



College of Human Services, Education & Public Policy
Education Policy Brief

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NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

Across the nation, school districts are being released from court supervision of their desegregation efforts. As a result, many urban school districts are becoming re-segregated as students return to their neighborhood schools. While neighborhood schools may alleviate problems with busing children for long periods of time over long distances, this policy can create some new problems. At the forefront are the educational implications for students from low-income families. This policy brief primarily explores the research on the effects of poverty on education. It also explores some lessons that have been learned in other places that have neighborhood schools' policies.

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

POVERTY & EDUCATION

Many educational characteristics that are attributed to race are actually related to poverty. For example, students in segregated minority schools are 11 times more likely to be in schools with high percentages of students from low-income families. The two issues are often interrelated and frequently misunderstood.

In high-poverty¹ urban schools,

Children tend to perform worse academically than students in low poverty schools;

Children tend to read less, get lower grades, have lower attendance rates, and spend less time on homework;

Levels of peer competition and peer group support for educational achievement are much lower;

Children are more likely to have serious developmental delays, untreated health problems, and move more often during the school year;

More funding is invested in remediation classes and less in advanced classes;

Administrators have more difficulty hiring qualified teachers;

Teachers are more frequently absent than in rural high-poverty schools;

Student behavior problems occur more frequently particularly in the area of absenteeism, classroom discipline, weapons possession, and student pregnancy; and,

Students are less likely to feel safe at school.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

It is often assumed that parental involvement will increase if children attend neighborhood schools. Another common assumption is that student achievement will increase because parents who are more involved are essentially more able to work with their children on learning activities at home. However, in high poverty schools, increasing parental involvement is more complex.

Teachers in high poverty schools are more likely to report that lack of family involvement was a serious problem.

Low-income families are often underrepresented among those involved with the schools. However, adequate training and encouragement can bring about increased family involvement in schools.

LESSONS FROM OTHER PLACES

Denver, Colorado

Since establishing neighborhood schools in Denver,

¹ “High poverty” refers to schools with more than 40% poverty concentration.

- * Schools' composition has come to reflect the community's composition. In some schools 8 out of 10 students receive free or reduced lunches (a low-income indicator);
- * The achievement gap between schools has increased;
- * Transportation costs have only minimally declined. Many students are still bused to their charter, magnet, or neighborhood schools.
- * More Title I programs and special education classes are needed in the high-poverty schools, restricting offerings in other areas.

Kentucky

The achievement gap that separates students from low-income families from other students can be closed. In Kentucky, top performing high-poverty schools:

- * Make extensive use of standards to design curriculum, instruction, assess student work, and evaluate teachers;
- * Increase instructional time in reading and mathematics;
- * Devote more funding for teachers' professional development focused on improving instruction;
- * Establish comprehensive systems to monitor student progress and provide help to struggling students before they fall behind;
- * Focus efforts to involve parents on helping students meet standards, and;
- * Have accountability systems with real consequences for adults in the school.

DELAWARE SITUATION:

It is impossible to predict what effect neighborhood schools will have in Delaware. However, current achievement data related of students from low- income families can illuminate potential outcomes that might be further exacerbated by the creation of schools with high levels of concentrated poverty.

Percentages of DE Students Scoring BELOW the Standard on DE Student Testing Program*

The tables below compare the DSTP performance of low-income and not-low income students. They clearly reveal that at each grade level and in both content areas students from low-income families are less likely to meet the state standards than are students from not-low income families.

Table 1. DSTP 1999

READING		3RD GRADE	5TH GRADE	8TH GRADE	10TH GRADE
	LOW INCOME	49%	55%	58%	68%
	NOT LOW INCOME	21%	26%	28%	40%
	<i>GAP</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>28%</i>

MATHEMATICS		3RD GRADE	5TH GRADE	8TH GRADE	10TH GRADE
	LOW INCOME	56%	62%	84%	88%
	NOT LOW INCOME	25%	34%	55%	64%
	<i>GAP</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>24%</i>

Table 2. DSTP 2000

READING		3 RD GRADE	5 TH GRADE	8 TH GRADE	10 TH GRADE
	LOW INCOME	37%	51%	53%	61%
	NOT LOW INCOME	15%	21%	24%	33%
	<i>GAP</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>28%</i>

MATHEMATICS		3 RD GRADE	5 TH GRADE	8 TH GRADE	10 TH GRADE
	LOW INCOME	43%	57%	80%	85%
	NOT LOW INCOME	18%	27%	51%	59%
	<i>GAP</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>26%</i>

“Below the Standard” is defined as students scoring 1 or 2 on Delaware State Testing Program. Percentages are rounded to the nearest full percentage point. Data source -- DSTP online reports provided on the Delaware Dept. of Ed. website.

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- * What would be the educational impact of a neighborhood schools plan in the City of Wilmington? How many schools will be characterized as “high-poverty urban schools”?
- * Currently the health, behavioral, social, and educational challenges associated with students from low-income families are distributed somewhat evenly across the county. How will the intensified needs within these high-poverty urban schools be addressed? What are the staffing and financial implications?
- * What are the potential long-term effects of creating high-poverty schools in the City of Wilmington? Social Effects? Economic Effects?
- * With the state’s commitment to holding high expectations of all students, what will be done to ensure that students who attend high-poverty schools will have access to educational programs and services that will fairly and adequately prepare them to meet the state’s content standards?
- * There is a mismatch between where schools currently exist and where students live. What are the financial implications of rectifying this issue?
- * How does the state intend to monitor the impact of policies that have the potential to re-segregate schools and create schools with high levels of concentrated poverty?