



# Outliers in Education: Evaluating the Impact of Inequality in Schools

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**There is unequal resource allocation within our school system.**

**Problem**

There is inequality within our school system that must be evaluated and prevented. Studies have shown that a child’s quality of education is strongly correlated to future projected earnings as an adult,<sup>1</sup> making education a necessity to raise an individual’s standard of living. But what prevents some students from acquiring a high level of education and propels other students towards success in the classroom? Many people believe that the success of a student is determined by how motivated they are to learn. Though this reasoning may hold water, it’s based on the assumption that all students have an equal learning environment, not factoring in the state of inequality within our school system.

For students, the educational resources available to them can have strong effects on their long-term growth. The more funding a school has, the more resources a school can purchase. But with funding for school districts dependent on tax revenue, the funds are not distributed evenly across districts, resulting in wealthier schools having more educational resources.

**Background**

To understand the state of inequality within our schools, schools around the Chicagoland area and rural United States will be evaluated. Along Lake Michigan, north of Chicago resides the communities of the North Shore. The North Shore has many wealthy residents who pay high taxes. Because of the tax revenue from these residents, the public schools are funded very well (seen below in the blue section of the chart.) Around 15 miles from the North Shore resides Austin, IL. This community represents one of the seventy-seven communities that are part of Chicago and the Chicago Public School district 299. District 299, along with the rural school districts of Wagoner and Henry county are communities that produce less tax revenue, resulting in less funding (seen below in the red section.)

**School Data Table**

District Name	City, state	Type of Schools	Funding per Student <sup>2</sup>	Median Household Income <sup>3</sup>	Funding/Income
District 36	Winnetka, IL	Elementary	\$26,706	\$207,955	12.84%
District 203	Winnetka, IL	High School	\$28,707	\$207,955	13.80%
District 35	Glencoe, IL	K-8	\$25,117	\$171,250	14.67%
District 299	Austin, IL	All Schools	\$10,331	\$31,435	32.86%
Henry County District	Hampton, GA	All Schools	\$9,517	\$43,838	21.71%
Wagoner District	Wagoner, OK	k-8	\$7,874	\$34,450	22.86%

Through Analyzing this table, it is easy to see that there’s a substantial difference in the amount of funding per student the North Shore receives, compared to the amount of funding per student received by District 299, Henry County District, and Wagoner District. What is also apparent is that inequality in funding is not dependent upon a

<sup>1</sup> Porter, Eduardo. "A Simple Equation: More Education = More Income." The New York Times. The New York Times, 10 Sept. 2014. Web. 05 July 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Public School District Finance Data. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> "Winnetka, IL." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 11 July 2017. Web. 12 July 2017./ "Glencoe, IL." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 11 July 2017. Web. 12 July 2017."Austin, Chicago." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 11 July 2017. Web. 12 July 2017. "Hampton, GA." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 11 July 2017. Web. 12 July 2017. "Wagoner, GA." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 11 July 2017. Web. 12 July 2017.

community being urban or rural, with district 299 representing an urban community and Henry county District and Wagoner District representing rural communities across the United States. Not only do the less privileged school districts have less funding, they are also paying a higher percent of funding per student to median household income. This means that, by percentage, more of their usable tax revenue from the state is being used for education, while their students are receiving less funding. It is apparent that there is funding inequality in our schools.

What is not shown in the funding data is that the students from higher funded schools typically have parents who are more economically well off, investing more financially into their son or daughter's growth as a student. Their investment could come in the form of providing more school resources, or hiring tutors.

### Implications

In the words of the Canadian professor, Marshall McLuhan, "We become what we behold. We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us."<sup>4</sup> Applied to the classroom, these words form the assumption that the more tools a student has access to, the better his or her learning environment will be. With more funding, schools can buy better resources and tools for learning, promoting a better overall learning environment. With a better learning environment in higher funded schools, it places the children in the lower funded schools at a disadvantage.

The disadvantage students face at the lower funded schools can have profound effects on their academic growth.<sup>5</sup> The effect of having less resources can result in a lower overall level of education and future earnings compared to students in higher funded schools, who were not placed at the same disadvantage.<sup>6</sup> The logic behind this can be seen through Malcom Gladwell's perspective on why most professional athletes are born in the months of January, February and March. In the book, *Outliers*, Gladwell states that most professional hockey players are born in the months of January, February, and March; athletes who are not born in the months of January, February, and March are at a strong disadvantage in becoming a professional in their respective sport.<sup>7</sup> Since the cutoff date for youth sports is January 1<sup>st</sup>, athletes who are born in the first three months of the year are older than their other teammates. Older children are stronger, faster and generally more coordinated and athletic, meaning that they are usually the best players on their team. Because they are the best players, they get the most attention from the coaches and play on better teams. As they continue to grow up, the higher-level coaching and team placement makes them improve at a faster rate than their teammates who did not receive the same coaching attention or team placement. This cycle continues throughout high school, into college athletics, and then finally, they make it to the professional level.

The same logic that Gladwell used with athletes potentially explains why there are higher high school graduation rates in wealthier school districts. An article by The Heritage Foundation focuses on education reform based on improving resource allocation.<sup>8</sup> This article claims that improved resource allocation could increase the high school graduation rates of lower funded schools. Comparing the high school graduation rates of lower to higher funded high schools supports this claim. We can use this same

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<sup>4</sup> "A Quote by Marshall McLuhan." Goodreads. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Lips, Dan. "Does Spending More on Education Improve Academic Achievement?" The Heritage Foundation. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 June 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher S. Rugaber, The Associated Press. "Pay Gap between College Grads and Everyone Else at a Record." USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 30 June 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. New York: Back Bay, Little, Brown, 2008. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Lips, Dan. "Does Spending More on Education Improve Academic Achievement?" The Heritage Foundation. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 June 2017.

**Students who attend lower funded schools are placed at a disadvantage.**

## There are higher graduation rates in wealthier schools.

process to see if the schools we evaluated earlier show any sign of a correlation between funding and high school graduation rates. Let's again compare district 203 and district 299. With \$28,707 worth of funding per student, New Trier high school from Winnetka, Illinois, had a graduation rate of 99 percent in 2016.<sup>9</sup> With \$10,331 worth of funding per student, the Chicago public school district 299 had a high school graduation rate of 73.5 percent in 2016.<sup>10</sup> Although other factors could have contributed to the high school graduation rates of these two districts, the evidence shows that the Chicago public school district has \$18,376 less funding per student than New Trier High School and a high school graduation rate 25.5 percent lower.

Considering Gladwell's logic and The Heritage Foundations article on resource allocation affecting high school graduation rates, an inequality assumption can be formed. This assumption is that students attending higher funded schools who have more resources have an accelerated learning process compared to the students who attend lower funded schools. The benefit of a comparatively accelerated learning process is that it enables children to be placed into higher level classes taught by more experienced teachers, at an earlier age. This causes the students to learn even faster, placing them into even higher level classes as they move on to high school. The combination of high level classes and high academic standards they acquired over the years propels them to graduate high school and move on to college. At every level of education one acquires, it increases your potential future earnings. In 2015, college graduates earned 56 percent more than high school graduates.<sup>11</sup> With a high correlation between going to college and future earnings, students of higher funded schools who have a higher level of education, make more money over their life time. This passes on the cycle of inequality to the next generation, with the students of higher funded schools becoming wealthier parents that live in more affluent neighborhoods and send their children to higher funded schools.

### Solutions

To prevent generational inequality from persisting, a solution must be found to give students at lower funded schools a chance at success. But how can lower funded schools acquire the resources to have the same learning environment found in higher funded schools?

Education grants are a great resource for schools who are struggling to acquire necessary school funding. While many education grants are available, a great deal of educators do not know where to find them. Websites like [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) and [GetEdFunding.com](http://GetEdFunding.com) were created to make sorting through available grants easier for educators.

AdoptAClassroom.org is another option educators can utilize to purchase necessary resources. Many teachers spend their own money to purchase educational supplies; through AdoptAClassroom.org, teachers can fundraise and ask for donations so they can purchase books, technology, games, and other necessary items for the classroom. If you would like to know more about AdoptAClassroom.org or register your class to receive funding, visit their website at [adoptaclassroom.org](http://adoptaclassroom.org)

Scholastic Book Fairs are week-long events that a school can host. By hosting a book fair, schools receive a portion of the sales and can use these Scholastic dollars to purchase other Scholastic Book Fair products. The products in the Scholastic Book Fair catalog can be "bought" without the school having to dip into their funds. To learn more about Scholastic Book Fairs, visit their website at [scholastic.com/bookfairs/](http://scholastic.com/bookfairs/)

<sup>9</sup> "NEW TRIER TWP HSD 203." NEW TRIER TWP HSD 203 | Graduation Rate. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 July 2017.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-chicago-schools-graduation-rates-20160905-htmlstory.html>

<sup>11</sup> Christopher S. Rugaber, The Associated Press. "Pay Gap between College Grads and Everyone Else at a Record." USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 30 June 2017.

## Affordable education technology can even the playing field.

Innovative education technology products can be another solution to unequal resource allocation in schools. Affordable technology has given students in lower-income areas the same classroom environment found in higher-funded schools. A report from the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Stanford Center for Opportunity in Education (SCOPE) found that technology “can produce significant gains in student achievement and boost engagement, particularly among students most at risk.”<sup>12</sup> Products in the education technology market have kept the same quality, while reducing the cost to schools.

If an “affordable” product is still a little too expensive for a school, a school can strategically budget for education technology. To budget strategically, a school must first understand what they will be using the technology for. Once a school understands their needs, they can start by buying a few products and sharing them between classrooms. This is a great way to see if the product is useful before spending the money to implement it in every classroom. Other factors to look at when strategically budgeting are the recurring licensing fees associated with the product and how durable the product is. It may be in a school’s best economic interest to buy a product that costs a little more if the product is expected to last longer. To know more about how to strategically budget for education technology, read our blog [Strategic Budgeting for Education Technology](#). Educators can also apply for technology grants; for more grant application options, visit our blog, [Finding Technology Grants](#).

For a school, the process of buying education technology can be intimidating, especially if they do not have an IT director for guidance. With so many education technology product on the market, it is hard for schools to find and compare all the options. Education resellers can act like education consultants for schools, realizing their technology problems and then finding the appropriate solution. At no cost to the school, they offer consultation based on the customer’s long-term goals, budget, and the technology currently being used by the school. If you’d like to know more benefits of working with education resellers, read our blog, [Benefits of Working with An Education Reseller](#).

*(All Blogs on our Website at [myboardshare.com/blog](http://myboardshare.com/blog))*

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<sup>12</sup> "Technology Can Close Achievement Gaps, Improve Learning." Stanford Graduate School of Education. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 July 2017.