

Article 27: Lack of Education and Education Support Programs

Lack of education is not an isolated event but a cumulative disadvantage unfolding over an individual's entire life. Early life educational disparities can have lasting, negative impacts on health, socioeconomic status, and overall well-being across the lifespan (Harms & Garrett-Ruffin, 2023; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Pierce & Cleary, 2024). Therefore, **education support programs** are critical interventions designed to disrupt these negative trajectories and mitigate the transmission of inequality across generations. These programs work by providing crucial resources at strategically timed "turning points" to place individuals on a more positive and equitable life path (Bergin et al., 2024; Jenner et al., 2022; Shortlidge et al., 2024).

Causes and Scope of Lack of Education in the United States

Lack of education in the United States is largely a consequence of systemic inequality and resource disparities across different communities. The scope of this issue is vast, affecting students' academic performance and long-term economic prospects. Key causes include disparities in school funding, which relies heavily on local property taxes, and a lack of qualified teachers in high-poverty areas. These foundational issues contribute to "achievement gaps" that disproportionately impact students from low-income and marginalized backgrounds (Harms & Garrett-Ruffin, 2023; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Pierce & Cleary, 2024).

For instance, a study looked at the relationship between poverty-related chronic stress and reduced educational outcomes in the United States, explaining how stress originating in low-income environments contributes to widespread lack of education. Drawing on existing neuroscience, psychology, and education research, the authors found that economic hardship exposes children to recurring stressors—such as unstable housing, food insecurity, noise, and limited access to enriching activities—which weaken cognitive systems needed for learning. These stress-related issues affect memory, attention, emotional regulation, and motivation, making everyday school tasks far more difficult. Following that lead, children's educational progress is hindered over time because poverty-related stressors are concentrated in low-income communities and consistently obstruct their ability to learn. Furthermore, the review emphasizes that these challenges are not caused by students' abilities but by structural inequality that shapes early environments. As stress disrupts learning capacities, academic gaps widen, reinforcing long-term disparities in educational attainment. The authors argued that reducing educational gaps requires lowering poverty-related stress and improving the environments in which children grow. Hence, they concluded that lack of education in the United States should be addressed by mitigating the social conditions that undermine children's ability to learn in the first place (Harms & Garrett-Ruffin, 2023).

Another study looked at the relationship between teacher shortages and the limited educational opportunities available to students in many parts of the United States, showing how unstable staffing contributed to lack of education. The study drew on nationally representative data from the Schools and Staffing Survey, the National Teacher Principal Survey, and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey. These surveys were administered by the National Center for Education Statistics using extensive questionnaires filled out by teachers and school leaders. The findings revealed that rural schools experienced more severe and persistent staffing shortages than urban or suburban schools, even as rural enrollment declined. High turnover emerged as the central driver of these shortages, as teachers

frequently left rural positions due to restricted professional autonomy, challenging working conditions, or limited involvement in school decision-making. These conditions led to understaffed classrooms and greater reliance on inexperienced or uncertified teachers, which reduced instructional quality. The shortages were most acute in high-poverty rural communities, where students already faced broader socioeconomic barriers. As shortages deepened, educational inequities widened, leaving many rural children with fewer learning opportunities and reduced access to stable, well-supported teachers. The researchers concluded that strengthening education in certain areas requires improving working conditions and leadership practices to increase teacher retention, not just recruitment of teachers (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

On a related note, a study looked at the relationship between disparities in access to computers/the Internet and unequal educational opportunities for school-age children in the United States. Particularly, the study assessed how gaps in access to educational technology worsened learning disadvantages, often resulting in lack of education. The study relied on the November 2019 CPS Computer and Internet Use Survey—a nationally representative poll conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that included 47,000 households and more than 23,000 children aged 3–18. The survey asked families about computer and Internet use at home and school, allowing researchers to identify access disparities by child demographics, household socioeconomic status, and available technology resources. The findings showed substantial gaps: over a quarter of school-age children did not use the Internet at school or home, and many more used it in only one setting. Disparities in this context were linked to family income, adult technology use, and the availability of computing devices, leaving children in lower-income households with inconsistent or limited access. Furthermore, unequal educational opportunities emerged across communities, as students without reliable computer and Internet access could not fully engage in homework, research, or modern learning tasks. The study highlighted how lack of early and reliable access to technology hindered students’ ability to succeed academically, especially for disadvantaged children. The researchers argued that the system can help mitigate these gaps by properly equipping schools and households with sufficient digital resources and dependable connectivity so that all students can fully participate in the learning process (Pierce & Cleary, 2024).

Effectiveness and Impact of Education Support Programs

Education support programs have proved effective in mitigating educational achievement gaps and providing essential resources to underserved populations in this context. These programs enhance academic outcomes and improve graduation rates for at-risk students by offering targeted tutoring, mentorship, and college preparation initiatives. Therefore, they often help close skill deficits and increase access to higher education opportunities, which leads to improved socioeconomic mobility. Ultimately, these targeted interventions provide a critical counterbalance to the systemic issues that cause educational inequality in the United States (Bergin et al., 2024; Jenner et al., 2022; Shortlidge et al., 2024).

For instance, a study looked at the impact of a cross-age peer mentoring program on ninth-grade students in the United States. Particularly, the researchers examined whether structured peer support could help address challenges associated with academic disengagement. The study used a randomized controlled trial with about 1,351 ninth-grade students across eight North Carolina high schools. Following that lead, students were assigned either to the Peer Group Connection High School (PGC-

HS) mentoring program or to a control group. Mentors were older peers in grades 11 and 12 who met weekly with ninth graders to build supportive relationships and strengthen school connection through structured activities. Data were collected through baseline surveys at the start of ninth grade and follow-up surveys at the end of the spring semester, along with administrative records on disciplinary outcomes and GPA. Findings showed that students participating in the program experienced fewer suspensions and disciplinary referrals. They also reported higher levels of school engagement and expectations for postsecondary education. Although academic outcomes such as overall GPA and credits earned did not change significantly in the intent-to-treat analysis, students who attended mentoring sessions regularly had higher GPAs and stronger decision-making skills. These results indicated that peer mentoring reduced behavioral barriers and strengthened students' sense of belonging in school. The researchers concluded that structured cross-age mentoring showed promise as a strategy for improving engagement and reducing risks of disengagement or dropout when participation was consistent. These positive effects suggest that education support programs can help counter early patterns of disengagement that contribute to lack of education among at-risk students (Jenner et al., 2022).

Similarly, another study looked at the impact of STEM Intervention programs on student persistence, identity, and sense of belonging at a large public university in the United States. More specifically, the researchers aimed to understand whether structured support could help students remain in STEM fields. STEM Intervention programs are designed to address frequent attrition in STEM majors by providing intentional academic and social support to students. With that in mind, the researchers used a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and focus groups, to compare students supported by STEM Intervention programs with those who did not participate. Survey measures included sense of belonging, scientific self-efficacy, scientific community values, scientific identity, and involvement in STEM-related activities. Additionally, enrollment status was tracked about two and a half years after the survey. Students who engaged in the programs reported significantly higher science identity and sense of belonging than unsupported peers, and they participated more in STEM activities. Differences on these measures were also related to race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and age. Students involved in STEM Intervention programs had higher odds of persisting in STEM majors than students without such support. Focus group data added depth to the quantitative results by revealing how such programs shaped students' experiences and perceptions of support. The researchers concluded that involvement in STEM Intervention programs aligned with theoretical models of student persistence, and they offered meaningful educational support for students at risk of leaving STEM fields. Particularly, these programs helped address barriers that contribute to lack of education in STEM for underrepresented and vulnerable student groups (Shortlidge et al., 2024).

Lastly, a study assessed the impact of the *Leader in Me (LiM)* social-emotional learning program on teachers and students in U.S. elementary schools. Particularly, the researchers aimed to determine whether structured social-emotional learning support could strengthen school climate and improve student outcomes. With this purpose in mind, they compared 117 schools participating in the program to 348 non-participant schools. Data was collected from teacher and student reports, observations, and matched school records on discipline and achievement. Teachers in the program-participant schools reported better prosocial behavior, stronger relationships, and more positive classroom environments. Additionally, students in the program were described as more confident and motivated, and they showed fewer behavioral problems. Participating schools also demonstrated higher math and English language arts scores and fewer discipline incidents than comparison schools. These improvements

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reflected the program's ability to support both academic and social-emotional development. Hence, the researchers concluded that programs like *Leader in Me* can help strengthen engagement and reduce barriers linked to lack of education, especially in schools seeking supportive structures for students (Bergin et al., 2024).

References

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