

“Education is the single-most important civil rights issue that we face today.”

– Michelle Obama

*Program Note: Before we get into **Week 10 of the 14 Week Equity Challenge**, we want to do a quick program alert. Tonight (11/6, 9:00pm), WNED PBS will show a powerful hour-long documentary production that sheds light on the historic Niagara Movement. This captivating documentary delves deep into the Niagara Movement's pivotal role in shaping the civil rights landscape. Just prior to the first official meeting of the Niagara Movement in Fort Erie in 1905, an organizational gathering was held at the home of Mary and William Talbert on Michigan Avenue in Buffalo.*

May 17, 2024 will mark the 70-year anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* where the United States Supreme Court confronted the institution of racial segregation in our public schools and ruled unanimously that segregation was unconstitutional. The decision marked the first great victory of the civil rights movement and left no doubt. All nine justices stood behind the opinion of Chief Justice Earl Warren, who declared, "The doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

Despite the ruling effectively dismantling the legacy of Jim Crow and declaring unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional, most public schools across the United States today are, arguably, just as racially segregated as they were in the Jim Crow era. Today, more than half of the nation's school-age children are in racially concentrated districts in which over 75% of students are of the same race, and districts are further segregated by income. Students of color, who are more likely than their white counterparts to attend under-resourced schools, suffer because of teachers working in under-resourced school environments and large class sizes.

Historically, local public education systems have been funded through the local tax base and property taxes, creating an uneven system of public education funding. Economically and racially divided neighborhoods have long lead to inequitable educational environments and adverse academic outcomes for youth. Children from families with low incomes enter high school with literacy skills 5 years behind and are over 4 times more likely to drop out than those from high-income families.

School attendance zones are often drawn to include, and exclude, families of certain races based on the neighborhoods in which they live. While it is illegal to segregate within school

districts, it is not uncommon to draw attendance zones that may include or exclude specific neighborhoods. We know that decades of housing and neighborhood discrimination have caused inequities in where people live (looking back at Week 9 of the Challenge – Housing and Transportation); this has made it even easier to draw attendance zones according to “desirable” or “undesirable” neighborhoods which further separate students based on racial lines. Concentrations of poverty and disparate property tax bases between urban and suburban districts lead to drastically different access to resources and quality of education for local children. Black and Latino families bear the brunt of this problem nationally and locally, with educational opportunities being significantly different across geographical and racial or ethnic lines.

Communities of color experience more limited access to high quality early education and disparities in higher education; and data from around the country show racially discriminatory disciplining practices that feed the school-to-prison pipeline that we introduced in Week 8. The digital divide also contributes to disparities for students in rural and low-income areas. This week’s Challenge provides data, as well as historical accounts and personal experiences, to explore inequities in access to quality education and opportunity.

Finally, in light of the United States Supreme Court decision in June of this year, we absolutely must include a discussion and resources around the dismantling of affirmative action at our nation’s colleges and universities. In response to a pair of lawsuits accusing Harvard University and the University of North Carolina of racial discrimination in their admissions process, the Supreme Court voted in a 6-3 decision to curb affirmative action in higher education, ending a four-decade precedent that allowed colleges and universities to broadly consider applicants’ race in their admissions process. Interestingly, legacy admissions, where preference is given to family members of alumni from those institutions, remains unchallenged. Please check out our new resources on this issue.

READ

[Responding Systematically to Racial Inequity in Schools](#)

Schools aren't doing a good enough job of addressing the complex issues of racism in the curriculum and school community culture. Students of color are still not getting the supports they need to thrive—and white students aren't getting the skills they need to understand and challenge racism. Hosts of the podcast *Teaching While White* delineate the dos and don'ts of institutional approaches to racial equity. (About a 5-minute read)

[4 Ways Racial Inequity Harms American Schoolchildren](#)

This brief article bridges the conversation from last week and highlights four things to know about how racial inequity affects the nation's school children. (About a 3-minute read)

[Native American Students Left Behind by South Dakota Education System](#)

For decades, Native Americans in South Dakota – who make up 9% of the population – have been left behind by a system that fails to meet their needs and has resulted in generations of Natives suffering the consequences of inadequate educational achievement. While this special report examines the historical and current educational achievement gap between Native American and white students in South Dakota, it has national implications. (About a 14-minute read)

[Public Education in Buffalo and the Region](#)

While a few years old now, the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) produced this report examining public education in Buffalo and the surrounding region. While they found that the Buffalo-Niagara region is well educated, with higher than average rates of high school completion and graduate or professional degrees, within the region, residential segregation by race and income produces sharp disparities in educational outcomes. (About a 7-minute read)

WATCH

[2019 Affirmative Action for White People? Legacy College Admissions Come Under Renewed Scrutiny](#)

In the wake of the Supreme Court that strikes down affirmative action in admissions, colleges are coming under renewed pressure to put an end to legacy preferences — the practice of favoring applicants with family ties to alumni. Long seen as a perk for the white and wealthy, opponents say it's no longer defensible in a world with no counterbalance in affirmative action. (About 2 minutes).

[Hip Hop, Grit and Academic Success](#)

In this underappreciated and powerful 2014 Ted Talk, Dr. Bettina Love explains how students who identify with Hip Hop culture have been ignored or deemed deficient in schools because of mainstream misconceptions associated with Hip Hop culture. Dr. Love argues that forcing students to leave the essence of who they are behind at the door when they walk into school amounts to "spirit murder," and ignoring students' culture in the classroom is discrimination and injustice. In 2020, Dr. Love was the featured keynote speaker at the University at Buffalo's Graduate School of Education's Teach-In for Racial Equity: "Make Good Trouble." (About 15 minutes)

[How America's Public Schools Keep Kids in Poverty](#)

Kandice Sumner sees the disparity every day in her classroom in Boston. She shares how schools in low-income neighborhoods across the U.S., specifically in communities of color, lack resources that are standard at wealthier schools -- things like musical instruments, new books, healthy school lunches and soccer fields -- and this has a real impact on the potential of students. (About 14 minutes)

[Help for Kids the Education System Ignores](#)

Define students by what they contribute, not what they lack -- especially those with difficult upbringings, says educator Victor Rios. Interwoven with his personal tale of perseverance as an inner-city youth, Rios identifies three straightforward strategies to shift attitudes in education and calls for fellow educators to see "at-risk" students as "at-promise" individuals brimming with resilience, character and grit. (About 12 minutes)

LISTEN

[Affirmative Action Faces Toughest Test in a Generation](#)

For more than 50 years, colleges and universities across the country have taken race into account as they craft their incoming classes. A pair of lawsuits recently heard by the United States Supreme Court have changed the face of higher education in this country. This June, 2023, UnCommon Law series explores the biggest challenge to affirmative action in a generation. The series explores the arguments and the people driving this latest battle over affirmative action in higher education. (About 37 minutes)

[The Far-Reaching Health Care Impacts of the Supreme Court's Affirmative Action Decision](#)

When we think about Affirmative Action, we may only think about the educational impacts. What are the ripple effects when it comes to health care? *Health Affairs'* Ellen Bayer and Chris Fleming discuss the wide-reaching health care implications of the recent Supreme Court decision on affirmative action. (About 11 minutes)

[Achievement Gap, or Opportunity Gap? What's Stopping Student Success: Part I](#)

WBUR Boston's *On Point* introduces Part I of their special series, "The 50 Year Fight: Solutions for Closing the Achievement Gap." Along with guests, sociologist Prudence Carter and historian Ibram X. Kendi, host Meghna Chakrabarti explores solutions to a persistent problem in American education. (About 47 minutes)

[Buffalo, What's Next?: Restorative Justice – Changing School Discipline](#)

During the 2016-2017 school year, Buffalo Public Schools suspended more than 30.7% of Black male students — nearly 1 in 3—according to a 2018 report called "Stolen Time" by The New York Equity Coalition. About 1 in 5 of all Black students were suspended compared to about 1 of every 12 white students. It's a trend that holds nationwide too. This conversation extends last week's discussion about the school-to-prison pipeline by examining how the concept of Restorative Justice can be used and is being used to impart an alternative discipline system that cuts the pipeline off at the start. (About 60 minutes)

Buffalo, What's Next?: Three Perspectives on Education

Educator Vicki Math will discuss using African-inspired art, music and literature to teach Black history. And we'll be joined by Eva Doyle, the author and former school teacher who has been chronicling the history of Black life in Buffalo for over 40 years. Host Jay Moran will hear from Ann Ryan of Read To Succeed Buffalo, who offers a look at some of the stark realities of how many children are falling behind in reading skills and what that could mean for their lives and provide a glimpse at some successful solutions. (About 59 minutes)