



Blatant Disparities in Educational Opportunities

By David R. Jones
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The opportunity of students to learn is determined by the quality of the schools they attend. And the access to good public schools depends on the neighborhood of the student. Using data from nearly 500 of New York's middle schools, a new report from the Schott Foundation for Public Education concludes that the city's education policies "systematically lock out most of its student population from an opportunity to learn."

The report, entitled, "A Rotting Apple: Education Redlining in New York City," reveals that the city's school system's funds, experienced teachers, and quality programs are unequally distributed according to race and neighborhood. It shows how the school system practices education redlining. Redlining is the practice of banks designating whole communities – mostly low-income neighborhoods of color - where loans, usually housing loans, are restricted. It is illegal, although there are still instances of it occurring.

Mayor Bloomberg and several public figures running to succeed him have lately been arguing about the closing of schools that do not meet certain levels of testing. The Schott report exposes the fact that all the talk about school closings is just nibbling around the margins of the problem. As the report states: "This unequal distribution of opportunity by race and neighborhood occurs with such regularity that reasonable people can no longer ignore the role that policies and practices play in institutionalizing the resulting disparate outcomes."

New York City's 32 Community School Districts (CSD) vary from prosperous, predominantly white and Asian neighborhoods in Manhattan (CSD 2 – Battery Park City to Upper East Side) and Queens (CSD 26 – Hillcrest-Flushing Heights-Fresh Meadows) with excellent schools to low-performing districts serving highly segregated, impoverished neighborhoods of color primarily in the Bronx (CSD 7 – Mott Haven-Port Morris) and Brooklyn (CSD 16 – Bedford-Stuyvesant). The report determines that inequalities between districts largely correlate to poverty and race.

Among the report's findings: Latino students are nearly four times more likely to be enrolled in the city's lowest-performing schools than white and Asian students. It is five times more likely that a white student will have a top score on the state's English Language Arts assessment than a Latino student. On the other hand, it is three times more likely that a Latino student will be in the lowest scoring group than a white student.

And students of color have far less likelihood of graduating high school with a Regents diploma, the baseline qualification for college or a good job. Fifty-five percent of white students received Regents diplomas in 2009 compared to 26 percent of Latino students.

The city's Department of Education spends 19 percent more on schools in the most prosperous neighborhoods than it does in the most impoverished neighborhoods. According to U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, there is a difference of \$8,222 in high school teacher salaries between schools with the highest and lowest Latino and black student enrollment.

New York State should increase funding, and that funding should be targeted to the lowest performing districts. School funding should be on a non-competitive basis and should be meted out in accordance with the needs of the students. There also should be a maximum set percentage of inexperienced teachers in low-performing districts, and the salary gap between teachers in high and low poverty schools should be narrowed.

The success of students is currently being determined primarily by where they live, their color, and their parents' economics rather than by their abilities. Mayor Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Walcott should be working to change this situation and give each student an equal opportunity to learn and acquire a decent education.

The Schott Foundation report is available [online](#) .

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 168 years. For over 10 years he served as a member of the board of directors of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer.