

# High-Quality Education for All: Good for Families, Communities, and the Economy



This is one of a series of issue briefs dedicated to helping community leaders and policymakers bolster their campaigns and strategies with the economic case for equity. The issue briefs correspond with the 13 planks of the Marguerite Casey Foundation's [Equal Voice National Family Platform](#). Additional issue briefs can be found at [www.policylink.org/focus-areas/equitable-economy](http://www.policylink.org/focus-areas/equitable-economy).

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by **Lifting Up What Works**®.

Marguerite Casey Foundation exists to help low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society for all.

## Overview

The face of America is changing: more than half of Americans under age five are of color, and by 2044 we will be a majority people-of-color nation. But while communities of color are driving growth and becoming a larger share of the population, inequality is on the rise and racial inequities remain wide and persistent. Dismantling racial barriers and ensuring that everyone can participate and reach their full potential are critical for the nation's prosperity. Equity—just and fair inclusion of all—is essential to growing a strong economy and building vibrant and resilient communities. This issue brief describes how creating an equitable pre-K through 12 educational system can benefit families, communities, and the economy.

## Why High-Quality Education for All Matters

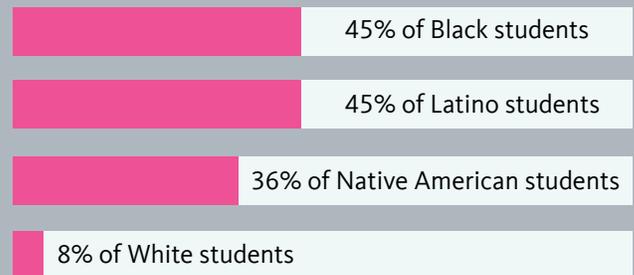
Education is the key pathway to economic opportunity and upward mobility in today's global knowledge- and technology-driven economy, but America's public education system is largely failing low-income students and students of color. Sixty years after the Supreme Court mandated desegregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, youth of color still largely attend segregated, underresourced schools that limit their educational opportunities and outcomes and do not prepare them for college or careers. Housing, land use, and other policies that continue to perpetuate segregation and disinvestment in communities of color contribute to these challenges.

Ensuring that the nation's public education system endows all youth—including youth of color, who are quickly becoming the majority—with the skills and capabilities they need to manifest their potential and thrive in the world of work is a moral and economic imperative. The nation's economic competitiveness depends on improving educational opportunities and outcomes for the children who are being left behind.

## Equity in the Pre-K through 12 Educational System

On average, state funding in high-poverty districts is \$1,200 lower per student than in low-poverty districts. Districts with the most students of color receive an average of \$2,000 less per student than those with the fewest students of color.

### Youth attending high-poverty primary and secondary schools:



Sources: [Data First](#); [National Center for Education Statistics](#); [CityLab](#)

## The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Education for All

An equitable education system from pre-K to college benefits individuals and the communities in which they live. The nation's economic prosperity will depend on opportunities for equitable access to quality education for a growing student-of-color population.

- **Stronger economic growth.** Investing in the education of all students strengthens the economy by providing a highly skilled workforce. Closing the achievement gap by race would have increased the U.S. GDP in 2008 by as much as \$525 billion, or 2 to 4 percent, and this potential return on investment will grow as demographics shift.<sup>1</sup>
- **Higher earnings and increased spending.** When students achieve higher levels of educational attainment, individual earnings are higher and spending in the local economy increases. The higher the educational level, the more people pay in taxes and into social support programs like Social Security and Medicare, increasing the return to the public budget.<sup>2</sup> A college graduate with a bachelor's degree earns about \$21,000 more than a high school graduate each year.<sup>3</sup> A long-term study of high school career academies found that they resulted in a 17 percent (or \$3,731) increase in real earnings for young men enrolled in such programs compared to their non-academy peers.<sup>4</sup>
- **Lower unemployment.** Higher educational attainment corresponds with lower unemployment rates. For example, in 2009 the College Board found that Latino college graduates experience an unemployment rate of 5 percent, compared to 9 percent for Latino high school graduates; and Black college graduates experience an unemployment rate of 6 percent, compared to 13 percent for Black high school graduates.<sup>5</sup>
- **Lower government spending.** Greater educational attainment reduces the likelihood that an individual will require public assistance or get trapped in the criminal justice system. In 2011, 12 percent of high school graduates ages 25 and older lived in households that relied on SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) benefits, compared to just 2 percent of those with at least a bachelor's degree.<sup>6</sup> Taxpayers spend an average of \$12,643 each year to educate a student, but more than double that on incarceration, spending on average \$28,323 per inmate each year.<sup>7</sup> One study found that high school dropouts were 63 times more likely to be incarcerated than those with a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>8</sup> If the high school male graduation rate was increased by 5 percent, the nation would save approximately \$18.5 billion per year in crime-related costs.<sup>9</sup>

## Key Challenges to an Equitable Education for All

To build a more equitable education system, several systemic challenges must be overcome.

- **Uneven access to quality early childhood education.** Early childhood education provides a strong foundation for lifelong learning and success, but too few three- and four-year-olds attend preschool, particularly poor and Latino children.<sup>10</sup> Only 37 percent of Latino children ages three and four enroll in early childhood education programs, for example, compared to 50 percent of White children.<sup>11</sup>
- **School pushout.** Many schools have adopted zero-tolerance school discipline policies that contribute to high expulsion and dropout rates for boys of color (and increasingly girls of color as well), limiting their career options and their ability to earn a living wage.<sup>12</sup> Research also indicates a link between high-stakes testing and school dropout rates. Following the implementation of the new Common Core tests, the share of Black students in New York who scored “below standard” increased from 16 to 50 percent; among English language learners, 84 percent were ranked “below standard.”<sup>13</sup>
- **Barriers to parent engagement.** Parents’ involvement in their children’s education contributes to better outcomes for students including better school attendance, higher graduation rates, and higher rates of enrollment in colleges and universities; however, low-income parents and parents of color are most likely to report barriers to school involvement.<sup>14</sup> Among the common barriers these parents face are inflexible work arrangements; lack of time, transportation, or childcare; and, for parents with limited or no English proficiency, the absence of translation and interpretation services, which leaves them unable to directly engage in either written or spoken communication with schools and teachers.<sup>15</sup>
- **Inequitable school funding.** Severe gaps exist in per-pupil state and local spending for students of color when compared to spending on White students. Schools with White student populations of 90 percent or higher spend an average of \$733 more per student than schools with majority student-of-color populations.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, hundreds of U.S. public schools have been closed—largely in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.<sup>17</sup> The loss of neighborhood schools has a real impact: displaced students lose up to six months of educational progress each time they change schools.<sup>18</sup> Privately managed charter schools often exclude the most vulnerable pupils, leaving those with the greatest needs in schools with the fewest resources and the least experienced teachers.<sup>19</sup>
- **Lack of teacher diversity and quality.** Students and schools benefit from an effective and diverse teacher workforce, but while half of public school students are of color, 72 percent of their teachers are White.<sup>20</sup> Underresourced schools, serving large numbers of students of color, are also less able to attract and retain experienced, high-quality teachers.<sup>21</sup> Black and Latino children attend schools with higher concentrations of first-year teachers and lack opportunities to learn from certified teachers: Black students are more than four times as likely, and Latino students twice as likely, as their White peers to attend schools where 20 percent or more of their teachers have not yet met all state certification and licensing requirements.<sup>22</sup>

## Strategies to Increase High-Quality Education for All

Solutions and strategies should focus on reducing systemic barriers for students to succeed in our nation's schools.

- **Increase access to high-quality preschool opportunities for all children.** The federal government, in partnership with states, should offer full-day early education to every three- and four-year-old. States and communities can identify additional sources of revenue, such as categorizing pre-K as part of the broader K-12 educational context to provide a steady funding source. The City of San Antonio's residents, for example, voted in 2012 to implement a special tax to expand opportunities for early childhood education.<sup>23</sup>
- **Improve school funding and equity.** School funding mechanisms at every level of government should be revisited to ensure that schools with greater need receive adequate levels of funding. More equitable funding would use a weighted student formula that allocates additional resources to schools serving higher-need student populations such as English language learners, low-income students, and foster youth. The State of California's local control funding formula and the weighted student formula in the state of Hawaii both allocate more resources to higher-need students.<sup>24</sup>
- **Adopt restorative approaches to school discipline.** States and districts should begin dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline by reforming harsh, exclusionary school discipline policies and prioritizing restorative justice. Restorative justice reduces incidences of misbehavior, repairs harm caused by the behavior, and keeps children from missing valuable classroom learning time. Such policies have been adopted by the Oakland Unified School District and Denver Public Schools.<sup>25</sup>
- **Increase quality and equity in the teacher workforce.** States and districts should improve teacher evaluation systems by using multiple, objective, and valid methods that include measures of student achievement, classroom observations, and student feedback. States and districts should prioritize hiring high-quality teachers for hard-to-staff schools and implement strategies to recruit, train, and retain teachers of color. In Illinois, the Grow Your Own Teachers initiative—a collaborative effort among school districts, community organizations, and higher education institutions—is improving teacher effectiveness and retention as well as the academic achievement of low-income students while developing a pipeline of successful teachers of color.<sup>26</sup>

- **Implement coordinated cradle-to-career initiatives.** Comprehensive cradle-to-career approaches, like the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative, can help all children to succeed. By effectively coordinating the efforts of schools, families, social services, health centers, and community-building programs, advocates and policymakers can ensure that all children can successfully transition from cradle to college and career. Job-training programs that prepare young people to successfully enter the workforce are also vitally important, as 5.8 million “disconnected youth” ages 16 to 24 are neither working nor in school—23 percent of Black youth and 19 percent of Latino youth, compared to 12 percent of Whites.<sup>27</sup>

### Equitable Growth in Action

#### Support the Education of Every Child in the Neighborhood

The Promise Neighborhoods Initiative was launched in 2010 to provide children with the supports that will successfully guide them from cradle to college to career. Modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone, the initiative is a place-based strategy that coordinates high-quality education, health, and community supports around children and families. The effort is interdisciplinary and comprehensive in addressing the interconnectedness of problems in distressed neighborhoods. The initiative's outcomes are striking: In Minneapolis, the Beginning Kindergarten Assessment administered in fall 2013 indicated that 59 percent of kindergartners enrolled in the Northside Achievement Zone (the name of the Minneapolis Promise Neighborhood) were ready for kindergarten, compared to 35 percent of kindergartners in the geographical area. In the 18 Los Angeles Promise Neighborhoods target schools, the academic performance index (API) increased an average of 18 points in a single school year (from 2011/12 to 2012/13), with eight schools showing increases of more than 30 points; in contrast, the statewide average API decreased by 2 points during the same period.

## Learn More

- [The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink](#) Supporting communities of opportunity centered around strong schools.
- [Education Policy](#) Overview of issues related to equity in education policy. (Local Progress)
- [Community Schools](#) Case studies of schools successfully integrating health, social services, and other community partners. (Local Progress)
- [Children's Defense Fund Report: The State of America's Children](#) Comprehensive report on issues of equity related to children in the United States.
- [The Education Trust](#) Promoting economic equity in education and the success of all students.
- [MDRC](#) Researching innovative solutions to improve education for all students.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

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**Lifting Up What Works®**

**Headquarters**

1438 Webster Street  
Suite 303  
Oakland, CA 94612  
t 510 663-2333  
f 510 663-9684

**Communications**

55 West 39th Street  
11th Floor  
New York, NY 10018  
t 212 629-9570

**Washington, DC Office**

1200 18th Street, NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036

**Los Angeles Office**

1000 North Alameda Street  
2nd Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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1425 4th Ave, Suite 900  
Seattle, WA 98101  
t 206 691-3134  
f 206 286-2725

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