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The Educational Effects of the Socio-Economic Gap

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, only 9 percent of students from low income communities earn a bachelor degree compared to the 77 percent of students from the “top income quartile” (Belkin). This is evidence of an unjust education system. In Illinois, schools are funded by property tax, mostly hurting inner-city CPS students. In 2015 mayor Rahm Emanuel closed 54 schools in primarily low-income communities (Kelly). This mass closure caused many students to scramble to other low income schools, as a result larger class sizes and lower budgets per students. In addition to the education system failing low income students, they have to search for a way to not become a product of their surroundings. From staggering teen pregnancy rates to the alarming increase of violence, low income students have many barriers against them. Because of the different aspects of lower income communities, the value of education decreases based on your socio-economic status. With the numerous aspects that contribute to the negative correlation between the value of education and socio economic status, there are as many possible resolutions to this problem.

As new programs and opportunities are emerging it would be common to guess that the college attendance rate for low income students would increase. This is actually not the case. In a study done by the U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau the college attendance rate for low income students “have been decreasing since 2008.” Between 2008 and 2013 the college

attendance rate decreased for economically challenged students by more than 10 percent (Nellum, Hartle). This is disproportional compared to the three percent of middle income and high income students. The current attendance rate is only three percent higher than 20 years ago. The socio-economic education gap is an epidemic that will strongly affect the low income community. As one we must develop a plan to reverse this path.

There are many factors that contribute to the lack of higher education in an urban community. **The quality of low income schools is one of the most prominent factors of this difference in attempt and completion of higher education.** Many states fund public schools based on the neighborhood's property taxes. It's no secret that property in wealthy communities are more valuable, in currency, than less fulfilled areas. By funding schools by their surrounding it is communicating to students that their demographics determines their educational worth. This, from elementary school, creates a disadvantage. Students who attend low-income communities are starved of many resources because of lack of funds. **Chicagotribune.com points out that** "wealthy districts in Illinois spends more than 25,000 dollars per students, while the neediest districts spend less than 7,000 (Black)." In Illinois the neediest communities happen to be mostly in the inner-city. These communities include Garfield Park, Austin, and west Humboldt. Students in these neighborhood, in addition to many more, are robbed of their education. Acts like *No Child Left Behind* have proposed objectives and procedures that have failed time and time again. According to one of the Education Funding Advisory 2002 memorandum, by 2014 the *No Child Left Behind* wanted all children to "meet state standards and achieve at high levels (Leninger)." As of 2016, this is still not the case. Neighborhood schools education is still slacking behind, partially because of the budget deficit.

In addition to the unjust education, obviously low income students face economic challenges. Aid like the Pell Grant and federal work study often fall too short when helping low income students. With grants, federal work study, and loans, low income students often still face the burden of an out of pocket cost. According to a study done by the U.S Department of Education, the average low income student receives \$12,300 in grants at public four year university. \$12,300 is miniscule compared to the almost \$30,000 tuition (Department of Education). With the average low income family only making about \$23,300, it is impractical to believe that Low income families can afford to survive while putting a student through college (Alhanti). Many low income families scramble for the funds to have a meal day to day, adding the worry of tuition could be the straw that financially broke the camel's back.

Specifically in Illinois, the tug of war in the education funding is causing many deficits that affect the ability of low income students to plan and go to college. According to the Americanprogress.org, this budget battle was caused by Mayor Rauner's 2016 Fiscal budget. This included the partial defunding of higher education. Although both State Chambers prohibited the budget, "the governor and legislature have not yet been able to come to a consensus (Flores)." This budget battle has resulted in many students questioning their attendance to college because of the possibility of discontinuing the Monetary Award Program. Also the budget battle cause Chicago State, a college of predominately low income minorities, to end a semester early and question the college's future. The Wall Street Journal reports "More than 1,000 low-income students fail to return for second semester as grant funds freeze (Belkin)." The lack of financial security from the state is causing many students to give up on their education. The budget battle is causing a great barrier between low income students and college graduation, and unnecessary barrier.

In low income communities there is a tendency of lower test scores. This can be a result of many factors. As stated above, this is an effect of the budget deficit in low income schools. Also, this can be result of the complications that many low income communities face. In Maslow Hierarchy of needs, you must first fulfill your physiological needs first. This includes shelter and food, two of the most stressed necessities (Maslow). Low income families worry daily about how they're going to make ends meets or feed themselves. Their financial situation cause constant burdens. Once our physiological needs are fulfilled we can then worry about our safety. This, in low income communities, is a huge problem. The violence in these communities are increasing at a staggering rate. Students from neighborhoods like West Garfield, one of the most violent neighborhoods in Chicago, have to fight a constant battle with safety. As they make their daily journey to an underfunded school they must watch their backs. They trot back and forward to school knowing that at any second their life can be snatched away. If students can't rely on their basic needs, how can they be expected to realize their capabilities? Many students of low income schools are constantly worrying about their basic needs, therefore they cannot entirely focus on their education. This can be one of the causes of socio-economic test score gap. Further, this is one of the cause of many students from lower income communities not striving for higher education.

As we grow up we search in our surroundings for role models. If there is a lack of college graduates in the low income communities, the students do not have a variety of idols. As children we look up to adults and glorify their lifestyle. In a community with an absence of college graduates, children do not have the ability to see an example of how a college education can benefit them. Also, first generation college students are less likely to succeed in college. Schools, secondary and post- secondary, are creating programs to assist first generation students. With

programs like TRIO, a mentoring program, first generation students are more likely to succeed in college. In a quantitative case study performed by Jacqueline O. Dansby and Gloria Dansby-Giles, professors from Jackson State University and St. Mary's University, they studied different minorities groups in regards to their success in college. From their study they realized that many drop outs, secondary and post-secondary, felt as if the lack of information assisted to their decision to drop out. Many students reported seeking out help from counselors, but because of the load of work counselors were too busy (Dansy). If students cannot seek crucial information at home or at school, they are much more likely to give up on attaining that information. It is important that students have outlets of knowledge to be successful. **It is imperative that students have someone that has been through what they are going through. That will provide them with not only guidance, but also motivation.** The lack of people to educate students of the process of college, the less likely they are to succeed.

With every problem there is a solution, of some sort. Although there is no definite or simple solution to the socio- economic education gap, there is way to help lessen the gap. One of these solutions being mentoring programs. As Stated above many low income students lack sources of knowledge about college. Many mentoring programs will pair students with college graduates or elder college students similar to them. This gives students a personal connection to information. Students receive firsthand account from people who have had similar struggles to them. Mentor programs have created pathways for students who would otherwise not be able to attain knowledge of the college experience and process. In a 2010 study on Boston two year college students who had mentors “had a 77 percent persistence rate compared with 67 percent for 2008 graduates (Claybrooks).” **In this study two year students who are able and willing to consult with a mentor or an advisor received support that further helped them. The mentor was**

there to help them not only with questions towards their academia, but also with questions dealing life. This is evidence of how a mentor, in low income communities, can positively affect a student's education.

In addition to mentorship, extracurricular activities have been proven to have a positive effect on student's value of education. In the same quantitative study by Jacqueline O. Dansby and Gloria Dansby-Giles, they surmised that students react well to extracurricular activities. Students reported that the extracurricular "enhanced their level of comfort" transitioning into college. The work load of an extra-curricular and school prepares many student for the heavy workload that comes with college (Dansby). If the amount of extracurricular activities in low income high schools were to increase, many students who decide to attend college won't be as overwhelmed by the work. They would have learned many fluid skills like time management and prioritizing. This can result to a higher college retention rate of low income students.

One of the most effective ways to increase the value of education is to alter how lower education schools are funded. It is crucial to analyze the people whom "controls the flow and distribution of taxpayer money" and question their decisions. Only "34 percent of dollars spent on education in Illinois comes from the state (Illinois Funding)." If more money is spent on education, low income students can have access to a better education. On a broader spectrum in order to create an equal learning system, states like Illinois will have to stop funding schools based on property tax. A student's neighborhood should not determine the quality of education they receive. States should fund school equally, giving low income students the same educational opportunity as others. In addition, the Education memorandum the Education Advisor Board gave many suggestions of how to improve Illinois education systems. One of their suggestions is to better fund the special education system in low income schools (Leninger). Many students

need for special education in low income communities are overlooked. The lack of budget also limits their opportunities, therefore causing them to fall even more behind their wealthy counterparts. Fixing the education funding is the pathway to greatly decreasing the educational gap.

Money is a constant flow. Adding any currents to this flow will cause a shortage of flow elsewhere. Any extra funding to education will result in the cut of funding in other areas like projects that better Illinois or the increase of taxes for the people. Specifically in Illinois, there are many suggestions to how we can increase the funding of education. Christopher A. Kotch, the State Superintendent of Education, suggest that Illinois “increase education funding by \$291 million through the existing income tax.” This will result in the “a \$633 million decrease of the income tax is not extended (Illinois State Board of Education).” This is one of the many budgets suggestions. This specific suggestions may or may not be the proposal that will work, but this suggestion depicts how public education is Pareto efficient. Pareto efficiency is an economic state in which “there is no way to make anyone better off without harming another”. Because public education is funded by taxpayer dollars, the better funding of public education will cause a switch in the public money flow. This also explains one reason why there is such a battle in Illinois about funding education. Although extra funding to education will result in losing money elsewhere, it will be funding our future.

The socio economic education gap is causing a crises within low income students. This gap is a crises without direct cause. There are many factor that contribute to the lack of value in education in low income communities. We first must analyze the potential causes so that we can plan the reform of low income education. Children are the future, therefore the quality of their education is directly correlated with the future success of our country. Once we diminish the

education gap, low income students can have the same opportunities to thrive as their counterparts.

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