The Effects of Poverty on the Quality of Education Received by Louisiana Students

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The Effects of Poverty on the Quality of Education Received by Louisiana Students

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
The Effects of Poverty on the Quality of Education Received by Louisiana Students

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Abstract

How does poverty affect the quality of education that children in Louisiana receive? Several studies have explored the various components of living in poverty and how these factors can contribute to the quality of education to which students living in these conditions have access. This paper will attempt to bridge the connection between the various consequences of low socioeconomic status and the poorer quality of education that students in Louisiana receive relative to many other parts of the country. This study finds that, though there are some factors that arise due to specific conditions in Louisiana, most of the factors that connect living in poverty to a poorer education are present in all states. However, it is apparent that these factors are more prevalent in Louisiana, so their effects are more easily observed. This study further finds that there are definitive connections between socioeconomic status and the quality of education that students are able to obtain.
Introduction: The State of Louisiana

This paper will examine the ways in which the conditions that children living in poverty in Louisiana face which may affect the quality of the instruction that they receive to argue that there is a definitive negative effect on the education that these students are able to obtain. There are a wide variety of factors that contribute to the quality of education to which a student has access to, so this paper will furnish an opportunity to examine these factors and compare them to the consequences that children face when growing up in a low socioeconomic household, in order to determine if there is commonality prevalent between the two. Though there has been research done on the effects of impoverishment on education, there have been very few studies that have focused on Louisiana specifically. Louisiana has had the unfortunate honor of being frequently ranked as one of the poorest states in the nation for educational attainment, as well as one with the highest numbers of people living in poverty. Indeed, in 2021, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Louisiana 48th in the nation for education and determined that the poverty rate was 19%—6.7% higher than the national average. Analyzing the direct consequences of these two factors in tandem provides the opportunity to determine whether the two have any effect on each other.

Though not all schools in Louisiana are performing poorly, there are a good number of schools that are. One commonality shared by many of the schools that are performing poorly is that they are public schools. In the state of Louisiana, the percentage of students attending private schools versus those in public institutions is significantly higher than it is in most states. According to the *Digest of Education Statistics* (2013), only the District of Columbia and Wisconsin have higher percentages of students in attending private schools. This is a fairly exceptional statistic when one considers the average annual cost of private school in the state of Louisiana, which is $6,550 according to *Education Data Incentive*. Many of the other top performing schools in the state of Louisiana, as revealed by data gathered from *Louisiana Believes* (2019), are magnet schools which, while free to attend, enroll students on a lottery-based application, meaning not all students will be accepted into these schools and no single student is guaranteed acceptance.

In 2019, *The Louisiana Budget Project’s* (LBP) annual census listed Louisiana as 2nd in the nation for both the highest poverty rate and the highest child poverty rate. Additionally, the same census ranks Louisiana 4th lowest in income and 4th highest in income inequality. This study concluded that 28.6% of children in Louisiana are living in poverty, and 13.2% of children of
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Louisiana’s children are living in deep poverty, which means that they live below half the federal poverty line.

There are several issues that people living in poverty face which also have a direct impact on a child’s education. Among the most immediately threatening issues are factors such as food and housing insecurity, affordability of healthcare, and access to power and running water. In the 2019 LBP census, 28% of families reported that their children were not eating enough because they could not afford food. 26% of families reported that they had children who were living in households that were either unable to pay their rent on time or deferred making payments. If these basic necessities—food and shelter—are not being provided for children, issues such as education are likely going to fall to the wayside.

A secondary issue that arises due to poverty, and one which is ever-growing in its impact on students, is accessibility to internet connections at home. As education becomes increasingly more digital, home internet access at home becomes an ever-more-crucial component to a child’s success in school. For many families, however, this is not an affordable expense. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in Louisiana study (2020) found that 1 in 4 students lacked internet at home, and that over 40% of Louisiana’s students did not have access to high-speed internet. Not only have these students had to confront the issue of a national pandemic, which has rendered their education completely virtual on more than one occasion, but they must also find a way to complete an education that has largely moved online when they do not have access to this resource in their homes. Not only will grades suffer for students’ inability to complete assignments at home, but many students may find themselves without any access whatsoever to study materials or aid due to a lack of a reliable internet connection.

There are also many other matters that are impacted by poverty which make it more difficult for children to receive a quality education. Lack of transportation is a major issue for children living in poverty, particularly in Louisiana where many schools do not provide transportation for students who are living within a certain distance of their school. The East Baton Rouge Parish Schools website states that students who live within a mile of their school must find their own means of transportation. Though this may seem like a minor issue for many, not all schools have safe means for their students to access campus on foot or bicycle. If parents are unable to drive their students to school due to scheduling conflicts with work or issues with transportation (such as increasingly-higher gas prices or the lack of a vehicle), students may struggle to attend
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school every day simply because they cannot make it onto the campus. Another impediment to the receipt of a quality education faced by families living in poverty is access to is childcare. Childcare Aware (2015) found that childcare in Louisiana costs $5,747 a year on average. For families where childcare is a luxury they simply cannot afford, some of the childcare responsibilities may fall to the older children in a given family, which can have a negative “domino” effect on the homework and study time of both younger and older children. Additionally, this can leave children in such situations with fewer opportunities to join extracurricular activities which could otherwise boost their performance in school and ultimately assist them in accessing higher education.

This paper will look at these overlapping factors between poverty and education by reviewing existing literature on both of these topics. The paper will then examine the ways that poverty and education intersect. The Methods and Analysis section will provide an in-depth study of the varying factors that can lead to a student receiving a quality education and determine how poverty can prevent students in Louisiana from attaining these factors. Lastly, the conclusion of this paper will utilize these findings in order to determine what effect poverty has on the quality of education to which children in Louisiana have access to.
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**Literature Review: The Facets of Poverty**

Poverty looks different for families of different sizes and in different states. In 2019, *The Louisiana Budget Project* (LBP) determined that the median income poverty threshold for a family of two was $16,910, for a family of three was $21,330, and for a family of four was $25,750. For a family of four living in Louisiana in 2019, the average cost of housing was $10,261, and estimated food costs was $8,822 (Martin, 2019). Additionally, the *American Public Transportation Association* estimates that Americans spend 16 cents of every dollar earned on transportation, and that 93% of that spending is towards a privately owned car. The LBP estimated that there were 285,000 children in Louisiana that lived in poverty as of 2019. Additionally, 140,000 of those children were living in deep poverty—meaning their family’s income was less than half of the poverty threshold. When considering these numbers, it becomes all the more apparent that there is little in the state’s budget to earmark for things such as a quality education.

Poverty is an issue that affects different groups more severely than others. In Louisiana, the LBP reported that 29.4% of Black Louisianans and 26.1% of Hispanic Louisianans were living in poverty, whereas only 13.4% of White Louisianans were. Poverty also disproportionately affects children—children are more likely to be impoverished in the state of Louisiana than men are, with 27% of the state’s children living in poverty. In America as a whole, “81.3% of children living in census tracts with poverty rates greater than 50% are children of color” (Bruner, 2017).

Poverty also has an impact on the physical health of a person. “Higher rates of mortality, morbidity, and disability are known to be associated with lower income, less education, lower occupational level, racial or ethnic minority status, and other social class variables” (Montgomery, Keily, and Pappas, 1996). People who have lived in poverty for an extended period of time and/or who have suffered from the many side-effects of living in poverty tend to have poorer health than those who have not experienced poverty. Many physical illnesses that people experience due to impoverishment tend to be long-term diseases that require frequent visits to medical care providers in order for the person to remain healthy. As healthcare tends to be a major expense in the United States of America, this is an issue that will not only create additional struggles for people living in poverty, but can also further the poverty in which someone is living. More than one in every three adults living in the U.S. are living with medical debt (Dore, 2021).

One of the driving factors making poverty such a major issue is the fact that it tends to have a ripple effect on subsequent generations. “Social and economic deprivation during childhood and
adolescence can have a lasting effect on individuals, making it difficult for children who grow up in low-income families to escape poverty when they become adults. Because the negative effects of deprivation on human development tend to cumulate, individuals with greater exposure to poverty during childhood are likely to have more difficulty escaping poverty as adults” (Wagmiller and Adelman, 2009). Many children who are born into poverty will struggle to ever escape as they mature. The longer a child spends living in poverty, the more likely it is that they will remain in poverty for an extended period of time during their adult life (Wagmiller and Adelman, 2009). Those individuals are then more likely to see this cycle of poverty continue in the lives of their own children.

Growing up in poverty also affects the likelihood that an individual will complete school, which can play a major role in the types of career opportunities that will be available to them later in life. According to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), “Persistently poor children are 13 percent less likely to complete high school and 43 percent less likely to complete college than those who are poor but not persistently poor as children” (Ratcliffe, 2015). While drop-out rates are higher across the board for children who grow up in poverty, those who are more frequently living in impoverished households are less likely to graduate from high school or college than those who do not live in impoverished conditions as chronically. Additionally, Study International (2018) reports that research by the U.S. Education Department National Center for Education Statistics determined that students with one or more parent who attended college are not only more likely to make the decision to go to college, but are less likely to drop out than students whose parents did not complete college.
Theory: The Quality of Education for Those Living in Poverty

Though a good deal of research exists concerning both poverty and education, this paper will attempt to connect the many common threads between the two and discover how poverty specifically affects the quality of education received.

There are many areas in which a child must feel secure in order to be a successful student. Success for students is not defined solely scoring well in both the gradebook and on standardized tests, though this is typically the easiest route taken when examining student achievement. In order for a child’s education to have fully been considered a success, however, they also need to have completed their education and walked away from it knowing all of the skills that they were supposed to have been taught. This means that they must be proficient in all areas of study.

As stated in the Introduction, one of the areas in which students must be secure before they are able to accomplish what they need to in school is the receipt of basic necessities. The American Psychological Association found that “students who were food insecure experienced significantly higher rates of depression, loneliness and anxiety...[t]hey also had lower self-esteem and lower grade-point averages”; in other words, food insecurity, which many children in Louisiana and across the nation struggle with, has a direct negative impact not only on their education, but on their day-to-day lives. Additionally, children whose families are struggling with housing, keeping running water or power available, or accessing and paying for healthcare frequently face similar issues as those who are food insecure, particularly when these issues happen in-tandem with each other. Additionally, issues such as access to transportation and childcare can impact the quality of education a child receives.

Mental health is directly negatively impacted by living in poverty. “Living in a poor or low-income household has been linked to poor health and increased risk for mental health problems in both children and adults that can persist across the life span” (Hodgkinson, Godoy, Beers, and Lewin, 2017). When families are living in poverty, the children within those families are regularly required to “grow up” more quickly than their peers. This can be due to a number of reasons, from needing to help out more around the house to simply experiencing all of the stress that arises in a household that is struggling to make ends meet. Children who battle with mental health problems also tend to struggle to perform well in school. Such performance issues can range from having lower grade-point-averages than their peers to being more likely to drop out of school.
altogether. Mental health issues also tend to be genetic as well, so the higher prevalence of mental health issues in lower income families tends to be a problem which is generationally layered.

As a nation, the United States of America does not boast the public transportation system that many other countries have. The *American Public Transportation Association* reports that 45% of Americans are without access to public transportation. Of all public transportation riders in the country, only 7% are students. For families in rural areas, access to public transportation may consist solely of the school bus that comes at a set time each morning and drops students off again in the afternoon. If students miss the bus for any reason, there is a chance that they will simply be unable to attend school that day, should their parents be unable to provide the transportation necessary to get them on campus. Even the need to ride a bus in the mornings can have a negative impact on a child’s education. The average school start time in Louisiana is 7:40 am, which means that some students need to be ready to get on the bus by 5:45 am (Cordell). Given that school-aged children are generally considered to require more sleep than adults do, the need to be up at such an early hour can make it more difficult for students to be successful and remain on task throughout the school day.

There is more that goes into a child’s education than simply being able to attend and perform in school, even if attendance and performance are the baselines for any student’s success. Though extracurricular activities may seem like a very minor consideration when looking at student success, they can be hugely beneficial to a child’s education and future prospects. *The National Center for Education Statistics* (1995) found that “Extracurricular activities provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply academic skills in a real-world context, and are thus considered part of a well-rounded education”. Students who participate in extracurriculars are more likely to remain in school. Additionally, most such activities that are offered to students require that they keep their both grades and attendance up in order to remain involved in them. This offers incentives for students to maintain their school performance and ensure that they attend school whenever they can. Extracurriculars also have the added benefit of helping students continue their education. Not only do students who are considered “well-rounded” have a greater chance of being accepted into higher-education establishments, but students also tend to have better opportunities to earn scholarships that can open previously-unattainable doors to them.
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Unfortunately, there are many factors that limit an impoverished student’s ability to get involved in extracurricular activities. Transportation once again becomes an issue when considering a child’s participation in activities beyond the classroom, as they must have a means of getting home from any meetings or practices that they may be required to attend. Additionally, there is the issue of expenses when considering extracurriculars. Even if a family can afford the basic fee required for their child to join a particular team or group, any additional charge for items such as uniforms, supplies, competition fees, travel, and even snacks can make participation unattainable. If parents are relying on a child to provide childcare for other, younger family members, or if parents are locked into a tight schedule for getting their children to whoever may care for them while they (the parent(s)) are at work, students will find themselves facing yet another barrier that can keep them from being able to join in such activities.

There is also the reality of lower-income schools simply having fewer extracurricular activities to offer their students. Lower socioeconomic status families report that there are fewer opportunities for their children to get involved outside of school in their communities (Fisher and Anderson, 2019). This comes down in large part to budget cuts across the nation, and it tends to hit home in areas with lower-income families and schools than anywhere else.

Costs associated with higher education must also be taken into account when considering how poverty will affect the education that children receive. One of the major issues with higher education is that many families are unable to afford to send their children to college. 95% of colleges in the nation are unattainable to lower-income families due to the cost of tuition (DeRuy, 2017). Additionally, for families that are either dependent on their older children to provide childcare for their younger children or to provide an additional source of income, sending those children off to college tends to impair their continued ability to assist their families in such ways. It is also more difficult for students who grew up in poverty to get into higher education programs, as well as to graduate from them. The Atlantic (2012) found that only about 50% of low-income students enroll in college after graduating from high school, and, of those students, only about 9% went on to graduate from a university. This is a major difference from the approximately 80% of high-income students that enrolled in college, with more than half of those students graduating from college.

Lastly there is, as there always seems to be when considering the manifold effects of poverty, the issue of perpetuation. Children are hugely benefitted in their education by having
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someone at home who is able to support them in their studies. That being said, poverty is very frequently the source of a vicious cycle within a given family, with the amount of time that a person spends living in poverty directly correlating to their decreased ability to haul themselves out of poverty. “Increased time spent in poverty is associated with lower chances an individual will exit poverty, which ranges from 56% after one year poor to 13% for those in poverty for 7 or more years” (Stevens), meaning that many children who are born into an impoverished family will remain in poverty for most of their lives. This also means that a lot of the same students whose educations suffered due to their socio-economic statuses are now raising their own children in a similar situation to that in which they grew up in. It becomes harder for parents to support their children’s educations when they themselves received an education that was not of a particularly high quality or advanced level. This means that, through no fault of either the parent or the child, availability of assistance at home will also negatively affect the education of many impoverished children.

When students are assigned homework that they must do independently, or are required to study for their exams outside of schools, it quickly becomes apparent how having a parent who did not receive a quality education themselves or was unable to finish school can negatively affect their children’s education. In these situations, socio-economic status again becomes an issue in trying to find someone to help such students with their studies, as tutoring requires both the money to pay for such a service and the means/time to get the students to a tutor. Additionally, many families who are impoverished have at least one parent who works more than one job. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2018 7.8% of employed Americans held multiple jobs. Parents who work more than one job are home less frequently, which means that they are often unavailable to assist their children with schoolwork or to ensure that their children are getting adequate nutrition and rest.

Children who grow up in poverty are less likely to receive a quality education than their peers for a wide variety of reasons. This is an issue that is apparent not only a national scale, but also a global one as well. As poverty is also a deeply repetitive one, it is also an issue that can be both traced back generationally and predicted in the future. To put it simply, children who are born into poverty will automatically find themselves at a disadvantage in their education and are far more likely to remain in poverty.
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Methods and Analysis: The Overlap Between Poverty and Education in Louisiana

This paper theorizes that there will be significant data showing that the overlap between poverty and the quality of education in Louisiana stems from issues that are specific to Louisiana. Though there is a considerable amount of global data indicating an overlap between these two areas, Louisiana itself has such a high incidence of impoverished residents and does so poorly in education that this study aims to discover the state-specific causes to explain the Louisiana data.

According to the World Population Review (2022), 16% of adults in Louisiana have a low literacy rate; the "Nation's Report Card," or the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2019) finds that fourth and eighth grade students in the state are considered to be behind their peers nationally in math, reading, social studies, and science, despite an upward trend in scores in mathematics for eighth grade students. This does not suggest that students in Louisiana are receiving a successful education, by whatever metric that term is defined.

There is also a pervasive issue in Louisiana concerning both the type and quality of education that is available. In all of the research covered by this paper, the issue surrounding the disparity in educational quality presented by magnet, public, and private schools seems to be the only one that is, if not completely unique to Louisiana, not a problem that is particularly widespread across the nation. Though having access to magnet schools is a wonderful opportunity for impoverished children, the fact remains that magnet programs are one of very few routes available for gaining access to a high-quality education. Further, acceptance to such schools in the state is lottery-based, meaning that not all students who so desire will be given the opportunity to attend such schools. In many other states, public schools are by far the most prevalent type of program available, meaning that most students attend these schools. In such states, public schools tend to provide a quality education, with many extracurricular opportunities for their students, simply because they are the only type of school available. The Digest of Education Statistics indicates that in Louisiana, 16.11% of students attend private schools, whereas only 9.34% of students in the neighboring state of Mississippi and 6.13% of students in Texas attend private schools.

In the data provided by Louisiana Believes in 2019 for schools in need of intervention due to their testing scores, only a very small percentage of the schools listed are not public ones. This indicates that the majority of schools that are struggling in Louisiana are public schools. Given this information, and taking the cost of private school in Louisiana into consideration, attending a
magnet school becomes a necessity for impoverished families who have any hope of their children receiving a high-quality education. However, even students from lower-income families who are selected to attend a magnet school are not completely immune from perils that can intercede and impair their children from succeeding in a magnet program. There are many factors caused by poverty that can make it extremely difficult for students to succeed in school. When students attend a magnet school, they are held to certain standards in order to keep their magnet status. Should their grades fall below whatever their contract requires, they will be removed from the magnet program. Additionally, behavioral issues may lead to a loss of magnet status for a child, and children who are struggling at home tend to experience more of these sorts of issues than students from more financially-stable homes may.

The Rapides Parish Health Profile (p. 112) estimates that 245,000 children in Louisiana have a diagnosable mental illness, and that 109,782 of those children were living with a severe mental illness. It also estimated that only about one-third of Louisianans living with a diagnosable mental illness are receiving treatment for it. When considering the huge impact that mental health can have not only on a person’s life but the lives with whom that person comes into contact, it is obvious that a number of children in Louisiana are negatively affected by these statistics. Not only can a child who is suffering with mental illness find themselves struggling in school, but children whose parents are struggling with their own mental health will find that this has oftentimes serious repercussions for their education as well. A stable home environment does not only mean that things such as food, water, and shelter are provided, but also that the mental and physical health of all persons living in the house are being addressed.

Healthcare is also incredibly expensive in the state of Louisiana. The Louisiana Budget Project (LBP, 2020) reported that 47% of Louisiana adults spend money out of pocket on healthcare. In 2018, Louisianans were spending an average of $6,623 per person on healthcare. For a family of four who is at the poverty threshold in Louisiana—$25,750 (LBP, 2019)—this constitutes a major expense. Healthcare is unfortunately a frequent victim of budgeting when an impoverished family is forced to make choices regarding basic needs such as food and shelter. Unless someone in the family is in need of regular medical treatment, healthcare tends to be an expense that arises randomly and unexpectedly and is all too often sacrificed in order to keep food on the table. This makes it all the more difficult to fit into a budget. When taking into consideration
that physical health is, a lot of the time, not something that can be left unattended, it is easy to understand how essential mental health care can fall to the wayside for a lot of families.

Extracurricular activities, for all that they can benefit a child, can also be immensely expensive. In Louisiana, having a child that is on an extracurricular team that travels costs a family about $2,292 annually (Giroir, 2020). Enrolling a child in a dance program in Louisiana can cost anywhere from $1,500 to $7,000 annually (Giroir, 2020). For many families, if extracurricular activities are not free, they are simply unattainable. Additionally, East Baton Rouge Schools alone estimate that 35,000 children ride the bus home each day. If this is a child’s only means for transportation after school, staying behind at the school or travelling elsewhere for an extracurricular activity can often be out of the question.

There is also the issue of college attendance rates in Louisiana. “Researchers found that 30.8 percent of Louisianians 25 to 34 years old held degrees. The national rate for that age group was 40.1 percent. The study also showed that 22.7 percent of the state's adults had started college but dropped out” (Pope, 2013). The LBP (2019) reports that only 2.4% of people living in Louisiana who have a college degree are living in poverty.

Drop-out rates further play a role in how likely someone in Louisiana is to live in poverty. 13.9% of Louisianans without a high school diploma are living below the poverty threshold. As stated in the theory section of this paper, there are many factors that stem from living in poverty that lead to higher high school and college drop-out rates as well as lower college enrollment. In Louisiana, 21.9% of children will drop out of high school, making it a lowly 47th in the nation for drop-out rates (Guidry, 2020).

The cyclical recurrence of poverty in a generation is, again, an issue that crystallizes in its clarity when examining the interconnection of poverty and educational quality in Louisiana. Children who are born into poverty in Louisiana are more likely to remain in poverty for a significant portion of their lives. Everything from at-home stability, access to reliable internet service, affordability of mental and physical health care, ability to participate in extracurricular activities, access to free public transportation, availability and affordability of childcare, and the likelihood of graduation will affect not only a child’s education, but the education of future generations of their family.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) was a study created to measure the level of abuse, neglect, and exposure to household disfunction that children experienced prior to turning 18
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(Zeanah et al., 2020). There are 10 different areas measured by ACEs; a child is considered to have had a more adverse childhood experience for each additional ACE factor that they have faced. *ACEs Too High* states that the higher ACE score an individual has, the more at risk they are for disease, social, and emotional problems. An ACE number of four or higher is considered a serious score. “Louisiana is ranked 3rd in the US for highest per capita number of children (birth to 17 years) who have experienced two or more ACEs…” (Zeanah et al., 2020) meaning there is an extremely high number of children in the state who have experienced fairly severe childhood trauma. ACE factors are very regularly linked to poverty, as poverty is a major factor that can contribute to the presence of ACE factors in a home.

This paper finds that the effects of poverty on education are not unique to Louisiana. Higher drop-out rates for students who grew up in poverty is something that can be seen not only across the nation, but globally. These consequences are merely more prevalent in a state where the quality of education for students who are living in lower socioeconomic status situations is already worse than that of their peers. When students are not only in poorer schools, with fewer available resources, lower testing scores, and fewer opportunities for extracurriculars, but also dropping out at far higher rates than their peers, it is hardly a stretch to claim that the education that impoverished students in Louisiana receive is of a lower quality than that of their peers who may be better off financially.
Conclusion: A Verdict on the Effects of Poverty on Education in Louisiana

This paper examines the effects of poverty on the quality of education to which students have access. The expectation was that there would be a large number of issues linking these two subjects that were specific to Louisiana, as Louisiana ranks so highly in the nation for poverty and so lowly for education.

The finding was that the issue of magnet, private, and public schools is one that is relatively unique to Louisiana. Additionally, most if not all of the issues linking poverty and education that are mentioned in this paper are more prevalent in Louisiana than they are in most other states. This makes them both easier to observe and to take note of when considering their impact on the state’s students. The statistics surrounding almost all of the issues that impoverished students face are both dramatic and concerning, and there are state-specific circumstances that further aggravate these problems for this subset of children.

These findings raise some interesting suggestions. Though Louisiana is not unique in the challenges that impoverished students face, there are more children in the state that find themselves struggling to receive a quality education than in most of the remainder of the country. This is due to a litany of reasons, some of which are more obvious than others. Though there are some issues that students face purely because of their status as children living in low socioeconomic conditions, there are others that could be mended from within the school-system that would allow for more opportunities for these students to be successful in school.

Increasing both funding for and access to extracurricular activities would provide a multitude of benefits for impoverished students. Similarly, accessibility to free public transportation for all students at varying times of the day so that students can be involved in these activities would boost student performance. Even providing affordable childcare outside of school or making meals available to students who cannot afford them—not just during school hours but outside of them—would benefit students who are living in poverty and increase their chances of breaking the poverty cycle and successfully completing their educational experience.

Another major improvement affording benefits to children living in poverty would be an increase availability in the availability of affordable healthcare—and not just for physical health. The mental health of children living in poverty suffers a great deal due to the circumstances of their home lives and their struggles in school. Making sure that students are able to be both
physically healthy and mentally healthy would help provide them with the means to succeed not only in school, but in life.

More than anything, however, Louisiana and the nation as a whole need to focus on getting children out of poverty in order to keep children out of poverty. The issue with poverty is that it is largely a cyclical one. If the nation wants to keep its children from living in poverty, it must break the cycle and help students into a more stable socioeconomic status. Children who are born into poverty and spend most of their childhoods there are more likely to continue living that way for the majority of their lives. If the quality of education is increased for students from lower income families, there is a far better chance that they will be able to get out of poverty later on in their lives. Concomitantly, children who are not born into poverty are less likely to ever enter into poverty and are more likely to spend less time in it if they do. Stated simply, the best way to keep children from living in poverty is to keep them from entering it altogether.

Louisiana needs to closely examine the ties between its lower socioeconomic families and its poorest-performing students, in order to best offer the necessary support to these children. Should Louisiana and the rest of the nation work on eliminating some of the many factors that contribute to a lower-quality education for impoverished students, there is a good chance that these children will have the opportunity to create a better life for themselves in the future.
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Citations


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*Using administrative data, Census Bureau can now track the rise in multiple jobholders.*

