Challenges to Equity in American Public Education

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The Flat World and Education: Inequality, Reform, and Learning
“I lived in Master Hugh’s family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. In accomplishing this, I was compelled to resort to various stratagems. I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the ~inch,~ and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ~ell.~”

-- The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass
A Changing Economy Makes Education More Important

![Chart showing the percentage of low skill jobs and knowledge work jobs over time (1900, 1950, 2000). The chart indicates a significant increase in knowledge work jobs from 1900 to 2000.]

- Low skill jobs
- Knowledge work jobs
How the demand for skills has changed
Economy-wide measures of routine and non-routine task input (U.S.)

The dilemma of schools: The skills that are easiest to teach and test are also the ones that are easiest to digitize, automate, and outsource

(Levy and Murnane)
Yet, in many nations, budget cuts have hit education hard
Spain
England
New Zealand
United States

[Image of a protest sign: Why is there always money for war and not for education?]
Today, In the U.S., There are Two Achievement Gaps

- The gap between white and more affluent students in the U.S. and students of color and those in poverty
- The gap between U.S. students and those in other high-achieving nations that have made greater – and more equitable - investments in education over the last thirty years.
The U.S. is Falling Behind in Educational Attainment

Approximated by percentage of persons with ISCED3 qualifications in age groups 55-64, 45-55, 45-44 and 25-34 years.

1. Excluding ISCED 3C short programmes
2. Year of reference 2004
3. Including some ISCED 3C short programmes
4. Year of reference 2003
College Participation is Also Falling Behind

- The U.S. has dropped from 1st to 17th in college participation over the last decade.
- About 38% of US students – and 28% of California students -- earn a college degree, compared to 50% in European countries and close to 60% in Korea and Singapore.
- Each year of additional education in the population nets a gain of 3.7% in long-term economic growth (OECD, 2005).
US Outcomes in International Perspective

Reading
Korea
Finland
Singapore
Canada
New Zealand
Japan
Australia

US is #14

Mathematics
Singapore
Korea
Finland
Lichtenstein
Switzerland
Japan
Canada

US is #27

Science
Finland
Singapore
Japan
Korea
New Zealand
Canada
Estonia

US is #21
Inequality Influences
Low US Rankings

Figure 1
U.S. PISA Results, by Subgroup, Compared to OECD Average

![Bar chart showing U.S. PISA results by subgroup and compared to OECD average.](chart.png)
Poverty Rates of PISA Participants

[Bar chart showing poverty rates for various countries with the United States having the highest rate.]
School Spending is Unequal Across States

Expenditures per pupil

- Utah: $6,586
- Vermont: $17,552

Expenditures per pupil (adjusted)

- Tennessee: $6,839
- Wyoming: $16,947

Spending is Also Unequal Within States

- Expenditures by NY district
- NY adjusted expenditures

- Expenditures by CA district
- CA adjusted expenditures
The Anatomy of Inequality

Dysfunctional schools

Unequal access to curriculum

Inequitable distribution of well-qualified educators

Unequal school funding

Poverty and segregation
Education vs. Incarceration?

- The U.S. is 1st in the world in Incarceration
- Over the last 2 decades, prison enrollments quadrupled, with largest increases for dropouts
- Funding for jails increased 900% while funding for schools increased 1/3 as much
- More than 50% of inmates are functionally illiterate
- More than 70% of adjudicated juvenile offenders have learning or emotional disabilities never addressed in school
- Five states now spend more on corrections than on public higher education
Moving Backward after Moving Forward

- Programs of the 1960s and ’70s reduced poverty, unemployment, segregation, and teacher shortages while boosting school funding.
- Most of these programs were eliminated or sharply reduced during the 1980s.
- Had we continued the policies that closed the gap between 1971 and 1988, there would have been no racial achievement gap by 2000.
Brown +50 – The Next Horizon

SCHOOL SEGREGATION - CIRCA 2000
Segregation Supports Inequality

- 2/3 of Black and Latino students attend predominantly minority schools with lower levels of instructional resources.
- Within “integrated” schools, most minority students are concentrated in low-track classes which receive less well-qualified teachers, less engaging and less well taught curriculum, and lower-quality materials.
What Kind of Policies Can Help?

"Today you're going to learn the meaning of 'irony.'"
No Child Left Behind: Noble Goals and Unintended Effects

- Goal to focus on all groups of students
- Demand for “highly qualified teachers,” but incentives for reducing preparation
- Demand for higher achievement, but incentives for
  -- Excluding low-scoring students
  -- Narrowing curriculum
  -- Chasing teachers from high-need schools
## Rewards or Sanctions?

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Ave. Score = 70

% Meeting Standards=66%

Ave. Score = 74

% Meeting Standards= 80%
Underprepared Teachers Decrease Student Achievement

Fall-to-Spring Test Score Gains / Losses of Students Taught by Alternative Route and Traditional Route Teachers

Based on actual (unadjusted) fall and spring scores
Outcomes of NCLB

- State scores have ‘increased’
- National gains have slowed
- International scores have dropped
- Graduation rates have declined
- Student exclusions have increased
- Teacher attrition has grown
Strategies that Go Straight to the Periphery of the Issues

- Reducing preparation for teachers and firing “low-performers” rather than building a profession
- Merit Pay without competitive, equitable salaries and working conditions
- Managing schools exclusively by test scores without attention to school completion, poverty, or other purposes of education
- Targets, sanctions, and school closings without resources for capacity-building
- Requiring charters without ensuring access and supporting innovation throughout the system
What are the alternatives?
The Need to Develop Excellence and Equity

“Excellence and equity are not opposing concepts. The definitions of the words include each other. Excellence without equity is simply not excellence; it is privilege. Excellence is superlative performance starting from a level playing field; performance made superlative through extraordinary effort and talent, not from the relative advantage of some at the expense of others. True excellence requires equity as a precondition…”
The Need to Develop Excellence and Equity

“And equity without excellence is not equity, it is tokenism and leads to a mediocrity that is good for no one's kids. Equity means we push every one of our students to excellence and tell them in no uncertain terms: we will support you along the way, no matter who your parents are, where they may have been born...the color of you skin...where you live...how much money your parents make...the structure of your family...your prior academic performance...or even how long you have been in the district. You are ours and we will support you.”
What are the Highest-Achieving Nations Doing?

- Societal supports for children’s welfare, including health care and preschool
- Equitable resources with greater investments in high-need schools and students
- Substantial investments in initial teacher education and ongoing support
- Schools designed to support teacher and student learning
- Equitable access to a rich, thinking curriculum
- Performance assessments focused on higher order skills
Teacher Quality Matters Greatly

Large-scale studies of student achievement in NC and NYC found that teachers were significantly more effective if they:

- Were fully prepared when they entered teaching – rather than entering through a “lateral entry” or unlicensed route,
- Were more experienced,
- Were certified in the specific field they taught, and
- Were well prepared academically,
- Were National Board certified (NC study).

The effects on student achievement of having a teacher with most of these qualifications as compared to having one without were greater than the effects of race and parent education combined.

What are the Highest-Achieving Nations Doing?

- Universal health care, housing, preschool for children
- Equitable & adequate resources for schools
- Equitable access to a thinking curriculum (evaluated by rich performance assessments)
- Substantial investments in initial teacher education and ongoing support
- A well-paid and well-supported profession
- Schools designed to support teacher and student learning
Professional Learning Opportunities in High-Achieving Nations Abroad

High-achieving nations in Europe and Asia:

- Ensure extensive, fully subsidized preparation that includes clinical training in model schools
- Provide beginners with intensive mentoring.
- Offer extensive, sustained learning opportunities embedded in practice:
  - Teachers have 15-25 hours a week for collaboration plus 100 hours a year for professional learning
  - Most engage regularly in Lesson Study, Action Research, and Peer Observation and Coaching to evaluate and improve practice.
What are these Nations Not Doing?

- Cutting funds to schools / colleges
- Privatizing K-12 education
- Ranking and labeling schools and teachers
- Allocating rewards or sanctions based on test scores
- De-professionalizing teaching
Questions to Ask about Education Reforms

**Standards, Curriculum, & Testing**
- Do standards & curriculum emphasize higher order thinking and performance or superficial coverage of content?
- Do tests ask students to apply their learning to genuine problems and communicate their thinking, or merely to recall or recognize memorized content?

**Teachers and Teaching**
- Do policies help educators develop and share sophisticated expertise, or do they foster low skills, high turnover, isolation, and remote control of teaching?

**Accountability and Improvement**
- Do policies foster professional responsibility or competition and gaming among schools and educators?
What Is Needed to Ensure Equity and Excellence

(1) Equitable and adequate resources;
(2) Strong professional standards and supports;
(3) Meaningful learning goals
(4) Intelligent, reciprocal accountability systems;
and
(5) Schools designed for empowering forms of student and teacher learning
Plus… investments that can help close the growing income gap

-- Preschool
-- Summer learning
-- Wraparound services
What Happens When States Make Smart and Equitable Investments?

New Jersey Math Achievement Trends
4th Grade NAEP

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP Data Trends
"On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?'
Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?'
And Vanity comes along and asks the question, 'Is it popular?'
But Conscience asks the question 'Is it right?'
And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right."

-- Martin Luther King, 1968