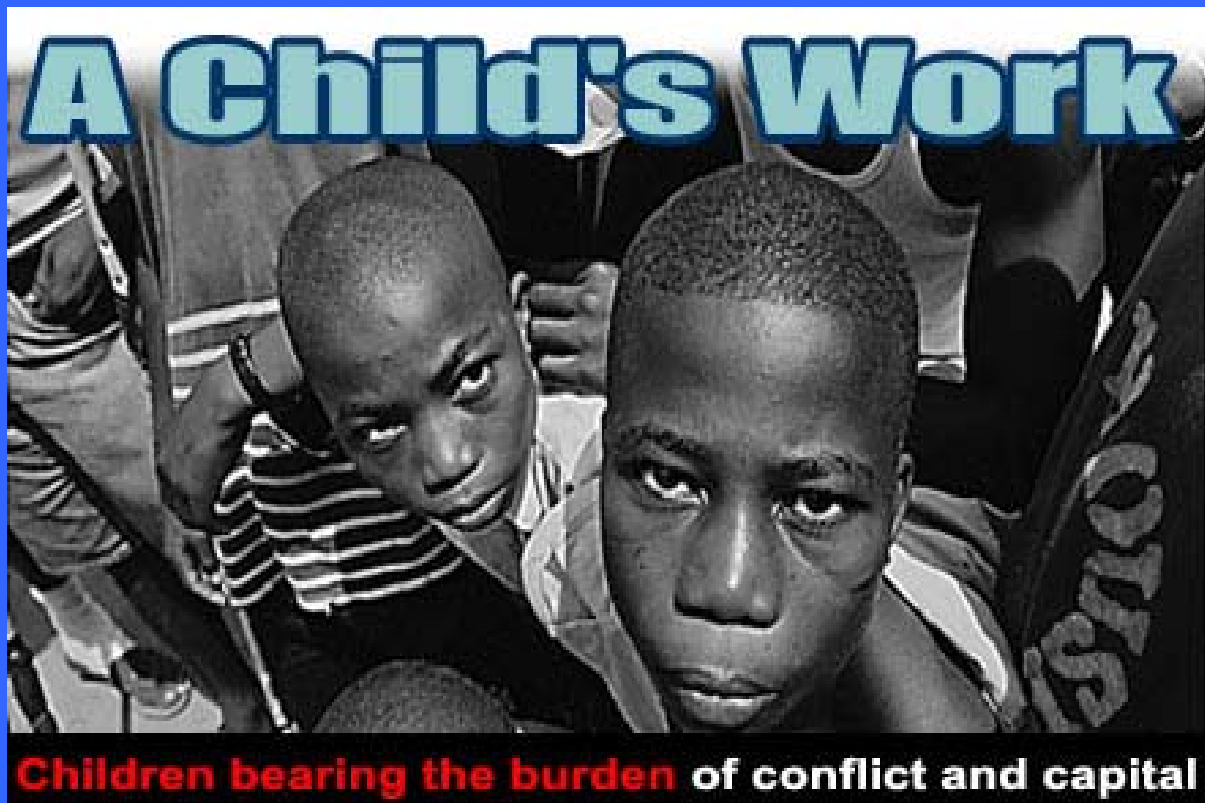


Inequality of Education in the United States



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*Picture found at http://marketplace.publicradio.org/features/child_labor/

An imbalance between rich and the poor is the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics.

-Plutarch

"Education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education."

- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on racial segregation in schools ([The School Funding Gap](#)).

Executive Summary

The inequality problem in the United States is directly related to the manner in which wealth is distributed.

According to NYU economist

Edward Wolff, the richest

five percent of American

households controlled over 59

percent of the country's

wealth, the richest 20 percent

held 83 percent of the wealth,

the bottom 80 percent had 17

percent, and the bottom 40

percent just 0.3 percent. In

addition nearly 31 percent of

black households and more

than 13 percent of white households had zero or negative net worth.

(<http://www.inequality.org/facts.html>) **The unequal distribution of wealth is directly**

related to inequalities in education beginning at early education. The following

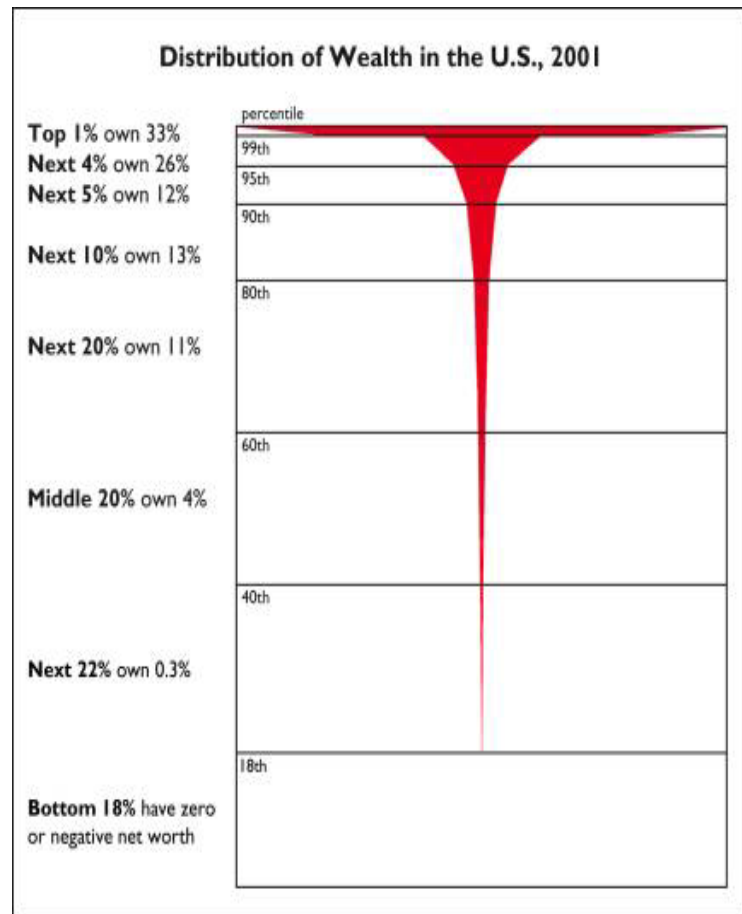
paper will attempt to prove the above statement. The first section provides a brief

historical account of education in the United States which shows where many of the

inequalities derive from. The history of education is filled with segregation, bias, and

inequalities for the minorities and poor. The next section discusses the funding gap and

shows how it causes inequalities in education among the youth of America. I will show



how funds are being allocated unequally resulting in an inferior education for many minorities and families in high poverty. I will discuss the consequences of the funding gaps and relate it to many of the inequalities in America. I will then provide my own personal reflection upon the research that I have conducted. My central thesis for the paper is the following: **A key solution to minimize the widening gap between the upper class and the rest of the American population is to increase education equally among Americans regardless of gender and race.**

History of Education in the United States

The problems of education inequality are deeply rooted throughout American history. In the South segregation was upheld in the Supreme Court in the *Plessy vs Ferguson Case* in 1896 which mandated that schools be segregated into black and white.

In the North there were no segregation laws, but school officials deliberately drew up districts with the intent of segregation.

([Racial Inequality](#)) Segregation caused inferior education for blacks because the districts in which they were schooled in had less money. This meant that the schools could not afford quality teachers or sufficient facilities. It was not until 1954 when the

Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, thus reversing the position it had held since 1896. ([Racial Inequality](#)) By 1980 the federal courts had largely succeeded in eliminating the system of legalized segregation in southern schools. The federal government also investigated many

Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group in American schools, increasing from 10% of the enrollment in public schools in 1986 to 16% in 1999.

([Racial Inequality](#))

In the 1999-2000 academic year the dropout rate among Hispanic students was 7.4 percent, while for white students it was 4.1 percent.

([Racial Inequality](#))

northern cities and mandated that the school districts be redrawn to include minorities and in some cases ruled the busing of minorities to other districts in an attempt to make education equal between districts. In the 1970's there was a massive urban sprawl in which many white and middle class blacks moved out of the urban areas into the suburbs leaving the poor blacks and rising Hispanic American minorities behind to attend urban schools. ([Racial Inequality](#))

Public education in that past has always been the main priority of the state rather than the federal government. The federal government's responsibility is to provide the necessary safety and minimum requirements, but they only contribute a small percent to the overall funds. Prior to the 20th century the state's public education system was driven primarily by the local districts.

| Funds for Elementary and Secondary Education | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| | 1940 | 1999 |
| Local | 68% | 44% |
| State | 30% | 49% |
| Federal | 2% | 7% |

([Racial Inequality](#))

Number of School Districts in the U.S.
1940: over 117,000
2000: fewer than 15,000
 ([Racial Inequality](#))

Over half of the school's funding came from local taxes, so therefore the district that you resided in decided the quality of your public school. In 1940 states took more control by consolidating school districts and implementing more common procedures. In 1983 a federal commission report entitled, *A Nation at Risk*, presented statistics suggesting that American students were outperformed on international academic tests by students from other industrial societies. ([Racial Inequality](#)) Following this report the federal government began to increase their involvement in education and have passed reforms ever since to strengthened the education system. One of the latest reforms, *No Child Left*

Behind, was passed by President George W. Bush in 2002. This reform challenges schools to achieve results that are driven by the students test scores on state examinations. The new law seeks to identify poorly performing public schools by requiring states to test students in grades three through eight annually in reading and math. ([Racial Inequality](#)) Schools that do not make state proficiency standards must allow students to transfer to better performing public schools. Schools that continually fail to make achievements above the standards require new teachers to be rotated within the system and ultimately the government has the right to take over a school that continually fails to perform. In addition all teachers must be highly qualified in their field by the year 2006. While the *No Child Left Behind Act* seems to be an answer to the inequality issue in education, there are many other discrepancies that prove fatal for many young Americans.

The Funding Gap

The key issue in education in public schools resolves around how and where funds are allocated. State government has primary control of the distribution of funds since they provide the majority of funds while the Federal revenues, which make up less than 10% of all school revenues, are designed to supplement state and local resources (<http://www2.edtrust.org/>). States need to close the funding gap between districts by spending an equal amount on education among districts whose population consists of high poverty and low poverty. A 2004 report by Education Trust shows that 36 states have a funding gap, with a nationwide disparity between high-poverty and low-poverty districts of \$1,348 per student which is based on the difference between the top 25% and the bottom 25% (http://www2.edtrust.org). While the average funding gap for the United

States is \$1,348, there are some states that are much better and some that are much worse. There are states such as Massachusetts, Minnesota and New Jersey that have a positive funding gap, meaning they give more resources to their highest poverty districts, even after taking into account the additional cost of educating poor children. States that have funding gaps of over \$1000 per student are at a severe disadvantage with regard to providing ample resources such as proper facilities, books, learning technology, and most importantly quality teachers. For example, the shortfall of \$2,465 in Illinois translates into a shortfall of \$61,625 annually for a typical classroom of 25 students, and almost \$1 million annually for a typical elementary school of 400 students. The following chart, tabulated by the Education Trust, details the funding gap:

| Per-Student Funding Gaps Add Up | | |
|---|--|---|
| For example, when you consider the cost-adjusted per-student funding gap for low-income students in... | Between two typical classrooms of 25 students, that translates into a difference of.... | Between two typical elementary schools of 400 students, that translates into a difference of.... |
| New York | \$65,375 | \$1,046,000 |
| Illinois | \$61,625 | \$986,000 |
| Virginia | \$35,750 | \$572,000 |
| Pennsylvania | \$32,700 | \$523,200 |
| Texas | \$23,400 | \$374,400 |

(<http://www2.edtrust.org/>)

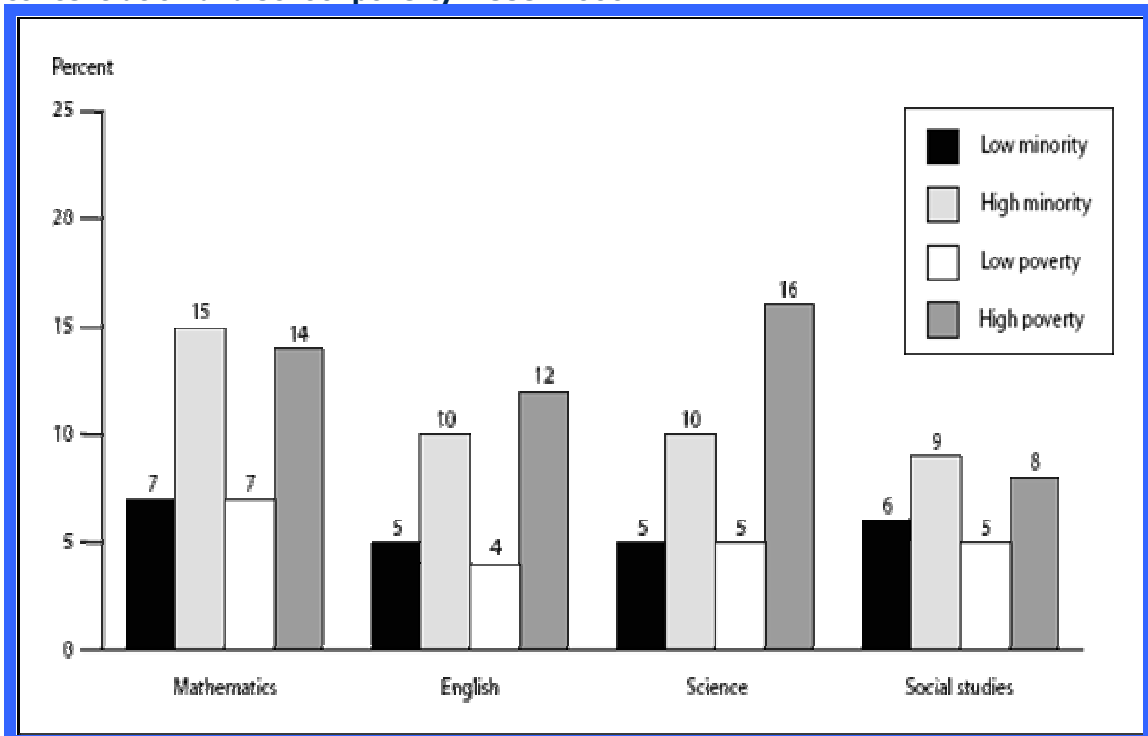
Consequences of Funding Gaps

The consequences of funding gaps in public school district are real and well documented. A school without sufficient funds is unable to teach their students.

Important funds need to be allocated so that students have the proper materials and

environment for them to succeed. In today's society technology is very important in a student's education because it provides the necessary resources for him or her to learn. In addition to external resources the most important tool for the success of students is having a quality teacher. Teacher salaries are determined by what is called a "single salary schedule, which ensures that teachers with equal experience and qualifications are paid the same." (<http://www.hiddengap.org/resources/report031105.pdf>) Teachers' salaries are determined by various terms including years of experience overall, years teaching in a particular district, certification status and educational level. In addition teachers earn more based on their involvement with extracurricular activities such as coaching or mentoring students. This ensures that the highest quality teachers are being paid the most. Consequently, schools that have minimal funds are unable to afford high quality teachers. The following graph demonstrates this discrepancy:

Figure C. Percentage of public high school students taught selected subjects by teachers without certification or a major in the field they teach, by minority concentration and school poverty: 1999–2000



NOTE: "Major" refers to a teacher's primary fields of study for a bachelor's, master's, doctorate, first-professional, or education specialist degree. "Major field" can be an academic or education major. "High minority" refers to schools in which 75 percent or more of their enrollments are minority students; "low minority" refers to schools with a minority enrollment of less than 10 percent. "High poverty" refers to a school in which 75 percent or more of students are eligible to participate in the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, a common proxy measure of poverty; "low poverty" refers to schools in which less than 10 percent of students are eligible to participate in this program.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 1999–2000, "Public School Survey" and "Public Charter School Survey." (Originally published as the Out-of-Field Teachers figure on p. 73 of the complete report from which this article is excerpted.) (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_6/1_2/7_1.asp#5)

This graph shows that students who are considered in a district of high minority or high poverty have a higher percentage of being taught by a teacher that does not have a major in the field that they teach.

Funding gaps play a key role in this issue because the single largest category of educational

In 2003, black and Hispanic 4th-graders were more likely than white 4th-graders to be in high-poverty schools.

(http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_6/1_2/7_1.asp)

spending is devoted to the purchase of teacher time; in 2002 alone the United States invested \$192 billion in teacher pay and benefits.

(http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/books_teacher_quality_execsum_intro) Without sufficient funds many schools can not purchase a quality teacher with experience that can produce results. Those students that attend a school that consists of high minority are more likely to receive an education of lower quality than their peers. In addition students of low income families are disadvantaged when measured against their peers in that they have a much higher dropout rate.

High school students living in low-income families dropped out of school at SIX TIMES the rate of their peers from high-income families.

(http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_6/1_2/7_1.asp)

My Thoughts

When I first began researching this topic, I did not realize to the full extent the importance of education. Because I have been blessed to attend private schools all my life, I guess that I have taken for granted the importance of a quality education. I do not know where I would be today if I had been put in the situation that many Americans, whether black, white, or Hispanic, have been placed in. After researching the inequality in education in depth, I am more aware of why there are serious social and economic problems in the United States. Education affects every part of our lives. For the majority of people your education level will determine your income level, your place in the class system, and even your health. In doing my research I have found that the most important education is at the elementary and secondary levels. Without quality education in your youth, you are quickly at a severe disadvantage then a peer who receives one. This is why I feel it is very important for all children in the United States to have an equal education whether they live in a neighborhood of high or low poverty or high or low minority.

I believe that the reform passed by President George W. Bush in 2002, entitled *No Child Left Behind*, is a positive step forward for the education of our youth. The reform focuses of achievement among students and takes action if the standards are not met. Given that I still believe that the most critical tool in providing quality education to our children is providing quality teachers. The reform calls for all teachers to be certified in the field that they teach in by 2006. I think that this is a very crucial step. In addition I think it is unfair that the wealthiest schools and districts receive the best teachers because only they can afford them. It doesn't seem right that the most affluent schools with the

**CHILDREN BEARING THE BURDEN OF
CONFLICT AND CAPTIAL!**

best facilities should also have all the highest quality teachers. A system needs to be put in place where quality teachers are spread out among the districts immediately until the remaining teachers become at least certified in the field that they teach. In doing my research I have noticed that there are two sides to every angle in the education field. Because of this politicians are able to prove their point by pointing to facts that are then combated by an opposing politician's facts. The key phrase is "Children bearing the burden of conflict and capital". This is one area in which I think that politics need to be set aside so that reform can take place.

The importance of education goes far beyond what most would imagine. I believe that education is the main reason why it is so difficult to rise in income levels with relation to your parents. It is much more difficult for children in the bottom quintile to receive the same quality education as children whose parents are in the top quintile. I feel that equality in education is the major factor in minimizing the rising income gap between the rich and the poor. Restrictions in elementary and secondary education are serious

| | What are your chances of reaching the... | | |
|------------------------|--|-----------------|--------------|
| With parents in the... | Bottom quintile | Middle quintile | Top quintile |
| Top income quintile | 6.30% | 16.30% | 42.30% |
| Middle income quintile | 17.30% | 25% | 15.30% |
| Bottom income quintile | 37.30% | 18.40% | 7.30% |

(<http://www.inequality.org/facts.html>)

problems that affect people for their entire lifetimes. As mentioned in the opening quote from *Brown vs. Board of Education*, "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education." ([The School Funding Gap](#)) Any American that does not have an education will not be as

beneficial to the overall benefit of the country as compared to an American with a quality education. As American taxpayers we must make an investment now in providing quality education for all citizens; consequently I am convinced, through my research, that the investment will pay off in all aspects of the economy and quality of life.

!!ALARMING!!

Among adults age 25 and above the following reported being in “excellent” or “very good” health in 2001, regardless of income:

78% of those with a bachelor's degree

66% of those with some education beyond high school

56% of those who completed high school

39% OF THOSE WITH LESS THAN A HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

(http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_6/1_2/7_1.asp)