Education Inequality In America

Inequality in the American education system is intertwined with many significant social issues impacting our society. Studying the myriad of educational inequalities and mitigating their impact is critical to improving the world as a whole. Quality education is the key to individual success and a pillar for the possibility of a successful future for a society. Unfortunately, many children and families have to deal with major discriminating factors and are forced to live a life in a completely different way than most. The documentary “Teach Us All” delves into the past to give us a look at what it took for underprivileged and discriminated students to deal with to get an education and how things are like nowadays. It portrays how our society’s issues directly translate to the unfairness of our school systems. The impact of unequal education across race continues to cause a socio-economic imbalance that needs to desperately be corrected.

The landmark case of Brown vs Board of Education to desegregate our school systems in 1957 and yet much of our country still remains largely segregated, if not more segregated than before. Poverty stricken neighborhoods with underprivileged children suffer the most as the education system is deliberately built to spend less money to educate poor children than affluent ones. Lower quality teachers and staff tend to move to the poorer communities for opportunities. Even then, some communities struggle to even have teachers for some schools. The economic impact also relates to unfair distribution of resources like playgrounds, extra-curricular activities, books, and even the opportunity for field trips. Most of these teachers in broken down school systems do not strongly care about what goes on in these kid’s personal lives or back at their home. It isn’t necessarily that they don’t emotional care, but that it is almost impossible to make a true change in their lives. Most of them care about the paycheck and going home to their own kids that are in an already better system. Do teachers know their student may have five other brothers or sisters and a single mother that makes only $9,000 a year? The percent of Americans living in “very poor neighborhoods” is 7.5% white to 25.2% African American. This gap shows how schools are becoming even more segregated today.

A large role in education is that it molds our social personalities through learning about different cultures and coping with people with all sorts of differences. This is what makes us well rounded individuals. Schools that are all black, all white or all Latino certainly do not experience nearly the same social upbringing than those who go to a school that is completely diversified. I have personally experienced the difference between what a very diverse school looks and feels like versus a school that is not. Growing up in West Hartford meant I went to schools with people from the Hartford area leading to very integrated schools from elementary to high school. Moving to Simsbury, CT in high school showed me how living just a few towns away from a large city can make such a large difference. Simsbury is predominantly all white families, which meant the school system was full of white students. There was one bus that came from Hartford bringing only about 30 inner city kids to the school through the CREC program. Witnessing such a large difference in school systems just in Connecticut alone calls for a strong effort by high level officials to make all of our schools more integrated and equal at early stages so those who will be running our country down the road are well rounded individuals who can work with anybody from anywhere.

This issue is one that stems from all over America and is due to many different factors. One

being the behavior of the officials that implement the education systems in the first place. These elected officials are supposed to be the voice of the people, but in many cases end up suppressing the voices of those who are in a deeper need. Government officials dictate pretty much everything, even deciding when schools have metal detectors in them or not. This is almost always found inside inner city schools, labeling students as possible threats the minute they enter their learning facility. Students interviewed in the documentary felt like it was more of a prison rather than an environment of students. There are not many parents that willingly send their child to a school that has them checked for weapons every single day or the first person they see every day when they enter is a security guard. Schools with metal detectors versus those that do not, have basically the same race and class divide. In the documentary, Little Rock Arkansas is one of the main highlighted areas where these flaws can be examined. In 2015 the State Board of Education of was voted to takeover Little Rock's school district leaving the area stripped of their own school board. Parents were left voiceless as three white government officials were now placed in charge which left little hope for those in the most poverty-stricken area in Arkansas. This is an issue that has happened in numerous other areas like New York and Las Angeles. City schools get taken over and leave little leeway for the ones who actually have to go to school there.

One potential behavioral solution to this is to have student and family led changes along with implementing behavioral lessons for teachers in inner city / less fortunate schools to learn from more advanced teachers. The people who are in need of it should be the ones leading it! If the best staff is going to be sent to the wealthy areas then there still needs to be the same if not better level of staff in areas like Little Rock, where people need it more. These are the people that are affected by the discrimination in the school systems, not the rich white families, that is a fact. During the summers teachers from schools that lack performance can be sent to different branches over the country and go through courses to help increase their teaching skills and quality to ensure they are going to help their students to the max. Use methods like modeling and positive reinforcement to guide them along the right path. An example of a course can simply be learning how to change children's perspectives in the school and become a motivating factor in the kid's life and push them to want to succeed. Not just being looked at as a teacher. Those that make an effort to delve into their students' personal lives make a huge difference compared to teachers that pay little or no attention.

Some barriers that would come up would be not many teachers would want to go work in these inner city schools where they are forced to deal with a much more stressful and different environment than they may be used to. Also, not a lot of teachers would probably want to give their summers up to take courses about becoming better teachers. I think a way around these barriers would bring more pay into the picture. Start paying teachers that work in inner city schools more than those that do not, is critical to draw better talent. It is far more challenging to work in schools where students are harder to teach and go home to very different lifestyles. If we were to take a teacher from Simsbury CT and compare their experience with a teacher from Weaver High in Hartford CT, I can guarantee the teacher working at Weaver deals with far more stressful things and is paid a fraction of what teachers in Simsbury are paid. Some students in these very poor areas don't even have their own lunch half the time. So forget trying to teach young kids who barely even eat!

The teachers that I remember forever are the ones who really made an effort to get to know me, look out for me, and care for me and my family - and those are the people who need to be taking the initiative and putting the less privileged children onto good paths. It is no question that

America is headed backwards into worse times. Racial tension is high and a broken economy leaves many people hurting, even more importantly leaving their kids to suffer. It is clear to the eyes of college students that education is not fair at all throughout the country, so how can top government officials not see it? The statistics are in front of us and the racial divide is pretty clear to see as the gap between white & black achievement has been widening since the height of desegregation in 1988. If change wants to truly happen then the voices of the students who live through the suffering need to be heard and taken seriously, and even put into effect so education systems can be fair and nobody is being deprived from resources. Unity is the biggest plausible pathway to justice, and when students are moving for justice than the support will keep piling in to get the results that are needed for our country to thrive in the future.

Citation APA Style

1. Lowmen, Sonia, director. Teach Us All. Netflix, Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes, 2017.