



# PURE

## POVERTY and EDUCATION a PURE position paper

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 in Chicago 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 CPS probation with poverty levels**

This correlation was clearly evident in 1996 when the Chicago Public Schools placed 109 schools on probation based solely on low overall test scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills or its high school equivalent, the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency. The average poverty level of the 71 elementary probation schools was about 94%.

An overlay map of probation schools with the lowest income 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.

### **Continual grab for anti-poverty funds**

Federal and Illinois state anti-poverty programs acknowledge the relationship between money and educational quality. Federal Title 1 and State Chapter 1 funds flow into our schools based on numbers of low-income children, or children whose families qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. Yet the Vallas administration constantly moved to re-absorb those funds, attempting to mandate that they be used for previously board-funded programs (which is illegal) and, most recently, freezing the total amount of state anti-poverty funds flowing to schools at a time when enrollment has gone up by 30,000 children. The effect of this freeze is to lower the per-child allotment from nearly \$800 in 1995 to \$695 today.

## Unequal resources

Sharp contrasts continue to be revealed in the resources directed to schools serving low-income students and new schools designed to serve higher-scoring (and so generally higher-income) 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 such as the reconstituted Austin HS must go begging for any science lab at all, and the head of the school system himself put out a request for donations of musical instruments for other, less high-priority schools.

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.

## 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 results 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. 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, which are necessary for a high-quality program.
- The school administration may not concern itself with accountability to the school community; this exhibits itself in poor participation in school events, poor communication, and little shared decision making.

PURE's position is that all schools must receive adequate and equal resources. This includes a safe, clean, and pleasant facility, professional leadership, a qualified, well-trained, and well-supported teaching staff, and all necessary materials and equipment. Resources must be available for parent involvement programs. Information and data about the school budget and programs and student progress must be easily available and frequently communicated and reviewed. Information about and training in the best instructional practices must be widely available and easily accessible by school staff and parents. We must continue our strong advocacy efforts around fair and equal distribution of educational resources.

## Parents United for Responsible Education