



PAA Brief: The Impact of Poverty, Race and Cultural Bias on Educational Opportunity*

The wrong war

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (aka No Child Left Behind or NCLB) was designed as an integral part of the **War on Poverty**. The law has warped into a tool to **undermine and privatize** public education and do away with teachers unions. This “war on public schools,” meanwhile, has failed to significantly raise student achievement or narrow achievement gaps. In fact, students made greater gains prior to NCLB. It remains to be seen if the newly-reauthorized law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, moderates NCLB's ineffective and damaging elements.

It's about poverty...

- For the first time in 50 years, 51% of all public school students come from low-income families.
- Low-income students – those that qualify for free or reduced lunches – consistently have the lowest scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- Wealth and poverty are “sticky”: the rich tend to stay rich and the poor poor.

Education does NOT level the playing field

- White families are much wealthier than black and Hispanic families at every education level.
- All white families, even those at the lowest education level, have a higher median wealth than all black and Hispanic families, even those with the highest education level.
- The wealthiest high school dropouts (?)
- African-American college students are about as likely to get hired as white high school drop outs.

Other effects

- *Discipline:* Black students represent 16% of the US student population, but 32-42% of all students suspended or expelled, while white students make up 51% of the student population but only 31-40% of students suspended or expelled.
- *Retention:* African-American and Latino students are the most likely to be retained in grade, which is strongly correlated with dropping out. A recent national study of retention found a major drop in the number of students being held back, but African-American students in grades 2 through 9 were about twice as likely as white students to be retained.

*Details including data graphs and charts demonstrating each of these points can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/oplkauv>.

What can we do? Recommendations for ways to address these injustices can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/pp83uoe>