

The Impact of Poverty, Race and Cultural Bias on Educational Opportunity



For decades now, federal and local policies and practices have failed to address the growing inequities in educational opportunity faced by poor children and children of color. Here are some facts about the effects of poverty, race and cultural bias on educational opportunity, and some effects of the many wrong choices being made to address them.

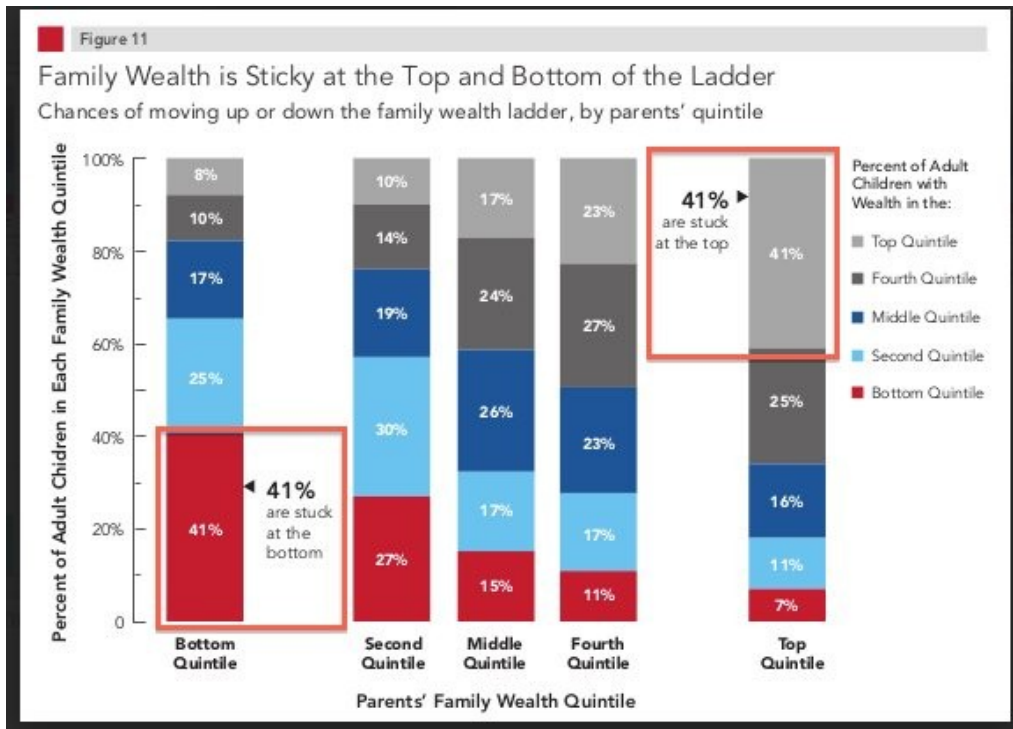
U.S. Poverty

51%

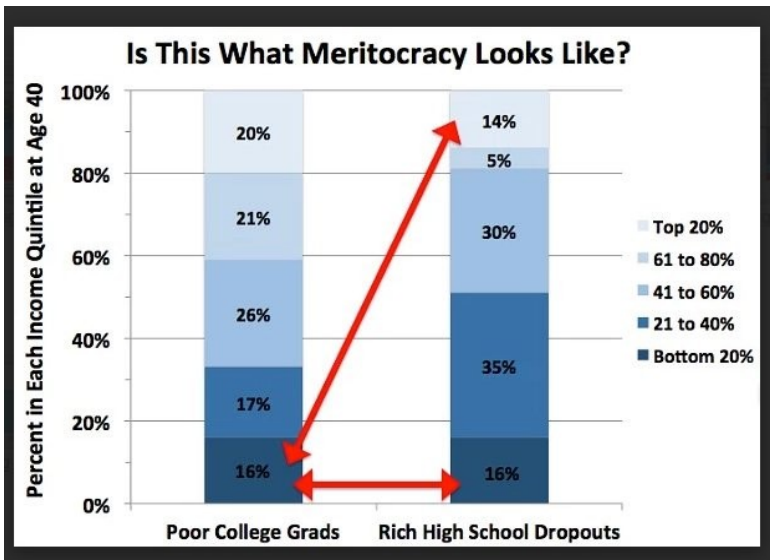
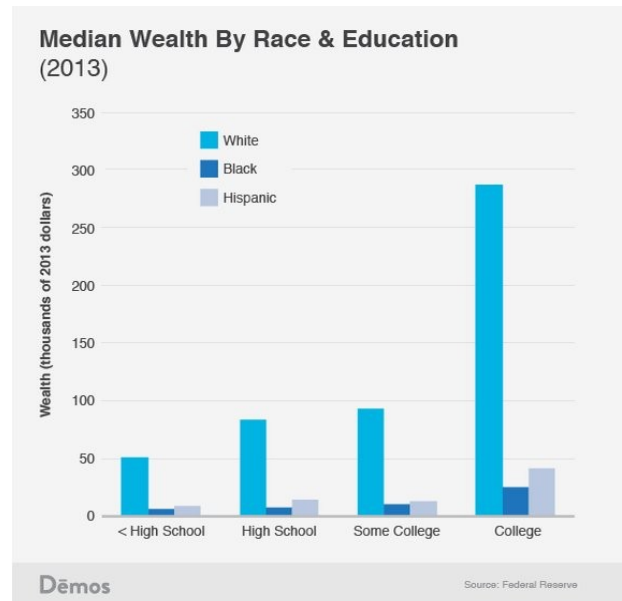
For the first time in at least 50 years, a majority - of U.S. public school students come from low-income families. States with high student-poverty rates tend to spend less per student: of the 27 states with the highest percentages of student poverty, all but five spent less than the national average of \$10,938 per student. (Southern Education Foundation 2015).

Not a Level Playing Field

Wealth and poverty are “sticky” - the wealthy tend to stay wealthy; the poor tend to stay poor.



White families are much wealthier than black and Hispanic families at every education level. More than that, all white families, even those at the lowest education level, have a higher median wealth than all black and Hispanic families, even those at the highest education level. >>>>



For too many low-income students or students of color, education does not level the playing field.

African-American college students are about as likely to get hired as whites who have dropped out of high school.

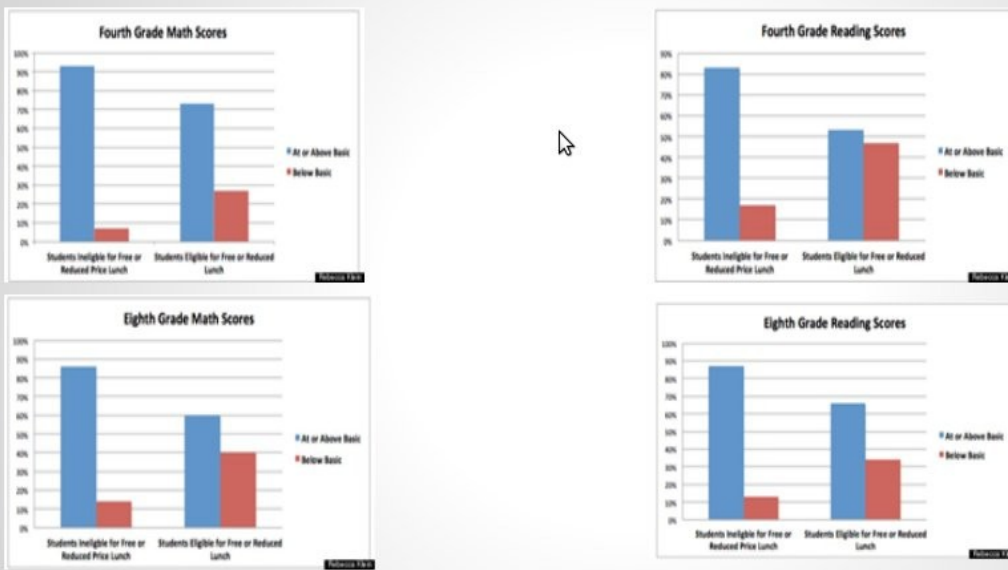
Table 2: Predicted Probability of Employment by Education Attainment, Race and Gender

	Black		White	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
No HS Diploma	65.3%	70.6%	81.8%	82.6%
HS Diploma	74.5%	79.1%	88.0%	88.5%
Some College	82.3%	85.9%	92.5%	92.9%
Associate's	88.4%	91.1%	95.6%	95.9%
Bachelor's	92.8%	94.7%	97.6%	97.7%
Professional	96.0%	97.1%	98.9%	99.0%

Holding school enrollment status, veteran status, work disability status, southern region, rural/urban status, city center/suburban status, marital status, and number of children at their observed values.

Professional Degrees narrowed to 25-34-year-old subsample.

Poor students and NAEP scores

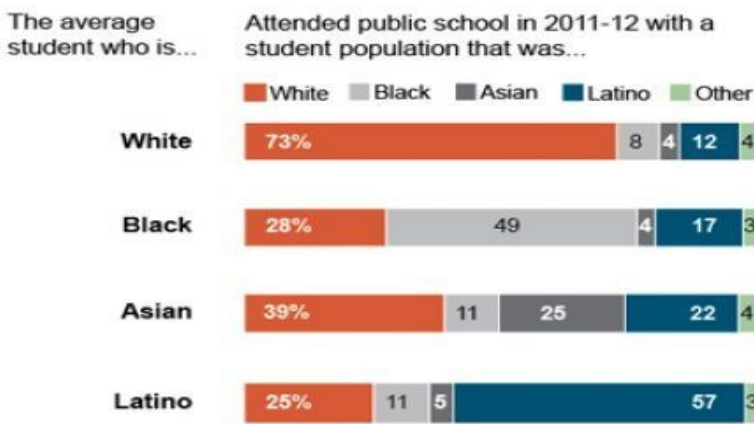


Students eligible for free or reduced lunch have the lowest NAEP scores.

School segregation, “double segregation” by race and poverty

Students, schools and race

Sixty years after U.S. courts ordered schools desegregated, nonwhite students are still more likely to attend a public school with a predominantly minority student body.



NOTE: Numbers are rounded. "Other" includes Native American and multiracial students.

SOURCES: UCLA analysis of Education Department data

AP

In spite of declining residential segregation for black families and large-scale movement to the suburbs in most parts of the country, school segregation remains very high for black students. It is also double segregation by both race and poverty. Nationwide, the typical black student is now in a school where almost two out of every three classmates (64%) are low-income, nearly double the level in schools of the typical white or Asian student (37% and 39%, respectively). New York, Illinois, and Michigan consistently top the list of the most segregated states for black students.

43 percent of Latinos and 38 percent of blacks attend intensely segregated schools (those with only 0 to 10 percent of white students) across the nation (*Civil Rights Project, "E Pluribus"*)

Other Effects

Bias in standardized tests

A Fact Sheet by Parents United for Responsible Education, "Bias in Standardized Tests," says that "although in recent years test makers have attempted to address concerns about test bias by establishing review committees to 'scour' the tests for bias, and by using statistical procedures, significant problems remain in the content of the questions, the cultural assumptions inherent in the 'wanted' answers, etc."



Here are just a few examples from PURE's Fact Sheet:

Discriminatory item selection: Jay Rosner, executive director of the Princeton Review Foundation, which provides test preparation programs for the college-entrance Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), reported in 2003 that potential SAT questions which are answered correctly more often by black students than white students are **rejected** by the test makers. This was apparently done to assure that test results (showing African-Americans scoring lower than whites) would be "consistent" from year to year.

Outright racism: A series of questions on the 2006 global history New York State Regents exam asked students to describe how Africa "benefitted" from imperialism. Using this 150-year-old quote: "We are endeavoring ... to teach the native races to conduct their own affairs with justice and humanity, and to educate them alike in letters and in industry," students were asked to name "two ways the British improved the lives of Africans."

Socio-economic bias masquerading as cultural diversity: The 2006 New York State Regents third grade reading practice test used the example of African-American tennis stars Serena and Venus Williams to ask children questions about tennis "doubles" and country clubs.

Accidental (?) bias: In 2001, the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) included a reading passage taken from Ann Cameron's book, *More Stories Julian Tells*. The book is about an African-American family and is familiar to many African-American children, but the illustrations showed a white family.

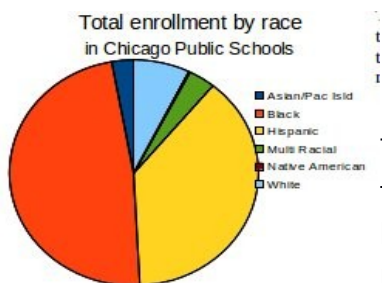
Lack of cultural awareness: A Latina "bias reviewer" caught this item while reviewing questions prepared for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. "I remember one question that showed a picture of a couch on a porch and asked, 'What doesn't fit?'" she says. "I started laughing...the way I grew up, everyone had a couch outside."

School Closures

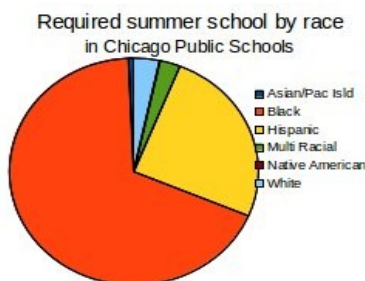
In Chicago, 88% of the students affected by the school closures are African-American. The numbers are just as glaring in Philadelphia, where 81% are black. In both cities more than 93% of the affected students come from poor families. The numbers have played out much the same way in Detroit, New York, Newark, NJ, Oakland and Washington, D.C. Parents of school children in each of these cities have filed federal complaints under the 1964 Civil Rights Act to fight school closings.

Retention

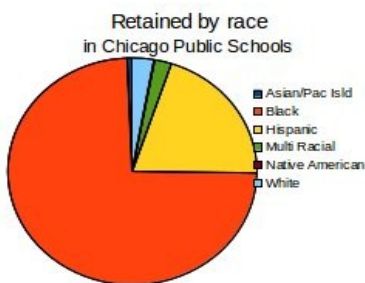
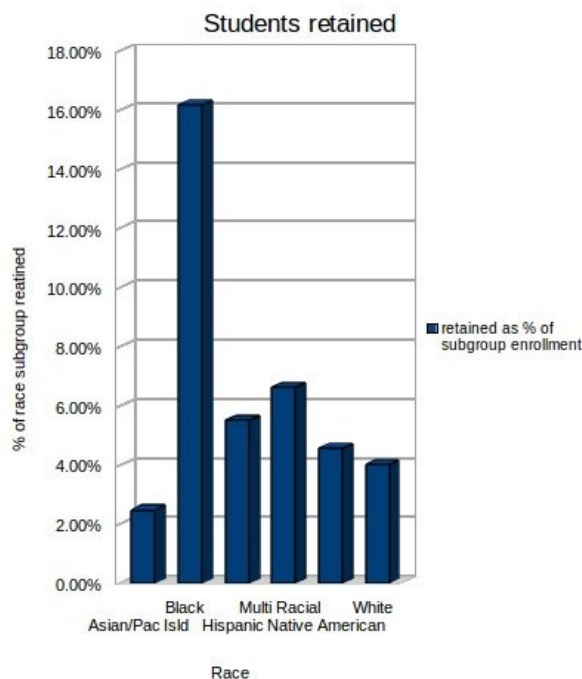
African-American and Latino students are most likely to be retained in grade, which is strongly correlated with dropping out.



The pie chart on the left shows that African-American students have been disproportionately retained in the Chicago Public Schools.



The bar graph on the right shows what percentage of each subgroup was retained in Chicago in 2008. For example, 16% of all CPS 3rd, 6th and 8th grade African-American students had to repeat the grade.



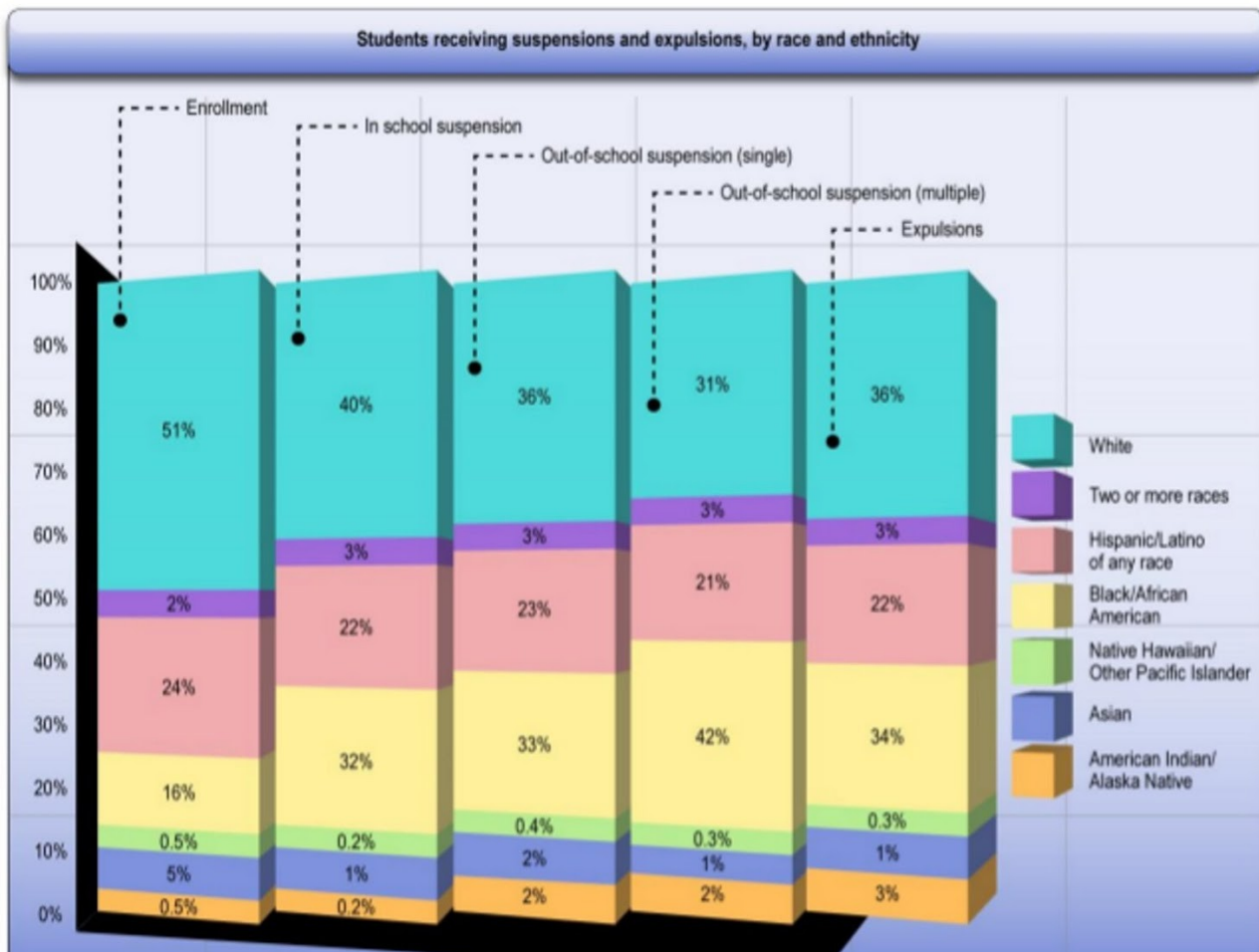
A recent national study of retention found a major drop in the number of students being held back, but across all grades, retention rates remained higher among African-American and Latino students, children of less educated or single parents, urban children, immigrants, and children in Southern and Northeastern states, the researchers found.

African-American students in grades 2 through 9 were about twice as likely as white students to be retained. (Warren, Hoffman and Andrew, Educational Researcher 2014)

Student Discipline

Rates of suspension and expulsion, by race/ethnicity

Black students represent 16% of the student population, but 32-42% of students suspended or expelled. In comparison, white students also represent a similar range of between 31-40% of students suspended or expelled, but they are 51% of the student population.



What can we do to address these injustices? Here are 13 ideas!

Use social media

- 1) Get acquainted with and share the great materials from the National Education Policy Center which debunks corporate reform propaganda. <http://nepc.colorado.edu/>
- 2) Follow Dr. Paul Thomas's blog, <https://radicalsolarship.wordpress.com/>
- 3) Go after the idea that there are "two sides" to each argument even when one is nonsense and the other has strong research behind it. Spread the truth – you know how!

Speak out on social policy

- 4) Work for a living wage and guaranteed employment.
- 5) Advocate for needed student and family services.
- 6) Demand an end to high-stakes testing and support for quality multiple assessments in ESSA and local policies.
 - PAA's Testing and ESEA position paper can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/q9cnpfx>
 - An alternative annual report card focused on teachers, students and parents is at <http://tinyurl.com/odkrz8w>.
- 7) Support school restorative justice programs and reforms in the criminal justice system. See <http://www.dignityinschools.org/>
- 8) Demand that public officials provide more resources and support for schools, not closure.

Take action!

- 9) Boycott WalMart and other funders of privatization (more here: <http://pureparents.org/?p=20594>).
- 10) Opt out of standardized testing.
- 11) Testify at local school board meetings and education-related legislative hearings: write, call and visit your elected officials regularly.
- 12) Run for your local school board or other municipal office: get inspired by PAA founding members Helen Gym (now a Philadelphia City Councilwoman) and Sue Peters (now a Seattle School Board member) along with Baton Rouge school board member Dawn Collins!
- 13) Sign up for the PAA newsletter which includes an action of the week: join our news list (the subscription box is on our home page) and consider starting a PAA chapter or affiliate (also on our home page).