United States, where children tend to change homes and schools more frequently than in other industrialized nations⁵—and disadvantaged children, in particular, may change classrooms, schools, districts, and even states at alarmingly high rates.

Student Curriculum to Guide Staff Preparation, Development, and Evaluation

Currently, there are efforts under way to develop assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards. But, as the past 30 years of the standards movement has shown, without attention to curriculum, standards are not specific enough to guide the development of valid measures of student progress. Simple logic suggests that it is impossible to assess student learning accurately when there has been no decision about what it is students are expected to learn. In order to create a rational system, we must begin with standards, then adopt curriculum and curriculum materials, and then develop assessments—in that order.

Countries that already enjoy the benefits of a knowledge-rich curriculum are able to design course-related assessments—tying classroom and system-wide evaluations to what students are actually being taught. Rather than waste time preparing for what might be on the test, students and teachers can be confident that mastering the course content will prepare them for what they will be asked to demonstrate and do.

With rich curriculum content, meaningful assessments, and quality teaching resources in place, we would finally be ready to dramatically improve teacher preparation, development, and evaluation. New teachers would enter classrooms having already studied and practiced teaching the curriculum they are to use. Their on-the-job professional development would be based on the curriculum, giving them common ground to work together, observe each other, and share and refine lessons. And, how much more meaningful and fair

could teacher evaluation become once teaching is based on common learning expectations and a common professional understanding of what constitutes excellent instruction?⁶

If teacher preparation, on-the-job professional development, texts and other instructional materials, and assessments could all be tied to the curriculum, we would have a better foundation for identifying teachers’ strengths and weaknesses, for helping them do better, and for telling those who can’t improve to find new jobs.

Recommendations

In calling for the development of common curriculum content, we are well aware that this will require a sea change in the way that education in America is structured. We do not believe that it will be easy, but are convinced it is necessary to raise achievement nationally and narrow our disgraceful achievement gaps. Specifically, we call for the following:



1. *Developing one or more sets of curriculum guides that map out the core content students need to master the new Common Core State Standards.* States could collaborate with each other in the development of their curricula, each could develop its own, or each could adopt an exemplary curriculum developed by an independent organization. Regardless of its origins, each curriculum guide should be coherent and sequenced, and lead to roughly the same store of student knowledge and capabilities by grade 12. Each should approximate what students in other high-performing countries study at comparable ages. And,

each should establish a content sequence for teaching that reflects the best of what is known about how students build knowledge upon knowledge, concept upon concept.

2. *Involving teachers, content experts, and cognitive scientists—not just curriculum designers by trade—in the development of such curriculum guides.* Of these, expert teachers tend to be the most overlooked. But they have special insights into the interaction between content knowledge and the ways students acquire it—including students’ most common mistakes and misunderstandings, and the most effective methods to help overcome them.

3. *Writing the common core curriculum guides with care and restraint, such that—when taught at a reasonable pace, with reasonable depth—they would account for about 50 to 60 percent of a school’s available academic time.* Such curricula should allow sufficient time to add important content desired by teachers, the local community, district, or state. For example, some states may want to add state history; individual districts may want to use local resources to expand upon particular art or science topics; a particular teacher may want to incorporate his love of art into English classes; and a particular class of students may want to extend the planned unit on thermodynamics. Teachers will want to tailor instruction to the academic needs, interests, and experiences of students in their classrooms, and will need the curricular space to do so.

4. *Including sample lessons, examples of acceptable levels of student work, and assessments that help teachers focus instruction as well as measure student outcomes.* We do not, however, recommend that any specific pedagogical approach be adopted for broad-scale use. If the curriculum guide calls for the structure and movement of the solar system to be learned in the fourth grade, then supporting materials may offer ideas for how to teach it. But some teachers may choose to have students spend a week building scale models of the solar system; others may give an engaging lecture followed by a NOVA video; others may integrate the lessons with other concepts (such as the chemical properties of gasses and solids) or disciplines (such as drawing and writing about planetary characteristics).

5. *Establishing a nongovernmental quality control body, with a governance structure composed of professionals: teachers, content experts, cognitive scientists, curriculum designers, and assessment authorities.* This body could help judge the strengths and weaknesses of particular curricula, as well as the quality and relevance of the textbooks, trade books, software, classroom materials, and assessments developed to support their implementation. Such a body might also sponsor research on the effectiveness of various curricula and approaches in reaching the Common Core State Standards, and oversee periodic revisions (possibly every five years).

6. *Creating state teaching quality oversight bodies to work on linking student*

standards and curriculum guidance to teacher preparation and development, and to ensure that sufficient resources are allotted to these efforts.

7. *Increasing federal investments in implementation support, in comparative international studies related to curriculum and instruction, and in evaluations aimed at finding the most effective curriculum sequences, curriculum materials, curricular designs, and instructional strategies.* □

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(Continued from page 23)

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Turning the Page

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limited resources?

To set the stage for meaningful policies that will address this question, we must enhance our efforts to collect—and effectively use—key outcome data. But this must be accompanied by collecting data on the education investments we are making. It is not enough just to track student learning over time and disaggregate school- and district-wide performance. To inform student and system-wide evaluation and make plans for improvement over time, state and district data systems also must track the investments being made to achieve those ends. This spotlight—merely one additional facet of meaningful accountability—can set the stage for ensuring the appropriate management of resources in light of performance over time. In particular, effectively designed and implemented data systems will focus on the key elements within schools, within districts, and within states that should be evaluated in light of potential synergies and efficiencies, avoidable redundancies and inconsistencies, and overall progress toward goals over time. Ultimately, such data will allow school systems to operate in much more resource-efficient ways—shining a light on the nature of our commitment.

Correspondingly, we must ensure that the strengths and limitations of the data we collect and report are well understood to avoid actions that would overreach or underreach. Often missing from our outcomes focus and numbers obsession is the contextualization of performance data. Without such contextualization, how do we know what the test scores mean? In the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act, with all of its strengths and flaws, there are lessons to be learned as we work to align federal, state, and local education systems around a common set of data points that should be foundations for, but not sole drivers of, institutional action. Context matters. Ensuring that our education leaders have sufficient resources to evaluate and re-evaluate key data points as foundations for meaningful diagnoses of the problems they face, *before* they take action, is a core element in any effort to advance the education goals we, as a nation, seek.

These observations will not be news to many who are heavily invested in the hard work of education reform. But they are important to articulate (and rearticulate) because such investments are often bypassed in conversations about what it will take to ensure that America maintains its international prominence and, most importantly, that *all* of our students graduate ready for college and career, enter the workforce with the skills needed by today's employers, and assume the mantle of fully-informed participants in our great nation. □

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Early Childhood

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mentary, secondary, and postsecondary education that promote the development of cognition *and* character.

The logic is quite clear from an economic standpoint. We can invest early to close disparities and prevent achievement gaps, or we can pay to remediate disparities when they are harder and more expensive to close. Either way we are going to pay. And, we'll have to do both for a while. But, there is an important difference between the two approaches. Investing early allows us to shape the future; investing later chains us to fixing the missed opportunities of the past.

Controlling our destiny is more in keeping with the American spirit. □

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Organizing for Equity

(Continued from page 40)

lenge historic relationships, if it is to make significant differences for the million-plus children attending New York City's schools.

It is essential to excavate the deep experience of education organizing if we are to build on and share the lessons of specific campaigns. We know that for a campaign to influence academic outcomes, it must effectively promote strategic investments in the poorest schools, increase parents' power, and create new relationships between parents, teachers, and students that can transform learning culture. Clearly, promoting equitable investments is paramount. Presently, the education organizing literature etches broad contours of a number of campaigns but reveals little about what was most salient to building parent power, producing alliances, influencing issue selection, sustaining community involvement, or structuring campaign strategy.

As noted earlier, community organizing as a principal strategy for correcting inequitable investment in public schooling and increasing academic achievement is not without its profound dilemmas. We have no airtight strategies to assure a substantial redistribution of public dollars to the poorest school systems. This much is clear, however: the present policymaking establishment will not advance a redistributive agenda in the absence of significant grassroots pressure. Our long history of inequitable investments has stunted the academic achievement and life chances of the poorest students in America. Parents whose children are damaged every day by these inequitable policies are ready to fight. They need to be joined by parents in other communities, teachers who are also outraged by underfunded schools, politicians prepared to call for transformative investments, and the cross section of citizens who understand the fragile but essential relationship between strong schools and a robust democracy. □

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