

# The Same Starting Line



**How School Boards Can Erase the Opportunity Gap  
Between Poor and Middle-Class Children**



## Acknowledgements

This project is funded by a generous grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, without which this report would not be possible. We would also like to acknowledge the spirited contributions of Appleseed Centers in Alabama, Chicago, Connecticut, Georgia and New Mexico. In addition, we had the staunch and creative support of a law firm that provided legal and policy background assistance from start to finish. We also received both support and information from various community groups around the country. As well, we spoke with public school district officials, state and federal officials and countless others. It is our hope that the people we talked to will see their thoughts, experiences and wisdom reflected in this report. Edwin Darden, Appleseed's Director of Education Law and Policy, led the research and writing of this report with the assistance of the following Appleseed Centers:

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## About Appleseed

Appleseed Foundation is a non-profit network of 16 public interest justice centers in the U.S. and Mexico. Appleseed is dedicated to building a society where opportunities are genuine, access to the law is universal and equal, and government advances the public interest.

Appleseed uncovers and corrects injustices and barriers to opportunity through legal, legislative and market-based structural reform. Working with our huge pro bono network, we identify, research and analyze social injustices, make specific recommendations, and advocate for effective solutions to deep-seated structural problems. Together, Appleseed and Appleseed Centers form a network for positive change, building a society that provides each individual access to justice and a genuine opportunity to lead a full and productive life.

Published January 2011

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Appleseed

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# Preface

This project focuses on the policies and practices of school boards (or mayors or others who govern public schools), and how their priorities can make a tangible difference in the academic success of kids living in poor communities. Instead of focusing on deficits of poverty, we wanted to stress school board action as an effective supplement that can give all students an equal opportunity to succeed. That led us to examine learning-related education resources<sup>1</sup> (aside from direct dollars) and how they are distributed by neighborhood.

Appleseed's "The Same Starting Line" report invites school board members, educators, communities and policymakers to shift the conversation about public schools from what kids lack to what schools and school boards, superintendents and other key decision-makers must provide. Constant talk of an achievement gap emphasizes standardized test results as the premiere measure of academic prowess and future potential. It also invokes class differences. Poverty is frequently cited as the central reason for test score disparities. Experts attest that children from economically struggling homes arrive at school with a smaller vocabulary, fewer world-expanding experiences, less math and science away from school, and an unfortunate environment where survival sometimes trumps high educational ambitions.

In focusing on learning-related education resources, we refer to items that affect education profoundly, that are disseminated by school board approval, but are not dollars *per se*. Among them: distribution of principals and teachers by experience and credentials; placement of new buildings and ongoing refurbishment; Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses; and school counselor-student ratio.

Not surprisingly, after looking at one sample school district in five states, we cannot point to a common single element as THE culprit. But the national Appleseed office in concert with Appleseed Centers in Alabama, Chicago, Connecticut, Georgia and New Mexico found that each location exhibited some form of resource disparity between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods. Hearteningly, we also found that each of the school systems provided equity in at least one dimension.

The opportunity gap between middle-class and high-poverty areas is not restricted to the locations in the study. They can potentially appear wherever wealth differences exist in a single district. Given demographic trends in the U.S., the most likely locations are large urban or suburban school districts and county-wide school districts.

To be clear: We are not saying the difference in resources is necessarily due to discrimination. Other, more benign reasons could account for differences. For example, resource gaps can recur over several years as budgets are developed using the same template or, because middle-class communities are better organized to influence decisions about pilot programs or superior curricula.

Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based Century Foundation, in May 2010, told the *Christian Science Monitor*, "High-poverty schools get worse teachers ... are more chaotic ... [have] lower levels of parental involvement ... and lower expectations than at middle-class schools – all of which translate into lower levels of achievement."

levels of parental involvement ... and lower expectations than at middle-class schools – all of which translate into lower levels of achievement.”

The devastating impact of poverty is also growing. According to the **2010 *Conditions of Education***, published by the U.S. Department of Education, more than 16,000 public schools "struggle in the shadows of concentrated poverty." Since 2008, the percentage of schools where at least 75 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals has grown from 12 percent to 17 percent.

For Appleseed, it comes down to fairness. The essential mission of a public education is to provide every child, regardless of background, with a chance to reach his or her full potential. Horace Mann, an early advocate for our modern system of free, widely available public schools, said, "Education...beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of conditions of men -- the balance wheel of the social machinery...It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich; it prevents being poor."

Our goal is to spark systematic changes so that children in poverty can routinely leap high above their starting circumstances. To do so, we must provide parents and high-poverty communities with information; engage them at "mobilization moments" when they should be at the table; and give well-meaning school board members the means to bring greater equity, and genuine opportunity for all.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each day children in poverty attend urban, suburban and county schools deserving (and likely expecting) education resources that match the quality available to their more affluent cross-town rivals in the same district. Since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, this vision of equity has been the implied legal promise of public schooling in the United States. Yet, two generations after *Brown*, students are still attending schools where resources are not evenhandedly apportioned. In 2011 the wedge can largely be explained by household income, rather than race.

The “Same Starting Line” focuses on policies and practices of school boards (or mayors or others who govern public schools), and how their priorities can make a tangible difference in the academic success of kids living in poor communities. Unlike other studies that review distribution of money or look at school finance lawsuits that seek greater funding from the state, we took dollars out of the equation. Instead, we examined learning-related resources and how they are distributed by neighborhood. Examples of board-controlled, learning-related resources: principal and teacher assignment by experience and credentials; placement of new buildings and ongoing refurbishment; availability of advanced placement or International Baccalaureate courses. These items can profoundly affect education quality, but are often overlooked because they are decided by school boards one-at-a-time. The decisions are worth paying attention to because learning resources are an important way of identifying an opportunity gap that, in general, gives well-off students a better chance of academic success.

This is not about taking away from one group and giving to another. Nor is the idea to set up a competition for finite resources. Rather, our position is that equity and fairness calls upon school boards – going forward – to be deliberate and more conscious of how resources are distributed and can have an impact on the quality of education and the life chances of kids who start out on the bottom.

We thus recommend ways to spot differences between educational offerings in middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods and discuss how that awareness can help reverse the discernable pattern in which decent schools are located in well-off areas and a lesser education awaits students in poverty.

# Summary of Findings

**Finding #1: Unfocused school board decisions about allocating personnel, curriculum, facilities improvements and other resources can create inequity between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods.**

The quality of personnel, the content of the curriculum and the condition of facilities that children attend, all influence the level of education offered, and ultimately the opportunity to succeed academically.

**Finding #2: District policies and practices too often fail to account for resource differences between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods and how the gap affects the opportunity to succeed.**

Big decisions can be easily overlooked because they occur one at a time or are packaged in a routine manner and approved by the school board as a group. The result is that inequity is a repeating pattern that gets locked in year-after-year as institutional habit. This occurs in part because equity has not been front and center on the agenda of many of the nation's more than 14,000 school boards.

**Finding #3: Chronic inequity in resource distribution correlates with meaningful differences in teacher absenteeism and lesser teaching credentials and teacher experience.**

How often a teacher is absent from the classroom, what credentials the teacher holds and how long he or she has been leading students all matter when assessing what opportunities are available to kids.

# Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation #1: School boards, parents and communities must take swift and purposeful steps to assure curriculum, personnel, buildings and other learning-related resources are allocated equitably.** Schools and communities should make a serious assessment of resource equity. Ways to do that include: (a) Using Appleseed's Resource Equity Assessment Document (READ) to evaluate your school district's status on equity between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods; (b) Pursue creative ways to achieve equity in distribution of personnel and other learning-related education resources; and (c) Explore the community school concept, which leverages the social service resources of the community at a high-poverty school site, as a means of addressing some outside issues that interfere with learning.

**Recommendation #2: District policies and practices must be aligned to maximize equity throughout the district; while federal and state education officials and political leaders should all stress equity as a key priority for success.** School boards should adopt and aggressively abide by an equity policy that is more than just a statement of philosophy, but which has clear implementation steps and is enforceable. In addition, districts need to examine policies and admission practices for advanced courses and gifted programs, which often serve as a gateway to career success.

**Recommendation #3: School districts should closely monitor, by neighborhood, teacher absences, teacher distribution by experience, and credentials and begin making equitable adjustments through hiring, strategic transfers and incentives.** School boards should develop a decisive strategy to address unheralded inequities such as teacher absences. In addition, districts should use various means to assign high-quality teachers to high-poverty schools.

# Introduction

Each day children in poverty attend urban, suburban and county schools, deserving (and likely expecting) education resources that match the quality available to their more affluent cross-town rivals in the same district. Since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*<sup>2</sup>, this vision of equity has been the implied legal promise of public schooling in the United States.

Yet, two generations after *Brown*, students are still attending schools where resources are not evenhandedly apportioned. In 2011 the wedge can largely be explained by household income, rather than race. School boards and superintendents – perhaps inadvertently – at times distribute pivotal human, curricular, infrastructure and other learning resources unfairly, causing an opportunity gap in the quality of education offered to kids living in “middle-class” versus “high-poverty” neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup>

Disparities in educational quality exist on a broad geographic scale - for example, among cities, throughout states and across district boundary lines. But this report defines a more concentrated permutation of the problem. We do not compare the usual measure of dollars received. Instead, this examination considers elements such as teacher credentials, curricular offerings and school building conditions as bridges to educational opportunity.

Strikingly, some youngsters within the same district have better-credentialed and more-experienced principals and teachers, are the preferred recipients of exciting experimental programs and advanced curricula and learn in better-maintained environments. Schools fitting this profile are generally in middle-class neighborhoods.

We defined middle-class and high-poverty schools based on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced meals. The free and reduced meal calculation is widely accepted in education as a reliable method of measuring poverty status.

The national office of Appleseed, along with Appleseed Centers in Alabama, Chicago, Connecticut, Georgia and New Mexico, examined the issue.

Here is the essential problem statement:

- School boards distribute personnel, curriculum and other resources year-to-year and often follow a pre-set pattern.
- Resource allocation includes familiar recurring needs, but often will also feature special opportunities such as pilot programs or new offerings.
- Key learning resource decisions are made by the board of education (commonly one-at-a-time), perhaps explaining why parents and communities often underestimate the seismic impact of key pronouncements.
- School board members are elected in most jurisdictions, meaning a political dimension may infuse their decision-making.

- The most active voters and most vocal stakeholders routinely live in and send their kids to school in more middle-class neighborhoods.
- Their political activism, coupled with a board's likelihood to follow previous resource distribution practices, works to the comparative disadvantage of people in poor neighborhoods.
- Teachers may transfer to progressively more middle-class schools as they build seniority, forsaking schools in tougher neighborhoods perceived as less safe or desirable.
- When permitted, some of the most ambitious and well-prepared children from higher poverty neighborhoods leave their own community to attend the higher-wealth schools, leaving behind an academically struggling population with various out-of-school challenges as well.

Over the long haul, what subtly happens is that more curricular offerings (AP, IB and courses in general) are housed in middle-class neighborhoods; the talented and properly credentialed teachers and principals congregate in middle-class neighborhoods; and the building conditions are more conducive to learning in middle-class neighborhoods.

Teacher absenteeism also has a tremendous impact on the quality of instruction that the student receives. Every day a teacher is absent translates into an interruption in the student's consistent and regular learning process. Even under the best of circumstances (quality substitute teaching, coherent and transferable lesson plans), a student will experience disruption in her or his learning.

Other meaningful differences abound.

The result is that inequity is locked in as a permanent and compounding feature. The encouraging news is that this fundamental unfairness can be remedied, at least in part, if boards of education adjust local policy or practice. No state or federal action is necessary.

In some ways, we found, school districts are excelling in equity. A good example is school counselors, those key adult advisors who provide academic and other information and support to high school students. Not a single district we examined had a disparity in the number – although it is impossible to tell the quality. Plus, students at high-poverty schools are more likely to have greater challenges than at middle-class high schools, perhaps indicating that greater resources are necessary. In some of the most dire learning circumstances, more than 90% of students live under the poverty line and 20% (or one in every five students) arrive with an emotional, physical or learning disability.

It should be noted that our emphasis differs from statewide finance lawsuits. The premise of those challenges is that state government, which holds primary responsibility for education, is not providing adequate or equitable funding for districts to successfully educate every child. By contrast, our approach involves a single district and is not directly concerned with money. We instead look at the learning-related education resources that money purchases, such as comparable curricula, qualified and motivated personnel and building upgrades.

Another way in which our approach varies from school finance lawsuits is that regardless of how much money – or how little – arrives from state, federal and local sources, the board of education is obligated to allocate those resources equitably.

Why is it important that we compare schools in high-poverty neighborhoods with those in middle-class neighborhoods? For one thing, resources can be viewed as a fairly reliable indicator of quality and tends to influence outcomes. Research demonstrates that better raw materials – in the form of personnel, building condition or curriculum, for example – are much more likely to yield better outcomes. Standardized test scores along with graduation and college-going rates of poor kids versus kids in middle-class or affluent families tend to validate that observation.

This Appleseed study is important because the changes we seek can potentially reap economic dividends. By eliminating or reducing the resource gap, more students have an opportunity to achieve academically and to become productive citizens who contribute to the financial prowess of this nation.

President Barack Obama, speaking to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in March 2010, put it this way: "... [F]or America to compete and to win in the 21st century, we know that we will need a highly educated workforce that is second to none. And we know that the success of every American will be tied more closely than ever before to the level of education that they achieve. The jobs will go to the people with the knowledge and the skills to do them – it's that simple."

This is not a "Robin Hood" approach that asks elected officials to take from the rich and give to the poor. It does, however, call on government to fulfill its essential mission of treating all young citizens fairly, particularly those who start with deficits. Giving middle-class citizens an even greater leg up – even if it happens inadvertently – only serves to make the American dream of social mobility illusory.

The larger meaning is that these kinds of resource opportunity gaps likely exist all over the country and are rarely acknowledged. Federal and state governments are taken to task for not providing enough money or support, but seldom are school board member decisions examined in sufficient depth to see a pattern of giving more resources to students who start out ahead and providing fewer learning resources to those who begin behind.

We know from research that poverty often sabotages student success. The May 2010 *Conditions of Education* publication, compiled annually by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center on Education Statistics, concluded that 91 percent of students from low-poverty schools graduated with a diploma in 2007 compared to 68 percent of students from high-poverty schools. In addition, enrollment in a 4-year college immediately following high school graduation was 52 percent for low-poverty schools contrasted with 28 percent for high-poverty schools.

## Our Objectives

Appleseed has three objectives for this report. First, we seek to raise awareness of these potential disparities so that schools boards, administrators, parents, state and federal education officials and the communities can investigate whether incongruities exist and address them. By highlighting key disparities in five locations, we provide examples of how the problem might manifest in locales across the country. Second, Appleseed hopes to motivate, mobilize, and support community-based advocacy by providing a tool (the Resource Equity Assessment Document – READ, *see Appendix II*) that allows any school district or community to conduct its own equity assessment. Finally, and importantly, Appleseed hopes that as a result of this report on intra-

district resource inequities, school boards, states and the federal government will adopt and act on a resource equity policy, ensuring that all students within a single school district are given an equal opportunity to develop and excel academically.

## METHODOLOGY

Our Erasing the Opportunity Gap project involved a two-pronged approach. First, we reviewed the social science research on learning related resource equity and found little scholarship on the subject. We added nationwide legal research, and discovered that we could not identify an instance when plaintiffs sued on an assertion that local learning-related education (aside from actual dollars) resources were distributed differently between high-poverty and middle-class neighborhoods. As well, because of the nature of the problem, courts would likely struggle to define the legal claim, meaning voluntary policy solutions are likely more efficient and effective.

Second, Appleseed Centers conducted on-the-ground research in all five communities, taking a data-collection approach in four locations and using interviews and reliable written sources in the fifth. Our data collection in most cases spanned three years, in order to identify trends.

We started with the premise that resource disparity within a single school district is an issue worthy of attention. That initial sense that public school systems in some ways provided more to the middle-class and less to poor neighborhoods was confirmed in several findings. Encouragingly, though, many areas we examined were either equitable or the difference was negligible.

This issue of resource equity is neither one-dimensional nor easily defined. Schools, individuals or groups looking to replicate the work in their own communities must investigate thoroughly and broadly. Where resource differences exist, they should be examined to see if students in high-poverty neighborhoods are on the losing end – adding learning resource deprivation to an already frustrating long list of disadvantages. *See more about methodology in Appendix I.*

## Summary of Findings

Finding #1: Unfocused school board decisions about allocating personnel, curriculum, facilities improvements and other resources can create inequity between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods.

Finding #2: District policies and practices too often fail to account for resource differences between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods and how the gap affects the opportunity to succeed.

Finding #3: Chronic inequity in resource distribution correlates with meaningful differences in teacher absenteeism and lesser teaching credentials and teacher experience.

Below, we discuss each finding in more detail:

**Finding #1: Unfocused school board decisions about allocating personnel, curriculum, facilities improvements and other resources can create inequity between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods.** The quality of personnel, the content of the curriculum and the condition of the facilities that children attend, all influence the level of education offered, and ultimately the opportunity to succeed academically. We started with the premise that as public institutions, school districts need to assure that distribution of these critical resources are equitable and do not skew to one neighborhood or the other. While on many items the scale was balanced, it was equally clear that work remains to guarantee that children in high-poverty neighborhoods gain the resources to compete with those in middle-class areas.

**Having proper facilities to support learning is an important, but often unnoticed asset. We found that often a school district's older building stock was located in the high-poverty areas.**

## GEORGIA EXAMPLE

### *Cobb County, Georgia*

In Cobb County, Georgia, the average age of a school building in the middle-class neighborhood is roughly 28 years old. By contrast the average age in the high-poverty area is 41 years old.

In the middle-class cluster, four of the eight school buildings or complexes used were renovated in the past ten years. The one school building that has not been renovated, Simpson Middle, was built in 1988 and was slated to break ground on a nine classroom addition. Interestingly, Lassiter High was renovated in 2001, increasing its space by 10,000 square feet, yet its stated capacity according to the school district's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report actually decreased slightly.<sup>4</sup> Three of the eight schools in the middle-class cluster are scheduled to receive classroom additions or renovations within the next three years.

The high-poverty cluster's school buildings and complexes are older than their middle-class counterparts. But ten of the sixteen have been renovated within the

last five years and four of the schools are scheduled to receive classroom additions in the next three years. So while the schools in the high-poverty cluster are older, they are on a seemingly reasonable renovation cycle.

Many facility renovations and replacements, major and minor, are slated to begin over the next four years. Absent a more granular level of assessment of current facility health, however, it is impossible to know whether the fact that 75 percent of schools in the middle-class cluster are slated for Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) renovation or replacement in the next four years, and only 31 percent of high-poverty schools are on the schedule, is due to the superior negotiating strength of middle-class schools, or better-funded diagnostics of their own infrastructure, or simply that the spate of recent renovations in high-poverty schools included HVAC installation.

*“Many schools in high-poverty areas are visually depressing and unsafe. Some are falling apart all around the students and staff. How does a teacher convince a kid or a parent whose child is sitting in a leaking trailer or dodging falling plaster that we really believe all children deserve a high quality education? What do such disparities say about the level of expectations the nation or the state (upon whom these schools rely for funding) has for the students and teachers who are in these schools?” “*

Reaping What We've Sown: How Schools Fail Low-Income Parents”, Renee Moore, October 14, 2009, *Teacher Magazine*

Similarly, little information is available regarding the existence or state of laboratory facilities in the middle and high schools of the two clusters. Performing arts venues are easier to discern because some are slated for renovation; the same proportion of schools in each Cobb County cluster (37.5 percent) appear to have an arts facility improvement or renovation as a priority. Even this, however, says little about the overall current state of arts facilities. To the district's credit, it has recently made an effort to provide major renovations to the older facilities used by students in the high-poverty cluster.

## *Accelerated Courses*

Classes that give academically talented students a chance to extend learning beyond the standard program should be distributed fairly. Too often, fewer advanced courses or less challenging offerings are the fate for kids living in high-poverty neighborhoods – a practice that aggravates the already existing opportunity gap.

Accelerated courses such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and gifted programs challenge students in ways that traditional school curricula do not. In addition, the potential for college credit for AP or IB courses taken in high school can prove a significant savings in college costs after graduation.

Several commentators have reported that the school curriculum for students growing up in poverty tends to be more general or vocational and less geared towards preparing students for college.<sup>5</sup> Ross Wiener, in the *North Carolina Law Review*, reports that “only 64 percent of students from low socioeconomic status families attend schools where trigonometry is offered, and only 44 percent attend schools where calculus is an option.”<sup>6</sup> The percentages are much higher for middle-class schools.

It certainly might be true that students in middle-class areas are better prepared to take advantage of college-level or more-highly challenging offerings. But that fact would simply underscore the point that poverty combined with less rigorous studies in elementary and middle school dooms children from low-wealth neighborhoods to a lesser education overall – unless something is done.

## **NEW MEXICO EXAMPLE**

### *Albuquerque, New Mexico*

Enrollment in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and gifted classes are important factors in assuring equal opportunity between the middle-class and high-poverty clusters.

In Albuquerque, two high schools were studied: La Cueva High, which has a middle-class student population; and Rio Grande High, which has a high-poverty student population. Although both high schools have similar total student enrollment, there is a wide discrepancy in AP class enrollment.

School district data indicate that students in the high-poverty Rio Grande cluster are less likely to enroll in their school's advanced classes and gifted programs than counterparts in the middle-class La Cueva cluster.

Most tellingly, the high-poverty Rio Grande High School does not offer any advanced math courses (only statistics), while middle-class La Cueva High School offered four courses (2008-2009).<sup>7</sup>

An analysis of 2009-10 gifted enrollment rates yielded some of the widest statistical gaps found by our Albuquerque evaluators. Two or three times as many students enroll in gifted programs in middle-class La Cueva, as compared to students who attend schools in high-poverty Rio Grande. In the 2009- 2010 academic year, approximately 5.9 percent of the student population at La Cueva HS enrolled in the school's gifted program, compared to 3.2 percent at high-poverty Rio Grande HS.

At middle-class middle schools, 18.2 percent and 12 percent of Eisenhower MS and Desert Ridge MS students respectively were enrolled in the gifted program. At high-poverty Polk MS and Ernie Pyle MS, however, only 4.5 and 3.1 percent were enrolled in the gifted program. At elementary school, 8.3 percent of middle-class Double Eagle students were enrolled in the gifted program, while 4.3 percent of middle-class Dennis Chavez students were enrolled in the gifted program. At the high-poverty Rio Grande cluster, 2.8 percent of Barcelona ES students and 2.5 percent of Pajarito ES students were enrolled in the gifted program.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, it's important and positive that schools across the income divide in New Mexico offer gifted programs. But the question remains whether resource gaps explain the difference in enrollment numbers. Are there fewer gifted slots at the lower income schools? Also, since students must be referred by teachers for giftedness testing, perhaps more students in the middle-class La Cueva cluster are being tested than in the high-poverty Rio Grande cluster. This possible lack of referral/testing could be because the Rio Grande cluster serves more English Language Learners. These students may not necessarily be referred to gifted programs based upon the flawed assumption that because they are "behind" in the language they cannot be academically exceptional.

The data on advanced placement enrollment and available offerings is also quite glaringly different, but perhaps improving. In the 2008-2009 academic year, La Cueva High School enrolled almost twice as many students in Advanced Placement courses as Rio Grande. This is a narrowing of the gap from the two previous years, when La Cueva enrolled almost three times as many students in the AP program.<sup>9</sup>

## CONNECTICUT EXAMPLE

### *Hamden, Connecticut*

In past years, parents and teachers were both allowed to nominate students for the Hamden Elementary Talented and Gifted Program ("TAG"), and standardized test scores were considered. But the net result of that process was that a child in the middle-class section had twice as good a chance as his/her counterpart in the high-poverty section to be nominated for TAG.

After review and deliberation, district officials recently changed the criteria for identifying academically gifted students. Now, in March of each year, teachers are given a list of the top 10% of their particular school's grade level which is derived from standardized test scores. Teachers are then asked to rank and nominate from that list. From those nominations, no more than 5% from each school will be selected.

The key changes in district policy served to remove parent bias from the process and to make nominations and selections from every school – rather than culling a pool of the top 5 percent from all Hamden elementary schools. Under the new criteria, fourth-grade students at a high-poverty school like Helen Street are now competing only with each other, rather than competing against middle-class peers at Bear Path or West Woods.

Hamden also plans to look at standardized tests that are used to assess students for TAG, weighing whether test scores are affected by family factors, such as income.

**Finding #2: District policies and practices too often fail to account for resource differences between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods and how the gap affects the opportunity to succeed.**

Big decisions can be easily overlooked because they occur one at a time or are packaged in a routine manner and approved by the school board as a group. This occurs in part because equity has not been front and center on the agenda of many of the nation's more than 14,000 school boards. Policies often do not exist, and if they do, they are written in aspirational language with no real definition of how that affects day-to-day practices or sways annual decisions about how resources are distributed. Unlike problems with federal mandates or the lack of state funding, being mindful of equity when considering learning-related education resources is something school boards can do on their own.

### *Resource Equity Policy and Practices*

None of the five districts in the Appleseed study had an equity policy on record. The closest was Hamden, Connecticut, where the board of education has a handshake deal to support the new superintendent's desire to make changes that could result in a more equitable education for all students.

## CONNECTICUT EXAMPLE

### *Hamden, Connecticut*

One example of the superintendent's equity approach dealt with transfers. She imposed a policy that required teachers to apply directly to the building principal at the receiving school and undergo an interview before making a position transfer. As a result, the previous heavy flow of teachers from high-poverty to middle-class schools within the district has dropped to a trickle.

**Finding #3: Chronic inequity in resource distribution correlates with meaningful differences in higher teacher absenteeism and lesser teaching credentials and teacher experience.**

### *Teacher Absenteeism*

Even in a 2010 culture in which technology dominates, a high quality teacher is still a key component in student learning in elementary, middle and high school. But first, the teacher must be present in the classroom and also be qualified for the job. Some researchers would also add being experienced to the list, arguing that too many new-to-the-field teachers are instructors for disadvantaged students.<sup>10</sup>

How often a teacher is absent from the classroom, what credentials the teacher holds and how long he or she has been leading students all matter when assessing what opportunities are available to kids.

Less experienced teachers are disproportionately assigned to high poverty schools.<sup>11</sup> One scholar described the problem this way: "[I]n many school districts the most experienced and highly paid teachers congregate in the district's middle-class schools. At the same time, the least qualified, lowest paid teachers tend to serve in the schools with the highest numbers of low-income and minority students. A typical pattern is that a new teacher will start his or her career at a high-poverty school and, as he or she gains experience... will transfer to a more middle-class school. District transfer policies, sometimes reflecting a hierarchy condoned within teacher union contracts, help facilitate this migration pattern."<sup>12</sup>

While the connection between years of classroom experience and quality is not absolute, anecdotal evidence and some formal research studies indicate that teachers get better with time.<sup>13</sup>

Absenteeism is a separate problem and one that may be circular in terms of cause and effect. Certainly one characteristic of any excellent employee is dependability. So absenteeism may be a component of being a less

effective teacher. However, working in schools with fewer resources – and the more intense problems that characterize high-poverty schools – may predictably lead to higher absenteeism.

## NEW MEXICO EXAMPLE

*Albuquerque, New Mexico*

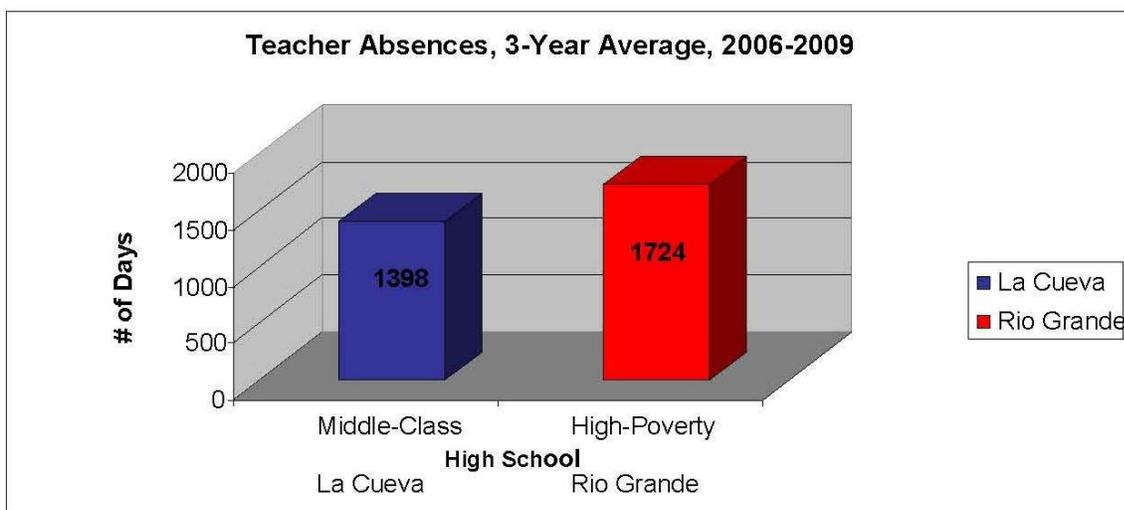
Teacher absenteeism takes a different arc in the high-poverty Rio Grande cluster than it does in the middle-class La Cueva cluster.

Teacher absenteeism is where the starkest differences appear in Albuquerque. By far, teachers in the middle-class La Cueva cluster missed fewer days than their counterparts in high-poverty Rio Grande cluster. Over a three-year period (2006-2009), teachers at high-poverty Rio Grande high school missed 326 *more* days than at middle-class La Cueva high school. The student population is about 200 students higher in La Cueva, yet the teacher-student ratio in Rio Grande is about 15:1 while in La Cueva it is 21:1. In middle schools records show teacher absenteeism at 652 days missed (at Polk MS in the high-poverty Rio Grande cluster), and 1722 days missed (at Ernie Pyle MS in the Rio Grande cluster).<sup>14</sup>

At the elementary level we also saw sharp differences between schools in each of the clusters, with middle-class La Cueva recording between 526 and 595 days missed, and high-poverty Rio Grande cluster recording between 901 and 911 missed days of instruction.<sup>15</sup>

## New Mexico Teacher Absences Over Three Years

Figure 1: Albuquerque teacher absences in middle-class vs. high-poverty cluster



Source: APS Communications Office

## Teacher Experience

### GEORGIA EXAMPLE

#### *Cobb County, Georgia*

In Cobb County Georgia's School District, teachers in high-poverty neighborhood schools had markedly less experience on average than counterparts in the middle-class section of the district. Though the high-poverty high school (Osborne) had fewer teachers than the affluent high school (Lassiter) in each of several school years studied, Osborne had more teachers with less than a year of experience. High-poverty Osborne High had at least 13 rookie teachers each year, while Lassiter High only employed that many rookie teachers once, in 2007. The gap has closed somewhat recently, with Osborne employing 14 rookie teachers and Lassiter 11 in the 2009-2010 school year.

This pattern is also reflected in the new teachers employed by the high-poverty and middle-class middle and elementary schools. In 2007, the average middle school in the high-poverty system employed 13 or more inexperienced teachers. The maximum number of inexperienced teachers employed by a middle school in the middle class system was six. In 2009, however, the maximum number of rookie teachers employed by a high-poverty middle school was six as compared to five for the middle-class middle schools.

In general, teacher experience was markedly higher in schools in the middle-class cluster. Average teacher experience in middle-class schools ranged from 16.22 years to 11.37 years in 2007. In high-poverty schools, by contrast, average teacher experience ranged from 10.84 years – less than the minimum mean teacher experience in the middle-class cluster – down to a mean of 6.29 years. The teacher experience gap between the two compared clusters has declined only slightly in three years.

### Teacher Experience in Middle-Class & High-Poverty Schools

**Figure 2: Cobb County, Georgia, teacher experience by high schools**

Mean Teacher Experience (Years)			
	2007	2008	2009
Lassiter HS (Middle-Class)	13.93	13.99	13.33
Osborne HS (High-Poverty)	7.78	8.60	8.60
Mean Difference	6.15	5.39	4.73

Some schools in the high-poverty cluster had persistently low levels of teacher experience over the past three years. Despite reducing the number of rookie teachers by two-thirds from 2008 to 2009, Belmont Hills Elementary, for example, recorded the lowest mean teacher experience in each of the three years of the study, never surpassing more than eight years of experience per teacher on average. Smitha Middle and Floyd Middle each increased mean teacher experience over the study period (by one and two years, respectively), but Campbell Middle saw its experience levels fall by nearly two years.

This differential is made all the more interesting when one examines the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) data. Georgia defines HQT as individuals who are certified by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, a state agency charged with developing and enforcing teaching standards. The teacher must also do one of

three things: a) teach in the fields of certification; or b) hold a bachelor’s degree or higher in the subject she teaches; or c) if teaching in Georgia before the 2003-2004 school year, have completed the Professional Standards Commission’s High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) test in the subject he or she teaches.<sup>16</sup>

Considerably more teachers who are not highly qualified by state standards are teaching in the high-poverty cluster. Only one class<sup>17</sup> in all eight schools in the middle-class cluster was taught by a non-HQT in 2008; while in that same year, ten classes at high-poverty Osborne High were taught by non-HQT. Of those ten classes, five were in mathematics and five were in science. Thirty five classes in total were taught by non-HQT in all of the 16 schools that make up the high-poverty cluster.

In sum, the strongest and most persistent resource disparity in the data reviewed is mean teacher experience. A story similar to Georgia’s can be found in Albuquerque.

### NEW MEXICO EXAMPLE

#### *Albuquerque, New Mexico*

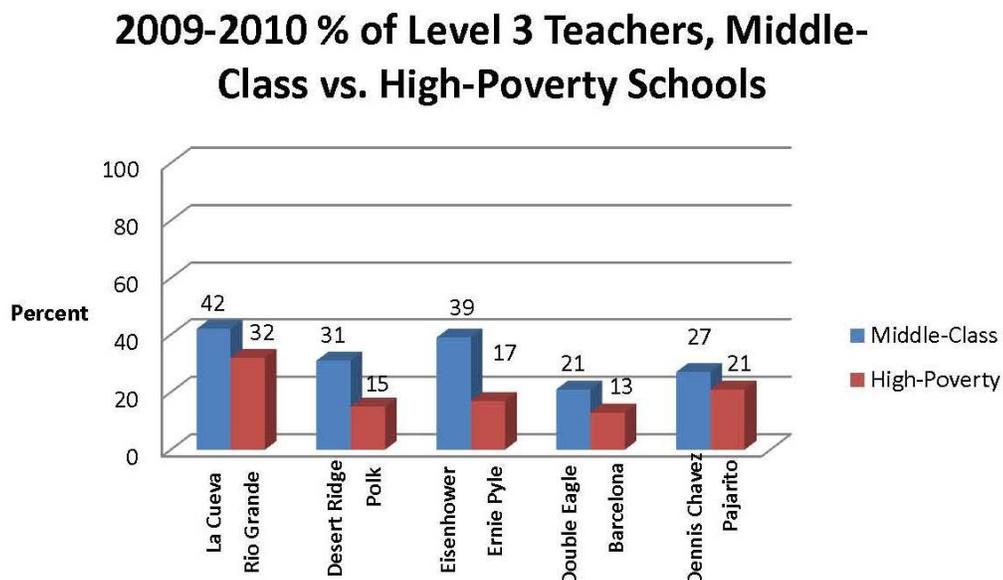
In the 2009-2010 school year the high-poverty Rio Grande cluster had, on average, fewer teachers at each school with five or more years of experience when compared to the middle-class La Cueva cluster. The gap is considerably wider in the high schools (14 percentage points); narrows at the middle school level; and widens again at the elementary school level (where the gap is six percentage points).<sup>18</sup> In 2008-2009, Rio Grande High School had a higher percentage of less experienced teachers than those at the middle-class La Cueva High School.

Looking at teacher qualifications is also revealing. A higher percentage of teachers in the middle-class La Cueva cluster have earned a Level-Three certification, New Mexico’s highest level of attainment for teachers. To reach Level-Three certification, a teacher must possess a graduate or doctoral degree or must hold a National Board Certification with two professional dossiers.

For the 2009-2010 school year, 42 percent of teachers at La Cueva High school held Level-Three certification; while only 32 percent had achieved the same high level at high-poverty Rio Grande High School.<sup>19</sup> The gaps are even larger in the middle schools.

### Albuquerque Teacher Certification

Figure 3: Albuquerque Teachers With Top Certification<sup>20</sup>



### **Albuquerque Teachers With Top Certification in Middle-Class La Cueva Cluster:**

- **42 percent** of La Cueva High School teachers were level 3 certified
- **31 percent** of Desert Ridge Middle School teachers were level 3 certified
- **39 percent** of Eisenhower Middle School teachers were level 3 certified
- **21 percent** of Double Eagle Elementary School teachers were level 3 certified
- **27 percent** of Dennis Chavez Elementary School teachers were level 3 certified

### **Albuquerque Teachers With Top Certification in High-Poverty Rio Grande Cluster**

- **32 percent** of Rio Grande High School teachers were level 3 certified
- **15 percent** of Polk Middle School teachers were level 3 certified
- **17 percent** of Ernie Pyle Middle School teachers were level 3 certified
- **13 percent** of Barcelona Elementary School teachers were level 3 certified
- **21 percent** of Pajarito Elementary School teachers were level 3 certified

## **CONNECTICUT EXAMPLE**

### *Hamden, Connecticut*

The same issue of teacher experience appeared in Hamden, Connecticut, school district. Although our analysis of teacher experience was confined to a single year, we found overall that teachers in the Hamden School District have an average of 13.2 years of experience and 84.9 percent have a Master's Degree or above. However, in high-poverty elementary schools, the average experience teaching is 12.1 years, as compared to 16.6 years for the middle-class elementary schools.

## **ILLINOIS, CALIFORNIA, OHIO EXAMPLES**

In Chicago, the gap in teacher salaries (and hence teacher experience and preparation) between schools with affluent and high-poverty student bodies was noted early in the study of intra-district inequality.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, one California-based study concluded that students in the most minority-heavy schools in that state are five times more likely than students in other schools to be taught by academically unprepared teachers.<sup>22</sup> The study further found that low-income students were twice as likely to be taught by underprepared teachers as wealthier students.<sup>23</sup> A recent Ohio study reached similar conclusions about the distribution of experienced, credentialed teachers in the state's largest school districts.<sup>24</sup>

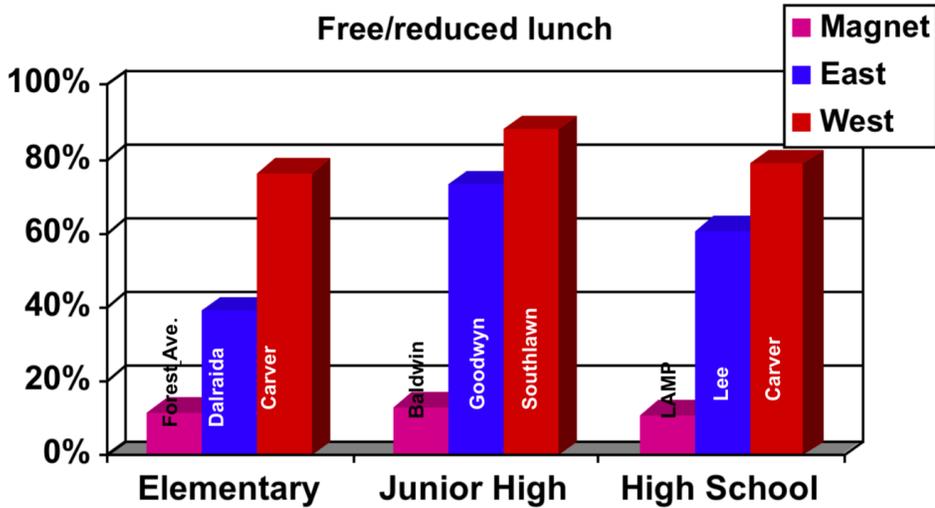
## **ALABAMA EXAMPLE**

### *Montgomery County, Alabama*

The connection between poverty and teacher credentials also appeared in Alabama, as the following charts demonstrate.

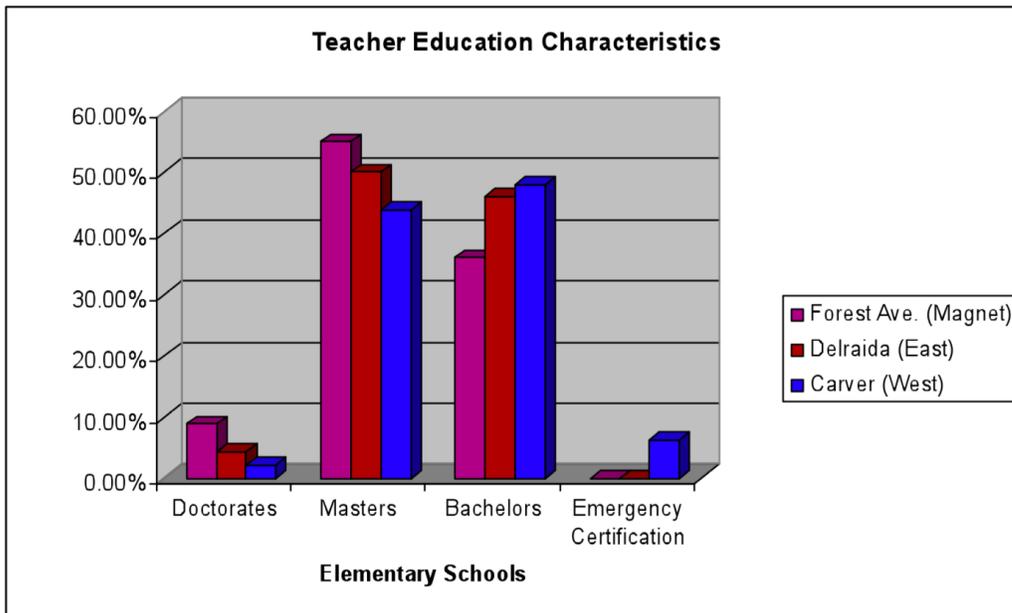
## Alabama Free and Reduced Meals

**Figure 4: Montgomery Schools by Elementary, Junior High and High School**  
(East is Middle-Class and West is High-Poverty)



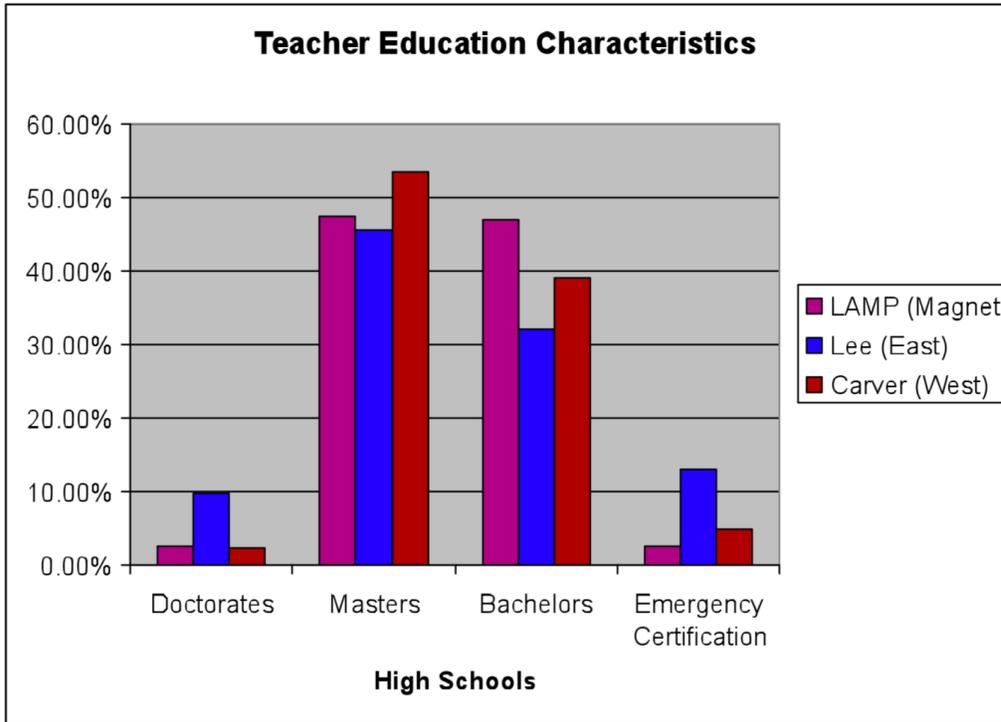
## Alabama Teacher Credentials

**Figure 5: Montgomery Elementary Teachers by Education and Emergency Certification**  
(East is Middle-Class and West is High-Poverty)



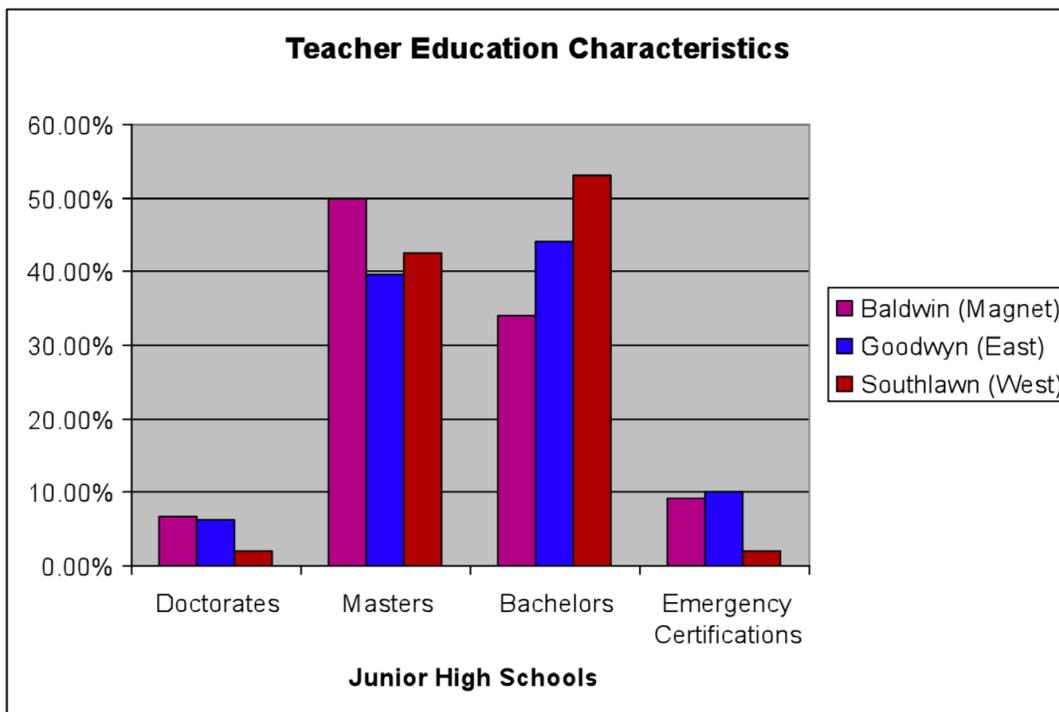
## Alabama Teacher Credentials

**Figure 6: Montgomery High School Teachers by Education and Emergency Certification**  
(East is Middle-Class and West is High-Poverty)



## Alabama Teacher Credentials

**Figure 7: Montgomery Junior High Teachers by Education and Emergency Certification**  
(East is Middle Class and West is High-Poverty)



# Recommendations For Action

## Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation #1:** School boards, parents and communities must take swift and purposeful steps to assure curriculum, personnel, buildings and other learning-related resources are allocated equitably.

**Recommendation #2:** District policies and practices must be aligned to maximize equity throughout the district; while federal and state education officials and political leaders should all stress equity as a key priority for success.

**Recommendation #3:** School districts should closely monitor, by neighborhood, teacher absences, teacher distribution by experience, and credentials and begin making equitable adjustments through hiring, strategic transfers and incentives.

Below, we discuss each finding in more detail:

**Recommendation #1: Examine Inequity.** School boards, parents and communities must take swift and purposeful steps to assure that curriculum, personnel, buildings and other learning-related resources are allocated equitably.

The task involves making a serious assessment of resource equity, going beyond the factors that Appleseed assessed preliminarily in this test study to redress all areas where opportunities for students in high-poverty areas are constrained due to inequitable allocation of resources.

We suggest three ways for implementing this recommendation:

- A. Use Appleseed's Resource Equity Assessment Document (READ) to evaluate your school district's status on resource distribution between schools located in middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods.
- B. Pursue creative ways to achieve equity in distribution of personnel and other learning-related resources. One method: provide financial incentives for talented instructors and building leaders to work in high-poverty schools. Another: Examine academic outcomes, as one potential indicator of disparate inputs.
- C. Explore the community school concept, which concentrates social service resources at a high-poverty school site as a means of addressing issues that interfere with learning.

## A. Resource Equity Assessment Documents

Appleseed has developed, in conjunction with university professors, a Resource Equity Assessment Document (READ) that helps a community measure the distribution of education resources that affect learning. It can be used in a variety of ways. First, boards of education and stakeholders can join in doing the comparative assessment to get a read on both potential problem spots and points of pride where the school system is doing a good job of offering opportunities equitably. The results, particularly if assessed over a three-year period as Appleseed did or even longer, can provide a roadmap for where board members need to be more purposeful about decision-making.

Another use of the READ tool is to assist parents and community groups in recognizing items that matter most in the development of high-achieving students, despite poverty. The READ gives interested stakeholders a guide to important items and allows them to identify the “mobilization moments” when advocacy before a school board vote can match that of middle-class communities, thereby increasing the odds of getting equitable treatment.

The READ comes in three versions – basic, detailed and the basic side-by-side comparison. The basic consolidates only the most crucial information for instances where time or capacity to collect information is limited. The basic side-by-side permits the data gatherer to compare information over several school years or another

*“Here in the Delta, my high school students understood very well that the historically white high school across town had a science lab and we did not. They got new textbooks when we did not. They had new computers that actually worked, while we had older ones – some of which had never worked. The mostly white school offered classes such as drama, dance, and creative writing, which we could not, and on and on. My students also realized this disparity did not start here in the new millennium; most of their parents had come through this same school system with many of the same issues. Nor is it lost on students or parents when their school gets the temporary teachers, the teachers hired at the last minute, or the extended substitutes in “gatekeeper” classes like algebra and science.”*

“Reaping What We've Sown: How Schools Fail Low-Income Parents”, Renee Moore, October 14, 2009, *Teacher Magazine*

As one commentator aptly noted, “[t]ypically, district budget documents report how money is spent by category and program rather than by school. As a result, even superintendents and school board members often do not know whether they spend more money on one school than another or whether they spend more or less on low-income and minority students.”<sup>25</sup> The same is true of resources.

If school boards and superintendents are sometimes fuzzy about how and where money is spent, they are perhaps even less aware of the learning-related education resource disparities within their districts. If the problem can be brought into focus, the resulting transparency should lead to greater awareness and discourse

period of time. The detailed version has a far wider range of comparative items and allows for a more in-depth look. Whichever instrument is selected, the tool is meant to document resource distribution. But it only captures facts, not reasons. The READ allows savvy educators, board members and community members to ask more pointed questions and to get at “why” the differences exist.

Admittedly, the kinds of personnel, curricular and facilities resources Appleseed examined bear a close resemblance to and rely upon monetary resources. So the budget development process is the starting point. Often, even with zero-based budgeting, school systems have a template in mind that guides their thinking. Zero-based budgeting is a budget preparation technique that seeks to have decision-makers fund necessary items without regard to what has been funded in the past. Moreover, many of the items in the budget are locked in from year-to-year by law and provide only scant discretion. The key question for us, however, is how those dollars translate to resources and how those resources get distributed.

about what should be done to remedy the disparities hurting kids living in poverty. Once the issues are on the table, stakeholders can debate whether reasons for disparities are justified and what remedies might be appropriate. Without basic knowledge and evidence of disparities, the conversation cannot even start.<sup>26</sup>

## **B. Pursue Creative Strategies, Examine Academic Outcomes**

### **1. Personnel Distribution Strategies**

On distributing personnel, in North Carolina, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district employs a Strategic Staffing Initiative that uses incentives to attract excellent teachers and principals to schools most in need. The team moves as a unit to the low-performing building and receives a financial reward for their willingness to lead change in tough circumstances.

### **2. Implement an Equity Policy**

The Wake County, North Carolina, school board has been working toward adopting a formal equity policy for about two years. The purpose is to “reaffirm and communicate a commitment to provide equal access to programs and services and equitable distribution of resources through board policy.” While that effort has stalled, the board continues in conversation about the best way to move from theory to reality.

### **3. Examine Outcomes as an Indicator of an Opportunity Gap**

In Cobb County, Georgia, outcomes help to indicate the connection between the quality of education being received by students in middle-class versus high-poverty schools. Graduation rates over a three-year period were far higher in the middle-class high school than in the high poverty location. The percentage of graduates in the high-poverty school increased each year – a promising sign. But middle-class high school graduation rates increased as well.

The number of students accepted to two-year and four-year colleges was far higher in the middle-class high school, almost twice as high in one year and then more than double the next. Equally distressing was that students graduating from the high-poverty school were less prepared to handle college-level work. More than 1 in 4 students from high-poverty Osborne High School needed learning support services, while less than one percent of students from middle-class Lassiter required extra help.

#### **Number and Percentage of students graduating high school in four years**

The reported graduation rates for middle-class Lassiter High School for 2007, 2008, and 2009 were 94.6%, 94.7% and 96.4%. For the same period the rates for high-poverty Osborne High School were 56%, 63.3%, and 74.4%.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Number and Percentage of students ACCEPTED to two-year and four-year colleges (Plus – Number and Percentage of students who ATTEND two- or four-year colleges)**

In 2007 and 2008, the percentages of students who were admitted to a public college in Georgia after graduating from Lassiter High School were 60.6% and 58.9% respectively while the percentages for Osborne High School graduates were 21.9% and 24.2% respectively. These numbers likely under state college admissions, especially for Lassiter because they do not include admissions to private universities in Georgia or to public or private out-of-state institutions.

In New Mexico, where the difference in offerings for advanced math is glaring, the results on standardized tests are dramatic. The disparity is not only a pattern in math, but holds true for reading as well. See chart below.

## New Mexico Academic Testing Results

**Figure 8: 2009-2010 AYP Assessment Report, Percentage Proficient or Above**

Middle-class La Cueva Cluster	Math	Reading	High-poverty Rio Grande Cluster	Math	Reading	Achievement Gap (% points)	
						Math	Reading
La Cueva HS	76.2	83	Rio Grande HS	21.9	33	54.3	50
Desert Ridge MS	65.4	78.9	Polk MS	16	33.1	49.4	45.8
Eisenhower MS	69.4	83.7	Ernie Pyle MS	19	33.1	50.4	50.6
Double Eagle ES	88.1	92.2	Barcelona ES	39.9	45.2	48.2	50
Dennis Chavez ES	82.3	86.5	Pajarito ES	30.5	39.8	51.8	46.7

### C. Community Schools

Chicago Appleseed suggested that in addition to equitable resource distribution, an additional strategy would be to provide greater support in high-poverty communities by adopting a community schools approach, similar to the Promise Neighborhoods the U.S. Department of Education is advancing.

Given that the opportunity gap exists in some districts, it would be helpful for schools in low-income communities to draw on resources from outside school walls. But schools in general are not particularly good at building what social scientists refer to as “social capital” – connections among individuals and institutions.<sup>28</sup> And schools in low-income communities tend to be especially weak on that point. A community schools approach harvests the various support systems and concentrates on schools as a central distribution point. Hence, medical and mental health services, dentistry, job placement and more are available when parents and students arrive at school.

Though the community schools movement is still relatively young, it has already demonstrated real results, particularly in Chicago. The Community Schools Initiative has bolstered student achievement, provided students with more time in school, channeled additional resources into schools, allowed students greater extra-curricular opportunities, spurred a growth in parental involvement and helped break down barriers between schools and their surrounding neighborhoods.

Given community schools' demonstrated success at mitigating various aspects of the opportunity gap, Chicago Appleseed supports legislative and policy changes aimed at strengthening and expanding the reach of community schools, particularly in low-income, minority communities. These changes will both increase financial support for community schools and further encourage community schools to make sure their after-school programming is aligned with what goes on in the classroom.

*“In a democracy, citizens and their children are entitled to similar treatment, especially because intellectual capital is a national concern, not designed for the benefit of one group of students or the exclusion of another.”*

“The Search for Equality: As the Age-Old Battle of Rich vs. Poor Continues, Can Schools Overcome the Effects of Class?”, Allan C. Ornstein, ***American School Board Journal***, May 2010.

**Recommendation #2: Articulate Policy Norms and Follow Through.** District policies and practices must be aligned to maximize equity throughout the district; while federal and state education officials and political leaders should all stress equity as a key priority for success.

We suggest two ways for implementing this recommendation:

- A. School boards should adopt an equity policy that is more than just a statement of philosophy, but which has clear implementation steps and is enforceable.
- B. Districts need to examine policies and admission practices for advanced courses and gifted programs, which often serve as a gateway to success.

### **A. Adopt An Equity Policy**

Policy is a powerful means of enacting change in a school district, and the authority to adopt policy rests with the board of education. State and federal governments also have a role in insisting that equity should be a priority that is considered with every decision. That idea is particularly true of “turnaround schools” that perpetually struggle academically and often are located in high-poverty neighborhoods.

None of the five school districts we examined had an explicit equity policy. Indeed, having such a policy is rare in most school districts across the U.S. While board members and educators publicly speak of equity as important, few have committed that principle to paper and outlined the implementation steps that a robust equity policy entails.

One school district that defies common practice is Ithaca, New York. School officials have collaborated since 2006 with a community organization called The Village at Ithaca to produce an “Equity Report Card” that

looks at 16 indicators. Among the factors considered are Advanced Placement enrollment, student participation in athletics and clubs, music and drama participation and others.

Cal Walker, co-founder of the Village at Ithaca, wrote about the goals in the first report. He said, “The concept of equity is accessible enough—it connotes fairness, balance, and sharing of resources—but achieving equity is much more elusive. Unless we are truly committed to not just the concept, but the processes and resource investments necessary to produce more equitable outcomes, our school district as well as our community will continue to be plagued by disproportionate drop-out, joblessness and incarceration rates. Equity requires believing that all children have the potential to succeed and have the fundamental right to all of the same resources to achieve that end. Equity requires an unwavering commitment to change, for the simple reason that the current system is not meeting the needs of all of our children equally.”

*“Today, I’m calling on state lawmakers to rethink and rewrite the hundreds of pages of state code that limit the ability of school districts to succeed in promoting student learning, especially in our lowest-performing schools. I urge you to do the tough work of addressing the grossly inequitable distribution of resources that now prevails in a number of states and districts. And, I urge you to build the capacity of districts to challenge the status quo and implement far-reaching reforms to dramatically improve education.... Ultimately, when it comes to...state laws, our guiding principles should be straightforward: does a law advance student learning and do what’s right for kids?”*

-- Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (12/10/09), at the National Conference of State Legislatures’ Fall Forum

as human beings, we are more alike than not.”

Walker added, “But equity is not a zero-sum game—all students benefit when more of their classmates are engaged in the exchange of ideas and information in school and are thus prepared to succeed. When every child is valued, treated, and nurtured equally, when education gaps are closed, when all students can realize their full potential, the lines between “us” and “them” will be blurred because reasoned thought says,

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## **B. Examine Policies and Admission Practices for Advanced Courses**

Gifted classes in elementary and middle school and Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes in high school are rightfully seen by parents as a gateway to success. In the Appleseed study, one of the most obvious disparities was in the number and type of courses available in the upper grades and in the percentage of students enrolled in gifted classes when looking at middle-class versus high-poverty neighborhoods. Policies for determining admission to gifted programs play a part in whether that opportunity is genuine. Factors, such as which tests are used, whether teacher recommendations are required and preparation in early years, should all be viewed through an equity lens.

Appleseed recommends local policy-making over litigation as the principal tool for rectifying resource inequities. Over the past thirty years, virtually every state in the union has faced legal challenges to their schemes

for public school financing. Those cases invited courts to evaluate whether unconstitutional inequities existed in the amount of funding for education available to school districts, focusing on disparities across districts within a given state. Some of the reported decisions, particularly a series of decisions in New York, even identified resource disparities (beyond simply funding disparities) as constitutional violations. But, to date, courts have had scant opportunity to rule on the legality of intra-district resource disparities.

As discussed more fully in our forthcoming article “**Achieving Resource Equity Within a Single School District: Erasing the Opportunity Gap By Examining School Board Decisions,**” that will appear in the *Education and Urban Society* journal, lawsuits attacking monetary and learning-related education resource inequities would be chancy and expensive and too particularized by jurisdiction to change what appears to be a pervasive problem. Litigation also entails the risk that change agents might dig themselves in and justify existing disparities rather than work to remedy them. By contrast, inspiring school board members to prioritize equity is a practical way to proceed.<sup>29</sup> We assume that board members – many of whom serve without pay – are by and large dedicated citizens who believe in education and want to see all children at their best. Once aware of disparities they have been party to creating in their districts, board members should want to do something about them.

### **A Texas Example**

In Texas, a December 2009 analysis by the *Dallas Morning News* found a significant difference in Advanced Placement courses available to middle-class students and their high-poverty peers. “The AP courses are key in building impressive transcripts and giving students an advantage in the competitive college admissions process. Students who pass AP exams can also earn college credit and save themselves thousands in tuition dollars,” the story explained.

“But the world of AP is not an equal one, with some students exposed to a wide breadth of offerings and others to a meager slate. The affluence of a school’s student body is a key factor related to the number of AP subjects offered,” the *Morning News* concluded in its article titled, “Inequities Found in Area Advanced Placement Course Choices.”

**Recommendation #3:** School districts should closely monitor, by neighborhood, teacher absences, teacher distribution by experience, and credentials and begin making adjustments through hiring, strategic transfers and incentives.

We suggest two ways for implementing this recommendation:

- A. School boards should develop a decisive strategy to address unheralded inequities such as teacher absences.

Districts should use various means to assign high-quality teachers to high-poverty schools.

## A. Developing a decisive strategy to reduce teacher absences.

Board members should work with superintendents to develop strategies for reducing teacher absences and for placing quality teachers in locations where the need is greatest. Abundant research supports this recommendation and offers practical, often inexpensive ways to address these inequities. A February 2010 working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research found a link between teacher absences and achievement, but also found that school districts could significantly reduce teachers' time out of the class-

### Staff-Based Budgeting, Teacher Experience & Inflexibility

Accurately assessing teacher experience becomes complicated in districts that follow staff-based budgeting. Staff-based budgeting refers to a school district's practice of treating schools within the district as *units* that differ only by the number of pupils. As a result, little consideration is given to the student differences that may exist within each of those units. For example, as applied to teacher salaries, districts that pursue staff-based budgeting principles typically employ salary cost-averaging. This means that for budgetary purposes all schools within the district have a teaching budget that is based on the "average" teacher salary across all schools within that district. For schools whose teachers' salaries are lower, because the teachers are relatively inexperienced, the funds earmarked for teacher salaries are higher than the school's real costs. The problem lies in the fact that the leftover funds cannot be applied to other resources (as they are only budgeted for teacher salaries). As a result, schools with lower-paid teachers commonly have a disproportionate share of their budget earmarked for expenses they do not have and cannot be shifted for resources they need. If leftover funds could be made available to the poorer schools, schools could use the extra funds to better train their teachers or even create financial incentives for recruitment of more seasoned, higher-quality teachers.

Source: "Achieving Resource Equity Within A Single School District: Erasing the Opportunity Gap By Examining School Board Decisions," *Education and Urban Society journal*, forthcoming 2011, Edwin C. Darden and Elizabeth Cavendish.

room by adopting policies.<sup>30</sup> The paper, "The Effect of Employment Protection on Worker Effort: Evidence from Public Schooling," by Brian Jacob, focused on the Chicago Public Schools and its revised policy enabling district officials to dismiss probationary teachers without an elaborate procedure.

Jacob wrote, "Results suggest that the policy reduced annual teacher absences by roughly 10 percent and reduced the prevalence of teachers with 15 or more annual absences by 20 percent. The effects were strongest among teachers in elementary schools and in low-achieving, predominantly African-American high schools, and among teachers with high-predicted absences." Interestingly, tenured teacher absences fell in the

wake of the policy, even though it did not directly affect them. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) cites research suggesting that policy changes can play a role in reducing teacher absences. For example, requiring teachers to speak directly to the principal, rather than using a call-in system, has an impact.<sup>31</sup> Three Harvard researchers in 2007 discovered that students suffer learning losses when their regular classroom teachers are absent. When a teacher is away for 10 days, the study says, the impact is about the same as being taught by a first-year teacher instead of a second-year teacher.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the researchers said teacher absences decline when schools either provide incentives for good attendance or implement unused sick time buy back policies. In North Carolina, for example, teachers are allowed 10 penalty-free days. After that, they must contribute \$50 toward the cost of a substitute for each day they miss.<sup>33</sup>

## B. Assign High-Quality Teachers to High-Poverty Schools

In 2008, the Illinois Education Research Council developed a teacher quality index called ITAC, the Index of Teacher Academic Capital. ITAC measures five components of a teacher's academic qualifications and combines that with experience. They applied it to schools within the state of Illinois from 2001-2006. "We found that high minority, high-poverty schools were likely to have a cadre of teachers with lower teacher quality than schools with a more advantaged student body, and that school performance was related to these teacher characteristics..." according to the policy research report, **"Leveling Up: Narrowing the Teacher Academic Capital Gap in Illinois."**<sup>34</sup>

Comparing their results to an earlier 2005 study by the Illinois Research Council, the authors noted "that schools whose ITAC increased saw improved student achievement and that the hiring teachers with stronger academic characteristics can offset the negative impact of lack of teaching experience." But they also shared a lament: "Students' access to teachers with strong academic backgrounds still depends too much on location and demographic make-up of their schools." The U.S. Department of Education is likewise seeking to draw attention to the problem of teacher experience and its impact on opportunity. In fact, to qualify for stimulus dollars under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), one of the assurances was "achieving equity in teacher distribution." It was also a criterion for the 2010 Race to the Top funds, a federal program that provides competitive grants to states for making changes to education law and policy. Indeed, in August 2010, the Department announced that it was forming an Equity and Excellence Commission to promote fiscal equity among schools. A 2006 report by The Education Trust also found that teachers in high-poverty schools are less skilled and experienced than those serving more advantaged populations. One of its conclusions: "The very children who most need strong teachers are assigned, on average, to teachers with less experience, less education, and less skill than those who teach other children."<sup>35</sup>

Other research also supports the idea that making changes to ensure great teachers teach disadvantaged kids does make a difference in outcome. Finally, according to a study conducted by Harvard economist Raj Chetty, and issued in July 2010, the effects of a good kindergarten teacher can last for life. Chetty looked at 12,000 students in Tennessee, who were studied as five-year-olds in Project Star and now are age 30. His data (which has not yet been peer reviewed) demonstrated that students with superior teachers were more likely to go to college, were earning more money, were less likely to be single parents and were saving for retirement."<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusions

The fundamental problem of disparate educational outcomes continues to mar America's promise as a land of opportunity. Appleseed has found inequities in resource allocations within school districts as an oft-hidden component contributing to this problem. In fairness, the school districts studied, along with the states' education departments, local leaders, and the communities, have worked extremely hard over the years to eliminate some of the inequities that this report explores. Some of these efforts have included the recruitment of more experienced teachers for schools that are the most underachieving. Others have initiated a revised protocol for nominations into gifted and talent programs, incorporating additional nominators and eliminating exclusive reliance on testing and teacher nominations. Still others have supported the development of community schools that involve partnerships with outside organizations within the neighborhood. Appleseed found learning-related education resource items where schools are uniformly doing an outstand-

ing job.

Our report also points the way to solutions. In doing so, we made no effort to assess the vexing question of intent; rather we assume that the inequities that persist are not necessarily caused by purposeful bias. In keeping with Appleseed’s practical, results-oriented approach, we recommend that the first step in solving an awareness and focus issue is thus increasing awareness and demonstrating how school boards and educators can overturn the trends that lock in disparities.

Although increasing awareness is not an easy process, community groups should be able to assess inequities in their local communities, particularly if they partner with a broad range of stakeholders. The Resource Equity Assessment Document (READ) provides a starting point and the means for figuring out where the most serious differences appear. As well, school boards, of their own initiative, can initiate self-examination and decide where to focus their efforts on closing any opportunity gaps.

Appleseed urges that as a result of this report and other scholarship focusing on intra-district resource inequities, school boards will adopt resource equity policies that are guided by the principle that all students within a school district must have an equal opportunity to develop and excel academically.

By adopting equity policies, school districts help ensure that resource equity issues are not ignored and that school board actions can be judged against this important standard of fairness. The policies must be clear, have defined implementation steps, and include accountability provisions that communicate the seriousness of the undertaking.

A “Robin Hood” solution stripping middle-class neighborhood schools of their AP courses, extra-curricular activities or best teachers would be both simplistic and misguided. Rather, school boards and superintendents must be both purposeful and fair in making decisions. It is a delicate balance, because city schools, in particular, need a vibrant middle-class for the tax base as well as the school-ready kids middle-class and affluent families typically provide. If schools fail to provide challenges to academically well-prepared children, then parents with choices will move and employers will locate operations elsewhere.

Yet, hiding the ball on learning-related education resource distribution has not worked in the past for millions of children, and will not work in the future. We must point to the gap and work studiously to fix it. Rectifying the opportunity gap can become the rallying cry for justice in education in our era.

□ □ □

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> We use “learning-related education resources” to denote those items that are not cash but that contribute mightily to the learning climate that surrounds a child, whether in a middle-class or high-poverty neighborhood. Of course it takes dollars to purchase additional or better teachers, to upgrade or build new facilities, to provide a wider spectrum of advanced courses, and other actions. But the point is not to look at a dollar-for-dollar comparison, but rather to examine the specific resources that the dollars purchase. As an analytical technique, we wanted to determine how opportunities available to high-poverty students matched up with their peers in the higher-earning neighborhoods. Discussing actual dollar distribution, therefore, would only serve to obscure a clear vision of learning-related education resource equity.

<sup>2</sup> 347 U.S. 483 (1954). While *Brown* dealt exclusively with race and segregation, the grand principle is that public school systems cannot create or passively tolerate unequal schools.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report we will refer to schools in richer neighborhoods as “middle-class” and schools in poorer neighborhoods as “high poverty.” We defined middle-class and high-poverty based on the proportion of students who qualify for Free and Reduced Meals (FARM). According to the 2010 *Conditions of Education*, published by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, are eligible = high poverty; by contrast, schools in which 25 percent or below are eligible for free and reduced meals = low poverty. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau sometimes uses quintiles when displaying family income levels. Using the 2005 Census measure, the most recent available, scholars deduced that an income of about \$19,200 classifies as working poor; 19,200-35,000 is poverty can be measured based on students who qualify for FARM. The Department judges that schools where 76-100 percent of students lower middle-class; \$35,000-57,650 is middle-class; \$57,650-91,700 is upper middle-class; and beyond that is upper-class. While understanding that geographic differences, family size, inflation in the last six years and a host of other factors compound such simplistic definitions, thinking in these terms does help the reader more clearly understand the differences between communities.

<sup>4</sup> Lassiter High was also overenrolled by 32 percent just after the renovation, in 2002. Likely as a result of other new high schools opening in northern Cobb County, Lassiter became under-enrolled by about 9 percent in 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Wiener, Ross, “High Poverty Schooling in America: Lessons in Second-Class Citizenship: What Do We Know About Our High- Poverty Schools? Opportunity Gaps: The Injustice Underneath Achievement Gaps in Our Public Schools, 85 North Carolina Law Review, p. 1329-31, June 2007 Symposium.

<sup>6</sup> Wiener, Ross, “High Poverty Schooling in America: Lessons in Second-Class Citizenship: What Do We Know About Our High-Poverty Schools? Opportunity Gaps: The Injustice Underneath Achievement Gaps in Our Public Schools, 85 North Carolina Law Review, p. 1330, June 2007 Symposium.

<sup>7</sup> Albuquerque Public Schools Communications Office.

<sup>8</sup> Albuquerque Public Schools Communications Office.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note the way in which AP enrollment data is collected by Albuquerque Public Schools (APS): If a student enrolls in an AP math course AND an AP history course, that student is counted twice. However, even by its own data collection standards, and without knowing a true percentage of students enrolled in AP courses, the data suggests that at the very least students are enrolling in more than one AP course at middle-class La Cueva High School.

<sup>10</sup> NAACP Education Department. (n.d.). *Call for action in education* (pp. 1-37). Retrieved February 10, 2010, from [http://www.naacp.org/about/resources/publications/education\\_call\\_to\\_actn\\_2.pdf](http://www.naacp.org/about/resources/publications/education_call_to_actn_2.pdf), p. 6; Wiener, 2007, p. 1321.

<sup>11</sup> Warner-King, K., & Smith-Casem, V. (2005). *Addressing funding inequities within districts*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Education, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Liu, G. (2006). *How the federal government makes rich states richer*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Davis, James R. *Better Teaching, More Learning*. (Phoenix: American Council on Education/Oryx Press Series on Higher Education, 1997). Concluding that research shows “...Inexperienced teachers lack the conceptual structures to make sense of classrooms events. Beginning teachers simply do not extract the same levels of meaning from what they see. Experienced teachers see better what is happening.”

<sup>4</sup> Albuquerque Public Schools Communications Office.

<sup>5</sup> Albuquerque Public Schools Communications Office.

<sup>16</sup> Georgia School Council Institute, 2009 Georgia School Council Guidebook, available at <http://www.georgiaeducation.org/index.html> (accessed March 23, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Note, however, that the percentages of classes taught by HQT in both systems is quite high, which makes sense given that the overwhelming majority of teachers in Georgia are considered to meet the relative low bar established for being considered “highly qualified.”

<sup>18</sup> Albuquerque Public Schools Communications Office.

- <sup>19</sup> Id.
- <sup>20</sup> Id.
- <sup>21</sup> Rubenstein, R., Schwartz, A. E., Stiefel, L., & Amor, H. B. H. (2007). From districts to schools: The distribution of resources across schools in big city school districts. *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 532-545.
- <sup>22</sup> The Education Trust-West, (citing Esche, C.E. et al. (2004). California's Teaching Force 2004: Key Issues and Trends).
- <sup>23</sup> Id.
- <sup>24</sup> DeLuca, B, et al. (2009). Are the "Best" Teachers in the "Neediest" Schools? An Urban Intradistrict Equity Inquiry, *Education and Urban Society*, 41(6), 653-671.
- <sup>25</sup> Liu, 2006, p. 9.
- <sup>26</sup> Hawley Miles, K., Ware, K., & Roza, M. (2003). Leveling the playing field: Creating funding equity through student-based budgeting. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85, p. 116; NAACP, pp. 4-5; Goetz, M. E., & Stiefel, L. (1998). School-level resource allocation in urban public schools. *Journal of Education Finance*, 23, p. 437.
- <sup>27</sup> Georgia Department of Education reports.
- <sup>28</sup> Telephone Interview with Dr. Mark Warren, Associate Professor of Education, Harvard University (Nov. 30, 2009).
- <sup>29</sup> Darden, Edwin C., Cavendish, Elizabeth, "Achieving Resource Equity Within A Single School District: Erasing the Opportunity Gap By Examining School Board Decisions," *Education and Urban Society* journal, forthcoming 2011.
- <sup>30</sup> Jacob, Brian A., "The Effect of Employment Protection on Worker Effort: Evidence from Public Schooling," The National Bureau of Economic Research, February 2010. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15655>.
- <sup>31</sup> Teacher Rule, Roles and Rights, "Issues and Trends: Leave," National Council on Teacher Quality web site. <http://www.nctq.org/tr3/issues/index.jsp?sectionId=4>.
- <sup>32</sup> Miller, Raegan T., Murnane, Richard J., Willet, John B., "Do Teacher Absences Impact Student Achievement? Longitudinal Evidence From One Urban School District," National Bureau of Economic Research, August 2007.
- <sup>33</sup> It's obviously complicated to implement such policies as districts do not want to encourage teachers with communicable diseases to come to school, nor to penalize those with genuine illnesses.
- <sup>34</sup> White, R. Bradford, Presley, Jennifer B., DeAngelis, Karen J., "Leveling Up: Narrowing the Teacher Academic Capital Gap in Illinois," Policy Research Report: IERC 2008-1.
- <sup>35</sup> Peske, Heather G., Haycock, Kati "Teaching Inequality: How Poor and Minority Students Are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality, Education Trust, 2006, <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/010DBD9F-CED8-4D2B-9E0D-91B446746ED3/0/TQReportJune2006.pdf>
- <sup>36</sup> Leonhardt, David, "The Case for \$320,000 Kindergarten Teachers," July 27, 2010, New York Times. See also: "Good early education can impart skills that last a lifetime — patience, discipline, manners, perseverance. The tests that 5-year-olds take may pick up these skills, even if later multiple-choice tests do not."
- <sup>37</sup> The data may be found at: [http://app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte\\_pack\\_ethnicsex.display\\_proc](http://app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_ethnicsex.display_proc).
- <sup>38</sup> 2008-2009 Albuquerque Public

# APPENDIX I

## Methodology and Scope of Work

This report combines practical, on-the-ground perspectives (based on interviews and data collection); federal, state and county research, and current social science research on the existence and effects of intra-district educational resource disparities between middle-class and high-poverty neighborhoods. It assembles and analyzes what we know as a matter of practice and as a matter of research about these disparities and sheds light on the problem in a way that few have done before.

The Appleseed national office, in partnership with Appleseed Centers in Alabama, Chicago, Connecticut, Georgia and New Mexico, and with local partners, worked for the past year collecting information necessary to determine if resource disparities really existed and whether they resulted in schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods receiving less than more affluent peers.

The methodology employed varied somewhat from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, highlighting the fact that communities desiring to conduct similar analyses should be flexible in their chosen approach. That said, while there is no one-size-fits-all tool kit for analyzing questions of intra-district resource disparities, the approaches taken (and obstacles faced) by these Appleseed Centers are instructive.

Appleseed looked at resource equity in five locations: Montgomery, Alabama; Cobb County, Georgia; Hamden, Connecticut; Chicago, Illinois; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Called “Erasing the Opportunity Gap,” the goal was to examine how educational resources are distributed between schools located in affluent neighborhoods versus high-poverty neighborhoods. We did not look at money, *per se*, but rather at personnel resources (credentials and experience of teachers and principals), curricular resources (availability of special programs and enhancements like Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate) and infrastructure resources (building condition and renovation schedule).

Three observations are worth noting: first, although our study concentrated on specific communities, the findings can be paralleled in other urban, large suburban or county districts. So, systems fitting that profile should consider performing a self-examination. Second, we worked with two Pennsylvania State University professors to assemble the trio of Resource Equity Assessment Documents (READs). Each one is a matrix of learning-related items that will allow any community organization or school district or parent group to determine how its local schools fare on this topic. Last, by knowing these learning-linked items and by knowing how well your community is doing, parent organizations and other leaders can determine the “mobilization moment” when the decisions are being made and use the READ as a tip-sheet for when stakeholders should be at the board table making their voice heard. In essence, knowing when to be present allows parents in poverty to match the middle-class advantage of advocating for precious resources that translate to opportunity.

## Profiles of Districts in the Appleseed Study

### *Cobb County, Georgia*

Georgia Appleseed’s study focused on 24 of 111 schools in the Cobb County School District (CCSD), a large system in suburban metro Atlanta. Eight of the schools are middle-class, with low numbers of students eligi-

ble for the free- and reduced-price meals (FARM). The middle-class schools are Lassiter High School along with two middle schools and five elementary schools that “feed” their students into Lassiter. The other sixteen schools are high-poverty, carrying a far higher proportion of FARM-eligible students. That cluster is composed of Osborne High School together with four middle and eleven elementary feeder schools.

Appleseed examined school and school district websites to obtain qualitative data describing course offerings and to compare guidance counselor availability at the two high schools studied. To procure data on school facilities and recent construction projects, Georgia Appleseed relied upon documents obtained from the public websites of the Cobb County School District Department of Financial Services. Appleseed representatives also relied upon state-mandated and collected “Report Cards” to obtain quantitative data focusing upon student demographics and teacher characteristics, including experience levels and status as a Highly Qualified Teacher. Each of these data points was available by school, district, and state on the website of the Georgia Department of Education.

Appleseed volunteers in Cobb County relied principally on on-line sources, which were not complete for our purposes. For example, data regarding teacher absenteeism and out-of-field teaching did not appear to be publicly available on the Internet. Student achievement rates on Advanced Placement tests likewise were unavailable. Despite a number of requests, our volunteers were unsuccessful in arranging a meeting with representatives of the Cobb County School District. Such a meeting would likely have provided additional information about other resource disparities or even places where resources are equivalent

Additionally, the Appleseed volunteers did not make an on-the-ground examination of facilities in the middle and high schools of each system. Such examinations might have shed more light on whether laboratory, performing arts, classroom, maintenance and general facility resources are in fact equitably distributed across the two sections of the county schools.

**Number of children in elementary, middle and high schools (by race/ethnicity) for entire district and selected sections (middle-class and high-poverty)**

As of October 2008, the total enrollment in the Cobb County School District was 106,747.<sup>37</sup> The racial/ ethnic composition of this population was reported as: Asian-4,932 (4.6 percent), Black-32,342 (30.3 percent), Hispanic-15,706 (14.7 percent), American Indian-213 (<1 percent), Multi-Racial-4,288 (4.0 percent), and White-49,266 (46.2 percent).

The total enrollment in the middle-class cluster was 7,130 of which 78 percent were White. The total enrollment in the high-poverty cluster was 13,789 of which 13.7 percent were white.

At middle-class Lassiter High, four of every five students are White/non-Hispanic. At high-poverty Osborne High, less than one of every ten students is. With the exception of Cheatham Hill Elementary, where half of the students are White/non-Hispanic, all of the schools in the high-poverty cluster have majority-minority student bodies. Eight of the schools, including Osborne High, have a student body with a Black/African-American plurality. The other seven schools have Hispanic pluralities.

In the middle-class cluster, the largest ethnic population at five of the eight schools is Black/African-American, and in no case does that ethnic population rise above 15 percent. At two of the schools, the largest ethnicity is Asian/Pacific Islander, with the larger ethnic population reaching 12 percent of the student body. The last school has equal proportions of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African-American, and Hispanic students.

*Hamden Connecticut*

Hamden, Connecticut is a blended urban/suburban town of 58,000 with more than 6,000 students in its public

schools. Of those, 47 percent are white, 33 percent black, 13 percent Hispanic and just over 6 percent Asian. Appleseed collected data relating to eight elementary schools in Hamden. The schools were divided into two clusters – those schools serving high-poverty neighborhoods (5 total), all of which are Title I (high-poverty) schools, and those schools serving middle-class neighborhoods. (3 total). Of the five schools serving the high-poverty neighborhoods, four of the five had at least 50 percent of the students receiving Free or Reduced Price Meals.

In Connecticut, Appleseed collected substantial on-line data, most of it coming from three separate sources: (1) the School Profiles of each of the eight elementary schools studied in Hamden, focusing on years 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009; (2) the 6-year Capital Budget proposed by the Board of Education on February 10, 2010; and (3) the Operating Budget. However, the balance of the data and information was gleaned from interviews with 4 elementary schools principals (two of which are Title I, and two which are not). Moreover, we were able to interview the Hamden School District Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Hamden Board of Education Chair, which collectively assisted us in interpreting the data and providing context to the analysis.

Hamden's eight elementary schools include five which are Title I: Church Street, Dunbar Hill, Helen Street, Ridge Hill and Shepherd Glen. Among these five, all but Ridge Hill are identified under No Child Left Behind as in need of improvement. With the exception of Dunbar Hill, at least 50 percent of the students in each of these five schools receive free- and reduced-price meals. Each school serves the neighborhood in which it is located.

Connecticut Appleseed examined whether an opportunity gap exists among the eight elementary schools in Hamden, Connecticut, a town with neighborhoods that vary widely in income. Connecticut Appleseed's findings report how this school district purposefully allocates the limited resources that contribute to student "opportunity" and evaluates the extent to which such an opportunity gap exists among those schools by focusing on disparities – and their absence – over a recent three-year period.

Three years ago, Hamden hired Superintendent Fran Rabinowitz. During her third year (2009-2010) on the job, the Superintendent developed and publicized her "All Means All" vision for the district. This vision will have increasing implications during the Board of Education's distribution of resources through its annual budget process, and will be a reference point for parents, teachers and principals alike.

During her very first year, Superintendent Rabinowitz put equity squarely on the table. Prior to her arrival, all of Hamden's elementary English Language Learner (ELL) schools were concentrated at Ridge Hill School for their education. The Superintendent reversed this policy, returning ELL students to their respective neighborhood schools on the premise that ELL students need to be located where there was the greatest opportunity to practice their English Language skills.

In a district as diverse as Hamden, "All Means All" is implicitly redistributive in terms of resources. "All Means All" may be open to interpretation, but it could not be cited as justification for grossly inequitable resource allocations. A Superintendent's "vision" is a key factor in a district's policy environment; as such "All Means All" has been a positive change in the context of resource equity.

That said, the analysis in Hamden had its own set of obstacles. For example, the study focused exclusively on elementary schools because the Hamden Public School district includes only a single middle school and high school, precluding any meaningful comparisons in the upper grades.

### *Albuquerque, New Mexico*

Appleseed's analysis of the Albuquerque Public School district focused on two clusters with different socioeconomic statuses. The two clusters were the Rio Grande and the La Cueva cluster. For each cluster, Appleseed studied one high school, two middle schools, and two elementary schools.

The Rio Grande cluster sits in Albuquerque's South Valley, a historic area flanked to the east by the Rio

Grande and to the West by the scenic mesas and inactive volcanoes. The area has long been agricultural in nature, and many of its residents continue to use the land for these purposes. The median household income is among the lowest in the city at \$37,280 and the infrastructure in the area has long been neglected.

The La Cueva cluster sits on the east side of the city. Flanked by the Sandia Mountains to the east, the area is home to some of Albuquerque's newest and most affluent communities. The area's schools have long served as a model of student achievement, and the community's high education level is reflected by its \$93,564 annual median household income.

Student demographic data shows that between 4 percent and 12 percent of students in the relatively affluent La Cueva cluster are eligible for free- and reduced-priced meals, compared to 63 percent to 97 percent of students in the high-poverty Rio Grande Cluster.<sup>38</sup>

The Albuquerque Partnership, New Mexico Appleseed's partner on this project, worked with New Mexico Appleseed's Executive Director to identify the variables for the study. A report of the findings was submitted to national Appleseed.

New Mexico Appleseed also utilized existing partnerships with education advocacy organizations such as Parents Reaching Out, Albuquerque Public Schools and the Public Education Department during this project.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico, Appleseed collected data primarily from the Research, Deployment and Accountability (RDA) office at the Albuquerque Public Schools. That department collects and analyzes data for the district. The department publishes several reports per year that focus on student educational outcomes, including graduation rates, student achievement and student programs. Both the University of New Mexico Office of Institutional Research as well as the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center made data available. Other data came from U.S. Census reports as well as from individual interviews with teachers, students and parents.

Even when one has access to stakeholders and a rich supply of data, the time it may take to obtain the data often presents its own set of challenges.

First, because of Albuquerque Public School (APS) policy, we were unable to collect data directly from RDA. Instead, we had to formally request data from the APS Communications Office. This process added several weeks to a request that should have taken a few days.

Second, while we had specifically requested data for the 2006-2009 school years, the district was not consistent in providing what we requested, thus requests for the same data had to be made on several occasions (and those subsequent requests resulted in additional waiting time).

### *Montgomery County, Alabama*

In Montgomery County, Alabama, Appleseed collaborated with the Montgomery Education Foundation (MEF) and Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) to obtain data studies and analysis of the Montgomery Public Schools (MPS). However, Alabama Appleseed experienced many obstacles throughout the data collection process. Although much data was received from MEF and PARCA, Appleseed needed to reach out to other data sources, including the Alabama Department of Education, the Montgomery Public School System, the United States Census, a national nonprofit organization called GreatSchools, and the Alabama PTA Congress of Parents Teachers and Students. Though most of these sources had official, publically accessible reports on the Internet, some sources required further inquiry and verification through the Montgomery Public Schools Department of Communication. Even then, there were still gaps in available information, including data that was not always current, consistent, immediately accessible or complete.

The biggest challenge, however, stemmed from the historical make-up of the Montgomery County schools. Not only is Montgomery County's black population growing, as it is in many southern cities, but its white population is diminishing. The opening of predominantly white private schools in the sixties created a largely white, middle-class private school population and a largely black, lower-wealth public school population.

The resource inequity inherent in such a bifurcated system is further complicated by nine public magnet schools populated by students from throughout the MPS system. The magnet schools, by definition, receive a more generous allocation of resources.

Alabama's participation in the Erasing the Opportunity Gap project cannot be understood minus its full historical and legal context.

Alabama's capital city of Montgomery, and its educational system, have not wanted for public scrutiny in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The state's current Constitution was written in 1901 and provided in Art. 14, Sec. 256:

*The Legislature shall establish, organize, and maintain a liberal system of public schools ... for the benefit of the children ages 6-21. Separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children... (emphasis added)*

In the wake of the federal mandate of Brown v. Board of Education the constitution was amended in 1956 to remove the original language and to now read:

*.... Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed as creating or recognizing any right to education or training at public expense. The Legislature may authorize the parents or guardians of minors who desire that such minor shall attend schools provided for their own race, to make election to that end.*

*(emphasis added)*

Thus, while primary attention is focused on the overtly racial constitutional language, the more lasting impact on education is the removal of a state-funded mandate for "public schools" in which to educate all children, to the explicit assertion that there is no right to publicly-funded "education." This is the point at which any discussion of public education in Montgomery Public Schools (MPS), and particularly resource equity, must begin, and as a matter of law, often ends.

As the research unfolded, we became aware of numerous administrative and political challenges in gaining access to information. Our preliminary study was guided by four questions:

1. Is resource inequity a significant enough issue in Montgomery County to warrant further study?
2. What sort of data must be acquired and from what sources can we gather such relevant data?
3. What partnerships are required, and how would we fashion them for the success of this undertaking?
4. What factors should be considered in determining resource equity in Montgomery County?

Alabama Appleseed found in short that: resource allocation is an issue in the MPS requiring further study; to understand the full and deepest meaning of the collected data sets would require solid cooperation of the board of education and the schools involved and perhaps even the teacher's union because of particular conditions in Alabama; and correcting any found inequity invariably requires school board and other officials to have a demonstrated commitment to righting imbalances.

*Chicago Appleseed*

Chicago Appleseed continued the resource equity research started in 2008-2009. Interviews with representatives of key community organizations in Chicago helped define the areas in which inequities are strong and persistent. Interviews were focused on utilizing the community school concept as a means of reducing the opportunity gap.

Chicago Public Schools is the third largest school system in the nation with more than 417,850 students and 675 schools. To place that in perspective, in addition to the traditional schools there are 32 elementary magnet schools, 10 magnet high schools and 22 charter schools. There are also 12 gifted centers that serve students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

## APPENDIX II

Displayed below is the Basic version of Appleseed’s Resource Equity Assessment Document (READ). There are two other READs that can be used. All three are arrayed as a matrix for easy collection of learning-related education resource information for a single school district. Which one is selected depends upon the needs and resources of the organization or individual collecting the information. The second version is the Basic Side-by-Side READ, which allows for recording information over multiple years. The final version is the Detailed READ, a tool that allows for collecting a far more extensive list of data. The Detailed READ caters to those with greater resources or those who seek to measure equity on a wider scale. The other two versions not seen here are available on the Appleseed web site: [www.appleseednetwork.org](http://www.appleseednetwork.org).

### BASIC RESOURCE EQUITY ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT (READ)

BUILD-ING NAME	CUR-RENT YEAR	DISTRICT NAME		
ITEM NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	ENTRY TYPE	ENTER DATA IN SHADED CELLS	USER GUIDE DEFINITIONS AND DIRECTIONS

RESOURCES				
				<b>Some of the items listed below will be available from state department of education websites, district websites, school building websites, and other public sources. However, much of the information will need to be obtained from a school official</b>
1	Principal or Contact	Enter		
2	Telephone	Enter		
3	Grade Levels in School	Enter		Indicate the grades served in the school (e.g., K-5, 7-9, 9-12)
4	Total Students Enrolled in Building	#		Pupil count on date set by State Department of Education
5	Average Student Attendance	%		Total days of student attendance/ total possible days of student attendance
6	Punctuality	%		% Tardy = average daily % of students not arriving at school on time
7	Student Graduation	%		Students who graduate in customary time/total students who could have graduated

8	<b>Total Professional Teaching Staff</b>	#		All teachers in all areas
9	Student/Teacher Ratios	#		Item 4/Item 8
10	Highly Qualified Teachers	%		% of teachers meeting highly qualified status; teachers must have: 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach
11	Average Years of Experience	#		Total teacher years of experience/total number of teachers
12	Average Education Level	#		1 = Bachelor, 2=Masters, 3=Doctorate
13	Average Days of Teacher Absenteeism	#		Total days of Teacher Absences/Total Teachers
14	Teacher Turnover	%		Professional Staff currently in the school who were not in the school the previous year/Item 8
			TEACHERS	ST U D E N T S
15	<b>Total Regular Instructional Programs</b>	#		Regular Instruction Programs
16	<b>Total Special Instructional Programs</b>	#		Programs designed primarily for students having special needs
17	<b>Total Vocational Instructional Programs</b>	#		Programs that provide organized learning experiences designed to develop skills, knowledge, attitudes and work habits in order to prepare individuals for entrance into employment in occupational fields

18	<b>Total Other Instructional Programs</b>	#			Other learning experiences not listed previously (Items 19 & 20 + others such as driver's education, summer school, homebound instruction)
19	Alternative Education	#			Programs to provide regular instruction for students in detention homes and centers or youthful offenders in Correctional Facilities. Also for students removed from regular school programs.
20	Programs outside established school day	#			Tutoring programs outside the normal school day
			PROGRAMS	STUDENTS	
21	<b>School-Sponsored Programs</b>	#			School sponsored activities under the supervision of the district staff. (Total of Items 29-30)
22	School-Sponsored Co-Curricular Activities	#			Activities such as band, chorus, choir, speech, debate and peer counseling and student financed and managed activities such as Class of 20xx, chess club
23	School-Sponsored Athletic Programs	#			Activities to provide opportunities to students to pursue various aspects of physical education
			STAFF		
24	<b>Professional Support Personnel</b>	#			Activities by professional staff designed to assess and improve the well-being of students. Total of Items 24-28
25	Guidance/School Counselors	#			Activities involving counseling with students and parents

26	Library	#		Activities such as selecting, acquiring, preparing cataloging and circulating books and other printed materials; planning the use of the library by students, teachers and other members of the instructional staff
27	Administration	#		Concerned with directing and managing the operation of a particular school
28	Pupil Health	#		Physical and mental health services, which are not direct instruction that provide students with appropriate medical, dental and nurse services
29	Other - Specify	#		If needed, use space provided at end of form
			STAFF	
30	<b>Total Classified Staff</b>	#		Total of Items 31 - 34
31	Secretaries	#		Secretaries and other clerical personnel
32	Aides	#		Instructional and non-instructional (if needed, use space provided at end of form)
33	Custodians	#		
34	Other - Specify	#		If needed, use space provided at end of form
	<b>Facilities</b>			
35	Age of Building	#		Current year minus year of original construction
36	Recent Renovations	Year		Use space at end of form to explain major renovations in the last ten years
37	Scheduled Future Renovation	Year		Use space at end of form to explain planned future renovations

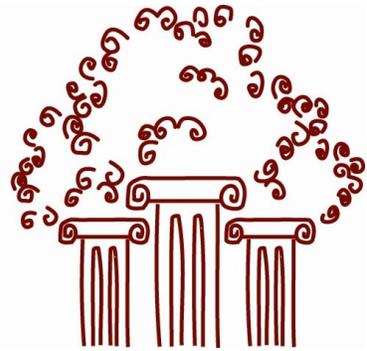
38	Classrooms	#		Separate rooms where instruction is provided (excluding items 39-42)
39	Computer Labs	#		
40	Science Labs	#		
41	Gymnasium	#		
42	Multi-purpose Rooms	#		
43	Sq Feet of Instructional Space	#		Total building space minus non-instructional space
44	Outdoor Playground Sq Ft	#		
<b>Security</b>				
45	Entry	Y or N		System to control entrance into building (use space at end of form to describe)
46	Cameras	Y or N		
47	Security Personnel		Armed	U n a r m e d  If needed, use space provided at end of form
48	School Resource Officers	#		
49	Security Guards	#		
<b>Technology</b>				
50	Computer Count #	#		Total number of computers in building for use by students
51	Internet Y or N	Y or N		Do students have access to the Internet
52	LAN	Y or N		Do students have access to a Local Area Network
<b>Library</b>				
53	Books	#		Total number of books in the library
54	Other Instructional Media	#		If needed, use space provided at end of form

<b>Parental Involvement</b>					
55	PTO/PTA	#			Number of various parent support groups
56	Number of members	#			
57	\$ contributed annually	\$			Dollars contributed to school to support student programs
<b>Textbooks</b>					
58	Textbook for every student for every subject	Y or %			If no, how close to 100%
<b>ADVANCED PLACEMENT &amp; INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE COURSES</b>			SECTIONS	STUDENTS	
59	Math	#			
60	Science	#			
61	Language Arts	#			
62	World Languages	#			
63	Other - Specify	#			If needed, use space provided at end of form
<b>STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>					
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
64	White	#			
65	Black	#			
66	Latino/Hispanic	#			
67	Asian/Pacific Islander	#			
68	American Indian/Alaskan Native	#			
69	Multiracial	#			

	NCLB Subgroup				
70	Regular Ed	#			
71	IEP	#			
72	ELL	#			
73	Economic Disadvantaged	#			
74	Migratory	#			
75	Homeless	#			
	<b>STUDENT OUTCOMES</b>		Reading	Math	Entries should be made for grade levels in the building. If grade level is not tested, enter NT. % is number of students achieving Advanced or Proficient/number of students taking test
76	Students at Advanced & Proficient on AYP Test	% or NT			Total number of students in school achieving Advanced or Proficient/Total Number in school who took test
77	PK	% or NT			
78	K	% or NT			
79	1	% or NT			
80	2	% or NT			
81	3	% or NT			
82	4	% or NT			
83	5	% or NT			
84	6	% or NT			
85	7	% or NT			
86	8	% or NT			
87	9	% or NT			
88	10	% or NT			
89	11	% or NT			
90	12	% or NT			
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SPACE FOR ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION OF ITEM RESPONSES--IDENTIFY ITEM NUMBER IN FIRST COLUMN</b>				

# NOTES

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