
Unequality of the U.S. Educational System

From the perspective of students that experience the consequences of ongoing discrimination, affirmative action is needed to protect opportunities that is likely to vanish if an affirmative act does not exist, or gets re-written and becomes unequal.

The U.S. educational system is one of the most unequal in the industrialized world, and students routinely receive dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status. In comparison to European and Asian nations that fund schools equally, the wealthiest 10 percent of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent, and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states.

In spite of differences in funding, teacher quality, curriculum, and class sizes, the main view is that if students do not achieve, it is their own fault. Even so, educational experiences for minority students have continued to be separate and unequal. Two-thirds of minority students attend schools that are primarily minority, most of them located in central cities and funded well below the line aside those in neighboring suburban districts.

Recent analyses of data for school cases in Alabama, New Jersey, New York, Louisiana, and Texas have found that on every measure—from qualified teachers to curriculum offerings—schools serving greater numbers of students of color had significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly white students. As William L. Taylor and Dianne Piche noted in a 1991 report to Congress: “Inequitable systems of school finance inflict disproportionate harm on minority and economically disadvantaged students”.

Many of the states with the extensive inequalities in educational expenses are large industrial states. In these states, many minorities and economically disadvantaged students are located in property-poor urban districts which are the worst in educational expenditures (or) in rural districts which suffer from fiscal inequity. Take for example Paterson, New Jersey. This city could not afford the qualified teachers needed to offer foreign language courses to most high school students, with Princeton, where foreign languages begin in elementary school.

States that eliminated Affirmative Action in part of college admissions process, these schools have seen a decrease in minority enrollments. In the state of California, where nearly 50% of the population is Hispanic, only 11% of freshmen are attending state colleges. Affirmative action programs do not guarantee favoritisms based on race.

The law states that affirmative action programs must be flexible, using goals and timetables, but

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not quotas. Surely, unfair preferences in admission do exist for some groups, but, in fact, such preferences almost always favor Caucasian students. Race and gender should not be the sole selection criteria (that would be a quota system), but they do deserve to be among the many factors that are taken into account in college admissions, and also awarding grants and other types of financial aid, like scholarships. Harvard University and other schools, for example, assess race as a factor among others, including geographical region provided the applicant meets other admissions criteria.

Patitu and Terrell (1998) explained that the goal of affirmative action in higher education is to "increase the number of people from underrepresented groups in higher education and to diversify colleges and universities" (p. 41).

As a concept, affirmative action first emerged in 1961 in President John F. Kennedy's Executive Order 10925 as a means to end discrimination in government employment and contracting (Peters, Wooley). Executive Order 10925 called for government contractors to voluntarily ratify affirmative action in the recruitment, hiring, and promotion of minorities.

In the 1978 case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell wrote a critical opinion, arguing that the "atmosphere of 'speculation, experiment and creation' — so essential to the quality of higher education — is widely believed to be promoted by a diverse student body. It is not too much to say that the nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the ideas of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples" (p. 2760). Since the *Bakke* decision, the educational benefits of diversity have provided prime defense for affirmative action at selective institutions across the country.

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