



CHAPTER FOUR

Education

The Path Out of Poverty

Educational opportunity shapes employment status, wages, and general well-being to a greater extent than ever before, while lack of opportunity too often precludes success and contributes to school failure, dropping out, and poverty.

Americans with less than a high school diploma saw their mean family income decline by 14 percent between 1979 and 1995, while college graduates' mean income rose 14 percent. Americans with a college degree will earn nearly twice as much over their lifetimes as those with a high school degree; professional degree holders earn almost four times as much.

High school dropouts are three times as likely to receive welfare benefits as are those who complete high school but do not go on to college. Students from low-income families drop out at six times the rate of those from wealthy families.

Poor children consistently achieve at lower levels than their more affluent peers. In writing, only 15 percent of those fourth graders eligible for free and reduced-price lunch write at grade level compared to 42 percent of those who are not eligible.





If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin.

—Charles Darwin

Forty years after President Johnson declared a War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, too many poor and minority children still lack a fair chance to live, learn, thrive, and contribute in America. Nearly 13 million American children live below the poverty line¹ and one-third of all children will be poor at some point in their childhood.² For these children, public schools represent one of the greatest hopes to escape a life of poverty. As Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote for the unanimous Supreme Court in *Brown v. 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.”³ More than 50 years later, it is clear that to a greater extent than ever before, educational opportunity shapes individuals’ employment status, wages, and general well-being, while lack of opportunity too often precludes success and contributes to school failure, dropping out, and poverty.

- Those with less than a high school diploma saw their mean family income *decline* by 14 percent between 1979 and 1995, but college graduates’ mean income *rose* 14 percent.⁴
- Those with a college degree will earn nearly twice as much over their lifetimes as those with a high school degree; people with professional degrees earn almost four times as much.⁵
- People with bachelor’s degrees were twice as likely as those without high school diplomas to report being in excellent or very good health.⁶
- Unequal educational opportunities are linked to social problems, such as drug abuse, crime, and lack of access to medical care.⁷
- High school dropouts are three times as likely to be welfare recipients as are high school completers who do not go to college.⁸

- High school dropouts make up 30 percent of federal and 40 percent of state prison inmates.⁹

No Child Left Behind: High Schools at the Forefront

At a time when news coverage often focuses on security, terrorism, and the national economy, Americans still rank education as an issue of great importance.¹⁰ Issues related to the implementation and funding of the three-year-old No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) continue to dominate the education policy landscape, with many states and districts escalating their opposition to the law. A bipartisan report from the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) examining NCLB summarized state legislators’ concerns. It included 43 specific recommendations to change the law and its implementation,¹¹ including full federal funding for its provisions, increased flexibility for states and districts, and more sophisticated and accurate assessments that recognize student achievement cannot be measured by a single, high stakes test.

The NCSL report echoed the views of a growing number of state and local leaders that many of the law’s provisions amount to one-size-fits-all, unfunded federal mandates. Utah Governor Jon Huntsman signed a controversial law stating that the state’s education laws trumped NCLB when there was a conflict between the two.¹² In Connecticut, Attorney General Richard Blumenthal announced his intention to sue the U.S. Department of Education over extra cost burdens the law’s testing mandates place on his state.¹³ In April of this year, the National Education Association (NEA), the nation’s largest teacher’s union, along with nine school districts in Michigan, Texas, and Vermont, filed suit against the Department of Education

seeking relief from the mandates of the Act because, the plaintiffs allege, the federal government has provided \$27 billion less than is necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, as required by the law.¹⁴

In response to state complaints over the costs and rigidity of NCLB, Margaret Spellings, Secretary of the Department of Education, signaled a willingness to introduce more flexibility into the law. In May 2005, Spellings announced new guidelines allowing states to use modified standards and assessments for a greater number of students in special education—a change that will make it easier for some states to make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) and avoid federal sanctions.¹⁵ On a more general note, Spellings announced that the department would approach implementation of NCLB in a more flexible way, as long as the basic requirements of the Act are met by states. At the time of publication, 37 states had requested changes to their state accountability plans that would affect calculation of AYP,¹⁶ but Florida was the first state to benefit from such flexibility. Citing the state’s commitment to the principles and goals of the Act, Secretary Spellings granted two of the three requests for rule changes—and both will increase the number of districts meeting proficiency targets. Last year, only about 23 percent of Florida’s public schools made AYP. With the changes, Florida education officials estimate that an additional 4 percent of schools would reach proficiency targets without an increase in test scores.¹⁷

Reactions to Spellings’ flexibility policy have been mixed. Some education and civil rights advocacy groups expressed disappointment, arguing that the Act’s accountability provisions must be rigidly enforced if they are to be effective. A spokesperson for the National Council of La Raza, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving life opportunities for Hispanic Americans, critiqued Spellings’ new policy: “None of this added flexibility will improve instruction and improve outcomes” but will only allow states to appear to be doing better.¹⁸ In fact, a recent study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard found that the Department of Education had allowed California to reduce the number of districts in need of improve-

ment by 60 percent by exempting up to two grade spans (i.e. high school and middle school) from needing to make AYP at all. Nineteen states received such flexibility.¹⁹ Disability rights groups have echoed that sentiment, believing increased flexibility amounts to a retreat from accountability standards meant to ensure students with disabilities a fair and equal education.²⁰

Numerous state education officials, many of whom have been sharply critical of NCLB, hailed Spellings’ announcement as a long overdue step in changing a law they view as deeply flawed. Thomas Houlihan of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a national organization of public officials who head state departments of education, applauded the new rules calling them “a positive step forward.”²¹

Another approach to the law came from a coalition of more than 61 national education, civil rights, disability, children’s, and citizens’ groups, including the Children’s Defense Fund, who have expressed a commitment to the Act’s objectives of strong academic achievement for all children, including children of color, from low-income families, with disabilities, and of limited English proficiency. The group endorses the use of an accountability system that helps close the achievement gap but believes changes are necessary to make the Act fair and effective. The group’s recommendations are based on concerns that the Act puts too much weight on standardized testing, fails to provide adequate funding to support key reforms, and emphasizes sanctions over promoting long-term, systemic reforms that will truly improve student achievement and understanding.

Recent months also have seen an increased focus on high school and reform. President Bush used his 2005 State of the Union address to announce a new \$1.5 billion “High School Initiative,” the centerpiece of which is an expansion of the NCLB testing regime to two additional years of high school. The President’s initiative also incorporates several new programs, among them a proposal to fund individual graduation plans for struggling students, merit rewards for teachers who increase achievement in low-income schools, and a “State Scholars” program to encourage stu-

dents to take more rigorous classes.²² Critics of these proposals argue that funding for these new programs is generated by eliminating other important high school programs such as TRIO and GEAR-UP, which help low-income students access and succeed in higher education. In addition, the \$1.5 billion the President sought for his initiative is part of his FY 2006 budget request that sought an overall 1 percent cut to education funding—the first cut to education funding in a decade. The President's plan was received coolly on Capitol Hill, largely due to these budgetary concerns and to concerns about further expanding the No Child Left Behind Act. Representative Michael N. Castle (R-DE), Chairman of the House Education Reform subcommittee, expressed serious misgivings about the future of the reform package and asserted that it would be highly unlikely to pass the Congress this year.²³

State leaders and the business community have also focused on high school reform. The National Governors Association convened a two-day summit on this issue, where more than a dozen states committed to providing college preparatory courses to secondary students and increasing graduation rates. Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates began the conference with the unsettling warning that

American high schools were nearing obsolescence. Gates reminded his audience that “only one-third of our students graduate from high school ready for college, work, and citizenship... [those] who graduate from high school, but never go on to college, will earn, on average, about \$25,000 a year. For a family of five, that's close to the poverty line.” If you're Black or Hispanic you earn even less.²⁴

Gates' message echoed similar sentiments from other business leaders who have joined education advocates in calling on policy makers to bring about significant and immediate improvements in our schools so that all children—not only those from the wealthiest families—benefit from a quality education.²⁵ Their message is that providing low-income and minority children an adequate education is no longer only the just course of action, it is an economic imperative. Improving our education system is essential if we are to provide children with the tools they need to escape a life of poverty and give our businesses a highly skilled workforce, strengthen our families, and prepare our citizenry for effective participation in democracy. As this chapter will show, education plays a central and indispensable role in providing children the knowledge and skills they need to complete a successful passage to adulthood.

STORIES FROM THE STATES

Access to Adult Education

Leta Jackson, of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, with her children, Kayla, Naturelle, Jacquinn, and Emari at her kitchen table: “My mom was addicted to drugs. I dropped out of school my sophomore year. I ran away from my dad's. My grandma took care of us and encouraged me to get my GED. At age 18, I had Kayla. I moved to Minneapolis because there were more opportunities here. I worked at Hennepin County Medical Center as a nursing assistant for two years and supported two kids and made my rent, but got pregnant and lost my job. I first went to Crisis Nursery when Kayla was three years old and she is eight years old now. I've been unemployed for two years. I'm going to school and have work study at Hennepin Technical College to become a leasing agent for residential properties. Transportation is a problem. I rely on the bus and I ride it for three hours to school.”



Education's Role in Lifting Children Out of Poverty

Comparing the opportunities of a well-educated child versus a child denied a high quality education casts in stark relief the critical role public schools play in preventing poverty. Research shows a strong relationship between education attainment and economic well-being. Children who are provided a comprehensive, high quality education are less likely to be poor and more likely to find employment and receive higher wages than their less educated peers. In addition, we find that children from low-income families are constantly outperformed by their wealthier peers across a broad range of academic measures. Poor children, therefore, often find themselves in a Catch-22 with their economic circumstances denying them access to the escape valve out of a life of poverty—a quality education.

Poor children consistently achieve at lower levels than their more affluent peers. In writing, only 15 percent of those fourth graders eligible for free and reduced-price lunch could write at grade level compared to 42 percent of those who are not eligible.²⁷ In math, only 46 percent of eligible fourth graders

performed at grade level compared to 79 percent of those who are not eligible.²⁷

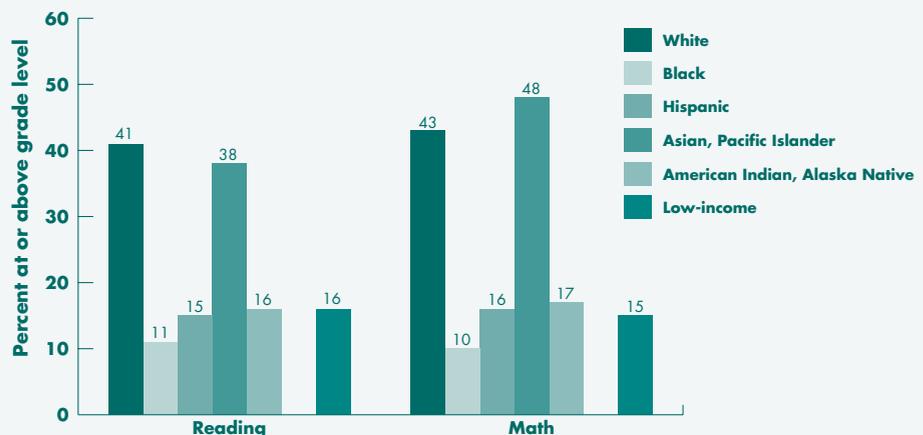
Dropping Out of School and into Poverty

Poor and minority children comprise a disproportionate number of high school dropouts. Students from low-income families drop out at six times the rate of those from wealthy families.²⁸ In addition, students from low-income, single-parent, less educated families drop out at a much higher rate than other students.²⁹ A growing body of evidence shows that dropouts are far more likely than graduates to be unemployed, incarcerated, and living in poverty.³⁰ A 2003 study of employment rates in Chicago, for example, shows that the jobless rate for young, adult Black male dropouts is more than 50 percent.³¹ A 2002 U.S. Census Bureau report showed that Latinos who finished high school earn 43 percent more than Latinos who dropped out.³² Staying in school is also the best way to stay out of prison. High school dropouts are almost three times as likely to be incarcerated as youths who have graduated from high school.³²

Education – Figure 1

Fourth Graders at or Above Grade Level in Reading and Math

The majority of fourth graders cannot read or do math at grade level.



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading Highlights 2003* (NCES2004-452, November 2003), pp. 14-15; and U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics Highlights 2003* (NCES2004-451, November 2003), pp. 14-15. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

Education as an Economic Imperative

Given today's global economy, our nation's economic strength has never depended more on the educational attainment of its citizens. As Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan stated recently, "We need to increase our efforts to ensure that as many of our citizens as possible have the opportunity to capture the benefits of the [changing economy]. One critical element in creating that opportunity is the provision of rigorous education and ongoing training for all members of our society." Our government's commitment to public education determines an individual's employment status, wages, and health as well as the country's economic growth to a greater extent than ever before.

An estimated 14 percent of our nation's economic growth between 1929 and 1982 is attributable to improvements in education.³⁴ A 1 percent increase in spending on education relative to income was associated with a 0.72 percent increase in total employment in 48 states from 1973 to 1980.³⁵ A state's economic performance correlates to previous investments in such areas as education,

according to a state report card assessment by the Corporation for Enterprise Development. Eight out of 11 states with the highest grades for local investment received an "A" or "B" in overall economic performance.³⁶

Education and Earnings

On average, each year of education increases a worker's hourly wages by 10 percent.³⁷ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, workers 18 and over with a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$51,206 a year, while those with a high school diploma earn \$27,915. Workers with an advanced degree make an average annual salary of \$74,602, and those without a high school diploma average \$18,734.³⁸

Disparities: Educational Disadvantage Disproportionately Affects Low-Income and Minority Students

Despite the positive role education can play in shaping the lives of our young people, for children of color, in particular, schools also play a significant

Education – Table 1

Whites earn more than minorities with the same level of education.

Median Annual Earnings by Education, Race, and Gender, 2003 year-round, full-time workers Ages 18 and older

	Not a high school graduate	High school graduate	Bachelor's degree or higher
<i>White, non-hispanic</i>			
Male	\$ 28,320	\$ 35,882	\$ 63,253
Female	20,343	26,344	44,180
<i>Black</i>			
Male	20,978	28,996	49,338
Female	18,001	22,792	40,861
<i>Hispanic</i>			
Male	20,796	26,378	47,772
Female	15,975	21,505	40,444

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2004," Tables 9 and 9a, at <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/education/cps2004.html>>.



role in perpetuating inequality on the path to poverty. The dual school system *Brown* intended to abolish continues to this day. Over the last half-century, the educational needs of children of color remained largely unmet and the result has been too many children of color unprepared for the demands of today’s global economy and unable to rise out of the poverty of their youth.

The Achievement Gap Persists

Student Achievement Gap data based on the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) show:

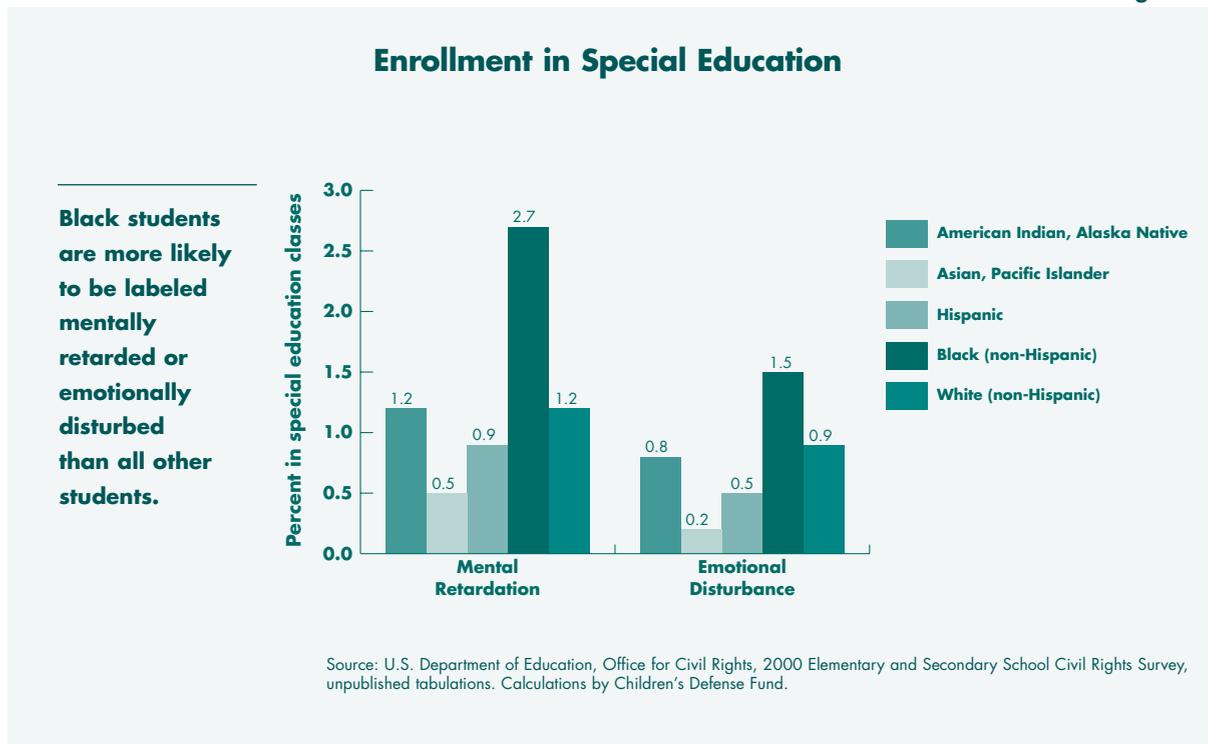
- Of all the nation’s fourth graders, 41 percent of Whites are reading at grade level compared to 15 percent of Hispanic and 13 percent of Black students.³⁹
- Black and Hispanic 12th graders perform at the same level in reading and math as White eighth graders.⁴⁰
- A Black child is more than twice as likely as a White child to be behind grade level, and the

longer a Black child is in school, the further behind he falls. A Hispanic child is significantly more likely than a White child to be behind a grade level.⁴¹

- In math, 37 percent of White eighth graders perform at grade level compared to 12 percent of Latinos and 7 percent of Blacks.⁴²
- Black and Hispanic children are more likely than White children to be absent from school.⁴³
- Black and Hispanic children are less likely than White children to be in programs for the gifted and talented.⁴⁴ Black children are much more likely than White children to be in programs for children with mental retardation or emotional or behavior disturbances.⁴⁵
- Children of color and low-income children are less likely to graduate from college.

In 2003, 34.2 percent of non-Hispanic White adults, aged 25-29, had earned a bachelor’s degree or more, compared to 17.2 percent of Blacks, 10 percent of Latinos, and 61.6 percent of Asians in the same age range.⁴⁶ At the age of 24, nearly half of young adults raised in affluent families have

Education – Figure 2



College Graduation Rates Among Young Adults, 1957–2004

Young Blacks and Hispanics are less likely to graduate from college than Whites.



*Persons of Hispanic origin can be of any race.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Table A-2, Percent of People 25 Years Old and Over Who Have Completed High School or College, by Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex: Selected Years 1940 to 2004, at <<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/tabA-2.pdf>>.

graduated from college compared with only 7 percent of young adults raised in low-income families.⁴⁷ Even when low-income children do reach post-secondary education, they are less likely to graduate on time. In 2001, over 70 percent of financially secure post-secondary students had received college degrees compared to only 47 percent of students from moderately to highly disadvantaged backgrounds.⁴⁸ This significantly impacts children because parental education is a key predictor of children's academic success.⁴⁹

Segregation and Inequities

Much of this disadvantage is rooted in the segregation and inequity that continue to drag down the quality of public education. One of every three Black children attends a school that has 90 percent or more minority enrollment.⁵⁰ Forty-seven percent of Black students and 51 percent of Latino students (compared with 5 percent of White students) are in schools where 75 percent or more of the students are poor.⁵¹ Schools with large populations of Black and Hispanic students are more likely to suffer from teacher shortages and to lack high quality teachers.⁵² The “instant academies,” all

White private schools that sprung up in the 1950s in reaction to *Brown*, are alive and well today. For example, in the Lee County School District in South Carolina, White students are almost 900 times more likely to attend private schools than Black students. In some districts, Black children are still offered only what Bob Moses, founder of the Algebra Project and a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the Civil Rights Movement, calls “share cropper education”—education designed to prepare them for manual labor.⁵³ It is no surprise that with this prevalence of segregation, inequality plagues Black school children.

Access to Quality Teaching

Research demonstrates that access to quality teaching is one of the most significant factors in improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap.⁵⁴ Yet for poor and minority children, quality teaching is often not available.⁵⁵

- Schools with the highest percentages of minority, limited English proficient, and low-income students are more likely to employ beginning

teachers than those with the lowest percentage of minority, limited English proficient and low-income students.⁵⁶ For example, 20 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools have three or fewer years of teaching experience, compared with 11 percent of teachers in low poverty schools.⁵⁷

- Classes in high-poverty schools are 77 percent more likely to be assigned to teachers who did not major in the field in which they are teaching than are classes in low poverty schools.⁵⁸ Classes in majority non-White schools are over 40 percent more likely to be assigned to an out-of-field teacher than those in mostly White schools.⁵⁹
- Teachers with master's degrees are less likely to teach in high-minority, low-income schools than they are to teach in high-income, low-minority schools.⁶⁰
- Teacher attrition is the main reason there is a shortage of high quality teachers.⁶¹ Teachers are significantly more likely to leave a school because of poor working conditions, and teachers in high-minority, low-income schools report significantly worse working conditions, including inadequate facilities, fewer textbooks and supplies, less administrative support, and larger class sizes.⁶² As a result, the turnover rate for teachers in high-poverty schools is almost one-third higher than the rate for all teachers in all schools.⁶³ Contributing to a vicious cycle, high turnover becomes a burdensome cost to school districts and represents a loss of resources to the education system, which then means fewer textbooks, larger classes, etc. ⁶⁴ A study conducted in Texas estimates the cost of teacher turnover to be between \$216 and \$329 million each year. ⁶⁵

Lower student to teacher ratio has not only been correlated with higher academic performance,⁶⁶ but also with lower levels of school violence.⁶⁷ Yet small class sizes are not available to minority and non-minority students on an equal basis.

- In classes with more than 75 percent minority students, 31 percent of teachers have 25 or more students.
- In classes with less than 10 percent minority students, only 22 percent of teachers have 25 or more students.

- In classes that are 10-25 percent minority, 25 percent of teachers have classes with 25 or more students.⁶⁸

Access to Advanced Curricula

According to a study by the U.S. Department of Education, the rigor of courses taken reflects the quality of education schools deliver.⁶⁹ Yet advanced curricula and high quality college preparation is not available equally to all. In analyzing data from the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, the National Research Council found that Black and Latino students are half as likely as Whites to be placed in gifted and talented classes. Asian/Pacific Islanders are one-third more likely than Whites to be placed in these advanced classes.⁷⁰ The number of Advanced Placement exams taken by Black students has increased 600 percent since 1984, and the number taken by Latino students increased 460 percent. Yet gaps in exam taking persist between Blacks and Latinos and their White peers. There were 184.7 White test-takers per 100,000 White 12th graders in 2000, compared to only 53.4 Black test-takers per 100,000 Black 12th graders and 111.3 Latino test-takers per 100,000 Latino 12th graders.⁷¹

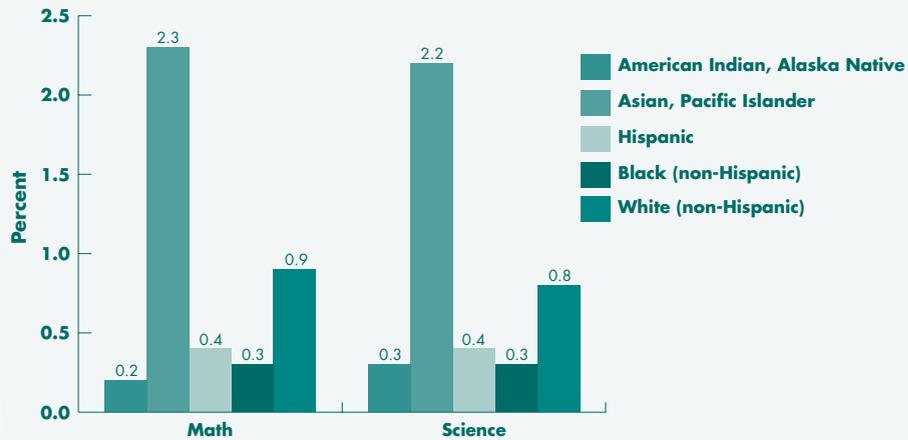
There also are significant gaps in access to advanced math and science courses. Where 45.1 percent of White and 55 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates have taken precalculus, calculus, trigonometry and other advanced math courses, only 30.4 percent of Black, 26.2 percent of Latino and 26.9 percent of Native American high school students graduate having taken these courses.⁷² Trends are the same in the sciences. Whereas 15.9 percent of White and 29.5 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students graduate having taken advanced physics, chemistry, or biology, only 10.3 percent of Black, 10.7 percent of Latino, and 5.1 percent of Native American students graduate having completed such courses.⁷³

School Facilities

Overcrowding of public schools has become a significant problem—especially as public school enrollment has reached historic levels and is

Enrollment in Advanced Placement Math and Science Courses

Access to advanced placement math and science is not available to all students.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2000 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey, unpublished tabulations. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

expected to continue to grow well into the future.⁷⁴ The problem is particularly acute for high-minority, low-income schools. Schools whose students are 50 percent or more minority are nearly twice as likely as schools whose students are less than 20 percent minority to be overcrowded.⁷⁵

Schools whose students are 70 percent or more low-income are more than twice as likely as those whose students are less than 20 percent low-income to be overcrowded.⁷⁶

The problem of overcrowding has grown worse in recent years, and media reports have demonstrated a link between overcrowding and school violence. One example came in June of 2005 when Thomas Jefferson High School in Los Angeles was the scene of several brawls involving hundreds of students. The school was built to hold 1,500. Its current enrollment is 3,800.⁷⁷

The Digital Divide

To compete in the “Information Age,” all students require access to modern computers with high-speed Internet access. More than a decade after the Internet first appeared in classrooms, poor and

minority children have significantly fewer opportunities to use this technology. Research shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds rely more heavily on schools to provide them with computers and Internet access. In fact, computer use at school exceeds use at home by 30 percentage points or more for Blacks and Hispanics, with many disadvantaged students unable to get online anywhere but school. Of students who access the Internet at only one location, 52 percent come from poor families.⁷⁸ Yet children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to attend schools with adequate technology.

The subsequent divide between White and poor and minority students is staggering: The difference in Internet use between White and Black students is 21 percent. The comparison between Whites and Hispanics is larger still—with a 30 percentage point gap.⁷⁹

The digital divide is especially significant because greater access to technology correlates with greater educational attainment and income. Of those children having no parent who has graduated from high school, only 32 percent use the Internet. Eighty percent of poor students use computers compared to 93 percent of non-poor students.⁸⁰

Access to School Counseling

Given the significant academic and non-academic challenges facing students today, the need for school counselors is greater than ever. Counselors help students navigate often complex academic requirements, prepare for college, and develop important, personal relationships with students. School counselors also provide support to a student population increasingly plagued by untreated mental health problems. There is significant research showing the link between mental health problems and dropping out of school.⁸¹ Estimates have shown that nearly two-thirds of the country's dropouts have some kind of behavioral or emotional problem.⁸² One national study finds that 14.2 percent of high school dropouts have a history of some kind of psychiatric disorder compared to only 5 percent of high school graduates who do not go on to college.⁸³

Students at high-minority, high-poverty schools have significantly reduced access to school or community-based counseling services.⁸⁴ Schools with a minority population of 10 percent or less have well over 2.5 times as many school counselors and guidance staff as schools with 75 percent or more minority students. High-minority schools also have far fewer certified counselors.⁸⁴

Funding Gaps

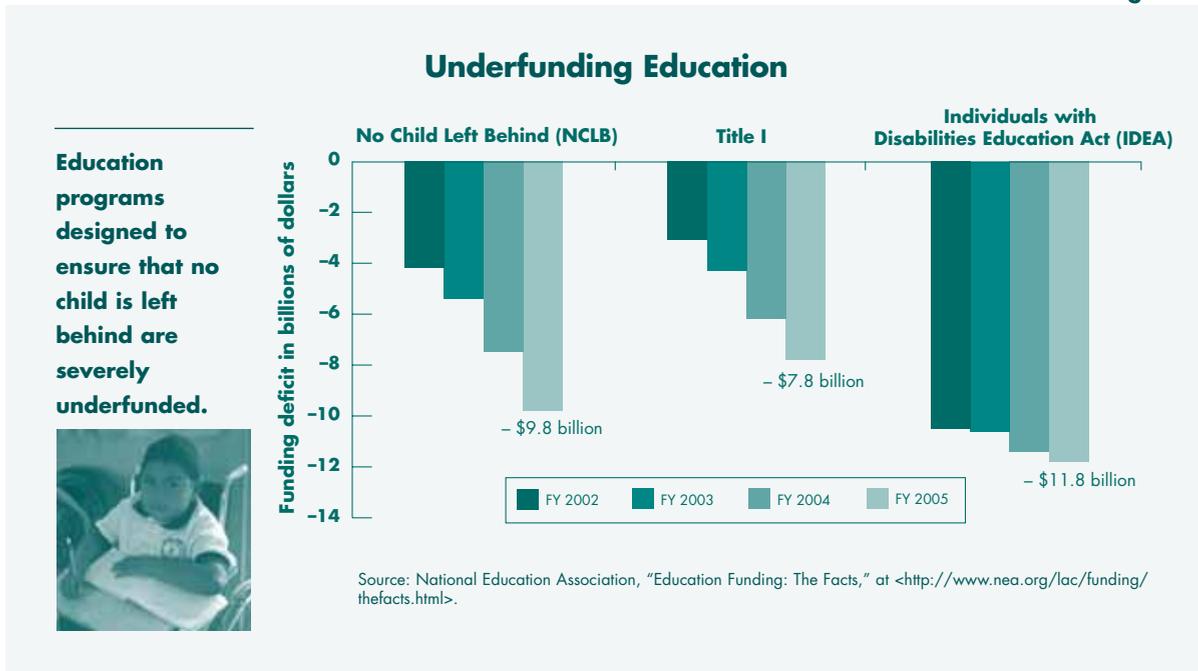
Many of the disparities in resources are due to insufficient financial support for high-minority, low-income schools. Without this support, schools cannot repair and modernize their facilities; attract and retain high quality teachers; reduce class size; hire adequate numbers of school counselors; provide basic materials like textbooks, pens, and paper; or provide access to advanced curricula. Unlike other industrialized nations, a large percentage of U.S. schools are funded from local property taxes. As a result, schools often reflect the relative wealth of the communities surrounding them, and wide gaps in funding exist between high- and low-income areas. In Illinois, for example, districts spend almost \$2,500 more, on average, per pupil in the wealthiest areas compared to

the high-poverty ones.⁸⁶ The gap between rich and poor districts is even more significant when one considers that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more expensive to educate than those from wealthier areas.⁸⁷ A recent analysis found that in 31 of 49 states, school districts with high-minority populations received fewer resources.⁸⁸ Indeed, the gap in funding between poor and non-poor schools has been widening in recent years, growing from \$1,208 in 1997 to \$1,348 in 2002. That's a difference of \$33,700 in each classroom of 25 students.⁸⁹ Funding disparities also exist between states. In 2003, state per student spending ranged from \$5,175 to \$12,046, a difference of \$171,775 spent per classroom⁹⁰

Federal Funding

The President's fiscal year 2006 budget sought to cut education funding for the first time in a decade. While schools are struggling to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Administration's budget underfunds those programs by \$12 billion this year, bringing the total underfunding since NCLB became law to almost \$40 billion. Within this shortfall, the President's plan leaves behind nearly three million disadvantaged students who cannot be fully served by Title I because the budget provides only \$13.3 billion of the \$22.75 billion promised in NCLB—a deficit of more than \$9 billion for only one year.⁹¹

The Administration's budget also failed to provide adequate or promised resources for special education. Despite having signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), the President moved away from the bipartisan funding agreement reached in the Act and funded special education at \$3.6 billion below the authorized level.⁹² As a result, funding for IDEA Part B State Grants would provide just 18.6 percent of the national average per-pupil expenditure toward meeting the excess cost of educating students with disabilities—still less than half of the 40 percent “full funding” level that Congress committed to paying when IDEA was first adopted 30 years ago.



State/Local Budget Cuts

According to the National Council of State Legislatures, most states are facing serious budget shortfalls in fiscal year 2006.⁹³ To make up for lost tax revenue, many have made, or intend to make, significant cuts in education. Lawmakers in Colorado, for example, are considering amending their state constitution to allow them to spend less on schools.⁹⁴ Struggling to trim 5 percent off its budget, Maine is debating a plan that would cut almost \$100 million from schools. Large protests have erupted across California as its governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, pursues a budget that would leave schools with billions less in needed funding.⁹⁵

The federal and state budget cuts of the past five years have fueled what is now a widespread effort to achieve school funding adequacy through litigation. Forty-five states have litigated, or are in the process of litigating, some kind of funding adequacy or equity court battle. The cases trace their legal origin to 1973 when *Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District* was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court. Plaintiffs petitioned the Court to declare the state's school funding formula unconstitutional based on large disparities among districts. The Court ruled for the defendants,

saying education was a state not a federal matter, turning future litigants toward the state court system.⁹⁶ Plaintiffs have had some preliminary success, winning cases in Arizona, Kansas, Massachusetts, Montana, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, and Wyoming. New cases have been filed in Alaska, Georgia, and Nebraska. However, the process of change has been slow. Courts have tended to delegate the task for devising adequate funding systems to state legislatures where the plans have met resistance. Lawmakers in New York, for example, are in defiance of a court order to make their education funding system more adequate.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, funding shortfalls trickle down to the local level. Most cities, ranging from the most disadvantaged to the most affluent, have been forced to cut important academic services. The Piedmont School District in California, one of the wealthiest in the nation, is but one example of the local effects of state and federal revenue shortfalls. Having enjoyed a quarter of a century of fiscal adequacy, Piedmont was forced to cut \$1.3 million over three years from their schools. In Philadelphia, literacy programs, up to half of paraprofessional jobs, hundreds of teaching jobs, and potentially the entire Comprehensive Early Learning Centers

Program are on the chopping block.⁹⁸ At the Gill-Montague Regional School District in Massachusetts, 19 teachers were let go, and the district was forced to combine grades in the elementary schools. For example, first and second grade is held in one classroom with one teacher, and the same is true for third and fourth grades. Some students now spend free periods running errands for teachers.⁹⁹ Across the state, about 1,400 teachers have lost their jobs, class sizes have grown so large that they're hard to control, and some students are paying high fees for sports, activities, and transportation.

Walking the Path: Parent Involvement in Education

Positive cooperative relationships between schools and parents can be a key to student and school success. Students with involved parents, regardless of their background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, take advanced courses, be promoted, have better attendance rates, be better behaved, graduate and go on to college. Teachers with students whose parents are highly involved are more attentive to those students. With that in mind, the New Song Academy in Baltimore has made parent involvement a pillar of its success. New Song serves low-income children, the majority with learning disabilities and/or emotional and behavioral disorders. The charter school actively reaches out to parents and involves them in ways that are comfortable, constructive, and build upon individual parents' strengths. The school solicits parent volunteers to work with children and hires parents for full- and part-time positions. According to the school, parents do not just drop their children off at school, they are considered colleagues, neighbors, and friends working hand-in-hand to educate the children of their community.¹⁰⁰

Policies That Negatively Impact Students of Color

While financial and resource-based inequalities pervade our school system, politicians, policy makers, and educators often have advanced “one size fits all” education policies that also have had the effect of discriminating against poor and minority students and have proven to play a significant role in promoting school failure, high school dropout, and subsequent poverty.

High Stakes Tests

Accountability and assessment are essential to ensure that children who have been traditionally neglected by schools are not forgotten. But they are only a piece of what needs to be done. It is not enough to impose a system of high stakes tests on schools and children and call it, in and of itself, education reform. Without significant investments in educational resources so that all children have the opportunity to learn and to succeed on assessments, what could be substantive education reform will be reduced merely to a system of measurement and punishment, leaving America's most vulnerable children on the margins, decreasing their motivation to learn, and increasing their risk of dropping out—perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Significant concerns have been raised that under high stakes-low budget accountability systems, an overemphasis on, and in some cases abuse of, testing has characterized reform in many high-minority, low-income schools. For example, a study in New Jersey found that teachers from high-poverty schools “reported substantially more time devoted explicitly to test preparation activities than those in wealthy districts.”¹⁰¹ These non-substantive educational practices have reduced student learning, motivation, and engagement,¹⁰² putting poor children and children of color at even greater risk of failure and dropping out.

Another negative consequence of the over-reliance on a single test has been the elimination or reduction of important academic subjects that are not covered by state tests. According to a survey of public school principals conducted by the Council

for Basic Education, increases in instructional time for reading, math, and science are leading to decreases in arts, foreign language, social studies, civics, and geography. The most significant decreases are in high-minority schools. For example, high-minority schools have experienced a 36 percent decrease in instructional time for the arts and 23 percent decrease in instructional time and professional development for teachers of foreign languages.¹⁰³

In no case have schools betrayed the hopes and potential of students more cynically than when they disguise school failure at the expense of low-performing, at-risk students. Media outlets recently reported that Orlando school officials have been pushing low-performing students out of high schools and into GED programs as a way to artificially inflate the schools' overall test scores. These schools also are not counting these students as official dropouts. Instead, they simply drop the GED-bound students from their rolls, deceptively concealing their low graduation rates. Last year, one school referred 271 failing students into GED programs. The school's graduation rate subsequently rose from 61 percent to 66 percent, while the actual number of diplomas handed out fell from 412 to 354.¹⁰⁴ Another recent study showed that a large increase in children retained in ninth grade corresponds with the rapid growth in high stakes accountability systems in the 1990s. These results have been interpreted by some to indicate that chil-

dren are unfairly retained to avoid their scores being included in high schools' overall scores.¹⁰⁵

Another recent study, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, showed that high stakes policies can also harshly impact students with disabilities. In states where teachers, schools, and students are rewarded for performance, discipline rates for students with disabilities are more than 50 percent higher than in states that do not provide these rewards. For example, in states that give bonuses to schools for good performance, the discipline rate for students with disabilities is 17.35 per 1,000 students. In states without such rewards, the rate is 10.88 per 1,000 students with disabilities.¹⁰⁶

The unfairness of one-size-fits-all testing is most evident when a single, standardized test is used to make life-defining decisions about individual students, such as graduation, grade promotion, or ability tracking. Graduation from high school is the foundation for future success in college and the workplace. Therefore, decisions about whether or not a student will graduate should be made in the most thoughtful way. While, historically, states and districts have made individualized decisions to graduate students, by 2009, half of all states will use a single standardized test as the sole means to determine whether a student will graduate.¹⁰⁷

Studies have shown that standardized testing has led to negative academic outcomes for students and schools, particularly for those from low-

STORIES FROM THE STATES

Building a Foundation Early in Life

At the Early Childhood class in Colonia South Tower in Rancho Blanco Alamo, Texas, teacher Dolores leads a class of six young children (Jesus Alberto, Cristian, Reyna, Omar, Paola, and Arlene) in lessons involving fine motor skills, fitting shapes into holes, fitting keys into locks, and playing with blocks. The class prepares children for prekindergarten and to leave their mother for the first time. The children practice singing, dancing, and table manners.



income and minority communities. A National Research Council report found that high stakes tests may help to motivate those students who are “just getting by, but know they can do better.” However, they likely will harm the lowest performing students who will “not exert effort when they do not expect their efforts to lead to success.”¹⁰⁸ A recent report by the Center on Education Policy found that exit exam scores were significantly lower among Blacks, Hispanics, low-income students, children with disabilities, and those with limited English proficiency. Gaps in pass rates between these groups and non-Hispanic White students climb as high as 40 percent, depending on the subject.¹⁰⁹ In Massachusetts, for example, the dropout rate increased from 2.9 percent to 3.5 percent among seniors graduating in 2003, the first year that students were required to pass an exit exam to graduate.¹¹⁰ An earlier study found that nine of the 10 states with the highest dropout rates used high stakes exit exams, while none of the states with the lowest dropout rates used these tests.¹¹¹ By 2009, eight out of 10 minority public school students (compared to seven out of 10 public school students, in general) will be denied high school diplomas if they do not pass a standardized exit exam.¹¹²

Research shows why such testing is neither fair nor the most accurate way of evaluating students and emphasizes the importance of using multiple indicators of achievement before making impor-

tant decisions about individual students. The Joint Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing explicitly state that “in educational settings a decision or characterization that will have a major impact on a student should not be made on the basis of a single test score.”¹¹³ The Association of American Publishers, which represents the companies that publish standardized tests, asserts, “It is important both legally and technically not to put all the weight on a single test when making important decisions about students and schools. Rather, there must be multiple measures or indicators of performance to support important decisions.”¹¹⁴

Sound education policy cannot demand the same academic results on the same assessments from all students while ignoring the gross educational disparities that confront poor and minority students and students with disabilities and limited English proficiency. It cannot rely on punishing students because they did not succeed when they are competing on a vastly unequal playing field. Given the inequalities we know exist, it is no surprise that Black students are passing exit exams at significantly lower rates than their non-Hispanic White peers.¹¹⁵

Lest this analysis lead to the conclusion that the answer is to eliminate standards, assessment, and accountability—to do so would harm student learning and widen the achievement gap. We would do well to remember that before the high stakes

Walking the Path: The Developmental Approach to Learning

Helping children learn by first meeting their individual, developmental needs is key to school success. The Yale School Development Program, also known as the Comer School Development Program (SDP), pioneered by Dr. James Comer, is a comprehensive school reform model centered on children’s development along six developmental pathways—cognitive, physical, psychological, ethical, social, and linguistic. SDP brings together school personnel, parents, and students to take responsibility for children’s individual development and, consequently, their readiness to learn. Relationships are key to students’ success. By not focusing exclusively on cognitive development, but on all developmental pathways, and by ensuring inter-staff collaboration and parental involvement, school districts fully adopting SDP have been able to significantly increase student academic performance in districts across the country. The program is now in place in more than 50 school districts nationwide.¹¹⁶

testing emphasis during the past decade, low-income and minority students were also ill-served. It is not the testing or testing itself that is the culprit. What is necessary is systemic change that begins with the belief that all children can learn to high standards; a sound system of standards, accountability and assessments; small classes in small schools; high quality teachers; high quality comprehensive early childhood programs; attention to non-cognitive factors like health; up-to-date technology, facilities and instructional materials; public engagement; and sufficient funds to provide these resources.

Automatic Grade Retention

While “ending social promotion” has become a popular slogan, the automatic grade retention policy that generally accompanies it has further disadvantaged struggling students and has disproportionately affected Black and Hispanic students. In fact, the National Research Council found that simply repeating a grade does not improve achievement over the long term and can actually result in negative outcomes for those retained compared to those with similar academic problems who are not retained. Among those negative outcomes is a significantly increased dropout rate.¹¹⁷

While certainly there are some circumstances when grade retention is an appropriate way to help some students, the negative effects of the policy are profoundly illustrated in a longitudinal study of the Baltimore Public Schools. The study found that:

- 71 percent of students retained once dropped out;
- 80 percent of students retained more than once dropped out; and,
- 94 percent of those retained both in elementary and in middle school dropped out.¹¹⁸

Most recent data show that twice as many Black students as non-Hispanic White students have been retained at least once.¹¹⁹ Data on Black and Hispanic students ages 10 and 16 show that they are more likely than their White and Asian peers to be two or more grades behind.¹²⁰ While there are certain circumstances when grade reten-

tion is appropriate, those decisions are complex and should be made on a case-by-case basis, in the best interests of the child. Yet because of high stakes testing policies, many students are retained based solely on the results of a single test, increasing the risk that children will be incorrectly placed and their school paths will be jeopardized. Most at risk are Black children. Black eighth grade students are almost 2.5 times more likely than non-Hispanic White students to be subjected to high stakes tests to determine promotion.¹²¹

Schools should only retain a student after a careful evaluation of the student’s social, emotional, and cognitive needs. In general, academically failing students should be provided high quality extra support as needed as they move from grade to grade.

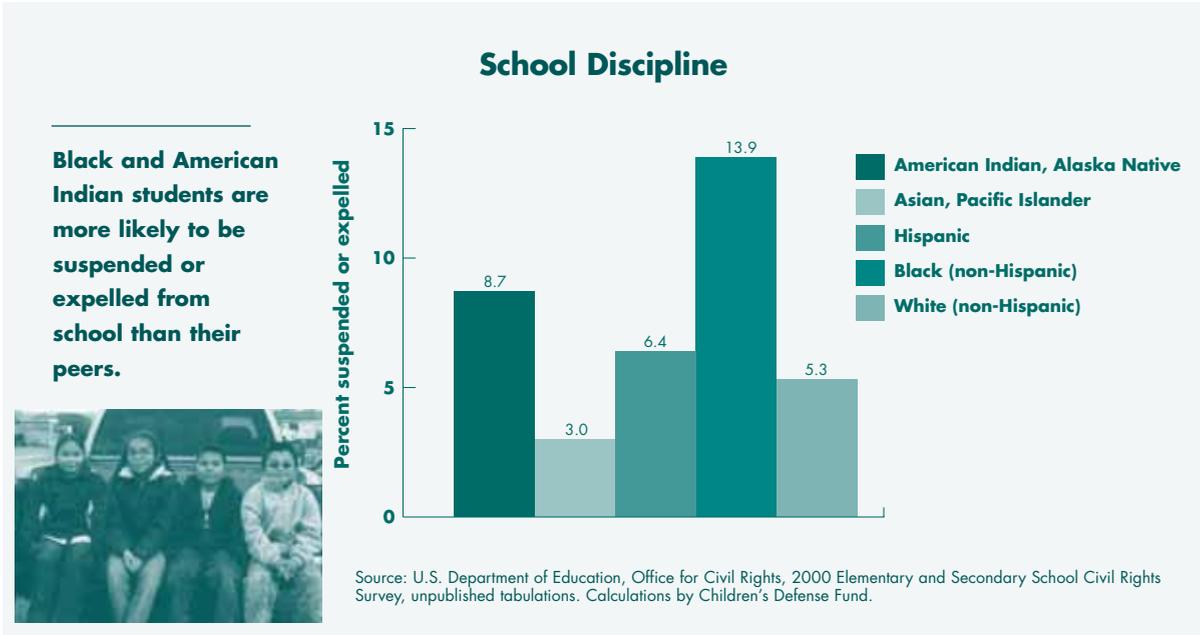
School Discipline

Despite the fact that schools remain the safest place for children to be, many schools have started to crack down on misbehavior in increasingly inappropriate ways. According to a recent report by the U.S. Department of Education, a larger number of serious violent victimizations occur away from school than occur at school.¹²² The percentage of students who report being victimized at school has also declined—from 10 percent in 1995 to 6 percent in 2001.¹²³ Yet many school districts have initiated overly punitive discipline policies that have the effect of pushing children out of school and off the pathway to success.

Zero Tolerance

Minority youth also have been disproportionately affected by the use of zero tolerance discipline policies, which require automatic and often disproportionate punishment for a variety of school code of conduct violations. Nationally, Black youth are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanic White youth to be suspended or expelled from school. Hispanic youth are also significantly more likely than Whites to be suspended or expelled.¹²⁴ While such punishments are appropriate in many contexts, it is clear that too often they are used thoughtlessly, in response to minor offenses, and to the detri-





ment of minority children. Disproportionate and arbitrary punishment impairs children's development by disrupting their trusting relationships with adults and by distorting their sense of fairness and justice. Such policies accelerate the path to the juvenile and criminal justice systems by giving children more unsupervised time and more time with peers who are engaged in delinquency.¹²⁵ Numerous studies demonstrate that students who are suspended or expelled are more likely than their peers to drop out of school altogether.¹²⁶ One study found that being suspended or expelled is one of the top three school-related reasons for dropping out.¹²⁷

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, housed at the Indiana Education Policy Center, has

had tremendous success in providing alternatives to out-of-school suspension. Lobbying by this organization, along with local education advocates and concerned parents, convinced the Indiana legislature to do away with their ineffective zero tolerance policies and adopt a preventive model. If low-income students and families are to pull themselves out of poverty, they are going to require that more states move toward prevention and away from zero tolerance.

Decisions about suspension and expulsion should be made individually, after careful consideration of their efficacy for school safety and for each child. Rather than focusing on school-wide systems of punishment that wait for children to fail,

Walking the Path: School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support

The 2001 Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence identified "commitment to school" as key to averting youth violence. Recent research has shown that if schools move from control and punishment to positive behavioral support, they can significantly reduce misbehavior among even the most challenging students. In this model, endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education, school staff come together as a team to agree on a plan where behavioral expectations are defined and taught. Good behavior is reinforced, and inappropriate behavior is corrected, in consistent, predictable, and constructive ways. The result: fewer disciplinary infractions, less youth violence, improved academic achievement, and increased academic and social engagement.¹²⁸

schools should focus on school-wide systems of prevention and individual student support.

Criminalization of School Misbehavior

Along with the implementation of zero tolerance policies, schools also have dramatically broadened the scope of juvenile offenses to include what used to be considered obnoxious but normal acting out. Childish misconduct like talking in class, talking back to a teacher, or juvenile speech can now result in the arrest of children as young as four. This “criminalization” of school misbehavior has resulted in a number of controversial overreactions on the part of school staff and local law enforcement that disproportionately impacts minority children. A few recent examples include:

- In Virginia, an eight-year-old boy was arrested when he allegedly threw a violent temper tantrum. The four-foot tall child was taken away in handcuffs from his elementary school and charged with disorderly conduct and assault and battery. The boy was upset because his teacher wouldn't let him go outside to play.¹²⁹
- In Palm Beach County, Florida, a six year-old student was arrested for trespassing on school property. The student was walking through the school yard, after school hours, on his way home.¹³⁰
- In Irvington, New Jersey, two elementary school boys were arrested and charged with making terrorist threats for playing cops and robbers with a paper gun.¹³¹

While the aforementioned anecdotes may seem comical in their absurdity, punishing non-criminal student behavior is common and has harmful effects. The Advancement Project released

a report this year entitled, “Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track,” that examined the negative consequences of zero tolerance, the expanding role of law enforcement in our nation's schools, and the criminalization of school misbehavior. The report finds that increasingly students are being suspended, expelled, or arrested for non-violent “offenses.” The facts highlighted in the report tell a grim tale:

- The number of students given out-of-school suspensions increased from 1.7 million to 3.1 million from 1974 to 2000. An analysis of this trend shows that suspensions are being used increasingly for “trivial conduct, much of which is subjectively labeled ‘disrespect,’ ‘disobedience,’ and ‘disruption.’”
- There is also a growing trend toward arrests in a number of school districts across the country. As reported in “Education on Lockdown,” Denver, Colorado, students referred to law enforcement by school officials, either through tickets and/or arrests, increased by 71 percent between 2000 and 2004, and minority students were referred at much higher rates than their White counterparts. During the 2003-2004 school year, Black students were twice as likely and Latino students were seven times as likely as White students to receive a ticket at school.
- In 2003, 8,539 students were arrested in Chicago public schools. Almost 10 percent of those students arrested were 12 years old or younger, and four of the arrests were of seven-year-old children. Though Black students made up roughly 50 percent of student enrollment, they constituted more than 77 percent of arrests made in Chicago schools that year. Palm Beach County, Florida, exhibited similar racial disparities. In 2003-2004, Black students made up less than 29 percent of enrollment, yet almost 64 percent of school-based arrests.¹³²



Recommendations for Moving Forward

There is a tremendous need to proactively keep students in school and out of trouble and to help them academically, emotionally, and socially. Ensuring a quality education for all children is not only a moral imperative, but a wise investment. A recent study by researchers at the Maxwell School of Public Policy at Syracuse University found that an extra \$1,000 spent on education is associated with a 10 percent reduction in the number of low math and reading scores, a 15 percent reduction in high school dropout rates, and a 10 percent reduction in teen birth rates.¹³³

With this in mind, schools must do far more to ensure that all children have the resources they need for success. Schools must provide:

- Advanced, relevant, and diverse curricula that includes service and other experiential learning;
- Higher quality teachers and school leaders who better represent the population of students in public schools;
- Personalized, more responsive learning environments, including smaller class size, where students feel challenged, respected and receive more support and individual attention;
- Increased parent involvement so parents can reinforce student learning at home, and schools can better understand students' individual needs;
- Expanded partnerships with business, cultural institutions, preschools, universities, and other community-based organizations to open opportunities and support for children in school;
- Collaborations with other service providers so students' health, mental health, housing, and child welfare needs do not overwhelm their ability to learn and stay in school;
- High quality mental health services for students; and
- Safe and modern school facilities.

A strong accountability system is necessary if we are to raise achievement for all children, including children of color, children from low-income families, those with disabilities, and children of limited English proficiency. However, to be effective, accountability systems must:

- Hold the federal government, states, and districts accountable to ensure equity and adequacy of educational resources for all children.
- Never use a single test to make high stakes decisions about schools and students. Instead, examine success in the most comprehensive, fair way by considering a variety of collateral academic indicators of student performance in addition to tests.
- Use only high quality assessments that employ multiple measures of student achievement that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding, not just rote memorization and test taking skills.
- Ensure there is an accurate measure of and accountability for dropout rates, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, income, disability, and limited English proficiency status.
- Require more substantial improvement in dropout rates as a condition for making Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB.
- Investigate and punish schools and districts for unfairly and inappropriately placing students at risk of failure outside the accountability system in low-track programs and classes.
- Base any effort to allow states and districts to waive requirements of NCLB on solid evidence that those waivers will be educationally beneficial for children and will not arbitrarily leave some children behind. Rather than simply allowing states to use creative accounting to get schools out of "needs improvement" status, such as by exempting entire grade spans from district accountability, the Education Department should ensure that waivers are rooted in solid educational practice that will lead to a more valid assessment of how schools and districts are really doing in educating their students and advancing education reform.

- Allow time for improvement plans to take hold. Sanctions under NCLB should have a proven record of success and should not be applied if those sanctions are going to undermine existing, effective reform efforts.
 - Permit states, in determining Adequate Yearly Progress, to consider individual student improvement over time in addition to the percentage of students that achieve a certain level of proficiency.
 - Develop and implement an accountability system based on disaggregated data with consequences for state officials that is parallel to the accountability system that applies to schools and districts.
- sary to become strong readers and good students.
 - Offer access to after-school activities for school-aged children that not only offer a safe haven, but also provide the academic enrichment they need to stay and succeed in school.
 - Provide reliable, affordable child care options that enable parents to work outside the home or give children extra learning experiences if their parents stay at home.
 - Give parents the opportunity to stay at home during their child's critical first months or when their child is sick.

A comprehensive national policy vision that moves all children's needs, ranging from health and nutrition to early care and education, to the top of our national agenda is urgently needed. As stated in chapter Chapter Three, if children are to succeed in K-12 they need a *Head Start*.

- Provide a solid foundation for young children that allows them to enter school with the skills neces-

If we want children to come to school ready to learn, if we want children to be engaged while in school, and if we want children to leave school on a successful passage to adulthood, it is essential that they not come to school hungry or sick or victimized by violence. Policy makers need to recognize that children do not come in pieces. They live in families and communities who need the capacity to support them. Legislation, such as the comprehensive Act to Leave No Child Behind, which addresses children's multiple needs, is essential for successful education reform.



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