

# Evaluation & Research Department

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## RESEARCH ON POVERTY AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Scholars of educational achievement have long observed a relationship between family poverty and student achievement. While the precise nature of the relationship is unclear, many efforts to measure it have been undertaken. Part of the problem probably lies in the fact that poverty is often conflated with race, another student characteristic that has been shown to be associated with student achievement. It must be emphasized that, while the precise nature of the relationships between poverty/race and student achievement are unknown, it is clear that the relationships are not causal. That is, poverty/race do not cause lower achievement. Rather, the variables (poverty and academic achievement) co-exist. Thus, it is not possible to declare that, above a certain percentage of low-income students, a school's performance must decline. Indeed, there exist schools that serve a very large population of impoverished students who are performing well academically.

Policy makers, however, cannot wait until the relationships are clarified to enact programs and policies intended to support student learning. To assist the Wake County Public Schools Board of Education and professional staff in understanding the impacts of poverty and achievement, this bibliography has been prepared. Without making any claim that the bibliography is exhaustive, we have tried to survey the vast literature devoted to the topics of poverty and school achievement. For the most part, we have included here documents that study poverty, schools, achievement and change. Some of these documents are book-length; the Kahlenberg and Rothstein works cited below are examples. Other documents are articles published in the scholarly journals. Some of these articles are from scholars for whom education is not a primary concern. The articles by Galster, Quercia, and Cortes, and Lowe are examples of work by those in urban planning and economics who have addressed issues only indirectly related to schooling. Other works included here (see the Reeves entry) represent the work of scholars who have devoted much attention to the study of schools struggling to overcome the effects of poverty on school achievement.

It is hoped that this annotated bibliography will serve as a starting point for those interested in learning more about the complex issues that underlie the decisions made by policy makers, teachers, and principals as they all work for the improvement of education for all students. In addition to these resources, a number of items related to poverty and achievement may be found on the E&R web site <http://www.wcpss.net/evaluation-research/>.

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WAKE COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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A BRIEF LOOK AT:

1. **Center on National Education Policy. (1996). Do we still need public schools? Washington, DC: author.**

This policy paper provides a description of the history of American education. Discussion includes a number of different benefits of public education, including improvement of social conditions, to educate the citizenry of the republic, to promote cultural unity, to increase economic self-sufficiency, and to enhance individual happiness. The authors then examine each of these goals to determine that they are/are not still valid. Includes 14 references.

2. **Card, D., Mas, A., & Rothstein, J. (2007). Tipping and the dynamics of segregation. Working Paper 13052, Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.**

The authors used regression discontinuity, a statistical procedure, to examine census data from 1970 to 2000 to test for discontinuities in neighborhood racial composition. In most cities, they found, white population flows showed “tipping-point” characteristics, with a distribution of tipping points ranging from 5% to 20% minority share. The authors found similar processes (but not necessarily tipping points) for school enrollment as for neighborhoods. The authors also found that cities with more tolerant whites exhibited higher tipping points. Includes 58 references.

3. **DeLuca, S. (2007). All over the map. Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution. Retrieved August 17, 2007 from <http://www.printhis.clickability.com>.**

This is an exploration of aspects of the larger study by Sanbonmatsu, Kling, Duncan, and Brooks-Gunn of the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program in which poor families were provided with housing vouchers that enabled them to move out of high-poverty neighborhoods. Following the move, there appeared to be no impact on children’s education attainment. DeLuca concludes that the new neighborhoods were only slightly less impoverished and that the lives of program participants were so chaotic that the program had only slight impact.

4. **Ding, W., & Lehrer, S. (2005). Class size and student achievement: Experimental estimates of who benefits and who loses from reductions. Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University.**

The authors reanalyzed the STAR data on benefits of class size reduction and found that, while politically appealing, such reductions do not benefit the most needy students. Indeed, the authors suggest that the greatest beneficiaries of reduced class size measures are higher ability students. The authors also assert that they found no significant benefit in reduction from 22 to 15 students in any subject area and no additional benefits for minority or disadvantaged students. Includes 21 references.

5. **Entwisle, D.R., & Alexander, K.L. (1992). Summer setback: Race, poverty, school composition, and mathematics achievement in the first two years of school. American Sociological Review: Vol. 57, No 1, pp. 72-84.**

The authors conducted a longitudinal study of a random sample of students in Baltimore, MD. Starting in first grade, mathematics achievement levels of African American and white students were almost identical. Two years later, the African American students had fallen behind by about half a standard deviation. The authors believe that the most important source of variation is the difference in family economic status. Includes references.

- 6. Flinspach, S.L., & Banks, K.E. (2005). Moving beyond race. In Boges, J.C. & Orfield, G. (Eds.), School Resegregation: Must the South turn back? Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.**

Using data from Wake County schools, the authors found that socio-economic characteristics and race were intertwined, such that while 5 percent of white students but 50 percent of Latino and black students qualified for free/reduced price meals.

- 7. Futernik, K. (2005). Excellence loves company: A tipping point turnaround strategy for California's low-performing schools. Sacramento, CA: Author.**

Applying Gladwell's Tipping Point theory to reform of low-performing schools, the author proposes creating schools that feature well-operated teams, time for team work, a physical environment conducive to teaming, class size reduction, autonomy and shared governance within the school, leadership, a well-rounded curriculum, external support and parent/community involvement. It is the interaction of these nine characteristics that the author believes will create schools effective at educating students at risk of failure because of socio-economic characteristics. Includes 38 references.

- 8. Galster, G.C., Quercia, R.G., Cortes, A. (2000). Identifying neighborhood thresholds: An empirical exploration. Housing Policy Debate, Volume 11, Issue 3, p.701-732.**

The authors explore the threshold-like effects of four aspects of neighborhood environment: poverty rate, adult nonemployment rate, female headship rate for families with children, and secondary school dropping out. Analyzing the changes in the neighborhoods over time, the authors propose using public policy resources in a very targeted way to influence neighborhood health. Includes 33 references.

- 9. Greenwald, R., Hedges, L.V., & Laine, R.D. (1996). The effect of school resources on student achievement. Review of Educational Research, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 361-396.**

The authors conducted a meta-analysis of several studies that assessed the relationship between a variety of school inputs and student achievement. The 60 studies considered all controlled for socioeconomic characteristics or were longitudinal in design. The analysis found that a range of resources were positively related to student outcomes, and found evidence that even moderate increases in spending may be associated with significant improves in achievement. Includes references.

- 10. Jacob, B. & Lefgren, L. (2007). In low-income schools, parents want teachers who teach. Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution. Retrieved August 17, 2007 from <http://www.printhis.clickability.com>, 8/17/2007**

The authors analyzed two data sets: parents' requests for specific teachers for their children and teacher evaluations by principals. They found that parents in high poverty schools were more likely to request teachers believed to be able to increase student achievement whereas parents are more likely to request teachers who are able to "satisfy" the student. These different choices may be related to the perception that higher income families value aspects of schooling that are not

measured by achievement tests (varied curricula, positive self-concept, etc) whereas less-well resourced parents recognize the need for schooling that will better prepare their children to succeed at advanced levels of education.

**11. Kahlenburg, R. (2001). All together now: Creating middle class schools through public school choice. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.**

Relying heavily on sociological, educational, and policy research, the author argues that impoverished students will adopt the values, attitudes and behaviors of more prosperous fellow students if the balance between poor and middle class students includes a larger portion of middle class students. References included.

**12. Kahlenburg, R. (2007). Rescuing Brown v. Board of Education: Profiles of twelve districts pursuing socioeconomic school integration. Washington, D.C.: The Century Foundation.**

The author provides profiles of three districts (Wake County, La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Cambridge, Massachusetts) that have successfully adopted policies of student assignment based on socioeconomic status. In addition, profiles of nine other districts (including Charlotte-Mecklenburg) are provided. These schools have adopted some student assignment policies related to socioeconomic factors, but with only limited success. References included.

**13. Klem, A.M., & Connell, J.P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. Paper presented at the Tenth Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence. Baltimore, MD.**

The authors report a study that involved students at all school levels and their teachers. Of particular interest was the degree to which the relationship between students and teachers enhanced student achievement. Specifically, the teachers were instrumental in improving engagement rates experienced by at-risk students. Includes 64 references.

**14. Lee, J.C., & Staff, J. (2007). When work matters: the varying impact of work intensity on high school dropout. *Sociology of Education*, Volume 80, pp. 158-178.**

The authors hoped to study the effect of intensive work (more than 20 hours per week) on the likelihood that a student would drop out of school. The question is important because of the possibility of conflation of pre-existing conditions in the student who is likely to work that are associated with dropping out. Thus, it is unclear whether dropping out is caused by intensive work or other, pre-existing conditions. In their study, the authors found that students from economically-disadvantaged families are more likely than others to engage in intensive work but that such work may actually serve to enable them to stay in school. Includes 37 references.

**15. Linn, R.L. & Welner, K.G. (Eds.) (2007). Race-conscious policies for assigning students to schools: social science research and the Supreme Court cases. Washington, D.C: National Academy of Education. Includes 94 references**

The National Academy of Education constituted a committee charged with reviewing and analyzing the social science research that was cited by various litigants in two Supreme Court cases focused on student assignment. While centered chiefly on the results of race-conscious student assignment, the

report observes that assignment based on socio-economic factors is “likely to marginally reduce racial isolation and may have other benefits” (p. 3). Includes 94 references.

**16. Lowe, J. (2005). Social justice and neighborhood revitalization. Paper presented at the American Planning Association’s 2005 National Planning Conference, San Francisco, CA.**

The author argues that neighborhood composition and revitalization are indicators of social justice. Further, arguing against the Tipping Point hypothesis, he observes that 75% of racially integrated neighborhoods in 1980 were still mixed ten years later. However, even in neighborhoods that have experienced gentrification, the economically disadvantaged did not experience rapid displacement. The author concludes by identifying a number of policy actions that can both stabilize and revitalize neighborhoods. Includes 18 references.

**17. Matsui, B.I. (2002). The Ysleta story: A tipping point in education. Claremont, CA: The Institute at Indian Hill/Claremont Graduate University.**

This study focuses on a school district in Texas many of whose students exhibit risk factors often associated with school failure: poverty and limited English proficiency. Using Malcolm Gladwell’s Tipping Point theory, the author identified five tipping points that led to academic excellence: an emphasis on diverse means to reach common ends; high expectations for all students; continuous assessment; designed redundancy; and, complementary norms. Includes 15 references.

**18. Meyers, S. L., Jr. (2004) The effect of school poverty on racial gaps in test scores: The case of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests.**

Using HLM regression statistical strategies, the author examines the test scores of schools in Minnesota in an effort to account for differences in measured achievement among groups of students. While he finds that socioeconomic status accounts for a portion of the achievement gap, it is clear that the interactions between socioeconomic factors alone do not account for all of the gap, suggesting that race/ethnicity is implicated in the achievement gap as well. Includes 65 references.

**19. Reeves, D.B. (2000). The 90/90/90 schools: A case study. In (EDITORS) Accountability in action: A blueprint for learning organizations. CITY: Advanced Learning Press.**

Reeves has studied, over the course of many years, a group of schools characterized by the fact that they include at least 90% impoverished students, 90% students of color and 90% of students meet state testing standards. Among common characteristics of these schools, Reeves notes a strong focus on academic achievement, clear curriculum choices, an emphasis on nonfiction writing, frequent assessment of student progress and opportunities for improvement and collaborative scoring of student work with explicit guidelines. Includes references.

**20. Rhodes, V. L. (2007). Student mobility: The elephant in NCLB’s living room. ERS Spectrum, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 1-10. Includes 19 references.**

While many educators believe that excessive student mobility leads to decreases in student achievement, the author identifies a number of policies and practices common in schools that

influence achievement and that can be used to diminish the impact of mobility. Includes 19 references.

**21. Rothstein, R. (200 ). Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap. New York: Teachers College and The Economic Policy Institute.**

The author studies the black-white and low- to middle-income achievement gaps from a broad perspective. His analysis of how social class shapes learning outcomes looks at the differences in learning styles and readiness across students as they enter school for the first time. Further, he considers the influence of income, health, safety and other gaps affecting students as they proceed through school. Even the racial and income gaps facing adults play a role, particularly as students look to their elders for signs of a payoff to education and sometimes find the evidence lacking. Consequently addressing the achievement gap requires a transformation of social and labor policy along with extensive school reform. Includes references.

**22. Rumberger, R.W., & Palardy, G.J. (2005). Does resegregation matter? In Boges, J.C. & Orfield, G. (Eds.), School Resegregation: Must the South turn back? Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.**

The authors analyzed population statistics and student achievement data to argue that students of color, as a group, are poorer than white students. Because more students of color attend racially segregated schools, they also attend schools that tend to be under-resourced. The achievement levels in these schools are lower than levels at schools serving wealthier students. However the authors found that by controlling for differences in school structure, socio-economic composition of the school can be overcome.

**23. Sanbonmatsu, L., Kling, J.R., Duncan, G.J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007) New kids on the block. <http://www.printhis.clickability.com> 8/17/2007.**

The authors studied a total of 4248 families that entered a lottery to receive housing vouchers that would enable them to receive subsidized rent. About a third of the families received unrestricted vouchers, while another third received vouchers that required them to find housing in low-poverty neighborhoods. However, the bulk of the families chose neighborhoods served by schools that were only marginally better than the schools they left. So, despite changes in quality of neighborhood, the schools were only slightly better, thus restricting the academic improvement experienced by children of the families.

**24. Willie, C.V., Edwards, R., & Alves, M.J. (2002) *Student diversity, choice and school improvement*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.**

The authors lay out the case that concentrations of any population characteristic—racial or socioeconomic—result in systemic inequities. Student diversity provides, the authors maintain, a path to equity and may be used to increase excellence. Case studies are provided of school districts in Florida, South Carolina, and Massachusetts that have adopted controlled choice plans of student assignment.