

THE EQUITY DIVIDE: A CALL TO ACTION

Derrick Love, Grand Canyon University of USA

The educational divide continues to establish itself as a prevalent force in the neighboring communities of low socioeconomic status across this great country. The difficult task of closing the educational gap and attainment of high school African-American graduates -- compared to their white counterparts -- continue to face mounting challenges in 2020. Moreover, the disparity continues for those African-American and other minority students who persist in college and complete 4-year degrees. Statistics show that the national graduation rate for African-American students is 78% compared to 89% of white students The Public High school (2019). African-American students were 2nd to last with American Indian/Alaska Native at 72%. This historical context is critical to determining the measurable steps to move forward in addressing the equity divide in America.

The historical journey began with eliminating Jim Crow laws, the prominent case *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965 Ferguson & Martha (2004). The Supreme Court pronounced that the legally authorized public school system of segregation was unconstitutional. These milestones shaped the educational landscape for African-American students. African-Americans perceived these milestones as a means of social and academic advancement. They believed they would have the same opportunities, privileges, and equal access to quality education as their white counterparts. The elimination of the Jim Crow laws began the free enterprise of equity for African-American students in the educational arena. The intentions of these acts and laws were established to provide minority students with a fighting opportunity to achieve in an integrated system and advancement in higher education.

However, African-American students and other minority students are still playing catchup while the equity divide persists in America today. One of the most critical elements that contribute to the equity divide is the educational funding formula, which separates the wealthy and privileged from the poor and disadvantaged. Formally, public schools were seen as institutions that served their host communities and, as such, were funded by voluntary or charitable contributions and donations from the town dwellers.

But by the late 19th century and onward, they were financed by local property taxes. This was an advantage for public schools at first because of the large populations that lived in these small communities. But over the years, more people have left these local communities to live in major cities and suburbs. So, the population of inhabitants funding these public schools through local property tax has dramatically decreased.

Furthermore, those who moved to the suburbs began to fund the already developed, adequately equipped, and well-staffed public schools in the cities. This created a drastic inequality and divide in the American educational system. In every state, though, inequity between wealthier and poorer districts continues to exist. That's often because education is paid for with the amount of money available in a district, which doesn't necessarily equal the amount of money required to adequately teach students (2019).

Presently, if you live in the poverty area of any city, you will notice that the educational attainment, facilities, and resources are limited. Which primarily impacts black and brown

communities. These schools are typically filled with inexperienced teachers who do not understand the cultural relevance of teaching minority students.

Over the last 50 plus years in education, the achievement gap decreased between minority students and the dominant culture. However, “*effectively educating African-American students remains one of the most pressing tasks facing educators at all levels*” Millner & Howard (2004). If you walked into any district or campus professional learning community meeting, one of the topics of pressing concerns, is how are we going to increase the student achievement of our African-American and minority students. Educators and policymakers continue to ignore the culture relevance instruction and strategies missing in our classrooms today.

If we truly want to fulfill the intentions of Brown vs. Board of Education accelerating academic performance, then we need to change the educational pedigree to achieve success. Also, we must close the educational divide and fight for the equalization of educational resources that our students supposedly received over 50 years ago. One of the primary questions we must be willing to ask ourselves is, how much longer we would allow the educational system to bypass African-American and other minority students. We continue to propose and advocate for minimal growth, and the results from year to year, unfortunately, still remains unfavorable for African-American students compared to their white counterpart, who appear to be living the dream of the latter.

Indeed, the campaign for equality and leveling the playing field is becoming – besides being elusive – a far distant cry throughout our educational system. And because of this, education reform is one of the major platforms in today’s presidential election and debate. Truly, one may ask, how can we begin to invest in reform without examining and evaluating the educational funding irregularities and disparities? Especially if states continue to struggle with this ongoing problem that persistently perpetuates a system of injustice.

Funding disparities in low socioeconomic schools across America present challenges for students, teachers, administrators, and academic communities (Foley, 2004). Minority schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) are less likely to have qualified personnel, higher teacher attrition rates, lack of resources, crowded classrooms, and supplies. Since the Civil Rights Movement, urban schools’ districts promoted hardships from inadequate funding, which decreased the lack of quality instructional resources due to lower tax wealth (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005). School districts today are still facing and tackling the issue of efficiency and equity as it relates to school finance. Most certainly, these types of financial disparities in funding contribute to the lack of readiness that leads to unsuccessful degree completion in higher education (Foley, 2004). These differences create academic deficits for minority students and impact college entrance readiness, which directly impacts teaching and learning for these students.

The gap of challenging curricula, instructional practices (culture relevance instruction), and more advanced placement courses have negatively impacted minority college students. African-American students are less likely to take the advance placement and/or dual credit courses. These students are missing vital resources such as, adequate books, facilities, and quality teaching personnel, which is viewed as a determining factor and one of the reasons African-American students are not successful in college (Foley, 2004). According to Milner & Howard (2004). Today, a half-century since the Brown ruling attempted to make desegregation the law of the land, African-American students, the very group who were supposed to benefit most from Brown, are arguably the most underachieving group of students in U.S. schools (Foley, 2004).

The same perception and mentality continue to propagate itself in higher education. African-American college students attending colleges and universities have gained some of the proposed benefits of Brown vs. Board of Education, but racism and inequality still prevail for minority students (Milner & Howard, 2004).

African-American and other minority groups deal with obstacles and challenges while attending educational environments. Creating diversity and closing the equity divide would be great. However, it demands the active will of the people to rise and let their voices be heard that will no longer accept the status quo but demand equity today.

REFERNCES

The Public High School Graduation Rates, May (2019).

Ferguson, R.F., & Metha, J. (2004). An unfinished journey: The legacy of Brown and the narrowing of the achievement gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(9), 656-670.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/08/property-taxes-and-unequal-schools/497333/>

Foley, N. (2004). Black, white, and brown. *The Journal of Southern History*, 70(2), 343-351.

Ascher, C., & Branch-Smith, E. (2005). Precarious space: Majority black suburbs and their public schools. *Teachers College Record*, 107(9), 1956-1973.

Milner, R.H., & Howard, T.C. (2004). Black teachers, black students, black communities and brown: Perspectives and insights from experts [Electronic version]. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 73(3), 285-297.