

Breaking the Cycle of the Educational Divide

Before some students even consider applying to college, 71% of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds fail to meet the college prerequisites as opposed to 31% of students from a higher socioeconomic status (Cabrera and Nasa). The educational divide present among students is attributed to a complexity of issues. Among them is socioeconomic status, which ultimately contributes to the unequal level of education students receive. Socioeconomic status plays a large role in the opportunities available to students as they prepare to pursue higher education. Students from a lower socioeconomic background face an uphill struggle early in the K-12 educational system and experience inequities in ways that are often not considered. It may be less plausible for schools with limited budgets to provide their students with a variety of resources, including digital learning opportunities. The financial budgetary restraints present in schools prohibits their ability to support their students with additional tutoring or a Pre-K education. In addition to the limited school resources in economically depressed regions, these students face other significant challenges such as single parent homes, have a parent without formal education or lack parental role models. These compromised students often struggle to receive proper nutrition, with their only balanced meal coming from a school cafeteria. They may face social inequities and lack resources to dress in decent attire, negatively impacting their self-esteem. The financial strain these schools and students face, present even before these students enroll in K-12, is a contributing factor to the educational divide that may adversely impact their future trajectories and contributions to society. Success in education will help bring these students out of distressing socioeconomic poverty, leading them towards economic success and less dependence on government assistance. Equal academic opportunities will lead to more

educated parental role models to instill the importance of education in the next generation, helping close the current educational divide.

Students from a lower socioeconomic background often attend schools with insufficient budgets, which consequently limits the amount of additional academic support these schools are able to provide. The scope of the digital divide goes beyond merely having a computer with Internet connection. Lower income schools tend to have fewer computers, contributing to a higher ratio of students per computer, and are unable to invest in technical support staff and training to incorporate widespread use of technologies among teachers (Dolan). While students may have access to limited technology, there is a high probability that these schools are unable to allocate funds to teach students and teachers how to effectively use these educational tools. Furthermore, these schools may not have sufficient internet bandwidth or stable WiFi connections to allow their students access to the limited technology they may possess. When schools are unable to support the student population accessing the Internet, class time allotted to complete assignments and utilize technology becomes hindered by lagging Internet connections and hampers educational productivity. As we have entered a digital age, access to technology is a critical resource that can provide students with infinite knowledge right at their fingertips, from countless tutorial videos to scholarly articles. The digital divide in the classroom is a multifaceted issue, arising from limited technology and limited faculty resources, thus disadvantaging students who are unable to access this resource that could further enrich their learning.

The digital divide extends beyond limited classroom resources, further contributing to the problem of educational inequities. Many of these financially compromised students face significant technologic barriers at home. They may not have a single computer in their entire

house, or it may be shared by everyone living in one home. And although some students may have limited access to technology at home, the cost of accessing the Internet may not be feasible.

Additionally, the financial divide may limit lower income students' access to resources like tutoring and preschool, both playing fundamental roles in early academic success. Schools may not have the budget to pay teachers to stay during lunch or after hours to provide additional help outside of the classroom, or keep libraries open after school hours to give students a place to study. Low income schools are unable to fulfill the needs of some students when they are seeking additional academic help. Oftentimes students from underprivileged backgrounds are unable to seek out tutoring on their own because of the financial strain their families face. Beyond the limited number of resources offered to students in K-12, many of these students are unable to attend preschool beforehand. Preschool allows children to grow socially and expand their cognitive and language abilities early on in their development. Students who are unable to attend preschool may already be at a disadvantage when they enter Kindergarten, as they may barely know their ABCS while more privileged kids may already be able to read and write. The Head Start Program has been developed to try and close the educational gap that starts to form in early childhood, but some low-income students are still unable to attend preschool. Something such as limited transportation may prevent these students from engaging in these resources. Limited access to tutoring and pre-K learning contribute to the educational inequities that continue to persist, and partly determine whether students will successfully complete high school and earn a diploma.

Furthermore, these students may struggle to receive educational support at home, as they may come from single-parent households, have a parent without formal education, or be without parental role models. Single-parents may be focused on balancing multiple jobs and earning

enough money for basic necessities rather than on their child's academics. Children may come from households where their parents did not attend college, or even graduate from high school. These students may be more likely to follow in their parents' footsteps and dropout of high school because they were not given the resources to earn their diploma. A child's guardian is usually their first source of educational support for help with basic homework assignments. For those from a limited socioeconomic background, their parent may not have the educational ability to help the child or they may be unavailable secondary to work commitments, all of which can contribute to barriers for success in school.

Another basic need of students in the educational system is their dependence on receiving a majority of their nutrition from school meals. School lunches and breakfasts make up a larger proportion of lower income students' daily caloric intake compared to higher income students' (Potamites and Gordon). Students from a lower economic background may not have access to proper nutrition or enough food to meet their dietary needs at home. Insufficient nutrition may largely be related to the daily struggles these students' families face to put a meal on the table, many of which depend on food stamps. The free or reduced lunch programs, present in the American K-12 educational system, increase student accessibility to nutritional cafeteria meals. Nutrition plays a vital role in the cognitive and physical development of growing children, and their overall well-being. Children who are inadequately nourished may have increased susceptibility towards, "detrimental effects on cognitive development. Even nutritional deficiencies of a relatively short-term influence children's behavior, ability to concentrate and to perform complex tasks," ("FYI: Nutrition and Cognitive Development"). Programs like the free and reduced lunch attempt to diminish the food inequities present among students and set more students up for success in school. The role of schools extends beyond educating students. They

are critical in providing resources to meet the essential basic needs of children to support their growth and development. It has become a crucial role for schools to provide these food resources to students to prevent the detrimental effects lack of nutrition can have on their overall health and well-being.

Moreover, many of these disadvantaged students are struggling with personal issues of self-esteem and social inequities concurrently with school. These students may experience feelings of inadequacy as they endeavor to purchase simple necessities, like sufficient clothing and shoes. The social inequities these students are forced to deal with in their everyday life leave them focused on the stressful realities of trying to satisfy their basic needs, potentially shifting their attention away from academic performance. Not only can poor self-esteem contribute to serious issues like depression and suicide, but these students may be more likely to partake in criminal behaviors and succumb to peer pressure (Doi et al). Unfortunately, the weight of poverty on the lives of students can lead them down roads of delinquency and poor self-esteem.

The presence of the educational divide has become even more prominent with the recent Coronavirus pandemic. The financial disparities have left lower income schools scrambling to obtain resources to continue educating students from a distance. Specifically, in Los Angeles county, where there is prominent monetary discrepancy, schools with sizeable budgets transitioned faster to online education, especially because numerous students already had access technological devices and Internet at home. On the other hand, “students in high-poverty districts were expected to spend less time per day on instructional activities, more likely to use paper packs and more likely to focus on reviewing content than students in low-poverty districts,” (Esquivel et al). Not only were low-income students falling behind in curriculum, but the time they spent out of school when transitioning to distance learning caused the gap in their education

to grow even larger. The inequities present in student education became visible on a national scale, and the divide has continued to grow with the Coronavirus outbreak, leaving lower-income students struggling to catch up from the meager education they received with distance learning.

Education is a necessity in our society because it helps promote our economic productivity and advancement as a nation. As inequities continue to persist in the K-12 education system, “students from poor or single-parent households, or whose parents did not graduate from high school, are at greater risk of dropping out from school,” (Fall and Roberts) compared to more affluent students. For those with compromised socioeconomic status, the role of education may be completely life-changing. Successfully completing a high school education will increase a student’s likelihood of pursuing a career they are passionate about, and make them qualified for a wider variety of jobs. These students’ success in education will even be transformative for society as a whole, as they will require less dependence on social programs and make meaningful contributions to our collective community, as well as help decrease rates of crime and delinquency. More students will be able to instill the value of education in future generations, and help eliminate the current discrepancies in our educational system. As a society, we must recognize the problems that contribute to the educational divide, and continue to do our best for those compromised by no fault of their own.

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