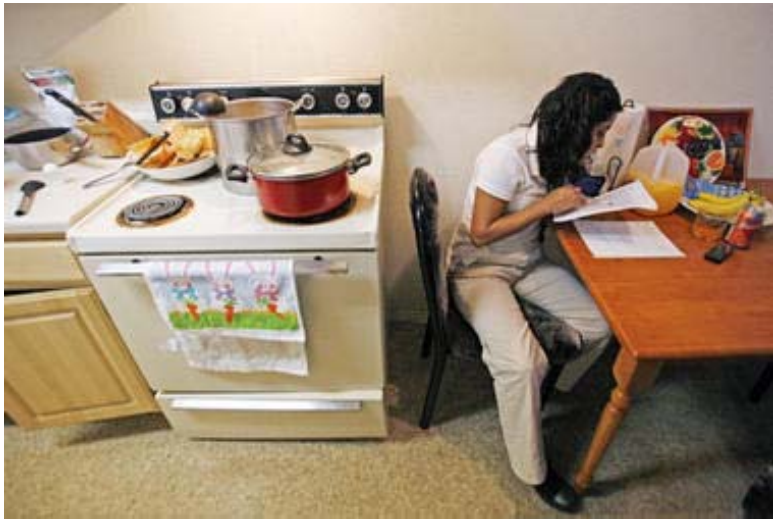


The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
MONITOR

Economic segregation rising in US public schools

The share of public schools with high concentrations of poor students jumped from 12 to 17 percent in eight years, a federal report shows. Economic segregation is tied to the persistent achievement gap.



Zamir Cristin Garcia, 15, works on her homework in Santa Fe, N.M. She shares a small room in a friend's three-room apartment with her two sisters and her parents. The family is homeless. Economic segregation is on the rise in US schools. In New Mexico, concentrated poverty affects more than one-third of K-12 schools.

(Luis Sanchez Saturno/The New Mexican/AP)

By Stacy Teicher Khadaroo, Staff writer
posted May 27, 2010 at 2:35 pm EDT

More than 16,000 public schools struggle in the shadows of concentrated poverty. The portion of schools where at least three-quarters of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals – a proxy for poverty – climbed from 12 percent in 2000 to 17 percent in 2008.

The federal government released a statistical portrait of these schools Thursday as part of its annual Condition of Education report. When it comes to educational opportunities and achievement, the report shows a stark contrast between students in high-poverty and low-poverty schools (those where 25 percent or less are poor).

Economic segregation is on the rise in American schools, and that “separation of rich and poor is the fountainhead of inequality,” says Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation, a public policy research group in Washington. High-poverty schools “get worse teachers ... are more chaotic ... [have] lower levels of parental involvement ... and lower expectations than at middle-class schools – all of which translate into lower levels of achievement.”

Cities aren't the only places facing this challenge: Forty percent of urban elementary schools have high poverty rates, but 13 percent of suburban and 10 percent of rural elementary schools do as well. In some states – Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico – concentrated poverty affects more than one-third of K-12 schools.

Hispanic and black children make up the majority of students in high-poverty schools – 46 percent and 34 percent, respectively,

compared with just 14 percent white and 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander.

In tests of reading, math, music, and art, students from high-poverty schools routinely score lower than their peers in low-poverty schools.

“There have been gains in achievement in high-poverty schools over the last decade or so ... but what we don’t see in most cases is a closing of the gap,” says Daria Hall, director of K-12 policy at the Education Trust in Washington, which aims to eliminate such gaps.

In graduation rates, there’s actually been a backward slide. In 2008, high-poverty schools reported that 68 percent of seniors graduated the previous year, compared with 86 percent in 2000. For students in low-poverty schools, the rate remained about 91 percent.

Solutions have been hard to come by, but there are some hopeful signs, Ms. Hall says. The attention to the subgroup of low-income students is relatively new, and some schools and districts are showing success in bringing up their achievement. “The willingness of educators to learn from these schools is heartening,” she says.

To address the gaps, education reformers are trying to connect stronger teachers with the most disadvantaged students. In 2008, about 21 percent of teachers in high poverty schools had less than three years of experience, compared with 15 percent in low-poverty schools. And fewer teachers in high-poverty schools have master’s degrees and standard certifications.

Since 2006, the federal government’s Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) has been aimed at helping districts improve teacher quality, particularly in high-needs schools. The Department of Education will distribute an additional \$437 million in TIF grants this fall.

While efforts to improve high-poverty schools are valiant, they’ve haven’t worked very well, Mr. Kahlenberg says. He advocates reducing the number of high-poverty schools altogether, by giving families more opportunities to choose schools outside of poor neighborhoods, for instance.

About 70 school districts have plans to draw a mix of income backgrounds to different schools, Kahlenberg says, and there are indications that low-income students achieve better in mixed-income settings.

Cambridge, Mass., for instance, strives for income balance in all its schools through a magnet school system. It has similar graduation rates for low-income students as for all students combined (about 85 percent), and outpaces the state average for low-income students (67 percent).

Related:

Report: Reading skills in early grades are crucial to success

Who’s poor in America? US tweaks how it defines poverty.

TOYOTA
STILL THE BEST
Sales Event

the **BEST**
Dependability
of any full-line manufacturer.*
R.L. Polk & Co

*Disclaimer

© The Christian Science Monitor. All Rights Reserved. **Terms** under which this service is provided to you. **Privacy Policy**.