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# Achieving Equal Opportunity in American Public Schools Through Equitable Funding and Multicultural Education

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by

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The United States is a country built on liberty, justice, and equal opportunity for all. However, many of America's public schools fall short in providing children such privileges in education. Public schools, as well as society, often emphasize the desire for all children to succeed in school by reinforcing the idea that they are America's future, tomorrow's great leaders. This dream soon diminishes for many American children when they begin schooling and realize that they do not have the same educational opportunities as others. In order for America's children to receive equal opportunity in education, the public school systems across this nation must recognize the need for equal funding and multicultural education.

In discussing equal educational opportunity for all children, it is necessary to note the recognition of this issue as a universal concern. The United Nations has addressed the need for equal opportunity in education in various documents. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that

> Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages...
>
> Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental

> freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (Article 26).

Yes, American public schooling is free to all, but it does little to promote the full development of children's personality or understanding of other cultures as well as recognition of their own culture's contributions.

The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Children (1989) also addresses the concern for equal opportunity in education for all children. According to this document, all children are guaranteed the right to a free education on the basis of equal opportunity (Article 28). It also recognizes that the education of every child be directed to:

> The development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
>
> The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
>
> The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
>
> The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, and equality of sexes, and friendships among all people, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origins (Article 29).

Although the ideas presented in both of these documents are certainly desirable goals for any educational system, the American public schools do not recognize these rights or

documents. This is truly a tragedy for the American children struggling for equal opportunity in public education.

**The Need For Equitable Funding and Multicultural Education**

In rationalizing the need for all children to receive equal opportunity in education, it is first important to discuss the unequal financing of public schools. How can children be expected to achieve success and compete with other students when many public schools cannot provide students with the basic necessities such as textbooks or enough teachers? Unequal funding has grown more evident with increased technological advances. Many American children living in poor districts are not provided with equipment such as computers, calculators, or televisions, while other children go to public schools with computer labs and televisions in every room. Such disparities in resources and funding are found in many of America's rural and inner-city schools. The following accounts are actual descriptions of the unequal opportunities in education due largely to inadequate funding in America's public schools.

> In East St. Louis, as in every city that I visit, I am forced to ask myself if what I've seen may be atypical. One would like to think that this might be the case in East St. Louis, but it would not be the truth.
>
> At Landsdowne Junior High School, the St. Louis Sun reports, 'there are scores of window frames without glass, like sockets without eyes.' Hallways in many schools are dark, with light bulbs missing or burnt out. One walks into a school, a member of the city's board of education, 'and you can smell the urinals a hundred feet away...'

> A teacher at an elementary school in East St. Louis has only one full-color workbook for her class. She photocopies workbook pages for her children, but the copies can't be made in color and the lessons call for color recognition by the children.
>
> A history teacher at the Martin Luther King School has 110 students in four classes - but only 26 books. Some of the books are missing the first hundred pages.
>
> Each year, Solomon observes of St. Louis High, 'there's one more toilet that doesn't flush, one more drinking fountain that doesn't work, one more classroom without texts...Certain classrooms are so cold in winter that the students have to wear their coats to class, while children in other classrooms swelter in a suffocating heat that cannot be turned down' (Kozol 36-37).

As one reads this passage from Jonathon Kozol's Savage Inequalities , it is difficult to imagine this scene as anything but atypical. However, Kozol's horrifying account of such a school system in need of major improvements could be the setting in a number of cities across this nation.

The system of financing public schools has widened the gap of educational opportunities for many American children. Financing has become inequitable due to the unequal distribution of local property wealth. School districts with high property valuations can levy low tax rates and still be able to generously support public education. Even with above average tax rates, districts with low valuations have less to spend. "State education aid is supposed to equalize school expenditures but rarely does. The result is high taxes and underfinanced schools for people living in poor areas and lower taxes and better financed school for those in wealthier districts" (Tolles 2).

Disparities in educational expenditure are found among and within states. For example, in 1974-75 statewide per-pupil expenditures ranged from a low of $838 in Mississippi to a high of $2,005 in New York. Differences within states are even more apparent. Among school districts in Massachusetts, expenditures have ranged from $454 to $2,243; in New York, the range extended from $936 to $4,215 (Tolles 2). Such disparities produce a significant denial of equal educational opportunity for children in the United States.

The issue remains vital despite a number of critics who seek to cast doubt on the primacy of American public schools. In an attempt to show that educational achievement depends little on the quality and funding of schools, they argue that other innumerable factors such as social class, a child's family, and inherent differences in individuals are to blame (Tolles 2). Despite this debate, the fact remains that wide disparities in public school funding do not allow all children equal opportunity in public education.

The case of Marcia Patton supports the need for equitable funding among school districts.

> Marica Patton is the 12-year old daughter of Mavis and Lew Patton, two politically active lawyers who practice law in a large Midwestern city. Marcia is in the first group of White children to attend Jefferson Junior High School, traditionally a school for inner-city Blacks. Although most of the children in her neighborhood attend a high-powered prep school, Marcia's parents are sending her to Jefferson on principle (Bennett 6).

On her second day at Jefferson, Marcia wrote a letter to Ms. Bryant, her former teacher.

> The teachers are real nice to me but I wish Ms. Samson wouldn't call on me so much. We use the book we used in your class last year, and lots of the kids in the class can't read it (Bennett 6).

Marcia's letter is a plea for help. Her new school is so poorly funded that the students are using the same textbook as she used last year. Marcia fears that she will not progress as she previously did in the more affluent school.

As in Marcia's new school, many children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often receive few equal educational opportunities in public schools. There are high proportions of indigent children in districts of low property valuation. Such children tend to be found in large central cities whose fiscal burdens prevent them from providing adequate educational services. This is true of the children in the St. Louis account mentioned earlier. The wealthier districts, usually composed of the middle and upper class often have the better teachers, educational programs, and physical facilities (Tolles 3). This could lead to a situation where a child who attends a public school in a wealthy district moves to a poor area and suddenly has many of the once received opportunities removed simply because of demographics. This alone can rationalize the need for equal opportunity for all children in American public schools through improved funding.

Equalizing the dispersion of school funds to improve the educational opportunities of children is not enough. Another

concern must be addressed in order for children to receive equal opportunity in American public schools. This concern emphasizes the diverse individuals that compose the student population and their cultural differences. This need is multicultural education.

The classrooms of America are more racially and ethnically diverse than ever. American children are the descendents of numerous nationalities, religions, races, and ethnic groups; thus, educators are having difficulty deciding whose or what culture to teach. Presently, the nation's school curricula are monocultural (European American, middle class, physically fit, and male) in content. In order for children representing other cultural groups to achieve academic success in school, they have to develop social competence in the dominant monoculture (Moore 2). Teachers must convey to children "the knowledge, skills, language, and habits they will need to participate successfully in their own society, but it is also important for them to learn about other cultures, so they will have a broader understanding of the world" (Ravitch 8). In educational terms, the identification of cultural pluralism in the schools has been labeled "multicultural education" (Grant 3).

The predominance of one culture in American school curricula creates many obstacles for all children. They develop ethnocentric and stereotyped attitudes toward cultures other than their own. Human understanding and commonality is repressed. Too, many children of the

overlooked cultures become alienated from school and develop low self esteem and respect. American educators must provide opportunities for all children that are multicultural and in fact, equal (Moore 2).

Educators generally agree on the need for multicultural education, but consensus does not exist about its scope and boundaries. Racial and ethnic groups are certainly included, but what about region, social class, gender, exceptionality, religion, language, and sexual orientation groupings (Bullard 5)? The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education defines multicultural education as "a process of preparing individuals for the social, political and economic realities which they will and do experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters" (Ramsey, Vold, and Williams 12). If America's children are going to be prepared citizens, then all of these groups must be included in multicultural education. For this discussion, the variables of social class, race, and gender are considered in the struggle for equal educational opportunities for all public school children.

As mentioned in the rationale for equalized funding, the need for equal educational opportunities especially applies to children of different social classes. Social class is often measured by a person's or family's educational level, occupation, rank in an organization, and earnings (Banks and Banks 68). These criteria usually constitute what is termed a person's "socioeconomic status" (Collins, Dupis, Johansen,

and Johnson 105). However measured, social class is related to how well students do in school.

Although the United States is based on the promise of equal opportunity for all, the educational experiences of its upper-, middle-, and lower-children are likely to be quite different. Even though there are many exceptions, students from higher social-class backgrounds often get better grades and remain in school longer than do students from lower-class backgrounds (Banks and Banks 68). This can be attributed to the idea that students from higher social-class backgrounds are more likely to attend small schools with more resources, small classes, and more demanding academic curriculums, while many of America's lower social-class students are trapped in school systems such as the one in East St. Louis (Banks and Banks 81). To achieve greater educational equality, educators need to make such school experiences available to all students, regardless of their social-class background.

There is also a need to provide children of different races with equal opportunity in education. In the past, the only students in America to obtain success and self-esteem in the educational and community setting were white. Historically, many other races that compose the United States have not been given the proper treatment by educators that is necessary for students to gain success in school or society.

Today, one in four Americans is either an Asian, Hispanic, or African American (Diaz 12). By the year 2000, however, one out of every three people in the United States

will be a person of color (Diaz 25). This means that one-third of the nation's public school students will be of color and that educators will have to accommodate their needs.

In a society historically dominated by Whites, race in the United States is a major issue in the desire for multicultural education. Discrimination because of skin color begins at an early age and affects children in various ways. It can contribute not only to a low achievement and self-image but to a poor perception of others. Three main sources of racism exist in the schools that are harmful to children: insensitive students, biased teachers, and skewed textbooks (Baruth and Manning 323). If teachers can overcome their bias, then they can model appropriate behavior for unconcerned students.

Gender is a third major concern of multicultural education , specifically in the opportunities of females in the American public schools. Girls and boys enter school generally equal in measured ability; however, twelve years later, many girls have fallen behind their male classmates in key areas such as mathematics, science, and self-esteem. Gender bias still remains in the schools, despite the fact that researchers have identified it as a major problem at all levels of schooling (AAUW 1).

The foundation for gender bias is established early. If a young girl has experienced gender role stereotyping at home, then she will probably enter school already somewhat compliant and passive. In schools, girls are reinforced for

silence, neatness, and conformity (Frazier and Sadker 95). Seldom do teachers praise girls for their active intellectual curiosity, analytical problem solving, or the ability to cope with challenging material (Frazier and Sadker 96). Many girls tend to have less confidence in science and mathematics, while boys receive more positive feedback from teachers in these courses (Banks and Banks 20). These negative views not only harm the victimized individuals, they also allow others to develop a false and misleading sense of superiority.

Although the issues of social class, race, and gender have been discussed separately, one must realize that each of these apply to all children and affect their opportunities in education. Researchers report that when African American girls from low-income families do as well as upper-class white boys in school, teachers often attribute their success to hard work while assuming that the white boys are not working up to their potential (AAUW 2). In order for all children in American public schools to receive equal opportunity in education, such discrimination must be abolished immediately.

Although multicultural education is a vital component in providing all children equal opportunity in American public schools, opponents of this issue argue otherwise. In The Way Things Ought to Be , Rush H. Limbaugh, III devotes an entire chapter on criticizing multicultural education. Limbaugh feels that Americans should "strive toward racial color-

blindness, rather than to encourage members of different cultures, especially their youth during formative years, to dwell on their native cultures" (Limbaugh 206). To progress toward equality, he feels that Americans should learn to view one another as human beings, not as blacks, African-Americans, Jews, Asians, WASPS, Native Americans, or Latinos (Limbaugh 206). He also argues that if ethnic subcultures have genuine vitality, their heritage should be instilled in children by families, churches, and communities, not public schools (Limbaugh 207).

Multicultural education has other motives than making children aware of their heritage. It is a method of empowering all students to succeed academically, to learn about other cultures, and to develop positive attitudes toward different groups. Perhaps one of the most important motives of multicultural education is that it provides all students with equal opportunity to learn.

Although equitable funding and multicultural education may seem as two separate issues, they are both necessary in the struggle for achieving equal opportunity in education for all children in American public schools. Without equal funding, children in poor districts do not have the same quality of resources, facilities, or experiences as children in wealthy districts. Without multicultural education, children are often faced with prejudices against their social class, race, and gender. Both equitable funding and multicultural education are needed to guarantee all children

equal opportunity in education.

**Unequal Opportunity Throughout History of Education**

Obtaining a perspective of the unfair schooling systems that children have endured over the centuries will help explain the urgent need for providing all children equal opportunity in education. To do so, it is necessary to briefly examine the major historical periods of American education, considering funding, social class, racial, and gender differences.

During the Colonial Period (1607-1783), from the first permanent English colony at Jamestown to the end of the Revolutionary War, education was mainly a responsibility of the church and home where it consisted largely of preaching and catechizing. Formal schooling in primary or reading schools and Latin grammar schools soon followed. It was important to church groups that all children be educated so they could read and interpret the Bible to help them defeat Satan (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 2).

Because the responsibility of education was in the church and home, the availability of schools varied throughout the colonies. The Northern cities' businesses required an ability to read, write, cipher, and sign one's own name which, in turn, enhanced school funding and attendance. On the other hand, the Southerners felt that the little education they received on the job was sufficient for daily life. The wealthy could afford private tutors for

their children, tuition payments for grammar school, or send their children abroad to acquire better education. Only apprenticeships and a few pauper schools were available to the poor (Webb, McCarthy and Thomas 2).

Later in this period, "free" schools emerged, without charge, for those who could not afford to pay tuition. Most of these free public schools were for the poor, while the wealthy and middle-class families sent their children to private or church schools. The state had no obligation to support schools. Families wanting their children to receive an education were responsible for paying the price. Such financial support became even more insufficient as the focus on education shifted to a more pressing problem - the Revolutionary War (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 3-4).

Early in this period, most girls stayed at home to learn to cook, to spin flax and wool, and to weave. Occasionally, girls were apprenticed to learn bonnet-making or to become better spinners or weavers (Button and Provenzo 15). By the mid 1700s, private schoolmasters accepted girls at beginning schools. At these schools, they were to study English, or Latin, or feminine and lady-like accomplishments such as needlework, singing, or playing the harpsichord or spinet (Button and Provenzo 31).

Nearly all the half million Blacks in the Colonial period were slaves. Slave owners gave little thought to schooling for slaves, so few could read or write. There were, however, efforts to Christianize Blacks and for that

purpose to teach them to read. This was accomplished through a few schools for Blacks taught by missionaries from England Button and Provenzo 37).

During the National Period (1784-1865), from the end of the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, the idea of publicly supported and controlled education continued to be accepted, but its implementation was slow. The economy and national security were the major concerns of the country, not its children and their equal opportunity in education (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 4).

As the population grew and became widely dispersed, town schools were even less accessible. To solve this problem, towns established school districts. Because of poor financing and the widespread population, many public schools were of poor quality. Hence, the wealthy enrolled their children in private schools, while the poor rural families were still critical of schooling (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 4).

Between 1830 and 1865, perceptions of equal opportunity in education changed dramatically. Coined as the "age of the common school movement," tax-supported public elementary schools became open to all children, including females, as the economy began to improve. This new movement sparked interest in other efforts for a more democratic educational system that included "(1) the continuation of the battle for tax support, (2) efforts to eliminate pauper schools, (3) attempts to make public schools totally free of charge, (4)

an increase in state supervision, and (5) a reduction in sectarianism" (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 5).

Although females were receiving more opportunities in education, they were anything but equal to those of their male counterparts. The aim of schooling at this time was to educate girls to be better wives and mothers. Women were not educated for professions or occupations, except for teaching. Even with such biased practices, the concern for appropriate studies for women was gradually becoming apparent (Button and Provenzo 110).

Blacks received few, if any, opportunities in education. During the 1800s, slavery became a carefully regulated institution. There were laws throughout the South prohibiting slaves from learning to read and write. Anyone caught teaching a slave these skills could be imprisoned up to one year. Clearly, the educational opportunities for blacks did not compare with those for whites.

During the Post-Civil War Period (1866-1904), while most Southerners were struggling to regain possession of their land and pride, the North provided little aid to the educational cause in the South. Southern schools were slow to repair, restaff, and reopen. Also, many Southerners feared the possible integration of black children in schools, even though an equal rights provision for black children was omitted from the Civil Rights Act of 1875 (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 10). The scarce education that was provided to blacks was significantly different than that of whites. It

was overall at a lower level, and facilities were usually inferior to those of whites.

Circumstances in the North were not as severe. The economy was growing along with the demand for skilled and knowledgeable workers. In addition, schools, now including high schools, were being established in less-populated areas (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 11).

School financing during this period still relied primarily on local funds. State funding was low and resulted in dramatic expenditure differences between poor and wealthy areas. With the growing population and the wide variety in local tax ability, something had to change (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 11).

After the Civil War, there was increased support for the establishment of higher educational institutions for women. Women's colleges began appearing more rapidly and by 1900, approximately 80 percent of the professional schools, universities, and colleges admitted women (Button and Provenzo 140).

During the Early Reform Period (1905-1969), children's need for equal opportunity in education became clearer. Although there were only beginning movements to improve the lack of gender equity, other accomplishments were made. There were significant increases in the population, number of school-age children, average daily attendance, teachers, schools, and programs for handicapped children. These improvements were due largely to the growth in transportation

expenditures, per capita personal income, and in the gross national product (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 16).

There were still great variations in schools for children of different social classes and demographics. Rural schools, often attended by the poor children, were mostly one-room and not much different from those fifty years before. City schools were wealthier and had better-paid teachers and much wider curricular offerings (Button and Provenzo 234).

It was in this period that the landmark case Brown v. Topeka Board of Education (1954) ruled "the practice of segregating Black and White students in so-called separate but equal schools wrong on Constitutional grounds" (Banks and Banks 47). Under state laws that made such arrangements possible, the Topeka Board of Education had schools for only Black children. The Supreme Court ruled that such segregation between Black and White children violated the Fourteenth Amendment in that separate facilities were "inherently unequal" (O'Reilly and Green 174). This case was a huge step forward in the race for all children to have equal opportunity in education.

Today, in the Modern Reform Period (1970-), we are still struggling to provide children with an equal opportunity in education. Several measures have been adopted since 1970 to instill equality in educational programs across the country, including reformed curriculums, increased graduation requirements, smaller classes, and teacher testing. States

have also chosen to fund additional programs such as those for infants and prekindergarten children (Webb, McCarthy, and Thomas 16). Even with these improvements, American public schools still lack proper funding and multicultural education. The educational system of this country must be reformed to enable all children equal opportunity in education.

The history of unequal educational opportunities in American public schools reveals a significant pattern. Most attention has been given to white, middle class males. Today, this haunts the American public school systems not only in unequitable funding but in biased curriculum, practices, and attitudes.

## Achieving Equal Opportunity Through Reform

In order for American public schools to provide equal opportunity in education for all children, major changes must occur. Not only should the funding systems be altered, but the teachers' attitudes, values, and beliefs toward multicultural education as well.

Some states are beginning to meet the challenge of achieving equal educational opportunity by implementing extensive reform in their public schools. This is true in the state of Kentucky where the whole educational system is undergoing complete change. The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) is an excellent model of a public school system trying to equalize educational opportunities for all

children.

The state of Kentucky has taken many steps within the last few years to ensure greater opportunities and educational equality in all of its public school systems. In Rose v. Council for Better Education (1989), sixty-six property-poor districts charged that the state had not met its state constitutional mandate to provide an efficient system of common schools. The allegations suggested that the entire system was inadequate, inequitable, unequal, and inefficient under Kentucky's Constitution and the Fourteenth Amendment in the United States' Constitution. The Kentucky Supreme Court agreed with the plaintiffs and cited Brown as its guide stating:

> The overall effect of appellants' evidence is a virtual concession that Kentucky's system of common schools is underfunded and inadequate; is fraught with inequalities and inequities throughout the 177 local school districts; is ranked nationally in the lower 20-25 percent in virtually every category that is used to evaluate educational performance; and is not uniform among the districts in educational opportunities (O'Reilly and Green 275).

In its ruling, the court stated that a child's education should result in seven capabilities:

1. Sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable the student to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization;

2. Sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable the students to make informed choices;

3. Sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his/her community, state, and nation;

4. Sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his/her mental and physical well-being;

5. Sufficient grounding in the arts to enable the students to appreciate his/her cultural and historical heritage;

6. Sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields to enable the student to choose and pursue life work intelligently;

7. Sufficient levels of academic or vocational skills to enable the student to compete favorably with counterparts in surrounding states in academics or in the job market (O'Reilly and Green 276).

In defining an "efficient" common school system, the court listed the following essential and minimal characteristics:

1. The establishment, maintenance, and funding of common schools in Kentucky is the sole responsibility of the General Assembly.

2. Common schools shall be free to all.

3. Common schools shall be available to all Kentucky children.

4. Common schools shall be substantially uniform throughout the state.

5. Common schools shall provide equal educational opportunities to all Kentucky children, regardless of place of residence or economic circumstances.

6. Common schools shall be monitored by the General Assembly to assure that they are operated with no waste, no duplication, no mismanagement, and no political influence.

7. The premise for the existence of common schools is that all children in Kentucky have a constitutional right to an adequate education.

8. The General Assembly shall provide funding that is sufficient to provide each child in Kentucky an adequate education.

9. An adequate education is one that has as its goal the development of the seven capacities recited previously (O'Reilly and Green 276).

With such measures in place, one may hope Kentucky's children will be receiving more equal opportunities in education. To begin equalizing funding across Kentucky, the state has begun giving $500 million a year mostly to schools in poor neighborhoods. Also, starting in 1995, Kentucky will use an incentive-pay system, based on how well each school's students perform to spur teachers to produce better results. If school success rates fall by five percent or more, the state will take over the school. Students will be given the opportunity to transfer if the decline continues (Bernstein 54).

KERA mandated other major changes in the funding of public education to increase the opportunities of all children. Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) is the formula established to equalize funding. SEEK guarantees each school district a per-pupil allotment based on the number of students in the districts and the needs of those students. For the 1990-91 school year, the state guaranteed $2,305 per student and $2,420 per student for the 1991-92 school year. Extra funds are then calculated for the number of students with disabilities, the number of low-income students "at risk" of educational failure, the number of hospitalized and home-bound students, and transportation needs (Miller, Noland, and Schaaf 17).

Local funding is also an important component of KERA.

Every school district is required to raise the equivalent of 30 cents for every $100 in assessed property. In addition to the property tax, school districts may also raise funds through three optional taxes: an occupational license tax, an income tax, and/or a utilities tax, which can include cable television service (Miller, Noland, and Schaaf 19).

To ensure equal dispersion of funds, the state calculates the amount of money raised by the 30-cent tax and the amount of money needed by the districts for its base funding allotment. The state then makes up the difference, thus guaranteeing each district the base per-pupil allotment (Miller, Noland, and Schaaf 19-20).

KERA also recognizes the need for multicultural education. In defining an "adequate education," the Act stresses that each student "appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage" (Miller, Noland, and Schaaf 5). Educators can take this statement a step farther by following the essential goals of multicultural education:

1. Recognizing and prizing diversity.
2. Developing greater understanding of other cultural patterns.
3. Respecting individuals of all cultures.
4. Developing positive and productive interaction among all people and among experiences of diverse cultural groups (Grant 3).

KERA recognizes and prizes diversity among students, the central theme of multicultural education. This diversity includes social class, race, and gender as well as other

differences such as ability and cultural background. KERA is about providing all children equal opportunity in education, which must include multicultural education.

In addition to KERA, there are other ways to provide students of varying social class, race, and gender equal opportunity in education. To provide multicultural education, the curriculums and teachers' attitudes must change. The following suggestions for educators offer a foundation for infusing multicultural education in public schools:

1. Transform the school so that male and female students, exceptional students, as well as students from diverse cultures, social class, racial and ethnic groups will experience an equal opportunity to learn in school.

2. Help all students develop more positive attitudes toward different cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious groups.

3. Empower students from victimized groups and help them develop confidence in their ability to succeed academically and to influence social, political, and economic institutions.

4. Develop perspective-taking skills and to consider the perspectives of different groups (Banks and Banks 20).

To achieve these goals, educators must first overcome their own biases and model appropriate behavior for their students. If students see and hear their teachers treating all of their diverse classmates with respect and understanding, the students will be more likely to repeat this behavior. Achieving equal opportunity in education requires such concern by both teachers and students.

Teachers must be aware of biases found in their resources. Often, textbooks impede efforts to teach in a multicultural manner. Textbooks reflect the social climate in which they are written, including its prejudices and discriminations. Teachers need to be aware of the subliminal bias and racism found in such materials. When selecting textbooks conducive in a multicultural educational setting, teachers must pay particular attention to discriminating ideas: presence of ethnic minority groups in a variety of roles, stereotyping and reinforcing prejudices, treatment of controversial issues, and use of language (Lynch 28).

Changes in the curricula must also occur to enrich a multicultural environment. If children are to receive equal opportunity in education, Anglo- and Eurocentric curricula can no longer prevail. In the past, multicultural content was often offered as an ethnic-additive lesson. A true multicultural curriculum infuses cultural content throughout all subjects and grade levels (Diaz 13).

## Conclusion

Although America's commitment to fairness and equal educational opportunity is an ideal goal in our nation, the issues surrounding the way society pays for education and addresses cultural diversity among students are complex and cannot be divorced from considerations of how well students are being educated. More money is needed in public education, but it must be combined with other elements of

policy and planning to guarantee equal educational opportunity for all American children. Educational reform thus goes beyond questions of financial equity and adequacy to an even more difficult problem, cultural diversity. The search for answers on all these issues requires the continuing efforts and best thought of many individuals and institutions (Tolles 32).

Movements to improve children's educational opportunities have been present throughout American history, with education for white, middle class males as the focus. Thus, we have to contend with narrow focused curricula and practices. Reforms, such as the one in Kentucky, are only the beginning cures of this on-going ailment. Yes, many of the educational systems in this country are diseased. They still provide the wealthy with the best schools and leave only the run-down, unsanitary, and underfunded programs, such as the St. Louis schools mentioned earlier, to the poor. They still do not recognize that all children, meaning students of different social and cultural backgrounds, can enrich the classroom. In order for America's public school educators to provide all children equal opportunity in education, they must strive to achieve equitable funding and multicultural education.

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