



PURE *perspectives*

Poverty and Education

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Poverty has always had a major impact on education in the United States. Affluent towns and suburbs often spend four or five times the amount on education per child as do poor urban and rural areas. Those who say that money does not buy a good education must explain why North Shore suburbs will spend nearly \$15,000 per child for education while some downstate rural communities can afford only \$3,000.

Study after study have also shown that student scores on standardized achievement tests are most strongly correlated with income level. The higher the income level, the higher the test scores.

Correlation of probation status with poverty levels

This correlation was clearly evident in 1996 when the Chicago Public Schools placed 109 schools on probation status. The probation determination was based solely on a ranking below a CPS-established cut score on one nationally-normed standardized test. The average poverty level of the 71 elementary probation schools was about 94%.

An overlay map of probation schools with the highest-poverty schools in Chicago showed an almost identical match. At the same time, CPS awarded an extra \$5,000 to schools with the highest test scores. The average poverty level of those 56 elementary schools was about 35%.

The maps of poverty and low test scores in Chicago reveal the ***systematic and long-term neglect and abuse of certain neighborhoods by Chicago's governmental officials and bureaucracies***. This neglect extends to the schools and school children in these neighborhoods.

Two-tiered system within CPS

Sharp contrasts continue to be revealed in the resources directed to schools serving low-income students and new schools designed to serve higher-income, higher-scoring students. Northside College Preparatory High School opened in the fall of 1999 with a state-of-the-art facility, a staff assembled through national searches, fully-equipped computer and science labs, a 70-piece orchestra, etc. High schools like Harper must rely on celebrities to draw attention to a swimming pool used for storage and other evidence of serious neglect.

There are schools with high percentages of low-income students which provide an excellent education. There are many, many poor students whose academic achievement is at the same high level as students in middle-class and even wealthy districts. However, these success stories are not the norm in schools in low-income neighborhoods because they have been deprived of the resources they need to succeed.

Parents United for Responsible Education

100 S. Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607 Tel. 312/491-9101 Fax: 312/491-9404 pure@pureparents.org www.pureparents.org

Burdens of our poorest community schools

Our poorest schools generally have at least some of the following common characteristics.

- The school facility is likely to be sub-standard, with environmental hazards, poorly-operating utilities, and classrooms without the well-lit, motivating environment students need. These schools may be overcrowded and lacking in space to implement a full school curriculum.
- The school neighborhood may be unsafe due to poor economic conditions, poor police and other municipal services, etc., which result in higher absenteeism and tardiness.
- The teaching staff may be less qualified, less experienced, or less likely to have majored in the academic area to which they are assigned. Students often have long-term or multiple substitute teachers. Schools in low-income neighborhoods also may be forced to accept teachers unwanted in other schools.
- Textbooks, the school library, and other material resources may be lacking. Students may not be permitted to take textbooks home to do homework, may be forced to share books in class, and may be using out-of-date texts.
- Parents may be treated as less than welcome participants in their children's education, with few opportunities to become involved and little home-school communication.
- The school curriculum may contain little to motivate students, little challenge, and little relationship to students' real lives, elements research shows are necessary for a high-quality program.
- The school administration may not concern itself with accountability to the school community, as evidenced in poor participation in school events, poor communication, and little shared decision making.

The Remedy

Every school must receive adequate and equal resources. This includes:

- a safe, clean, adequate, pleasant facility,
- low class size,
- professional, well-trained administrative leadership,
- a qualified, well-trained, and well-supported teaching staff,
- all necessary materials and equipment,
- programs that relate to students' lives and include arts, sports, projects, and special events,
- resources for parent involvement programs,
- involvement and support from the local community,
- information and data about the school budget and programs and multiple indicators student progress (beyond just test scores) which are easily available and frequently communicated and reviewed,
- training in the best instructional practices which is widely available and easily accessible by school staff and parents,
- accountable, representative local site governance such as Chicago's local school councils,
- **increased funding** from the state, and
- **monitoring** to assure that funds and other resources are **fairly distributed to all schools**.

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