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Equity and Equality for All: Justice by Education Reform

If education is the key to success for all, why is the gateway of its knowledge accessible only to some? As someone who identifies as a Black woman, growing up in Los Angeles, California may seem like a mecca for success. However, even in Los Angeles, a city many would consider to be a center for diversity and birthplace of dreams, it was quite the opposite. These dreams that many of us have cease to exist because the system we live by is built to oppress us – the ethnically diverse. The importance of education was always stressed to us especially because it is seen as the escape from our crime-ridden neighborhoods and financially unstable households. However, whether being educated in our own neighborhoods or traveling to others, we face the same problems. The coursework and lessons built to advance our knowledge of our society and world at large are of an imaginary narrative that disregards culturally diverse groups. In this paper, I will discuss the modern-day status of the achievement gap and how it has influenced the actions and words of people in society. Then, I will analyze the beliefs that people have about the topic, to further understand where the issue stems from. Finally, I will provide insight into solutions to address the issue, to further develop education through reform.

The achievement gap between students of color and White students is an issue on its own that we have been trying to address for years now. The achievement gap is the measurement of disparities of performance based on socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, or gender. The achievement gap that is a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. The fight against segregation was successful and the push for equal education for all was being stressed. It was believed that by integrating schools, this would resolve the already existing educational-based difference in success for students of color in contrast to white students. However, though being a turning point for many students and certainly developing the position

of people of color in society, the act to minimize the achievement gap would only work for some time. Over the past 50 years-plus, the achievement gap has not only continued to be the dominate exemplification of the academic results, but it has not closed either. Though this issue is recognized by others, “little scholarship has focused on long-term changes in the size of the achievement gap between students from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds” (Hanushek et al., *The Achievement Gap Fails to Close*). It is through the societal-induced hereditary nature that it is both race and socioeconomic status that has caused this achievement gap. The ongoing struggle to determine a point of fixture for this issue is seemingly never to be located and, thus, we see no improvement upon education for students of color. It also speaks volume to note that all while the achievement gap persists in the same degree, the population continues to grow and diversify. If this is the case, we can make an inference unto the decline of what is, right now, a slow incline to improvement. This is because there will be a disproportionate ratio based on growth of population those who are effectively educated. Despite a growing number of students attending schools, if they are still learning at the same rates then there will have to be a shift in an area such as the GPA trends by coursework based on race/ethnicity. The achievement gap is not the only area in which there was an issue with difference in experience primarily based on race.

The funding gap that persists in education has caused a difference in experience for people of color in contrast to most white people. According to Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford’s Graduate School of Education, we are still separate and unequal. The 10% of wealthiest schools in the United States spend 10 times more than the poorest 10% of schools. This is quite a contract from other countries such as Asia and Europe where school funds are allocated to all and in the same

manner (Darling-Hammond, *Inequality in Teaching and Schooling: How Opportunity Is Rationed to Students of Color in America*). Students of color are still being subject to inadequate education and in it is due in part to the inherent socioeconomic disparity. The opportunity to have an education is there, but just as racial inequalities have oppressed the process of learning in schools, they have also prevented the actual development of providing better education in schools for students of color. Time has told, and is still telling, the story of unjust and unequal education in the United States and though efforts have been, many problems lie within these efforts.

The issue of the education system being so outdated has been the case since it was established and it can be said there many reasons as to why that is. However, there are a few reasons that have played a primary role in the conceptualization of this issue. These include lack of diversity in coursework, lack of diversity among teaching staff, and lack of adequately funded schools in all neighborhoods. It is in all these causes that we must discuss education and what the state of our education system needs change.

When we think of the education system and how it has shapeshifted to exist as it does today, there are aspects we must look at. The primary factor that guides both teachers and students is the coursework provided. This said coursework is that of material most often included within the textbooks that teachers are to teach, and students are to learn. However, there is a question we should be asking. If this coursework is supposed to help us learn about the many subjects that encompass a way for us to go through life, why is it we are only taught certain parts and in a certain way? What I am saying is that there is a disparity for ethnically diverse students versus White students while learning. The education system's curriculum is whitewashed and has only taken notice of "token" people of color that benefit their narration. There has caused an

inability to engage students of color within the coursework and allow them to make connections between the material and their personal life. Allowing students of different backgrounds to learn concepts through the cultural experiences they face outside of school leads to increased achievement, interest in learning, and effort towards work (Gay, *The Importance of Multicultural Education*). If we want students of all ethnic backgrounds to succeed, we must make it, so this is possible. As society continues to grow as not only a totality in population, but becoming more ethnically diverse as well, the change in education is necessary. If we seek to continue developing and advancing as a society, it starts with the next generation. The next generation can only do as much as we allow them to, so must help them do more.

The need for more teachers of color stems from the struggles that many students of color face within the learning environment. While it is known that there should be more people of color in every career field, the field of education has been emphasized. People find that a great way to go about this is by hiring more teachers of color, and in this they are right. Although there are more teachers of color being hired, the rate at which they are being hired and how many are being hired is still at quite a slow pace. Therefore, we have a difference within teachers that are needed and the amount that are being hired (*Teachers of color: In high demand and short supply*). The importance of diversity in teaching staff is known, but it seems as though the structure that teachers are recruited by outweighs that of the actual abilities each one holds. Though this can help us solve the issue of ineffective education, it is hard to make a change when the effort is only being made halfway.

There are many problems with that way that the issue of ineffective education is addressed, but that does not mean we are unable to come up with solutions. Research has of course been done thus far to classify and categorize the means as to how each race is subject to

racial disparities. However, something that can be said when it comes to this research, that is under the line of education, is that much of it is done with negative connotations. Much of the research done is “. . . confounded by stubborn and persistent stereotypes and assumptions that are not grounded in empirical research” (Teranishi, “Race, Ethnicity, and Higher Education Policy: The Use of Critical Quantitative Research”). When research is done by such standards, it prohibits the ability to truly learn and understand how minority races are treated unequally and by how much of each minority population is affected. The existence of these assumptions and stereotypes leads us to conduct research on each race with a tainted view. This does nothing to not only allow each of us to learn more about our own race, but other races as well. It also serves a premise that separate the way in which we learn to understand each race.

There are many ways to approach this issue and all of them contribute to helping change a specific aspect even if we can't completely reach the roots of the problem. It is through the efforts of teachers to implement diversity in the curriculum, the hiring of more people of color to teach, and allocating proper funding to schools. This is far more complex than a two-dimensional issue, therefore, the solution must be flexible and adaptable.

The complexity of this issue raises question of where to start and it seems as though, based on recent events, the leaders of curricular reform are teachers. This is effective if we cannot completely reach the roots. Teachers are a great solution to resolving this problem. In most recent years, teachers have taken it upon themselves to approach school districts and the Board of Education to advocate for education reform. From protests, to petitions, and the resistance of continuing the cycle of how the education system teaches students, there has been more push by teachers since the death of George Floyd. On June 10, 2021, public school teachers in Jacksonville, Florida gathered to voice their opposition of the Republican-led states that are

planning to ban critical race theory (Strauss, *Teachers across the country protest laws restricting lessons on racism*). It is acts like this that can help develop our education system and increase the population of ethnically diverse students that are successfully being taught.

While teachers acting and standing up to those in charge can help overcome the issue that is biased teaching, there are those who resist it. A lot of the worry and recant lies in those teachers, more specifically White teachers, that face backlash from expanding upon the topic of racism (Strauss, *Teachers across the country protest laws restricting lessons on racism*). Despite the significance of establishing a connection between subjects, lessons and students, there are teachers that feel that their reputation must be upheld. In some cases, the tenure or position of a teacher is put at risk because of their decision to teach beyond the realm of what textbooks and their training has shown them. Although the idea of change is accepted and wanted by many, it is proven to be a slippery slope in many ways.

The slippery slope of trying to solve the issue of ineffective education for ethnically diverse groups isn't impossible despite its complexity. With having so many diverse students, and only continuing to increase, you would think it is only natural to hire more diverse teachers and staff. In fact, it has been proven that hiring more diverse teachers and staff increases standardized testing outcomes, student attendance, and disciplinary action rates. These were results of short-term outcome, however, more studies have been done on long-term results. One example is an empirical analysis that was done on public schools in North Carolina. This research was done regarding the probability of black students of low-income families dropping out of high school. The research showed a reduction of seven percentage points, or 39 percent, in which black males from low-income families dropped out of high school when exposed to a least one black teacher in grades 3-5. There was also a report of an increase of both females and males

by 19 percent who stated they would attend a four-year college after being exposed to a black teacher in grades 3-5 (Gershenson et al., *The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers*). This is just one instance as to the affect diverse teachers and staff have on diverse students. The impact is not significant for ethnically diverse students, but white students that are exposed to different communities improve their critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative outlook because of the multiplicity of perspectives (Villegas et al., *Diversifying the Teaching Force: A Retrospective and Perspective Analysis*). Hiring more diverse teaching and staff is a way to advance success in education and helps students strengthen their belief in education.

One attempt to level the funding gap in education was through busing. The idea of busing, formally presented as ‘desegregation busing’, was attempted following the decision of *Brown v Board of Education (1954)*. Still, despite efforts as early as the 1920’s, efforts resulted in violent opposition and would be left for years later. It was not until the case of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971)* in which the Supreme Court ruled that busing could federally be used to integrate students into all schools. Although we see this is true until this very day, it is also true that the increase has been slow. There are a lot of students who are not granted busing permission because of the distance between their residency and the school. Many students of color still attend schools within their neighborhoods and while they can obtain an education, there is a huge problem.

The neighborhood schools that most students of color attend are public schools, and these schools are funded by property taxes. When we talk about inequity in schools and lack of funding for proper education, therefore there is an issue. In the timeframe of 2013-2014 over 80 percent of education in the United States was funded by property tax. All the while less than 9 percent of public education was funded by the federal government (Reschovsky, *The Future of U.S. Public School Revenue from the Property Tax*). This is a problem because many of these students and their families live in poverty and their median household income remains

unchanging (Wilson, *Racial disparities in income and poverty remain largely unchanged amid strong income growth in*

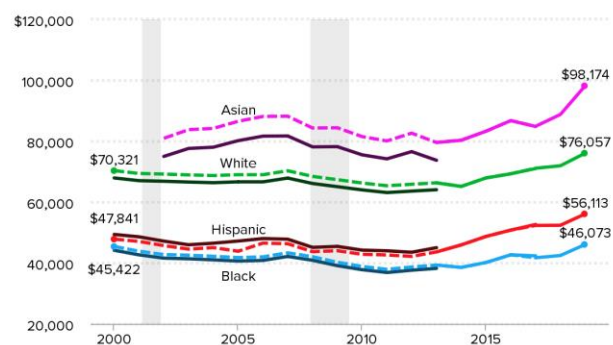
2019). Thus, there is an inability to provide a substantial amount of funding for schools in these neighborhoods which in turn results in less materials. This is

because property tax is allowed to be increased as local school boards decide and, because of the economic status of

most people of color, this will result in opposition. Although there has been much discussion as to how to reform the way tax policy is used when allocating funds for education, alternatives may be the better proposition (Reschovsky, *The Future of U.S. Public School Revenue from the Property Tax*).

The future of funding education may not completely be separate from the establishment we have now, but it makes a big difference when you look at the overall result. As previously

Real median household income by race and ethnicity, 2000–2019



Note: Because of a redesign in the CPS ASEC income questions in 2013, we imputed the historical series using the ratio of the old and new method in 2013. Solid lines are actual CPS ASEC data; dashed lines denote historical values imputed by applying the new methodology to past income trends. The break in the series in 2017 represents data from both the legacy CPS ASEC processing system and the updated CPS ASEC processing system. White refers to non-Hispanic whites, Black refers to Blacks alone or in combination, Asian refers to Asians alone, and Hispanic refers to Hispanics of any race. Comparable data are not available prior to 2002 for Asians. Shaded areas denote recessions.

Source: EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement Historical Poverty Tables (Table H-5 and H-9).

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stated, the largest part of our public education system is funded by property tax. This is what us as civilians are paying into and at the same time cannot afford to do so. This has led to students seeking education outside of their school districts, which leads to an increase of the student population in schools, causing a need for more teachers, and that means more money is needed. If this is the case, a better way to fund education may be using more state sales or income taxes rather than property tax. This form of funding could prove to be a source of financial stability and rely less on local taxes that may not be used or properly allocated (Griffith, *Is It Time to Stop Funding Schools With Local Property Tax?*). A state that has taken it upon themselves to use statewide taxes to fund education is Michigan. A few concepts within this are higher sales, use, and cigarette taxes to offset property taxes, a capped local tax value based on the lower rate of inflation (5 percent), and even got a “basic” level of funding for the lowers per-pupil districts (Summers, Slide 20). The use of state sales or income taxes causes more incentive for states to ensure that each educational institution is being properly funded because their money would be a large contributor. Not only would it be better for allocation of funding but also help those who live in these states and now have a little more money to use for their family.

Education is a path to success and travelling on it is a narrow road with many directions to end up going. Though we recognize the significance it has on the quality of life, many people are still being denied the right to equal opportunity. It is because of problems like the achievement gap, lack of diversity in teaching and staff, and inequitable funding that ethnically diverse groups are unable to have effective education. There are ways to address the situation such as teachers acting and working for a curriculum including diversity, increasing the hiring of diverse teachers and staff, and finding alternatives of funding. This issue and the way that it has conceptualized is a matter of humanity and moral ethics. If we see ourselves as civil beings, why

do we continue to subject people to a life struggle when they just as capable as the next person?

We want civility to thrive within our society, then we should teach people what it means to be as such and allow them to have access to that understanding. A push for educational reform is a push for civility unto our community and, thus, unto the world.

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