

Addressing the Correlation Between Income, Race, and Student Achievement

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My name is Addie Lentzner, and I am VSBA's summer intern. I recently graduated from Arlington Memorial High School and am attending Middlebury College in the fall. I founded the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network and the End Homelessness Vermont Coalition, and I'm very passionate about anti-racism and equity work. This kind of work is so important to me because I feel that education is the key to changing the future and building a better society. By creating equitable schools where all students can succeed, we are creating a better world for ourselves. I have been so thrilled to work with the VSBA this summer and I'm excited to share some of my learning with you now!



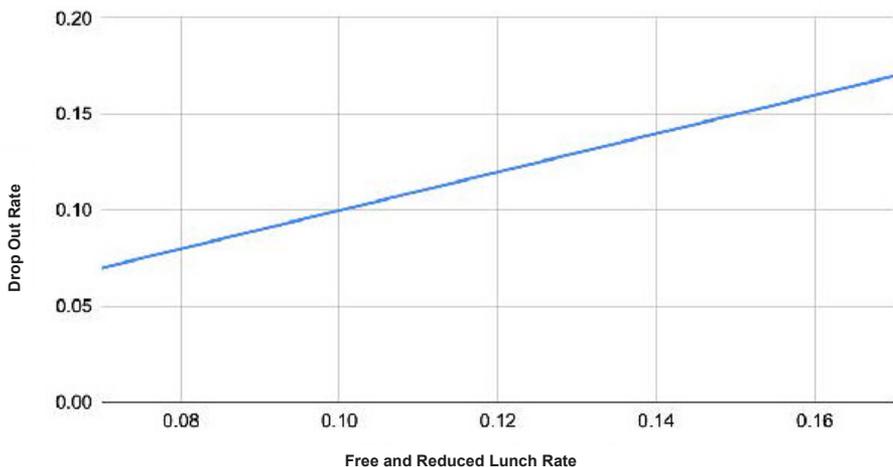
Imagine being a student with no parental support trying to learn in a hostile home environment while faced with lack of food and unstable shelter. Imagine being a student of color or with a disability who has been suspended numerous times in school because of bias and prejudices, now facing continued discrimination by teachers and administrators. Before the pandemic, students of color, students with disabilities,

and low-income students especially faced inequities. During COVID-19, thousands of students like these were thrust into online schooling, exacerbating the existing inequalities. Now, as we move out of the pandemic, it is time for a paradigm shift. It is time to support the most vulnerable students and eradicate existing inequities. It's time to change education so that all students have what they need and the effect of catastrophe, such as a pandemic, is minimized.

It's tempting to think of Vermont as a progressive haven from America's inequities. However, we have the same problems as the country as a whole, and they are just as urgent here as anywhere else. Take, for example, the drop-out rates and their correlation with low-income students. In one district, the drop-out rate of 30% correlates with a free and reduced lunch rate of 45.61%, while another district with a 10% drop-out rate has a 23.71% free and reduced lunch rate (source: Vermont Education Dashboard). The higher the drop-out rate, the higher the proportion of free and reduced lunch rate. This means that low income students are more likely to drop-

District	Drop Out Rate	Free & Reduced Lunch Rate
School District 1	30%	45.61%
School District 2	10%	23.71%
School District 3	7%	20.49%
School District 4	17%	57.32%
School District 5	12%	28.22%

Drop Out Rate and Free and Reduced Lunch Data



We can also look at the number of Black students and free and reduced lunch students in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. In AP classes, there tend to be only 1-2 Black students at the most, while there are around 5 free and reduced lunch students. Compared with White students and students who are not eligible for Free and Reduced lunch, this is a huge disparity.

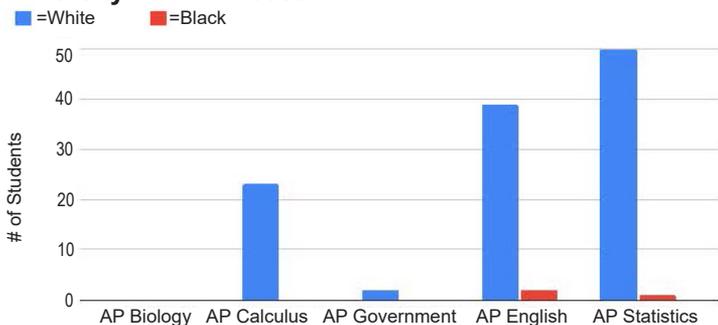
Class	Black Students	Free & Reduced Lunch Students
AP Bio	0	0
AP Calc	0	2
AP Gov	0	0
AP Eng	2	5
AP Stats	1	7

All numbers from 1 district.

Class	White Students	Free & Reduced Lunch Students
AP Bio	0	9
AP Calc	23	23
AP Gov	2	2
AP Eng	36	39
AP Stats	44	50

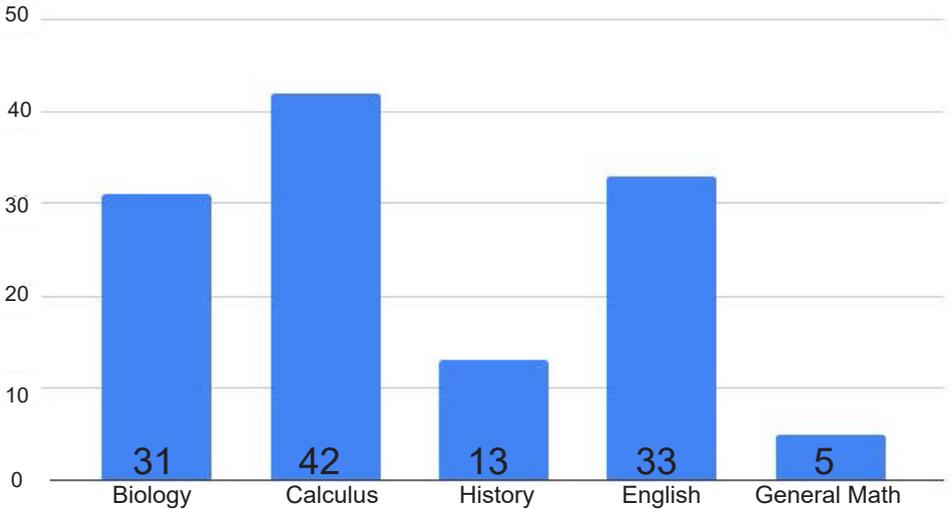
All numbers from 1 district.

Diversity in AP Classes



While there aren't many Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students in Vermont schools to begin with, it turned out that there was still a disparity in the districts that do have more diversity. Above is one such district. Below is the number of BIPOC students in "General" classes to juxtapose with the "AP" classes to show how there are many BIPOC students.

BIPOC Students in General Classes



As the great equalizer, public schools should be leveling the playing field for students and ensuring everyone has equitable access to a bright future. However, that's not the experience of every student right now. We have a lot of work to do to ensure that Vermont has an equitable school environment. Luckily, there's a lot we can do to change the status quo. Below are some factors to consider as part of your local board's policy development.

- Data on racial/socioeconomic/disability demographics in leadership and gifted programs
- Gifted programs in every school
- Data on racial/socioeconomic demographics on suspensions/expulsions
⇒ If disparities are found, adopt or amend policies to address them
- Bias training for all staff
- Extra supports (homework clubs or tutors/mentors) for all students
- High School Completion Plan
- Implementation of Act 77; individualized programs
⇒ School staff work one on one with students to develop their interests and find what they are passionate in, and then design curriculum around it for them
- Diversity of Staff (recruitment & retention)

- Accessibility and Support for English Learners
- Representation of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in literature and curriculum
- Mental Health Supports
- Community schools, as defined in [Act 67](#) (2021), address equitable access to high-quality education through community schools. Act 67 provided funding for the coordination of community schools programs, which includes all five of the following:
 1. Integrated student supports that address out-of-school barriers to learning and may include access to medical, dental, vision care, and mental health services or counselors to assist with housing, transportation, nutrition, immigration, or criminal justice issues;
 2. Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities (before-school, afterschool, weekend, summer programs, and during the school day) that enhance and are consistent with the school's curriculum;
 3. Active family and community engagement, bringing students' families and the community into the school as partners who represent a diversity of income, race, gender, newcomer status, language, and ability. Adults may access school facilities for educational opportunities, such as evidence-based literacy instruction and/or classes on English as a second language, green card or citizenship preparation, computer skills, art, financial literacy, career counseling, job skills training, services for substance misuse, and other programs;
 4. Collaborative leadership and practices building a culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility; and
 5. Safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments.

Now is the time to foster equity in our schools, and that change starts with you! The VSBA has resources for you and your board; visit the VSBA Educational Equity webpage for more information.

In November, the VSBA staff will join a cohort of education leaders in an initiative that will result in greater knowledge and resources to further promote educational equity in Vermont. As we develop these resources, we are collecting stories, feedback, and quotes from school board members about their experiences with educational equity in their own communities. Please take a moment to complete this brief questionnaire (<https://tinyurl.com/vsbaequity>). Your feedback is important to us and to your peers!

As you think about ways to change education so that all students have what they need, we encourage you to ask yourself: What will I do to promote educational equity using my position as a school board Member?