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Low-Income, Minority Students More Likely to Attend Schools with Larger Kindergarten Classes and Inexperienced Teachers

New Report Shows Educational Consequences of Connecticut's Racial and Socioeconomic Segregation

Low-income students and students of color are more likely to attend public schools with the largest kindergarten classes and least experienced teachers, according to a new report from Connecticut Voices for Children. The report points to Connecticut's residential segregation as a key factor in these disparities, and warns that this inequality in resources is widening the state's educational opportunity gap.

"A quality education offers children the opportunity to develop to their full potential, laying the foundation for social and economic success for individuals and for our state as a whole," said Ellen Shemitz, Executive Director of Connecticut Voices for Children. "Every child in our state should have equal access to a well-resourced school offering a quality education, but our research shows that Hispanic, Black, and low-income students are disproportionately clustered in schools lacking important school resources."

Among the report's key findings:

- **Schools with the largest kindergarten classes are comprised primarily of students of color and low-income students.** In the fifth of Connecticut public schools with the largest kindergarten classes, nearly four out of every five students (78%) is a student of color, and more than three out of every four students (76%) is eligible for free or reduced price meals (a common measure of student poverty). By contrast, in the rest of Connecticut's public schools, a majority of students are white and not eligible for free or reduced price meals.
- **Similarly, schools with the least experienced teachers are made up primarily of minority and low-income students.** In the fifth of public schools with the lowest average levels of teaching experience, two-thirds of students (67%) are students of color, and three out of every five (61%) are eligible for free or reduced price meals. By contrast, in the rest of Connecticut's public schools, a majority of students are white and not eligible for free or reduced price meals.

The report's findings suggest that the roots of these inequalities in resources lie in Connecticut's residential segregation:

- **A majority of schools with largest kindergarten classes (67%) and least experienced teachers (53%) are concentrated in the 10 towns with the lowest percentage of white residents.**
- **These under-resourced schools are also disproportionately located in high-poverty towns.** Sixty-one percent of schools with the largest kindergarten classes and 47% of schools with the lowest average levels of teaching experience are located in the ten towns with the highest child poverty rates.

“Research shows that children who attend smaller classes and who have more experienced teachers aren't just more successful in school, they're more likely to be healthy and economically successful adults too,” said Kenneth Feder, co-author of the report and Policy Analyst at Connecticut Voices for Children. “When our state's low-income and minority students must attend schools with inadequate resources, this puts them at a disadvantage for the rest of their lives.”

The report also finds that towns with more property wealth tend to have smaller class sizes. Given that the majority of education funding in the state comes from property taxes, Connecticut Voices for Children argues that many students are missing out on school resources because their towns simply don't have property tax base to afford them.

“This distribution of school resources isn't just unethical, it's unsustainable,” said Sarah Iverson, Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices and co-author of the report. “Each year, Connecticut's students are becoming less wealthy and more racially diverse. If we don't act to make sure every child gets an equal education, we will be depriving more students of learning opportunity each year.”

To broaden access to well-resourced schools, Connecticut Voices for Children recommends:

- Reforming the state's system of education funding to ensure that towns can afford to offer every student a high quality education, regardless of their property tax base.
- Increasing transparency in public education spending to ensure that dollars are invested in evidence-based resources.
- Investigating and remediating barriers that prevent families from being able to live in integrated communities with well-resourced schools.

The report, “Unequal Schools: Connecticut's Racial, Socioeconomic, and Geographic Disparities in Class Size and Teaching Experience,” is available on the CT Voices Web site at www.ctvoices.org. Connecticut Voices for Children is a research and advocacy organization that works to improve opportunities for the state's children, youth, and families.

Note to reporters: Maps with school-level data on class size and teaching experience are available online. (Click on school icons in the maps to view local data.)

<http://ctvoices.github.io/unequal-schools-class-size/>

<http://ctvoices.github.io/unequal-schools-teaching-experience/>

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