

Inequalities In Education

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Poverty directly impacts the mental, social, and physical health of students which, without a strong education system, can create a downward spiral in the lives of students. Schools in low-income neighborhoods, where property values are low, do not have the same resources and support as wealthier parts of society. High-poverty school districts in California receive two percent less funding per student than more affluent districts when adjusted for student needs. Poorly funded schools often cannot offer the same choices of curriculum as schools from higher-income areas. These schools cannot provide basic supplies like books and computers. Many affluent schools provide elective classes not available in low-funded schools such as music, theater, STEM, and sports. To close the gap, these schools need equal funding if not extra funding to help students' needs. In low-income neighborhoods, students have a greater need for academic and mental support and yet our education system lags behind in providing them where it is most needed. Students in low-funded schools often are in greater need of academic help due to difficulty in comprehension, focus, concentration, and memory, but these schools do not have the resources to provide the much-needed extra help. Counselors are available in wealthier schools but are less likely to be in low-funded schools due to low funding. Students from low-funded schools often experience more social and emotional challenges, chronic stress, behavior problems, and mental health issues. Counselors can help students establish coping skills, and promote mental health. The availability of modern technology at home and school allows students to socialize with their peers, facilitate learning, and find enjoyment in learning. High-quality education should not be limited to students from well-off schools and neighborhoods, it should be available to everybody as a basic human right. There are many ways

society can help students who live in poverty. Government can allocate more education funds for low-income districts, schools can partner with organizations and communities to provide support, and state and local governments can create financial policies to help low-income families.

While many improvements have been made since, society today continues to fail to provide social justice and equality in the education system. Education is a crucial part of a person's life and in society, and yet in this country, society fails to provide social justice and equality in the education system—especially for students living in poverty. Schools in low-income neighborhoods, where property values are low, do not have the same resources and support as wealthier parts of society. Poverty directly impacts the mental, social, and physical health of students which, without a strong, quality, and equal education system, can create a downward spiral in the lives of students and widen the gap between social classes. The United States society has not built a strong education system that provides equal opportunities, resources, emotional and academic support, and socioeconomic support for students who live in poverty. In the current United States education system, there is a lack of equal opportunities and distribution of resources in poorly funded schools often found in low-income neighborhoods. Without sufficient funding, these schools are unable to provide the same level of education as schools in higher-income neighborhoods. A recent study in high-poverty school districts in California showed that “high-poverty school districts in California receive two percent less funding per student than more affluent districts when adjusted for student needs” (Acting Colleges, 2020). The disparity in the financial support between schools puts the less-funded school at a disadvantage. These schools cannot provide basic supplies like books and computers. They have fewer high-quality, experienced teachers and a higher student-to-teacher ratio. Poorly funded schools often cannot offer the same choices of curriculum as

schools from higher-income areas. Accelerated, advanced placement and college preparation courses can provide more challenging work, expand students' academic experiences, and better prepare them for college and future careers, but they are mostly only available in schools that serve higher-income families. This growing funding gap between schools directly affects the academic performance of students. In addition to core academic classes, many affluent schools provide elective classes not available in low-funded schools such as music, theater, STEM, and sports. An article on electives making well-rounded students states that "electives provide students with basic knowledge on a myriad of subjects, and that knowledge may prove to be the key in snagging a job that isn't connected to a student's main area of study. Likewise, an elective course may give students access to a job field that would otherwise be restricted from them" (Waite, 2014). Given the wide diversity and background of students from low-income neighborhoods, electives would offer options to tailor students' needs and interests and help them achieve certain future goals. In restricting job prospects, low-income students may only have low-paying jobs which could lead their kids to fall into the same poverty cycle in which they grew up. To close the gap, these schools need equal funding if not extra funding to help students' needs, such as those learning English as a second language, poor early education, or students with disabilities. Some people might argue that students in low-income areas lack the academic ability or motivation to perform well. However, this is not true. A study on the effects of poverty on academic achievement indicates that "economically disadvantaged students who attend well-resourced schools demonstrate greater academic achievements than similar students in schools with fewer resources" (Blazer, 2019). The lack of resources in classrooms can distress students and teachers which can negatively impact the effectiveness of both teaching and learning. Some of these students are in fact eager to learn, talented, or interested in certain areas and would pursue their passion if

given the right opportunity and necessary material. The lack of equal opportunities and distribution of resources puts the students at poorly funded schools at a disadvantage and deprives them of the same quality of education available to students in affluent schools. In low-income neighborhoods, students have a greater need for academic and mental support and yet our education system lags behind in providing them where it is most needed. High-funded schools often allocate funds for additional academic help outside of classes, counseling, and extracurricular activities to improve academic experience, boost mental health, and pursue new skills and interests. Students in low-funded schools often are in greater need of academic help due to difficulty in comprehension, focus, concentration, and memory, but these schools do not have the resources to provide the much-needed extra help. Schools in higher-income areas have the resources to provide tutoring, after-school programs, and summer programs, helping underperforming students to catch up on material they might have missed in class or students who want to get ahead of their peers. The Afterschool Alliance, an advocacy group, “tracked 1,000 elementary school students over time. The more time that low-income students spent in after-school programs, the more their achievement in math improved by fifth grade” (Barshay 2022). However, many After-school programs operate with poorly trained teachers and lessons that are disconnected from what students are learning in their regular classes. When researchers look across studies, they usually don’t see meaningful gains in reading or math achievement, Only the ones they categorized as high quality produced significant effects on any outcomes. The others did not (Barshay, 2022). Students in low-income schools also lack mental support and resources. A recent government study finds that “schools across the country are overwhelmed with K-12 students struggling with mental health problems, competition, poor emotional health, and factors outside of school according to school staff, pediatricians, and mental health care workers” (Chatterjee, 2022).

Students from low-funded schools often experience more social and emotional challenges, chronic stress, behavior problems, and mental health issues. Counseling can help them overcome these challenges. Counselors can guide students with strategies that help them succeed as well as decrease stress and improve self-esteem. They can help students establish coping skills, and promote mental health. These school counselors are available in wealthier schools but are less likely to be in low-funded schools due to low funding. Another problem with low-funded schools is the lack of modern technology, which in turn impedes students' social and emotional well-being. The availability of technology at home and school allows students to socialize with their peers, facilitate learning, have fun, and find enjoyment in learning. A study by Kevin C. Costley showed that “using technology in classrooms has the potential to create increased student motivation, increased social interactions, positive outcomes, student learning, and enhanced student engagement” (2020). In high-income areas, students use internet-connected devices to access assignments, complete schoolwork, or learn subjects outside of the curriculum (such as programming, web design, etc.) Students also use technology to talk with their friends through video chat, online apps, and pursue common interests. However, students from low-income homes lack modern technology which creates mental state and academic disparities between impoverished and affluent students. Partnering with state and city governments, companies and community-based entities can provide extra funding for schools to furnish the necessary support students need. In addition to the lack of equal opportunities and academic support, underfunded schools are not equipped to provide socio-economic support to students in the lower-income groups that are essential for physical health and learning. Growth and mental issues begin at an early age, malnourished children do not adequately grow, either physically or mentally. “Their brains are smaller than normal because of reduced dendritic growth, reduced myelination, and the production of fewer glia (supporting cells in the

brain which continue to form after birth)” (ZeroToThree, 2020). Low-income families are less likely to eat healthy food, exercise, get proper health issue diagnoses, and receive appropriate and prompt medical attention which negatively impacts students’ health. Health-related factors damage gray matter, the part of the brain that controls movement, memory, and emotions, which deteriorates reasoning, learning, and memory span. Low-funded schools lack the resources and funding to help students whose basic needs are not met at home. Research on the healthy development of children consistently shows that “children need stable family relationships, with adults who are responsive, nurturing, and protective; physically safe environments that allow them to explore without risk or fear of harm— and adequate nutrition and health care” (CDC, 2022). Parenting practices and home environment directly impact students’ intellectual functioning, school readiness, well-being, and behavior. The quality of housing and life at home is directly affected by income. If parents have to work multiple jobs, they have less time to provide parental support, teach or play with growing children. Students who do not get enough attention at home are more likely to have a smaller attention span and more disruptive behavior at school. Parents under stress can turn violent which affects the child's psychological and emotional well-being. These children's problems are often manifested through violence towards other students or them becoming anti-social. Underfunded schools do not have the funding to help these troubled students. Some people might argue that even if students have their basic needs met, they will still not do well because they are unmotivated. However, this is absolutely untrue. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, “a person's basic and psychological needs must be met before self-fulfillment, such as furthering education and achieving one's full potential, can be reached” (VeryWellMind, 2022). This demonstrates how, for students who lack food, warmth, rest, stable housing, and relationships, poor educational outcomes are not a matter of motivation or being "lazy", but a psychological restriction due to

preliminary needs not being met. Again, education funding is needed to provide necessities such as nutritious school lunches, necessary medical care, and after-school care. High-quality education should not be limited to students from well-off schools and neighborhoods, it should be available to everybody as a basic human right. Unfortunately, our society has not built an education system that provides equal opportunities, resources, socioeconomic, emotional, and mental support for students who live in poverty. There are many ways society can help students who live in poverty. Government can allocate more education funds for low-income districts, schools can partner with organizations and communities to provide support, and state and local governments can create financial policies to help low-income families with basic needs. Allocating resources to provide additional help outside of classes can boost mental and physical health and help low-income students meet specific needs. Efforts and resources for these students will boost morale and performance. In doing so, students most in need can catch up, narrowing the academic gap between low-income and high-income students and helping them achieve success in the future.

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