



ENRICHING EDUCATION

Democracy depends on education. Along with its radical, democratic principles of government of, by and for the people, the United States of America in the late 18th century pioneered the concept of public education. One hundred years later, the movement toward free common schools supported by taxation was beginning to take hold. By the mid 20th century, the Supreme Court of the United States affirmed that education was essential in a democratic society.

Today's students, educators, parents, and business leaders know the importance of education. Workforce development, economic growth, capital investment, and long-term sustainability all depend on an educated population. Good education makes for good citizens and good communities.

Many also know the signs of struggling schools. Overcrowding, underfunding, declining enrollment, school consolidations, faculty cutbacks, language barriers, student violence, student poverty, and absentee parents are common. Community impacts may be less obvious, but they are profound: difficulty attracting employers, high crime rates, culture voids, and worst of all, immeasurable losses in human potential.

Fortunately, everyone can play a role in strengthening education, enriching lives, and building a stronger community.

"It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education."

Chief Justice Earl Warren
Brown v. Board of Education
1954

Michigan
community foundationsSM

For **good**. For **ever**.SM

FAST FACTS ON EDUCATION

High school dropouts In the wealthiest country in the world, only about 70 percent of public high school seniors graduate.¹

Economic impact In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education found that Americans who dropped out of high school earned about 25 percent less than those earning high school diplomas. During their lifetime, college graduates make an average of \$900,000 more than high school graduates.²

Space and supplies Out of K-12 teachers who use textbooks in the classroom, one in six reports that he or she does not have enough books for every child in class.³ A quarter of public school facilities are below adequate condition. Nearly 10 percent have a quarter more students enrolled than building capacity permits.⁴

Literacy Students are struggling to make the grade, especially when it comes to reading. Results of the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) placed 25 percent of eighth-graders and 26 percent of 12th-graders at a “below basic” reading level. Parents’ ability to read to their children and otherwise participate in their education is severely reduced by illiteracy. In 1990, more than 20 percent of adults in the U.S. were at the lowest level of literacy.⁵

Subject-specific achievement The Program for International Student Assessment reports that, in mathematics literacy and problem solving, American 15-year-olds performed below the average student in 29 industrialized countries.⁶

College readiness SAT scores are widely used to assess student preparedness for college. For the 1999-2000 school year, the national average score was 1019, with a perfect score being 1600. Among 26 communities surveyed in the U.S., students in communities with an average household income of over \$45,000 in 1999 scored an average of 1043 on the SAT. Communities with an average income under \$35,000 had an average score of 863. Lower SAT scores are also strongly correlated with households headed by single parents, and communities with great eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches.⁷

Student poverty Sixteen percent of children in the United States live in poverty.⁸ Many attend poor schools, which are more likely to have an unstable, under-qualified teaching staff, including teachers who are uncertified or teaching a subject outside of their own field of study.⁹ According to a survey of 26 U.S. communities, there is a strong correlation between regions with the greatest eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches and low student test scores in third-grade reading and math—standard benchmarks for a child’s future academic performance.¹⁰

Barriers Students are facing significant barriers in the classroom. More than 2.1 million public school students in the United States have limited English proficiency.¹¹ Crime—and the fear of crime—presents another obstacle to learning. In 2001, about two million nonfatal crimes made victims of students aged 12 to 18 years.¹² Students also face physical barriers. During the 1988-1989 school year, 112 students out of 1,000 were enrolled in special education. Ten years later, the ratio was 130 to 1,000.¹³ Racial segregation is a significant barrier, with large numbers of students of color living in markedly under-served areas. On the average, schools in the United States are considered highly segregated, according to analysts.¹⁴

Across the country, caring individuals and organizations have found new ways to boost literacy, improve academic achievement, and increase access to higher education. Educational needs remain great—but with these needs come opportunities to lift up future generations.

¹Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. “Education Working Paper: Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States,” 2003. ²Massinga, R. and P. Pecora, 2004, “Providing Better Opportunities for Older Children in the Child Welfare System,” *The Future of Children*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2004. ³National Education Association and Association of American Publishers 2002. ⁴U.S. Department of Education, 2000. ⁵“Listening and Learning,” John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2004. ⁶National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2003. ⁷“Listening and Learning,” John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2004. ⁸*ibid.* ⁹Orfield, Gary and Chungmei Lee. “Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality,” Harvard University, 2005. ¹⁰“Listening and Learning,” John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2004. ¹¹U.S. Department of Education, 2003. ¹²*ibid.* ¹³U.S. Department of Education, 2002. ¹⁴“Listening and Learning,” John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2004.