

Benefits of Socio-Economic Diversity in Public Schools

A large and growing body of research supports the benefits of socio-economic diversity in public school enrollments. These benefits include increased academic performance and lower drop-out rates for low-income students. This research shows that low-income students who attend a school with students who come from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds outperform low-income students who attend schools that have higher concentrations of students from low-income families. Schools with a diverse socio-economic enrollment are also more able to attract and retain teachers than are schools with high concentrations of low-income students. The United States Department of Education, in the arena of post-secondary education, has encouraged colleges and universities to employ socio-economic status as one race-neutral means to attain diverse student enrollments. See “Race-Neutral Alternatives in Postsecondary Education: Innovative Approaches to Diversity,” at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-raceneutralreport.html>.

The following are examples of the research that supports these propositions.

Socio-Economic Diversity in Student Enrollment Improves Academic Achievement for Low-Income Students

- James Coleman’s 1966 Report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, found that low-income students have higher levels of achievement, and/or larger achievement gains over time, when they attend middle-class schools than when they attend high-poverty schools.^[1] Coleman further found that the social composition of a school’s student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the student’s own social background, than is any school factor.^[2]
- A reanalysis of Coleman’s data found that poor black sixth-graders in middle-class schools were twenty months ahead of poor black sixth-graders in schools with high levels of student poverty; findings for poor whites were similar.^[3]
- In 1999, *Education Week* noted that Coleman’s finding that a school’s socioeconomic background is a strong determinant of its students’ achievement continues to be validated in education studies.^[4]
- Studies of international data reflect that the “socio-economic composition of a school’s student population is an even stronger predictor [of achievement] than individual home background.” This research shows, for example, that “two students with the same family characteristics going to different schools – one with a higher and one with a lower socio-economic profile – could expect

to be further apart in reading literacy than two students from different backgrounds going to the same school.”[\[5\]](#)

- A 1990 longitudinal study looking at factors that influence gains in achievement among high school students found the socioeconomic status of students at the school to be “strongly associated” with achievement gains between sophomore and senior years. The researchers found that “through their peers, students are influenced by the families of other students in a school.”[\[6\]](#)
- A 1986 national assessment of the federal Chapter 1 program found that the chances that a disadvantaged student would fall into the bottom quartile of achievement were twice as high for a student attending a high-poverty school as for a student from a low-poverty school (59% for the child in a high-poverty school and 28% for a child in a low-poverty school).[\[7\]](#)
- A 1993 study found that the percentage of poor students in a school was the most important predictor of achievement on Louisiana state standardized tests.[\[8\]](#)
- A 1996 study of 24,599 eighth-grade students found that, particularly for math and reading scores, the “SES of a school had an effect on achievement that was comparable to the effects associated with the SES of a family.”[\[9\]](#)
- A 1997 congressionally authorized longitudinal study of 40,000 students concluded that “the poverty level of the school (over and above the economic status of an individual student) is negatively related to standardized achievement scores.” This study supported the finding of an earlier study that “the poverty level of certain schools places disadvantaged children in double jeopardy. School poverty depresses the scores of all students in a school where at least half of the students are eligible for subsidized lunch, and seriously depresses the scores when over 75% of students live in low income households.”[\[10\]](#)
- A 1998 study of the effect of concentrations of poverty on school districts in Texas found that a middle-class school environment “significantly improves poor children’s academic achievement.” The study compared passage rates on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (“TASS”) for low-income students in a district that had 17% low-income students with those of low-income students in a district that spent more money per pupil, but had 88% low-income students. While 61% of low-income students in the district with a lower percentage of low-income students passed TASS, only 39% of low income students in the district with a higher concentration of low-income students passed.[\[11\]](#)

- A 1999 study of approximately 60,000 students in four Minnesota school districts concluded that “the degree to which poor children are surrounded by other poor children, both in their neighborhood and at school, has as strong an effect on their achievement as their own poverty.”[\[12\]](#)
- A 1999 Department of Education study noted that “poor students in high-poverty schools are doubly at risk, with lower achievement levels than poor students in low-poverty schools.”[\[13\]](#)

Students in Schools with Diverse Socio-Economic Enrollments are Less Likely to Drop Out of School

- A 1996 study found that students from schools with fewer low-income students were more likely to graduate on time than students from schools with large proportions of low-income students.[\[14\]](#)
- Recent studies have found that students in high-poverty neighborhoods and schools “are far more likely to drop out of school than are poor students who live in economically mixed neighborhoods.”[\[15\]](#)
- Attending a school with high concentrations of poverty increases the chances of adult poverty by a factor of between three and four compared with attending a low-poverty school (14% versus 4%), after controlling for individual ability and family home environment.[\[16\]](#)

Schools with Diverse Socio-Economic Enrollments Are More Conducive to Attracting and Retaining High Quality Teachers

- A 1996 study found that high poverty schools have the highest percentage of teachers with three years or less teaching experience and that administrators in those schools report greater difficulties in hiring teachers. That same study found that schools with a high concentration of low-income students are generally more likely to spend more classroom time maintaining order and discipline than are teachers in schools with lower concentrations of low-income students.[\[17\]](#)
- Teachers in middle-class schools are more likely to teach in their field of expertise and are more likely to have higher teacher test scores.[\[18\]](#)

Attachment D

- A 1999 study of Texas data found that teachers systematically leave districts with high concentrations of low-income students for districts with lower proportions of low-income students.^[19]

[1] Report of the Century Foundation Task Force on the Common School, Divided We Fail, (2002), p. 13 (citing James S. Coleman et al., Equality of Educational Opportunity (Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 22).

[2] Richard D. Kahlenberg, All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice (2001), p. 26 (citing Coleman, p. 22).

[3] Kahlenberg at 26 (citing Christopher Jencks, “The Coleman Report and the Conventional Wisdom,” in Frederick Mosteller and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds., On Equality of Educational Opportunity: Papers Deriving From the Harvard Faculty Seminar on the Coleman Report (1972), pp. 87, 105).

[4] Kahlenberg at 26 (citing David Hoff, “Echoes of the Coleman Report,” *Education Week*, March 24, 1999, p. 33).

[5] Michael Fullan, Change Forces with a Vengeance, (2003) p. 13 (citing Knowledge and Skills for Life: First Results from PISA 2000 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2000), p. 21).

[6] Kahlenberg at 27 (citing John Chubb and Terry Moe, Politics, Markets, and American Schools, (1990), pp. 124-28, 109).

[7] Kahlenberg at 26 (citing Mary E. Kennedy, Richard K Jung, and M.E. Orland, Poverty, Achievement, and the Distribution of Compensatory Education Services: An Interim Report from the National Assessment of Chapter 1 (Dep’t of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1986) pp. 21-22).

[8] Stephen J. Caldas and Carl Bankston III, “The Equality of Separation: Racial Composition of Schools and Academic Achievement,” Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Oct. 1998), p. 537 (citing Stephen J. Caldas, “Reexamination of Input and Process Factor Effects on Academic Achievement,” Journal of Educational Research, pp. 86, 206-14).

[9] Kahlenberg at 27 (citing Esther Ho Sui-chu and J. Douglas Willms, “Effects of Parental Involvement on Eighth-Grade Achievement,” Sociology of Education, vol. 69 (April 1996), pp. 130, 135, 138).

[10] Kahlenberg at 28 (citing Michael Puma, *et al.*, Prospects: Final Report on Student Outcomes (Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates, 1997), pp. 73, 12).

[11] Kahlenberg at 28 (citing David Rusk, “To Improve Public Education, Stop Moving Money, Move Families,” Abell Report, Vol. 11 (June-July, 1998), pp. 1, 5).

[12] Kahlenberg at 28 (citing Stephen Schellenberg, “Concentration of Poverty and the Ongoing Need for Title I,” in Gary Orfield and Elizabeth DeBray, eds., Hard Work for Good Schools: Facts not Fads in Title I Reform (Harvard Civil Rights Project 1999), p. 130).

[13] Divided We Fail at 13 (citing Stephanie Stulich, Brenda Donly, and Simeon Stolzberg, Targeting Schools: Study of Title I Allocations Within School Districts (Dep’t of Education, 1999)).

[14] Laura Lippman, Shelley Burns, Edith McArthur, Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty (Nat’l Ctr. For Educ. Statistics 1996), p. 32.

[15] Kahlenberg at 29 (citing, *e.g.*, John Powel, “Segregation and Educational Inadequacy in Twin Cities Public Schools,” Hamline Journal of Public Law and Policy, vol. 17, (Spring 1996) p. 345; Maureen T. Hallinhan, “Commentary: New Directions for Research in Peer Influence,” in Joyce Levy Epstein and Nancy Karwest, eds., Friends in School: Patterns of Selection and Influence in Secondary Schools (1983), p. 222).

[16] Kahlenberg at 31 (citing Claude S. Fischer, *et al.*, Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth, (1996), pp. 83-84).

[17] Lippman, *et al.*, at 87-88, 117.

[18] Divided We Fail, at 15 (citing National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers (Dep’t. of Education 1999), p. 17 (teaching out of field); John F. Kain and Kraig Singleton, “Equality of Educational Opportunity Revisited,” New England Economic Review, May-June 1996, pp. 87, 99, 107 (teacher test scores)).

[19] Eric A. Hanushek, *et al.*, “Do Higher Salaries Buy Better Teachers?,” Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association (Jan 3-5, 1999); *see also* testimony of Dr. Hanushek, in Leandro v. State, Wake Co. Circuit Court, December 1, 1999.