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EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUBURBAN AND URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS

by ALLAN ALSON & ELIZABETH NELSON

Public schooling in the United States exists as a great equalizer for our society, providing a powerful opportunity to launch all children into the realms of academic and social success. This, in turn, places a special burden on our schools to strengthen the pillars of democracy by ensuring that this opportunity is equally distributed. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan frequently espouses the belief that urban schools will succeed when they break the cycle of

poverty.¹ In order to accomplish this lofty goal, one may wonder: Is it necessary to equalize fiscal inputs in order to equalize academic outputs?

For many decades our country has debated, in public forums, legislatures and courts of law, the existing funding disparities among public schools and their resultant impact on student achievement. Studies of related effects, such as class size, teacher salaries and retention, and course offerings have yielded surprisingly uneven results. In turn, these studies have played a significant role in an array of case law findings, primarily in the states that generally have not overturned existing funding formulas.²

This article explores what achievement looks in one suburban high school, Evanston Township High School (ETHS), compared to various urban high schools in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system. A contextual background for each school system, including a statistical analysis relating to educational inputs and outputs will be provided. Furthermore, a discussion of how a significantly greater fiscal foundation can provide students with greater opportunities for success will demonstrate that extra funding and additional services do, in fact, make a difference.

BACKGROUND

The suburban high school, ETHS, serves the community of Evanston and part of Skokie, Ill. This single school district borders the city of Chicago and is generally regarded as a quality educational institution that sends large numbers of its graduates to higher education and has won various academic awards. ETHS is both financially and racially diverse, 36 percent of the students are in poverty³ (as determined by free and reduced lunch statistics) –with a racial breakdown of 47 percent white, 36 percent Black, 11 percent Latino, 3 percent multi-racial and 3 percent Asian.⁴ On average, ETHS spends \$17,908 per pupil annually.⁵

In the CPS District there are 116 Chicago public high schools.⁶ Not unexpectedly, there is enormous variation in student performance among these high schools. Overall, CPS high schools have a much higher poverty rate of approximately 85 percent,⁷ and a racial breakdown of 46 percent black, 39 percent Hispanic, 8 percent white, 3 percent multi-racial, and 3 percent Asian.⁸ Select enrollment schools tend to have lower poverty rates, are more mixed racially,

and have significantly higher achievement levels.⁹ CPS has an operational expenditure of \$11,033 per pupil, nearly seven thousand dollars less than its neighboring suburb, Evanston.¹⁰ The significantly higher poverty rate in Chicago poses academic and social challenges beyond what Evanston encounters. The cumulative impact of poverty has altered the landscape for these kids. Ultimately, this poverty means that kids are arising high school further behind than their Evanston counterparts. This reality is compounded by the resource differences between the two communities.

Review of the fiscal input data reveals evident disparities in what each school's yearly expenditures purchase, including length of the school day and year, class size, teacher salaries, education, and retention, after school opportunities, breadth and depth of class offerings, numbers of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and human resources devoted to student interventions and supports.

SCHOOL YEAR AND SCHOOL DAY

Evanston and Chicago each meet the minimum number of school days required by the state of Illinois, consisting of a 185-day school year to ensure 176 days of attendance.¹¹ There are some charter high schools that require a longer school year for students.¹² Both CPS and ETHS engage their teachers for the same number of days and provide similar time for professional development during the school year. The only exception to this similarity is that ETHS provides weekly late-start days for students so that teachers can work together on curriculum, instruction and analyzing student data. On average, principals in Evanston and Chicago work the same length school year and school day.

By far, the greatest difference between these districts is the length of the school day for students and teachers. CPS has the shortest high school day in Illinois, whereas ETHS has the longest. ETHS's student day is seven and one-half hours compared to approximately six and one-half hours for CPS high schools. This difference translates into 27 fewer school days per year for CPS's high school students. What does this time buy for Evanston's students and teachers?

First and foremost, ETHS has more instructional blocks of time which translates into an ability to offer a much more varied curriculum. By the completion of their high school career Evanston students are able to take one year of

math beyond calculus, study a world language for a year or two longer, have a greater choice of history electives, study science in greater depth, explore a longer sequence of (and more technologically rich) career courses and choose from approximately four to five times more AP classes than their Chicago counterparts. For example, in Evanston, 21.2 percent of students are enrolled in AP classes, with 78 percent of these students obtaining a three or higher on the AP exam.¹³ Conversely, 12.3 percent of CPS students are enrolled in AP courses; only 27.4 percent of these students score a three or higher on the AP exam.¹⁴ The enrichment opportunities can translate into both better preparation and a more favorable transcript for application to colleges and the working world.

This additional time at ETHS allows for the development of strategies that enhance graduation rates and diminish drop-out rates. Specifically, greater dollars for staff and more time enable Evanston students to repeat failed courses during the school year as well as in the summer. The most illustrative example is math: if an ETHS student fails the first semester of algebra, he or she can repeat it during the second semester and complete the course in the summer. In Chicago, the lack of time and money dictates that a student would need to wait for summer school to repeat that semester of algebra. One consequence of this curriculum constraint is that students with multiple failures have fewer chances to get back on track to graduate with their respective class or graduate at all. Sensing this inability to catch-up can contribute to the hopelessness that leads to students leaving school without obtaining a diploma.

In the case of ETHS, a longer workday for teachers translates into two time blocks available each day for preparation as compared to only one block in Chicago. Therefore, teachers have more time to assist students, engage in group planning, call parents and take a breath in their otherwise non-stop day. That extra time and the extra professionalism afford a more desirable work environment for teachers. This, in turn, becomes a factor in a teacher's decision to stay in the same profession and location.

CLASS SIZE

School districts with larger budgets tend to invest more money in human resources, namely teachers. A greater number of teachers means smaller class sizes and a wider range of educational and related services available to students.

Many studies indicate that students generally learn best in an educational environment characterized by relatively small class sizes.¹⁵ In Chicago most high school teachers have 140 students, or 28 students per class.¹⁶ By comparison, Evanston teachers have approximately 110 students.¹⁷

Teachers with fewer than thirty students in a classroom are more likely to give assignments of greater length more frequently and, in turn, provide more detailed feedback to their students. Managing group work and other activities that stimulate collaborative problem-solving are also more easily realized in classes with fewer students. Certainly, teachers are better able to build personalized classroom environments, considered an essential component for high school success, when they have fewer students per class. In addition, though teachers in general do not call parents enough, they are more inclined to do so when they have fewer students.

In addition to providing for smaller class sizes, schools must do their best to ensure that students spend their time in class effectively. Increasing time on task, particularly in reading and math, is necessary for students who enter high school below grade level. Those most likely to fall behind both in Evanston and Chicago are students on free and reduced lunch and students of color. In both communities those students are frequently one and the same. ETHS is able to use its additional revenues and extra time to provide double period math through 11th grade and double period reading through 10th grade. These double periods not only provide catch-up opportunities in math, but also enable students to complete a full college preparatory curriculum. However, these opportunities have only been possible in Chicago through temporary grant funding. This double period is available for one year less in Chicago than in Evanston. It is worth noting that while approximately 22 percent of ETHS students (virtually all poor and of color) arrive at high school below grade level in reading and math, the respective figure in some CPS high schools is three to four times that number, demonstrating the effectiveness of these double periods.

TEACHER PREPARATION, COMPENSATION AND RETENTION

Teacher preparation, compensation and retention are inextricably linked together in their impact on quality education. Students have a much greater chance of academic success and engagement when their teachers are better

prepared. That preparation includes a breadth and a depth of content knowledge, instructional repertoire and capacity to collaboratively analyze student work and reflect on their practice. In many ways these three factors create a vicious cycle in which less compensation and inferior working conditions draw less prepared teachers, leading to poorer pedagogy and diminished outcomes for students.

Teachers hired at ETHS are far more likely than their CPS counterparts to have gone to a college or university with a higher rated teacher education program, have a master's degree and have some prior teaching experience. Of course, one factor that lures teachers to Evanston is higher compensation. A starting teacher's salary at ETHS is approximately \$10,000 more than a first year teacher in Chicago receives. The average teacher salary in CPS schools is \$74,839,¹⁸ while the average teacher salary in Evanston is \$84,431.¹⁹ Using current salary figures, CPS teachers at maximum salary will receive around \$80,000, while teachers in Evanston will top out at nearly \$110,000.²⁰ When teachers are better paid and feel that they are well supported and have time to work with students, develop their skills, and engage with colleagues to improve their practice, they are more inclined to stay longer in the profession and at their current location. In fact, ETHS has far less turnover than CPS. The resulting stability affords students a learning environment where teachers are not only better prepared but are also more experienced and skilled at their craft, which translates into greater student engagement and academic success.

AFTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

Research clearly demonstrates that students who are involved in athletics and extracurricular activities have greater academic success than their peers. For poor students who lack a safe community environment and have few positive adult role models, after school activities enable them to be in a protected setting with an adult who can help them develop new interests and skills. Money provides the opportunity for schools to offer a wide range of programs that can meet the varied interests of students. Suffice it to say that ETHS is among the high schools in Illinois with the greatest number of athletic sports and teams. In addition, its rich variety of after school programs and clubs in the arts, politics, culture, student government and intramurals means that there is virtually "something for everyone." Unfortunately, resources in Chicago do not enable the high schools to match the wide collection of activities offered at

ETHS. The result is that far fewer students in Chicago will be engaged in fun and meaningful after school programs. Nevertheless, Chicago should be recognized and commended for its city-wide endeavor, After School Matters, which provides a wide array of social, cultural and art opportunities and strives to provide what the CPS budget will not allow.

STUDENT INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

High school students are at a difficult time in their lives. They are facing significant identity issues that are compounded by poverty and all of its related woes. For poor students who aspire to be the first college student in their family it can be especially challenging to navigate these uncharted waters. With this backdrop, students' experiences with violence, drugs, peer relationships and strife at home can result in emotional strains that require strong and supportive interventions. Additionally, students who enter high school behind in their academics, with low self-confidence and little resilience, as well as poor study and organizational skills, need specific support to help them surmount these barriers.

Again, available dollars translates into more academic counselors, better college and career centers, additional social workers, better health services, more tutoring, and teachers and administrators better equipped to respond to student needs. At ETHS there are academic tutoring centers for every subject available all day. Because ETHS has a longer school day, students have more opportunities to avail themselves of the subject supports and to visit the well-equipped college and career center. The student-counselor ratio at ETHS is 1:250²¹ while in CPS high schools it is 1:450.²² In addition, ETHS has an average of 6.5 social workers while most CPS high schools do not have one full-time social worker at their call.

Clearly, all of these factors combine to create and sustain opportunities for success in and beyond high school. It should be noted that the list above is not fully inclusive of the educational benefits gained by additional resources. Facilities, equipment, textbooks and technology all play a role in the probability of student academic success. Certainly, many CPS high schools and their students overcome the obstacles created by this very significant financial disparity. Students' path to success would be greatly eased if they could enjoy the services and supports that the extra dollars provide.

FISCAL OUTCOME DIFFERENCES

Finally, it is, of course, the academic results that matter. With respect to outputs, it is essential to analyze measures that both indicate success while students are in school and after students leave high school. The measures we chose to determine school success include the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), average American College Testing Program (ACT) scores, and freshmen on-track to graduate rates. The PSAE is the state exam administered to all Illinois high school juniors and is used to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the No Child Left Behind Act. The ACT, embedded in the PSAE, is the college admissions test of choice for students in the Midwest. Post-high school indicators employed are graduation rates, drop-out rates and college attendance rates.

TEST SCORES

In Evanston, there are significantly larger gaps in white-black and white-Latino test scores than in Chicago. Although results for poor and minority students in both communities fall below AYP standards, black and Latino students in Evanston outperform their peers in Chicago and in the state by significant margins on both the ACT and PSAE. In addition, far more ETHS students are meeting and exceeding state standards than those in Chicago. Statewide, 52 percent of students are meeting or exceeding standards as articulated by the PSAE.²³ In Chicago, 28 percent are meeting or exceeding this standard,²⁴ while in Evanston, this number exceeds the state average at 69 percent.²⁵ Similarly, the average ACT score in Evanston is 23.1,²⁶ whereas the average ACT score in CPS is 16.0.²⁷ The average for Chicago charter schools is slightly higher, at 16.5.²⁸

Many would argue that although test scores are critical school accountability measures, they do not tell the full story about academic achievement. Graduation, dropout and college attendance rates more fully reveal students' life opportunities after high school. Therefore, it is imperative to address the discrepancies in the data to get the complete picture of student achievement.

GRADUATION, DROPOUT, AND COLLEGE ATTENDANCE RATES

In the three areas of graduation rates, dropout rates and college attendance rates, ETHS students demonstrate far better performance than do CPS students. Overall graduation rates are 91.5 percent for Evanston²⁹ (four year rate) compared to 55 percent for Chicago (five year rate).³⁰ In Evanston, 86 percent of black kids graduate.³¹

Low attendance rates contribute to the discrepancy in the above referenced rates, compounding the achievement problem. Interestingly, however, attendance rates for CPS are 84 percent,³² while attendance rates in Evanston are 95 percent.³³ Additionally, CPS has a dropout rate of approximately 42 percent³⁴ while ETHS's rate hovers below 2 percent.³⁵ For graduates of their respective high schools, approximately 45 percent of CPS students attend two or four year colleges and universities as compared to the nearly 90 percent of ETHS students who do so in four years.

When one looks only at poor students and students of color in Evanston the numbers drop, although they still exceed those in Chicago. For example, for poor students and those of color in Evanston, the graduation rate drops to about 86 percent, the dropout rate remains the same, and the college attendance rate falls to about 80 percent. Clearly, these ETHS students are not matching their white or wealthy counterparts, but the resources that define the quality of their education ensure that their foundation for life beyond high school is better established and that they have a greater foothold for the future than their CPS peers.

Only 45 percent of CPS high school graduates graduate from college within 6 years, compared to 64 percent of the national sample.³⁶ This graduation rate is directly correlated with each student's high school grade point average (GPA) – only 15 percent of those students with a 2.0 GPA or less graduate from college within six years, as opposed to 75 percent of those students who graduate college with a 3.6 GPA.³⁷ The implication of this reality is clear when one realizes that only about 6 percent of CPS high school freshman will graduate college.³⁸ Sixty-five percent of students from ETHS graduated from college.

COMPARISON OF CHICAGO PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS TO EVANSTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL³⁹

	Chicago Public Schools	Evanston
Demographic Information	46 percent black, 39 percent Hispanic, 8 percent white, 3 percent Asian, 3 percent multi-racial	47 percent white, 36 percent black, 11 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian, 3 percent multi-racial
Percent Meeting Standard (PSAE)	28 percent	69 percent
Percent Meeting AYP⁴⁰	Reading: 63 percent Math: 63 percent	Reading: 70 percent Math: 73 percent
ACT College Readiness Benchmark	Reading: 21 percent Math: 16 percent	Reading: 58 percent Math: 59 percent
Low Income	85 percent	36 percent
Graduation Rate	55 percent	92 percent
Graduation Rate (black kids)	51 percent	86 percent

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In order to better equalize opportunities and outcomes for CPS high school students a variety of policies and practices will need to be altered. Foremost among these is the actual structure of school funding in Illinois. While school funding reform has been on the political landscape for over twenty years virtually no progress has been made. Simply put, unless CPS has more dollars it will not be able to address the organizational and instructional disparities that exist between itself and Evanston and other even more affluent suburbs. Whether it is through the courts or the legislature, a reduced reliance on property tax is critical to changing the distribution of educational dollars.

Funding differences also dramatically impact facilities, equipment, textbooks and supplies and technology. Very few, if any, CPS high schools can compete with ETHS in the provision of these capital goods. Greater funding equalization creates a more even playing field so that CPS can procure the quality materials necessary to support strong classroom instruction and student supports.

Moreover, improved instruction will require that the nation, state and universities as well as local school systems significantly alter the preparation, development, supervision and assessment of its teachers and leaders. In every case, more dollars are needed to build better candidate pools, create improved recruiting strategies, offer more effective professional development and design and implement supportive and accountable evaluation systems. All of this needs to be supplemented by a level of compensation that gives cities like Chicago a fighting chance when recruiting teachers and principals.

Perhaps of most immediate importance is using new funding to lengthen the school day. Helping students catch-up and accelerate their learning requires resources to expand curricular depth and variety, time-on-task, post-secondary planning, during and after school interventions and supports and athletic and extracurricular options that enhance student learning. CPS, along with its teacher union and administrative association should be exploring the means and resources necessary to lengthen the day for its high school students.

CONCLUSIONS

What matters most, whether in Evanston or Chicago, is that the greatest number of students possible are ready to successfully confront their post high school challenges. Whether that means college or the working world, students must have a meaningful high school diploma that ensures that the academic preparation they have received is sufficient in all regards. We have demonstrated that the differential in resources favoring Evanston and its students results in greatly diminished drop-out rates, much higher graduation rates, and far more students attending two and four year colleges. This is especially true for its poor students and students of color. More money, when used appropriately, will significantly improve academic outcomes. Additional resources are desperately needed on a variety of fronts in Chicago to accelerate the rate of increased educational attainment for its high school students.

NOTES

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- 2 *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973), *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), *Papasan v. Allain*, 478 U.S. 265 (1986), *Committee for Educational Rights v. Edgar*, 672 N.E.2d 1178 (1996).
- 3 2008 Illinois District Report Card, Evanston Twp HSD 202, *available at* <http://www.eths.k12.il.us/reportcard/pdf/SchoolReportCard.pdf>
- 4 *Id.*
- 5 *Id.*
- 6 Chicago Public Schools, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability, *CPS at a Glance*, *available at* http://www.cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats%20and%20facts.aspx
- 7 Interactive Illinois Report Card, City of Chicago SD 299 Report Card, *available at* <http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?districtID=15016299025>
- 8 Chicago Public Schools, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability, Citywide Demographic Report: Demographic Report Over Time, *available at* http://research.cps.k12.il.us/export/sites/default/accountweb/Reports/Citywide/citywide_demographic_report.pdf
- 9 These select enrollment schools are Lane Tech High School, Northside High School, Jones High School, Walter Payton High School, Whitney Young High School, and King High School. Statistics indicating the relative success of these high schools is detailed below.
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- 11 Illinois State Board of Education Key Checkpoints to Review Before Approval of the Public School Calendar, *available at* http://www.isbe.state.il.us/funding/pdf/ps_guidelines.pdf
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- 13 Evanston Township High School, Report on Student Achievement: ACT Assessment System, Advanced Placement, and Scholastic Aptitude Test, *available at* [http://www.eths.k12.il.us/eval/pdf/Achievement%20Report%20Oct%20-08%20\(4\).pdf](http://www.eths.k12.il.us/eval/pdf/Achievement%20Report%20Oct%20-08%20(4).pdf)
- 14 Chicago Public Schools, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability, Advanced Placement 2000-2008, *available at* http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/all_schools.html
- 15 MICHAEL J. KAUFMAN, EDUCATION LAW, POLICY, AND PRACTICE 3 (2005). (citing David Alan Gilman & Susan Kiger, *Should We Try to Keep Class Sizes Small?* 60 *Educ. Leadership* 80 (2003); Jeremy D. Finn, *Small Classes in American Schools: Research, Practice, and Politics*, 83 *Phi Delta Kappan* 551 (2002); Mary Anne Raywid, *Small Schools: A Reform That Works*, 55 *Educ. Leadership* 35 (1998); Del Stover, *Urban Districts Embrace Small Schools Movement*, *SCHOOL BOARD NEWS*, 7 (*Natl. School Bds. Assn.*, Nov. 25, 2003).
- 16 This is the number in the teacher contract in Chicago.
- 17 Evanston Public High School Report Card, *supra* note 3.
- 18 City of Chicago Report Card, *supra* note 8.
- 19 Evanston Public High School Report Card, *supra* note 3.
- 20 As stated in respective teacher contracts.
- 21 Evanston Township High School Annual Statistical Report 2007-2008, *available at* <http://www.eths.k12.il.us/reportcard/pdf/Final%20Annual%20Report%20Complete.pdf>
- 22 Chicago Public Schools Department of College and Career Preparation, *available at* <http://www.postsecondary.cps.k12.il.us/research/>
- 23 City of Chicago Report Card, *supra* note 7.
- 24 *Id.*
- 25 Interactive Illinois Report Card, Evanston Township High School Report Card, *available at* <http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?schoolID=140162020170001>
- 26 Evanston Public High School Report Card, *supra* note 3.

- 27 Chicago Public Schools, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability, ACT Average Scores, *available at* <http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/allschools.html>
- 28 *Id.*
- 29 Evanston Public High School Report Card, *supra* note 3.
- 30 Chicago Public Schools, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability, Cohort Dropout and Graduation Rates, *available at* <http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/citywide.html>
- 31 Evanston Public High School Report Card, *supra* note 3.
- 32 CPS at a Glance, *supra* note 6.
- 33 Evanston Township High School Annual School Statistical Report 2007-2008, *available at* <http://www.eths.k12.il.us/reportcard/pdf/Final%20Annual%20Report%20Complete.pdf>
- 34 Cohort Dropout and Graduation Rates, *supra* note 30.
- 35 Evanston Township High School Statistical Report, *supra* note 33.
- 36 Elaine Allensworth, *Update to: From High School to the Future: A First Look at Chicago Public School Graduates' College Enrollment, College Preparation, and Graduation from Four-Year Colleges*, Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, October, 2006, *available at* <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/PostsecondaryUpdate.pdf>
- 37 *Id.*
- 38 Jodi S. Cohen and Darnell Little, *Of 100 Chicago Public School Freshman, 6 Will Get A College Degree*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, April 21, 2006, *available at* http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/news_citations/042106_chicagotribune.html
- 39 All data for CPS high schools comes from the Interactive Illinois Report Card, *available at* <http://iirc.niu.edu/>. Percentages may not equal 100% as they have been rounded to the nearest percent. All data for ETHS comes from the Evanston Public High School 2008 Illinois District Report Card.
- 40 This data includes elementary school students as the data on the Illinois Interactive Report Card is not disaggregated for this point.