Poverty’s Impact on Education

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Poverty in public schools has become one of the biggest issues in education, we need to find ways to overcome the damage from poverty and help children from low-income families receive an equal and meaningful education as everyone else. Too many students and families are suffering from the effects of poverty, and it’s greatly affecting these students’ educations. Poverty affects the teachers and the whole school as well.

There are many ways in which poverty leaves an unfortunate impact on the students in public schools. Layton (2015) stated that, “For the first time in at least 50 years, a majority of public school students across the country are considered ‘low income.’” Most of the population is aware that poverty in America and in American public schools is very present and even more present in this time than it’s ever been. Politicians and others have been trying to solve this issue for years and not only are America’s schools and students still dealing with this but now, it’s even worse of a struggle to solve poverty in education. Unfortunately, students that come from low-income homes rarely ever catch up academically to their more privileged peers. There needs to be more help provided for these kids who aren’t able to catch up. Sometimes, they can’t do it themselves, some of them need help with certain material and teachers along with their schools should be capable and willing to provide programs and after-school time for them to learn to improve. High-poverty schools would surely benefit from that since students most likely wouldn’t have much access to the updated computers and materials at home that only the school would provide. These kids could be perfectly capable of having as much knowledge as a more privileged student if they had enough help to get there. We need to learn to help these kids succeed in having a meaningful education as much as we help the privileged ones.

Biddle (2014) explains that, “Those handicapped kids fail in education, they are led to believe either that they themselves are to blame or that the procedures and rules of American schools are hopelessly stacked against them. And because of these alienating beliefs, many of them come to lead disaffected lives that are reflected in the country’s high rates of homelessness, unemployment, gang warfare, early pregnancies, substance abuse, violent crime, imprisonment, and early death.” America’s education system should be more than willing to help these students. Students shouldn’t feel intimidated by their school or their schoolwork. We need to work with these children and try our best to make them feel more comfortable in their environment in school and the material they’re learning. No student should feel like they can’t do something to the point where they become different people, when they don’t believe in themselves and the only option for them is to become destructive and start getting into trouble. Many people don’t want to believe that this is what’s happening to our students in poverty but it is what happens and now, it’s happening too often. People associate kids in poverty to be the culprits of violence or crime. These kids are sometimes the culprits but if we helped them to succeed in school, it may not happen as often as it does now. If they realized how important they are to the education system and how important education is to them, then we would have a lot less dropouts, and less trouble on the streets. The ones in poverty are thought of as bums or druggies, they’re thought of as the ones who are homeless, the girls who get pregnant at sixteen or younger, and the troublesome boys who get incarcerated again as soon as they’ve been released. As soon as these children see that their mentors or teachers don’t care, they go participate in these dangerous acts. Assisting these students to succeed from the get-go should be a necessity for our schools. We can’t let these kids feel as if they’re not good enough because the reality is that they are good enough, our education system just fails to let them know that.

Balfanz (2003) stated that, “Urban education systems are not organized to provide assistance and attention to the students who are most in need.” Poverty is usually witnessed in urban areas and in big cities. The schools that are placed in these urban areas most-likely struggle with the lack of a stable education system. There isn’t enough money there to update the school’s much needed equipment such as computers, and there isn’t enough to purchase some of the materials needed for specific subjects such as textbooks. Also, there usually aren’t many after-school programs and extracurricular activities that could further help students in poverty. A lot of those kids don’t have access to a computer at home, and even if they do have a computer, some may not have access to the internet. Today in education, using technology for homework and school work is being seen more frequently. If they don’t have access to these needed supplies, they will get an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment. Schools like these have to start providing after-school programs and library visits so these students can receive the help that they need to succeed in their education.

This poverty crisis in American education greatly impacts the teacher as well as the students. According to Layton (2015), “The job of teacher has expanded to ‘counselor, therapist, doctor, parent, and attorney.’” There are probably some teachers out there who don’t care as much but there are many others who do actually care about the well-being of their students, whether they come from low-income families or high-income families. A teacher should always be concerned about their students’ well-being, that’s part of their job. Teachers are needed to help a student reach their full potential in order to succeed in school and when their life at home or their status of poverty is what keeps them from doing that, a caring teacher does everything they possibly can to help them. There are stories of teachers here who try to provide certain materials for kids who can’t afford them. Some purchase books, writing utensils, and other supplies needed for the class out of their own money. Something that some really dedicated teachers have also started doing is keeping wipes, toothbrushes, t-shirts, clean underwear, and other things that the students’ families should be able to provide, in the teacher’s office or classroom closets. Some families can’t help being unable to afford some things or some families just forget to make sure their kids get ready for school because they have jobs to keep up with so they can afford their children. These teachers take their own time and money to provide for these kids in need without being given anything in return. It’s also been said that even some bus drivers are trying to help low-income students without getting paid for it. Some bus drivers will take high-poverty students to certain learning centers, after school programs, or even the library. These individuals that are employed by the school shouldn’t have to take their own time and money to do things that are outside of their job description but they do it anyway because they feel like they should.

Mullen (2014) stated that, “Educators in high-poverty schools are expected to rise to the occasion by satisfying the same standards for learning and performance of schools that are highly resourced and that serve children living in favorable conditions.” This quote signifies another huge problem dealing with poverty that impacts teachers. Teachers are under very intense pressure to deliver more satisfying test results from their students on high-stakes testing and other assignments and there’s no way that every student in poverty is going to do as well as a more privileged student. A student living in poverty obviously doesn’t have the resources as other students and they need resources to do well on these tests. Children in poverty cannot be put in a standard as the other students, they have no chance to get better if they don’t receive as much help as other students to get ready for these tests. This also impacts the teachers because as of recently, perfectly capable teachers are starting to lose their jobs in result of high-stakes testing. People have been deciding that it’s up to the teachers to ensure that their students will score proficient or above on these tests. It has to be very difficult for these educators to lose their job over something that is completely out of their control. They can’t force a child to take something from every lesson they teach, just like they can’t expect a child in poverty to do as well as a more privileged and well-rounded student.

In conclusion, I believe that everyone deserves a right to receive a meaningful education, but especially those who suffer from the effects of poverty. Poverty has had a major impact on education in the United States. The majority of the U.S. come from low-income homes. Capra (2009) stated that, “The top one percent of U.S. families has more money than the bottom forty percent; this gap has steadily increased over the past seventy years.” This fact should not affect their education as much as it is. They should be receiving the same treatment and resources as any other student in the education system. Capra (2009) also stated that, “America must acknowledge that education is a public necessity and not a luxury for the privileged.” Everyone is capable and should be willing to help these students as much as they can. Education is an equal right for everyone, everyone deserves the right to receive a successful education in the United States. Students in poverty rarely catch up academically with their more privileged peers, and sometimes they seem to be segregated in schools by their peers. They have more stress and mental health issues that need to be assessed, and some of that is due to high-stakes testing which they’re almost destined not to pass. Dutro and Selland (2015) found that, “Student drawings suggested that high-stakes testing ‘does not motivate all students in the same way,’ and that while some students maybe respond to the high-stakes of the test with increased motivation, others, often older, urban students, ‘may simply give up,’ seeing the tests as less of ‘a challenge’ and more as a source of ‘intimidation and humiliation.’” Usually, these students in poverty rarely graduate because they either drop out or are unable to make the grades in order to graduate. Poverty in education obviously affects many teachers as well with teachers losing their jobs based on student’s performance and with teachers doing things to help children in poverty that are not in their job description. Poverty in education is affecting too many people and there are so many things people can start doing to help these students and schools. We need to start investing in America’s children and in their education more than we do now. We need to teach education students how to properly assess students in poverty and finally, we need to realize that this issue is too important to push aside, these kids could be perfectly capable of having as much knowledge and skills as anyone else if we helped them get there.

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