

Inequalities in the Educational System



Bianca Galarza
11th grade, Age 16
The Bay School of San Francisco
(Class of 2015)

National Association of Minority Companies Inc. Student Member

As Americans, we value the right to have access to receive a free and public education. The American idea entails that everyone has equal opportunity and the right to complete schooling. While the American idea strives for everyone to have access to a free education, the American reality is that the educational system is not equal. Therefore, not everyone is given a fair start with equal opportunity. Many factors play into this reality of unequal chance. Such factors include socioeconomic status and race. One of the first inequalities prevalent in America's education system is private schools versus public schools. Private schools, which have historically been known to be institutions available to the wealthy and privileged, play a role in the unequal educational system. The SAT's, which almost every high school student applying to college takes, estimates each student's comprehension and knowledge on basic high school material. In a

recent study by Time magazine, data shows that private school students significantly outperform public school students. Not only do private schools teach and operate at a more advanced level compared to most urban public schools, private schools have more effective resources.

For example, the Bay School, along with many other private institutions, offer SAT prep courses so that students can be prepared and know what to expect when they take the SAT's. Along with offering additional courses, private school parents are typically more involved in their child's high school career in areas such as hiring tutors and personal SAT and college coaches for their child. Time magazine reports that "private schools do more to develop students' critical-thinking abilities—not just the rote

memorization required to do well on achievement tests" (John Cloud). Private schools are not only advanced when it comes to education, they are also helping students to succeed in college. However, there is a very hefty price that is attached to receiving this kind of education. At the Bay School of San Francisco, tuition rounds out to about \$40,000 a year. The cost to attend Bay is more than double the income of what an individual in the bottom 50 percent earns in a year. Clearly, our educational system is not fair; wealth plays a major role in the opportunities available.

Rather than promoting an equal chance for everyone to receive a good education, our system promotes social inequalities. Colleges and universities display the large gap of wealth in our country. According to US News & World Report, among the 146 most selective colleges and universities in the U.S, only 3 percent of the enrolled students are from the bottom economic



quartile, while 67 percent of the students who attend the same institutions are from the top tier of the economic quartile. These statistics not only reflect the lack of economic diversity of universities, they also question why lower income students are hardly being recognized. One of the first reasons why there is a very small representation of low-income students attending rigorous universities is because of their lack of accessibility. Large urban public schools do not help students to navigate through the college process. Unlike Bay and other private schools that offer one on one college counseling and SAT prep, most public schools don't even include basic college information in their courses. For the most part, economically disadvantaged students are clueless when it comes to applying to colleges or applying for financial aid. An article written by the Center for American Progress states that "bright but poor high school students are left to figure out the maze of college applications and financial aid forms on their own" (Sam Fulwood). Another reason for the small representation of low income students in universities is due to the lack of preparedness. Urban public schools are teaching the very minimum so that students can just pass a test. Due to the lack of funding in low income public schools, students who attend these schools are not being prepared for college. According to The Bay Citizen magazine, 90 percent of the 100,000 students enrolled at City College of San Francisco is enrolled in remedial classes just to get to college level. These statistics reflect the absence of preparation in urban public schools in the Bay Area.

Another area in which we see inequalities in the education

system is race. There is a clear distinction of who can and cannot afford to attend private institutions and universities. While I couldn't find the Bay Schools demographics on their website, I think that we can look around and notice the small portion of Black and Latino students who attend this school. The reason why there are such low rates of Black and Latino students (compared to White and Asian students at Bay and other private schools) is because the large majority of them don't have access or opportunity to attend schools like Bay. In 2010, 39.4 percent of Black and 34 percent of Latino families were living in poverty. An article from the Huffington Post states that "more minority families end up in poor neighborhoods with underperforming school systems, leading to lower graduation rates and lower lifetime earnings" (William Schmidt). While some of the problems are the students themselves, the public schools should take time to reach these students at a young age and educate them on the opportunities and possibilities available. The dropout rates among Blacks and Latinos are startling and, to some extent, speak to the lack of attention given to them. In California, the dropout rate for Black students is 30 percent and for Latino students it is 23 percent, compared to 11 percent of White students who drop out of school. These staggering rates indicate that these students are not receiving the attention they need and are not getting a significant amount of help. A statement written by U.S. News & World Report identifies the real problem of why there are such low rates of Blacks and Latinos in prestigious and academically rigorous schools. The report

states, "Because more Whites end up in more elite schools, the system disproportionately tracks many qualified minorities on educational pathways that don't allow them to fulfill their educational and career potential."

The America idea of everyone having the accessibility to receive a good education has yet to come. Currently, we are seeing many students with the potential of receiving a higher education left behind due to factors such as socioeconomic status and race. The fact of the matter is that the quality of education we receive in America directly impacts our earning power. Therefore, if more students receive a solid education where they have the option of attending elite colleges and universities we can look forward to more "job opportunities and economic growth" (William Schmidt).

Works Cited

- "Are Private Schools Really Better" Time US. Time Magazine, 10 Oct. 2007. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.
- "Why We Can't Wait to Close the School Achievement Gap" HuffPost Education. The Huffington Post, 19 Jan. 2014. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.
- "Higher Education Creates White Racial Privilege" News. U.S. News & World Report, 31 Jul. 2013. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.
- "Race and Beyond: Why Economic Disadvantage Becomes Educational Disadvantage" Race and Ethnicity. Center for American Progress, 24 Sep. 2013. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.
- "Inequality in the American Education System" HuffPost College. The Huffington Post, 17 Jul. 2012. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.
- "A Battle Over Remedial Classes" Education. The Bay Citizen, 24 Jun. 2010. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.