

### **Educational Inequality: Socioeconomic status best predicts academic success in students**

The public school system is not broken, nor is it hopeless - it is simply skewed to best serve the wealthy. Children from affluent families have great advantages to their educational development in the form of tutors, extracurricular activities, standardized test preparation resources, better qualified teachers, and more individualized attention. Almost 50% of a public school's funding is from a portion of the taxes paid by individuals living in the area. Due to this, large discrepancies exist where schools in high income neighborhoods are well funded, while schools in impoverished neighborhoods face a poorer quality education due to low funding. Parents of public school children are only able to send their child to a school in their district. The American Dream of social mobility through education and hard work is propagated by those who have not seen its failure and don't listen to those who try to disabuse them with their lived experiences of poor treatment. This naive view of the American education system bars the doors which may open to the disadvantaged by refusing to acknowledge the vast differences in opportunity between lower and higher income groups. In this way, the poor's conditions are explained as a product of a broken family unit, neighborhood violence, drug involvement, a poor work ethic, and a myriad of other factors that fail to consider the government's role.

*“The function of high school, then, is not so much to communicate knowledge as to oblige children finally to accept the grading system as a measure of their inner excellence. And a function of the self-destructive process in American children is to make them willing to accept not their own, but a variety of other standards, like a grading system, for measuring themselves. It is thus apparent that the way American culture is now integrated it would fall apart if it did not engender feelings of inferiority and worthlessness.”*

– Jules Henry, Anthropologist (1904-1969)

### **Interview with R.K.**

*“There is a place in America to take a stand: it is public education. It is the great common ground. Public education after all is the engine that moves us as a society toward a common destiny... It is in public education that the American dream begins to take shape.” -Tom Brokaw*

RK is an Educational Psychologist certified in Testing & Measurement. He has served more than 20 years in the International Division of the Office of Higher Education and is a member of the Council of International Education. RK is a graduate of John Hopkins University. Shortly after receiving his Master's in education, he worked in the Department of Education for almost five years and started a student consulting firm called Post 12 Inc. For nearly fifteen years, RK has worked closely with students from all different backgrounds and advised them in how and where they should apply to schools. During our interview, he stated that the number of unqualified teachers in the public school system is staggering. He argues that the reason for this is that the standards of attaining a teaching license are set too low. For the sake of maintaining a high stream of revenue for labor unions, the quality of education at public schools is sacrificed, so in the long run, they are responsible for the deteriorating quality of education in public schools.

## **Problematic labor union ties**

*“A child miseducated is a child lost.” - John F. Kennedy*

The teachers' union has been contributing to the creation of the education monopoly and the decreasing quality of teachers in public schools. The teachers' union has been supporting and protecting unqualified teachers via tenure. Currently the Department of Education is in close relations with the labor union which ensures the stability of the positions of teachers, i.e. tenure. Tenure provides protection from demotion, salary reductions, and other discipline and the process to attain tenure takes only three years. Protected by tenure, teachers no longer are required to provide a high-quality learning experience for students as opposed to a teacher whose contracts is renewed annually under the discretion of the dean/principal. It is important to note that private schools do provide tenures to teachers but it is nowhere near as prevalent or automatic as it is in public schools. As economists Ruggiero and Vattalliano (1999) state, “Higher teacher salaries are strongly associated with less efficient operation of school districts: Each percent increase in relative salaries reduces efficiency by 0.43 percentage points. Virtually all the school districts in New York are unionized, so higher salaries may reflect greater collective bargaining power, which in turn may affect staffing levels, teacher performance, and other determinants of school efficiency.”

When the principal decides to fire an under qualified teacher, a notification needs to be sent to the labor union in which they conduct a thorough investigation of the teacher in question. After the investigation is finished, which can take up to several months, the teacher is then transferred to a different school. Although the school initially benefits from getting rid of that specific teacher, another school is faced with the exact same problem. Students in public schools cannot escape the plethora of recycled inexperienced and underqualified teachers and this ultimately hurts the students' learning experience. A student's academic growth is dependent on the teacher's ability to teach so when an unqualified teacher instructs a class, the students' academic progression is stunted. Students who are stuck in a public school in their district cannot escape the influences of lackluster teachers who lack incentives to promote excellence in the classroom. As opposed to students who come from a high socioeconomic status, students from a low socioeconomic level do not have the choice to either transfer to another school or hire a tutor to compensate for the teacher's incompetence.

### **Is private school truly better for its students?**

*“If a man empties his purse into his head no man can take it from him. An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” - Benjamin Franklin*

A nationwide study revealed greater scores in reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8 for private school students (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2006). Of course, there's the question of whether private school is responsible for these changes, whether or whether these students are already more gifted, given that private schools select who is admitted to their program.

**Marymount High School**, a prestigious all-girls Catholic private school in New York City. Facilities include several science labs, a dance studio, a gymnasium, and a media production lab. The

school boasts 100% graduation and college acceptance rate with a 5:1 student to teacher ratio.



Marymount High School is an elite public school that charges almost 5x the national average, at \$47,085 per school year (the national average is \$10,740, with \$7,770 for elementary school, \$13,030 for secondary, and combined totaling \$13,640. Notable alumni include three Kardashian sisters and Princess Camilla, Dutchess of Castro.

### **Why do parents send their children to private school?**

*“Action is the foundational key to all success”*

*-Pablo Picasso*

The majority of private schools in the nation are Faith-based, so a religious parent may find the cost worthwhile if it instills religious values and principles. By contrast, public schools are banned by law from endorsing any religion or religious practices. In matters besides that of religion, private schools generally have more autonomy than public schools, which may be valuable to teachers looking to have a say in their child’s education. The principal of a private school has more power and control over the educational curriculum than a principal of a public school, because private schools are not required to follow government regulations. Therefore, privately managed schools have better resources, better learning inducing temperament, and better performance results. A principal of a private school has more flexibility and authority by being able to time efficiently allocate resources to the specific needs of the student body. Private schools also boast a higher teacher to student ratio. The class size, as well, is relatively smaller than those of public schools, directly resulting in more opportunities for the students to have one on one interactions. In this way, teachers have an easier time tending to individual students and their specific needs. Private schools exist in a competitive market and create a system of incentives. Privately owned schools have the right to remove teachers if they do not uphold the school's standards for teachers. In privately owned schools, teachers have incentives to maintain a degree of quality and student performance results. Unlike teachers in publicly owned schools, the American Federation of Teachers cannot secure the jobs of teachers in private schools. Thus, private school teachers have more to lose. Another advantage of privately owned schools

is the temperament. Because private schools are exclusive to a certain degree, every student is handpicked and judged if he or she is a 'good fit.' This helps private schools create and control a temperament for the students that compliments a safe, learning inducing atmosphere.

According to two interviews conducted by Jane Graves Smith (2006), who ran a case study assessing the correlation between parental involvement and academic success, parental involvement acts as a source of motivation for their children to complete homework assignments and try hard in school. When children see their parents putting an effort into being involved, they may try to imitate their parent's level of dedication by working harder in school. One of the interviewees, Kathie Jones, said she noticed children are more on top of their homework, knowing their parents are in touch with teachers. Both parents and teachers agree that having parents involved with their child's learning process results in greater academic progression and achievement. However, it is important to understand that in order to promote parental involvement, the school must understand the district it represents. "So often, even with the best of intention, middle-class educators create and implement practices intended to serve low-income families without an assessment of community needs" (Smith, 2006). Understanding the needs of families is very important because some parents in these low income communities may not have the time or knowledge to visit school or help their child with school projects and assignments. Upon reading Smith's case study, it came to my attention that schools do not implement practices that cater to the needs of low income families and as a result, it is difficult for these parents to get involved.

### **My experience with the school system**

*"A good teacher must be able to put himself in the place of those who find learning hard"*  
*Eliphaz Levi*

**"Because the teacher had to cater to twenty-nine other students, I was left with the impression that the teacher did not care whether I succeeded or failed."**

After attending public school for all of middle school and freshman year of highschool, I was transferred to a private school for the remaining years of high school. One of the more obvious differences I noticed during my years at a private school was that my interactions with my teachers were more personal and frequent. The teachers seemed genuinely interested in my academic progression and offered help in and out of class. The extra attention and care the teachers gave me helped me improve my study habits, participation in class, test scores, and overall attitude about school. My class consisted of sixteen children so the interaction between the students and the teacher was frequent and the class discussions felt more engaging and active. When I used to attend public schools, my class consisted of at least thirty children, so the amount of teacher-student interaction was limited. Because the teacher had to cater to twenty-nine other students, I was left with the impression that the teacher did not care whether I succeeded or failed. This impression lead to a lack of attention or care during class lectures, incomplete assignments, and poor test results. Another difference I noticed while attending private school was the encouragement I received from my classmates. Because class discussions were so engaging and active, I felt encouraged to participate and contribute my ideas to the discussions. My input felt appreciated, which was not the case in my classes at a public school.

In fact, trying hard in public school was looked down upon by my peers and it was more acceptable to appear unfazed by poor grades and uninterested in the subjects. At private school, putting effort into schoolwork was the norm and only the children that transferred from public school complained about the work and didn't put effort in.

### **Tutoring**

“Pretty much all of my kids end up placing in a GT [Gifted and Talented] program. One of the things that I feel is broken about the system is that my work has proven to me that with enough prep, nearly everybody can get the scores. It's less about innate intelligence than it is about learning to focus and learning the rules for each puzzle”

- Shay Skobelova, private tutor based in NYC. Skobelova frequently tutors four-year-old children for an 80-question test needed for admission to the Gifted and Talented program at top private schools. Skobelova charges \$140/hour for her services.

Tutoring is one aspect in which students from a wealthy background have a clear advantage over students who are not. Tutoring not only helps students get back on track with the pace of the class, but also helps student stay ahead by teaching them lessons before it is introduced in class. As Ms. Skobelova mentioned, scores are obtainable with enough prep which can be translated as scores can be bought - with hard work, but bought nonetheless.

### **Inequalities in public school funding**

*We must work together to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth, opportunity, and power in our society.*

*–Nelson Mandela*

*State of the Nation Address, Parliament, Cape Town, South Africa, February 9, 1996*

Public schools are state funded and do not require students to pay a tuition. Currently, the total budget for the school year of 2016-17 is \$29.6 billion, which translates into an average of \$12,731 per pupil. The United States is amongst the five countries that spend the most on education and have the highest average for funding per pupil. However, it is important to know that discrepancy in the distribution of funding. “Among America's school districts, annual funding per student can range from less than \$4,000 to \$15,000 or more, and although the "typical" substantial school district receives roughly \$5,000 per year for each student, affluent districts may receive \$10,000 or more for their students.” (Biddle & Berliner, 2003).

Public schools can offer a variety of useful resources such as transportation buses, extracurricular activities, and after-school programs. Unfortunately, parents do not have many choices and are restricted to the public schools in their district. Although the government heavily funds the public education system, the distribution of funds amongst the schools is inconsistent and unfair. Some public schools receive more funding than others, and typically the public schools in districts that face poverty are subjugated to unequal funding. Also, because public schools are open to all members of their community, an overcrowded classroom is a standard issue. Compared to private schools, students in public schools have fewer one on one interaction with the teachers because each classroom may have up to 35 students.

Being that almost half of public school funding comes directly from local taxes, there is an undeniable discrepancy between impoverished and wealthy communities. Unlike public schools in wealthy districts, public schools in low socioeconomic level districts are faced with relatively less funding and cannot accommodate the necessary resources that are needed for a student’s academic progression. “[Our analysis shows] that school resources are systematically related to student achievement and that those relations are large [and] educationally important” (Greenwald,1996). Students from a low socioeconomic level are forced to read from subpar textbooks, participate in limited numbers of after school activities, and compensate for the lack of supplies for school projects. The Mathematics Benchmarking Report published by The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement reported that Naperville, an Illinois public school district, and Consortium, a Chicago North Shore based public school district, have the best-reported scores in America. Coincidentally these two districts have high levels of funding and serve low numbers of impoverished students. On the other hand, the two lowest scoring districts, Rochester (New York) and Miami-Dade, have received inadequate funding while serving many impoverished students. Biddle and Berliner (2003) write that “Higher levels of school funding not only generate better student achievements but the resources and strategies associated with this effect are now becoming know

**Declining Support**

Change in per-student funding of higher education in the 15 largest states, 2008–2016

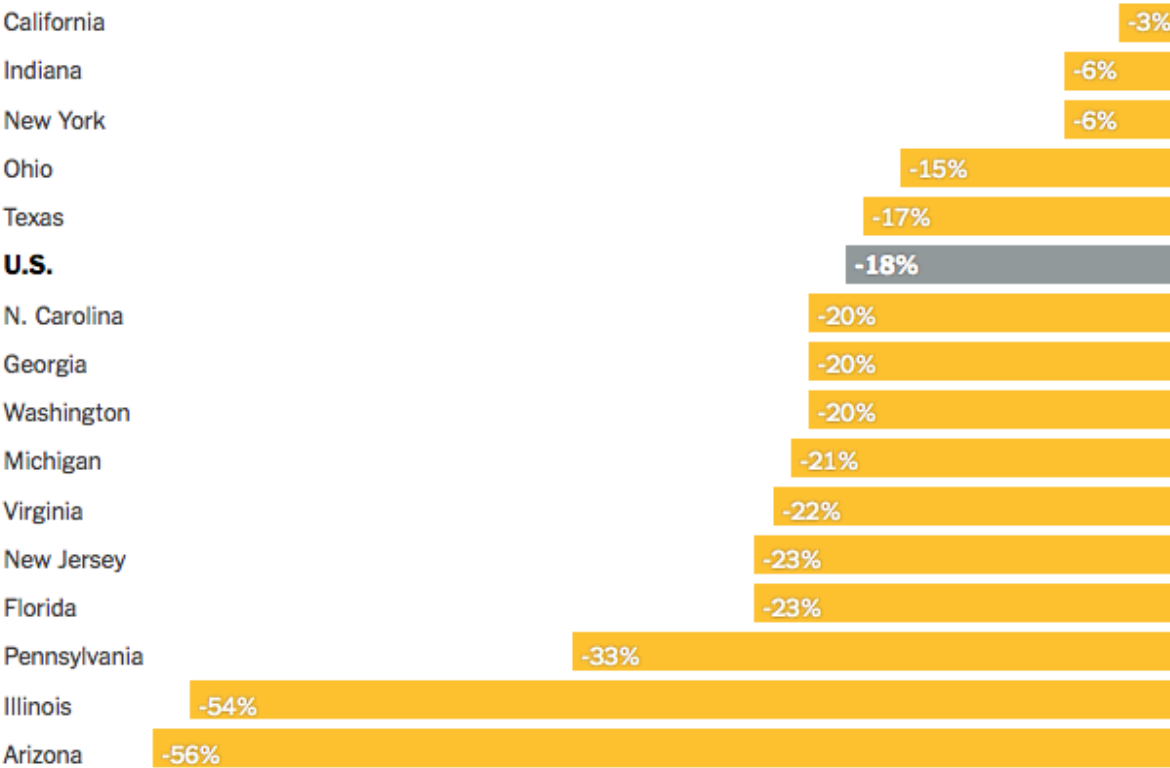


Figure A

Figure A is a sobering statistic which shows the percentage decrease in per-student funding for higher education in the 15 largest states, with an overall 18% decrease.

One of the biggest advantages of attending well-funded school districts is that it attracts teachers with higher education, more experience and higher scores on the competency test (Biddle & Berliner, 2003). These teachers have more to offer students regarding subject-matter knowledge, experience in managing classrooms, and the ability to motivate students thus are better able to equip students with the knowledge required for high academic achievement. This also means that schools that have relatively fewer funds have a hard time hiring teachers of such caliber. Secondly, better-funded schools can reduce classroom size which promotes more interaction between teacher and student on a more personal level. However, students that attend school in a poorer district cannot experience a more personal interaction with their teacher as it is proven to be more effective on impoverished students. According to lab report, What Research Says About Unequal Funding for Schools in America, strong field experiments, and trial programs confirm that reducing class size generate immediate and long-term advantages in student achievements and those effects are magnified when applied to students who are impoverished or from minority groups that are categorized as “at risk” in education.

### **Public school’s rigid approach to education**

*“The function of high school, then, is not so much to communicate knowledge as to oblige children finally to accept the grading system as a measure of their inner excellence. And a function of the self-destructive process in American children is to make them willing to accept not their own, but a variety of other standards, like a grading system, for measuring themselves. It is thus apparent that the way American culture is now integrated it would fall apart if it did not engender feelings of inferiority and worthlessness.”*

– Jules Henry, Anthropologist (1904-1969)

Since the state funds public schools; government regulation dictates the curriculum. The government attempts to make a "one shoe fits all" kind of student curriculum, and enforce it through standardized testing. A public school's funding correlates with how the students perform on standardized tests, which explains the overemphasis on such exams, standardized testing does not account for the students that do not respond to the conventional or traditional methods of teaching. Therefore, the public school system has a higher chance of overlooking poor test taking students who have enormous potential. The current public school system overlooks the issue with inexperienced teachers who are responsible for teaching students. Given that a student’s academic achievement correlates with the experience and qualifications of a teacher, many students are unable to reach their potential to score high on standardized tests.

Standardized tests have been a profitable market for the corporations that design and score them. “More often than not, these companies then turn around and sell teaching materials designed to raise scores on their own tests” (Kohn, 2000). Students who cannot afford to buy these study materials are left behind and put at a disadvantage when taking these standardized tests. The culture of standardized tests shifts from measuring a student’s academic aptitude to how much is one willing to pay for high scores? As Kohn (2009) writes, “The worst tests are often the most appealing to school systems. It is fast, easy, and therefore relatively inexpensive to administer a multiple-choice exam that arrives from somewhere else and is then sent back to be graded by a machine at lightning speed”.

Public schools that are constrained by a tight budget are enticed by the cost and time efficiency of standardized tests, but ultimately their focus on budget constraints ultimately hurts the students in the long run. Students who cannot score high on the standardized tests are unable to attend good high schools and prestigious colleges or universities. This scenario exemplifies one of the many disadvantages impoverished students face in the public school's rigid approach to education.

### **Other issues with public school**

What about individual differences? Aren't some children simply more intelligent? This popular assumption doesn't take into account the influence that a high-quality education can have on any pupil, regardless of initial cognitive skills. The evidence consistently points at the effectiveness of early intervention programs. Research has shown that pre-K alone can close up to 50% of the achievement gap if every child was granted access to the highest quality programs (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010). This is an unrealistic hypothetical, as differences in the quality of education have been found as early as at the pre-K level (Valentino, n.d.).

Social reproduction is another problem that many public schools in low socioeconomic level districts have. For a student who is born into a low-income, families are faced with many disadvantages and obstacles which limit their growth and progression as a member of society. The prevalence of violence and crime that is more prominent in impoverished communities heavily influences the behaviors and attitudes of students.

The fewer the economic resources available in a given neighborhood, the greater the chance of that neighborhood being plagued by gang-related crime (Wodnicki, 1999), and crime, unemployment, and poverty are widely recognized as being interrelated. "Rust belt cities" that have been hurt by unemployment due to the loss of manufacturing jobs experienced a rise in juvenile gang activity. (Wodnicki, 1999)

### **Interview with former Philadelphia high school student**

*"When I was a boy on the Mississippi River there was a proposition in a township there to discontinue public schools because they were too expensive. An old farmer spoke up and said if they stopped building the schools they would not save anything, because every time a school was closed a jail had to be built."*

*- Mark Twain*

Youth involved in gangs, distribute drugs, commit an act of violence towards other students or faculty, are expelled from school. Even though they are the by-product of their community, they are abandoned and neglected by the public education system, forcing them to rely on a lifestyle of crime for livelihood. These abandoned youths are stuck in the reproduction of chronic poverty and have no opportunity for growth. I had a chance to talk to a good friend of mine, JK, who has attended several public schools in Philadelphia.

*"Even though there weren't many wealthy kids in my area, they lived a completely different world than I. They didn't have to fight, struggle, or become independent at a young age. They are so*



sheltered. They have mentors which is something my friends and I never had”

**BC:** So, which part of Philadelphia do you currently live in? Can you tell me a little bit about the area?

**JK:** I currently live in North Philadelphia and it's considered a ghetto by many locals and people that live in Philadelphia. It's definitely not a place where you would want to walk around by yourself, especially during the night. It is also definitely one of the poorest parts of Philly and criminal activity is common. I mean North Philly isn't all that bad now compared to before. The community has been improving and a bit cleaner due to gentrification. My parents say that it is way safer now than it used to be a decade ago.

**BC:** I see, it must have been hard for you. What do you think about the public schools in your area? What were some of the challenges you faced going to school in Philadelphia?

**JK:** Compared to the schools I used to attend in Southern California, the public schools were way worse. The teachers really didn't care about us in terms of challenging us academically and making sure we didn't fall behind the class. It almost seemed like they didn't want to be there and their lack of enthusiasm was so obvious. Also it was hard to fit in with the children at first. Majority of the children in my class were somehow involved with gangs or drug dealing. Although I live in North Philly, I wouldn't say I'm apart of the majority in the sense that my household was economically stable. But most of my friends here come from a very poor background. It was common for parents to have two to three different jobs so the children basically had to grow up by themselves and become independent at a young age. Most of the time, these children looked to gangs because it provided them a place for social belonging.

**BC:** Do you think social reproduction is a major factor for the struggling youth in your community?

**JK:** 100%. Like I mentioned earlier, many of my friends' parents are forced to neglect their them because of they were busy with work. Their parents' priority was survival. They didn't have the luxury to ask how their children's day was or tuck them into bed. Being young, we didn't understand and appreciate our parents' sacrifices so many of us sought affection and attention from the wrong people. So many of my past classmates have been suspended, expelled, and even arrested for possession of drugs or assaulting a student or teacher. After they are expelled or sent to juvenile hall, there isn't much they can do but go back to their gang or selling drugs. They are trapped in this vicious cycle because what would you expect, if you grow seeing all of that throughout your life? And if you think about it, long term wise, their children will probably grow up to do the same thing. It doesn't help that a lot of parents are neglecting their children because of either work or they're incarcerated.

**BC:** What is one thing you would want to see changed in public schools in your district?

**JK:** I feel like they would need to fix standardized testing. From my personal experience, the teachers teach the bare minimum in hopes that we would get a decent score on the standardized tests. I honestly learned more from reading textbooks and surfing the internet

on my own than what my teachers taught in class. I'm currently studying for the upcoming LSAT and it wasn't until now how much I lacked critical thinking skills and logical reasoning skills. I completely blame the way the high school courses were designed. It's almost as if the school doesn't care about whether the students actually learn anything as long as they can get a decent score on those standardized tests. Even though I was fortunate enough to be able to take a separate course offered by Kaplan, they did not teach me a single thing about math, only strategies on how to approach test questions. It was as if these standardized tests aren't designed to measure your academic aptitude or accumulated knowledge but to measure your test taking skills.

**BC:** So, would you say there is a clear disadvantage for students that do not come from a wealthy background?

**JK:** Absolutely. My friends and I lived in a different world from the few wealthy children in our community. We could not afford tutors, independent online courses, or SAT test prep materials. A lot of us barely had money to go to school, buy lunch and catch the bus ride home. If we wanted money for anything else, we would have to get a job which was impossible for us because we were not legally allowed to work then. Which is why many of us turn to selling drugs for the sake of making quick cash. Also, our parents were not as involved so we definitely lacked the motivation to try in school. Many of my friends couldn't see the bigger picture, all their end goal was graduating high school because they are constantly exposed to the cycle of social reproduction. I do have some friends who earnestly try hard regardless of how bad their situation is at home. They had big dreams to break out of the cycle yet they were chained by their peers and socioeconomic limitations. Even though there weren't many wealthy children in my area, they lived a completely different world than us. They didn't have to fight, struggle, or become independent at a young age. They are so sheltered. They have mentors which is something my friends and I never had

### **English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs**

English as a Second Language (ESL) is a program that is designed to help students for whom English is not their primary language. With standardized tests and college admission tests focusing on students' reading comprehension, writing, and critical thinking skills, proficiency in English is a necessary skill. However, the way that ESL classes are taught can be problematic. An ESL teacher I spoke to voiced her concerns over the discrepancy between the student's English proficiency level in a classroom. Some children were far more proficient in English than others, and so for them, the coursework would be too easy and they would not be learning much. However, other children who lack foundational skills in English, the coursework is too difficult. Instead of dividing the ESL class by English proficiency, ESL students were carelessly grouped into one class. As a result, ESL students are making minimal progression in becoming proficient in English, and this makes it harder for them to keep up with the other courses and score high on standardized tests. "[An ESL instructor] felt that their ESL students have great difficulty with class participation, asking and responding to questions, and general listening comprehension (as opposed to lecture comprehension)" (Ferris & Tagg, 1996).

### **Creativity**

*“If we taught babies to talk as most skills are taught in school, they would memorize lists of sounds in a predetermined order and practice them alone in a closet”*

*Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Education at the Stanford Graduate School of Education & CEO of the Learning Policy Institute*

Teachers in public and private schools alike share certain flaws. Research has consistently shown that the more creative a student is, the more likely the teacher is to dislike them, due to their “obnoxious” traits of speaking out of turn and being critical of others (Wesby & Dawson, 1995). Instead, they favor obedient and unquestioning children, which less creative, more uniform thinkers tend to be (Wesby & Dawson, 1995). One study found that private school teachers rated their students as more creative than public school teachers, and that private school teachers were more likely to rate their students as creative when they self-identified as being creative (Easonam Giannangelo, & Franceschini, 2009). More troubling, these measures were carried out with teachers from the Pre-K to 3rd grade level, and found a decline in teacher reported creativity with higher grade levels. Perhaps creativity is seen as unique in early childhood, but is increasingly ignored or its expression punished as the years go by. However, teachers rate creativity as important in the classroom, leading to a puzzling incongruence of what teachers believe they are doing and their actual behaviors (Cheung & Hung Ping, 2012; Easonam et al., 2009).

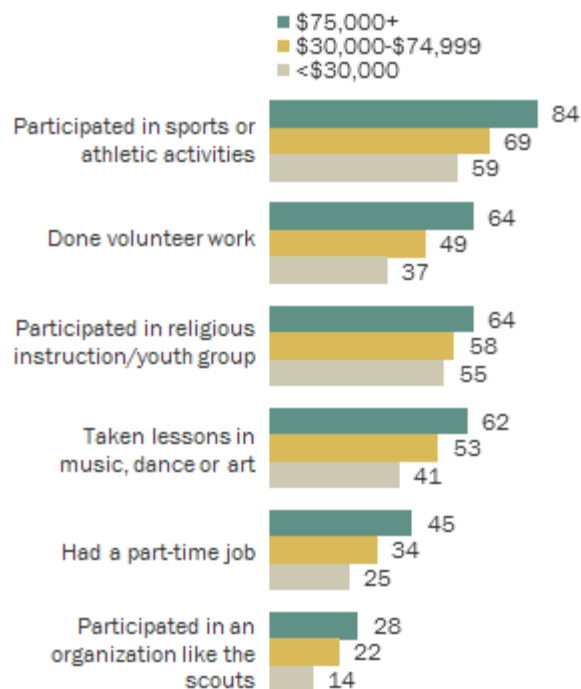
Students attending public schools with a tight budget do not gain the benefits of extracurricular activities which include social skills, a teamwork mindset, leadership skills, physical and mental health. Students participate in extracurricular activities based on their personal interest, and it brings students who share the same interest, together. This gives students opportunity to form friendships by working together. Teamwork which is valued by employers often develop into leadership. Every extracurricular club or organization offers a leadership position. In addition, students that are motivated to achieve success in an activity, develop time management habits. Many extracurricular activities require a minimum GPA requirement to participate, which motivates students to perform academically. All of these skills are invaluable and essential in the work force. Lastly and most importantly, extracurricular activities keep students occupied and decrease the chances of students becoming delinquents. All in all, unequal distribution in public schools directly translates to clear disadvantages for impoverished students because it limits their potential for academic achievement.

“Our rapidly moving, information-based society badly needs people who know how to find facts rather than memorize them, and who know how to cope with change in creative ways. You don’t learn those things in school.”

– Wendy Priesnitz, Alternative Education and Environmental Advocate

## Extracurricular activities are more common in higher-income families

% saying any of their children have \_\_\_\_ in the past 12 months



Note: Based on parents with children ages 6 to 17. Income is annual family income. Figure for "Had a part-time job" is based on parents with at least one child ages 13 to 17.

Source: Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, Sept. 15-Oct. 13, 2015

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Q868-g

Figure B

If we take the perspective of Wendy Priesnitz, we can argue that the issues with our education system persist in both public and private schools. What may give children with wealthier parents the advantage is their increased enrollment in extracurricular activities, which can become a creative outlet that makes up for their (still) less than ideal education.

**Figure B** breaks down the percentage of children who participate in extracurricular activities by family income, showing greater involvement as income rises. Lower income parents rate high quality, affordable after school groups as more difficult to find (Figure F).

### How do mothers feel about their child's education?

Low income parents do not deemphasize the importance of education or their role in helping their child. Instead, many low-income parents place a high value on education in their children and feel that they aren't doing enough. In fact, about 6 in 10 Black parents indicate they wish they were able to be more involved in their child's education (Pew Research Center, 2015). Parents who had completed some college coursework (either currently enrolled in college or had left without obtaining a degree) were especially likely to agree with this sentiment.

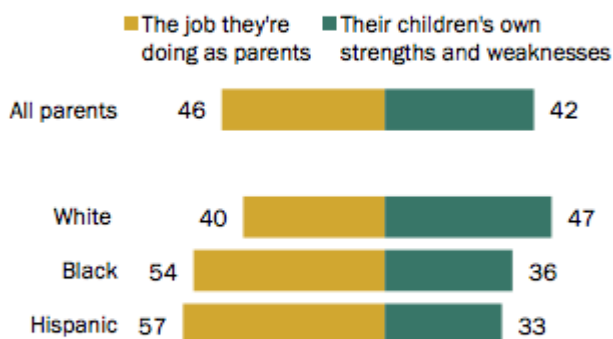
Their lack of involvement likely indicates not enough time because of the need to work more hours or inadequate understanding of the material. This is supported by a survey conducted with parents which found that the greater the education and income of the parents, the likelier they were to agree with the statement "Too much [of parental involvement in their child's education] can be a bad thing" and less likely to agree with the statement "Parents could never be too involved". (**Figure D**) (Pew Research Center, 2015).

These findings are somewhat troubling - coupled with data (**Figure C**) that shows non-white and lower income parents place a higher value on college degree. This suggests that these parents simply don't have the resources to help their children. Another financial difficulty impeding greater parental involvement is that lower educated families are likelier to have more children (Pew Research Center, 2015) and thus, less time devote attention to their child and

more time needed to work to support the family. It may also place a great deal of stress on the young student, who doesn't want to disappoint his family but can't perform well in school. In this way, school failure may become central to their identity and school involvement and effort may be abandoned due to this lowered self-esteem.

### Black and Hispanic parents are more likely to see kids' successes and failures as a reflection of their parenting

% saying their children's successes and failures mostly reflect ...



Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Voluntary responses of "Both," "Neither," "Depends" and "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, Sept. 15-Oct. 13, 2015

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Q30

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

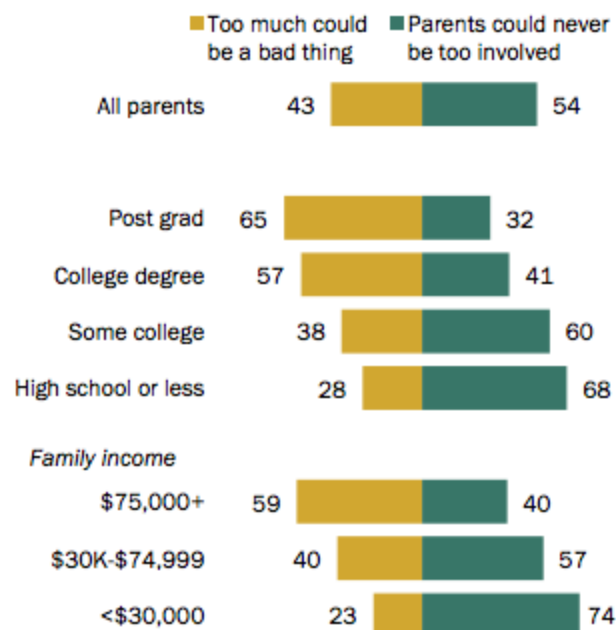
Q24

Figure C

Figure C shows that Black and Hispanic parents, two ethnic groups that are known to face greater rates of poverty, are likelier to view their children's successes and failures as a reflection of their parenting rather than their child's internal attributes (Pew Research Center, 2015). This is better than casting blame on their children, of course, but it can create a positive feedback loop, where the parent's guilt over their academically underperforming child leads to stricter rules and tougher discipline, which may be alienating to the child and reinforce school as something they struggle with and are "bad at". When parents were asked about the amount that they pressure their children to do well in school, low income families were slightly more likely to do believe they weren't pressuring their children enough (Figure E). The more interesting statistic, however, is that the vast majority of parents of all income brackets, education levels, and White/Black/Hispanic ethnic groups said they believed they were exerting the right amount of pressure on their children to do well.

### Most college graduates say too much parental involvement in a child's education can be a bad thing

% saying that when it comes to parental involvement in a child's education ...



Source: Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, Sept. 15-Oct. 13, 2015

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Q62

Figure D

## The American Dream via. Education

*“A liberal education...frees a person from the prison-house of his class, race, time, place, background, family, and even his nation.”*

*-Robert Maynard Hutchins, The Political Animal*

Any staunch believer of the American Dream advances the notion of equality through education. Nowhere is this more apparent, they argue, than in the college process. The wealth of financial aid, scholarship, and grant opportunities appear to offer every child the chance to attend a good school. Colleges go out of their way to encourage a diverse pool of students. Undoubtedly, this has helped talented students afford an education. The issue with this argument is that by the time students all over the U.S. graduate high school, the actual grade level equivalent of their abilities may vary considerably by socioeconomic status, given the more challenging curriculum that higher income children are likely exposed to. This trend continues in college, where the prestige determines the difficulty of coursework.

### Interview with a Psychology tutor (LT)

*“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think” - Cultural Anthropologist Margaret Mead*

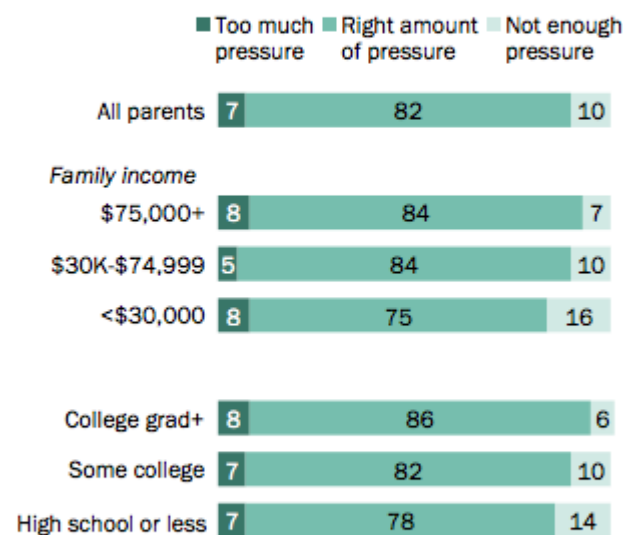
I sat down with LT, a Psychology tutor that works with college students across New York City.

**BC:** Tell me about your education history. Did you go to private or public school?

**LT:** I went to public school. I sat in classrooms with about 30 children in elementary, middle, and high school. Nobody told me I was smart or capable and teachers didn't pay a great deal of attention to me. Everyone in my middle class nuclear family has at least a Master's degree. I come from a family of statisticians, writers, poets, scholars, professors, teachers, and principals. Everyone in my family loves to read - as a child, I would read three books a day and write short stories. I modeled my family's behavior and, because of this, was more intelligent than most of my peers and aced my standardized tests. However, I didn't know this at the time - school moved extremely slowly and I was bored all of the time. I was the black sheep in my family because I started skipping school and cheated on my tests. They couldn't understand why I didn't seem to care or why I began my science fair projects the morning they were due. After high school, I only bothered to apply to community college because it was close by. It was there that I took

### Low-income parents slightly more likely to say they don't put enough pressure on their kids to do well in school

*% saying they put \_\_\_ on their school-age children to do well in school*



Notes: Based on parents with children ages 6 to 17. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

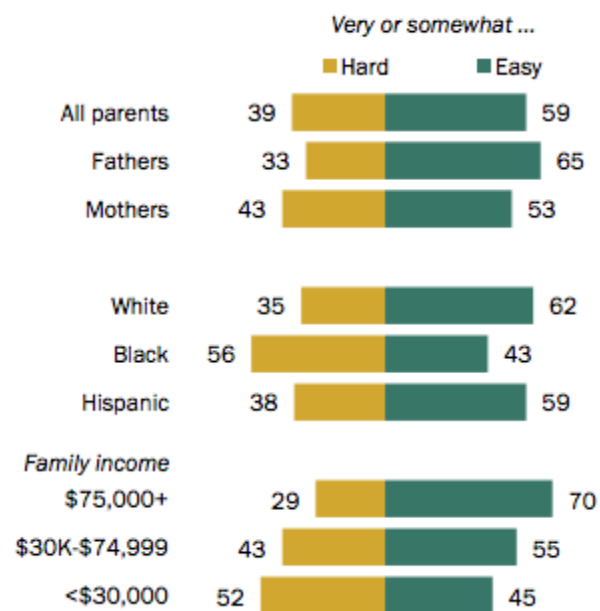
Source: Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, Sept. 15-Oct. 13, 2015

Figure E

an Introduction to Psychology course. I was fascinated with the topic and graduated with a 3.9 GPA, but was bored there as well. After that, I went to a public university (CUNY) school and was excited to finally be challenged in my schoolwork, only to find the same, mind numbingly boring classes. My passion in Psychology led me to read scientific papers on my own time and join four research laboratories. Before I received my Bachelor's, I began tutoring students in Bachelor's, Master's, and doctorate programs.

### Big racial, income gaps in availability of after-school programs

*% of parents with children ages 6 to 17 saying it is \_\_\_\_\_ to find after-school activities and programs for school-aged children in their community that are affordable and high quality*



Note: Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, Sept. 15-Oct. 13, 2015

Figure F

community college to CUNY schools to private universities like NYU and Columbia.

**BC:** Do you notice differences between these colleges in how they relate to their students? Were there any differences in college culture between community college and four-year CUNY?

**LT:** Absolutely. What I learned from my years at public school was that students - whether they struggle with understanding the material, lack interest in the subjects, or display any problem behavior whatsoever - are largely ignored. I saw stark differences between my education and

**BC:** That's a very unique story. What do you think you learned from all this?

**LT:** What I learned from my experience is that I was incredibly lucky. With no parent or teacher involvement and constant truancy, I somehow passively soaked up the knowledge I was around all these years and happened to grow up around people who loved literature. It's a shame that nobody in my years of education was able to pick up on my abilities or spark my interest in school. I suspect that, had I grown up with an upper-class family and went to private school, my talent would have been noticed and I would have been encouraged to do extracurricular activities and push myself in my classes - perhaps enrolled in advanced classes. I may have gotten a full scholarship at an elite college, rather than been in debt with an average education. Instead, I didn't feel passionate or interested in anything, and engaged in delinquent behavior (stealing, drugs).

**BC:** Tell me about your students.

**LT:** I tutor students from colleges all around New York City, from

that of my students. Community college professors very much cared about their students - I was singled out and told for the first time that I was intelligent and could go far in life. However, many of the students have immense difficulty with the material. The community college I went to, Kingsborough, has a 19% graduation rate. I've spoken to professors there who feel terrible that, simple as the material is, many people simply don't understand it and there is nothing they can really do. Anything short of a tutoring service for 20 hours a week (unaffordable for the vast majority of students) would lead to failing grades. The four-year CUNY I went to had students who struggle with the material as well, but the professors are largely detached from this and don't go out of their way to reach their students.

**BC:** How disparate are the curriculums at all these different colleges?

**LT:** The students I tutor at two-year and four-year colleges have difficulty understanding the material. Many are experiencing money problems and only reach out when they are on the brink of failing their class or getting academic probation. Not only are the concepts they are taught simpler and less comprehensive than at elite colleges (thus rendering them less prepared for possible graduate school), but these concepts are out of their reach for many of my students. I tutor a woman who is enrolled in a Master's program at Touro College, which has a pretty bad reputation in the quality of their education. She received her Bachelor's from there as well, and found that it was easy, but is struggling immensely with the Master's program. She is an immigrant and speaks and writes poorly. The complexity of the assignments in the Master's program at Touro is on par with the Bachelor's at a CUNY and far easier than a Bachelor's curriculum at Columbia or NYU. A professor at Columbia's Introduction to Statistics syllabus includes Bayesian statistics, an advanced statistical concept that even my CUNY Advanced Statistics course barely went over. I'm not against these discrepant levels of difficulty - it is necessary to adjust the curriculum of a college based on their student's academic success and capabilities. But it goes to show the vast differences in quality of education and preparedness for the working force that each college offers.

**BC:** How about the students you tutor at NYU and Columbia?

**LT:** There is a world of a difference between the schools I went to and NYU, and even more so Columbia. First off, the teachers are very involved. I tutor somebody at Columbia who skipped three classes. The dean of students was notified and the student was asked for a sit-down, where he explained why he missed the classes and what troubles he has in his life that are preventing him from attending class. The dean was understanding - he encouraged my student to seek an incomplete grade and reach out to his professor. All of his professors are well-known established Psychologists and Psychology professors. They were understanding and frequently emailed him to check in and see how we was doing. Second, Columbia's student population is largely made up of individuals with parents that are well-off. Most of the students at NYU and Columbia do not see me because they do not understand the material. Most of my students have poor time management skills or concentration issues. Any lower-class student that has these issues is out on their own, but these students are able to afford to see me frequently and excel at their classes as a result. I have one student in particular from a rich family who sees me 10-20 hours a week. Given his wealth, he is able to live alone in an apartment on the Upper West Side and have no job. His focus is entirely on his schoolwork. This person has ADHD and bipolar disorder. When he suffered a breakdown, he went to an inpatient facility that cost \$1,000 a day. His psychiatrist and psychologists are both experts on bipolar disorder. I'm not trying to rag on



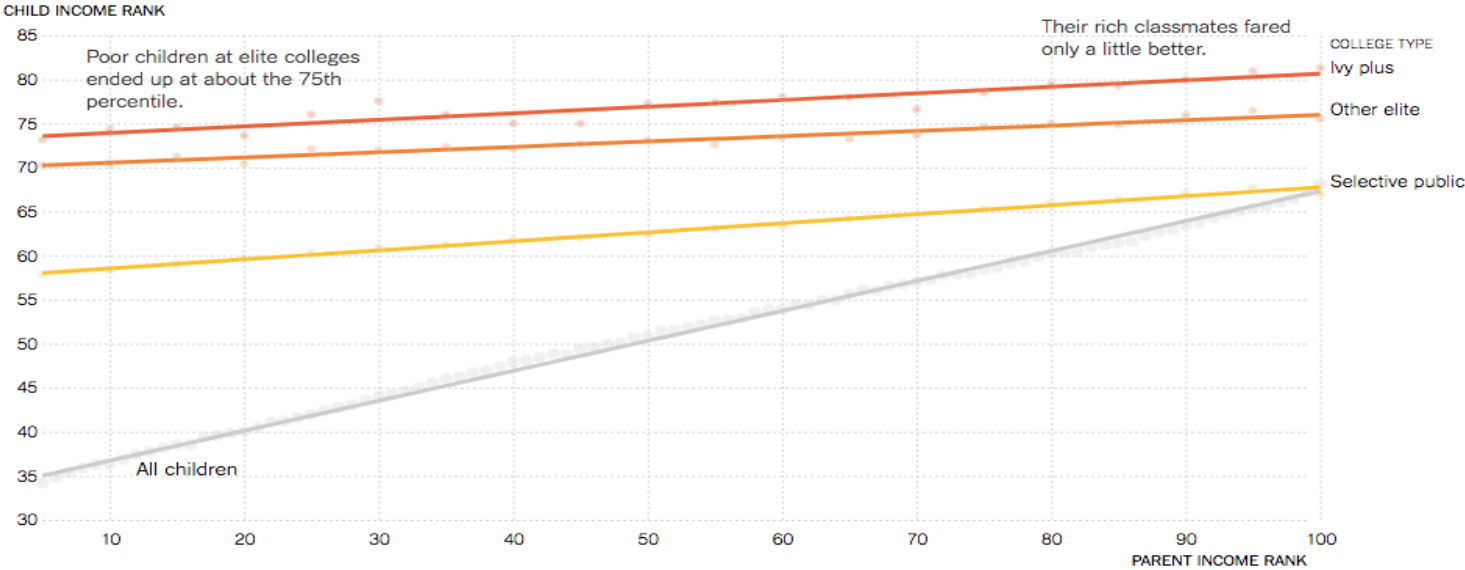
him here - he works hard. It takes him three times as long to get assignments done because of his mood and concentration issues. I appreciate the difficulties that he's had in life and I think it's wonderful he is able to afford these services and focus on his well-being and academic life. But I can't help but think of how somebody with those same issues, coming from a lower-class family, would not be able to manage. They would likely have to work a full-time job, struggle to get work done because of their condition, and either perform poorly in school or get very little sleep trying to balance these responsibilities.

**BC:** What is the take home message from all this? Do you believe that lower income students are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to college education? What do you think causes this?

**LT:** I would say that, yes. The obstacles that all students may face - a devastating breakup, a mental illness, stress - they can lower your grade and your GPA and make it very difficult to get into graduate school or even graduate. I think that students with rich parents have a safety net where they can experience these stressors and be able to afford counseling and tutors. The poor college student in debt likely has to work a part or full time job on top of their coursework. That's the difference between a student who gets far in life and a student who is out on their luck and doesn't get to experience social mobility. And this is only at the college level - there are of course inequalities in education standards through all grade levels, but my experience can only attest to college students.

**The relationship between family income, college, and salary on college students**

*“But before any great things are accomplished, a memorable change must be made in the system of Education and knowledge must become so general as to raise the lower ranks of Society nearer to the higher”*



Data here comes from the 1980-82 cohort, roughly the college classes of 2002-4. By this stage in life, income ranks are relatively stable.

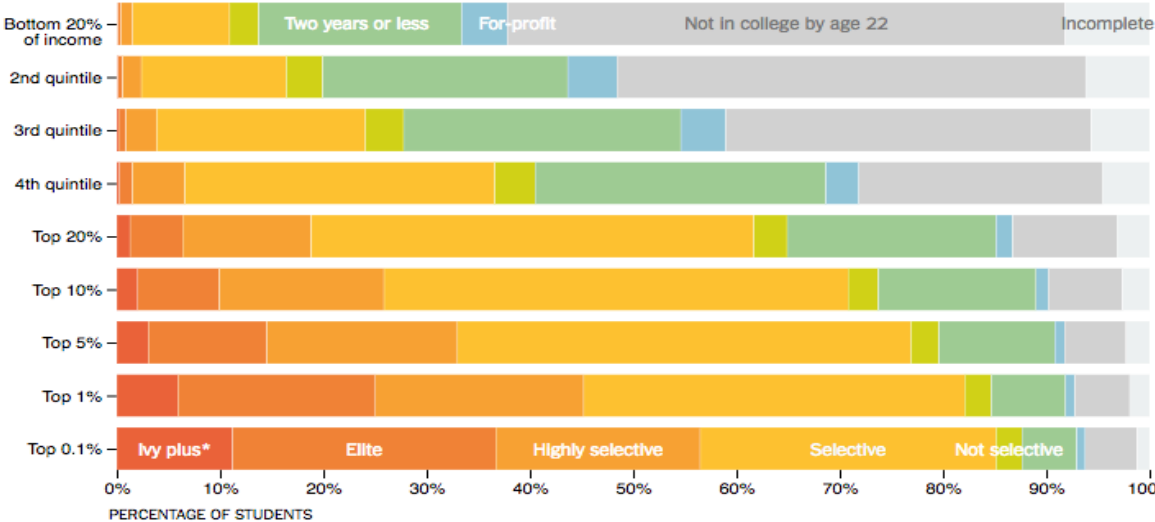
- Letter from John Adams to Matthew Robinson Jr, 1786

Figure G

**Figure G** shows a clear positive linear relationship in parental income and child income - most students who grow up poor will remain poor in adulthood, and most students raised in rich households will be rich in adulthood. Once in an elite college, however, poor students stand a real chance: they end up earning about as much as their rich classmates. This follows the general trend of colleges, where students generally end up earning around the same amount as their classmates after graduation.

**Elite Colleges, Packed With Rich Students**

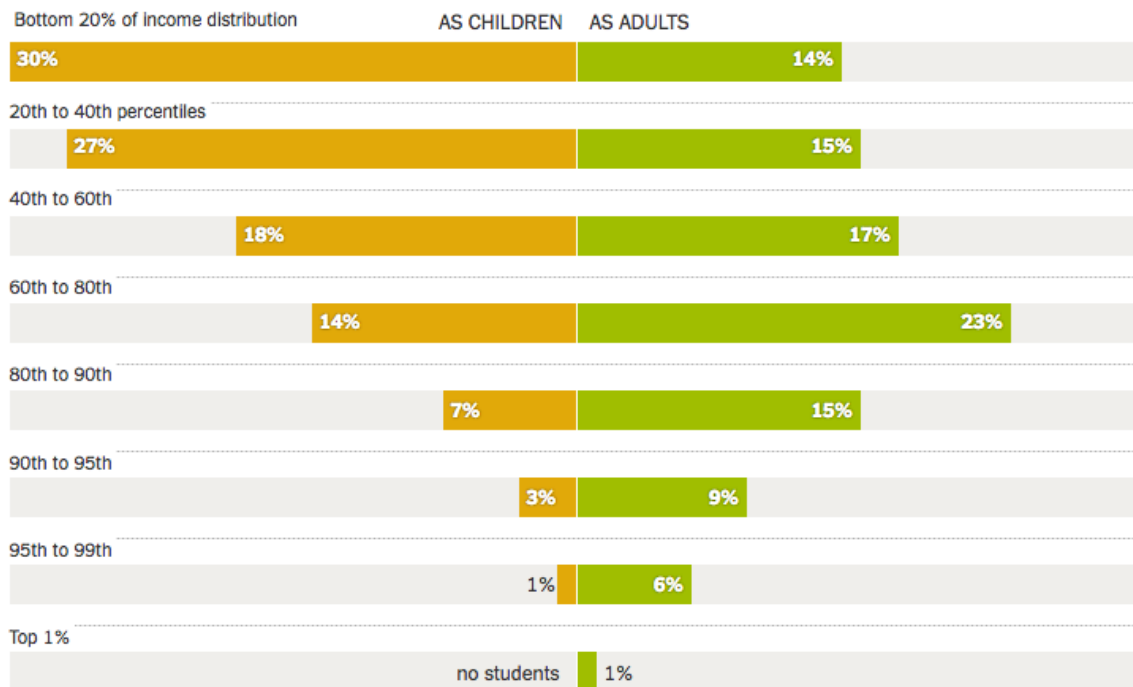
About four in 10 children from America's wealthiest families attend an Ivy League or other elite college.



Source: Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner and Danny Yagan with Kaveh Danesh, Niklas Flamang, Robert Fluegge, Benjamin Goldman, Sam Karlin, Carl McPherson, Benjamin Scuderi and Priyanka Shende.

**Figure H**

**Figure H** shows the breakdown of students who attend these colleges based on their family's income tier. Ivy League colleges have more students from the top 1% than the bottom 50%, and the top 0.1% was the likeliest of all income brackets to attend an Ivy League college. In contrast, most individuals coming from the bottom 20% income bracket do not enter college by age 22.



**Figure 1**

However, data are promising in a study of individuals who graduated from City College (a CUNY school) in 1980. Here, we can see that college students who came from the bottom 20% of family income have risen to the top three-fifths. At CUNY Baruch College, 79% of those coming from the bottom 20% end up earning in the top three-fifths income bracket.

It's important to note that financial aid and other forms of funding are far more generous in elite universities. Columbia allots 140 million per year in scholarships and grants, and students with parents earning less than \$200,000 are eligible for some form of aid. I know someone whose family income is about \$80,000. He was not eligible for financial aid at his CUNY school or even a subsidized loan, which does not accrue interest while the student is attending school.

### **College and Career Readiness - A Source of Confusion, not Hope**

Non-profit organization YouthTruth surveyed 165,000 high school students (2015) and found that less than half (44.8%) of high school juniors and seniors feel prepared for college and career aspects, with students more likely to say they are prepared for college level courses than prepared for what career they may be interested in and the steps necessary to make that happen. When it came to getting into college however, the results are troubling. Only about 32-35% of students went to counseling for career help, help applying to colleges, or information about college admissions requirements. The lowest statistic was found in the number of students who have visited a counselor to discuss how to pay for college (23%). Importantly, helpfulness ratings from students who had used these services reached almost 4 on a 5 point scale.

## **What does this mean for children of low income families?**

*“An imbalance between rich and poor is the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics.”  
–Plutarch, ancient Greek biographer (c. 46 – 120 CE)*

College is an excellent way and, save for some exceptions, the only way to rise in socioeconomic status for these children. Financial aid, scholarships, grants, and other awards permit students to go to college when they otherwise would have not been able to afford it. The main issue is that the majority of low income (bottom 20%) children never make it to college and the more prestigious the college, the less likely they are to attend. The reasons for this are vast - some people need to work full time to support their families and do not have the time. Worse still, many students have slipped through the cracks of the public education system. They have not been paid individual attention to or participated in extracurricular or after school activities. These children have likely fallen behind academically each year compared to their rich counterparts and by college age, without time consuming interventions, it is simply too late.

In America, we like to believe that a child's future is not predetermined but developed through experience and personal shortcomings. We like to think that every child is unique and can transform oneself. This is the basis of the American Dream that is still believed strongly today, even as social mobility becomes increasingly rare. We are a nation emboldened by the exceptions: the rare rags to riches story is advertised as a possibility, granted with enough hard work and determination. This view hurts our country in two ways. It provides a reason the upper class to view the poorly educated and underpaid as being responsible for their poverty - this alleviates any sense of personal responsibility, which demotivates politicians from focusing on unequal conditions. What's worse is that the poor may internalize these messages and feel a sense of learned helplessness when it comes to striving for success. This naive view dismisses the inequalities at play in the American education system.

The inequality of different socioeconomic levels is also evident in the American education system. Students from a low socioeconomic status face many disadvantages that make it harder for them to achieve academic success as opposed to students who are from a wealthy background. Impoverished students lack the critical resources for high academic achievement such as, test prep material, tutors, and best qualified teachers. Schools in high socioeconomic level districts attract teachers with higher education and more experience, which gives students who attend public schools in wealthy districts a greater chance for academic growth and achievement. Also given that schools in impoverished districts tend to generally receive less funding than schools in rich districts, there are limited numbers of extracurricular programs made available to the less privileged students. Extracurricular activities proved to help students develop essential social and personal skills that will have use later in their careers and reduce the chances of student delinquents.

## Bibliography

- Aish, G., Buchanan, L., Cox, A., & Quealy, K. (2017, January 18). Some Colleges Have More Students from the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours. Retrieved May 13, 2017, from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/18/upshot/some-colleges-have-more-students-from-the-top-1-percent-than-the-bottom-60.html>
- "An Overview of the U.S. Department of Education-- Pg 5." *Home*. US Department of Education (ED), n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2017.  
[https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/what\\_pg5.html#howis](https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/what_pg5.html#howis).
- Biddle, Bruce Jesse, and David C. Berliner. *What research says about unequal funding for schools in America*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd, 2003.
- Boaz, David. "The Public School Monopoly" Dofflemyer Lecture Series, 28 January 1992, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California
- Braun, H., Jenkins, F., and Grigg, W. (2006). Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (NCES 2006-461). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Camilli, G., Vargas, S., Ryan, S., & Barnett, W. S. (2010). Meta-analysis of the effects of early education interventions on cognitive and social development. *Teachers College Record*, 112(3), 579-620.
- Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2017). *Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility*. Mimeo.
- Cheung, R. H. P. (2012). Teaching for creativity: Examining the beliefs of early childhood teachers and their influence on teaching practices. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(3), 43.
- Cohen, L. E., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American sociological review*, 588-608.
- Cohen, Rachel M. "The War on Public Schools." *American Prospect* 28.1 (2017): 80-84. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 8 Feb. 2017.

Condrón, D. J., & Roscigno, V. J. (2003). Disparities within: Unequal spending and achievement in an urban school district. *Sociology of Education*, 18-36.

"DOE Overview." *DOE Overview - Funding Our Schools - New York City Department of Education*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Feb. 2017.

<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/funding/overview/default.html>

Eason, R., Giannangelo, D. M., & Franceschini, L. A. (2009). A look at creativity in public and private schools. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 4(2), 130-137.

Ferris, Dana, and Tracy Tagg. "Academic Listening/Speaking Tasks for ESL Students: Problems, Suggestions, and Implications." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1996, pp. 297-320., [www.jstor.org/stable/3588145](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3588145).

Hedges, L.V. & Greenwald, R. (1996). Have times changed? The relation between school resources and student performance. In G. Burtless (Ed.), Does money matter? The effect of school resources on student achievement and adult success (pp. 74-92). Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban education*, 40(3), 237-269.

K, J. Personal Interview. 8 May 2017

K, R. Personal Interview. 1 March 2017

Kohn, Alfie. *The case against standardized testing: Raising the scores, ruining the schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000

Lawhorn, B. (n.d.). Extracurricular Activities. *SpringerReference*.  
doi:10.1007/springerreference\_69919

L, T. Personal Interview. 9 May 2017

Leonhardt, D. (2017, January 18). Opinion | America's Great Working-Class Colleges. Retrieved May 13, 2017, from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/opinion/sunday/americas-great-working-class-colleges.html>

OECD (2012), *Public and Private Schools: How Management and Funding Relate to their Socio-economic Profile*, OECD Publishing.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264175006-en>

Pew Research Center, December 17, 2015, "Parenting in America: Outlook, worries, aspirations are strongly linked to financial situation"

Ruggiero, J., & Vitaliano, D. F. (1999). Assessing the efficiency of public schools using data envelopment analysis and frontier regression. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, 17(3), 321.

Sacks, P. (1999). *Standardized minds: The high price of America's testing culture and what we can do to change it*. Perseus Books, HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

Skobelova, Shay. (2017, May 5) . IamA private tutor to the children of the lawyers, doctors, and executives of NYC. Basically, I get paid \$140/hr to do science experiments with kids! [Thread]. Thread started on [https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/69evqx/iama\\_private\\_tutor\\_to\\_the\\_children\\_of\\_the\\_lawyers/](https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/69evqx/iama_private_tutor_to_the_children_of_the_lawyers/)

Smith, J. G. (2006). Parental involvement in education among low-income families: A case study. *School Community Journal*, 16(1), 43.

Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours. (2017, January 18). Retrieved May 14, 2017, from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/18/upshot/some-colleges-have-more-students-from-the-top-1-percent-than-the-bottom-60.html>

Wodnicki, Michael. "A View of the Urban Underclass: How Crime and Poverty Create a Poor Society." *A View of the Urban Underclass: How Crime and Poverty Create a Poor Society*. EDGE, 4 June 1999. Web. 13 May 2017.  
<[https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty\\_prejudice/soc\\_sec/hview.htm](https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/soc_sec/hview.htm)>.

YouthTruth. (2015). *College & Career Readiness Data*. (Research Brief). Retrieved from <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2187198-college-career-readiness-survey.html>