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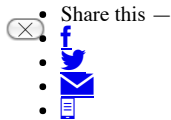
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Segregation, school funding inequalities still punishing Black, Latino students

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News

Segregation, school funding inequalities still punishing Black, Latino students

by Associated Press and Ariel Jao / Jan.12.2018 / 3:20 PM ET



In this Oct. 13, 2017 file photo, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos speaks during a dinner hosted by the Washington Policy Center, in Bellevue, Wash. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights says inequality and segregation persist in American schools. A study by the commission finds that low-income, black and Latino students too often end up in schools with crumbling walls, old textbooks and unqualified teachers. The commission is calling for a boost in federal education spending, changing school funding models and investing in housing. Ted S. Warren / AP Photo

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a report Thursday titled [Public Education Funding Equity: In an Era of Increasing Concentration of Poverty and Resegregation](#), which confirms what educators have known for a long time now -- that educational resources and outcomes have a lot to do with a child's particular neighborhood.

Residential segregation causes a disparity in educational opportunity because it creates higher-income communities, with predominantly white school districts that have more local tax revenue for their schools, compared to fewer dollars and resources for school districts in low-income, minority neighborhoods.

The Chair of the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, Catherine Lhamon said, "low-income students and students of color are often relegated to low-quality school facilities that lack equitable access to teachers, instructional materials, technology and technology support, critical facilities, and physical maintenance," in the [Letter of Transmittal](#) of the briefing report.

The inequitable spending results in achievement gaps among predominantly Black and Latino students.

A study in "[The Nation's Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress](#)" (2012) found that in 2012, students who did not participate in the National School Lunch Program scored an average of 37 points higher on the NAEP reading test than students receiving free lunch, and an average of 24 points higher than students receiving reduced-price lunch.

Schools with a majority of Black and Latino high school students have less access to high-rigor courses than predominantly white schools. For instance, the authors said, 33 percent of high schools with high black and Latino enrollment offer calculus, compared with 56 percent of high schools with low black and Latino student populations. Nationwide, 48 percent of schools offer the rigorous math course.

There is also a lack of courses in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) as well as Advancement Placement (AP) courses. This is a major factor in why Blacks and Hispanics are still heavily underrepresented in the STEM workforce relative to their shares in the U.S. workforce as a whole, according to [Pew](#)

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In addition to academics, there are disparities in the quality of athletic programs and extracurricular program offered to low-poverty and high-poverty schools. Fatima Gross Graves told USCCR in her testimony that, “while heavily minority schools typically have fewer resources and provide fewer spots on teams compared to heavily white schools, they also allocate those fewer spots unequally, such that girls of color get less than their fair share.”

When exploring the disparities in teacher salaries, the USCCR briefing report finds that the highest teacher salaries are reported in wealthy, suburban districts which serve predominantly white students. Districts that serve the highest proportion of low-income students and students of color are populated by about twice as many teachers lacking credentials and experience.

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Education Department spokeswoman Liz Hill said the commission’s findings underscore the need for reform through the promotion of charter schools, voucher programs and other forms of school choice. These are key goals for the Trump administration and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

“This is further proof that too many children, simply because of where they live, are forced to attend schools that do not provide an equitable education,” Hill said in a statement. “Secretary DeVos has made clear her mission is to ensure every child has the opportunity to attend a school that offers an excellent education that meets their individual needs.”

But the answer, say the authors of the report as well as many education experts, is to try to level the playing field when it comes to public school funding, so that the amount of local tax dollars does not dictate the quality of the school district.

“Money matters. If you don’t have it, you cannot spend it,” said Bruce Baker, a professor of education at Rutgers University. Baker said that states should do a better job in raising education funding and in equalizing spending among school districts. He also called for a greater federal role in making sure that less affluent states that need additional education funding get it.

“Having federal money can help states that cannot help themselves and federal pressure can encourage states to do the right thing, to raise enough resources and put them where they are needed.”

But Eric Hanushek, a fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University, disagrees.

“Money is not the secret recipe,” Hanushek said. “How much is spent on schools is not as important as how the money is spent.” For instance, he said, simply increasing the salaries of all teachers in a high-need school district won’t have as much of an impact as identifying high-performing teachers and increasing their salaries.

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