

# *What “Counts” as Educational Policy? Notes toward a New Paradigm*

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In my first article as a young PhD, which was published in the *Harvard Educational Review*, I argued that high school U.S. history curriculum, as represented in widely used textbooks, excises and thereby defines out of existence radical responses American workers have had to the problems they face on the job and in their communities (Anyon, 1979). This educational excision is one way that schooling mitigates against the development of working-class consciousness.

In empirical and theoretical work since then, I have investigated knowledge and pedagogical experiences made available to students in different social-class contexts (1980, 1981), and have attempted to understand the consequences of ways we conceptualize urban education, urban school reform, and neighborhood poverty. Recent arguments have aimed at unseating simplistic notions of the causes of urban poverty and low achievement in city districts, and explicating unexplored relations between urban education and movements for social change (e.g., 1995, 1997, 2005).

In this chapter I think about education policy over the seventy-five years of *Harvard Educational Review* publication. During these decades, many K–12 policies have been written and implemented by federal, state, and local governments. Some of these have aimed at improving education in America’s cities and are my primary focus. Over the years, dominant strategies called upon to improve urban schools have included curricular, administrative, and funding reforms, as well as increases in educational opportunity and district/school accountability.

A historical examination of policies can inform decisions we make today. Policy failures, for example, may demonstrate that we need to rethink strate-

gies we choose in our long-term attempts to solve the problems of school and student achievement in urban districts. Indeed, I will argue that the quality of education in city schools is a complex problem, and education policy as historically conceived has not been adequate to the task of increasing urban school achievement to acceptable levels. Academic learning in city schools is undoubtedly higher than in, say, 1900, yet there is still no large urban district that can demonstrate high achievement in even half its students or schools. Noting this failure of educational policy to render most urban schools high-quality institutions, I ask, what *should* count as educational policy? As in any attempt to resolve complex issues, workable solutions can only be generated by an understanding of underlying causes.

The diagnosis I provide is based on analyses completed for my book, *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement* (Anyon, 2005). In this book I examine federal and regional mandates that affect economic and social opportunities available to the urban poor. I find that despite stated intentions, federal and metropolitan policies and arrangements generally restrict opportunities available to city residents and neighborhoods. I show how job, wage, housing, tax, and transportation policies maintain minority poverty in urban neighborhoods, and thereby create environments that overwhelm the potential of educational policy to create systemic, sustained improvements in the schools. For example, policies such as minimum wage statutes that yield full-time pay below the poverty level, and affordable housing and transportation policies that segregate low-income workers of color in urban areas but industrial and other job development in far-flung suburbs where public transit routes do not reach, are all culpable.

In order to solve the systemic problems of urban education, then, I argue in the book — and will argue here — that we need not only better schools but also the reform of these public policies. Rules and regulations regarding teaching, curriculum, and assessment certainly are important, but policies to eliminate poverty-wage work and housing segregation (for example) should be part of the educational policy panoply as well, for these have consequences for urban education at least as profound as curriculum, pedagogy, and testing.

In the sections that follow I describe major K–12 education policies that have been implemented over the years to attempt to improve urban education, and then discuss several federal and metro-area policies and practices that limit the potential and success of these strategies. I also report hopeful new research suggesting that even modest income and other family supports typically improve low-income students' academic achievement. I end by arguing that, given this power of economic access to influence educational outcomes, strategies to support economic opportunity and development for urban residents and neighborhoods should be among the policies we consider in our attempts to improve urban schools and districts. Just as in affluent suburban districts where economic strength is the engine of educational reform, so it would be in urban districts where resident and neighborhood affluence

would support and retool the schools. I begin with an overview of education policy as typically conceived.

## Education Policies

Over the last seventy-five years or so, federal policies have attempted various strategies to improve city education. The first federal policy aimed at working-class populations was the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which provided funds to prepare students in industrialized areas for working-class jobs through vocational programs. Variants of this policy continued throughout the twentieth century, in the Vocational Education Acts of 1963, 1984, and 1998, and in the School-to-Work Opportunity Act of 1994 and the later federal legislation in which it was subsumed.

Some federal education policies have attempted to improve urban education by making funding available for increased curriculum materials and libraries, early childhood classes, and various types of programmatic innovations in city schools. Head Start in 1965, Follow Through in 1967, and, to a lesser extent, Title IX, which banned sex discrimination in 1972, brought and instigated new curricula and programs into city districts.<sup>1</sup> These policies were intended to increase student access and/or achievement by upgrading curricular resources and experiences.

Other federal K–12 policies have aimed specifically at increasing educational equity. The 1954 *Brown* decision (which committed the federal government to desegregation as a policy stance), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the Bilingual Act in 1968, Title IX in 1972, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 opened doors to academic experiences for previously underserved K–12 students. These policies are generally thought to have expanded urban students’ educational opportunities.

More recent federal education policies to improve schooling — with urban students and teachers often a target — have called for increased academic standards and requirements, standardized testing, and professional development of teachers. These policies were recommended by the influential report *A Nation at Risk*, commissioned by President Ronald Reagan and published in 1983. The emphasis on increased academic standards was part of an effort to support business needs for well-prepared workers and employees. The report’s recommendations for higher standards and increased testing were introduced as policy in 1994 and 1996 as part of the Goals 2000 legislation. In 2001 these goals were instantiated as federal mandates in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Privatization of education via nonpublic providers when K–12 schools fail is a subtextual education policy in NCLB (Conley, 2003; Cross, 2004; Stein, 2004).

It is important to note that federal education policies intended to improve urban schools did not take aim at the economic arrangements and practices

that themselves produced the poverty in which city schools were embedded. Despite increases in educational opportunity, the effects of almost a century of educational policies on urban school and student achievement have, by most accounts, been disappointing.

The first state policies regarding the education of America's urban (and rural) poor emerged earlier than federal ones. What has counted as state education policy regarding poor students can be said to have begun with mid- to late-nineteenth century insertions into state constitutions of the right of all students to a free, "thorough," "efficient," or "useful" education (Odden & Picus, 1992). Following these insertions and until the 1970s, however, most state education policies did not focus specifically on urban education. State mandates typically set regulations and requirements for school systems, teacher and administrator preparation, and school funding (through property taxes). During the 1970s and 1980s, lawsuits challenging state education funding systems brought increased attention to city schools and districts. State urban education policy in these decades involved various kinds of efforts, including school-based management and basic skills mandates. In the 1990s, state policies attempted to align education standards and regulations with federal ones, mandated curriculum and teacher licensure reform, and closely monitored urban districts. As legal challenges to state systems have led to increased funding of city schools, states have imposed stricter academic and graduation requirements, as well as multigrade and multisubject standardized testing. Quasi-privatization policies supporting charter schools, vouchers, and other school choice programs have also been a state strategy to attempt to improve the education of urban children by offering them a choice of schools to attend (Conley, 2003).

Over the decades, federal and state policies codified an increasing number of requirements that urban schools and districts must meet. Local governments and educational bureaucracies have undertaken a plethora of programs to attempt to meet those guidelines. Local districts have also mounted school reform projects in response to local social conditions and political pressure from parents and communities. Most local initiatives have been curricular, pedagogical, and administrative.

During the Progressive Era, cities consolidated and professionalized their school systems and personnel, introduced programs like the Gary Plan to prepare students for the industrial experience, increased access to high school, organized educational opportunities for immigrant parents, and sometimes fed, bathed, and clothed poor children. During the decade of the Great Depression, most large cities retrenched and severely cut educational social service and academic programs, as local tax receipts plummeted and banks that offered loans demanded broad cuts in education. During the 1960s, many urban districts were weakened further as most remaining businesses and jobs moved to the suburbs, decimating the urban property tax base (Anyon, 1997; Ravitch, 2000; Tyack, 1974; Wrigley, 1982).

Since the 1970s, in response to federal, judicial, and state mandates, urban districts have bused students to meet racial integration guidelines, decentralized authority to increase community participation, and created magnet schools to attempt to attract middle-class parents. Other local policies that have been attempted to improve achievement are a multitude of reform programs or "school improvement projects," student retention services, privatization of educational offerings, vouchers and magnets, mayoral control, small schools, and curriculum standardization and evaluation through testing. The social context of these policies has included pressure to be accountable in the wake of increased funding, as well as community and corporate demands for better schools. None of the local policies has focused on the poverty of families or neighborhoods.

One way to evaluate this long run of education policy is to compare the achievement of urban students at the beginning of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although achievement is higher now in that larger percentages of students remain in school past the elementary years than in 1900, I would argue that the improvement is relative and illusory. That is, while in the early twentieth century relatively few urban poor students went beyond fifth grade, the vast majority did not require further education to find employment in industries that could lead to middle-class income (Anyon, 1997; Ayres, 1909). Currently, relatively few urban poor students go past ninth grade: The graduation rates in large comprehensive inner-city high schools are abysmally low. In fourteen such New York City schools, for example, only 10 percent to 20 percent of ninth graders in 1996 graduated four years later (Fine, 2001; Greene 2001; Miao & Haney, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that low-income individuals desperately need a college degree to find decent employment, only 7 percent obtain a bachelors degree by age twenty-six (Education Trust, 2001; Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 2001). So, in relation to the needs of low-income students, urban districts fail their students with more egregious consequences now than in the early twentieth century.

Given the plethora of federal, state, and local education policies aimed at urban schools and the current widely acknowledged necessity of high-quality education for all, why have most urban schools and districts not been able to provide such an education for their students?

### Barriers to High-Quality Public Education in Cities

There are multiple causes of low-quality schooling in urban areas, and education policies as heretofore conceived address only a few. Education policy has not addressed the neighborhood poverty that surrounds and invades urban schools with low expectations and cynicism. Education policy has not addressed the unemployment and joblessness of families who will have few if any resources for the further education of their children, even if they excel in K-12 classes.

And education policy — even in response to state financial challenges — has not addressed the political economy that largely determines low levels of city district funding. Taxes on wealthy families and corporations are among the lowest on record (Phillips, 2002). Business and government investment in affluent suburban job centers rather than urban areas continues to deprive poor neighborhoods of entry-level jobs and a tax base, and residents' poverty wages further diminish available funding sources (Anyon, 2005; Orfield, 2002; Rusk, 1999). These political-economic constraints on quality schooling are not challenged by current or past education policy. In most U.S. cities, the political leverage of urban parents has not been sufficient to force the funding necessary to overcome outdated buildings, broken computer labs, and overcrowded classrooms.

These economic and political conditions are the building blocks of formidable barriers to systemic, sustainable school quality. Indeed, even when urban school reform succeeds, it fails — when there are no decent jobs a diploma from a successfully reformed school or district will attract, and there is no government or familial funding sufficient for the vast majority of low-income graduates of even good urban high schools to obtain a bachelors degree.

Individual and neighborhood poverty builds walls around schools and classrooms that education policy does not penetrate or scale. In the following section I describe some of the federal and metro-area policies and arrangements that sustain these barriers.

## Federal Policy

Analysts typically do not link federal policies to the maintenance of poverty, to the lack of jobs that bedevils American workers, or to the increasingly large portion of employment that pays poverty and near-poverty wages. Yet federal policy is determinative. To take a blatant example, Congress set the first minimum wage in 1938 at \$3.05 (in 2000 dollars); it stands in 2005 at \$5.15 — a mere two dollars more. (Yearly income at this wage is \$10,712.) This sum ensures that full-time, year-round, minimum-wage work will not raise people out of poverty (Mishel, Bernstein, & Boushey, 2003). Analysis in 2004 found that minimum-wage standards directly affect the wages of 8.9 percent of the workforce (9.9 million workers); when we include those making one dollar more an hour than the minimum wage, this legislation affects the wages of as much as 18 percent of the workforce (Economic Policy Institute, 2004). Contrary to the claims of those who oppose raising the minimum wage (that an increase will force employers to fire, or hire fewer of those affected by the increase), studies of the 1990–1991 and 1996–1997 minimum-wage increases failed to find any systematic, significant job losses associated with the increases and found no evidence of negative employment effects on small businesses (Economic Policy Institute, 2004).

Almost half the workforce earns what some economists call *poverty-zone* wages (and what I define as up to and including 125% of the official poverty level; Anyon, 2005). I analyzed figures provided by the Economic Policy Institute to calculate the overall percentage of people who work full-time year round yet make wages up to and including 125 percent of the official poverty threshold needed to support a family of four at the poverty level. The analysis demonstrates that in 1999, during a very strong economy, almost half of the people at work in the United States (41.3%) earned poverty-zone wages — in 1999, \$10.24/hour (\$21,299/year) or less, working full-time year round (Mishel et al., 2001). Two years later, in 2001, 38.4 percent earned poverty-zone wages working full-time year round (in 2001, 125% of the poverty line was a \$10.88 hourly wage; Mishel et al., 2003). This suggests that the federal minimum-wage policy is an important determinant of poverty for many millions of U.S. families.

There are other macroeconomic policies that produce hardship. These especially penalize Blacks and Latinos, the majority of whom live in segregated, low-income urban neighborhoods. These policies include the following: job training as a predominant federal antipoverty policy when there have been too few jobs for graduates; ineffective federal implementation of policies that outlaw racial discrimination in hiring and housing; regressive income taxes that charge wealthy individuals less than half the rate charged the rich during most of the first sixty years of the twentieth century, yet substantially raise the payroll taxes paid by the working poor and middle class; and corporate tax policies in recent years that allow 60 percent of large U.S. corporations to pay no federal taxes at all (and in some cases to obtain millions in rebates; Citizens for Tax Justice, 2002; Lafer, 2002; Orfield, 2002; Rusk, 1999).

These federal policies and practices contribute to personal, neighborhood, and educational poverty because they lead to the following problems: There are not enough jobs for poor families who need them; low-income families of color are concentrated in low-resourced urban neighborhoods; and when the wealthy do not contribute equitably to public expenses, funding for services like education declines and the quality of the services tends to be low.

The effects of these policies are compounded by harsh union laws and lack of federal protection for labor organizing; Federal Reserve Bank pronouncements that ignore the portion of its mandate to maintain a high level of employment; and free-trade agreements that send thousands of corporations, and their job opportunities, to other countries. These policies hurt workers of all colors — and in most sectors of the economy — as existing jobs disappear and those remaining pay lower wages, in part because they are not unionized (Anyon, 2005; Citizens for Tax Justice, 2002; Economic Policy Institute, 2002, 2004; Galbraith, 1998; Lafer, 2002; Mishel et al., 2001).

However, there are federal policies we could create that would lower poverty by important margins — including a significantly raised minimum wage,

comparable worth laws, and policies to enforce existing regulations that outlaw discrimination in hiring. A raise in the minimum wage that brought workers above poverty would improve the lives of at least a fifth of U.S. workers (Economic Policy Institute, 2004). Paying women the same amount men are paid for comparable work would, according to one analysis, reduce poverty by 40 percent, as such a large percentage of poor people are women in low-wage jobs (Lafer, 2002). And requiring employers to hire without discriminating against Blacks and Latinos would further open opportunities currently denied.

In addition, policies that worked against U.S. poverty in the past could be reinstated: U.S. government regulation of the minimum wage, which kept low-paid workers' income at the median of highly paid unionized workers in the decades after World War II; federal support for union organizing; a federal program of job creation in cities, as during the Great Depression of the 1930s; and federal programs for urban youth that would support further education, as such policies did for eight million men and women after World War II (Anyon, 2005; Galbraith, 1998). These national policies were important supports of the widespread prosperity of the United States' working and middle classes in the quarter century following 1945 (Galbraith, 1998).

### Metropolitan Policy and Practice

Like current federal mandates, there are metro-area policies and practices that increase the problems of urban residents and neighborhoods. Metro areas are shaped by regional markets — for jobs, housing, investment, and production. Metro areas account for over 80 percent of national output and drive the economic performance of the nation as a whole. Each metro area is anchored by one or more cities (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2001).

Today, metropolitan regions are characterized by population growth, extensive inequality, and segregation (Orfield, 2002; Rusk, 1999). The percentage of racial minorities in large metro areas who live in the suburbs jumped from 19 percent to 27 percent during the 1990s. However, a growing share of these families lives in fiscally stressed suburbs, with an increasing number of neighborhoods having poverty levels over 30 percent (Kingsley & Petit, 2003; Orfield, 2002). As in areas of concentrated poverty in the central city, low levels of taxable resources in these “urbanized” segregated suburbs leave services like education lacking in funds.

U.S. metropolitan areas are characterized by the following problems, all of which disadvantage urban minority families and communities: Most entry-level jobs for which adults with low to moderate education levels are qualified are increasingly located in suburbs, rather than in central cities, but public transit systems do not connect these suburban job centers to urban areas, where most low-income minorities live — thus preventing them from access to



jobs there. State-allowed local zoning on the basis of income prevents affordable housing in most suburbs where entry-level jobs are located, which means there is little if any housing for low-income families near the suburban job centers. Indeed, as I have mentioned, the failure to enforce antiracial discrimination statutes in housing confines most Blacks and Latinos to housing sites in central cities and segregated suburbs. Finally, even though federal and state taxes are paid by residents throughout metro regions (including inner cities), most tax-supported development takes place in the affluent suburbs rather than in low-income areas. Thus, few jobs exist in most low-income urban neighborhoods (Anyon, 2005; Dreir et al., 2001; Orfield, 2002; Rusk, 1999). These inequitable regional arrangements and policies exacerbate federal wage and job mandates and contribute in important ways to joblessness and poverty in cities and urbanized suburbs, and to the low quality of investment in services such as education there.

### Poverty

One consequence of federal and regional policies regarding work, wages, housing segregation, and transportation is that the numbers of poor people approach the figures of 1959 — before massive urban poverty became a national issue. Although the percentages are lower now, the numbers are still staggering: There were about as many people officially poor in 1993 (39.2 million) as in 1959 (39.4 million; Harrington, 1963). And in 2003, 35.8 million were officially poor, only 3.5 million fewer than in 1959 (Mishel et al., 2003).

A more realistic measure of poverty than federal guidelines is that those earning incomes up to 200 percent of the official levels are considered poor (Bernstein, Brocht, & Spade-Aguilar, 2000; Citro & Michael, 1995; Short, Iceland, & Garner, 1999). This revised threshold is used by increasing numbers of social scientists. A calculation of the individuals who earned less than 200 percent of the poverty level in 2001 (\$17.40/hour, or \$36,192/year), demonstrates a much larger percentage of poor employees than is commonly acknowledged: *84 percent of Hispanic workers, 80 percent of Black workers, and 64.3 percent of White workers made wages at or under 200 percent of the official poverty line* (Mishel et al., 2001).

A calculation of *families* living with earnings up to 200 percent of the poverty line reveals that Black and Latino families face the greatest financial hurdles. More than 50 percent of Black and Latino families earn less than 200 percent of the poverty level, compared to only 20.3 percent of White families, even though White families constitute a slight majority (50.5%) of families that fall below 200 percent of the poverty level (Mishel et al., 2001). In sum, poverty in the United States is higher than commonly perceived and is maintained in urban areas by federal and metro-area policies and distributions.

## Effects of Poverty on Urban Students

Macroeconomic policies that set wages below poverty levels, that train inner-city hopefuls for jobs that do not exist, that do not extract from the wealthy a fair share of social expenses, and that rarely enforce laws that would substantially decrease the economic discrimination of people of color all support persistent poverty and near-poverty among minority urban populations. This economic and social distress can prevent children from developing their full potential and can certainly dampen the enthusiasm, effort, and expectations with which urban children and their families approach K–12 education.

As I will report, a recent national study of young children confirms the potential of impoverished circumstances to prevent students' full cognitive growth before they enroll in kindergarten. Of countervailing power, however, is research demonstrating that when parents obtain better financial resources or better living conditions, the educational achievement of the children typically improves significantly. These findings empirically support the argument that for the urban poor, even with the right educational policies in place, school achievement may await a family's economic access.

I already presented adult poverty figures at the official threshold and noted the alarming increase in numbers when a more realistic assessment is made. The same disparities exist between federal and alternative counts of poor children. Sixteen percent of American children — almost 12 million — lived below the *official* federal poverty line in 2001. Almost half of those children (44%, or a little over 5 million) lived in *extreme* poverty (less than half the poverty line, or \$7,400 for a family of three in 2001) — including nearly a million African American children. This was a 17 percent increase in the number of children in extreme poverty from 2000, at the end of the economic boom (Cauthen & Lu, 2001; Dillon, 2003; Lu, 2003).

When the more appropriate alternative poverty threshold criterion is applied, however, a full *38 percent* of American children are identified as poor — 27 million who lived in families with income up to 200 percent of the official poverty line. These children live in poverty as well — although official statistics do not designate them as such. However, these families experience hardships that are almost as severe as those who are officially poor (Cauthen & Lu 2001; Lu, 2003). *By the revised measure — 200 percent of the official poverty cutoff — a full 57 percent of African American children, 64 percent of Latino, and 34 percent of White children were poor in the United States in 2001* (Lu, 2003; Mishel et al., 2003).

It is only in the 1990s that empirical studies focused on why and how poverty affects cognitive development and school achievement. Researchers began to document the specific effects of poverty environments on children's development (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Leventhal, & Aber, 1997; Goering & Feins, 2003; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). This body of work documents the correlations between low income, child development, and educational achievement (see Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997, for an overview of

studies). For example, poverty has been found to have consistently negative effects on children’s cognitive development (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; McLoyd, 1998). Longitudinal studies that have been carried out also demonstrate that “family income consistently predicts children’s academic and cognitive performance, even when other family characteristics are taken into account” (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Persistent and extreme poverty has been shown to be more detrimental to children than temporary poverty (Bolger & Patterson, 1995; Duncan et al., 1994). Family income may influence children through both lack of resources and parental emotional stress (Bradley, 1984; McLoyd & Jartayne, 1994; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997; Sugland, Zaslow, Brooks-Gunn, & Moore, 1995). Poor children have more health and behavior difficulties than those from more affluent families, which mitigates against educational success (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Houser, Brown, & Prosser, 1997; Klerman, 1991/2003; Korenman & Miller, 1997). Studies collected by Duncan and Brooks-Gunn teased out some of the variables within the effects of income. In summarizing research reported in their 1997 volume *Consequences of Growing up Poor*, they point out the following:

1. Income matters for the cognitive development of preschoolers “because it is associated with the provision of a richer learning environment” (p. 601). This is true in part because family income is a “significant determinant of child care environments, including center-based childcare (p. 601). . . . Income allows parents to provide their children with safer, more stimulating home environments; to live in communities with better schools, parks, and libraries and more challenging peers; to afford tuition and other expenses associated with higher education; to purchase or otherwise gain access to higher-quality health care; and in many other ways to buy the things that promote the health and development of their children” (p. 14).
2. “A variety of income measures — income [relative to needs] . . . income loss, the ratio of debts to assets, and unstable work — are associated with family economic pressure” (p. 602). Economic pressure has been found to be associated with depression (and stress) in parents, which can affect parenting, and thus school achievement.
3. “Family income is usually a stronger predictor of ability and achievement outcomes than are measures of parental schooling or family structure [e.g., single parenthood]” (p. 603). Many studies have shown that children raised in low-income families score lower than children from more affluent families do on assessments of health, cognitive development, and positive behavior. “In general, the better the measure of family income and the longer the period over which it is measured, the stronger the association between the family’s economic well-being and children’s outcomes” (p. 14).

It is important to understand that these findings do not suggest that poor students are of low intelligence; rather, the studies point to the power of the economy — and of economic hardship — to place extremely high hurdles to full development in front of children who are poor. It is of course possible — although it is not the norm — that education over time mitigates the effects of SES (Hout, 1988; Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

In 2002, Valerie Lee and David Burkham published the results of a large-sample assessment of the effects of poverty on cognitive development. They utilized data from the United States Department of Education's early childhood longitudinal kindergarten cohort, which is a comprehensive dataset that provides a nationally representative portrait of kindergarten students. Lee and Burkham (2002) explored differences in young children's achievement scores in literacy and mathematics by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES) as they began kindergarten. They also analyzed differences by social background in an array of children's homes and family activities.

The study demonstrates that inequalities in children's cognitive ability by SES are substantial even before children begin kindergarten and that poverty has a detrimental impact on early intellectual achievement. Importantly, it demonstrates that the disadvantages of being poor outweigh by far the race or family structure of children as causes of the cognitive disadvantages.

Details of the national assessment include the following:

1. Before children enter kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of children in the highest SES group are 60 percent above the scores of the lowest SES group.
2. Cognitive skills are much *less* closely related to race/ethnicity after accounting for SES. After taking racial differences into account, children from different SES groups achieve at different levels — before they begin kindergarten.
3. The impact of family structure on cognitive skills (e.g., being in a single-parent family) is much less than either race or SES.
4. Socioeconomic status is very strongly related to cognitive skills; SES accounts for more of the variation in cognitive scores than any other factor by far.

Lee and Burkham (2002) also found that disadvantaged children not only enter kindergarten with significantly lower cognitive skills than their advantaged peers, but also that low-SES children begin school (kindergarten) in systematically lower-quality elementary schools than their more advantaged counterparts. "However school quality is defined — in terms of higher student achievement, more school resources, more qualified teachers, more positive teacher attitudes, better neighborhood or school conditions, private vs. public schools — the least advantaged United States children begin their formal schooling in consistently lower-quality schools. This reinforces the inequalities that develop even before children reach school age" (p. 3; see also Entwistle &

Alexander, 1997; Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klevanov, & Crane, 1998; Phillips, Crouse, & Ralph, 1998; Stipic & Ryan, 1997; White, 1982).

In their review of studies of poverty's effects on individual development, Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997) conclude, "Taken together, [these studies] suggest that programs that raise the incomes of poor families will enhance the cognitive development of children and may improve their chance of success in [education and] the labor market during adulthood. Most important appears to be the elimination of deep and persistent poverty during a child's early years" (p. 608). I now turn to research suggesting that familial financial and other supports do indeed lead to increased educational achievement in children.

### Evidence that Familial Supports Raise Educational Achievement

I have been examining relationships among education policy, the economy, and achievement in urban schools. First, I critiqued education policy for its lack of attention to urban poverty, which, I argued, is maintained by policies and decisions made at the federal and metropolitan levels. I provided evidence of some of the egregious consequences of federal and regional policies and practices for urban families, neighborhoods, students, and schools. In particular, I demonstrated that child poverty creates obstacles to full development and educational achievement, especially when low-income minority children attend low-resourced schools — which most do. In this section I provide indirect and direct research evidence that increased family supports such as financial resources and less segregated neighborhoods raise educational achievement.

Indirect evidence is present in a longitudinal study completed in 2003 that found that improving family income reduces the negative (aggressive) social behavior of children, which in turn is likely to lead to better school behavior and performance. For eight years, researchers studied a representative population sample of 1,420 children ages nine to thirteen in rural North Carolina. A quarter of the children were from a Cherokee reservation. Psychological tests were given at the start of the study and repeated each year (Costello, Compton, Keeler, & Angold, 2003; O'Connor, 2003).

When the study began, 68 percent of the children were living below the official poverty line. On average, the poorer children engaged in more vandalism, stealing, bullying, stubbornness, and outbursts of anger than those who were not poor. But halfway through the study, a local casino began distributing a percentage of its profits to tribal families. Given to each tribal member over eighteen and put in a trust fund for younger members, the payment increased slightly each year, reaching about \$6,000 per person for the year 2001. Psychiatric tests administered by researchers for the four years that the funds were being distributed demonstrated that the negative behaviors of children in families who were no longer poor dropped to the same levels found among

children whose families had never been poor (decreasing by 40%). Parents who moved out of poverty reported having more time to spend with their children, and researchers identified better parenting behavior. Researchers also identified the psychological benefits of not being poor as important to both parents and children. Poverty puts stress on families, which can increase the likelihood of children developing behavioral problems. One parent in the study told researchers that “the jobs [produced by the casino] give people the chance to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and get out of poverty. That carries over into less juvenile crime, less domestic violence, and an overall better living experience for families” (O’Connor, 2003, p. 2).

Other research demonstrates that urban low-income parents are also able to practice more effective parenting strategies when some of the stress of poverty is eased by a higher income. And the reduction in stress in turn may positively affect the behavior and achievement of low-income children (see information below; also Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; Jermiah, 2003; Seitz, Rosenbaum, & Apfel, 1985).

Direct evidence that income supports improved educational achievement is also available. In March 2001, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) published a synthesis of research on how welfare and work policies affect the children of single mothers (Morris, Huston, Duncan, Crosby, & Bos, 2001). This synthesis reviewed data from evaluations of five programs that provided income supplements to poverty-wage workers (Florida’s Family Transition Program, the Minnesota Family Investment Program, the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies, Milwaukee’s New Hope for Families and Children Program, and the Self-Sufficiency Project). These programs offered supports of differing kinds to poverty-wage workers — income supplements, earnings disregards (rules that allow working welfare recipients to keep more of their income when they go to work), subsidized health care, employment services, counseling, supervised afterschool activities for children and youth, and informal get-togethers with project staff.

MDRC’s review of the studies found that even relatively small income supplements to working parents (amounting to about \$4,000 per year) improved children’s elementary school achievement by about 10 to 15 percent of the average variation in the control groups. These improvements were seen on test scores as well as on ratings by parents and/or teachers. The earning supplements had “consistently positive impacts on children’s [school] achievement” (Morris et al., 2001, p. 63). The positive effects were small, but were statistically significant.

Longitudinal studies have found that the achievement and behavior problems of young children can have important implications for their well-being in adolescence and adulthood (Caspi, Wright, Moffit, & Silva, 1998; Masten & Coatsworth, 1995). Moreover, even small differences between children in school achievement early on can translate into larger differences later (Entwistle & Alexander, 1997). Therefore, as the authors of the research synthesis

state, "a program's effects on children, even if the effects are small, may continue to have implications over the course of their lives" (Caspi et al., 1998, p. 25).

The earning supplements provided by four of these programs did not, however, bring the families above the poverty level. The improvements in children's school achievement and behavior from even these relatively meager cash supplements for working families suggest that if we were to increase family resources substantially, we could probably improve educational and social outcomes for children substantially.

Indeed, one program that did provide an earning supplement that brought the families above poverty level showed particularly impressive results for children's behavior and achievement. New Hope for Families and Children was run between 1994 and 1998 in two inner-city areas in Milwaukee. Candidates had to live in one of two targeted areas, be eighteen or older, be willing and able to work at least thirty hours per week, and have a household income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level (Huston et al., 2001). Almost 90 percent of the adults in the sample were single or separated mothers with children when they entered the study, and 80 percent were receiving public assistance. The program was conceived by a nonprofit community-based organization and provided several benefits: the earnings supplement, subsidized health insurance, and subsidized child care. The program offered help in obtaining a job and provided a community-service job for up to one year for those not able to find work elsewhere, the advice and support of project staff were made available. The annual cost of providing these benefits was \$5,300 per family.

New Hope was evaluated at two-year and five-year intervals using a random assignment research design. After conducting outreach in the communities to identify eligible people, the study enrolled over 1,300 low-income adults. Half the applicants were randomly assigned to a program group that received New Hope's benefits, and the other half were randomly assigned to a control group that was not eligible for the benefits.

Both evaluations showed positive results (Bos, Huston, Duncan, Brock, & McLoyd, 1996; Huston et al., 2001). Financial supplements in the New Hope program did reduce the number of families in poverty, but both program and control groups reported similar levels of hardship, such as food insecurity and financial insufficiency. Yet the program had positive effects on parents' well-being and coping skills. As Huston et al. (2003) explain:

Parents in the New Hope group were more aware of available "helping" resources in the community, such as where to find assistance with energy costs or housing problems. More of them also knew about the [Earned Income Tax Credit] and its support, an important source of support for low-income workers. Ethnographic data suggest that a significant number of families intentionally used the Earned Income Tax Credits as a savings plan for making major purchases, reducing debt, and stabilizing rent and other payments. Parents in New

Hope also reported better physical health and fewer symptoms associated with depression than did parents in the control group. At the two-year point, New Hope parents reported reduced stress, increased feelings of social support, and increased time pressure. The ethnographic study found that many parents had children with disabilities or behavioral difficulties; New Hope helped the parents achieve a difficult balance among work, services, and parenting. . . . The New Hope parents did report fewer problems controlling their children, and parents of adolescents reported more effective management (better control and less need for punishment). (p. 9)

New Hope improved children's school performance. "At both the two-year and the five-year points, children in the program performed better than control group children on several measures of academic achievement, particularly on reading and literacy tests. After five years, they scored higher on a standardized test of reading skills and their parents reported that they got higher grades in reading skills" (Huston et al., 2001, p. 13). These effects were slightly more pronounced for boys than for girls. Compared with their control group counterparts, boys in New Hope also received higher ratings of academic performance from their teachers and were more likely to expect to attend college at both the two-year and the five-year assessments. "New Hope adolescents reported more engagement with schools, feelings of efficacy, and expectations to finish college than did their control group counterparts" (pp. 13–14). New Hope's effects are consistent with the results of other programs that have improved children's outcomes by providing wage supplements and subsidized child care (Michalopoulos et al., 2002; Morris et al., 2001).

Indeed, the New Hope findings are in line with the increased educational achievement of students that has been identified in large-scale programs that assist low-income minority families by helping them move from inner-city neighborhoods to more affluent and/or less segregated metropolitan areas. The first of these "mobility programs" was the Gautreaux program in the Chicago metropolitan area.

As a result of a victorious lawsuit charging the Chicago Housing Authority with segregation in public housing, the court ordered the housing authority to move families who wanted to live in less segregated areas of the city and suburbs. The Gautreaux program moved over 7,000 families to higher-income areas of the Chicago metropolitan region between 1976 and 1998 (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2002). Although at first a disproportionate number of the children who moved were placed in classes for the learning disabled by their suburban schools, they ultimately were significantly more likely than their urban counterparts to be in college-bound tracks, in four-year colleges, and were subsequently more likely to be employed in jobs with higher pay and with benefits than children who stayed in the city (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2002).

The success of the Gautreaux program led to more than fifty other mobility programs, including the Moving To Opportunity program (MTO) begun by



the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1994. The Housing and Community Development Act of 1992 authorized HUD to "assist very low-income families with children who reside in public housing or housing receiving project-based assistance under Section 8 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1937 to move out of areas with high concentrations of persons living in poverty (40% or more) to areas with low concentrations of such persons (less than 10% in poverty)" (Goering & Feins, 2003, p. 6). Moving To Opportunity projects were carried out in five cities: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. Congress stipulated that HUD conduct evaluations of the program to determine its effects (Goering & Feins, 2003).

Overall, roughly 5,300 families volunteered to move within the metropolitan area of the city in which they lived. In total, 4,608 families were eligible. They were divided into three groups: the MTO "treatment" or experimental group, which received Section 8 certificates or vouchers that could only be used in areas where 10 percent or less of the residents lived below official poverty levels; they also received counseling assistance in finding private rental units. A second group was given Section 8 certificates with no special restrictions on where they were to move, and no counseling (Section 8-only group). An in-place control group continued to receive housing project assistance in the inner-city neighborhoods where they lived. The families in all three groups of the MTO program tended to be young single mothers (under age 35), African American, with a median income of \$8,200. Most stated that their main reason for wanting to move was fear of gangs and violence in the neighborhoods in which they lived.

Social scientists conducted research at all five sites, using HUD data, baseline surveys, follow-up surveys of families, qualitative interviews, and data on juvenile crime, labor-market outcomes, and school performance. Among their findings are the following.

One to three years after the families in the experimental group moved, they lived in significantly more affluent and more racially mixed communities than families in the other two groups. In addition, those who were in the experimental group had median incomes that were 73 percent higher than the median incomes for the control group and 53 percent higher than the Section 8-only group. In 1997, three years after the program began, the MTO experimental group families in all five metropolitan areas lived in less-segregated neighborhoods than either of the other two groups.

Studies of adults in the experimental groups in New York and Boston reported significantly better health and emotional well-being than the Section 8-only and control groups in those cities. Mothers in both the experimental groups were much less likely to report being depressed or stressed. The parents provided more structure for their children's activities and used less restrictive parenting styles. By the third year, 10 percent fewer of the experimen-

tal group in New York City were receiving welfare. In Boston, public assistance for MTO families dropped by half, and employment in all MTO sites increased from 27 percent at the beginning of the program to 43 percent three years later. Employment in Boston increased by more than one-half.

The outcomes for children in these experimental groups were also encouraging. They attended schools that had higher pass rates, more affluent student bodies, and more resources than the schools attended by control group children. Ludwig, Duncan, and Ladd (2003) hypothesize that the peer groups in the new schools had more positive attitudes toward school than in the inner city, and this may also have contributed to good outcomes for the children.

Ludwig, Duncan, and Ladd report that young children in the experimental and Section 8–only groups “achieved higher test scores than the controls, and experienced fewer arrests for violent criminal behavior” (2003, p. 164). The authors report in some detail the assessments in Baltimore, and state that they are “largely consistent with evidence from the other MTO sites” (p. 163). Young children in the experimental and Section 8–only groups had Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) reading scores that were on average six to seven percentage points higher than those in the control group (i.e., in low-income urban schools). “This large effect is equal to around one-quarter of the control group mean of 25 percentile points and one-quarter of a standard deviation in the national CTBS math distribution” (p. 165). Children in the experimental group also raised their CTBS math scores about the same amount, and their pass rates on the Maryland Functional Tests’ (MFT) reading test were almost double those in the inner-city schools.

High school students in the Baltimore experimental group had a more difficult transition. In the first three years of MTO, they had higher rates of grade retention, disciplinary action, and school dropout rates than the children of families in the other two groups. The authors suggest that these differences may be due to the enforcement of higher behavioral and/or educational standards in more affluent schools (Ludwig et al., 2003).

However, teens who moved from high- to low-poverty neighborhoods were arrested less often than teens in the other groups. For example, 2.7 percent of control group adolescents were arrested during an average three-month period, compared with only 1.4 percent of teens in the experimental group during the same period. Furthermore, there was a 50 percent reduction in the proportion of juveniles in the experimental group who were arrested for violent offenses. For example, in a given quarter, 3 percent of adolescents in the control group were arrested for violent crimes, compared with only 1.4 percent among the experimental group (Ludwig et al., 2003).

Research in the Boston MTO found significantly fewer behavioral and mental health problems among boys in both the experimental and Section 8-only groups, and experimental-group children were less likely to be injured or to experience asthma attacks. Among children with asthma, the number of attacks requiring medical attention fell significantly (Goering & Feins, 2003).

Additionally, the children in the experimental group in Boston were less likely to engage in antisocial behavior (Ludwig et al., 2003).

In sum, these results are in general agreement with evaluations of other mobility programs, which have generally led to "substantial improvements in . . . neighborhood conditions, physical and mental health, safety, housing conditions, adult labor-market outcomes (although the findings here are mixed)" (Johnson, Ladd, & Ludwig, 2002, p. 185) and improvements in the children's behavior and educational outcomes of families who moved.

The success of even small family supports and of a move to places of increased opportunity suggests that we should provide a financial and opportunity base for urban families. This in itself will lay the foundation for fuller child development and educational achievement.

### A New Education Policy Paradigm

I have outlined a number of federal and regional policies and practices that undermine urban school quality and potential by maintaining large poverty populations in urban neighborhoods. I have also provided evidence that this poverty works against the development and achievement of urban students. Importantly, however, we also see that even modest financial and social supports for poor families enable the children to achieve at higher levels in school. This suggests that policies to counter the devastating effects of macroeconomic and regional mandates and practices should "count" as policies we call on to create equity and quality in urban districts and schools.

As education policymakers and practitioners, we can acknowledge and act on the power of urban poverty, low-wage work, and housing segregation to dwarf most curricular, pedagogical, and other educational reforms. The effects of macroeconomic policies continually trump the effects of education policies.

To remove economic barriers to school quality and consequence, we can legislate a significantly higher living wage; we can create jobs in cities that offer career ladders and prepare low-income residents to fill them. And, like a number of European countries, we can tax wealthy families and corporations to pay for these and other investments. We should enforce federal antidiscrimination measures to integrate segregated housing and create public transit routes so low-income urban residents without cars are not denied access to jobs in the suburbs. Policies like these would create a social foundation on which high-quality schooling would rest. As has been the case in affluent suburbs, economic access creates the financial and political conditions in families and communities for educational commitment and reward.

In this new paradigm, education policies for which we press would take on the larger issues: Education funding reform would include the companion need for financing neighborhood jobs and decent wages. New small schools would be created as an important part of coordinated efforts at neighborhood

revitalization for low-income residents. Vocational offerings in high school would link to living-wage campaigns and employers who support them. College graduation would be understood as a continuation of government's financial responsibility for public education. And lawsuits to racially integrate districts would acknowledge housing segregation as fundamental and target legal challenges accordingly.

Policies that set the standards schools must meet would identify the money, materials, teachers, courses, and neighborhood needs that must be filled in order to provide opportunities to learn at high levels. Educational accountability would be conceived as a public undertaking, centrally involving families, communities, and students, in consultation with district and government officials.

In this approach to urban school reform, "policy alignment" would not refer to the fit between education mandates issued by various levels of government and bureaucracy. The fit we would seek is between neighborhood, family, and student needs and the potential of education policies to contribute to their fulfillment.

However, economic strength and political leverage is not all that is required to transform urban education. Good schools require not only good neighborhoods, but — as equity-seeking educational reforms have promised — also the detracking of minority and working-class youth, a culture responsive to students, and assistance to teachers in their struggle to surmount the wall of resignation and defiance that separates many students from the educational enterprise.

A new paradigm of education policy is possible — one that promotes equity-seeking school change and that includes strategies to create conditions that will allow the educational improvements to take root, grow, and bear fruit in students' lives.

## Notes

1. The 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) funded and promoted curriculum materials, primarily in science, math, and foreign languages (e.g., the "New Math"), and some of these probably found their way into city districts and classrooms. But the NDEA was aimed at increasing the security and technological prowess of the United States, not at improving urban schools.
2. Graduation rates in large urban high schools are lower than is commonly believed. Jay P. Greene, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, calculated graduation rates in all states and large cities for major racial groups. For this calculation he first identified the eighth-grade public school enrollment for each jurisdiction and for each subgroup from the 1993 fall semester, adjusting for student movement into or out of an area. He then obtained counts of the number of regular high school diplomas awarded in the spring of 1998 when the eighth graders should have been graduating. (In calculating the 1998 graduation rate, he did not include later GED or other alternative diplomas, as the federal government does.) He found that the national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 71 percent. For White students the rate was 78 percent, for

African American students it was 56 percent, and for Latinos, 54 percent. In fifteen of forty-five large (mostly urban) districts for which there were data, fewer than 50 percent of African American students graduated; and in twenty-one of thirty-six large, mostly urban districts for which there were data, fewer than 50 percent of Latino students graduated (Greene, 2001, pp. 1–5).

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