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EXAMINING CONSTRUCTION AND REPRODUCTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY GAP: THE NATION'S SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS RESPOND

By Hallet DeMouy

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

University, Mississippi
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ABSTRACT

HALLET DEMOUY: Examining Construction and Reproduction of the Educational Opportunity Gap: The Nation's School Board Members Respond

This thesis explores opportunity gaps, often related to achievement gaps, in education via the analysis of school board members' responses regarding challenges that face future education, students, and the public school system. The perceptions of these school board members serve to address the sources, prevalence, and effects of inequities that exist in widening (perpetuating) this gap between students. After discussing and elaborating upon the perceived challenges and barriers located in the institution of education, school board member responses will again be used to present potential ways and opportunities through which the achievement gaps, relating to the success rates and testing scores of students that largely defines them, can be lessened and overcome. Societal constructs that benefit certain individuals and groups at the expense of oppressing others, such as race and socioeconomic status, commonly uphold and are upheld by large institutions, reproducing this cycle intergenerationally. The gathered responses are utilized to explore opportunities that could potentially decrease, or even diminish, the bars of inequity in the system of education and beyond.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“... [T]he sociology of educational institutions ... is capable of making a decisive contribution to the sciences of the structural dynamics of class relations, which is an often neglected aspect of the sociology of power. Indeed, among all the solutions put forward throughout history to the problem of the transmission of power and privileges, there surely does not exist one that is better concealed, and therefore better adapted to societies ... than the solution which the educational system provides by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of class relations and by concealing, by an apparently neutral attitude, the fact that it fills this function.”

The institution of education has proven to be an immensely influential impactor in society and, more specifically, in the journey and opportunities presented in one's own life. Within the academic setting, students are to learn various subjects and ranges of information depth, depending on numerous factors including age, grade level, institution type, set curriculum, and location. Though this institution is regarded by many, including Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), for its prominent role in the lives of those within a society, it is important to bear in mind that the system of education is thought to support and be supported by external forces that uphold and reproduce inequality, an example being the reality that certain groups or people are given access while others are inhibited in the same spheres and settings. Prominence and power in society, also elaborated upon by Bourdieu, are defined in forms of capital; the three key forms of capital depicted are construed as cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital.

Among families, groups, social classes, and institutions, the amounts of capital acquisition resulting from these forms differ and interact to further benefit or disadvantage. Both within and outside the educational institution, an endless overlap and combination of attributes help in determining one's capital within the society. The ever-interacting characteristics, often being inherited or otherwise not personally selected or in control over, work within societal

constructs to present advantage and opportunity to some while presenting disadvantage and absence of opportunity to others. The identity of a person is impacted by these interacting factors such as the following: race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability, language, age, and, being of special significance within this research, education (Bhopal & Preston, 2011). The idea of these elements being interwoven and interlapping with one another, termed intersectionality, seeks to further understand and emphasize how the aspects of a person and one's identity conjoin in constructing and giving meaning to certain privilege or discrimination. Within a given social construct, intersectionality defines the oppression or absence of oppression, that reproduces in a cyclical manner, working against certain people and groups in a society. The generated oppressions stem from varying attributes that are rendered as undesired or lesser than in some manner when compared to others.

This idea of overlapping interactions is denoted by Hill-Collins as the 'matrix of oppressions' (Hill-Collins, 1999). This concept has a dual layered idea: the first centering around the interwoven, enhancing oppressions an individual has and the second revolving around how the oppressive categories are structured in a given matrix or sphere. This matrix of oppressions is the idea of how individual aspects that create an oppressive-oppressed divide also rely on the time, place, and dominant structures in certain contexts. In effect, though class, race, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability, and more are, undoubtedly, extremely important measures of one's dominance or oppression, the time period, location, and power structures in context also remain critical in determining the systems of dominance and oppression of a person. As detailed by Bhopal and Preston, "'mash-up' social theories are a productive way to consider the development of intersectional theorizing by not only examining what might be called the crossroads of personhood but also in terms of new theoretical integrations (or disintegrations) ...

The intersections between these theories can also lead to new forms of oppression which are not accounted for in one or the other theoretical perspectives” (Bhopal & Preston, 2011, p. 217-218). By approaching oppression and the systems of oppression from numerous perspectives, one is better able to understand the complexity and dimensions of the domination-dominated relationship as it appears in a multitude of ways. Through differing analyses, a greater view of a larger picture is enabled, depicting oppressions not only as they are in form but also in certain contexts and arenas. Looking at systems of oppressions from various views first allows a wider view but, second, entails a strengthened support for the oppressions labeled and existing in an institution.

In his work, Pierre Bourdieu (1973, 1977) upholds the idea that societal constructs of classes and culture are reproduced and reinforced through large institutions such as the educational setting. Cultural and social differences lead to a cycling effect through which some groups benefit and continue on paths of higher success while others are inhibited and are restrained by the constructs that society has placed against the groups they belong to, such as class background or other impacting factors. In the classroom itself, these inequalities may be demonstrated through specific language used, common phrasing and word patterns, rewarded behaviors of students that praise certain groups over others, access to more advanced technology, teaching methods, teacher adequacy, programs offered to students of diverse learning needs, and countless other ways. Through the many examples of potential inequalities present in the institution of education, students are presented with different challenges and levels of barriers placed against them, affecting their ability and chances to gain access to higher education, organizations, social groups, employment positions, and the multitude of life aspects that spur from these in interaction with one another. However, in addition to those who support the idea of

the academic setting serving as a continuous reproducer of oppression and inequality, critics stand in contrast with the idea of placing such a heavy emphasis on the educational institution for a variety of reasons. One reason includes modern research that has supported the immense role of other factors in determining opportunity and predicted achievement of students. One study, conducted in the 1960s, “found that differences among schools mattered much less than assumed and that family socioeconomic status was the strongest influence on a child’s educational achievement and life chances” (Collins, 2009, p. 43). Here, Collins mentions that other factors have been indicated to play large, or larger, roles than the system of education that has been so heavily attributed by individuals, including Bourdieu, in the regeneration and upholding of oppression and inequity between groups. The educational setting is not entirely discredited, but critics do advocate for the need to think about the academic setting and, more specifically the classroom setting, in a wider lens, addressing and analyzing how larger institutions in society can impact and influence the gaps that exist between students from different circumstances and backgrounds. Hence, the classroom is supported to be a factor, but not an overall indicator, in determining student opportunity and success in the academic sphere. Collins calls for the use of “hierarchical models [to] help formulate the place of classrooms and schools in larger educational systems, as a structured but not predetermined process, shedding light on studies of schools as sites of innovation and resistance that can quickly be reversed by higher bureaucratic levels ... [as well as the] understanding [of] reproductive processes [that] requires alertness of patterns that become evident only over long periods of time” (Collins, 2009, p. 43-44). From this view, the classroom affects students, but it is not the overall determinant and can be altered by larger, more powerful institutions in society. The classroom, from this view, is not the omnipotent, malicious force that reproduces inequity by oppressing some while benefitting

others. However, Collins also upholds that the reproductive mechanisms in the system of education and, on a more local level, the classroom, require time and intentional analysis to develop and understand how this setting plays a role both in the present as well as in the future life of an individual (Collins, 2009).

Even amongst critics, other researchers analyze the institution of education, drawing focus to gaps between students that can be researched and analyzed across a vast range of places, peoples, and circumstances. The achievement gap in education, the term first credited to the United States press, "... refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures" (Ansell, 2011). In more recent years, this specific term has been called into question by those who believe it fails to encompass variables that present challenges, barriers, and conditions that students are presented with throughout their academic journeys. A shift in favor of a more representative term, opportunity gap, to discuss the inequities within the educational system has received increasing support. According to Teach For America, the opportunity gap "... refers to the fact that the arbitrary circumstances in which people are born—such as their race, ethnicity, ZIP code, and socioeconomic status—determine their opportunities in life, rather than all people having the chance to achieve to the best of their potential" (Mooney, 2018, p. 2). Due to a clear gap existing between students and groups of students who come from different backgrounds, homelife, and situations, this analysis will proceed with the term "opportunity gap" to discuss the inequities and disadvantages that cross spheres to affect performance and perception in the academic setting, resulting in students and their educational results differing vastly and, thus, affecting them later in life, too.

The opportunity gap can be observed and researched on wide scales and within each and every school district to search for patterns and interpret meanings. Through this, the gap is represented as a macro-scale issue and inflicts various impacts depending on the school district, demographics, and circumstances present. The opportunity gap can be analyzed across different places and times and, though the gap may differ in specifics when compared across varying data, the evidence upholds its existence to some capacity. The gap can also be seen at the micro-scale, in interactions between students and teachers, through a student's circumstances and homelife, and by narrowing in on the issues that persist on more personalized levels. Because the achievement gap is a widespread issue, the focus of this research being on a nationwide scale is critical in helping determine consistencies in overarching themes. Thus, in striving to find patterns and consistencies of the challenges that face education and often regenerate the disparities that then feed into the opportunity gap, data that is gathered across the nation is important in granting confidence in a nationwide sentiment towards this topic. In addition to desiring a more open, randomized, unbiased approach on a greater scale, surveys allow beneficial insight due to the ability to reach across wider areas and allow both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

In this research analysis, two surveys were conducted – one in 2007 and the other in 2019 – to gather a variety of information about the educational system, demographics, and opinions about the educational system. The surveys each gather the opinions and data from school board members across the United States. This allows several benefits including gathering input of the local leaders, showing consistency as well as disparity over time in responses, and gaging the commonalities among school board members relating to demographics, characteristics, and perceptions of the school system. Though these findings add meaning and significance to this

analysis, the main focus lies in the open-ended questions. Though largely the same in format and questions presented, the 2019 survey includes two additional questions, both being open-ended questions, regarding challenges that face future education and potential opportunities to overcome these challenges. These open-ended questions included in the 2019 survey allow a greater look into potential sources of inequities as well as potential solutions in maintaining and working towards closing the opportunity gap. These open-ended questions, gaging the specific opinions of school board members across the nation, attempt to uncover what future challenges are thought to face education and those within it as well as what possible opportunities exist to lessen this gap in the educational setting. The critical focus is centered on the question that revolves around future challenges that face education. The answers to this question, derived from the opinions of school board member respondents, include an array of issues and concerns that face school districts throughout the nation.

Though an abundance of concerns spurs from this general question, importance lies in the patterns that can be further developed and given meaning. Perceived challenges for future education represent, on a grander scale, the barriers and issues that either face education currently or are emerging as determined threats. The individual perceptions of respondents offer depictions of personally perceived issues, such as inequity or the quality of a certain school district, via personal understandings and beliefs regarding the surrounding environment and society. Through their own interpretations, the opportunity gap stands as a potential emerging result, applied and reinforced within society through the matrix of oppressions. In addition to the core focus of future challenges, the responses related to educational opportunities that might aid in lessening the achievement gaps among students is overviewed and elaborated upon in its generalities and commonalities depicted by these school board members. The insights are

important because school board members are “insiders” of the institution of education; though personal experiences alter how and what they interpret, we are better enabled to gather general assumptions through collection of their sentiments towards this topic. This research is also important in outlining current as well as predicted issues within the educational system, perhaps leading to more research in this area and analyses addressing plans to reduce these concerns and challenges. It serves as an acknowledgement of the inequities that often persist, whether obvious or not, between varying groups, affecting individuals in different areas of life and success based largely on characteristics and attributes that are biological or otherwise inherited.

If, as argued by Bourdieu, the inequity present between people and groups is grounded deeply in societal beliefs and is reproduced continuously by the large and dominant institutions that we in society rely on to grant us equal and unbiased access in order to provide the best probabilities at success, then society itself must be deconstructed at least partially to reverse the assumptions, biases, and beliefs that remain embedded within the systems at large as well as within our individual beings. Because something cannot come from nothing, a certain assertion of giving and providing would be required for the reversal of inequity that perpetuates and grasps tight to the system in place. Whether this might be better obtained through the creation of programs, a distribution of resources and greater access enabled to necessities, or some other means, an action or spur of some type must be enacted if society is to seek a reduction at the omnipresent inequalities that face certain groups and individuals. The narrative must change, our beliefs and understanding about ourselves, others, and the structures in place reprogrammed, no longer adhering to the narrative of the superiority of some over others.

On the school setting level, there could be measures taken to properly instruct and relay how these systems continue to oppress certain groups to the educators and administrators who

are then entrusted to teach the youth in society about the world in which they will grow up. These measures might take the form of annual seminars and programs or courses. Within the classroom, there might exist programs to explore what inequity is, how it manifests, and how it persists in even the most mundane and ordinary spheres. An acknowledgement of this unlevelled playing field, with increasing conversation and understanding developing around it, could help in seeing it in society, taking preventative measures to avoid it, and suppress it when it presents itself. This would help children begin to realize when structures are set up to make them fail or fall behind as well as attempt to lower this barrier until it no longer dominates societal systems and institutions. By addressing and fighting against inequity, we as a society would be, in effect, addressing and fighting against poverty, racism, sexism, and discrimination as well as disadvantage predisposed to specific people and groups. Through this, education might begin to offer the very tenets it claims to offer students today, the difference being we might begin to witness positive change occurring through students actually attaining access to what has been promised to them – the idea of equal opportunity as well as necessary aid and resources to attain level ground with all others before beginning the race to success through educational attainment. Though Bourdieu may be utilized in attempting to depict systems of oppression in various arenas, his ideas also face backlash from critics who undermine this all-encompassing idea as too broad and grand to hold any substance in application on a societal level (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014).

The focus of this research seeks to analyze the opinions and perceptions made by school board members regarding challenges that face the system of education and the education of students throughout the United States. Through an in-depth analysis of responses concerning future challenges and barriers in the educational institutions, this research explores inequity

within the educational system, how it is generated and regenerated, how it manifests in form, the effects it conducts on students, and how it is further widened or narrowed by societal institutions. This thesis searches for emerging consistencies that relate to challenges in the academic setting via the responses of school board members – being the leaders on a local level of school districts. After scoping the depth of their roles, the opportunity gap can be fully developed and given significance through the challenges that are of core concern to these local leaders in their respective school districts. Through this analysis, I hope to better discover what disparities uphold and reproduce the opportunity gap within the educational system and, on more personal levels, within the academic setting and home. From here, I strive to develop ideas for potential research to further this understanding. Including some general themes from these school board members relating to possible ways to lessen the magnitude and gravity of the gap in the future, I hope to provide more stability to build from in attempting to dismantle the systems of inequality that continue to oppress some while benefitting others.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Pierre Bourdieu (1973) asserts the idea that opportunities granted and achievements gained by individuals are larger than the personal efforts enacted to attain. Bourdieu supports that one's experiences are influenced by the large, powerful institutions in society, the impact and consequences typically relating to one's background, family history, and characteristics that make up one's identity. Within the educational sphere, Bourdieu (1973) maintains that, just like the other dominant and impacting forces in society, this institution reconstructs inequity time and again by reproducing the disparity and inequality between groups and people that have large, lasting effects. Within the academic setting, the misleading preconceived notions cling to opportunity for success to all – yet inequity persists and remains deep-rooted over the course of time within the same groups of marginalized peoples. Bourdieu directly acknowledges this falsity that the educational system preaches. “By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give.... By making social hierarchies and the reproduction of these hierarchies appear to be based upon the hierarchy of ‘gifts,’ merits, or skills established and ratified by its sanctions, ... the educational system fulfills a function of legitimization which is more and more necessary to the perpetuation of the ‘social order’” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 58,60). This system is a fraud in that it displays opportunity and success as attainable to all, basing these end results off the work one puts in to obtain desired standing. Yet, the system is complicit in the reproduction of power and dominance of certain groups in countless ways including teaching styles and wordage used, child homelife and attitude toward school as learned through the family, race, disability, gender, family socioeconomic status, and much more (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986, 1991; Lareau & De Gruyter, 2011). The system claims that, if one just tries hard enough,

s/he will receive the results wanted, but the system also fails to acknowledge that telling people to try hard does not insinuate in the slightest that the starting point from which all individuals are to work from will be anywhere near equal. As supported by Gilda Ochoa, “such delivery frameworks largely dismiss the impacts of historical, structural, and institutional inequalities as well as systems of race, class, and gender on life opportunities (Ochoa, 2013, p. 22).

This concept is accentuated and elaborated upon in Lareau’s research conducted through the comparisons of the childhood of individuals from different classes (Lareau & De Gruyter, 2011). In her study, family socioeconomic status serves as a form of capital that is addressed by Bourdieu (1986), embodying the family income, wealth, and access to differing opportunities and spheres in society. Class is compared to parenting styles, expectations of and interaction with children, activities of children outside of school, and much more, an analysis of the life of a family in combination with aspects that define one from another. Lareau examines the impact that social class, race, and family dynamics influence and reproduce the benefits as well as hindrances that come along with these influences, as well as the influences in combination with each other. She first conducted research in attempts to gain insight on the vast differences caused by societal distinctions and concluded that “working-class and middle-class parents... have different ideas of how children develop, ideas that have fascinating consequences [even in seemingly arbitrary areas including] children’s play” (Henslin, 2014, p. 83). The analyses depicted by Lareau demonstrate that children learn to behave in certain ways, partake in certain activities, adjust to certain levels of parental involvement or lack of involvement, think in certain ways about certain things, and much more, all according to familial processes of socialization and teachings.

Yet, critics of Bourdieuan thought assert several oppositional stances regarding habitus and its role in the life and shaping of individuals. Addressing Bourdieu's theory of reproduction in society, "some critics doubt the usefulness of the cultural capital concept altogether (e.g., Kingston, 2001) whereas others see it, with some revision, as a potentially important piece of the educational inequality puzzle, but reject the concept of habitus as too vague and unquantifiable to offer any important contribution (e.g., Sullivan, 2002; Van de Werfhorst, 2010)" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 194). Though some critics observe Bourdieuan thought to have meaningful input and thought, needing alterations to purposefully analyze inequity within the institution of education, others stray completely from this way of thought, regarding the habitus as too general and all-encompassing to define any significant measure. Critiques refute the overall use of habitus, stating it as overly stressed in influence, so much so that an individual would be unable to assert influence in one's own life. In effect, critics uphold this concept of habitus to be "an overly deterministic construct that leaves little room for individual agency, innovation, and change." (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 199).

Taking into account a few of the many influences on an individual's success and probabilities for success in society, various intellectuals have emphasized key factors in this reproduction of inequity and oppression of already marginalized groups that is further impacted by all within society, even those who are completely unaware they are perpetuating this corrupt system. As supported through various outlets of data and research, Richard Rothstein states that though "income and skin pigment do not directly cause low achievement, the characteristics that in general define social-class differences inevitably influence learning" (Rothstein, 2004). He upholds the notion that opportunity and outcome stem from a variety of outside forces such as access to medical care, stability in living situations, and financial assets. His ideas revolve

around the idea that social class differences reproduce and reinforce barriers that are constructed in the academic setting against certain group members such as those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

This assertion can be demonstrated through theories like Basil Bernstein's noting of elaborated and restricted code. Bernstein upholds that different forms of language and speech, being either more elaborate or restricted, depends on the group and setting (Bernstein, 1975). Restricted code is presented in the form of language that only group members can fully comprehend; it inhibits outsiders, those who are not members, through the lack of inclusive context and description in language. Elaborate code, being more inclusive, detail and context sharing, and wordy, refers to language that can be understood by people who belong to the group as well as those who do not. This theory has been largely applied to the academic arena in attempts to see how it applies to students of different socioeconomic classes, races, and sex, as well as how these factors might relate to one another in this case. Yet Bernstein also faces critique and scrutiny over his writings, some arguments, such as those made by Gabrielle Ivinson (2018), reflecting on the limitations of Bernstein's thought expansion regarding restricted code. Within Ivinson's research, it is first supported that Bernstein held tightly to the idea that the institution of education consistently works against students from the working-class through language and communication styles used, relationships, and understandings of the surrounding environment. In effect, the styles used in the school setting, benefitting middle-class students, oppress students from lower classes who are unable to grasp this knowledge and understanding used by educators. Bernstein, upholding the notion that groups who take power then retain it, reproduce it, and use institutions of society – such as the school – to repetitively perpetuate social class inequity and oppression, faces critique from Ivinson who instead focuses "... on

difference rather than deficit” between students from differing social classes (Ivinson, 2018, p. 540). Ivinson points out that Bernstein’s work is supported when research is limited and lacks thorough examination, data that can be collected via methods such as in-depth interviews with participants. After conducting interviews with youth from working-class backgrounds, Ivinson denotes that the codes of different social classes vary according to diverging adaptation and understanding processes, “... the assets of these close-knit communities that are transmitted intergenerationally. This knowledge include[s] the values of caring, looking out for one another, and belonging to interconnecting networks of people, place and practices. ... Elaborated and restricted codes point to difference: different logics, different social organisations and different ways of thinking, being and knowing. They also require us to start in a different place when working to understand why some young people might not be as invested” (Ivinson, 2018, p. 550, 552).

In effect, Ivinson supports Bernstein’s idea that students and, in general, people, differ in knowledge and understanding of the surrounding. However, Ivinson disagrees that students from working-class families, being from lower classes, also insinuates an inability to effectively learn and succeed. Ivinson argues that, because we come from different backgrounds and various ways of interpreting the world based largely on our family and life circumstances, it is a matter of differences – not inabilities – that relate to learning disparity in the classroom. Additional critiques refer to Bernstein’s apparent superiority catered towards the middle-class beneficial codes used in the academic setting, occurring at the expense of members from working-class backgrounds. Bernstein’s writings imply the absence of the beneficial knowledge for understanding in the school setting, the creation and regeneration of elaborate codes by the dominant class, and a reliance on this dominant class to enable members of the working-class to

access this knowledge and understanding that manifests in the form of codes. As rejected by some, including Richard Ohmann, this way of thinking errs in its predisposition that coding used in the classroom, derived from a more dominant class in society, is the desirable, superior form that will never be attainable by those in lower classes. Bernstein's theory is objected by those who seek to demonstrate ways in which the inequity presented within the academic setting can be balanced and altered to lessen the gap that separates lower from dominant classes and, thus, the students who come from these differing backgrounds (Peckham, 2010). Nevertheless, communication, being a primary means of expressing oneself and relaying ideas to one another, remains a critical component in how we interact and understand the world and people in society. Language, in effect, stands as a centerpiece in the complexity of communication. Individuals are able to understand some more than others, largely stemming from how the individual him/herself learned to communicate. Bernstein's work surrounding language as a code is significant because it depicts a similar idea of the importance of communications as well as how, what, and who one can effectively understand and interact with.

As children grow up in different families who descend from different backgrounds, histories, and circumstances, there is surely a wide variance in the family and home structure. Children are accustomed to a certain way of talking, behaving, thinking, and believing, these factors largely being dependent on how they were socialized and raised in their surrounding environment. These differences also stem from embedded characteristics such as gender, race, sexuality, and family socioeconomic status. These attributes then intertwine and overlap in how an individual both perceives and is perceived by others. These understandings and ways of being understood impact all degrees of life, including that which occurs within the classroom. Just as they are important in shaping how individuals understand and interpret the surrounding society,

these factors are also critical in being discussed and explored within the school setting. The diverging attributes of students within a classroom are important to develop understandings of and, going further, to then pass along to children so that they might better understand and learn the importance of these contexts. The histories, concerns, struggles, and roles of areas including race, religion, sex, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and (dis)ability are crucial to engage with, increase understanding of, and expand upon with students who construe a wide variety of these combinations. Because these factors embody such impacting roles in the life of each individual, whether in terms of benefitting or oppressing that person, there is clear need for "... A paradigm shift in [the] approach to [and understanding of] education. [This entails a] call for an expansion of the parameters of critical disciplines in education ... insist[ing] on the expansion of the theoretical and methodological zones of encounter with racial antagonism to address concrete patterns of historical incorporation of different groups into society. As critical race theorists such as Delpit (2006) have maintained, we must engage with the multiplicities that are generated in the linguistic, cultural and economic orders of schooling every day. Our students, 'other people's children' (Delpit, 2006), are not two-dimensional beings. They, instead, present to us the deep-bodied pedagogical challenges and rewards of working with multiple identities and multiple dimensions of life. Racialized school subjects bring to our classrooms not the deficits depicted in culture-of-poverty theories, but instead the rewards of encounter with difference that should and must be seen as a tesoro of concrete contributions to the enhancement of the educational experience for all participants in the school environment" (Farmer & Farmer, 2020, p. 209). As instigated here, there is a clear need to address and engage with intersectionality and how it affects each and every person, particularly those who are oppressed on accounts of numerous aspects – such as race, sexuality, and religion interwoven. The systems

that feed inequity, reproducing disparity and oppression intergenerationally, need reevaluation, deeper understanding, and open conversation if change is desired and sought after. Challenges and barriers cannot be overlooked nor suppressed. Through analysis, critical thinking, and forward discussion that openly facilitate engagement on these overlapping oppressions and how they work in the academic setting, the institution of education will begin to witness changes in the perception, narration, and inclusion of diversity that exists. It is through a diversion from the common, comfortable narrative used that we could grow as a society and see the benefits of diversity and difference. Conforming to the dominant “master script” inhibits the shift that is necessary for embracing and identifying positive transitions that stray from the highly racist, sexist, homophobic, gendered constructs of society. A divergence from this closed-minded, bigoted script is critical in adapting to the current day and age, especially within the system of education (Farmer & Farmer, 2020).

The institution of education caters to benefit some at the expense of others through components including speech, behavior, and thought process. The way in which the academic setting is displayed not only disadvantages lower class students from feeling capable, prepared, and welcomed when entering this sphere, but it is also constructed so that the intergenerational reproduction is impacted via teacher and educator perceptions of students as well as through educator-parent relationships. Within the research by Edward Morris, “From ‘Middle Class’ to ‘Trailer Trash:’ Teachers’ Perceptions of White Students in a Predominantly Minority School”, the teachers play just as large a role in shaping the future of students when compared to the role of parents and students personal impacts to their success. After collecting data for analysis, Morris resulted with his assertion that “... for the black teachers, in particular (perhaps influenced by the southern context and white-controlled school district), whiteness symbolized

connections to status and power – what may be characterized as a symbolic form of social capital. ... Thus, we should consider the importance of capital in terms not just of what students have, but of what teachers assume they have, on the basis of interpretation of race and class” (Morris, 2005, p. 116). Here, Morris noted that, just as parents have a large role in shaping their children, educators often have predetermined insights and stereotypes of students – especially those who differ from the demographic majority within a classroom setting. This could be advantageous or disadvantageous for the student but, regardless, it is often a reality and is present whether conscious or subconscious to the one conceiving the notion and opinion.

As detailed by Carol Vincent, important scholars have researched “... the ‘socially constructed scripts’ that institutionalise parent–teacher relations. ... These lay down relatively narrow parameters for ‘good’ parent behaviour in the eyes of teachers, and parents can overstep these boundaries by displaying either too much or too little interest” (Vincent, 2017, p. 544). Again, teachers have opinions and biases towards parental figures, resulting in a certain mindset regarding the caregiver(s) as well as impacting the opinion of the student, too. Though an “overbearing” parent may come across as annoying and difficult, a teacher is likely to feel more confident that this intrusive and protective guardian figure will spend time with the child out of the classroom to encourage and further academic development. On the other hand, educators may view the “lazy” and/or “disinterested” parents, some who might be working numerous jobs to make ends meet and provide food and shelter for their family, in a negative way and have less confidence that this child will have additional structure and learning aid encouraged outside of the classroom. This again feeds into the systems of inequities that filter into a cyclical system, regenerating those in greater poverty to reproduce into poverty while further advantaging the already advantaged.

Diane Ravitch highlights a "... list of the essential ingredients of a successful education system: 'a strong curriculum; experienced teachers; effective instruction; willing students; adequate resources; and a community that values education'" that contribute to the shaping of individuals via the academic setting (Ravitch, 2010, p. 224). Educational opportunity and achievement correlate with numerous factors including community engagement, homelife and family circumstances, and, of course, the classroom itself. Yet, even in the academic setting alone, factors such as adequate educators, access to appropriate resources, and condition of facilities provide context regarding how variables correlate with success. Though an important figure in discussing educational inequity and challenges, it is of equal importance to detail a history of opposing beliefs that Diane Ravitch has unveiled. Though she now counters former stances, as depicted in *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*, Ravitch has formerly produced works in favor of standardized testing, accountability, and school choice. Though her earlier works favored these ideas and policies that aligned with these methods, she claims that, as she witnessed the enacting and practice of these methods, she was "... horrified by what they were doing to children and the schools. [Ravitch] realized that they were making education worse, not better; that competition was compelling schools to focus relentlessly on basic skills testing, not better education" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 7). Though her position has starkly shifted in numerous areas when comparing early work to more recent pieces, Ravitch is eager to provide explanation and insight for her change in beliefs. Through her interviews and expansive writing on these altered positions, Ravitch embodies a representation of how we as a society perceive, visualize, observe, and alter the positions and opinions that define our place in society (Kirylo, 2010).

The inequality relating to one's ability to access opportunities and resources is highlighted in the writings of Ravitch as well as research conducted by others including Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). These critics note outside forces that act on smaller levels, such as within the academic setting, in disadvantaging and inhibiting all students from accessing the same outlets and benefits. These learning barriers, whether direct in the form of attended school or more indirect such as language used in the classroom, allow or disallow an individual to continuously progress and succeed due to factors outside the student's control. The overarching concern remains in the need to deepen understanding on how the opportunity gap is maintained and reproduced. Is this gap reliant on the macro-level aspects in society, the seemingly omnipotent forces that continue to generate inequity in granting privilege to the dominant class while inhibiting others? Does the gap reproduce on a more local, micro-scale level, happening within the classroom through aspects including speech, relationships, and socialized behavior expectations? Is the opportunity gap a combination of the two, upholding and reinforcing one another to perpetuate this inequity throughout the various spheres of society and life? How do factors such as race, sexuality, gender, and (dis)ability contribute to inequity within the classroom and, even more, how does this inequity affect students outside of the classroom? In addition to these questions, it is important to discern the role of school board members, their personal perceptions and beliefs, and how they might affect this opportunity gap. These perceptions help to shed light upon areas of agreement where challenges and inequities might exist as highly prevalent which, in turn, can be elaborated upon to discuss the levels at which the challenges persist.

Chapter III: Methods

This research examines how the opportunity gap is produced, maintained, and placed upon students. This gap, oftentimes correlating with achievement disparity and a variety of additional disadvantages characteristics including family socioeconomic status and discrimination in areas such as race and sexuality, is important in reviewing the prevalence of privilege versus oppression in society – specifically focusing on the academic setting. The role and perceptions of school board members, being local leaders in school districts, provide meaningful context to this gap and the challenges that face education. This research analyzes and gathers further conclusions from secondary data. The data sets were previously collected by Dr. Albert Nylander via multiple surveys sent out to school board members nationwide. In order to provide as much representation as possible while remaining conscious of error, random sampling was utilized in listing the existing school districts per state and determining the sample sets with random selection. In order to ensure representation further, proportionality in terms of state size and numbers was controlled with oversampling in larger places compared to smaller states.

The national school board surveys, distributed in 2007 and again in 2019, were sent to members of the randomly selected school boards. E-mails of school board members were obtained via public records on the websites of each of the public school districts. The survey included numerous closed-ended questions and, in the 2019 survey, open-ended questions addressing the achievement gap and potential routes to alleviate this gap were included for participants to respond. Accounting for potential biases, the school districts for every state were listed in alphabetical order. Because larger, more populated states would enhance limitations when compared to smaller, less populated states, the states were proportionally represented in sampling. Random sampling was utilized in selection of twenty to forty sets of school board

addresses. The process used in determining selected school board districts was the same in both surveys, but the process was conducted twice – first in 2007 and second in 2019 – which resulted in differing selections. In the 2007 survey, around 7,000 e-mail addresses of school board members were collected from available public school districts’ websites from the fifty U.S. states. The overall completed respondent surveys totaled 1,938. In the 2019 survey, approximately 5,000 e-mail addresses of school board members were collected from available public school districts’ websites from the fifty U.S. states. The overall completed respondent surveys totaled 1,124. The response rate, accounting for those who chose not to partake as well as bounced e-mails, fell around 30%.

The closed-ended questions are relevant in determining opinions and differences in perceptions by school board members around the nation, belonging to different groups and having spent different ranges of time and efforts within rightful districts. In addition to this, time is important and critical in analyzing shifts as well as consistencies in data gathered. The open-ended questions allow an endless variety of responses, because respondents can type anything they desire to say due to the absence of choosing an available answer choice. In these responses, respondents, not hindered by answer choices, are able to type as much or little as desired and are free to express personal beliefs and thoughts on the topic of the future challenges to education, such as the achievement gap, parental involvement, and school funding. These responses generate much more variety, interpretations, and opinions that can then be qualitatively reviewed, coded, and analyzed for significance.

My focus largely centered on the open-ended segment that stated the following: “Explain the major challenges for education in the future.” I read through the open-ended responses, referring to the question about perceived challenges to future education, to allow generalizations

of potential important themes I would later code. During this process, I searched for patterns and common sentiments made by the school board member respondents regarding future challenges. I predicted finances, funding, and anything related to money would be a prominent code, having read concern after concern related to this area. I began elaborating on my thoughts in a Word document and listed sixteen core ideas that appeared to be of importance. I knew these initial codes would likely be rearranged, consolidated, or removed altogether, and I remained confident in my prediction that additional codes would emerge from the data as I read these responses again. Reading through the responses a second time, I began adding additional information, codes, and subcodes to the Word document; this was my first step in sorting and compiling responses together to give further meaning to concerns and struggles facing education. Completing this second round of analysis, I was left with an overabundance of codes and subcodes. I realized many of these overlapped and fell under similar categories, so I began thinking of broader themes that would allow a wider encompassing of my present codes while also remaining separate from too much overlap with other codes. I created general categories, attempting to minimize overlap between responses with clear distinctions between topics of concern. I generated ten main codes in this process.

The third read through the responses required my annotation of these responses; I printed out and coded responses by underlining key phrases and labeling them with a coding number, or numbers, referring to the challenges mentioned. This process proved to be the most tedious, because I edited the Word document and the printed responses simultaneously. I had to start the coding process over multiple times because, when I would edit the Word document and consolidate, alter, or remove a code and/or subcode, this alteration was then applied to all related responses. The codes become more distinct while encompassing different aspects and opinions

from the school board members. After starting over numerous times when combining and altering codes, I finished the third round of coding with five overall codes to represent the key themes that emerged. However, my coding work was not finished until I accounted for the many differing aspects within a given code. Because there were five general categories but hundreds of responses to this question, a wide variety of diverging opinions and subsequent categories comprised the subcodes. I made note of disparities within codes and subcodes, including many examples and quotes to support the emerging patterns.

I coded an abundance of information – some being prevalent, relevant, and important while other information was rarely mentioned and more obscure. I detailed the important and repetitive aspects as subcodes to best represent emerging themes regarding the proportionality of patterns when compared to others. Responses with contrasting and more uncommon opinions also fell under subcodes, but these subcodes were denoted for their deviance from typical patterns. Subcodes had subcodes within them, and some even had an additional category within if additional detail proved relevant for that category. This process was tedious due to the fact that compiling subcodes and even the subcodes within these subcodes sometimes created an overlap that I desired to eliminate. Word choice was important in creating broad and inclusive codes in which more information would fall. Subcodes also had to remain relatively broad to contain a variety of opinions and focuses of respondents.

This all-encompassing approach was helpful for separating a very high majority of the challenges presented in responses. Difficulties remained in coding some responses due a variety of reasons. One difficulty in coding emerged when respondents failed to state any perceived concerns and/or issues facing education. For example, some respondents failed to include a specific challenge, such as one who stated, “I don’t even know where to begin.” Though this

type of response acknowledged a challenge or challenges facing future education, it did not fall under any coding category listed. Another difficulty in coding resulted from a lack of clarity or meaning in stating a challenge. For example, one respondent said a challenge was “Entitlement.” This response was extremely vague; did the respondent mean entitlement of students to teacher access, entitlement of parents in pushing duties to the school for their children, entitlement of government leaders who do not appreciate education, or some other type of entitlement? For each of the responses or parts of responses that proved to be incohesive, unhelpful, or some other factor that rendered it unable to code, I marked and tallied to include in the overall findings as a limitation. Responses similar to those included above were present but, in the overall collection of data, responses like this proved very uncommon and atypical in comparison to responses that were able to be coded.

Showing the patterns within the codes, I first added up all of the coded responses in correlation with the code they belonged to. I did this by going back, page by page, and counting the number of codes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, making note of this on a separate piece of paper, conducting this process for each of the 23 pages of responses, and adding them all up for an overall total. I completed this process over a range of time to ensure I would not be fatigued and/or careless in counting the codes. I later checked over data twice, on separate occasions, to confidently support my summaries. I added each code’s abundance per page on my calculator, which I then checked after on two separate occasions. I created a pie chart on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS, with the total amount of qualitatively coded collections for each of the five codes. The charts depict the code title, abundance in number total, and overall percentage for each of the five codes. Going even further, I then went over codes once more and more specifically wrote down the actual subcodes involved per response. For instance, under

code 1, being “System of Education,” there are subcodes 1a, “Teachers, Administration, Staff;” 1b, “Teaching Methods and Focuses;” 1c, Preparation of Students;” 1d, “Relationships within the Institution;” 1e, “Aging Facilities, Buildings, Etc.,” and 1f, “Consolidation”. I accounted for the total number of each subcode in the same manner as I did the codes: going through each page and adding up, adding all the pages together, checking numerous times for error, and checking calculations on my calculator several times, too.

I followed the same process of creating pie charts on SPSS to show the divide within a given code in comparison to the overall scale as well as showing the division and percentages of subcodes within a single code. This allowed greater detail to see where the prominence of coding fell on a more specific basis. It enabled more precision about what many school board members viewed as challenges and concerns for future education. Because respondents were able to complete this question in an open-ended manner, respondents had extremely varying responses in terms of length, concerns and future challenges elaborated upon, wordage used, meaning intended, and relevancy to the presented question – just to name a few of the ways in which variance was made possible between respondents. Because of this, further divisions and categories were necessary within each of the five codes. Under each code, subcodes were used to include more specific focuses of the respondents in addition to helping ensure the mentioned challenges were able to be represented and included in the analysis of prevalence. Additionally, under the subcodes contained within a given code, subcodes of the subcodes were often necessary in order to further develop the present patterns and opinions of respondents. I could have gone a step further in creating visuals for the divisions of categories within each subcode under a given code, but I thought this might present an overwhelming number of charts and information that need not have such overtly demonstrative analysis and depiction.

The open-ended question concerning challenges to future education represented the majority of my focus and research, but the other open-ended question included on the 2019 survey also served an important role in deriving generalizations and statistically meaningful responses when elaborating on potential opportunities to lessen the achievement gap in education. Using SPSS, frequency tables were utilized to support patterns of responses and areas mentioned. The responses were uploaded into SPSS, run for frequency measures, and gathered to depict the emerging themes. This, an important aspect of the data set though not the core of this research analysis, served to present possible ways through which the achievement gap could be overcome in the institution of education.

In order to understand the coded analyses on a wider scale, I turned to JSTOR and Google Scholar, online tools containing research studies, journals, book chapters, and more, to support and elaborate upon my ideas. Expanding on Bourdieu's theories of how capital works, forms of capital, and how systems of inequity are upheld and reproduced, I researched correlation between these writings and themes from survey responses. I used basic key words, such as the words used for code and subcode categories, with other core, such as "school board members" and "educational inequity", when searching for additional resources. With this survey being based on the responses and opinions of school board members nationwide, I also researched the role on the classroom, level of knowledge pertaining to students and issues in the school, and the overall impact that school board members have, both directly and indirectly, in the academic setting. I sought to better understand who the school board members are and their real influence and relationship with the school district, according to prior research. Because this analysis is largely based on the insight and perception of school board members, additional

information about school board members specifically emerged as relevant and important in supporting the credibility, authenticity, and legitimacy of results and gatherings.

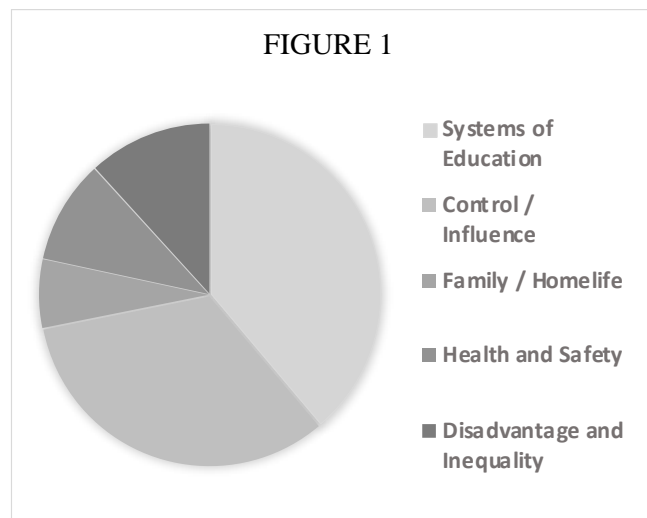
Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion

According to the coding constructs and measures personally created and outlined within the methods section, responses regarding future challenges to education as detailed by participating school board members were collected under five main codes. The five centralized codes, ranking in order of prevalence from greatest to least abundant, is as follows: Systems of Education, Control / Influence in Educational System, Disadvantage and Inequity, Health and Safety, and The Family / Homelife. This breakdown of abundance is presented below, showing the proportional divides amongst codes as well as the percentages and coded abundances.

The most abundant code, Systems of Education, represented 38.8% of challenges according to the opinions of respondents, this being a total of 860 counted and categorized depictions of this code. Next, Control and Influence retained 33.0% of respondents concerns, totaling in 732 counted remarks about concerns regarding this code. Coming in third relating to prominence, Disadvantage, Disparity, and Inequity garnered 11.8% of the mentioned challenges, relaying to 261 distinct concerns raised for this theme. Health and Safety emerged as the fourth most abundant code, representing 9.8% and 218 respondent mentions of future challenges to education. Finally, Family / Homelife totaled 6.5% and 144 respondent mentions of concern for future challenges facing education.

Table 1

Explain the major challenges for education in the future.	
Systems of Education (n=860)	38.8%
Control and Influence (n=732)	33.0%
Family / Homelife (n=144)	6.5%
Health and Safety (n=218)	9.8%
Disadvantage, Disparity and Inequality (n=261)	11.8%



This data collection proved helpful in depicting a general scope of the prominent concerns, but subcodes emerged as important when illustrating components of a code with examples. Under each of the five main codes, divisions furthered in order to best embody the often diverging, opposing, or otherwise distinct opinions and responses that fell under the very broad category in the form of the generalized code. Respondents had extremely varying responses in terms of length, concerns and future challenges elaborated upon, wordage used, meaning intended, and relevancy to the presented question – just to name a few of the ways in which variance was made possible between respondents. I focused on each code separately, categorizing each appearance of the code into its respective subcode that had been categorized and detailed to encompass each and every one of the tallied distinctions. In short, taking System of Education for example, because there were 860 tallied examples under this code, each of the 860 was then placed in a fitting subcode. After completing the distinction of subcode category abundances for each of the five codes, pie-charts were used to show this breakdown of subcodes within their respective codes and examples were provided to display evidence. The outcomes can be further visualized and detailed in the figures and diagrams below.

Systems of Education, being the most highly cited code, presents the most abundant concerns and, through this, allows deeper analysis of meaning behind it. Being the most abundant, garnering 38% and 327 examples, Methods of the School contains topics related to academic curricula, standardized testing, technological resources and advances, and teaching methods implemented. A key concern that resulted in being a common theme revolves around the notion of the educational institution not being adequate in teaching focuses and methods, material covered, and the heavy dependence on set standards and tests to measure success. Within this subcode, the forces act at the micro level, such as the methods implemented by an educator and the technology used, but predominantly at the macro level, with curricula being set by governmental and other authority powers, standardized tests being nationally distributed and relied on to accurately measure a student's ability, and the expectations of conforming to this system of academic methods in order to be rendered a success by societal standards.

Following next, Student Preparation results in 31% and 268 examples. Student preparation ties into the previous subcode, the difference here being focused on the student him/herself for the present as well as the future. This can be depicted through preparation for the workforce, preparation for college, preparation for abiding by societal norms and behavioral expectations, in addition to the measures supported to aid this such as smaller class size and stressed importance of early education. Again, this subcode presents both the micro and macro-level ideas. On the micro-scale, the preparation of one's students happens through education that is deemed advantageous for the student both in the present and later in life. This may be aided by a reduced class size or more personalized study plans to help a student succeed. On the other end of the spectrum, preparation of students for later success is a determinant made by larger forces in society such as the workforce and higher education, setting standards and expectations of

future prospects. As examples state, the idea of teaching students to prepare them for a workforce that currently is nonexistent relies on technological advances and increasing reliance, predicted to be the bulk of workforce in the future. This, again, is due to the more invisible, omnipotent forces that act and reinforce models to abide by for society.

The other significant subcode, Teachers, Administration, and Staff, collects 28% and 239 references. Core focus here manifests in concerns regarding adequate training, expectations, and retention of teachers to then be able to efficiently teach students to be successful. Micro- and macro-scale forces again present themselves throughout this subcode. On a more personal level, the education, training, and respect shown towards an educator is likely to impact how effective and accomplished the educator is as well as influence one's desire to become and remain an educator. These factors result from interactions and instruction that makes the educator more confident in both abilities and value within the academic setting. On a larger scale, the programs and means of educating future teachers and administration are largely established on a national or, at the least, state level, being enforced over all who want to pursue this field. The preparation of educators may be used for years, becoming outdated and irrelevant and, with this, less equipped teachers emerge in present society.

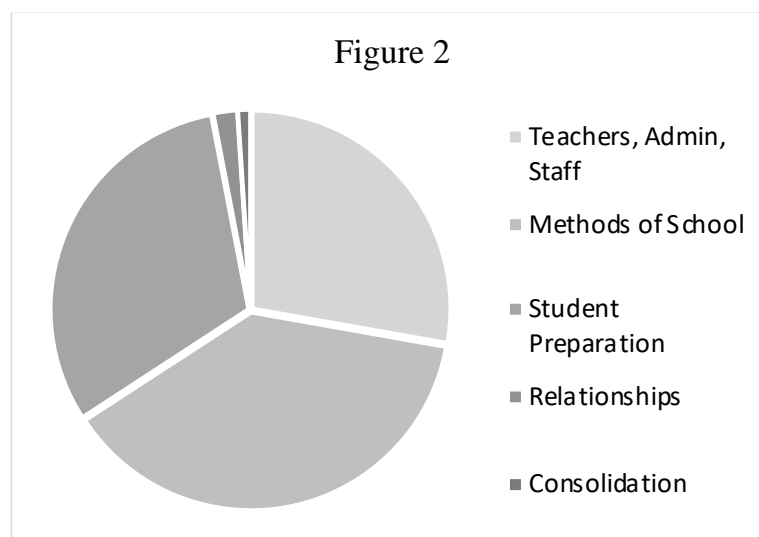


Table 2
Code 1: Systems of Education (n=860)

- I believe one major challenge is **hiring and keeping qualified teachers**. Teachers are being asked/required to do more for the students than just teach them. Teachers are overworked, overwhelmed and underpaid and I am afraid it will be harder and harder to find and keep qualified individuals who have a passion for teaching.
- **Devaluation/de-professionalization of teaching means that the best and brightest are choosing careers other than teaching**. This devaluation includes over-reliance on standardized tests, blaming teachers for low graduation rates, etc. Governments from local to federal fail to take responsibility for the impact of policy decisions on the rise of poverty, instead, blaming students for their trauma and disadvantage, blaming teachers and the school system for not overcoming the factors that lead to student failure (such as absenteeism, community violence, trauma). (New York school district)
- Curriculum that doesn't work. Curriculum that is not perceived as relevant to the students. Students are not prepared for the jobs of the future. **We are not making curriculum decisions based on future needs**. (New Hampshire school district)
- **Preparing students for a technologically advanced society** Changing the industrial mindset of education
- We need **more diverse programming in primary grades** and less focus on test scores at the elementary level. Fundamental skills are crucial but they are not just math and literacy.
- **Too much stress on standardized tests. Class size is too big**. We need more bi-lingual classrooms. A great need for more mental health professionals in the schools – teachers are not mental health professionals.
- Maintaining rigor, focus and academic discipline in young students who are so easily distracted by social media, devices, etc. is a challenge. Meanwhile, instruction and curriculum will need to steadily evolve in order to remain relevant
- **Training students for jobs that don't exist yet**. Teaching them to be collaborative and use the resources available, dealing with the social and emotional issues that seem to overwhelm this generation.

The main subcodes demonstrated and elaborated upon help shed light on challenges within the academic setting itself, both relating to micro- and macro-scale forces that interact and exist in the same spheres. As supported, the concerns related to educational standards, methods, expectations, and focuses all stress the role that education plays within an individual's life and success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The roles of education relate to not only the proper training and teaching of aspiring educators but also the students that will later be taught by these very educators. The roles of education relate not only to the governmental set curricula and standardized tests but also to the interactions and language used between teachers and students in the academic setting. The achievement gap, relating to score-based determination of student ability and success via nationwide and statewide testing measures, is denoted as an overused,

hindering measure of student knowledge due to its hyper focus on certain criteria deemed important by a select group given the responsibility of determining relevant versus irrelevant knowledge. Conformity to the rigid academic construct and measures ensure greater success than those who deviate from abiding by these terms. A dissonance is generated by groups who are able to afford more opportunity and access to better their knowledge pertaining to this determinant when compared to groups who are unable to obtain necessary measures and knowledge for this “success”, such as preparing for a national test such as the ACT with a tutor, expensive courses and preparation books, and the fee it costs to sign up. The achievement gap looks only at the actual scores and stats, paying no mind to the conditions of a classroom, circumstances of a student, adequacy of an educator, and other factors that affect the outcome of student accomplishments (Ansell, 2011).

The language used in a classroom, between educators and students, may be interpreted differently by members of different backgrounds and circumstances. Here, socioeconomic status and learned beliefs are key influencers in how a young individual talks, behaves, and perceives others in the world. From Bernstein’s view, language used in a classroom setting, as well as outside of a classroom, shapes the perception and, in turn, the understanding and success of a student. A student from a poor, working-class family who has busy parents and often must complete coursework without any aid, might be less enabled to understand and process presented material and word usage in the classroom when the teacher leads the class. If this results as pattern, this student will be less predicted to succeed when compared to more privileged, wealthy peers who study outside of the classroom, retain opportunity to expand understanding and knowledge, and have help from outside individuals (Bernstein, 1975). Thus, language and course material matter, and the relationships between students and educators depend on preconceived

notions based on stereotypes and stigmas of one another, interactions and conversations, levels of engagement, behavior, and outer forces including parental involvement (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

Control and Influence, totaling 732 responses and 33% overall, displays an overwhelming abundance of the Funding and Finance subcode. This subcode, collecting a majority 60% and 439 respondent detailing, focuses on all forms of monetary distribution that is used within the academic setting. The bulk of these concerns relate to governmental funding restraints and lessening support for public school education as depicted through funding for programs, upkeep, salaries, and other areas like facility maintenance. This macro-level focus centers on governmental positions, primarily the state and federal levels, in asserting authority through measures that takes away funding from the public school system. These governmental roles act as regulators and decisionmakers for school policies, budgets, and success through the enactment or diminishment of support through monetary and expressed appreciation. The government is illustrated as an omnipotent force here, determining which school systems to support and then creating measures to enact these efforts. This subcode goes hand-in-hand with others, namely Regulations and Interference as well as Authority.

In terms of analysis, Authority relates to those who hold positions of power to make decisions for or against institutions within society. If an abundance of individuals with positions of authority were to outright oppose and degrade the public school system, whether publicly or within more private moments of voting and deciding, steps would likely be taken to work against support of the public school system. This might result through expression of outright support for privatization efforts, relating to the subcode Public Schooling versus Other, or taking steps to create regulations, laws, and taxes to defund and refrain from aiding public school systems and

their programs. This action then brings in the other mentioned subcodes, Funding and Finance in addition to Regulation and Interference. Thus, the macro-level government can instigate massive measures to undermine or support policies and positions that will largely affect the school system and its survival. Support for privatization such as charter schools results in less enrollment of students from more stable, contributing families, a rise in the proportion of impoverished and oppressed groups in the public school district, a further declining support for these degrading school systems, and the further dilapidation and destruction of the public school system that then becomes consumed with poverty, illiteracy, lack of qualified educators, absence of advanced and helpful resources, and a multitude of other negative consequences. From this perspective, the concerns and challenges facing education and opportunity for students relate to larger forces in society that reproduce and further inhibit success of already disadvantaged groups and areas. The concern here lies in the macro-scale forces that continue to oppress and suppress marginalized areas and people, reinforcing and regenerating inequality (Collins, 2009).

On a more central level, though still present at a larger scale too, focusing in on perceptions of public schools and public school education can be analyzed through community support and perception, often being influenced by larger powers like governmental authority and decision-makers. A community is critical in the success of any school district, often providing support in a variety of ways such as engagement, validation through voiced support, and monetary support. A negative perception of a school district from the masses in a community steals the critical support that is necessary for a school system to thrive and continue desirable, helpful education of students. If the public does not care or dislikes a school system, little support can be expected and garnered. In effect, the lack of support from community members and governmental support can lead to the destruction and failure of a school district that strives

to educate and prepare students, especially being prominent in more disadvantages areas and groups. The role of these measures together represent the exact opposite of the necessary elements for a successful and able educational system (Ravitch, 2010).

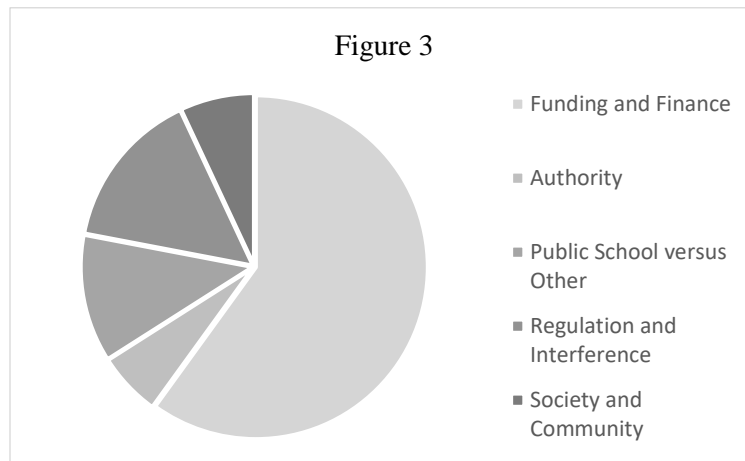


Table 3
Code 2: Control and Influence (n=732)

- **Funding, funding, and funding.** Schools are underfunded and the need for schools to provide wrap around resources for mental health, poverty issues, housing is increasing. (Ohio school district)
- **Lack of funding. Lack of fully investing in public schools.** Increasing needs of our students; poverty and mental health related. **State government acting as educational experts and passing legislation without first consulting with the educational experts** (teachers and superintendents). **Public's lack of understanding** of how a public school system works and the challenges we face.
- **Low and inconsistent government funding, state and federal regulations** causing districts to use more money for non-educational use.
- Education is stuck in an antiquated system based on systems that no longer exist. School should be year round. Learning happens in relationship. Class sizes need to be much smaller. All of this is related to funding. **The effort to privatize education** means less money for public education means lower quality of education. Federal and state funding needs to increase exponentially. (Minnesota school district)
- **The draining of tax support from public schools and the funneling of that money to private schools.** The growing divide between rich and poor in our country, loss of the middle class and the lack of recognition as to the institutional factors contributing to an inability to break out of poverty. The segregation of our neighborhoods and the wildly different levels of crime, poor education, and no opportunities in each of these communities that happens just a few miles apart. Current government leaders at the state and national level.
- **Privatization and lack of public support** for the public schools.
- The State and Federal **Government continue to chip away at Local Control.**

As shown in Table 4 and Table 5 below, school board members relay the overall message desiring change within their respective school districts. However, there is also an established knowledge that these local leaders do not hold vast amounts of power to yield change within the districts, upholding the example presented earlier in regard to governmental dominance over local positions. This illustrates the idea that forces at larger levels assert power and make choices for smaller, localized areas, regardless of a knowledge or lack of knowledge about the particular area and school district. This depicts the notion of controlling powers that assert dominance over diverse, far-reaching areas, places that likely differ greatly and require differing levels of aid and support from the larger controls in society. Though small decisions and impacts might be made by these local leaders, leaders often elected by the people as representatives for the majority concerns, decisions of great potential and substance typically reside in the hands of those higher up who assert decisions without consulting and debating the effects resulting across different areas. The power then resides in the hands of the few dominant leaders who often come from more privileged and well-off backgrounds and histories, as opportunities were presented to these few throughout their lives to then rise to their held positions. This leads to a failure to understand and know people and places of greater struggle and oppression, as discussed in the sections to come.

Table 4
Our School District needs change.

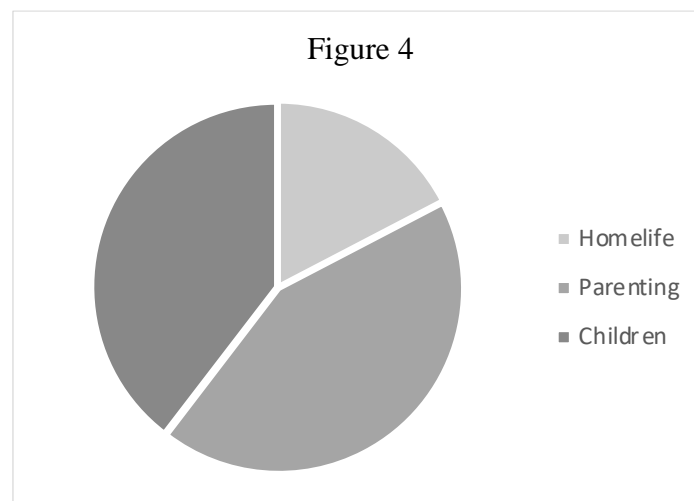
		2007	2019
Agree	Count	1152	438
	% within	58.4%	60.2%
Disagree	Count	819	289
	% within	41.6%	39.8%
Total	Count	1971	727
	% within	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5
How much influence does a School Board member have over local government decisions?

		2007	2019
A lot	Count	60	68
	% within	3.1%	6.7%
A moderate amount	Count	599	245
	% within	31.0%	24.0%
A little	Count	858	437
	% within	44.4%	42.8%
None at all	Count	414	271
	% within	21.4%	26.5%
Total	Count	1931	1021
	% within	100.0%	100.0%

The remaining code breakdowns are combined due to the proportionality of abundance when compared to the former codes analyzed. Within Family / Homelife, overall being only 6.5% and 144 of the responses, the core concerns revolved around parenting, abuse of some form that affects children, and lack of involvement in the child's life. This centralization on parents being indifferent, apathetic, unconcerned, or otherwise too preoccupied with other areas of life was supported to negatively affect both the child and the educators responsible for caring for students within the academic setting. This parental lack of investment suggested a gradual, but steady, decline in child success in the academic setting, falling behind and being unable to prevent this decline as parental figures convey inefficient responses to these concerns. This can be addressed as a micro-level issue, but many factors can play roles in this inability to be involved. For instance, families in greater poverty who struggle to pay for housing, food, and other survival necessities might have both parents working numerous jobs to maintain balance and stability within the household. This then provides less academic encouragement and aid to children who struggle academically which, again, can be due to an endless variety of reasons such as lack of concern, rebelliousness, and/or learning disabilities. In this example, with both

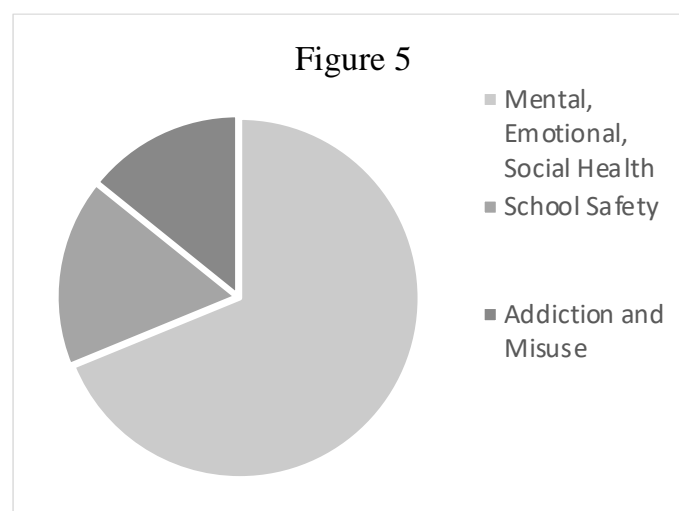
parents working long and hard hours to provide for the family, these jobs might also be low paying and require no higher education degree to obtain. Lack of access to higher education often stems from inability to obtain it through inhibitions based on (dis)ability, socioeconomic status, race, or some other disadvantaged reasoning. This inequality typically breeds and reproduces to create the same or similar barriers intergenerationally. Thus, the systems at play are larger forces of inequality that reproduce in society to benefit some people and groups at the expense of others. In this scenario, if a child begins to struggle and fall behind while also bearing in mind that his/her own parents did not have higher education, a loss of interest and following down the same paths might occur and reproduce the inequity that barriers certain peoples.



Health and Safety, with 9.8% and 218 responses overall, focuses primarily on the social, mental, and emotional wellness and health of students and educators within the school system. Individuals with traumatic and/or abusive experiences, such as physical violence, emotional abuse, addiction and/or misuse of drugs by oneself or loved ones, those struggling with anxiety and/or depression, as well as the many other variations of this term, are not able to enter the academic setting fully prepared and ready to take upon new challenges and material in the classroom. Resources and reliable programs are depicted as necessary tools to help in uncovering

hard experiences and working with individuals to overcome the hardships and enable later success. This focus is a micro-scale challenge, needing to retain dependable, trustworthy individuals who can efficiently help those struggling with problems and experiences.

Traumatized individuals must trust and be able to confide in these professionals, believing in the fact that the professional is there to help in recovery. However, macro-scale forces are also pertinent here. Funding is needed for this aid and hiring of equipped professionals to deal with these matters. In addition to this, as will be elaborated upon in the final code, the distribution of resources fairly and correctly needs to be determined by those with the authority to incite these measures.



Disadvantage, Disparity, and Inequality, having a totaled 261 direct mentions and an overall 11.8% of concerns, filters in the concerns of inequity and continued oppression of certain groups, often living around one another in certain districts, that result in the intergenerational gaps between people of advantage versus people of disadvantage. Many factors of life such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, and ZIP code overlap and work together to determine one's access to opportunity and, through this, one's predicted chances at success as defined in societal terms (Ansell, 2011). The idea of intersectionality

presses into all aspects of life, the focus here being education and the academic setting. However, with the focus of this analysis centering on the opportunity gaps that exist in the academic setting, and with the term correlating with the idea of disadvantage and inequality of some groups in comparison to others, why does this code appear in less abundance than others? In determining a core concept, the opportunity gap, to embody inequity within its very definition, it is likely that inequality and disadvantage can be seen to be present in other qualitatively coded sects. In effect, the presence or lack of inclusive representation of a community demographic regarding race infers levels of inequality, so too does the presence or absence of funding for certain school districts. Though the former example would be coded under Disadvantage, Disparity, and Inequality, racial demographics being further depicted and elaborated upon in Table 7, the latter example would be coded under Control and Influence which involves governmental funding and financial assets of a school district.

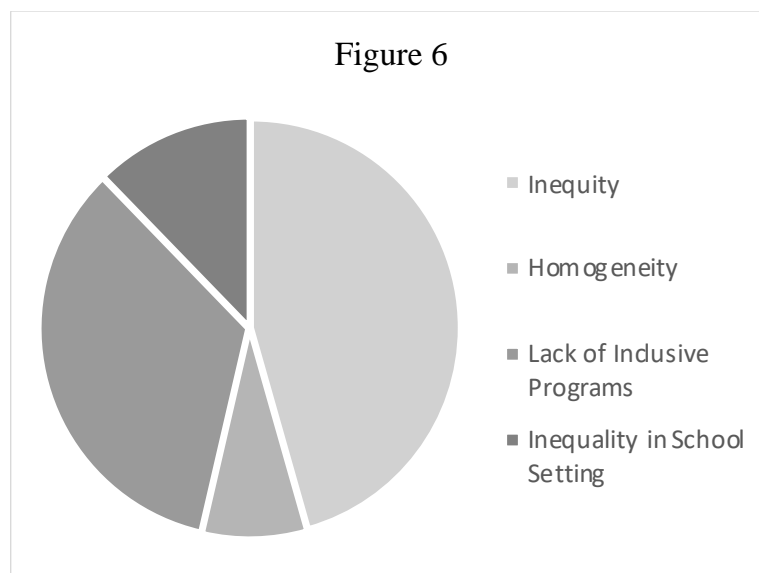


Table 6
Code 3 – Family / Homelife (n=144), Code 4 – Health and Safety (n=218), Code 5 – Disadvantage, Disparity, and Inequality (n=261)

- **Poverty** is at the top. **Apathy or lack of family involvement** is close behind.
- **School Safety**, college and career readiness, **mental health services**, educational funding, **support at home**
- Balancing the correct integration of technology in curriculums and **managing the use of technology** (cell phones, messaging, social media, etc.). **Supporting mental health and trauma issues within the student and staff population. Increasing equity** in the system with a focus on achievement gap, special education, and gifted student programs. (Virginia school district)
- **Eliminating the opportunity and achievement gap.** Responding to mental health crises, homelessness and poverty – which affect students’ ability to learn. (Oregon school district)
- **Closing the achievement gap among marginalized groups** – the spread between those who are succeeding and those who aren’t seems to be getting larger. Making school more relevant for students – the nature of work is changing and everyone needs to be more adaptable to technological and social changes. (Massachusetts school district)
- **Equity is and will continue to be a major challenge.** Students in poverty, non-white students, and those learning English as a second language have challenges that many leaders and community members fail to understand and fail to address. **School competition/choice** – charter schools and vouchers continue to draw resources from public schools while having less accountability to the public. **Poverty**, of our students, our teachers and our educational assistants. (Colorado school district)

As supported through previous illustrated literature, marginalized groups have, historically, as well as continue to be under-represented and marginalized in society. Oppressed groups are often kept out of power-holding positions, because their experiences and goals might differ from or even oppose the beliefs and aims of the domineering, power-holding group. This can be reflected in the figure above, most school board members identifying as white individuals. This is an under-representation of the nation proportionally, with marginalized groups numbering in much greater abundance than that which is depicted through the school board members’ representation. Oppressed groups tend to be reproduced in a society of oppression through various institutions, whether through the family, educational setting, or other (Bourdieu, 1994). Yet, even with school board members often being the elected representatives for the school district, their responses also indicate feelings of low levels of control or power. This, again,

supports the idea that stronger forces and institutions within society act at all levels. From school board members' perceptions, governmental regulation and interference is typically seen as a disruption, hindrance, or otherwise negative impactor on potential progress and prosperity of a school district. This governmental role, commonly at the state or federal level, can act through increasing mandates and laws, lessening funds, and/or a role on the perception and stigma attributed to the public school system and public school education. Though many school board members indicate a desire for change within their respective school districts their lack of confidence in being able to assert this change, for whatever reason, illustrates an ominous force opposing the public school district as a whole.

Table 7
Which racial or ethnic group do you most closely identify
yourself with?

	2007	2019
Black (African American)	108 5.8%	93 9.5%
White (Caucasian)	1671 89.6%	809 82.7%
American Indian/Native American	17 0.9%	13 1.3%
Hispanic or Latino	35 1.9%	28 2.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	9 0.5%	7 0.7%
Other, please specify	25 1.3%	28 2.9%
Total	1865 100.0%	978 100.0%

Marginalized and oppressed groups, often being associated with lower socioeconomic status and poverty, tend to populate these public school districts as the parent or guardian figures might not be able to afford to pay for their child or children to attend private schooling. This

results in a slippery slope, one that can be upheld by the respondents in their key concerns about challenges to future education. As more marginalized, impoverished children represent the demographic makeup of a school setting in proportionality, members of other class ranking and status are likely to perceive this in a negative way and desire to send their own children elsewhere. This may lead to efforts of privatization, mentioned by many respondents, and further manifest into “white flight.” As included in open-ended answers, privatization efforts, seemingly favored and praised by governmental positions and representatives, then construe to society, at large, that private schooling and charter schools are better equipped and advantageous than the public school sector. This might be further backed by more distributed funding allotted to privatized schools, then allowing them to access better resources, administration, and, thus, students. The slippery slope creates a continued disadvantageous ground for the more oppressed groups who can only maintain enrollment in public school settings. Increasing funding from governmental roles for charter school and privatization efforts, increasing community discontent and misalignment from the public school sector, a loss of higher class students which disrupts the proportional makeup, lessening funding for already impoverished public school districts, and an absence of strong family involvement and structure all contribute to this disparity that continues to widen between the rich and the poor, the marginalized and the dominant, the powerful and the powerless (Farmer & Farmer, 2020; Bourdieu, 1973, 1986, 1991).

An increasing and ever-strengthening gap then creates more opportunities and benefits for the privileged groups at the expense of the disadvantaged groups. Thus, students who come from underrepresented and oppressed groups then receive diminishing access to opportunity and resource that is vital for success both in present academic settings as well as in future endeavors (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The student who comes from a working-class family, attending a

crammed and cluttered classroom with little resources, receiving little to no encouragement or help outside of the classroom, a very high student-to-teacher ratio, and an internal belief system that reinforces the idea that education won't help overcome one's impoverished circumstances is less likely to be motivated to learn and strive for higher education and later success. Also, a teacher in this setting might feel more responsibility and burden with many students who are underserved and behind on curricula expectations, might feel helpless when trying to fight against the systems of oppression that often regenerate intergenerationally, and might feel less appreciation from parental figures, students, and other administration for the hard work put in to help students learn. The slippery slope can have extremely saddening and detrimental effects, such as a student being passed through each grade and arriving to high school unable to read or write; the societal machines in place, then, help maintain and reproduce the oppressions that benefit the few at the cost of many others.

The responses from school board members largely focuses on larger, domineering forces that exert control from a macro-level, refraining from more personal and close interaction and decision-making. Even so, the reproduction and enforcement of these forces on smaller scales, such as through expectations in the classroom, interactions between students and teachers, and internal preconceived notions and ideas about people based on physical characteristics and circumstances all represent micro-scale forces that enable this cycle to continue. Thus, through the perceptions of school board members, both interact and structure one another to uphold the other. The small reinforcing of the larger forces add up together to create the whole.

School board members are the individuals often elected to represent an area, such as a group of school districts or even a single school district, regarding issues and concerns. Because school board members are thought of as representatives on the local educational sphere, it could

be assumed that this body would generally be representative of the population demographics being represented. However, past research has continued to oppose this idea. In the research presented by Deborah Land, “[t]he reform movement of the early 20th century, which transformed school boards into smaller, centralized, city-wide organizations, also brought more educated, higher income, successful professionals and businessmen to school boards, a change that generated concern regarding the ability of such elite members to effectively represent the concerns of local citizens. ... According to surveys, ... school board members continue to differ demographically from many of the people they serve” with a large majority of school board members reporting themselves to be white individuals (Land, 2002, p. 233). Land also supports that, over the years in which state and federal governments have increasingly taken control in regulating and controlling the school system, the school board has faced exponentially increasing difficulties in asserting any productive, needed change on local levels. This can be paralleled with the findings gathered from survey responses involving reduced and inadequate funding, intrusive and domineering governmental controls in the form of laws, regulations, and mandates, a lack of control at the local government level, discordance in relationships between local leaders and community members in uniting for the good of local society, and a lack of proper education for leaders who are then entrusted to guide our youth to success for the future. Each of these represent core ideas found within the open-ended question regarding challenges to education in the future.

School board members are important community leaders, yet they often represent an already dominant group in society – this group being white individuals. Due to the fact that white individuals have historically wielded the power holding, dominant position in society, this finding supports the idea that true representation of the population is not likely to be depicted in

school boards and their members. This then carries further in issues that are or are not addressed. For example, with white individuals not facing oppressions in the U.S. based on the color of skin, these topics of concern may be deemed less relevant and, thus, this form of oppression might continue to play lead roles in the different spheres of society including the institution of education. Thus, diversity is likely a necessary tool to enable proper representation and spur new and important conversations about issues and ways to overcome obstacles facing the local community. As gathered through studying school board members of minority status in various locations, Carrie Sampson concluded "... that Latinx school board members are often among the most committed on school boards to improving educational equity for [English learners] and other underserved populations. Moreover, their leadership provides unique and significant representation for these communities that lead to interesting possibilities" (Sampson, 2019, p. 296). It can be inferred that school board members, with personal biases and beliefs based off one's own experiences and teachings, naturally feel more passionately about concerns that relate to their own struggles or barriers that they have faced personally. It is also important to maintain the criticality of the fact that this focus on inequity and problem-solving for future education lies on all members in society, in thought, work, and action. It is a matter that involves the participation and concern of all individuals, not just the local, state, and/or federal leaders.

Though many of the findings conveyed similar results to those of which I expected, some differences emerged. Initially, I predicted the code referring to inequity would be much higher in abundance than it resulted in being. Perhaps inequity is oftentimes overlooked, it being deeply embedded with the systems of oppression in society that work like invisible, omnipotent forces. Perhaps this was viewed as a smaller challenge due to the abundance of school board members identifying as white individuals, being privileged and free from the afflictions of oppression that

strike the marginalized groups in society. As mentioned before, this limitation could also relate to the fact that the question centered on in this research, centered around challenges to future education, already depicts notions of disadvantage and disparity through the question to some extent. Thus, elements of inequality and disparity might be depicted throughout each of the five qualitative codes, though one code embodies inequality and disadvantage alone. This limitation depicts overlap and correlation between data points that were arduously attempted to diminish. I predicted funding and monetary measures to be of significance, and this proved to be supported. Perhaps funding is presented as a more dominant issue because lack of funding can result in tangible, visual aspects such as poverty and the dilapidation of buildings and resources.

Also stated earlier, the 2019 distributed survey had an additional open-ended question revolving around potential opportunities to reduce the gap, specifically the achievement gap, among students. As shown in Table 8, a breakdown of central elements mentioned by respondents depict perceptions of possibilities that might help overcome the existing gaps separating students from one another. The responses, ranging from funding concerns to increased importance on early education and reduced classroom size to a need for higher family and community engagement, were grouped and ran in SPSS for frequencies, generating percentages relating to abundance. Along with the breakdown included, additional tables depict respondent examples that highlight central themes and responses that often emerged.

Table 8 Describe educational opportunities that you believe would reduce the Achievement Gap among students. Total Response to question (778).		
Teaching Profession, Classroom Size, Tutoring, Afterschool (n=204)	26.2%	
Funding, Equity, Teacher Pay (n=193)	24.8%	
Parent Engagement / Family (n=115)	14.7%	
Community and Civic Engagement, Experiential Learning, Internships (n=94)	12.1%	
Mental Health, Anxiety, Housing, and Poverty (n=78)	10.0%	
Career and Career Technical (CTE) (n=70)	9.0%	
Early Childhood Learning, Kindergarten or Pre-K Focus (n=69)	8.9%	
Diversity and Restorative Justice (n=57)	7.3%	
Educational Opportunities, Literacy, Financial Education (n=46)	5.9%	
Standardized Testing (n=44)	5.6%	
Leadership, Superintendent, Board Training (n=25)	3.2%	
Differentiated Learning, Special Needs or Education (n=23)	2.9%	
Academic and Behavioral Discipline (n=22)	2.8%	

Table 9 Teaching Profession, Classroom Size, Tutoring, Afterschool (n=204)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I believe an opportunity that would support achievement of all students is improvement in our teacher preparation programs, increased general support and respect for teaching as a career, and enhanced peer support/coaching models for teachers. We cannot improve student achievement without improving support for the teaching profession. (White, Female, Independent, Arizona school district) More individual and personalized learning in the classroom. Create teaching models that help every student MASTER the learning and performance objectives before moving on. Train teachers how to use education technologies better in their classrooms. (White, Male, Republican, Montana school district) Researched based teaching strategies, competent new teachers coming out of University programs with a servant attitude, smaller classroom sizes, more and better prepared Special Needs teachers. (White, Male, Republican, Kentucky school district) I think more real world teaching instead of only standardized testing is important to help the achievement gap. (White, Female, Republican, Kansas school district) I believe that smaller class sizes, especially at the lower levels, is the most important step a district can take to reduce the achievement gap among students. (White, Female, Democrat, Tennessee school district) Smaller class size and using foundational reading methods to increase reading achievement. (White, Female, Republican, North Carolina school district) Significantly smaller class sizes (to less than 17); up to date technology for all students in their homes; staff development; beefed up mental health services; universal preschool beginning at age 3; additional special education funding; free, nutritious meals for all; longer school day; after school and summer learning opportunities; community support for children in poverty; more bilingual teachers and teachers of color; parent involvement and learning opportunities; affordable and plentiful housing; etc. (White, Male, Democrat, California school district)

Table 10
Funding, Equity, Teacher Pay (n=193)

- **Funding from the state and federal level to increase resources and teacher salaries** so that highly qualified teachers can be hired. Reduction and/or elimination of standardized testing – use that funding to support school districts in more positive ways. (White, Female, Democrat, South Dakota school district)
- **Focus on equity.** It's not just about the education programming. It's about making sure students can get to school, have the services and supports they need. That teachers and school staff are trained in cultural responsiveness and implicit bias and ensuring that all student populations feel safe and confident in their learning environments. Hire and retain teachers of color. (White, Female, Democrat, Iowa school district)
- Equal educational opportunities alone are not enough to address the multiple achievement gaps among students (ie, race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status). **Meaningful efforts to close the achievement gap will require creating true equity of opportunity.** In fact, I believe it is more accurate to consider that there exist important gaps in opportunity for many of our children that make it nearly impossible for them to achieve at the same level as privileged students whose families already enjoy high levels of economic stability and social mobility. Education reform should focus less on standardized curricula and more on transforming policies that promote true social equity.
- Nationally and locally, more Personalized Learning, Project Based Learning, Competency based grading and access to technology is needed to truly provide quality education to ALL students. **Too many students below the poverty line, ESL students and students with IEPs are not being provided the same educational opportunities that other students receive.** Locally (NE Ohio), more (and more equitable) State funding for public schools is needed. (White, Male, Democrat, Ohio school district)

This question, relating to potential opportunities for lessening the achievement gap in education, provided insight into many of the same topics mentioned as challenges to future education. Thus, the very things that are believed to potentially aid in diminishing the achievement gap that remains so prevalent in the institution of education across different schools and school districts are also those that are disregarded or otherwise suppressed by individuals capable to make change a reality. As shown in Table 8, school board members outlined areas such as reduced classroom size, additional programs for students, funding, teacher pay, family engagement, community support, and mental health as ways through which the achievement gap could be lessened. Those that appeared in greatest abundance also appeared in greatest abundance in the open-ended question regarding challenges to future education. This also supports Bourdieu in his idea about reproductive, structural powers, because the change thought to be needed in order to create better equity and support for even the most marginalized peoples

also tended to be the change that posed the greatest challenge to instigate. This is due to the fact that, those who hold and maintain the power in society understand that, if this change were to truly indulge equity and access for all, the gaining of power from these marginalized peoples would have to result from the taking of power from others. Because those in power understand that their power would likely come at the hands of equity, the changes needed to incite this are opposed and suppressed in order to reproduce the uneven and unfair structures that remain omnipotent in society. Though small change might ensue, providing small gains and benefits to those who are oppressed, the system, at large, stays tightly grasping the power which it wields over the masses. The structures are corrupt, the power players remain largely invisible from the public knowledge, instead allowing the indirect implications to be perceived and believed to be true without a questioning of the forces at large. The greater forces, acting through the unequal funding, the belief systems and valued thinking methods in the academic setting, the reliance on standardized tests for future success, the appraisal of privatization efforts and charter school education, the rise and spread of technology that can be accessed by some but not all, and the ability of the family to involve in student education matters, serve purposes that, together, combine into a systemic structure of disparity and inequity. The overwhelming amounts of small elements that sum together, creating a monstrous entity, prevent change from being readily enticed and enacted. The small build together to compose the large, and it induces a system of inequity that remains stubbornly intact.

Chapter 5: Limitations

Limitations were present in this study and are also important to discuss. One limitation resulted from respondents who either failed to detail a specific challenge in their response or who lacked clarity in describing challenges. For instance, one respondent lacked clarity and precision in claiming a challenge facing education in the future will be “tolerance that is demanded but not reciprocated” (p. 1). In this example, a challenge is mentioned, that of lack of tolerance, but it is unclear who or what this tolerance refers to. Tolerance could refer to the school, family, student, or someone else, but it is best to steer clear of assumptions and, instead, refrain from using it in data collections and coding. Another way of providing limitation and being unclear can be shown through one response that denotes a future challenge as “[the] rigidity of the school industry in some respects.” This is too vague to code and make assumptions for intended perceptions, so it is best to leave it out of coding. Another limitation stems from the lack of respondents who answered this question in comparison to the overall number of respondents. It allows for less generalization because less representation than the total respondents answered this question. Limitation is also present in my qualitative coding, as I created the codes and, thus, determined how and where responses were categorized. I might have also limited the research through an error in counting the codes, though I attempted to remedy this by checking my work numerous times on separate occasions. This can be attributed to human error.

Another limitation can be attributed to respondent honesty and legitimacy, being impossible to fully know how accurate and honest the responses were. Though the survey provided anonymity to best ensure honesty from respondents, this cannot be entirely guaranteed. Perception of responses might also provide a limitation in this work, with the respondent intending a different interpretation than the one I derived for his/her response. Also, with data

being collected via surveys in 2007 and 2019, limitations exist through the collections taking place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Limits can also arise from the fact that one open-ended question, regarding challenges facing future education, was coded through the use of qualitative, personal coding methods. On the other hand, the open-ended question concerning potential opportunities to lessen the achievement gap used SPSS to generate common responses based on quantitative and repetitive matters. This second form used might present less accuracy in the way that coding by hand allows for synonymous words or phrases to be gathered in support of the same idea. Yet, the SPSS coding is also more specific, more accurate in not missing a certain work or phrase desired, and much more efficient in gathering data in a timely manner to portray overall generalized patterns.

VI. Conclusion

As philosopher Ayn Rand once wrote: “The hardest thing to explain is the glaringly evident which everybody has decided not to see” (Rand, 1943, p. 521). Though obvious gaps in achievement and opportunity exist between students, schools, districts, and regions, there remains difficulty in defining the sources and, even more, attempting to mediate them. In order to make progress and alleviate inequity that seeps into every aspect of society in some form, it is necessary to ask whether this is an issue reinforced and structured by societal institutions at large, more local, interactionally based levels, or elements of these two together. If it persists largely at a macro-level, how do we begin adjusting and deconstructing the pillars of society, such as government roles and regulations, to enable a fair distribution of resources throughout society, with additional acknowledgement and efforts made for the most marginalized in society? If it persists mostly at the smaller, micro-level, how do we adapt our interactions with one another, the roles of elected leadership, our thoughts, words, and actions to mirror meaningful change that serves to uplift the very people who have suffered at the hands of oppression for so long? And if it seems to exist at both levels, the gaps between the privileged and disadvantaged remaining stable or, worse, widening even further, what then? How do we even begin to destroy the very thing that remains a stronghold within all levels of society, a presence that is typically most invisible to those capable of asserting real, effective change?

The irony of the invisibility of oppression lies in the fact that is not truly invisible at all. Oppression exists in the impoverished, marginalized groups, immigrants and people of color who continue to face societal norms that glorify whiteness as though it is something other than a variation in pigment. Oppression exists in a lack of resources, outdated buildings, absence of funding, inadequate teachers, and preferential treatment given to privatization efforts for schooling (Ravitch, 2010). Oppression exists in the automatic assumptions and stereotypes we

subconsciously make before even speaking to a person, attributing meaning and stigma to an individual based on outward appearance. Oppression exists in the achievement gap, the overwhelming reliance on standardized tests and mandated curricula testing, that bases learning ability and success on stats and ratings. Oppression exists in full form because it is so deeply rooted in society, in our very selves who have been socialized and taught to think, believe, speak, and act in certain ways that were set by an oppressive society.

The irony of the invisibility of oppression lies in the fact that, even if the most powerful and dominant people truly and openly witness the oppressions in society hindering certain groups, the likelihood of these dominants desiring to take action first in reducing inequity is grim. For, even if the dominants understand the present oppressions to an extent, the act of fighting against inequity might come at the cost of their own power. To make advances and equality for the afflicted, it must take away from someone else. Yet, this is not to say the task before us is impossible nor unmanageable. Though it has deep roots engrained within each of us, we can learn to unlearn the societal mechanisms that are long overdue for an upgrade.

At a larger level, it begins with equitable distribution of resources and funds, aiding those who need help the most while those who are most content might face slight discomfort. It is not to say that the process of equity will be thoroughly enjoyable and advantageous for all, but it is of equal importance to note that not all need any additional advantages in a society that already gives great privilege to some rather than others. Whether this equity distribution occurs at the local level, with school boards determining the best pathway for its school district, or at a larger level, such as the state or federal, it will be a key component in attempting to reduce the opportunity gaps that create such starkly contrasting realities for the youth. In another way, addressing this issue in discussion and open recognition will go a long way, the simplicity in

acknowledging its existence, its history, and its perpetuation all developing new ways of thinking and solving issues both inside and outside the classroom. With current society constantly progressing in technological advances and forward thinking in many areas, the discussion of the opportunity gap and its effects in education is of increasing importance. Local leaders must be willing to invest time and effort to incite real change, and they need to mirror the diverse peoples they serve. Educators must instill new ways of thinking and perceiving of the world in the minds of students who will grow up to be leaders who incite even more change. However, in order to produce great students and thinkers we must first have great educators, ones who feel valued, appreciated, and adequately compensated for their efforts in spurring positive change in society. Education must center on learning that will engage students but also push them to desire their own quests for knowledge and truth. Education must be flexible, diverging from the “one size fits all approach” for students with different talents and passions, a changing demand in future work, and a future society that will hopefully represent greater equality and inclusion of all.

Within the data, seeing both macro- and micro-levels at work in reproducing and upholding elements of opportunity gaps, both levels, as well as their interaction and overlap with one another, must be addressed in attempts to overcome the challenges and threats. Its existence and persistence at larger levels regenerates and perpetuates and more local levels, upholding the inequity intergenerationally. A systems approach, one that involves and embodies all levels of the educational system, is necessary to target and reduce the persisting inequalities. As supported by Ballantine, context and environment is critical in understanding the roles and structures within institutions, specifically referring to the educational setting. In the open systems approach, environment is necessary to divulge in understanding a wider, more accurate depiction of the roles at play to then best approach and alter what needs change (Ballantine, 2015). This change,

perhaps in the form of national policies to implement educator training on inequity that then spreads and manifests within the classroom on more local levels, could work against the inequities that tightly bind society and those within it, strangling the marginalized while others benefit from the same system.

Pierre Bourdieu explores and analyzes the many constructs that build together to form a rigid, strict barrier by which we construct lives and beliefs. Who someone is and who someone becomes is not simply reliant on that individual. There are factors, the majority being outside of one's control, that filter into this display of the have versus the have nots. The oppression and suppression of peoples occurs intergenerationally, reinforcing inequity and certain access to opportunity depending on the person and groups belonging to. In effect, society invades every aspect of one's being, on as personal a level as one's own thoughts to as grand a level as the idea and power given to government. Inequity begins when one is born, depending on the desirable traits one has versus those lacking, and continues in its dominance throughout one's life, in every sphere and area of existence (Bourdieu, 1973).

In the well-known work titled *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo writes, "Where the telescope ends, the microscope begins. Which of the two has the grander view?" In assessing the opportunity gap, the telescope entails a zoomed out effect, looking at society in its vast contexts and constructs such as the institutions that shape us as well as the challenges facing current society. The telescope allows for one to examine the bigger pictures from a far distance, first seemingly out of reach and then, when looking through the lens, seeing the overall mechanisms that compose the beast that is society. The microscope allows a closer depiction into the personal, localized level interactions such as those of student-teacher relationships and interactions within one's surroundings. The microscope is important in the micro-level portraits

of how society generates and reproduces structures through the constructs and thinking pathways we live by day-to-day. This is a critical component for, without the continued reinforcement of constructs on small, local levels, the larger levels would not properly function. Perhaps the key to inciting change rests in changes made at the micro-level aspects, such as the interactions and teaching methods used in the classroom, that build upon one another to create a cohesive whole. Perhaps the divergence of some at a small scale will lead to a domino effect, similar to that of a failing organ affecting the overall health of the body. Though it will take many small effects to ripple into large effects, I hope a resulting view is one of fairness, a stance of betterment for all.

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Appendix

Codes

Major Challenges for Future Education Coded

1. System of Education

a. Teachers, Administration, Staff

- i. Proper education for administration / teachers (both new and old)
- ii. Continuously teaching educators as society changes / progresses; educational programs
- iii. Finding qualified administration / teachers / staff to hire
- iv. Retaining these qualified individuals
- v. Teacher shortages
- vi. Respect and appreciation for educators and the school system
 1. Resulting in a lessening desire to enter field, increasing demand for educators
- vii. Unions (teachers and administrative)
 1. Seeking to reduce the power and role of unions or remove altogether
- viii. Increasing responsibilities of educators
 1. Increasing responsibilities / demands placed on educators to teach children / students (i.e., morals, behavior, discipline)
 2. Blaming educators for what is determined to be the failure of students' success
 3. Increasing demands by the family as well as the state and federal levels
- ix. Being role models and positive examples of leaders for students to look up to
- x. Constant adaptation to changing community and surroundings
- xi. Necessity of more professionals in educational setting
 1. Counselors, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists

b. Teaching Methods and Focuses

- i. Adjusting to current times, removing outdated / irrelevant teaching methods (that no longer benefit nor apply to students)
- ii. Adapting new teaching methods
 1. Specific focuses recommended:
 - a. Focus on STEM
 - b. Focus on history (more specifically U.S. history)
 - c. More focus on student creativity and the arts
 - d. Focus on past methods that have worked for skills needed
 - e. Focus on reading / literacy
 - f. Project-based learning combined with integrated learning
- iii. Technological Resources
 1. Online education

2. Access to these modern means of educating and teaching
 - a. I.e., access or hindrance to access of computers for students to use in the classroom
 - b. Low income school districts not having the resources to obtain current technology for teaching purposes
3. Utilizing technology for changing learning institution
4. Controls (and lack of)
5. Overreliance on
6. Negative aspects: social media, negative effects on learning and students' brains
- iv. Standardized testing
 1. High importance placed upon testing to determine success and future of student
- v. Set curriculum
 1. Common core
 2. Curricula tests needed to pass before progressing to next grade
 3. Lack of knowing what texts / curricula will be set by state government to teach
 4. Teaching driven by college admission process – “a means to an end” to get students in based on testing, scores, and rankings opposed to teaching for the sake of learning
 5. Grading system for a letter grade
 6. Conforming to a mold in learning in order to succeed
- c. Preparation of Students
 - i. Proper preparation of students for higher education (i.e., college)
 1. Preparation of student with regard to the college application process → driven in teaching to gain students admission into colleges
 - ii. Proper preparation of students for the workforce (and its changing demands)
 - iii. Preparing students for a workforce that does not exist yet (future based career demands)
 - iv. Deep-rooted belief in the necessity of a 4-year college degree opposed to a trade or skill program
 - v. School day / school year lengths
 1. I.e., too short a school day and/or school year (need for shortened summer)
 - vi. Class size
 1. I.e., class size too large
 - vii. Stressed importance of early education
 - viii. Keeping enrollment rates up to continue preparing students
 - ix. Teaching students the skills they will need to succeed (social, “soft skills”, critical thinking skills, etc)
 - x. Basic, adequate preparation of each student for life
 - xi. Keeping students engaged, interested, excited about learning
 1. Avoiding distraction

- 2. Avoiding apathy, indifference, and disinterest
 - xii. Keeping attendance and enrollment rates up
 - 1. Losing students to online schooling, homeschooling, or simply the failure to attend
 - xiii. Pressure to teach to an individualized learning process
 - d. Relationships in this institution
 - i. Importance of positive, healthy relationships: teacher to student, student to student, teacher to teacher, administrator to teacher, etc.
 - ii. Need for positive relationships with children in order to properly teach them
 - 1. Students need to trust the adult before able to learn and be expected to learn
 - 2. Teachers must have respect from students in order to efficiently teach them (as well as have the basic desire to teach them)
 - a. Teachers not wanting to teacher difficult, poorly disciplined children; takes away from other children
 - e. Aging facilities, buildings, etc.
 - f. Consolidation
 - i. Might allow greater amounts of resources per school district if schools with less came together
 - ii. Might allow more ability for specialized teaching methods and education
 - iii. (add 4-5 to total amount in the end)
2. Controls and Influence
- a. Funding and Finances
 - i. Lack of funding in the public school for the following:
 - 1. Old, outdated facilities
 - 2. School budgets
 - 3. Relevant, important, necessary programs
 - a. Afterschool programs; student additional aid programs (in and out of classroom); special education programs; arts programs; STEM programs; gifted programs; early education programs; ELL programs; etc.
 - 4. Important and needed resources
 - a. Mental health counselors, support staff, etc.
 - ii. Salary, Benefits, and Costs
 - 1. Pay / salary for administrators, teachers, staff
 - 2. Funding for educator benefits
 - a. Healthcare benefits, insurance, retirement benefits, etc.
 - 3. Dues in teacher unions
 - iii. Inadequate funding
 - 1. Lack of funding for mandates
 - a. Creates issues because causes unfunded mandates that are difficult to meet
 - b. These mandates define the “what” and the “how”, but they do not provide further funding or relief

2. Increasing taxes on the local level to gather funds needed
 - a. Tax caps
 - b. Tax cuts on larger scales
 - c. More pressure on local community to collect needed funds
3. Funding from the federal level
4. Funding from the state level
5. Funding for programs and resources that have negative effect on public school system
 - a. IDEA program (?)
- iv. Funding in public versus private school systems
 1. Funding differences for impoverished versus more privileged school districts are high
 2. ESAs; vouchers; (for profit) charters
 - a. “federal and state level push to privatize public education through ESAs and vouchers will further drain money away from classrooms and weaken public schools”
 - b. “we have two things that continue to negatively impact our most vulnerable students, vouchers and for profit charters. With vouchers, it is a subsidized private education with little to no accountability. With charters, the focus is on profits and less on students.”
 3. Open enrollment
 - a. Favors distribution of funds to private schools (?)
 4. The need for funding to show no preference and favor towards privatization through funding within school districts
- v. Waning / leveling / lessening population → consolidation with other schools
- b. Lawmakers, Government Officials, Positions of Authority
 - i. Corruption and Abuse of Power
 1. Self-interest of policy-makers, government officials, school board members, etc.
 - a. Harmful and bad because takes away focus from the students, families, and educators who matter the most within the educational institution
 2. The need for higher regulation of those in positions of power
 - a. Needing increasing accountability of the individuals who make the rules and regulations that schools are to abide by – in hopes to lessen abuse of power
 3. Politics
 - a. Cronyism
 - b. Nepotism
 - ii. Lack of Quality Leadership
 1. Lack of leadership displayed by those in positions of authority / power
 - iii. Lack of Respect and Appreciation towards Educators and School Administrators

1. Also creates trickle-down effect by affecting societal perception
- iv. Opinions about Schooling Forms
 1. Government (example: state legislature) seeking to destroy public education (via lessening of funds, giving funds to privatization / charters, etc.)
- c. Public School vs Other Forms of Schooling
 - i. Favoritism of privatized / charter schools by those with authority who make decisions
 1. Manifests in the form of less stringent rules to abide by for privatized schools
 2. Increased funding and preference in favor of privatized schools
 - ii. Charter schools
 1. The lack of accountability they have (especially in comparison to public school districts)
 - iii. School choice and open enrollment
 1. Rise and dominance of private schooling / charter schools (thus more funds going to these)
 - iv. Online school
 - v. Homeschooling
- d. Regulation, Interference, Laws, Taxes, and More
 - i. Lack of Local Government Control
 - ii. Interference
 1. Legislative interference
 - a. When they do not know the issues personally and fully
 2. Government interference through “reforms”
 - iii. Laws
 1. Laws set in place and the lawmaking process
 - a. Difficult of altering / changing them
 - b. Difficulty of removing them
 - c. Laws that are outdated and/or doing more harm than good
 2. The need to put students as primary concern in decision, lawmaking processes
 - iv. Mandates
 1. Federal Mandates
 - a. Example: No Child Left Behind
 2. “All mandates (PE, recess, certain classes that are needed to take, etc)”
 - v. Regulation
 1. On a national level
 2. On a state level
 3. On a local level
 4. In the form of laws
 5. In the form of taxes
 - vi. Legal Lawsuits
 1. And the threat they pose to the school districts
- e. Societal Perceptions, Community Engagement and Commitment

- i. Negative perceptions of public schools and/or public school education
 - ii. Lack of community support for the public school system
 - iii. Lack of community understanding and knowledge (i.e., education) about current issues and concerns
 - iv. Lack of community involvement
 - v. Lack of respect and appreciation for educators from the community
 - 1. Need for higher value placed on the role of educators
 - 2. Need for greater appreciation and respect for educators
- 3. The Family / Homelife
 - a. Homelife
 - i. “Broken” homelife
 - ii. Nontraditional homelife
 - 1. Examples: Single parent, same sex parents, cohabiting partners, raised by other family member such as grandparent → any situation deviating from the “traditional family” of married mother and father with children
 - iii. Negative / harmful aspects of homelife
 - 1. Abuse
 - 2. Neglect (specifically of children)
 - 3. Parent(s) / caregiver(s) addicted to drugs and/or alcohol
 - 4. Parent(s) / caregiver(s) with numerous jobs
 - b. Parenting (perceptions by school board members)
 - i. Lack of parental support, investment, involvement, and/or concern in child / child’s education
 - ii. Lack of responsibility for child’s education / growth / maturity / behavior
 - 1. Push of responsibility onto others (example: teachers) for outlets of life other than education, such as manners and behavior
 - iii. “Helicopter parents,” over involved and controlling of child’s life
 - c. Children
 - i. Learned behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and skills
 - 1. Learned at home
 - 2. Examples set by parents, children follow (i.e., lazy, not caring about schoolwork)
 - 3. Skills: social skills, social health, socialization; behavior, discipline, morals, manners; accountability, responsibility
 - a. Lack of important skills, discipline, socialization, behavior, morals, responsibility
 - ii. Trauma due to harmful homelife and parenting
- 4. Health and Safety (of educators, students, family)
 - a. Mental, Emotional, and Social Health and Issues
 - i. Student Health
 - 1. High pressures
 - a. Examples: comparison to peers, peer pressure, pressure to perform well and succeed academically and/or athletically

2. Overcommitment and spreading oneself too thin
 - a. Examples: balancing jobs, academics, athletics, social life, etc.
3. Anxiety and stress
 - a. Over the future (education, workforce, society in general)
4. Challenges
 - a. Depression
 - b. Suicide
 - c. Mental / behavioral issues
 - d. Social issues
 - e. Fear of failure
- ii. Educator Health
 1. Stress about increasing duties
 2. Stress / anxiety about making income work with duties and responsibilities
 3. Pressure to educate students for the future in a helpful, productive way
 4. Pressure to help all students to the best ability possible
- iii. Solutions to help better overall health of individuals
 1. Creating resources and centers to aid this
 - a. Such as wellness centers
 2. Conversations in the classroom
 - a. Acknowledging the reality of health issues and struggles
 - b. Discussions about kindness, empathy, compassion
- b. School Safety
 - i. Violence and danger
 - ii. Bullying
 1. Also, in the form of cyberbullying
- c. Addiction and Misuse
 - i. Vaping, nicotine, cigarettes
 - ii. Drugs and alcohol
 - iii. Technology and social media
 1. Harmful, negative effects → addiction, cyberbullying
- d. Support and Programs
 - i. Family
 1. Health (mental, physical, behavioral, addiction) programs for family units
 - ii. Educators
 1. Providing health services needed
 - iii. Students
5. Inequity, Disadvantage, Disparity
 - a. Inequity Facing Groups and People
 - i. Discrimination towards marginalized groups
 1. Preconceived notions and stigmas about certain groups and people

- 2. Lack of support and/or education about those who are disadvantaged
- ii. Language barriers
- iii. Poverty
 - 1. Homelessness, housing insecurity, food insecurity
 - a. Example: relying on free or reduced meal costs at school
 - b. Not being able to afford things and resources, such as not being able to afford college upon graduation
- b. Homogeneity
 - i. Lack of heterogeneity / diversity in the school districts and within class makeup / demographics
 - 1. Including race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, gender
 - ii. Resegregation trends
 - 1. Segregation of diversity in demographics at schools (in staff and students)
 - iii. Inequality towards school districts that contain high abundances of minority groups
 - iv. The need for more diverse, representative staff, admin, and educators
- c. Absence of Inclusive, Necessary, and Helpful Programs and Resources
 - i. Special education programs; Gifted programs; ELL programs
 - ii. The need for more inclusive, relevant, diverse education for all students
 - 1. Specifically focusing on the students within a given school district, such as if minorities are in abundance in that district
 - 2. Diversity in materials and books used in classroom
 - 3. Discussing diversity and its relevance within the classroom
- d. Inequality within Educational System
 - i. Public schools vs privatized / charter schools
 - 1. Unequal access and distribution of resources, advancements, and programs among different school districts and structures (i.e., public vs private)
 - 2. Unequal access to advancements in technology for learning purposes
 - ii. Achievement gaps in test scores between students – relating to opportunity gaps / educational gaps
 - iii. Unfair standards
 - 1. Expecting same results from school districts that differ greatly (in demographics, funding, etc.)
 - iv. Education in urban versus rural areas
 - 1. Lack of access to resources in rural school districts
 - 2. High rates of poverty, crime, housing insecurity in urban school districts

School Board 2019

Welcome to a national study of school boards! We are interested in understanding your perceptions on a number of issues related to education, community, and school board work. You will be presented with information relevant to school boards and asked to answer some questions about it. The information you provide will help us better understand the role of school board members across the United States. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential.

The study should take you around 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. At the end of the survey, you will have an option of receiving a summary of the survey results. If you would like to contact the principal investigator of the study to discuss this research, please e-mail Dr. Albert Nylander at nylander@olemiss.edu or call 662-915-2050.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Please mark your consent to participate.

- ☐ I consent, begin the study
- ☐ I do not consent; I do not wish to participate
-

How long have you been a school board member?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
 - ☐ 1 - 4 years
 - ☐ 5 - 9 years
 - ☐ 10 - 14 years
 - ☐ 15 or more years
 - ☐ No longer serving
-

How many years are in one school board term?

- ☐ 1
 - ☐ 2
 - ☐ 3
 - ☐ 4
 - ☐ 5
 - ☐ 6
 - ☐ Other, please specify _____
-

How many terms are allowed for a school board member?

- ☐ 1 - 3 terms
- ☐ 4 - 6 terms
- ☐ No limit on terms
-

In your last election for the school board seat, did you run opposed or unopposed?

- ☐ Opposed
- ☐ Unopposed
- ☐ Other, please specify _____
-

How many members serve on the school board?

- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ Other, please specify _____
-

How many students are in your district?

- ☐ < 1,000
 - ☐ 1,000 - 5,000
 - ☐ 5,001 - 10,000
 - ☐ 10,001 - 20,000
 - ☐ 20,001 - 50,000
 - ☐ More than 50,000
-

How many schools are in your district?

- ☐ 1 - 5
 - ☐ 6 - 10
 - ☐ 11 - 19
 - ☐ 20 - 50
 - ☐ More than 50
-

What type of area is your school district primarily located in?

- ☐ Urban
 - ☐ Suburban
 - ☐ Rural
 - ☐ Other _____
-

What state is your school board located?

▼ Alabama ... Wyoming (51)

How much are school board members paid annually?

- ☐ Not Paid
- ☐ < \$1,000
- ☐ \$1,000 - \$5,000
- ☐ \$5,001 - \$10,000
- ☐ More than \$10,000
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

On average, how many hours per week do you work with school board related issues?

- ☐ Less than 5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 11-20
- ☐ More than 20
- ☐ Other _____

Please answer yes or no to the following school related questions.

Do you have a full time job in addition to the school board?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are you a member of the National School Board Association?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are School Board members required to have a college degree?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Did you attend school within this district?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do your children attend (or previously attended) school within this district?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are you a current or former teacher?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

If yes, how many years?

Who makes the personnel decisions within your School District?

- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Superintendent
- ☐ School Board
- ☐ City/Town Leaders
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Please indicate your views on the following school related issues by marking Agree, Neutral, or Disagree

I regularly meet with the School District's teachers.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
I socialize with other School Board members outside of School Board meetings.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
Many of the other School Board members are involved in the same organizations I am.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
I feel accepted by the other School Board members.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
I feel that our School Board is influential in the community.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
More School Board business gets done in private meetings rather than public meetings.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
I find that state laws hinder my School Board from getting things done.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
Our School District needs change.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
Our School District provides a safe environment for students to learn.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree

Please indicate your views on the following school related issues by marking Agree, Neutral, or Disagree.

Funding from the Federal Government is sufficient for our local school district.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
School safety is a top priority for our school district.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
I support the Common Core State Standards for our school district.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
Standardized testing is a big problem in education.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
Teacher salaries should be increased.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
Student poverty is a growing problem in our school district.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
The average class size in our school district should be smaller.	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Disagree

Describe educational opportunities that you believe would reduce the achievement gap among students.

Continue rating your perceptions of these school related issues by marking Disagree, Neutral, or Agree.

Schools should be used as sites for after-school programs.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

The Superintendent is doing a good job.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

There are times when the School Board's role and the Superintendent's role are confused.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

There is a willingness for others in the community to get involved with education.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

Most parents are willing to serve on the School Board.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

The public has too little to say in how schools are run.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

Every Student Succeeds Act (previous "No Child Left Behind") is good for our School District.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

The teachers within our School District are paid enough.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

The Superintendent within our School District is paid enough.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

Schools within our School District should offer bilingual (English and Spanish) instruction.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

There should be term limits placed on how long a School Board member serves.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

Being a School Board member takes me away from my family too often.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

Being a School Board member is a rewarding service despite the low financial pay.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

I have strong social networking ties with business owners in my School District.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

How much influence does a School Board member have over local government decisions?

☐ A lot

☐ A moderate amount

☐ A little

☐ None at all

How often do you socialize with other School Board members on unrelated school board matters?

- ☐ Daily
 - ☐ Weekly
 - ☐ Monthly
 - ☐ Never
-

I am involved with clubs or organizations outside the School Board.

- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ If yes, what type? _____
-

How many years have you lived in your community?

- ☐ Less than 5
 - ☐ 6 - 10
 - ☐ 11 -20
 - ☐ More than 20
-

Please indicate your views on the following school related issues by marking Disagree, Neutral, or Agree.			
There are School Board members who can stop progress from taking place.	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Agree
Over the past 10 years Educational changes have gone in the right direction.	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Agree
When my School District is recognized for excellence it is a reflection on the School Board leaders.	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Agree
Now that I am a School Board member, I am more recognized in the community.	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Agree
Enrollment growth within my School District is growth for the community.	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Agree
My School District is vital for the economy within our local community.	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Agree
School Board members' relationship with the local community leaders is a positive one.	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Agree

Local elected officials make decisions that positively affect the schools within our district.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

Schools within my School District will improve their test scores in the next 5 to 10 years.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

School Board members should be more accessible to the public.

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

We are almost done, but I would like to ask you if the following issues are potential problems for students within your School District. Please indicate your views on these issues by marking from Serious Problem to Not a Problem.

Teenage pregnancy	<input type="radio"/> Serious Problem	<input type="radio"/> Moderate Problem	<input type="radio"/> Minor Problem	<input type="radio"/> Not a Problem	<input type="radio"/> Don't know/ No opinion
Bullying/physical or online	<input type="radio"/> Serious Problem	<input type="radio"/> Moderate Problem	<input type="radio"/> Minor Problem	<input type="radio"/> Not a Problem	<input type="radio"/> Don't know/ No opinion
School violence	<input type="radio"/> Serious Problem	<input type="radio"/> Moderate Problem	<input type="radio"/> Minor Problem	<input type="radio"/> Not a Problem	<input type="radio"/> Don't know/ No opinion
Gang Behavior	<input type="radio"/> Serious Problem	<input type="radio"/> Moderate Problem	<input type="radio"/> Minor Problem	<input type="radio"/> Not a Problem	<input type="radio"/> Don't know/ No opinion
Drug and alcohol abuse	<input type="radio"/> Serious Problem	<input type="radio"/> Moderate Problem	<input type="radio"/> Minor Problem	<input type="radio"/> Not a Problem	<input type="radio"/> Don't know/ No opinion
Absenteeism	<input type="radio"/> Serious Problem	<input type="radio"/> Moderate Problem	<input type="radio"/> Minor Problem	<input type="radio"/> Not a Problem	<input type="radio"/> Don't know/ No opinion

Disorganization/feeling overwhelmed

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Eating right and staying healthy

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Not resolving relationship issues

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Poor grades/not studying or reading enough

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Poor sleep habits

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Wasting time/procrastinating

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Lack of home support

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Poverty

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Mental Health challenges

☐ Serious Problem

☐ Moderate Problem

☐ Minor Problem

☐ Not a Problem

☐ Don't know/
No opinion

Describe any other challenges for students not listed above.

In concluding, we would like to ask you some demographic questions. Remember, you do not have to answer any particular question.

What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other _____

What is your marital status? Are you currently:

- ☐ Single (never married)
 - ☐ Married
 - ☐ Divorced
 - ☐ Widowed
 - ☐ Separated
-

In general, was your employment during 2018?

▼ Employed, working 40 or more hours per week ... Other

Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

▼ Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations ... Other (23)

If other occupation, please list.

In general, would you say that your health is excellent, good, fair or poor?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

Which political affiliation do you most closely associate with?

- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

How many years of formal education have you completed?

- ☐ Less than 9th grade
 - ☐ 9th to 12th grade (No High School Diploma)
 - ☐ High school diploma (or equivalency)
 - ☐ Some college, no degree
 - ☐ Trade/technical/vocational training
 - ☐ Associate (two-year) degree
 - ☐ Bachelors (four-year) degree
 - ☐ Graduate or professional degree
-

Which racial or ethnic group do you most closely identify yourself with?

- ☐ Black (African American)
 - ☐ White (Caucasian)
 - ☐ American Indian/Native American
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
 - ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
 - ☐ Other, please specify _____
-

Which category best describes your age?

- ☐ 18-24
 - ☐ 25-34
 - ☐ 35-44
 - ☐ 45-54
 - ☐ Over 54
-

Which category best describes your total 2018 household income BEFORE taxes.

- ☐ Less than \$25,000.
- ☐ \$25,000 to \$34,999.
- ☐ \$35,000 to \$49,999.
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$74,999.
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,999.
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$149,999.
- ☐ \$150,000 to \$199,999.
- ☐ \$200,000 or more

Why did you become a School Board member?

Explain the major challenges for education in the future.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

If you'd like a summary of the results, please enter your email below. Thank you!
