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How Teachers and Lawmakers Can Combat Disparities in the United States Education System

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Abstract:

According to the Census Bureau, in 2004 nearly one fifth of the United States K-12 students lived in poverty and experienced disadvantages in the quality of their education compared to students living in affluent and suburban school districts (Jacob, 2007, p. 130). As an English Secondary Education intern placed in a school system with students of low socioeconomic status, I constantly see the negative effects of poverty in urban school settings, and sought to research the national relationship between race, socioeconomic status and education quality for my honors thesis. This paper examines how race and socioeconomic status determine the educational value of a student and what resources the student receives, how to bridge the gaps in education, and what actions are still needed to resolve the deep-set issue of unequal education for students across the United States. Through my research I have found that achievement and opportunity gaps are prevalent issues in the United States education system that are consistently perpetuated by the placement of lower qualified teachers and lack of funding to urban and high poverty schools, which creates a detrimental learning environment for minority and low socioeconomic students (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 30). Implications of my research show that programs such as Teach for America strive to alleviate gaps in the system by placing highly knowledgeable graduates into classrooms, but programs such as these can be improved upon to increase teachers' pedagogical and cultural awareness. Further, large scale adjustments to the education system with incentives to attract and retain teachers may not be a reasonable solution, but equalizing education spending and increasing the teaching standards may be a suitable option to combat the hierarchical and unequal education experience for students from poor and minority populations.

Introduction

Although the United States residents claim a reputation of achievement and success for anyone who strives for the American Dream, the population struggles with one of the largest achievement and opportunity gaps internationally, and students face disparities in the school system due to their socioeconomic status and race. An international study of achievement gaps world-wide showed that “Among 46 countries, the United States is ranked 15th in national achievement and 10th in the size of achievement gap” (Akiba, 2007, p. 374). This study ranked the United States in the top third of achievement level, but also found the United States educational system to be in top quarter of nations with high levels of achievement gaps. This research depicts the range of work from students across the United States and “While achievement gap discourse in education usually focuses on the students’ scores on standardized tests, it also concerns graduation rates, patterns in gifted and advanced placement, and other measurable outcomes that allow for comparisons between groups of students” (Milner, 2012, p. 694). Researchers assessed quantifiable data of students internationally for their success levels primarily through standardized test scores, and the data points indicated that the United States students performed lower than most of the countries they used in their study. The low quantifiable performance of United States students compared to several countries internationally indicates the critical issue that students struggle to understand educational curriculum in the United States. One of the overlooked factors that affects these numbers is the high rate of poverty that negatively impacts student’s success in the classroom and denies all students an equally constructive education.

Many students in the United States face poverty in their childhood, which consequently affects their socioeconomic status and level of education that they receive

throughout their schooling career. The Census Bureau counted that in 2004, “13 million American children under age eighteen lived in poverty- and overall child poverty rate of 17.8 percent” (Jacob, 2007, p. 130). Approximately one-fifth of the student population live in poverty and combat disadvantage in the quality of their education because of the lack of resources and qualified teachers allocated to high poverty school systems.

Haskins (2008) performed studies that show the “gaps in skills related to school achievement are present as early as the age of three and persist throughout the school years” (p. 192). The disparities in the education quality between high and low poverty students begin at a young age, and are perpetuated throughout their schooling careers. The lack of educational resources dedicated to schools with high poverty students is coupled with the assignment of unskilled teachers, and together these two factors contribute to the lower quality education of students. Darling-Hammond (1998) found that in minority-majority schools, “curriculum offerings and materials are lower in quality; and teachers are much less qualified in terms of levels of education, certification, and training in the fields they teach” (p. 30). Students placed in classes with lower quality teachers are susceptible to scoring lower on standardized tests and more likely to suffer from high dropout rates. In addition to the disparity in resource quantity, “Many inner-city neighborhoods suffer from poor “social capital”- the informal connections between people that help a community monitor its children, provide positive role models, and give support to those in need” (Jacob, 2007, p. 132). The students lack a support system outside of school and may not receive affirmative guidance in the classroom as well. In order to better support high poverty location students, teachers and outside mentors need to help students to flourish by providing support on an educational and emotional level.

Troubles in Education

Although a majority of the United States school systems center their learning goals on the use of Common Core Standards and Curriculum, the nation still lacks cohesion between all states to equalize the curriculum and expectations for teachers. Ball (2010) states that one obstacle the United States faces is “the lack of common K-12 curriculum that would enable a coherent system of instructional materials and comprehensive teacher training to achieve that curriculum” (p. 12). Without the cohesive standards and expectations, every state decides what training and knowledge is required for a prospective teacher. In effect there is no “well-defined curriculum of practice for prospective teachers”, and this inconsistency leads to a division in equity and student achievement (Ball, 2010, p. 11). Newly hired teachers enter the workforce with varying content knowledge, skills, pedagogical experience, preparation for the classroom, and training. In addition to the incongruity that teachers experience nationwide, students also encounter diversified school experiences dependent on their race and socioeconomic status. These two qualities determine the level of excellence of education that students obtain, and they may differ greatly per student.

Race

Opportunity gaps related to poverty affect a child’s education throughout their schooling career, and effects can follow them through life, but those disparities begin in early schooling and spur from the race of the student. Haskins (2008) discusses that opportunity gaps appear in “preschool through college, education usually reinforces rather than mitigates preexisting differences between groups defined by race and socioeconomic status” (p. 192). This creates an educational hierarchy based on race and prevents students of minority groups to access resources and quality educational tools to

be successful. The separation of races in schools, with the majority of the population of students as either minority or non-minority, shows that segregation still exists in our school systems and is perpetuated through the degrading of some schools and limiting of their resource allocation. Darling-Hammond (1998) discovered that nearly “Two-thirds of minority students still attend schools that are predominantly minority, most of them located in central cities and funded well below those in neighboring suburban districts” (p. 29). The unequal funding of school systems, especially the lower funding for higher poverty schools, creates disparity in the distribution of crucial resources for educational use. The financial inequalities are perpetuated in education because “many minorities and economically disadvantaged students are located in property-poor urban districts which fare the worst in educational expenditures... (or) in rural districts which suffer from fiscal inequality” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 30). Minority students often obtain less funding in schools, which correlate to their attendance of urban schools. Meanwhile, school systems that do not contain a minority-majority student population makeup receive decent funding and non-minority students do not feel the negative effects of disproportion and unequal allotment of resources.

Researchers such as Darling-Hammond (1998) delved into examining the quality of education within schools, and differentiated between the factors and impacts of policies. She examines that “policies leave minority students with fewer and lower-quality books, curriculum materials, laboratories, and computers; significant larger class size; less qualified and experienced teachers; and less access to high-quality curriculum” (p. 30). As a result of the unequal funding in schools due to location and ethnicity makeup, the resources distributed among school districts vary. Location is not the only

premise for this difference in pupil funding because “Even *within* urban school districts, schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students receive fewer instructional resources than others” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 30). One of the main factors deciding the instructional tools assigned to schools include race, and minority-majority schools suffer from the lack of funding for necessary educational resources. Darling-Hammond (1998) states that “Schools serving greater numbers of students of color had significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly white students”, which shows a positive correlation between the ethnicity of students and their resource allotment (p. 29). Students of minority races are persecuted educationally while white students receive greater quantities of resources and educational opportunities.

Another common occurrence observed predominantly in minority schools is the placement of students into larger class sizes and overrepresentation of minority students in remedial classes. Through observation of schools, Darling-Hammond (1998) noticed that “In predominantly minority schools, which most students of color attend, schools are large (on average, more than twice as large as predominantly white schools and reaching 3,000 students or more in most cities); on average, class sizes are 15 percent larger overall” (p. 28). The observable increase in student to teacher ratio in the classroom is detrimental to student learning, as students benefit greatly from individual instruction. This gap in classroom size exemplifies the effect of underfunding in minority-majority school systems and the lack of qualified teachers to fill positions and create a larger amount of class sections for students. In addition to the overpopulation of classrooms, school systems perpetuate an “overrepresentation of color in special education, [and an] under representation of color in gifted education” (Milner, 2012, p. 701). Having

minority students placed in remedial classes, possibly by assumptions made from the student deficit mindset, and preventing them from entering a challenging program promotes the self-fulfilling prophecy mindset in students and shows minority students that schools do not believe in their abilities. This deficit mindset leads to a bias towards students and subsequently an “over referral of African American students to the office for disciplinary actions and consequences, overwhelming number of African American and Latino American students expelled or suspended, under representation of students of color in schoolwide clubs, organizations, and other prestigious arenas” (Milner, 2012, p. 701). Perception of students based on race is apparent in these observations. By placing a large amount of minority students into disciplinary plans and over correcting behavior, students learn that no matter the situation they may be punished or castigated from a quality education because of their race.

Socioeconomic

Urban schools contain a large population of minority students that are overlooked because of their race, but also their low socioeconomic status. School systems in the United States are not Federally funded, nor is there is not equality in the educational funding, so the socioeconomic status of a school and its students determines the resources and quality of education per domain. Many nations internationally fund their schools centrally and equally, but in contrast, “the wealthiest 10 percent of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent, and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 28). These unequal funding scenarios discriminate against students of lower socioeconomic status and ensure the lesser than equitable education for students of poorer backgrounds. As a result, “the U.S. educational system is one of the most unequal in the industrialized world, and students

routinely receive dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 28). The unfair advantage gained by higher socioeconomic status students creates a cyclic disadvantage for low socioeconomic students that become seemingly impossible to break. This cycle presents itself as students cannot gain access to quality teachers not a satisfactory education. As a result, “people who grow up in poverty or those from lower socioeconomic statuses generally do not start their educational or life experiences in a fair or equitable position” (Milner, 2012, p. 704). Children from lower socioeconomic status and who are considered minority are thus punished with a less than equitable education from a young age, and this is may be perpetuated throughout their entire school career. The hierarchical determination of student worthiness of education is continued through the unequal funding and many researchers, “Identify disparities in students’ socioeconomic status as a cause of opportunity gaps and mostly as explanation for achievement gaps” (Milner, 2012, p.703). Students in areas of low socioeconomic status and high poverty rates experience lower funding and receive disproportionate amount of resources, including materials and teachers, to sustain a quality education. These disparities are described by Milner (2012) to be “inequitable in different social contexts: Numbers of high-need districts, where resources are low, too often receive the same resources as districts with much greater resources” (p. 708). Thus, students from separate counties and districts receive an equal amount of materials, but not equitable, as the high number of students in high poverty school systems require more materials than the small class sizes in low poverty school systems. A large factor in the distribution of resources, which hinders the performance of high poverty students, is the socioeconomic status of students in a school system.

Students not only are negatively affected by the materialistic resources allocated to the school, but may also suffer from unqualified teachers in the classroom and lack of productive consistency.

Teacher Qualifications Matter

While students are hindered by their ethnicity and socioeconomic status, outside influences such as the qualification level of the teacher determines the success of a child in school. The National Academies noted that “Teacher quality is widely recognized by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers alike to be the most powerful school-related influence on a child’s academic performance” (Akiba, 2007, p. 369). Thus, researchers have found positive correlations between the performance of a student and the attributes of the teacher, and teachers can be rated as qualified or unqualified through observable criteria. Akiba (2007) discovered that “Several syntheses of these studies have identified teacher certification, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching experience as significantly associated with high student achievement or greater achievement gains” (p. 371). In order to consider a teacher candidate as successful, the candidate must be skillful in content, pedagogical practice, and well practiced in the field of teaching. The success in each of these fields can be measured to determine the outcome of the student’s success, which also shows through test scores and grades.

In high poverty school systems attracting qualified teachers poses a challenge, which causes less qualified teachers to fill positions and a large portion of students to obtain poorly qualified teachers. Akiba (2007) states that a “major obstacle in federal and state efforts to increase the quality of the teaching gap workforce and student achievement is the persistent opportunity gap between students in their access to qualified teachers” (p.369). Thus, the opportunity gap drives away qualified teachers and

perpetuates the cycle of low income area students receiving teachers with less training and pedagogical knowledge. Darling-Hammond (1998) studied the composition of teacher makeup within school districts and found that “Students in poor or predominantly minority schools are much less likely to have teachers who are fully qualified or hold higher-level degrees” (p. 31). In order to fill the less than desirable positions at low-income schools, which high degree holding teachers do not want to take, the schools rely on hiring less qualified teachers. Teacher placement, even within school systems that contain a large number of minority students, may be rigged to benefit the higher socioeconomic status students. Some school systems utilize “a ‘positive matching’ of students to teachers, in which affluent or high-achieving students end up in classrooms taught by better-credentialed teachers” (Clotfelter, 2006, p.807). Schools assign students’ classes with a bias in order to allow higher socioeconomic and white students an education with competent teachers. Placing students of lower abilities with incapable teachers, but students of affluence with more qualified teachers, sustains the idea that students with lower socioeconomic status do not deserve quality teachers. As a result, students of lower socioeconomic status and minority races are placed with teachers with an absence of pedagogical awareness and experience.

Pedagogical knowledge

Studies that observe teacher performance indicate a correlation of teacher performance with pedagogical knowledge, and this directly impacts the effectiveness of the teacher. When teachers are under-prepared with minimal fundamentals of a teaching philosophy and limited understanding of how to disclose content materials through multiple means of strategic methods, the students suffer. Darling-Hammond (1998) states that multiple “Studies of under-prepared teachers consistently find that they are less

effective with students and that they have difficulty with curriculum development, classroom management, student motivation, and teaching strategies” (p. 31). The use of management, curriculum design, and motivation are crucial to student learning, and less than qualified teachers who do not contain this key knowledge are prone to running an insufficient classroom. Teachers with a lack of preparation are “less likely to understand students’ learning styles and differences, to anticipate students’ knowledge and potential difficulties, or to plan and redirect instruction to meet students’ needs” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 31). Having content knowledge is a key component to teaching students a subject matter, but without knowing how to express the material to students, the information may be lost in translation. Teachers who solely have content knowledge, without pedagogical experience, lack the abilities to “unpack” the information for students (Ball, 2010, p. 10). As a result, the unprepared teacher may understand what “student thought processes might lead to difficulties, but they must be able to explain in ways that students can understand” (Ball, 2010, p. 10). This skill develops from classroom management training and experience working with students. Ultimately, teacher knowledge of content must be coupled with a pedagogical awareness and understanding of implementation, which allows the students to perform best. This practice is described as enabling the teacher to “expose the subject to learners, to highlight potentially confusing issues, and to pose strategic questions designed to help novice learners” (Ball, 2010, p. 10). A mixture of these strategies allows the novice learner to evolve their English language skills and comprehend material. Qualified teachers demonstrate a proficiency in pedagogical ideals and supplement this knowledge

with classroom experiences, but many urban students are not placed with these knowledgeable teachers.

Experience in field

Teachers of high poverty students, and especially in urban communities, enter the teaching profession with less field experience, which detrimentally affects students who receive an education from the teacher. Jacob (2007) declared that “Teachers in urban schools, particularly urban schools serving poor and minority children, are less qualified than their suburban colleagues in terms of such conventional measures as experience and educational background” (p. 137). Teachers entering positions in high poverty school districts generally contain less experience in pedagogical training and less competitive college degrees than those teachers in suburban schools. Jacob (2007) continues on this notion to state that urban setting teachers are also “more likely to be inexperienced, less likely to be certified, and less likely to have graduated from competitive colleges than are suburban teachers” (p. 135). His examination of experiential gaps between teachers in urban and suburban districts stems from evidence that a smaller percentage of urban teachers graduate from competitive colleges, hold fewer conventional credentials, and their rate of failing teaching certification exams is higher.

Less classroom experience, lower qualifications, and lack of pedagogical training associated with urban teachers indicates a relationship to the student’s success in the classroom; while teacher experience growth can increase the likelihood of success in a student, the lack of experience can hurt the student’s success rate. Akiba (2007) found that “Many empirical studies have indeed shown a significant and positive relationship between number of years [teaching] and student achievement” (p. 371). The examination of teacher experience is crucial in high poverty school districts where schools have a hard

time retaining staff and turnover rates are high. Constant cycling of new teachers into the school prevents students from obtaining an experienced teacher. Akiba (2007) elaborates that “If teacher learning accumulates with longer years of teaching practice, experienced teachers should be more effective than novice teachers in improving student achievement” (p. 371). Schools of high poverty rates struggle to retain high quality teachers, and many teachers who accept jobs in these schools often leave positions quickly. As a result, there is an influx of novice and non-tenured teachers in urban school classrooms. Jacob (2007) researched that “According to the SASS, 20.3 percent of teachers in urban districts had three or fewer years of experience, compared with 17.6 percent in suburban districts” (p. 135). Although the percentage difference may seem relatively small, this variation proves a gap between the abilities and professionalism in urban and suburban teachers. Teachers entering suburban schools are less likely to enter the classroom with a lack of pedagogical knowledge and experience, whereas the urban teachers who are accepted to fill positions out of desperation may not be as capable and equipped to manage a teaching profession. This same study found that “roughly one-third of all seventh to twelfth grade teachers had neither a major nor a minor in the field which they taught” (Jacob, 2007, p. 135). Placing students with teachers who not only do not have pedagogical knowledge, but no content mastery is harmful to student learning. Students in low socioeconomic school systems receive teachers with little training and background knowledge in the content and teaching skills, which decreases the likelihood that students competently learn the material. Not all but a large amount of urban teachers rank at lower standards than suburban teacher counterparts, which stems from insufficient training and preparation programs.

Licensure

Similar to experience, one of the few factors that researchers have focused on in order to determine teacher efficiency includes the examination of teaching licensure scores. Licensure scores of teachers are proven to increase or decrease student performance, depending on the quality of the teacher's achievements. For example, "Some teachers who score higher on certification exams and some who attend more competitive undergraduate institutions produce larger performance gains for their children" (Jacob, 2007, p. 138). When teachers obtain higher test scores on their certification exams and prove mastery of content, their students in the classroom benefit from their knowledge. The success of the student can be linked to the testing scores and achievement level of the teacher, which presents itself in the math and reading assessments of students. Ronald Ferguson found that "teacher's expertise- as measured by scores on a licensing examination, master's degrees, and experience- was the single most important determinant of student achievement, accounting for roughly 40 percent of the measured variance in students' reading and math achievement gains in grades 1-12" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 30). The achievement of a student throughout their entire schooling career is measured in conjunction with the knowledge of the teacher. This is reflected when students suffer from lower standardized test exam scores when their teacher is teaching a subject that they are not well certified or qualified to teach (Jacob, 2007, p. 135). If teachers show success in the subject that they teach, then the students are more probable to also show success. Considerable research shows how important a "teacher's content knowledge is to their effectiveness with students, especially at the middle and high school levels" (Haycock, 1998, p. 62). Urban schools have a large teacher turnover rate, and also struggle to attract teachers with training in all desired

training techniques or content area, creating an influx of teachers that lack skills necessary to help students succeed. A teacher with more preparation and higher accreditation exam scores proves to turnout increased test scores from students.

Research studies at state and school wide levels show that students with higher credential earning teachers receive better assessment scores and are more likely to succeed academically than students placed with lower quality teachers. Darling-Hammond produced and conducted a trial for statewide analysis through the National Assessment of Educational Progress data set to discover that “the percentage of teachers with a subject major predicted higher state-level student achievement in both mathematics and reading” (Akiba, 2007, p. 371). Teachers who possessed qualifications for content material produced more knowledgeable students, which correlated through achievement scores. This juxtaposes the qualifications of urban teachers, with so many of the urban educators lacking content mastery. Through her research, Darling-Hammond also found that the “percentage of students taught by fully certified teachers, the percentage of students taught by teachers with 3 or more years of teaching experience, and the percentage of students taught by teachers with high overall quality were significantly associated with higher national achievement” (Akiba, 2007, p. 378). Placement of students with teachers who contain high rankings of quality, certifications, and experience yields a larger amount of educated students. Even the differentiation between average to highly qualified teachers impacts the students, as a student with a more qualified teacher produces large gains in achievement. It is crucial to place students of all abilities with qualified teachers because “a student who has three consecutive very high-quality teachers will gain 50 percentile points more on an achievement test than a

student who has three consecutive average teachers” (Jacob, 2007, 138). Placement of students strategically, as per ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and deficit mindset hinders students because they are blocked from the opportunity to receive a teacher that allows for increases in achievement levels. Teachers with less advanced degrees tend to teach students with lower test scores, and this placement method of matching student ability to teacher qualifications may create or continue the cycle of disparities in student achievement level (Clotfelter, 2006, 793). Creating an equality of placement for students in all classrooms with licensed, accredited, and well-prepared teachers is crucial to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed and improve their education.

The Impact of the Teacher on Students

Teachers in urban schools system are shown to be less qualified than suburban school teachers due to “experience, educational background, and teaching certification” and the lower teacher quality leads to opportunity gaps for students impacted by the disparity (Jacob, 2007, p. 130). These three qualifications are prominently linked to the success rate of struggling students and how it will cause the students to prosper or suffer as a result of the teacher placement. Consequently, the lower the teacher quality, the more likely the student is to receive lower achievement scores. Many teacher education programs work towards sufficient preparation of teacher candidates but state that although “they are doing the best they can- that low salaries and lower prestige make it impossible to attract able candidates, especially minorities, to the teaching profession and higher standards will make it worse” (Haycock, 1998, p. 63). The limited resources allocated to teachers in urban settings may discourage and impede a strong teacher workforce in the school systems that need the most support and dedicated teachers. The lack of funding and resources for teachers in urban schools dissuade teachers from

working in the schools and pushes away many highly qualified teachers. As well, teacher preparation programs state that “Inequities in access to qualified teachers are likely to play a significant role in long-lasting achievement gap in the United States” (Akiba, 2007, p. 370). Deterring qualified teachers causes students in lower socioeconomic schools to receive a poor education in comparison to suburban communities, which continues the gap between the student achievement. Students of low socioeconomic status are regularly the victim of opportunity gaps throughout their schooling career, which hurts their achievement scores and future education or careers. Akiba (2007) states that “The high level of childhood poverty, combined with the lack of a strong national system of early childhood education and care, may intensify the significance of opportunity gaps in access to qualified teachers later in the school career” (p. 370). The placement of students with unqualified teachers inadvertently undermines the students’ future studies and learning achievements. Just as students in poverty are affected largely by inequitable opportunities, the lack of national cohesion in our schools across the nation also contributes to inadequacies in resources and funding.

Students in urban communities tend to need the most support, yet they receive the shortcomings of materials and teachers. Jacob (2007) claims that “Teachers play a critical role in schooling, particularly in inner-city school districts where children often have less support at home” (p. 130). Schools send a message to students in urban schools that they are less worthy of a quality education with their distribution of lower quality resources to the students. Dr. Richard Ingersoll from University of Georgia proclaimed that “the very youngsters who are most dependent on their teachers for content knowledge- are systematically taught by teachers with the least content knowledge” (Haycock, 1998, p.

62). Students who may have a smaller amount of resources at home to utilize and advance their education, such as family support or parents with higher education, do not receive the boost of guidance necessary to improve their education in school. Studies discovered a discriminatory placement system of students based on race, where white students tend to be placed in classes with higher qualified teachers and students of color receive teachers of lower quality. The Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers found that “as the percentage of non-white children in the student increases, the average teacher score declines” (Haycock, 1998, p. 62). Bias placement of teachers inhibits the opportunity for students to academically grow, and also sends the message to students that they are worthy or unworthy of an education based on race and financials, and education can be earned or deserved more by a certain type of student.

Hiring Unqualified Teachers

The United States ranks as the third largest country, in respect to its physical size, and thus stands as a country with one of the largest teaching workforces in the world. As well, teaching is a high demand job, which is needed in every state and often times causes teacher shortages in schools, particularly in urban settings where employment is not as highly sought after. A teacher shortage entails that the “number of effective teachers the district wants to employ is greater than the number of effective teachers who are willing and able to work at a given salary” (Jacob, 2007, p. 134). When a district or individual school experiences a teacher shortage, the school may be apt to accept teachers unworthy of the position in order to satisfy occupation numbers and ensure classrooms are occupied. Some other ways that schools districts respond to a teacher shortage include, “by hiring teachers with no certification or experience, by using long term substitutes, or by increasing class sizes” (Jacob, 2007, p. 134). These methods are detrimental to the

students' learning processes as they promote an unstable learning environment with unqualified teachers. Creating a staff filled with substitute and temporary teachers limits the number of experiences staff members in the school and increases the teacher turnover rate.

Problems of inequity in the classroom, ranging to school wide issues, stem from “a lack of highly qualified teachers, especially in science and math related subjects; the low social status and salary of teachers and their poor working conditions; a lack of systemic induction programs; and inequitable distribution of qualified teachers between high-poverty and low-poverty schools” (Akiba, 2007, p. 371). Akiba states several of the issues prevalent in schools, many of which relate to the poor working conditions and inequitable treatment of students based on the insufficient standards produced and practiced for hiring teachers. The hiring of unqualified teachers in order to satisfy requirements of providing an educator to students is a flawed system that causes students to lose valuable educational practice. Teacher shortages are especially common in urban school districts, where the pool of teacher applicants is limited in number. Due to desperation to fill job positions, “urban schools were substantially more likely to fill these vacancies by hiring a substitute (42.4 percent versus 30.0 percent) or hiring a less than fully qualified teacher (19.2 percent versus 14.4 percent)” (Jacob, 2007, p. 134). Although suburban schools employ these methods as well, the occurrence is less substantial than in urban schools. Jacob's data collection from urban and suburban schools proves that there is a quantifiable difference between the teacher populations in these juxtaposing school settings and that teachers of higher skill choose to work in suburban school settings with students who fit their desired student type criteria.

Teacher Assignment

Teacher to student assignment presents a bias within schools, especially pertaining to the race of students correlating to the teacher assignment and the resulting achievement associated with these placements. Darling-Hammond (1998) found that, “minority students are about half as likely to be assigned to the most effective teachers and twice as likely to be assigned to the least effective” (p. 31). Students of minority do not acquire teachers that provide the highest quality education because of their race, and ergo perform worse on standardized tests. The positive matching system is present in a Virginia school where “students who attend predominantly minority secondary schools are more likely to be taught by under-qualified teachers than students who attend high-poverty secondary schools” (Haycock, 1998, p. 62). Within this school, the positive matching is connected to race more so than poverty levels, but both socioeconomic levels and race affect the student’s placement and assignment to teachers. As well, Haycock (1998) concluded that race plays a significant factor in teacher placement and its effect on students as, “Poor white children appear to have a higher likelihood of having well qualified teachers than poor black children” (p. 62). Through examining white and minority students who both contain low socioeconomic status, a link of teacher placement based on race supports the concept that teachers of better quality are placed with non-minority students. In addition to being assigned a less effective teacher, “high-poverty students and ethnic minority students are twice as likely as low-poverty and majority students to be assigned novice teachers who are new to the profession” (Akiba, 2007, p. 369). Race and financial standings impact the parameters of education they will be assigned. Furthermore, high-poverty students are also often taught by uncertified teachers, out of field teachers, and teachers with low ACT and SAT scores (Akiba, 2007,

p. 369). The economic standing of a student determines many of the quality characteristics of the teachers they receive, which generally relies on the bias deficit mindset. This perpetuates the idea that students of poverty and minority are only suitable to receive teachers that are limited in experience, less qualified, and unsubstantially knowledgeable.

Lower quality teachers placed in high poverty and minority-majority school systems depict the unequal distribution of qualified teachers through the United States education system, which represents the unequal opportunities for students. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future concluded that "new teachers hired without meeting certification standards (25 percent of all new teachers) are usually assigned to teach the most disadvantaged students in low-income and high-minority schools, while the most highly educated new teachers are hired largely by wealthier schools" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 31). When teachers do not meet the high standards that suburban schools require for their staff, unqualified teachers seek staffing in urban schools and generally get placed with students of low achievement levels that need knowledgeable teachers to be successful. Assigning students that need the most support and assistance with teachers that may lack the skills to aid their learning is detrimental to the students' learning processes. The assignment based on bias in urban settings also teaches students that their education is not valued, and re-enforces the deficit mindset. Haycock (1998) insists that "If they remain in the hands of under-qualified teachers, poor and minority students will continue to fulfill society's limited expectations of them" (p. 62). The deficit mindset theoretically decreases the value of some student's education due

to their race or affluence, rather than skill, and placement based on this mindset hurts the student.

Deficit in Expectations of Students

One resulting factor of clumping minority students into one school system is the deficit mindset that teachers carry into the classroom. Milner (2012) states that “Analyzing and addressing opportunity gaps in educational practices concerns low expectations and deficit mindsets that teachers and other educators sometimes have of students” (p. 706). In order to prevent perpetuating stereotypes of student’s abilities based on race or socioeconomic status, teachers must be cognizant not to characterize a student’s abilities based on these traits. Teachers sometimes apply low expectations and deficit mindsets with students, primarily through an inadvertent bias, which “can make it difficult for educators to develop learning opportunities that challenge students cognitively” (Milner, 2012, p. 706). Judging a student’s abilities and categorizing a student based on wealth or race hinders the student’s chances to gain work that matches their abilities, and can prevent the student from gaining a challenging workload. Conceptions and mindsets that lead to low expectations and deficit mindsets can stem from conversations with students, interpretations of standardized test results, historical perceptions, and isolated negative experiences (Milner, 2012, p. 707). Misconceptions about a student leads to a detrimental cycle that may begin at a young age for the students and continue throughout their schooling career, in which they are misplaced for academic rigor. There is an “unending and evolving cycle: Educators do not teach with rigor and high expectations; students do not learn, or they learn a low level of knowledge and skill; students’ test scores suffer, and then all involved may wonder why” (Milner, 2012, p. 707). Consequently, students in high poverty schools are prone to a deficit mindset and

placed into a category that disables them from moving into a rigorous curriculum to better their knowledge and education.

Instability and Retention

Urban school systems are prone to the revolving door cycle of teachers entering positions and quickly leaving, creating a high turnover rate and disruption to the classroom environment for students. The United States, in comparison to other countries nationally has “one of the lowest rates of school retention in the developed world” and also has a large rate of child poverty (Akiba, 2007, p. 370). A majority of unstable school climates are in high poverty school systems, were attracting and retaining qualified teachers presents a challenge. Teachers in urban schools are “less likely to stay at the same school for an extended period, with 52.4 percent (compared with 57.1 percent of suburban teachers) reporting having taught at the same school for four or more years” (Jacob, 2007, p. 135). Almost half of the teachers in urban schools leave their positions in the school before teaching in the location for four years. The exodus of many teachers from high poverty schools may stem from the fact that “teachers who themselves have stronger academic backgrounds are more likely to leave the lowest-performing schools” (Jacob, 2007, p. 136). The lack of resources and funding at the high poverty schools may drive away teachers of high quality to seek jobs in suburban areas, where the pay grade is higher and resources are more abundant.

Urban schools represent some of the largest areas with low retention rates in the United States’ education system. School systems in poor and minority areas “experience far more instability in the teacher workforce” (Akiba, 2007, p. 370). Low socioeconomic schools with high minority rates and large amounts of poverty present a constant flux of teachers and a lack of consistency in staff. Milner (2012) found that “Teachers are absent

from school more often in urban and high-poverty schools in comparison to schools in other locations” (p. 708). As a result, students do not have a constant system of support from school staff, and students are more likely to obtain substitute teachers that are not proficient in the content material. Students in urban school systems are often “taught by substitute teachers, many of whom are not trained in subject matter domains or instructional strategies, approaches, and techniques necessary to help students learn” (Milner, 2012, p. 708). Instead of receiving a decent education from qualified teachers, students are subjected to continual substitutions by less skilled staff. This perpetual lack of quality education is heightened by the constant leaving of teachers and the high turnover rate. The constant hiring and leaving of teachers destabilizes the education of the students, as the new teachers need time to learn procedures and gain competence in the classroom, especially to build their curriculum. Jacob (2007) also found that “In 2000, for example, teacher turnover was 15 percent in all public schools, compared with 22 percent in high-poverty urban schools” (p. 136). The large difference in turnover rate shows the increased abandonment of teachers in urban school districts and emphasizes the issue that students are forced to constantly adjust to new and less competent teachers.

Not only is the revolving cycle of teachers detrimental to the students’ educations, but it also costs the school system valuable money that could have been put towards resources. Jacob (2007) stated that “Teacher attrition imposes costs not only on the students of the novice teacher who replaces the outgoing teacher but also on the school as a whole” (p. 136). The school system loses money with outgoing teachers as they exit with value of teacher development and training implemented upon them, and the incoming teacher needs to have money spent on him to receive these training session, a

repetition of money spent towards resources that would have been minimized if a staff was maintained. With each new incoming teacher, the turnover rate increases and “a staff with high turnover loses the institutional memory that could help it avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’ or making costly mistakes” (Jacob, 2007, p. 136). When teachers invariably withdraw and enter the school staff, disruption and disorganization is bound to follow, leaving the school in disengagement. In addition to the high teacher-exiting rate, students in urban schools tend to have a higher mobility rate, which also leaves the classroom disjointed. As a consequence of the high mobility rate, “teachers are forced to adjust to accommodate an ever changing set of students, this high mobility becomes disruptive” (Jacob, 2007, p. 132). Both of these movements, by teachers and students, leaves the classroom displaced and jumbled, which is not a conducive learning environment for students.

Test Scores Correlation

The success of a student often depends on the qualifications of his or her teacher, in particular the teacher’s licensure qualifications and scores. Clotfelter (2006) collected data from teachers and students to compare students success in correlation to student achievement, and he found that there are “positive correlations between the strength of teacher qualifications and student achievement observed in cross-sectional data are driven largely by sorting of teachers and students across schools and, to a lesser extent, within schools” (p. 807). Student teacher matching occurs with the assistance of teacher qualifications. When teachers obtain high certification test scores and rank as qualified then they are placed with students of higher achievement levels. The student’s access to a qualified teacher controls the future success of the student, especially their standardized test scores, as the positive correlation depicts a connection between teacher aptitude and

student achievement. As opposed to students assigned to teachers with less experience, “students assigned to highly experienced teachers attain standardized reading and math test scores roughly one-tenth of a standard deviation high in math and slightly less than one -tenth of a standard deviation in reading” (Clotfelter, 2006, p. 799). When the teacher has pedagogical and content experience, the students are proven to achieve a higher success rate, in comparison to students placed with an ill qualified teacher. In contrast, when the county hires a teacher with little experience and low qualifications, the student performance drops. Clotfelter (2006) discovered that “Teachers graduating from less competitive colleges continue to be associated with lower-performance in reading, and those with lower licensure test scores are associated with lower scores in both areas” (p. 796). The education and competency of the teacher shows through the progress of the students, but when teachers are less qualified than the students suffer from lower grades and the effectiveness of the teaching drops. All students deserve to be placed with a competent teacher who delivers instruction in a manner that increases aptitude and achievement.

Government and Nonprofit Efforts

Governmental Education Laws

Suggestions to raise salaries and provide incentives to teachers who teach in urban schools is not always a financially achievable technique to attract and retain teachers in lower socioeconomic schools. The Learning Policy Institute recommends that federal, state and local government should provide “collegial, supportive, well-resourced environments in order to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools”, but a lack of consistent federal funding for schools prevents this expenditure (Podolsky, 2016, p. 53).

This policy making institution devised that states should create a minimum salary for teachers and that salaries should be adjusted for “regional cost-of-living differentials” to create equity in pay throughout the state (Podolsky, 2016, p. 53). One of my main turn offs from teaching in an urban school includes the low income and lack of resources available for teaching in these lower socioeconomic areas. Providing equality in the pay scale for teachers and establishing a minimum salary ensures that teachers receive an equitable income.

The Learning Institute also suggests that the standard for teacher entrance should be increased, including preparation quality and licensing scores, but also that salary incentives should be given to teachers who show efficiency in the National Board Certification. The money to support these efforts would be collected from the Title II Part A funds that support career advancement opportunities. Another opportunity for teachers to yield money is by participating in performance based compensation systems, such as the “Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund” to gain money for teacher retention (Podolsky, 2016 p. 54). Although budgeting improvements through financial contributions may not constitute as a valued option to solely edify the school troubles, teachers may have resources and funds available for educational use to assist their efforts. If teachers and school administrators take advantage of the funding then the school could benefit with salary increases and improved teacher retention rate. A portion of the funding could be applied towards staff development and retention programs, and the Education Commission of the States offers recommendations to improve the condition of our education system through “offering professional development specific to teachers and administrators in low-performing schools and districts” and “creating programs to recruit

and retain teachers and administrators of color” (Wixom, 2015). These conditions remain as prevalent issues in schools across the nation that need rectifying, and schools would benefit from using their resources to organize and implement improvement plans.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act Efforts

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) is a government legislative bill to allocate federal resources “for more than four decades to help ensure all children have equal access to a quality education” through reform plans and targeted support (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2016). Some of the primary goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act include ensuring that states set high standards for students, maintain accountability for the lowest five percentage of low performing schools, empowering state and local decision makers, reduce unnecessary annual assessments, provide more students with high-quality preschool education, and establishing new resources in schools (Executive Office of the President, 2015). This bill stands as an advocate for at-risk students and allots more of the decision making power to the schools, where administrators and teachers are most aware of the issues needing combating. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act implementation creates “critical reforms leading to fewer low-performing schools; a narrowing graduation gaps among minority and white students; and increased focus on meaningful professional development for teachers, principals and superintendents” (Executive Office of the President, 2015). These particular goals are challenged and monitored throughout schools systems in the United States, seeking improved growth in narrowing educational inequalities between high-performing and low-performing schools. This bill is a national effort that branches out to over forty states, and these schools have “developed state

driven solutions through ESEA flexibility that expect college- and career-readiness for every student, use multiple measures to differentiate schools for rewards and supports, focus resources on comprehensive, rigorous interventions in the lowest performing schools, and ensure that all low-achieving students have the supports they need to catch up to their peers” (Executive Office of the President, 2015). The bill requires that the school systems manage and regulate the interventions necessary to help students onto the path of success. One of the most helpful attributes of the bill to students of urban districts is that its reforms focus on the need to raise students most at-risk and offers valuable resources to students who are often neglected in funding. Schools participating in ESEA need to show evidence of plans for support of growth and the subsequent results. The US Department of Education (2016) states that the schools are held responsible to “show how their reform plans advance all students’ achievement by maintaining a high bar for student success, closing achievement gaps, improving the quality of instructions, and increasing equity by targeting support and resources to schools based on need”. The ESEA beneficially creates equity in schools for students as several of the states utilizing the law are: adding proactive ‘triggers’ to their accountability systems that identify groups of students for specialized assistance when those groups chronically underperform” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2016). The schools involved in the program are monitoring student’s progress and identifying how to best assist chronically at-risk students, which allows for assessment of student achievement and steps towards helping students improve their educational experience. Several states in the United States have proposed plans to limit the opportunity gap in their state schools through the assistance of ESEA, along with outside plans for reform. Kentucky intends to implement statewide

initiatives for students with disabilities and English Language Learners to close the achievement gap. South Carolina is developing an “A-F grading system for individual schools” and holding schools accountable for individual subgroup performance. Lastly, Indiana intends to use performance data to identify achievement gaps in their school system and compare their subgroups statewide to use interventions (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2016). States are utilizing the program reform principles in conjunction with their own reform ideas, which is creating improvements in accountability for performance, achievement monitoring, and exceptional student learner initiatives.

Legal Continuation with Every Student Succeeds Act

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into effect a bipartisan bill called the Every Student Succeeds Act, which took the place of ESEA and reauthorized similar objectives. This bill continues the efforts of creating equality and opportunities for all students in schools. President Obama stated that “With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamentally American ideal- that every child, regardless of race, income, background, the zipcode where they live, deserves the chance to make their lives what they will” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2016). One of the primary goals of this bill is to support students of all backgrounds and close the educational differences created through opportunity gaps. This bill seeks to serve students of all socioeconomic status’ and “advances equity by upholding critical protections for America’s disadvantaged and high-need students”, requires that “all students in America be taught to high academic standards”, that schools create evidence and place based interventions for students, and create accountability to positively enhance lowest-performing schools so that students make progress towards higher graduation rates (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2016).

Although the President claimed that the bill aims to assist every student, it influences and impacts students most particularly those who are considered lower performing and disadvantaged. The majority of students impacted by this law include the bottom five percent of lowest performing schools and schools with high dropout rates of sixty-seven percent or higher. Creating a law that specifically benefits and guides students who historically are denied qualified resources and teachers shows a step towards improving the conditions for students in urban schools and makes apparent that students from all backgrounds are worthy of a quality education.

This law fully takes effect in the 2017-2018 school year and will strive to close achievement gaps by addressing testing proficiency and graduation rates of students. The intervention program includes the school district working in conjunction with the school staff to create an evidence based plan for improvement, monitoring the “turnaround effect” and progress, and each school creating its own plan of improvement within four years (Klein, 2016). As the schools create a plan for improvement, they receive funds to implement for these changes, which may be used to the school’s discretion according to their improvement plan. School districts that receive more than thirty-thousand dollars in funding must spend twenty percent of that money on a program to help “students become well-rounded”, and another twenty percent of the money on an activity to help students be “safe and healthy” (Klein, 2016). As a safeguard, schools receiving large quantities of funding must follow a guideline for their spendings, such as the quantities determined per category, for student advancement. This law will also include a pilot program to allow fifty districts weighted student-funding to combine “state, local, and federal funds to better serve low-income students and those with special needs” (Klein, 2016). The

program aspires to reward schools that receive low amount of funding but are greatly in need, with resources to assist their students in receiving a quality education.

ESSA holds each school system accountable for progress toward student improvement, and each state must develop plans for intentions to help students that are not “served as disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teacher” in order to enhance their education (Podolsky, 2016, p. 55). The Act targets schools that employ under-qualified teachers, which are proven to be detrimental to student learning, and monitoring and improving teacher quality benefits student success. Another component of this act requires districts to identify teacher equity gaps so that schools may access the Title II funds to attract more experienced and qualified teachers. This institution also suggests that

federal and state governments should cover the entire cost (through service scholarships or loan forgiveness programs) of high quality preparation programs for new teachers who commit to teaching in high-need communities or in grade level with shortages for a significant period of time (typically four years or more), so that more new teachers can receive the financial support they need to enter the profession well prepared to succeed (Podolsky, 2016, p. 55).

This federal Act continues the legislative standards to improve the quality of education for all students and specifically aims to assist students of low socioeconomic status.

School districts can leverage a section of this bill to help teachers provide more assistance for funding training new and retaining effective teachers in urban school settings. This is beneficial for the equalizing of school systems as money is set aside to decrease the disparities of funding between urban and suburban school systems.

Teach for America: Alternate Teaching Programs

Teach for America reigns as one of the largest alternate teaching organizations in the United States and the program strives to place recent college graduates into high poverty classrooms with the hopes of recruiting more teachers in the career field and limiting the perpetuation of unqualified teachers, who are inexperienced and score low on achievement tests, in these schools. Wendy Kopp (2008), the creator and original director of Teach for America, stated that her primary goal of the program was to create equity for students in lower socioeconomic districts and that a, “lasting solution is to build a massive force of leaders working from inside and outside education who have the conviction and insight that come from teaching successfully in low-income communities” (p. 735). She proposed providing TFA teachers with the, “training and professional development necessary to ensure their success as teachers in our highest-poverty communities, and fosters their ongoing leadership as alumni” (Kopp, 2008, p. 735). Kopp (2008) examined the large academic gaps between students in affluent and impoverished areas and exposed that, “13 million children growing up below the poverty line are already three grade levels behind children in high-income communities by the time they are 9 years old” (p. 734). In order to combat the educational inequalities in students caused by poverty she aimed to help “populations of students including free and reduced lunch program recipients, minority students, low academic performers, and students overage for their grades” (Glazerman, 2006, p. 80). This program seeks to assist students who are at-risk, similarly to the Every Student Succeeds Act targets students who are chronically under-performing, but TFA attempts to improve the educational misalignment through placement of recruited graduates, from highly renowned Universities, to teach in urban, Rural and low-income schools for the duration of a two-

year contract. The program also includes an incentive program to attract and retain its members, which includes a yearly salary that ranges from 24,000 to 55,000 dollars, loan forgiveness, scholarships, and benefits. Although the program proactively seeks to assist a long standing issue of disparities in the educational field, the program excels at some aspects of retaining teachers in hard to fill urban school teaching positions, but it could use development to more successfully assist its candidates into these classrooms.

Retroactive Changes to Enhance Program

In response to the TFA alumnus critiques about difficulties adjusting to the classroom and lack of quantifiable training, it recently launched a pilot program “to offer TFA recruits a year of classes in educational theory and pedagogy, along with hands-on experience, while they are still in college and before they begin full time” (Layton, 2014). This addition to the organization mimics a pre-service education program, where student teachers gain experience under the mentorship of a knowledgeable veteran teacher. The revision of the program to include more classroom preparation is a step towards more valuable preparation of the participants for teaching. These additions to the almost three decade old program are recent as Elise Villaneuva Beard began the overtaking of Teach for America and Wendy Kopp stepped down, which has led to the revolution towards the implementation of several new training methods in the program. In an interview with Beard, she stated that the program leaders “decided to test a new training approach after a nationwide ‘listening tour’ where they met with TFA members, school officials and community leaders” (Layton, 2014). One of these pilot training programs was offered to five-hundred college juniors who applied early and were accepted into the TFA program, which allowed training to be mixed into their senior year of college (Layton, 2014). One

of the main issues for teachers who enter into a teaching position in an urban schools are the lack of fundamental pedagogical knowledge and experience with managing and effectively teaching students. The short five week program that TFA administers to prepare their candidates for their classroom experience is inadequate, and steps towards preventing the high turnover rate from both teacher candidates and TFA members is crucial to discontinuing the perpetuation of unprepared teachers for students who need the most support academically.

In addition to the pedagogical augmentation in the training program, TFA seeks to create a cultural relevancy in their members. The Education for Justice Pilot “focused heavily on social justice topics and how teachers can better engage with diverse communities TFA places them in” (Sawchuk, 2011). The head of national communication for Teach for America, Takirra Winfield, stated that the pilot program also promotes “focusing on classroom readiness; building authentic relationships with students, families, communities; and fostering a deeper understanding of the historical, political, and sociocultural origins of educational inequity” (Prinster, 2015). The program morphed the training to include training on factors and issues that deeply affect targeted school systems, including the urban communities that a majority of the TFA candidates are placed. In addition to fostering an understanding of student education origins, the TFA pilot program worked towards “increasing our focus on culturally responsive teaching- helping our teachers engage with their own identities and backgrounds so they can better affirm those of their students” (Prinster, 2015). Teach for America aims to attract candidates that represent the demographics of TFA placement schools to create a racial representation of TFA members that resembles the school system population that

they serve. In 2014, forty nine percent of TFA candidates were of color and thirty three percent were first-generation college students (Prinster, 2015). This hiring of a diversified staff mimics the workforce adjustment that many policy makers are trying to implement- inclusion of more diverse teachers is beneficial to student academic outcomes.

One of Teach for America's most recent undertakings is to provide diversity in the classroom to students that they serve, and although TFA candidates present diversity, an examination of the composition of TFA members and students they teach shows that the candidates were "still more likely to be white (67 percent) than the students they taught or the other teachers in the schools where they taught and has a higher percentage of male teachers (31) than their non-TFA counterparts (13)" (Glazerman, 2006, p.79). TFA works towards creating an assorted staff, ethnically and gender wise, and they stand as an example for recognizing the importance of cultural relevance and cultural correspondence in the classroom. Efforts to match the teacher and student population based on diversity is shown in 2013 when forty percent of the Corps members placed in Rio Grande Valley were Latino, and ninety percent of the location population consists of Latinos (Prinster, 2015). TFA organized their members to create a positive matching of teachers to students that would best meet the diversity cohesion for successful connection in the classroom. Teach for America members also commented about experiences being placed with students of their own race, such as at a Native American reserve, and the comfort level they managed to achieve in their classroom, which they felt to be beneficial to student success.

Although Teach for America creates an opportunity to provide students in urban communities with highly successful college graduates as teachers, and strives to give

students the knowledgeable teachers that they might otherwise lack, the program still needs improvement in its training program. Sending candidates into school systems with a lack of proper training is equivalent to hiring an unqualified teacher just to fill a position. Creating knowledgeable TFA members, who learn the pedagogical and experiential skills necessary to be successful in a classroom would prevent a high turnover rate of its corps members. The under-prepared staff of TFA is as detrimental as an unqualified teacher to student success, and both systems need adjustment for higher teacher standards or training programs. However, TFA's determination to impart cultural responsiveness in the classroom is a valuable asset that can be applied to all teaching preparation programs, and student teacher matching based on race may enable more successful classroom communities and understanding. Lastly, TFA utilizes an incentive program to attract and retain their candidate members, which has proven to effectively draw in qualified participants. School systems could emulate the incentive system, using federal resources to fund retaining teachers, or schools can alter their budgeting technique to better suit the needs of the students. Teach for America stands as an example of a nonprofit program that attempts to assist students in urban schools, and although adjustments are required to make the program more effective, it demonstrates an effort to monetarily, culturally, and academically improve teaching candidates' experience as a teacher.

Moving Towards a Solution

Several states are making adjustments to their schools in order to create an effective learning environment for all students; some of these advancements include budgeting techniques, culturally diversifying staff and creating cultural awareness, and

raising teaching standards upon entry to the profession. Legislative acts have been created for educational movements and reforms, and some of the states that are making progress and worthy of exemplifying include Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin. Allocating funding in a profitable manner can increase resources for all students, but this may require schools to alter their budgeting technique. As well, the United States does not contain one set standard of regulations and expectations for hiring students, as it can vary per state or school, and raising teacher hiring standards can largely fluctuate depending on location. Just as expectations vary per school system, the ethnic and socioeconomic composition of students also varies per school. Due to the lack of consistency, preparing teachers to work with a range of students that come from miscellaneous conditions and backgrounds enables the teacher to work more successfully with the students. Several suggestions have been made to nationally unify the standards for schools, or rely on government funding to support all changes and incentivization in schools, but these expectations are unrealistic and movements towards valuable and approachable changes containing funding, diversity, and teaching standards could effectively enhance the education system for all students.

Holding Teachers to Higher Standards

In order to better prepare teacher candidates, the Learning Institute recommends that the federal government should increase investments in current residency modeling and create more extensive modeling opportunities for future teachers candidates. The Federal government can contribute to teacher rates of retention by increasing “existing investments in the teacher residency model” and providing “intensive clinical training” with rigorous coursework and partnering teacher candidates with qualified mentor

professional teachers (Podolsky, 2016, p. 53). Under the ESSA law, teachers have the benefit of utilizing funds built in for educational growth. States can “leverage funds under Title II of ESSA, which provides funding to support high-quality principal preparation programs, including school-leader residency programs offering a full year of clinical training” (Podolsky, 2016, p. 55). The preparation of teachers and school leaders, such as administrators, is crucial to the success of the students, and schools can apply the available funding to receive clinical training and residency programs. The addition of residency and training time with rigorous coursework intermixed will allow candidates to “meet local workforce needs in key teaching areas” (Podolsky, 2016, p. 53). Mentoring systems with observation time, shared lesson planning, and reflection opportunities allows teacher candidates to become involved in several “instructional support activities” under the mentorship of a knowledgeable veteran, which can improve teacher quality when entering the profession for adequate induction programs and supplement candidate expertise. States such as North Carolina and South Carolina promote teacher cadet programs to high schools students who show an interest in the education field as an investment of teacher formation starting in the secondary level (Podolsky, 2016, p. 54). Using mentorship programs ensures that teach candidates receive adequate experiential training in the field and become more qualified to fill teaching positions.

Some of the management techniques that schools can utilize to increase hiring qualified teachers include investing in “strengthening relationships with local teacher preparation programs, involving existing staff and community members in recruitment processes, and instituting a multi-step hiring process that includes a demonstration less and school visit” (Podolsky, 2016, p. 53). Many school systems can implement an

improved preparation program for their incoming teachers but also require the teacher candidates to prove their knowledge and expertise prior to offering the job. Requiring teachers to demonstrate their pedagogical knowledge in the interview and hiring process decreases the amount of teachers hired who are unknowledgeable and ill-prepared for the position. Just as the cadet program aims to entice bright students into the teaching career at a young age, preparation programs can expand through community ties to connect a larger community of staff to the hiring process, and provide a valuable resource for training or testing candidate knowledge.

Equalizing Budgeting

To combat unequal funding for students statewide and nationally, school systems can implement the student-based budgeting method to create a fair division of funds for schools according to student population. Also known as weighted student funding, this method is known for “allocating public school funds in a way that is responsive to students’ needs” (Calvo, 2011). This funding process assigns public schools financing based on student enrollment numbers and the student body populations’ needs, instead of staffing ratios. Students are assigned “weight” dependent on their level of need and students at risk of performing as low achieving students are given more priority to receive funding. The division of money reliant on need ensures that students of low socioeconomic status are recognized for financial need and are more likely to receive funding, which juxtaposes the populous occurrence of low socioeconomic schools lacking resources and money. This also gives the school system greater power in decision for how the allocated money is spent. Using a student-based budget “connects students’ academic needs with adequate funding to effectively result in a responsible approach to

educating each child” (Calvo, 2011). Principals and school leader figures are given more autonomy with this budgeting technique, but it also requires a lot of management to effectively regulate the program, and schools using it must create a “fiscal oversight system” to ensure appropriate spending and budget accountability (Calvo, 2011). This budgeting system can be especially useful for lower socioeconomic school systems who could choose to use the money towards raising teacher quality, investing in smaller class sizes, hiring an instructional coach, and shifting resources throughout the year when the need arises.

In 2012, Connecticut passed a Public Act in legislation to increase the annual per-student grants in various schools statewide, create intensive intervention programs in low-performing schools, require low-performing schools to make improvement and turnaround plans, and increase school readiness programs (Wixom, 2015). Connecticut’s legislative plan lists a guide of recommendations for authority and community figures to utilize inside and outside of the classroom, in higher education, and in state or government regulation. Some of the broader topics within the Act that administrators and legislators seek to improve include: family economic stability, family engagement, early care and education, administrator and teacher hiring retention in underperforming schools, use of curriculum in closing achievement gaps in low performing schools, school climate and the achievement gap, and highly effective teacher-preparation programs (Wixom, 2015). Policies regarding the achievement improvements incorporate incentive programs and statewide training for teachers and administrators hired to low-achievement schools, increased learning time for students, incentives for teachers who improve student reading levels, “provide achievement gap seminar program for school leaders in at-risk

schools”, encourage effective pre-service teachers to work at low-performing schools, encourage higher education systems to create relationships with low-achievement K-12 schools, and develop school climate improvement plans (Wixom, 2015). Connecticut instituted this legislative guidance to target several of the state issues in education, including achievement gaps and school climate, but approaches these issues through incentivization programs for teachers and increased training.

Cultural Responsiveness Efforts

Just as Teach for America implemented a cultural relevancy training program and tried to align teachers with students of similar ethnic backgrounds, some states are creating policies and reforms that target the cultural diversity in the educational setting. For example, Massachusetts created a Diversity Task Force in 2013 to focus on “increasing the diversity of the educator workforce” (Executive Office of the President, 2015). The state is attempting to entice students of all ethnicities to enter the teaching profession, which would create a large diversity in the teaching force. Another objective of the Task Force includes “decreasing the disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions of students of color” (Executive Office of the President, 2015) and limiting the bias against students leading to authority action and punishment. On a state level, Massachusetts looks to change “existing state educator requirements and creating alternatives to out-of-school suspensions” (Executive Office of the President, 2015). This state aims to limit the deficit mindset that unfairly limits the students or causes them unnecessary distress. The Task Force recommend school systems to

design opportunities to attract students of color to the teaching profession, expand the acceptable out-of-state educator requirements, increase the transparency and

accountability of teacher preparation programs' efforts to diversify their enrollment and program completers, create a Cultural Responsible Education Academy for Educators and require all teacher and administrator-preparation programs to offer effective cultural proficiency training, and create a Commendation School Status to recognize schools offering excellent cultural proficiency strategies (Wixom, 2015).

Massachusetts places a high value on the cultural awareness in their school settings, which is clear through their intentions to implement a "Cultural Responsible Education Academy for Educators" and require all teachers and administrators to participate in a training course. Another option to promote cultural awareness training is to require all teacher candidates to take a course before they receive their teaching license.

Washington state schools also emphasize the importance of cultural competency within the education field and have created the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight Accountability Committee that annually meets to make policy recommendations to the legislature and department of education for lessening the opportunity gap. Some of the suggestions created by the committee include recruiting and retaining "educators of color", enhancing the cultural competence of school systems, assessment tools, competence training for educators, investing in community engagement initiative, and disaggregating data by ethnic subgroups to track student progress (Wixom, 2015). Both Massachusetts and Washington underscore the importance of attracting and hiring "educators of color" and creating competence training, but Washington also incorporates diversity inclusion into assessment tools. One of the main featured suggestions for the Washington educational policy change includes the cultural competency of educators,

which demonstrates the crucial professional development of teachers to understand and implement cultural awareness. Washington emulates the goals of Teach for America, with the inclusion of cultural awareness competency, which will aid teachers in working with students and enhance student learning experiences.

Conclusion:

United States students in urban school settings suffer from a perpetual degrading of their education through a lack of resources and school funding, unqualified teachers, and unequal educational opportunities. By placing students with teachers that hold low licensing test scores and limited pedagogical knowledge, the schools show students that they are not deserving of a valued education. The constant placement matching of minority and lower socioeconomic students with unqualified teachers has proven to decrease test scores for these students and decrease their educational experience. In order to combat this constant inequality, teachers, administrators and policy makers can make efforts to equalize budgeting, diversify staff and provide cultural relevance training for all staff members, and raise teacher standards during the hiring process of new teachers. Teacher and school systems should be aware and knowledgeable about the funding and opportunities available to them through legislative acts, such as ESSA, and work to apply these benefits in their school.

Schools should examine model schools that are enforcing policy-changes to their school and implement new protocols for assisting students. Schools and states can imitate the efforts of Wisconsin, which is a state with one of the largest race-based achievement gaps in the country, but who focused on four key factors to improve their school systems. The state superintendent of education created an agenda to set into motion in 2017, which will increase graduation rates, increase reading proficiency, and

create more equitable funding statewide (Wixom, 2015). The four largest components of the Wisconsin strategy to eliminate achievement gaps incorporate school and district level educators to create effective instruction, student-teacher relationships, family and community engagement, and school and instructional leadership (Wixom, 2015).

Following the example of Wisconsin and their pursuit to improve teacher instruction and student education through decreasing achievement gaps, forming relationships, and equalizing funding, other states can look towards their solutions and progress.

All students deserve the right to education, but not all students are receiving an equitable and adequate education. Schools, school districts, teachers, policy makers can work towards creating improvements in a range of areas, and these figures should refer to school districts that are in the process of reforming in order to find an example.

Considering urban context and problems associated with disparities in race and socioeconomic privileges, lawmakers and school districts can work to make informed improvements in our educational system. School systems, communities, teachers, school boards, and associated nonprofit university programs can all work in conjunction to make informed improvements in our educational system that will impact the lives of all students. Students of any socioeconomic status and race merit a quality education.

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