

PRESS RELEASE



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A RICHNESS OF POVERTY IN OUR SCHOOLS

Education is a proven path to upward mobility for all students. “Our schools can’t do it all, or all by themselves” according to a 2017 [commentary](#) by Mike Petrilli. Mr. Petrilli is correct. I would add to his statement you can’t do it without a great teacher either.

Nick Hanauer, an entrepreneur and a venture capitalist, wrote in [The Atlantic](#) in July 2019: “However justifiable their focus on curricula and innovation and institutional reform, people who see education as a cure-all have largely ignored the metric most predictive of a child’s educational success: household income.” Mr. Hanauer is also correct.

I would point out to Mr. Hanauer that poverty is no indicator of potential or intellectual capabilities. Also, I would suggest other studies which point out [the impact of two-parent families](#), that many children in poverty lack. That research points out that “A solid, intact family structure can have a significantly positive impact on a child’s present and future wellbeing and offers countless benefits for both adults and children.

However, Hanauer’s statement is just as powerful: “The lower your parents’ income, the lower your likely level of educational attainment.” There has to be a correlation, and schools cannot do it alone nor should we expect them too. Lawrence Mishel, an economist at the liberal-leaning Economic Policy Institute is cited in [The Atlantic](#) article by Hanauer. In it, Mishel chastises conservatives for failing to address inequality. He states they focus instead on what they call “the opportunity gap.”

Defining inequality is key to policy debates. I would define it for educators simply as “The unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to; school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, books, and technologies to socially excluded communities. These communities tend to be historically disadvantaged and oppressed.” Disadvantaged communities can be urban or they can be rural. It could be argued our rural schools are often overlooked. Perhaps inequality or opportunity gaps isn’t an either-or situation? Instead of setting up in ideological camps, we admit there is truth on both sides and work to address both issues. It is the chicken and the egg scenario: kids are poor and do not get quality education, thus get worse jobs in life. Does it really matter how we break the vicious cycle? Policymakers could address both issues simultaneously. Petrilli cites “The overwhelming research consensus still stands: Students who attain valuable postsecondary credentials have a much better chance of making it into the middle class and beyond.”

The [Schott Foundation for Public Education](#) pointed out that the “Opportunity gap is the greatest crisis facing America’s schools.” They argue, we “Must close the opportunity gap in education if we want to close achievement gaps.” Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Education at Stanford University has rightly suggested: “The opportunity to learn - the necessary resources, the curriculum opportunities, the quality teachers that affluent students have, is what determines what people can do in life.”

Mishel’s theory suggests that “Promoting mobility and opportunity through more and better education is a false promise.” I reject that flawed theory. I have seen first-hand, how education can change the trajectory of someone’s life. I am not sure the research supports his theory either. Education changed my economic mobility.

I do agree with Hanauer’s point: “We must invest not only in our children, but in their families and their communities.” While improved early-childhood education or access to college is beneficial, I think they are secondary to what

SUMMARY

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policymakers must address: the unequal distribution of academic resources, school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, books, and technologies.

And we must factor in Petrilli's suggestion: "All too often, then, the outcome of our current strategy—what you might call "bachelor's degree or bust"—is that a young person drops out of college at age twenty with no post-secondary credential, no skills, and no work experience, but a heavy burden of debt. That's a terrible way to begin adult life, and it's even worse if the young adult aims to escape poverty."

Debates and discussions are useful from the schoolhouse to the White House. In the end, it only matters if it helps your house. We have a richness of poverty in our nation and that is unlikely to change anytime soon unless we start working together to get the necessary resources, the curriculum opportunities, and the quality teachers in every classroom in America.

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