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Authors

Trujillo, Tina
Gutierrez, Kris D
Mahiri, Jabari
et al.

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Responding to Educational Inequality

Addressing Race and Social Class Disparities to Increase Opportunity

Tina Trujillo
Kris D. Gutierrez

Jabari Mahiri
Janelle Scott

Zeus Leonardo
Na'ilah Nasir



About

This policy brief reviews scholarship by members of the **Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California, Berkeley** to advance a broader and more complex understanding of the persistent failure of U.S. schools for youth from non-dominant communities. Members of the **Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster** include:

[Tina Trujillo](#)

Graduate School of Education

[Jabari Mahiri](#)

Graduate School of Education

[Zeus Leonardo](#)

Graduate School of Education

[Kris Gutiérrez](#)

Graduate School of Education

[Michael J. Dumas](#)

Graduate School of Education

[Mark Brilliant](#)

History

[Janelle Scott](#)

African American Studies &
Graduate School of Education

[Na'ilah Suad Nasir](#)

Vice Chancellor, Equity & Inclusion,
African American Studies &
Graduate School of Education

[Rucker Johnson](#)

Goldman School of Public Policy

[Christopher Edley, Jr.](#)

Berkeley Law

[Lisa Garcia Bedolla](#)

Graduate School of Education

In memory of the late **W. Norton Grubb**, Professor Emeritus of UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Education, was a founding member of the Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster

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Editors

Na'ilah Nasir

Taeku Lee

Layout & Design

Image Design Works

Images

FatCamera , Demachi

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Executive Summary

This report takes up a critical issue in education: the continuing reproduction of educational inequality in relation to race and social class. In doing so, it highlights several key issues in how we study and attempt to ameliorate disparities through educational policy. We conclude with a set of recommendations for policymakers and advocates.

Key Findings

- Growing inequality, re-segregation, and structural racism pose fundamental challenges to America’s schools and its ideals of democracy and equity.
- Educational policy perpetuates inequity through fiscal disinvestment, a neglect of the broad sociopolitical structure, the application of universal interventions, and the usage of a narrow research base.
- Educational policy can mitigate educational inequities.
- Local practices undermine educational equity by limiting student access to robust learning environments through segregation and tracking practices.
- Racial biases held by teachers and leaders are enacted in classrooms and can impair deep learning and engagement for all students.

A Plan to Respond

- Educational policy interventions can improve educational opportunity:
- ➔ Craft and invest in policies that acknowledge and address the impact of economic, racial, and social forces on students and schools
 - ➔ Ensure schools and educational reforms are sufficiently and equitably funded
 - ➔ Utilize rigorous, systematic and ecologically valid research from various sources and methodological approaches to develop policies and to evaluate their impact and implementation
 - ➔ Enable the development of equitable, robust environments through professional development
 - ➔ Re-frame the research focus to capture the varied, rich, and consequential practices of non-dominant communities to build equitable, evidence-based policy
 - ➔ Educational policy perpetuates inequity through fiscal disinvestment, a neglect of the broad sociopolitical structure, the application of universal interventions, and the usage of a narrow research base

Introduction

AMERICANS ARE STEADFAST in their belief in the power of education. We believe in education's ability to transform the lives of youth and communities by enabling greater opportunity. This strongly held ideal also motivates teachers, educational leaders, and policymakers who passionately believe that their work has the potential to facilitate greater economic, political, and social well-being.

Despite these laudable goals, too often reforms are crafted and enacted with a limited vision for how schools can bring about transformational social and educational change. The problem of educational inequity is often expressed as a problem of achievement gaps or teacher quality, locating inequities in the performance of district and school personnel and students. While in-school factors and entrenched disparities undoubtedly affect schools and students (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Edley, 2014; Lee & Orfield, 2006; Reardon, 2011), broader social, political, and economic patterns and indeed, structural racism, impact schools and their students, helping to explain the inequitable schooling students and their families continue to experience.

A Plan to Respond

Over the past three decades, many youth in the U.S. have experienced the debilitating effects of growing economic inequality and its widespread effects (Steil & Menendian, 2014). Rising income inequality has occurred alongside astounding levels of re-segregation (Johnson, 2011). Schools and communities are increasingly segregated along class and racial lines, exacerbating unequal social contexts and resource distribution (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011) while leaving many students increasingly racially and linguistically isolated (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Mickelson, 2001; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). Income inequality also coincides with and

contributes to the growing health disparities among the rich and less privileged (Johnson, Schoeni, & Rogowski, 2012; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2011). Overall, this increasing bifurcation of wealth, felt acutely among racial and other marginalized groups, has implications for the well-being of the schools and our democracy (Nasir, Scott, Trujillo, & Hernandez, 2016; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

All the while, racialized violence and racial inequality persist in national headlines daily, particularly as protests surrounding the deaths of Black men and women at the hands of police continue to spark the nation. These events point to the entrenchment of racism in our institutions and the manner in which these institutional biases can impact marginalized racial groups. This structural racism also plays out in schools in myriad ways. African American, Latino, and other marginalized students have limited access to high-quality curriculum, are subject to harsher discipline, encounter multiple forms of structural and interpersonal racism, and attend schools in neighborhoods that have systematically been under-resourced (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014; Losen & Skiba, 2010).

These alarming patterns exacerbate critical issues facing an educational landscape characterized by decreased educational spending, inconsistent distribution of quality teachers, and entrenched disparities in achievement and school quality. This historical moment calls for more robust, equity-oriented, and race-sensitive policies that recognize the multiple and complex factors impacting students and communities. This policy brief reviews recent scholarship by members of the **Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California, Berkeley** to advance a broader and more complex understanding of the persistent failure of U.S.

schools for youth from non-dominant communities. Moreover, this brief suggests policy-based solutions that acknowledge and address the complexity of making schools more equitable and have the potential to mitigate the varied inequities experienced by students. An important contribution of the cluster's collective work is its added emphasis on valued-added understandings of the practices and possibilities of youth and families from non-dominant communities.

First, the brief assesses why current educational policies focused solely on school improvement and academic achievement perpetuate rather than alleviate inequities. These policies neglect the role of socioeconomic and societal factors on academic achievement, apply universal solutions to complex problems and diverse communities, fail to adequately fund schools, and utilize a narrow research base that results in the design and enactment of reforms with minimal understanding of complex school and community environments.

Second, the brief demonstrates how resegregation and tracking can undermine educational opportunity and achievement. Structural racism operates to ensure that marginalized students have less access to robust learning environments because of re-segregation patterns, entrenched tracking practices, and fierce resistance to policies that aim to disrupt these long-standing practices. Non-dominant students also encounter racial stereotypes regarding their academic abilities as well as culturally insensitive teaching practices, which serve to alienate rather than empower students.

Finally, the brief presents several policy recommendations to suggest how educational policies can mitigate educational inequity by embracing a more expansive approach to educational reform. The recommendations include attending to the

socioeconomic context and complexities of local communities, increased fiscal investment, balanced research usage, increased access to high-quality learning environments for nondominant groups, and increased investment and commitment to the development of robust learning environments.

Educational Policy Perpetuates Inequities

Key Findings

-  Policies have insufficiently accounted for structural factors and their impact on educational opportunity.
-  Policies often prescribe universal interventions that obscure the particular needs of racial and other marginalized groups.
-  Schools have been underfunded, exacerbating resource inequities and leaving schools susceptible to vulnerable funding streams.
-  Policymakers utilize a narrow and often insufficient research base in crafting and implementing educational policy.

TO EFFECTIVELY MITIGATE EDUCATIONAL INEQUITIES,

policies must be developed and enacted with deep understandings of how race and class impact our educational system. To date, educational policies have generally been crafted with minimal regard to broader factors and patterns, leaving them to perpetuate inequities despite their aim to alleviate disparities. In particular, educational policies perpetuate inequities by neglecting to address the impact of socioeconomic factors on schools, students, and communities. They also fail to alleviate disparities by advancing universal educational strategies to address complex environments and students, by maintaining inadequate funding practices, and by utilizing a narrow research base to inform the creation and an enactment of educational remedies.

Policies Ignore the Impact of Broader Social and Economic Patterns.

Researchers have documented how patterns of social and economic disadvantage impact educational achievement, school quality, and the advancement of educational equity, reducing opportunities for rich learning experiences, and limiting access to high quality teaching (Basch, 2011; Duncan, 2011; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lareau, 2003; Nasir et al., 2016; Rothstein, 2004). This disadvantage is highly racialized and operates in accordance with the existence of white privilege (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Tate, 1997). For instance, Rucker Johnson, a **Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster** member and Professor of Public Policy, finds that poor health and limited parental resources (e.g. low income, lack of health insurance, inconsistent access to job opportunities) reduce educational attainment and worsen labor market and health outcomes in adulthood (Johnson, Kalil, & Dunifon, 2012; Johnson & Schoeni, 2007). Johnson and his

colleagues present strong evidence that illustrate the negative effect of economic marginalization of families and educational outcomes.

Educational policies have continued to leave broader, structural patterns of disadvantage unaccounted for, thus employing narrow understandings of educational problems and applying inadequate policy remedies. Zeus Leonardo, a Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster member and Professor of Education, highlighted the consequences of excluding these factors in his analysis of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), arguing that the law's emphasis on subgroup performance is tantamount to recognizing a problem without "locating the source of the problem" (Leonardo, 2007). Noting the continued socioeconomic obstacles facing communities of color including health disparities and labor market discrimination, he argues that NCLB erroneously situates educational achievement disparities as a problem of the educational apparatus, ignoring broader factors that necessarily impact the conditions in which schools exist and students live.

Policies advance universal solutions to complex problems.

Accompanying a neglect of broader factors impacting schools and students is the prescription of universal interventions to address school improvement. Universal approaches are colorblind and assume that educational opportunities and inequities are experienced uniformly, obscuring variation within groups and the particularities of disadvantage experienced along racial, gender, and economic lines (Gutiérrez, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Powell, 2008). John A. Powell, the director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society and Professor of Law, African-American, and Ethnic Studies, suggests that policymakers frequently opt to use categories or criteria that capture an array of marginalized groups

without reference to race or other factors in developing policies to alleviate inequity. In particular, he notes the frequent use of income-related criteria in lieu of race, a decision that assumes that such an approach will disproportionately benefit some racial groups, and not others (Powell, 2008). The use of income-based criteria in educational policies have not served to address racial disparities. For example, the use of social class to achieve economic and racial school integration has not yielded substantive demographic integration (Reardon, Yun, & Kurlaender, 2006) and has often served the interests of those with social advantages (Lipman, 2008). Thus, while people from marginalized racial groups are more likely to be poor, policies that are inattentive to the particularities of racial disadvantages miss the mark in mitigating inequities in schools.

Schools are inadequately funded.

Wide disparities in educational spending contribute to the poor quality of learning environments experienced by some low-income and minority students. A recent commissioned report, co-chaired by a Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster member and Professor of Law Christopher Edley Jr., highlights the consequences of unequal funding and documents how funding disparities exacerbate schooling inequalities. Students in high-poverty districts and schools receive less funding than low-poverty districts and schools (The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013), with some regional variation; this funding disparity results in less access to high quality teaching and facilities.

While increased funding alone does not always translate into school quality (Grubb, 1997), equitably funding schools and policies is fundamental to providing robust educational opportunities for all students, including students of color, English-language learners, and students with special needs who are often concentrated in high-poverty districts. Increased resources means

enhanced quality teaching, strong curriculum, and the ability to implement programs and strategies that can meet the needs of students and communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Overall, adequate and fairly distributed school funding is “an essential precondition for the delivery of a high-quality education in the 50 states” (Baker, Sciarra, & Farrie, 2010). As schools and key educational policies continue to be underfunded, resource-deficient schools are increasingly faced with decisions regarding how to invest funds, often at the expense of these greater fiscal investment in inputs that can facilitate robust learning environments.

The persistence of inadequate school funding is increasingly problematic given the turbulent, financial contexts facing our schools. Political and economic factors that resulted in the economic downturn of 2008 pushed states to consider further cuts to school budgets, leaving many school and district officials susceptible to vulnerable funding sources. Janelle Scott, a Professor of Education and a Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster member, interrogated this pattern by exposing the growing prominence of philanthropic groups and foundations in supporting educational reforms and institutions. While these foundations provide the necessary investment for reform and school sustainability, she argues their investment nonetheless represents a funding source that is susceptible to economic downturn, potentially leaving resource-deficient schools and communities to cope with greater fiscal disinvestment if or when the money runs out (Scott, 2009).

Using a narrow research base to inform policy leaves key factors unaddressed.

Despite the pervasiveness of educational inequality and the scholarship documenting it, policymakers rely on a narrow research base to create and enact educational

policies. For instance, much attention has been given to scientifically based practices, or “what works” in schools as measured by their impact on academic achievement. However, the utility of this research can be limited, due to its emphasis on generalizability, its negligence of the role of context, and its marginalization of other forms of research that inform policy knowledge (Berliner, 2002; Biesta, 2007; M. Dumas & Anderson, 2014; Erickson & Gutiérrez, 2002).

Kris D. Gutierrez, a Professor of Education and Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster member, takes on this issue (in a piece co-authored with William Penuel), and notes that studies of what works or traditional approaches to design based research often ignore “what works, under what conditions, and for whom,” thus obscuring variation in schools, communities, and student experiences that necessarily impact how schools work and how students learn (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014). They argue that a study’s relevance should be assessed on its ability to transform practice. They note policymakers should utilize rigorous research on “what works” that systematically addresses the fundamental questions of “Who is doing the design and for what purposes? How can research and practice inform one another? Who benefits from the design interventions? and What are the unintended consequences of the change?” (Erickson & Gutiérrez, 2002). Neglecting the specific mechanisms through which outcomes for teachers and students are achieved within particular contexts is one key way that policymakers employ a narrow research base, which neglects critical, contextual factors that impact students and schools.

Beliefs regarding student ability, and knowledge impact teachers' instructional practices, which can impede students from engaging in deep learning.



Re-segregation and Tracking Undermine Educational Opportunity and Achievement

Key Findings

Re-segregation and tracking practices impede students from accessing robust learning environments.

Fierce resistance to desegregation and detracking serve to maintain systemic inequities and white privilege.

Racial biases about student ability, knowledge, and learning practices reproduce inequitable learning contexts and impede students access to deep learning.

WHILE ASPECTS OF POLICY CREATION and enactment contribute to the perpetuation of educational inequity, local practices, such as tracking and re-segregation also play a role. Structural patterns of racial and class-based inequity are reflected in classroom, school, and district practices. Low-income and minority students are often systematically denied access to robust and culturally relevant learning environments through tracking and disciplinary practices. They also encounter implicit bias with respect to student ability and behavior that harm and impair student learning and participation. These factors shape learning environments and undermine educational opportunity and achievement. The research in the following section highlights these dynamics to reveal how these local practices impede the advancement of educational equity.

Marginalized students have less access to robust learning environments.

Many students of color, low-income students, immigrant students, including English-language learners have minimal access to high quality learning environments. Structurally, access to these schools and classrooms is impeded by patterns of re-segregation and tracking. Racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic segregation in schools have long been documented (Mickelson, 2001; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells & Crain, 1997). Even more alarming socioeconomic and linguistic segregation has rising in recent years, especially for Latino students (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Orfield, 2001). The high levels of segregation are exacerbated by within school tracking practices, which reproduce inequality along racial and class lines, providing some students with rigorous instruction, and others with much lower quality “drill and kill” types of instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Oakes, 1992). Structural practices of re-segregation and tracking systematically block access to such schools and opportunities to engage with high status knowledge.

While there are efforts to transform these structural practices, these systems are deeply entrenched and are often met with fierce resistance. For instance, **Michael J. Dumas, a Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster member and Professor of Education**, described the long and systematic political efforts of Seattle's more affluent, white community to delegitimize and dismantle the city's school desegregation efforts. Noting how both class and race were invoked in their efforts, he suggests that middle-class and affluent White Seattleites used the language of rights and justice alongside structural mechanisms like school choice to preserve their own privilege and reproduce inequities (Dumas, 2011). Efforts to minimize tracking practices are also met with resistance. For example, in her case study of one school district instituting a rigorous, equity-oriented instructional approach, Tina Trujillo, a Professor of Education and Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster member, demonstrates how district and school actors undermined efforts to advance the reform. She notes how teachers and leaders, often articulating their underlying beliefs in student ability to explain their positions, resisted increased pedagogical rigor and detracking practices that would provide nondominant groups like English Language Learners more robust learning environments. Resistance to the reform often led district leaders to prioritize district harmony over the equity-oriented policy (Trujillo, 2012).

Marginalized groups encounter racial biases about their abilities.

Beyond resistance to detracking and integration, implicit beliefs regarding the ability of African American and Latino students take shape in schools and classrooms. The character of racial inequities in school discipline practices have been well-documented in recent years. Black students, boys and girls, are much more likely to encounter harsher discipline and to be suspended

and/or expelled (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Recent research by Na'ilah Nasir Suad, the Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster Chair and Professor of Education and African American Studies, also interrogates this dynamic. Examining an all-Black, all-male class providing an alternative space for school discipline practices, Nasir and her colleagues note how educational experiences in this context contrast with prevailing disciplinary practices, which are often based on perceptions of Black males as defiant and thus deserving of harsh punishment (Nasir, Ross, McKinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013).

Relatedly, Nasir also illustrates how youth of color and other marginalized groups encounter beliefs about their academic ability and intellectual assets in classrooms. Nasir and Shah (2011) note how racialized narratives that denote African Americans as low-achieving in math and other racial groups as high achieving were invoked and utilized in classrooms to explain academic achievement and justify the allotment of learning opportunities to particular students.

Beliefs regarding student ability, and knowledge impact teachers' instructional practices, which can impede students from engaging in deep learning. Jabari Mahiri, Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster member and Professor of Education, reveals this dynamic in his work comparing school-based and out-of-school literacy practices of African-American youth. In particular, he notes how the out-of-school literacy practices, in which students frequently engaged and expressed a deep commitment to, were marginally present or validated in traditional school settings, serving to alienate students who might otherwise be fully engaged in robust literacy development (Mahiri & Sablo, 1996). Kris D. Gutiérrez reveals similar trends

when considering the deep learning practices and knowledge assets of English Language Learners. In revealing the social and academic constraints inherent within traditional approaches to the ELL community that prioritize English learning as the primary goal, Gutiérrez suggests that teachers' assessment and activation of students' full linguistic toolkit actually enables more literacy-based exploration and development in robust learning environments (Gutiérrez, 2009; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). In new work funded by the MacArthur Foundation, Gutiérrez and colleagues have studied the new media practices of Latino and low-income communities. This work examines how youth and families develop and leverage their repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) across the home and after-school programs. Studying youth and families across settings has highlighted the disconnect between new media/technology initiatives and practices proliferating across federal, state, and local levels and the everyday media practices of families. There are many threats to the "connected learning" necessary for rich engagement and equitable forms of learning (Ito, Gutiérrez, et al., 2013). For example, the pre-adolescent youth studied engaged collaboratively with siblings, peers, and parents in new media activities. This stands in stark contrast to the preferred and normative 1-to-1-participation structure that characterizes technology use in schools.

This disconnect is further exacerbated by English only or English dominant practices in new media activity, rather than using youths' full linguistic toolkit to engage in consequential learning. In contrast, Gutiérrez found that children's interaction with parents and siblings and the tools they use play an important role in socializing children into technology use and for the development of children's digital practices. Mothers, in particular, play a significant role in children's access to new media, as mothers' mobile phones provide a hub of access to

information and communication among family members.

A key contribution of this work lies in its reframing of families' in general and their new media practices in particular. Gutiérrez' team found that the Latina/o families with whom they worked employ creativity and ingenuity to expand the possibilities of their current circumstances through their use of technology in the home. The parents, specifically mothers, orchestrated what they deem as the responsible use of digital technologies in the household in order to ensure the academic success and safety of their children. This orchestration included setting of parameters, as well as organizing opportunities to interact with digital media that facilitate learning. Of interest, mothers in this study also reorganized ordinary practices with digital media to re-purpose tools and their possibilities, engaging in process of "inventos" (Schwartz & Gutiérrez, 2015), or the way in which nondominant communities engage their creativity and ingenuity to create everyday objects for learning. This work aims to contribute to a shift in public discourse about the role of Latino/a parents in their children's learning and to educational policy and practice around technology.

Educational Policy Can Alleviate Educational Inequity

Key Findings



Educational policies must account for and address the impact of social and economic factors on students and communities.



Increasing equity requires the allocation of adequate and stable resources.



Utilizing a broader research and methodological base can generate more sound policy and implementation.



Policies must increase marginalized youth's access to high-quality learning environments.



Professional development and increased flexibility can create more robust, culturally responsive learning environments.

WHILE POLICIES HAVE INTENDED to improve schools and alleviate inequities, the research highlighted in this brief provides insights into why educational policies may be missing their mark. Yet, do these research findings suggest that educational policy cannot mitigate educational inequities? Can educational policy in fact improve learning opportunities for all students?

Despite the evidence demonstrating how and why policy initiatives have failed to advance educational equity, **research suggests that it is possible to reduce educational inequity through policy. Policies should advance fiscal investment, balanced research usage, and more comprehensive educational remedies as means to combat the persistent inequities that continue to plague our educational system.**

Policies must address broader factors impacting students and communities.

Students and families are deeply affected by social, political, and economic challenges, including structural racism in all facets of social life. These experiences necessarily impact how students engage in learning and must be acknowledged and addressed when forming and enacting educational reform. To address the well-documented impact of social, racial, and economic disadvantages on academic achievement, educational policies should incorporate efforts to address the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of students alongside school improvement efforts. A comprehensive approach can more holistically address the obstacles that many students face. It will also more realistically combat educational inequity by broadening “what counts as educational policy” (Anyon, 2005).

This broadening of the scope of educational policy includes a range of possible approaches, including wraparound services, or efforts that explicitly increase

A 20% increase in per-pupil spending over the duration of student's education leads to approximately:

0.9

more years of completed education

25%

increase in job earnings

20%

reduction in adult poverty

investments in health services and programs that foster the social and economic development of students across various stages of their lives. Research has highlighted the impact of wraparound services including early childhood intervention, efforts to engage families, and extended learning opportunities (Dryfoos, 2000; Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005). These efforts increase students' readiness to learn, meet the emotional and social needs of students experiencing hardships, support parents in the academic and behavioral development of their children, and promote culturally relevant interactions between schools and their constituents. To facilitate these efforts, policymakers should enable cross-sector collaboration that acknowledges the many factors that impact students and in turn supports the development of the whole child.

In supporting policies that address the broader needs of students and families, policymakers must also acknowledge and specifically attend to structural inequalities experienced by marginalized groups. The application of universal interventions, even when subgroup data is reported or when wraparound strategies are proposed, may inaccurately prescribe remedies that obscure how different groups experience various social contexts. Instead, policymakers should craft and implement policies that are targeted and universal. John A. Powell describes targeted universal policies as those that are inclusive of the needs of both dominant and marginal groups in particular social and community contexts, paying particular attention to the

experiences of marginalized groups (Powell, 2012). Policymakers and school officials must assess the needs of communities and prescribe strategies that address the specific social and economic challenges faced by the students and families while promoting efforts to improve school quality and academic achievement.

Schools must be adequately funded.

Disrupting educational inequity requires that sufficient resources and revenues are distributed based on student need, are efficiently utilized, and are invested in a variety of resources that enhance school learning environments. Policymakers must address disparities in educational funding to ensure that all students have access to robust learning environments and educational opportunity. In particular, they must adopt and implement funding systems that equitably allocate resources to schools and districts, targeting significant funding to schools with high concentration of low-income, minority students. We know from research that increased fiscal allotments to schools can have a significant impact on educational attainment and life earnings. For example, a study conducted by Rucker Johnson and colleagues, notes that a 20 percent increase in per-pupil spending over the duration of student's education leads to approximately 0.9 more years of completed education, a 25 percent increase in job earnings, and a 20 percent reduction in adult poverty (Jackson, Johnson, & Persico, 2014).

Increased school spending can also positively impact the day-to-day learning experiences of students. Specifically, when invested wisely, increased funds can minimize opportunity gaps by providing schools with sufficient resources to implement a rigorous curriculum, to hire and retain well-trained teachers and school leaders, and to provide additional resources to student populations who require more high-quality support (Yaffe, Coley, & Pliskin, 2008). To ensure that increased resources are used for these important inputs, policymakers must institutionalize equitable funding systems and buffer school budgets from financial crises to ensure schools can invest in key resources and avoid relying on more vulnerable or temporary funding sources. Furthermore, they must ensure that sufficient resources accompany policies so that school and district officials are not forced to channel money away from these inputs to meet policy requirements. Finally, they must also develop evaluation and monitoring systems to ensure that funding and resources are utilized in the provision of meaningful educational opportunities for all students, including investing in teacher professional development and the rigorous learning opportunities. Doing so is key in that resource inequality is an important mechanism of structural racism.

Policies must be based on a broader range of research.

Enacting and implementing educational policy that mitigates inequity also requires that policymakers utilize a diverse, rigorous research base that facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of how schools, students, and communities are situated within complex ecologies. To do so, policymakers must solicit and utilize research from a variety of methodological approaches to develop a more comprehensive grasp of how initiatives may impact schools, communities, and students.

A diverse research base should include research from a variety of methodological approaches. The research from the Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster members in this brief reveals the important role that qualitative research can play in informing policy by illuminating how inequities can be perpetuated despite explicit policy efforts to address them. As argued by Michael J. Dumas and his colleague Gary Anderson, qualitative inquiry can enhance policy knowledge, or “the information and ideas useful in framing, deepening our understanding of, and/or enriching our conceptualization of policy problems” (M. Dumas

& Anderson, 2014). This line of inquiry can provide key insights into how reforms will be undertaken and enacted in our educational system. Specifically, Kris Gutiérrez and Shirin Vossoughi (Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014), explore the limitations of traditional ethnography in capturing the movement of diasporic communities, as well as their stable and hybrid practices. They argue that multi-sited ethnographic sensibilities are important to developing ecologically valid research and policy to understand the regularity and variance in cultural communities. Specifically, multi-sited sensibility inquires into the ways people, ideas, tools, artifacts, and practices move and become re-constituted across the boundaries of school, home, and community spaces and even across the multiple contexts within a single setting. Using expansive notions of human development and culture, this work argues for the use of interpretive and multi-sited ethnography to challenge reductive one-size-fits-all policy and practice.

Policymakers must address disparities in educational funding to ensure that all students have access to robust learning environments and educational opportunity.

Such work also can provide critical insights into the political and normative dynamics that affect reform enactment and implementation. Political, normative, and ideological resistance to the ideas or approaches embedded within reforms (particularly those that attend to racial disparities) can impede equity-oriented initiatives from actually taking hold and improving learning contexts. Policies should anticipate and attend to political and normative aspects of reform to develop policies that can better inform educational practices (Oakes, 1992).

Policies must support the development of robust learning environments.

To ensure that all students can consistently engage in deep learning, policymakers must form and institute policies that facilitate the creation of robust learning environments. As demonstrated in this brief, classroom and school-level practices can perpetuate educational inequalities, particularly for marginalized groups, as deeply held ideas about student ability, behavior, and

acceptable learning practices are activated and perpetuated. To address these practices, policymakers must invest in building teachers and leaders' capacity to authentically engage a variety of learners in an equitable and respectful manner. Jabari Mahiri's recent research reveals the positive impact that deep investment in teacher and school development can have in creating optimal learning environments for some of our most disadvantaged and marginalized students. Focusing on the systematic way in which initially reluctant and discouraged teachers in an alternative school environment developed facility and confidence in the use of various digital tools, his research reveals that a commitment and investment in immersive professional development can change teachers' mindsets and positively inform their practice (Mahiri, 2011).

Increased flexibility in pedagogical approaches for teachers and schools can also facilitate the creation of more supportive learning environments. Qualitative case studies by Na'ilah Suad Nasir reveal what is possible when school environments are able to establish school cultures and supportive learning spaces that allow for student behavior and academic prowess to be reinterpreted through positive frames and deeper understandings of students and their communities (Nasir et al., 2013; Nasir, 2004). The positive impact of increased flexibility on students' deep learning is also demonstrated in research

noting deep student engagement in literacy practices associated with participatory action research and culturally relevant learning practices that allow students to develop critical thinking and authentically apply of their learning (Mahiri & Conner, 2003; Wright & Mahiri, 2012). At the school and neighborhood level, it is also critical to attend to issues of detracking and desegregation in order to ensure access to high-quality teaching within schools and across neighborhoods.

Overall, to disrupt persistent educational inequities, policymakers must enact school improvement policies that facilitate the enhancement of teaching and learning quality. This requires investment and commitment to systematic teacher and leadership development that focuses on pedagogical skills as well as addresses teacher and leader mindsets that may impact the creation of self-affirming learning spaces for all students. Policymakers can provide guidelines for ongoing professional development that deepens teachers' knowledge of the communities they serve, broader systems of disadvantages faced by their students, and robust pedagogical practices that engage all learners. Simultaneously, policymakers must grant districts and schools greater autonomy in determining professional development and pedagogical approaches that best serve their teachers, students, and communities. Providing guidelines while empowering those closest to the work can facilitate the development of rich, culturally responsive teaching and learning practices.

Ensuring that all students have their educational rights fulfilled through more equitable policies and improved schools can enable our system to transform from one that harms, dehumanizes, and marginalizes to one that confers to dignity to all groups and communities.



Conclusion

THE LATE W. NORTON GRUBB, a Professor Emeritus of UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Education and founding member of the Race, Diversity, and Educational Policy Cluster, argued that the U.S.'s long-standing belief that education could remedy social and economic problems was misguided. He and his co-author revealed how our society's faith-like commitment to this belief has led to the virtual neglect of any other form of social policy and often reinforced social inequality. While attempting to dispel this idea, they simultaneously suggest that schools do have a role to play, noting that educational policies should incorporate more expansive goals and approaches to engaging all learners in various communities to address social inequality and the maintenance of our democracy (Grubb & Lazerson, 2007).

Much of the research highlighted in this brief also suggests that our educational system cannot combat critical issues alone. While our schools are undoubtedly important institutions in furthering social equity, advancing educational policies that locate problems and solutions of inequity solely within schools obscures the historical and socioeconomic legacies that impact schools and communities, particularly for low-income and minority groups. In doing so, they fail to address how broader factors impact communities, schools, students, and families.

Each of the policy recommendations and approaches presented in this brief show how policy can attend to the broader factors affecting schools and communities alongside school improvement efforts. In committing to these policies, policymakers can mitigate the impact of structural disadvantage and better support the learning and development of all students, including those from nondominant populations.

Embracing this broader approach to educational policy also expands how many have understood and tried

to address educational equity. Acknowledging and attending to how social and economic disadvantages impact marginalized youth and how local practices can exacerbate these obstacles challenges mainstream approaches that emphasize achievement gaps as the primary criterion for assessing educational inequity. It more accurately considers the many ways educational inequities are created and maintained. More importantly, enacting policies with this broader understanding of equity can provide a clearer picture of how to mitigate the persistence of inequities for many of our most vulnerable communities.

At its core, educational equity is about ensuring that all students and communities are able to have positive educational experiences regardless of race, class, ancestry, or creed. Positive learning experiences enable students and communities to flourish and confers a sense of dignity (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014), particularly to marginalized groups who have struggled to see their humanity and ability acknowledged and celebrated within society and our educational system. Ensuring that all students have their educational rights fulfilled through more equitable policies and improved schools can enable our system to transform from one that harms, dehumanizes, and marginalizes to one that confers to dignity to all groups and communities.

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Contact

460 Stephens Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720-2330
Tel 510-642-3326
haasinstitute.berkeley.edu

