

# RACE matters

## Unequal Opportunities in EDUCATION

### Why Equal Opportunity is Important

- We know much of what is needed to ensure children's and youth's educational success. The most critical factors to effectively promote student success are quality teachers, smaller class sizes, access to high quality after-school programs, advanced curricula, and modern learning facilities.
- The consequences of failing to ensure educational success are far-reaching. The adverse impact is long term and reflected in future employment prospects, poverty and incarceration rates, as well as limited capacity to participate in the world community.
- Embedded racial inequities produce unequal opportunities for educational success. Systematic policies, practices, and stereotypes work against children and youth of color to affect their opportunity for achieving educational success. We need to understand the consequences of these embedded racial inequities, how disparities are produced, and how they can be eliminated to ensure that all children and youth have the same opportunity for educational success.

### Barriers to Equal Opportunity

- Ongoing racial segregation. Black and Latino students are more educationally segregated now than two decades ago. Data from the 2002–03 school year show that in Chicago, 87 percent of public-school enrollment was Black or Hispanic; less than 10 percent of children in the schools were White. In Washington, D.C., 94 percent of children were Black or Hispanic; less than 5 percent were White. In St. Louis, 82 percent of the student populations were Black or Hispanic; in Philadelphia and Cleveland, 79 percent; in Los Angeles, 84 percent, in Detroit, 96 percent; in Baltimore 89 percent.<sup>1</sup>
- Unequal school resources. Because of race and class segregation and its relationship to local school revenues, students in high-poverty racially segregated schools are not exposed to high-quality curricula, highly qualified teachers, or important social networks as often as students in wealthier, predominantly White schools.<sup>2</sup> The wealthiest 10 percent of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent, and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states.<sup>3</sup>
- Unequal academic opportunities. Schools where White students are in the majority are more than twice as likely to offer a significant number of advanced placement classes as schools where Black and Latino students are in the majority.<sup>4</sup> Black and Latino students with the same test scores as White and Asian students are less likely to be placed in accelerated courses and more likely to be placed in low-track academic courses.<sup>5</sup>
- Differential teacher quality. Schools with the highest percentages of minority, limited-English proficient and low-income students are more likely to employ beginning teachers than those with the lowest percentage of minority, limited-English proficient and low-income students.<sup>6</sup> Teachers who have higher test scores, attended higher-quality colleges and universities, and have more experience teaching mainly teach upper middle-class students, very few of whom are African American and Latino.<sup>7</sup>
- Differential discipline. Students of color are more likely to be more harshly disciplined than their White counterparts for a similar or less serious offense. 14.6 percent of White students had been suspended or expelled in grades seven through twelve compared to 38.2 percent Native Americans, 35.1 percent of African Americans and 19.6 percent of Latinos.<sup>8</sup> One study found that Black students are sanctioned for more subjectively determined infractions. Racial disparities drop dramatically when the offense is determined more objectively, such as with weapon or drug possession.<sup>9</sup>

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3. Kozol, Jonathan, 2005.

4. Applied Research Center. 2000. "49 Years after Brown v. Board of Ed: Still Separate, Still Unequal." Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center.

5. Oakes, Jeannie. 1995. "Two Cities' Tracking and Within-School Segregation," *Teachers College Record* 96, no. 4: 686.

6. Darling-Hammond, Lynda, "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement," Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 1999.

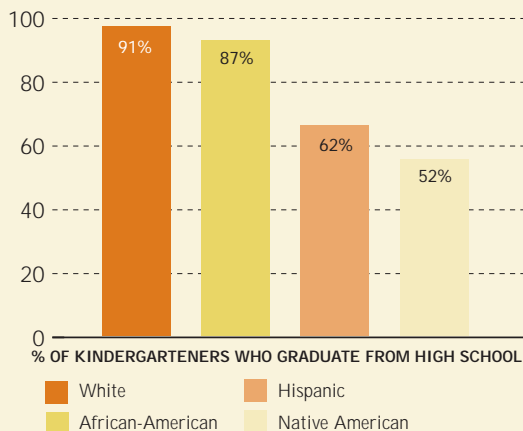
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8. *Building Blocks for Youth*, 2004. "Zero Tolerance" Fact Sheet, [www.buildingblocksfor youth.org/ issues/zerotolerance/facts.html](http://www.buildingblocksfor youth.org/ issues/zerotolerance/facts.html).

9. Aspen Roundtable on Community Change. 2004. "Structural Racism and Community Building." Keith Lawrence, Stacey Sutton, Anne Kubisch, Gretchen Susi and Karen-Fulbright-Anderson, authors. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute.

## The Consequences of Unequal Opportunity

- **Differential achievement levels.** According to the Education Trust, “by the end of the fourth grade, African American, Hispanic and low income students are already two years behind grade level... by the time they reach the twelfth grade they are four years behind.” National Assessment of Educational Progress data show that, on average, African American and Hispanic students trail White students academically by four grade levels by the time they finish high school.<sup>10</sup>
- **Differential high school completion rates.** High school graduation rates are substantially lower for minority groups than they are for non-minorities. 91 out of every 100 White kindergartners graduate from high school, only 87% of African Americans, 62% of Hispanics, and 52% of Native Americans ever finish high school.<sup>11</sup> According to a report by the Harvard Civil Rights Project the numbers are even more staggering for a few hundred schools in the 35 largest cities in the U.S. where a number of schools graduate less than 50% of their freshman class.<sup>12</sup>



- **Differential access to higher education.** Whites and Asian represent greater proportions of those who participate in and complete higher education than African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans. According to one study, the single largest barrier to college entrance for African Americans and Hispanics is high school completion. The same is likely true for Native Americans. Sixteen percent of all 18 year olds in the U.S. are Latino and only 7% of the college degrees in the U.S. are awarded to Latinos. African Americans represent 14% of 18 year olds and only 10% of the college degrees awarded.<sup>13</sup>

## Strategies to Promote Equal Opportunity

- **Equitable funding.** Widespread dependence on local property-tax revenues gives students living in school districts with high-priced residential or commercial property substantially greater resources to support their education than students residing in poorer districts.<sup>14</sup> The National Conference of State Legislatures identifies three building blocks of an adequate school-finance system: articulating educational objectives for students; identifying and acknowledging the educational capacity needed to accomplish these objectives; and supporting that capacity with sufficient funding.<sup>15</sup>
- **Programmatic equity.** Because students of color are routinely overrepresented in special education and disciplinary systems and under-represented in gifted programs and quality bilingual programs, criteria for making decisions about educational placement and educational punishment should be standardized in order to minimize stereotypes as the basis for decision-making.
- **Quality teaching.** There is growing consensus among researchers and practitioners that high quality teachers are key determinants of students' opportunities to be academically successful.<sup>16</sup> Students of color and students from low income homes, historically, have less experienced teachers, teachers with less formal education and training, and more teachers teaching without certification and/or outside their area of expertise. Equity efforts must focus on the distribution of teacher qualifications throughout the schools in the district.<sup>17</sup>

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12. Orfield, Gary. 2004. *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

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14. Rebell, Michael. 1998. "Fiscal Equity Litigation and the Democratic Imperative," *Journal of Education Finance* 24, 1, p. 25-30.

15. Hadderman, Margaret. 1999. "Equity and Adequacy in School Finance." *Eric Digest*, 129 (August).

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17. Skrla, Linda et. al, 2002. *Educational Equity Profiles*.

