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Learning Objectives

- 11.1 Describe the history of the American education system.**
- 11.2 Summarize why education is a social problem.**
- 11.3 Compare and contrast the sociological perspectives on education.**
- 11.4 Identify the educational attainment and achievement of different groups in society.**
- 11.5 Evaluate how students in the United States compare to students in other countries in terms of educational achievement.**
- 11.6 Discuss some of the current social problems facing schools.**
- 11.7 Evaluate access to higher education in the United States.**

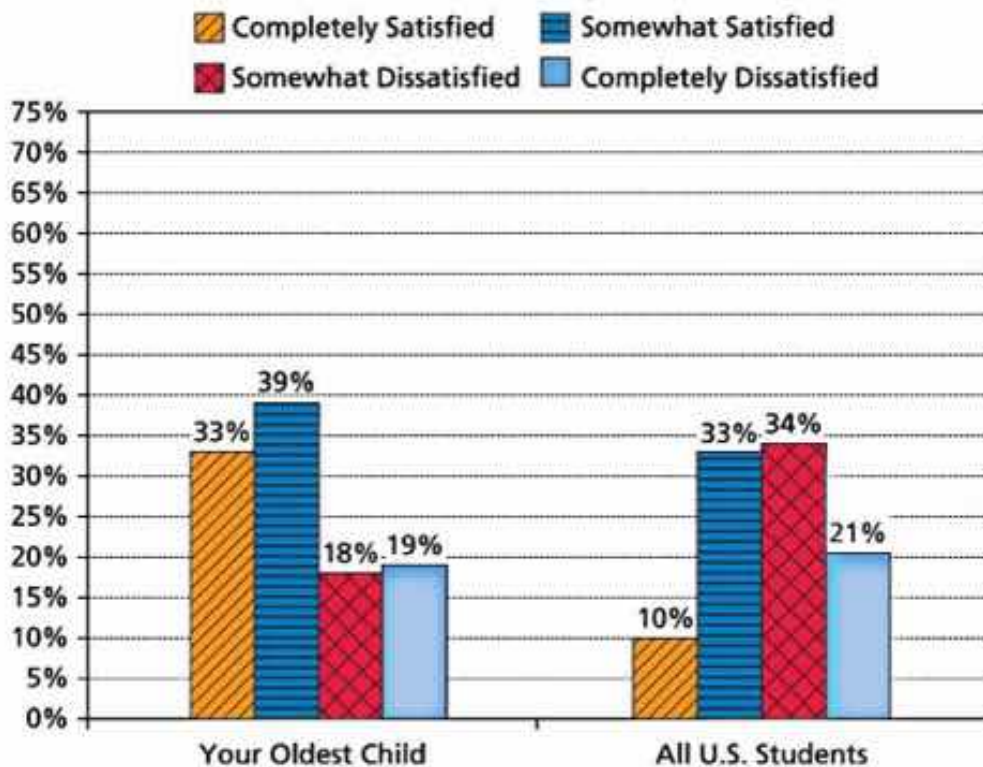
It's Monday morning, and Mason is just entering his classroom. He is a happy-go-lucky fourth grader and loves school, although he would never admit that to his friends, which include the other 16 students in his class. But he secretly knows that they also enjoy school. When the bell rings, he knows the drill—he goes to his personal computer and begins working on a paper that he saved yesterday in Google Docs. Once his file is up and he rereads his work, he combs the Internet for more information for his paper. He knows that if he has any problems finding what he needs, his teacher or the classroom aide can offer individual help. Likewise, if he has any problems with his computer it-

self, the school's technology department will have it fixed in no time or they will issue him another. Mason works on his project quietly until his teacher informs the class that the science specialist has just walked into the classroom. Mason saves his work, and eagerly awaits what they will do in science today. His favorite classes are science, art, music, and P.E., all taught by specialists with expertise in their fields. What school is this, you ask, where class size is 17 students, each student has his or her own computer, and the school's curriculum is so enriching? Where can you sign your child up? Mason attends a private school with tuition costs of \$25,000 a year, and your child will likely have to be put on the waiting list to get in.

Unlike with many private schools that cater to the wealthy, the issues that affect public schools in the United States are staggering. At present, there is a debate about national education standards; school choice; school privatization; prayer in school; weapons in schools; standards for teachers; the impact of technology; classroom and school size; and much more. School reform figures prominently in presidential and gubernatorial elections, and will no doubt be an issue in every local election for years to come. Yet, the irony in all of the controversies swirling around schools, including in higher education, is that people tend to like their own schools, even if they do not think highly of public schools in general, as shown in Figure 11-1 (Gallup, 2018).

Figure 11-1

Overall, How Satisfied Are You with the Quality of Education? 2018



Source: Based on Gallup, 2018. "Americans' Satisfaction with Quality of K-12 Education in U.S. (Trends)." Retrieved from (https://news.gallup.com/poll/241658/americans-satisfaction-quality-education-trends.aspx?g_source=link_news9%26g_campaign=item_241652%26g_medium=copy).

What Do You Think?

How would you rate the quality of your K–12 education, and why?

What, if anything, would you like to change? Are the changes realistically possible?

The **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001** ⓘ, a major legislative initiative of President Bush's administration, was designed to improve education in four clearly defined ways: (1) accountability for results; (2) an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; (3) expanded parental school choice options; and (4) expanded local control and flexibility.¹ According to the Act's accountability provisions, states must describe how they will close achievement gaps and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged or in special education classes, achieve academic proficiency. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making adequate annual progress after five years, make substantial changes in the way the school is run. Many educators complain, however, that under these strict guidelines schools suffer unfairly by being labeled as failing when they really are not.

¹No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, U.S. Congress.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

A major legislative initiative of the Bush administration to improve education in four clearly defined ways: (1) accountability for results; (2) emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; (3) expanded parental school choice options; and (4) expanded local control and flexibility.

*President Obama and his administration tried to improve the legislation by making more resources available to the public schools. The **Race to the Top** ⓘ approach encourages state school systems to institute creative reforms. President Trump's administration is more oriented toward school choice, although at the time of this writing no new large initiatives have been implemented.*

Race to the Top

President Obama and his administration had been trying to improve the No Child Left Behind legislation by making more resources available to the public schools for creative ventures.

History of American Education

11.1 Describe the history of the American education system.

Education is the social institution through which a society teaches its members the skills, knowledge, norms, and values they need to learn to become good, productive participants in society. *Formal* education is often referred to as *schooling*, and as this term implies, it occurs in schools under teachers, principals, and other trained professionals. In contrast, *informal* education may occur almost anywhere: at home, on a walk in the woods, or as you read a good book.

In early American history, education was largely informal. Boys and girls usually learned what they needed to know at home or on the family farm. During the colonial period, the Puritans in Massachusetts required parents to teach their children to read and required larger towns to have an elementary school. However, in general, schooling was not required in the colonies, and only about 10 percent of children, usually just boys from the wealthiest families, went to school. Boys who were not rich or not white were excluded from formal school. Girls were also excluded because their education revolved around homemaking skills and took place informally at home (**Urban and Wagoner, 2008**).

To help unite the nation after the Revolutionary War, educators created textbooks to standardize spelling and pronunciation. The books were also designed to unify cultural and political views, including patriotism, religion, and distrust of Native Americans. However, school continued to be largely a pastime of boys from wealthy white families.

It took another 75 years, or roughly until the mid-1800s, for people to begin calling for free and compulsory elementary and secondary education, and another 50 years for it to become the law. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most communities of size had schools, and schooling was considered an important development for all children, regardless of sex or social class. Note that blacks were still generally barred from government-subsidized schools that whites attended. Despite this important fact, compulsory education was intended to further national unity and to teach the swarm of new immigrants about "American" values. This period was also the time of the "Industrial Revolution." An industrial economy demanded reading, writing, and math skills at a higher level than was the case in an agrarian society.

Today, schools are open to all young people, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, and social class. However, you will see that these statuses continue to affect both educational achievement and the type of learning that occurs in schools.

Education as a Social Problem

11.2 Summarize why education is a social problem.


The concerns over the U.S. educational system are complex issues that different groups in society define differently, depending on the specific goals of each group. For example, parents at all social-class levels demand that the schools do a better job of preparing students to work and live in a technologically sophisticated society. Various minority groups want schools to prepare their children to compete in American society, yet at the same time, not strip them of their cultural identity—or of the language they learn at home. Educational policymakers believe that schools must do more to increase the overall level of student achievement. Many teachers, in contrast, believe that parents should play a greater role in their children's education. **Table 11-1**  shows what parents are doing in their children's schools, at least from their point of view.

Table 11-1

Percent of Parents Responding to Survey Questions, "How Often Did You _____ This Past Year?"


	Daily/Weekly	Monthly	Once or Twice a Semester	Never
Help your child with his or her homework?	80%	7%	7%	6%
Review your child's grades?	57%	27%	15%	1%
Take on a leadership role in any of your child's extracurricular activities?	18%	16%	32%	34%
Meet with your child's teachers?	17%	22%	55%	5%
Volunteer in your child's classroom?	10%	15%	35%	40%
Donate supplies for the school?	7%	21%	55%	17%
Donate money to the school?	5%	20%	53%	22%

Source: Tompson, T., J. Benz, and J. Agiesta. 2013. "Parents' Attitudes on the Quality of Education in the United States." *The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research*. Retrieved 15 April 2015. (www.apnor-

What Do You Think?

How involved were your parents in your school when you were a child? Do you think they volunteered too little, too much, or about the right amount? What social factors, including income, jobs, and attitudes affected their level of involvement?

In the face of severe state and federal budget deficits, many school boards have been cutting back on hiring teachers and even laying off some administrators and teachers. This crisis situation does not change the basic debates about school reform, but it does postpone some of the more heated debates as administrators scramble to find ways to retain their programs and staffs. Should schools be more open to new ideas and teaching methods, or should they focus on the traditional curriculum — “the basics”? Indeed, what are the basics? Do they consist simply of reading, writing, and arithmetic, or do they include learning how to get along with others and how to communicate effectively? Are the basics the same for all students? These questions are only some of the fundamental questions being asked about public education in the United States today. There are many others. Should more qualified and effective teachers receive merit pay? Should the school year be longer? Should there be a standardized national curriculum? The United States has led the world in establishing free public education for its people. Per capita public expenditures on education in the United States are among the highest in the world (**National Center for Education Statistics, 2017c**). A comparison of the countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an organization of 24 countries whose purpose is to promote trade and economic growth, shows that the United States is near the top in primary and secondary education funding at roughly \$11,000 per full-time-equivalent (FTE) for primary students and \$13,000 for secondary students (OECD, 2018).

Although the United States ranks near the top internationally in spending, the amount spent varies considerably from state to state as indicated in **Map 11-1**  (**Cornman, Zhou, Howell, and Young, January, 2018**). The District of Columbia spends \$27,810 per student, meanwhile, Idaho spends \$7,858. While some of these spending differences reflect the cost of living across the country, the differences also reflect the value placed on education and the willingness (and ability) of people to pay taxes for schools.

Map 11-1

U.S. Expenditures Per Pupil by State, 2015





Source: Data from Cornman, S. Q. et al. (January 2018) "Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2014–15 (Fiscal Year 2015)," NCES, U.S. Department of Education.

Education is compulsory in the United States; the requirements differ from one state to another, but usually children must attend school by age 7 until age 16. As a result, 98 percent of all U.S. children between the ages of 7 and 9 are enrolled in school, as are 94 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds (**U.S. Census Bureau, 2017**). Moreover, the number of students enrolled in higher education increased rapidly in the twentieth century.

So, what is wrong? Why is the educational system under attack? How does this impressive record constitute a "failure"? These questions can be answered in different ways, depending on the sociological perspective from which they are viewed.

Sociological Perspectives on Education

11.3 Compare and contrast the sociological perspectives on education.

In democratic nations, education is a primary method of addressing several social problems and needs. The schools are expected to prepare new generations of good citizens and reliable, capable workers who can enter the labor force with the necessary skills in literacy, computation, and written expression. Higher education in colleges, universities, and professional training institutions is expected to produce young adults who can become scientists, professionals, and leaders in business and other social institutions.

These ambitious goals hardly exhaust the list of demands placed on educators. Schools and institutions of higher education are expected to address and solve problems of inequality. They are not expected to make everyone equal (all societies recognize that people are born with differing interests and abilities), but they are expected to provide equal opportunities to learn and to gain the skills and experiences that society requires. And, as if these demands were not enough, the schools are also expected to address other social problems such as racism, sexism, and violence.

As might be expected, there are vast differences in the analyses of public education by sociologists who approach the subject from different theoretical perspectives. Functionalists stress stability and consensus; in their view, education is, or should be, one of several interdependent parts that work together to create a smoothly functioning society whose members all share the same basic values and beliefs. Conflict theorists argue that schools reproduce the society's system of inequality and class stratification in new generations of children. They see society as divided into dominant and subordinate groups, with education being used as a tool to promote the interests of the dominant group while teaching the subordinate groups to accept their situation. Symbolic Interactionists take still another approach: They examine how expectations of students' performance determine that performance and how these expectations can result in labels that shape the students' future. Each of these perspectives gives rise to different approaches to the study of public education and are summarized in **Table 11-2** and discussed below.

Table 11-2

Perspectives on Education

Theoretical Perspective	Major Assumptions

Functionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education serves several manifest functions for society, including (a) socialization, (b) social integration, (c) social placement, and (d) social and cultural innovation. • Latent functions include reduced crime, child care, the establishment of peer relationships, and lowering unemployment by occupying high school students. • Problems in the educational institution harm society because all these functions cannot be completely fulfilled. • Schools are poorly equipped to help students who come from disorganized backgrounds.
Conflict Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education promotes social inequality of gender, race, and class through tracking and standardized testing and the impact of its "hidden curriculum." • Schools differ widely in their funding and learning conditions, and this type of inequality leads to learning disparities that reinforce social inequality. • Those with wealth and power try to ensure that their children get high-quality education by going to private schools.
Symbolic Interactionism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This perspective focuses on social interaction in the classroom, on the playground, and in other school venues. • Specific research finds that social interaction in schools affects the development of gender roles and that teachers' expectations of pupils' intellectual abilities affect how much pupils learn. • Certain educational problems have their basis in social interaction and expectations. Schools label students as "achievers," "underachievers," or "rebels," which lead students to fulfill those expectations.

11.3.1 Functionalist Approaches

Functionalists view education as an important social institution because it can lead to the smooth functioning of society and can provide individuals with opportunities for work, fulfillment, and upward social mobility.

Manifest functions ⓘ are those that are direct and the most obvious, such as the teaching of academic subjects and the imparting of new knowledge (e.g., reading, writing, and arithmetic). Other manifest functions include:

manifest functions

Those societal functions that are direct and the most

- **Socialization, which involves enabling students to absorb dominant cultural norms, values, and attitudes.** In the United States, these norms, values, and attitudes include respect for authority (e.g., raise your hand for the teacher to call on you), patriotism (e.g., reciting the Pledge of Allegiance), punctuality (e.g., the ringing of school bells), time management (e.g., homework, deadlines), and competition (e.g., report cards, sports).
- **Social Placement, which involves assigning, or tracking, students into programs based on individual ability and achievement, and providing credentials.** Early on in school, teachers identify students as bright and motivated or as less so. Depending on how they are identified, children are taught at a level that teachers decide suits them best. For example, high schools may offer both a college “prep” curriculum and a trade school curriculum. In this way, students are presumably prepared for their later station in life.
- **Social Control and Integration, which involves imparting to students the knowledge that society shares.** School is compulsory, and the curriculum is relatively standardized from one school to another. A geometry course in Maine will cover the same material as a geometry course in Oregon, and the course is required for graduation, even though these high schools are located 3,000 miles apart. Schools help prepare students for the workforce and integrate them into American life.
- **Social Change and Innovation, which involves learning new information and technologies as they emerge.** Educational programs are designed to train new scientists, artists, and intellectuals who will make new discoveries, solve social problems, and impart that knowledge to a new generation of students.

In addition to these manifest functions, education also provides latent functions. **Latent functions** ⓘ are the indirect by-products of education rather than a direct effect of the education itself. For example, schooling reduces crime by keeping children and teenagers busy and off the street; it reduces the costs that parents pay for childcare; it lowers the unemployment rate by occupying teenagers; and it establishes peer relationships and assists with mate selection by integrating young men and women in a variety of social activities such as sports, dances, and parties. Can you think of any other latent functions of education?

latent functions

Indirect by-products of some phenomenon that are less obvious.

From a functionalist perspective, problems in the educational system are a symptom of social disorganization. The educational system is geared to students from stable homes and communities. It is not well equipped to

handle the problems of students from disorganized homes—for example, where there is a difficult divorce, extreme poverty, or other challenging circumstances. Such students may be depressed and angry, have trouble concentrating on their schoolwork, and therefore have more difficulty achieving in school (**Breger, 2017; Guinart and Grau, 2014; Soria and Linder, 2014**). According to social-disorganization theorists, these students are more likely to join deviant peer groups, such as gangs, that reinforce their negative attitudes toward school.

Additionally, a functionalist perspective sees schools as mechanisms to reinforce society's values and to control deviance through discipline. Educational problems arise when schools fail to do these tasks. Perhaps schools inadequately teach students the values that our society holds dear, or perhaps schools are weak on disciplining those who do not learn the rules. In a multicultural school with large numbers of students, these tasks become more difficult.

Functionalism may also analyze the difficulties experienced by schools when they attempt to change their organization or procedures to improve student performance. How can schools organize themselves to meet the demands of students with special learning needs? How can schools with high levels of student failure on standardized tests recruit better teachers and administrators? How can school systems offer parents and children more choices of schools and educational approaches? These are all issues that hinge largely on how schools, or entire school systems, are performing as they try to meet the demands placed on them. The No Child Left Behind legislation seeks to make schools accountable for students' performance on nationally distributed standardized tests of reading and math achievement. It also imposes penalties on schools and school districts when they fail to meet minimum standards of achievement. This legislation is a functionalist approach to improving the schools because it is based on performance measurements, but many would point out that the initiative does not provide adequate resources to help schools improve teaching and student performance (**Klenk, 2005; Ladd, 2017**).

11.3.2 Conflict Approaches

Conflict theory does not dispute the manifest and latent functions described by functionalists. However, it does give these functions a different slant by emphasizing how education also perpetuates social inequality (**Ballantine, Hammack, and Stuber, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2015**).

One example of this process involves socialization. Conflict theorists point out that compulsory schooling began in part to teach immigrants how to be "American" and prevent immigrants' values from corrupting "American" values. That approach is an example of **ethnocentrism** ⓘ (the belief that one's own group is superior to another group). Early schools were also designed to teach students the skills they needed to work in the "new" industrial economy of the mid-nineteenth century. Edu-

cation was not designed to teach students to be managers, leaders, or entrepreneurs, but to be compliant and obedient workers (Cole, 2008). Therefore, compulsory education served the interests of the upper class much more than it served the interests of workers. In a classic statement of this position, Samuel Bowles wrote that compulsory education in the United States developed to meet the needs of a capitalist economy for skilled and disciplined workers and, while doing so, to justify the unequal social status of workers and capitalists (Bowles, Gintis, and Groves, 2005).

ethnocentrism

The belief that one's own group is superior to another group.

Conflict theorists believe that schooling continues to teach a set of values and beliefs, such as conformity and obedience to authority, that support the status quo and perpetuate the existing social hierarchy. This effect is called the hidden curriculum (Booher-Jennings, 2008). Although no one plots this curriculum behind closed doors, our schoolchildren learn obedience and respect for authority from the books they read and from various classroom activities.

Theorist Pierre Bourdieu suggests that education reproduces social class inequities because students come to school with differing amounts and types of **cultural capital** ⓘ that they bring from home. This resource may include forms of knowledge, skills, education, and other advantages a person has that give him or her a certain status in society (Bourdieu, 1986). One example of this cultural capital is language. White middle and upper class families are more likely to teach their children to speak **Standard American English (SAE)** ⓘ and to avoid slang or poor grammar. They learn to "speak well" (not "speak good"). Blacks sometimes "code-switch" to sound less black when they are at work or in other settings. Even former President Obama is linguistically flexible, giving speeches with two different linguistic styles: one for a mostly upper-middle-class white audience in which he closely followed SAE, and one for an audience comprised of black working-class "brothers," in which his accent, word choice, and tone all differed (Alim and Smitherman, 2012).

cultural capital

The resource that a person brings from his or her family, which may include forms of knowledge, skills, education, and other advantages that a person has, and which give him or her a certain status in society.

Standard American English (SAE)

A speaking style that avoids slang or poor grammar, used by upper-class people.

An example of these differences in language is shown in the box, *A Personal View: "Learning to Speak SAE."*

Social placement is another aspect of education on which conflict theorists focus. Beginning in grade school, students who are thought by their teachers to be bright are placed in the faster tracks (especially in reading and arithmetic), while other students are placed in the slower tracks. Tracking may affect not only test scores but also the likelihood of college attendance (**Jennings et al., 2015**). Tracking students does have its advantages; it helps ensure that bright students learn as much as their abilities allow them, and it helps ensure that slower students are not taught over their heads. But conflict theorists believe that tracking perpetuates social inequality by locking students into faster and slower tracks. Worse yet, several studies show that students' social class, race, and ethnicity affect the track into which they are placed, even though their intellectual abilities and potential should be the only things that matter. White middle-class students are more likely to be tracked "up," while poorer students and students of color are more likely to be tracked "down."

Once they are tracked, students learn more if they are tracked up and less if they are tracked down. The latter tend to lose self-esteem; they begin to think they have little academic ability and thus do worse in school because they were tracked down (**Chmielewski, Dumont, and Trautwein, 2013; Dumont et al., 2017; Stanley and Chambers, 2018**).

Conflict theorists add that standardized tests are culturally biased and thus also help perpetuate social inequality (**Grodsky, Warren, and Felts, 2008**). They suggest that these tests favor white middle-class students whose socioeconomic status and other aspects of their backgrounds have afforded them various experiences that help them answer questions on the tests.

11.3.3 Interactionist Approaches

Symbolic interaction focuses on micro-level social interactions. Interactionists see education as a vital part of socialization and therefore tend to focus not only on the dynamics of the school or classroom but also on the interactions between students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and among students themselves. What are the norms around interaction, and what labels are used?

A Personal View

Learning to Speak SAE





Gilles Paire/Fotolia

Okay, here's the deal: I'm a working-class girl done good. Please allow me to rephrase that. I would like to share that I am a highly successful woman who has roots in the working class. Do you see the difference in these two ways of speaking? My words, syntax, tones, even gestures change depending on the group I'm with. It hasn't always been that way.

I was raised in a working-class family with notoriously bad grammar. Around them parts we said "ain't," as in "I ain't hungry no more," and "fixin'," as in "Hey Janey, you fixin' to get to the store soon?" We all spoke this way in my family, as did most people within my community, so I really wasn't aware that my grammar was incorrect. I don't even remember my teachers calling me on it.

Things changed drastically when I went to college. Because I did well in high school, I had the fortunate opportunity to attend a prestigious college in the northeast. I would like to say that I loved the experience, but the culture shock was so overwhelming that I might as well have landed on Mars. I especially noticed that people did not speak the same way I did. They didn't have my accent, they used different words, and they used those words in a different pattern. I immediately felt inadequate.

One incident stands out in particular: In one of my math classes I wanted to ask the professor to expand on his explanation, so I simply asked, "How come?" He stared at me. "How come?" he repeated. Then he said it again more loudly than the first, "HOW COME?" At first, I didn't catch what they were laughing about. But then it came to me, "I mean, why?" I gulped. Later that day I withdrew from the class.

That same day I also went to the English department and asked the secretary if the department offered any English tutors, "for, you know, people who talk different." She was a sweet lady, "Oh, you mean for people who have English as a second language? Sure, honey, let me give you a list." I didn't dare tell her that I was looking for a tutor for myself. But I contacted the first name on the list, Darcy, and I am forever grateful. She taught me to speak "Standard American English," as she called it. We met twice a week for an entire year, and I practiced daily. The drills included verbal and nonverbal communication.

I can now easily pass as an upper-middle-class student at my college. I know how to "talk the talk." However, when I go back home to see my mama and pa, I'm just one of the working-class girls "done good."

By the way, I think I'll stop by to see my old math professor just to say "hey."

—Janey, Age 20

Critical Thinking

What is it about social class that contributes to different speech patterns? Can you think of specific issues that would cause these differences? Why is an upper-middle-class speech pattern more valued than other speech patterns? How would a conflict theorist answer this question?

According to the interactionist perspective, schools label students, and these labels follow them for years (**Kirk and Sampson, 2013**). Through the formal structure of grades, testing, and tracking, along with the social aspects of cliques, students develop a self-identity, either positive (e.g., "I am a smart person with a talent for basketball") or negative (e.g., "I'm just not good at math"). Self-fulfilling prophecies can become a substantial part of education. That is, when students are labeled in any way—dumb, loser, smart, slut, friendly, jock, cute, learning disabled—they may come to view themselves that way and behave accordingly (**Shifrer, Callahan, and Muller, 2013**).

According to labeling theorists, teachers form expectations about students early in the school year, and these are communicated to the students in varying ways. The students tend to perform in ways that meet the teacher's expectations, thereby reinforcing them. Sometimes these labels have little to do with reality. An early research study (**Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968**) tested this theory by assessing a group of students

and Jacobson, 1968) tested this theory by assessing a group of students at the beginning of the school year and telling their teachers which students were smart and which were not. The researchers then tested the students again at the end of the school year. As you might guess, the smarter students had learned more during the year than those students who were not as smart. The truth is, however, that the researchers randomly selected which students would be called smart, and these labels had nothing to do with reality. What would account for these so-called “smart” students to have learned more during the school year, given that they were not necessarily smarter at all? The answers can be found in the teachers’ behavior. The teachers of the “smart children” spent more time with them and praised them more often than was true for the “less bright” group.

What Do You Think?

What theoretical perspective do you find most intriguing with respect to education, and why?

Educational Attainment and Achievement

11.4 Identify the educational attainment and achievement of different groups in society.


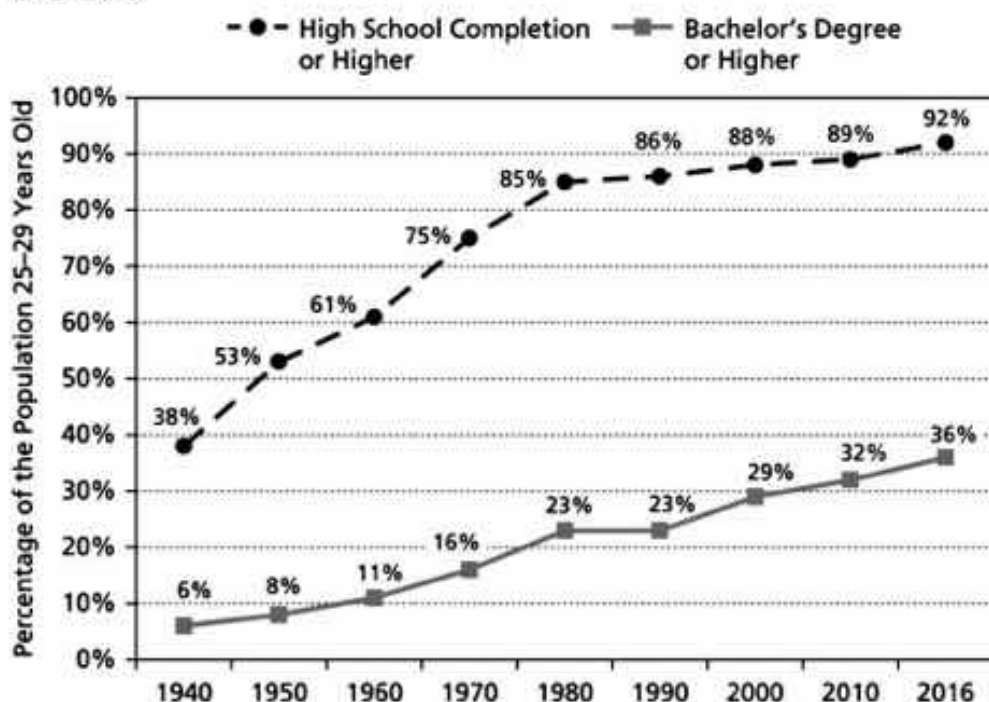
Today, ever-greater proportions of U.S. students are finishing high school and going on to college. As shown in **Figure 11-2** , from 1940 to 2016, the nation underwent a transformation in which high school completion, rather than leaving (i.e., dropping out), became the norm (**National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a**). Only 38 percent of people age 25 to 29 in 1940 had at least a high school diploma; today, that figure is 92 percent. Likewise, those with at least four years of college have also increased significantly. In 1940, only 6 percent of adults age 25 to 29 had earned at least a bachelor's degree, but today, over a third have done so.

Figure 11-2

Percentage of Persons 25–29 Years Old By Educational Attainment, 1940–2016



Source: Data from National Center for Education Statistics. 2018a. "Digest of Education Statistics: 2016." February. Retrieved 14 April 2018 (nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables_1.asp).





These young people did not complete high school. Their job options are very limited, and they have suffered bouts of unemployment. They now work in a packing company, earning \$10.50 an hour, with no fringe benefits. It is unlikely that their pay or working conditions will improve significantly; consequently, few people stay at the packing plant for the long term.

Monkey Business/Fotolia

educational attainment

The number of years of school completed.




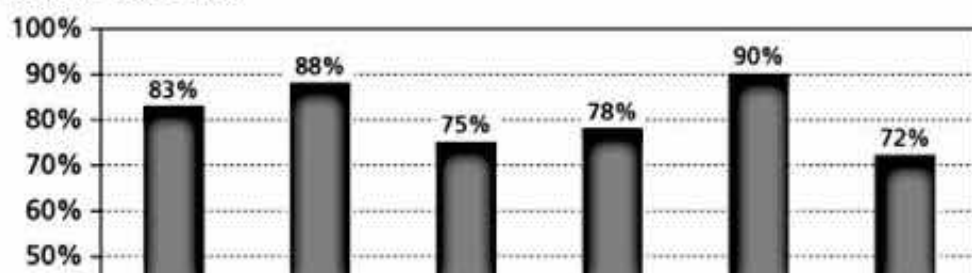
Nonetheless, much work remains in helping young people to finish high school and encouraging them to attend college. For members of most minority groups, these educational issues continue to be especially pressing, as shown in **Figure 11-3**  (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). Although the large majority of Asian/Pacific Islander (90 percent) and white (88 percent) high school students graduated from high school in the 2016 school year, only about three-quarters of Hispanic (78 percent) and black (75 percent) students graduated. The rate for American Indian/Alaska Native youths was even lower (72 percent). The good news, however, is that the gap in **educational attainment**  (number of years of school completed) between most minority groups and whites has narrowed considerably since the turn of the century. A generation ago, in 1980, 25 percent of whites between the ages of 25 and 29 had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with only 12 percent of blacks, and 8 percent of Hispanics, as shown in **Figure 11-4**  (unfortunately, no data are available for Asian/Pacific Islanders or American Indian/Alaska Natives for that year). However, all groups have seen significant increases over the years. Today, 51 percent of young Asian/Pacific Islanders have at least a bachelor's degree, followed by whites (37 percent), blacks (24 percent), American Indian/Alaska Natives (17 percent), and Hispanics (16 percent).

Figure 11-3

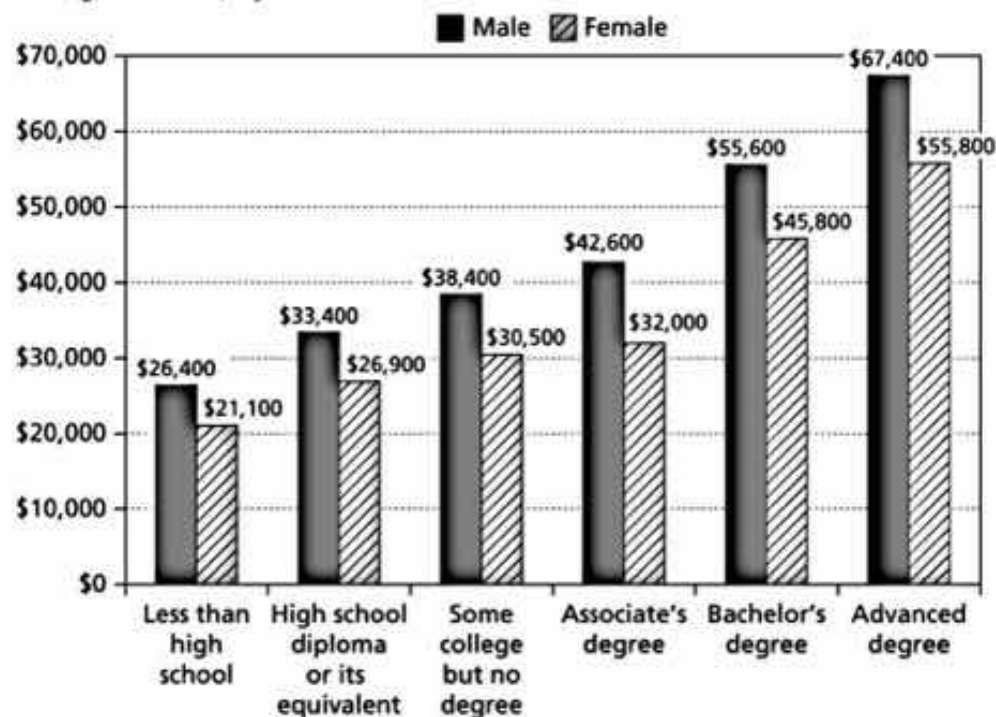
Graduation Rate for Public High School Students, by Race/Ethnicity:
School Year 2016



Women with a master's degree or higher earn about the same as men with only a bachelor's degree (Ma, Pender, and Welch, 2016).


Figure 11-5

Median Annual Earnings of Full-Time Year-Round Wage and Salary Workers Ages 25–34, by Educational Attainment



Source: Data from Ma, J., Pender, M., & Welch, M., (2016) "Education Pays 2016: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society." Trends in Higher Education Series, The College Board.

11.4.1 Blacks

Before World War I, about 90 percent of all blacks in the United States lived in the southern states (Orfield and Eaton, 1996). Although there has been tremendous migration since then, today black students remain disproportionately concentrated in the South, where blacks (and southern whites) receive only about 60–70 percent of the amount of schooling dollars received by whites in more advantaged areas of the nation (as shown earlier, in Map 11-1 ).

In the North, educational opportunities for blacks and whites are more equal, but inequalities between schools in poor black communities and those in more affluent white suburbs tend to perpetuate differences in educational attainment. At the beginning of the twentieth century, northern-born blacks were rapidly closing the educational gap between themselves and whites, but the gap widened again after 1915. The reasons for this reversal are complex. An important factor was the competition between black children and the children of European immigrants, who tended to come from better-educated families and thus enjoyed an advantage over blacks, whose parents had migrated from the South. Another factor, beginning in the Great Depression and continuing to the present,

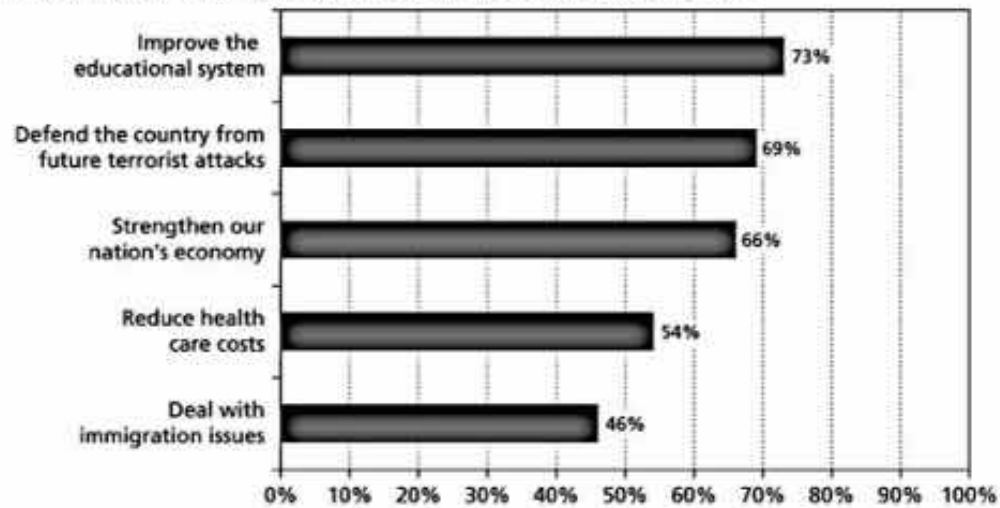
was the higher rate of unemployment among blacks. The employment status of parents has a great deal to do with the educational attainment of their children because children in low-income households are more likely to drop out of school. A third factor was segregation, which tends to increase disparities between groups.

11.4.2 Hispanics

Another minority group that has faced difficulties in education are Hispanics. The educational attainment of Hispanic students is lower than among whites and Asians (**National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a**). But this difference should not be interpreted to mean that Hispanics do not care about education. A study based on telephone interviews of over 1,000 Hispanics (conducted in English and Spanish), asked them to evaluate whether five issues for President Trump and Congress should be a “top priority,” an “important but lower priority,” or “not too important or it should not be done.” The results are found in **Figure 11-6** , and show that improving education is most commonly listed as a “top priority,” while immigration is least likely of the five issues to be listed as a “top priority” (**Pew Research Center, 2017**).

Figure 11-6

Percentage of Hispanic Registered Voters Who Say This Issue Should be a Top Priority for President Trump and Congress in 2017



Source: Data from “Latino priorities for the Trump administration and Congress in 2017,” Pew Research Center, February 23, 2017.

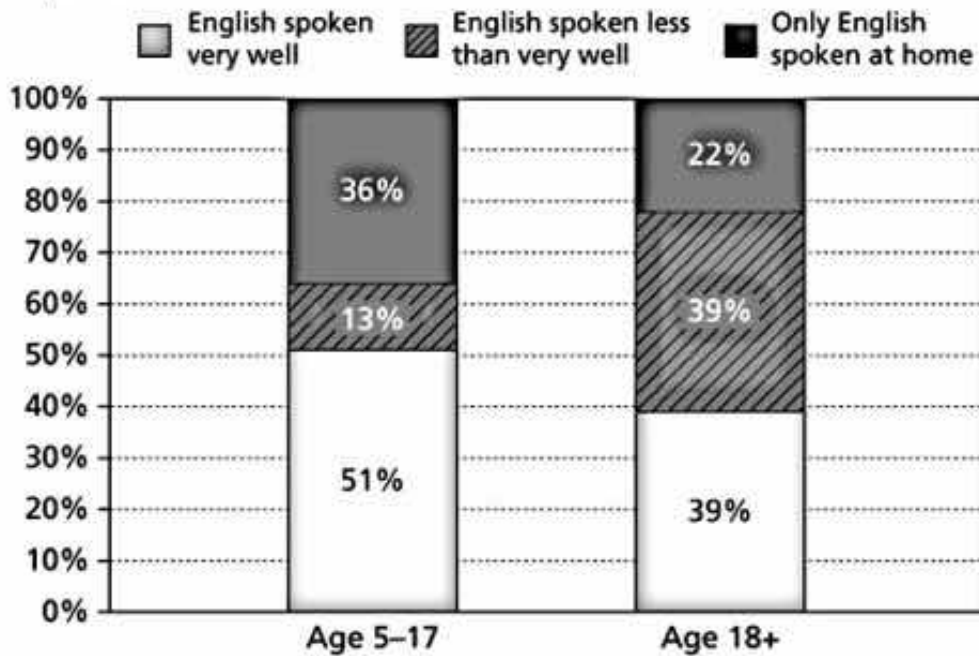
An especially important factor in the lower educational attainment of Hispanic students to date is that they, like blacks, have experienced the effects of de facto segregation and poor schools. This problem is particularly acute in large metropolitan areas, yet this issue has received minimal attention (**Orfield, 2004/2005**).

Another factor that receives greater attention is that some Hispanic students do not speak English at all or do not speak it well enough to succeed in an English-speaking school. A large nationally representative

more than 13 percent need substantial help with English to prevent them from falling behind in school.

Figure 11-7

Language Spoken at Home and English Speaking Ability by Age Among Hispanics



Source: Based on Brown, A., & E. Patten. 2014. "Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2012." Pew Research Center. 29 April. Retrieved from (www.pewhispanic.org/2014/04/29/statistical-portrait-of-hispanics-in-the-united-states-2012/).

Since the late 1960s, a primary goal of education for Hispanic students has been to improve their ability to use English without allowing them to fall behind in other subjects. One technique for achieving this goal is bilingual/bicultural education in which students are taught wholly or partly in their native language until they can function adequately in English, and in some cases, longer. This approach has received the support of the federal Office of Civil Rights, which requires that schools take "affirmative steps" to correct minority students' deficiencies in the English language to receive federal funds.





Asian Americans have been nicknamed the "model minority." Why is this?
GoGo Images Corporation/Alamy Stock Photo

11.4.3 Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Students from Chinese, Korean, East Indian, Pacific Islander, and other Asian backgrounds face different problems in American schools. Due to their higher achievement on most measures of school performance, Asian students and their parents are proud of their scholastic achievements but often feel that they are treated as the "model minority" who are expected to be uniformly high achievers and extremely well behaved in schools (Chou and Feagin, 2015; Poon et al., 2016). Asian Americans make up 4 percent of the U.S. population, but represent 20 percent of the students attending elite U.S. Ivy League schools. However, because so many Asian Americans apply, their acceptance rates are much lower than for other racial and ethnic groups (Hernandez, 2017). This representation has led some to ponder whether Ivy League schools may be putting a quota or limits on the number of Asians admitted (Klein, 2014).


But for Asian students who do not outperform their peers or do not behave according to cultural stereotypes, the extremely high expectations of their families and the larger society can present severe problems. Asian American teenagers and college students experience more stress, harbor more suicidal thoughts, and attempt suicide at higher rates than other racial or ethnic groups, as you can see in **Table 11-3**  (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2014).

Table 11–3

Results of Youth Risk Behavior Survey of High School Students

Survey Question, "In the past 12 months, have you ..."	Asian Youth	Total U.S. Youth
Had serious thoughts of suicide	19%	16%
Made suicide plans	14%	13%
Attempted suicide	11%	8%
Gotten medical attention for a suicide attempt	5%	2%

Source: Suicide Prevention Resource Center. 2014. "Suicide Among Racial/Ethnic Populations in the U.S.: Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians." Retrieved 2 February 2015 (www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/API%2520Sheet%2520August%252028%25202013%2520Final.pdf).

11.4.4 American Indians and Alaska Natives

There are nearly 650,000 American Indian and Alaska Native youths enrolled in public schools in the United States (**National Indian Education Association, 2018**). A much smaller number, about 50,000 students, attend one of the 183 schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The BIE school system was created to meet the federal government's commitment to provide for the education of American Indian and Alaska Native children. The goal of the BIE is "to provide quality education opportunities from early childhood through life in accordance with a tribe's needs for cultural and economic well-being, in keeping with the diversity of Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages as distinct cultural and governmental entities" (**Bureau of Indian Education, 2018a**).² The BIE schools consider the spiritual, mental, physical, and cultural aspects of the students within their family and tribal or village context. They strive to contribute to the development of quality American Indian and Alaska Native communities (**Converse, 2014**).

²Bureau of Indian Education. 2015. Home page. Retrieved 31 March 2015 (www.bie.edu/index.htm).

Of the 183 BIE-funded schools, 53 are operated by the BIE and the remaining 130 are tribally controlled. The Bureau also operates two post-secondary schools: Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (**Bureau of Indian Education, 2018b**).

How do the students in BIE-funded schools compare with other students across the country? A large-scale evaluation was conducted for the BIE by the educational research center, the Northwest Evaluation Association (**Converse, 2014**). Researchers found that student achievement in both

math and reading was below average at all grade levels. In only 29 percent of the BIE-funded schools did students have test scores near the national average. However, a review of data over the four years prior showed that student achievement had improved, particularly among younger students. Math gains were also notable. Therefore, proponents of BIE-funded schools suggest that these improvements, coupled with the social and cultural advantages available to students, indicate the successes and strengths of Indian education.

What Do You Think?

Identify the specific personal and structural factors that shaped your educational attainment to date (and your plans for the future). Personal factors might include intelligence or personal initiative, while structural factors might include your family's educational background or issues related to your culture, social class, or race or ethnic identity.

11.4.5 Can We Find Any Common Themes?

Lower-income persons, blacks, Hispanics, and American Indian/Alaska Native youths are less likely to finish high school and less likely to attend college than are their Asian American/Pacific Islander and white counterparts. Whatever the cause, dropping out has serious economic consequences. Those who have less education earn significantly less than people who have completed more years of school.

We have briefly reviewed some unique characteristics of these minority groups that could account for some of the educational disparities. But can we find any common themes that could offer us more clues? The following seven ideas offer potential leads in better understanding the disparities. Some of these ideas are structural and others represent individual-level factors:

- **Lack of Cultural Capital:** Students bring their own personal history to school with advantages or disadvantages. For example, if a child was raised by parents who did not read well, chances are these parents had a more limited vocabulary than other parents, they did not have a lot of books in the home, and they may not have valued reading as an activity. Therefore, the child begins school at a distinct disadvantage that can continue throughout a child's educational career, unless schools work to equalize cultural capital by providing enriching material and field trips (Kisida, Greene, and Bowen, 2014; Silva, 2017). The lack of cultural capital can hinder higher education as well because parents may not be familiar with college admission procedures, entrance exams, or financial aid.
- **Inferior Teachers:** The first large study of American schools was commissioned by the U.S. Congress and conducted by James Coleman in the 1960s (Coleman, 1966). He noted the factors that contribute to a student's academic performance, including family and

neighborhood experiences and, to a lesser degree, school resources. Yet, research suggests that among school-related factors, the quality of teachers matters most (Poulou, 2017; Sadler et al., 2013). When it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, a teacher is estimated to have two to three times the impact of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership (Rand Education, 2012). Yet classrooms are often segregated into achievement levels, racial composition, and socioeconomic composition, and it is the teachers with less experience who tend to be assigned to the most challenging classes (Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb, 2015; Harris, 2017; Kalogrides, Loeb, and Béteille, 2013).

- **Inferior Schools:** Traditionally, schools reflected the socioeconomic and racial profile of the surrounding neighborhood and were most often segregated. Desegregation effectively began with the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which found that segregation had negative effects on black students even when their school facilities were "equal" (which they rarely were). Segregation continued, however, because many white or upper-income families transferred to private schools (i.e., "white flight") and politicians gerrymandered districts to change school attendance boundaries (Richards, 2014). In 2007, the Court reversed the 1954 landmark decision, and ruled that policies that selected students based on race to achieve more integrated classrooms are unconstitutional. Consequently, today's typical minority student attends school with fewer whites than his or her counterpart did in 1970 (Fiel, 2013), despite the fact that high-poverty schools and racially segregated schools tend to result in lower educational attainment for the poor and racial minorities (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Karner, 2017; Mickelson, Bottia, and Lambert, 2013; Wolf, Magnuson, and Kimbro, 2017).
- **Lack of Parental Engagement:** Parental engagement in their child's schooling is an important factor in student achievement (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Majo and Siraj, 2015; Wilder, 2014). Parental involvement is especially important for more disadvantaged students (Benner, Boyle, and Sadler, 2016). However, many low-income and minority parents are less involved in their child's schooling than are other parents (Graves and Wright, 2011; Toldson and Lemmons, 2013). This might include less help with homework, infrequent communication with teachers, and fewer school visits. There are a variety of reasons for this—language barriers, work hours, a lack of understanding educational materials because of their own low level of education, and a general sense of not belonging or feeling different from the school culture.
- **Peer Groups:** Peer groups take on increasing importance as children become teenagers and young adults (Butler-Barnes et al., 2015). Some low-income students, as well as students who are black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native, may not have access to a large peer network of high-achieving and college-bound peers because they are overrepresented in underperforming schools. If you do not have very many friends who are finishing high school or consider-

ing college, it is not surprising that you may also have limited educational aspirations.

- **Multiple Obligations:** Although the primary cause of dropping out is poor academic performance, students often drop out of high school because of the difficulties they encounter in trying to cope with school, family, and work roles (Doll, Eslami, and Walters, 2013). They may be married and/or pregnant or working at a job, all of which increases the likelihood of dropping out of school.
- **Lack of Financial Resources:** Cutbacks in federally funded assistance, particularly the emphasis on loans rather than outright grants, place a college education out of reach for many minority or poor students. Moreover, since many are first-generational college students, they may not have the cultural capital to understand how to best utilize financial services for their education. A study that looked at students at six large public research universities found that low-income students are more likely to make financial decisions that could negatively impact their immediate academic experience, serve as disruptive barriers to success, delay or prolong graduation, or lead to increased debt upon graduation (Soria, Weiner, and Lu, 2014).

An egalitarian society has a responsibility to provide equal access to high-quality education for all its citizens. Critics claim that U.S. society has failed to meet this responsibility, particularly for persons who are low-income or from minority groups.



Low-income and minority students are more likely than others to be in crowded classrooms lacking basic resources such as textbooks, as shown here in a science class in New York.

David Grossman/Alamy Stock Photo

How U.S. Students Measure Up in International Comparisons

11.5 Evaluate how students in the United States compare to students in other countries in terms of educational achievement.

Throughout the world, education runs in two extremes: Some children receive excellent education, at least as evidenced by their high scores on standardized tests. In contrast, other children receive little or no education at all. This pattern is especially the case for girls, who are often excluded from school because of religious, cultural, economic, or sometimes even legal grounds.

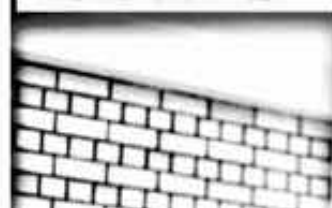
11.5.1 Education in Developed Nations

One issue that motivates the clamor for educational reform in the United States is the fact that on standardized tests administered throughout the world, the United States lags other advanced industrialized nations. One piece of evidence for this claim is to compare the average score of 15-year-olds taking the Program for International Student Assessment, which is a very large cross-national test that measures math, science literacy, and other key skills among 15-year-olds in dozens of developed and developing countries. The United States placed a paltry 38th out of 71 countries in math and placed 24th in science and reading (**DeSilver, 2017**).

The standing of American students is a bit better in other international measures, but not by much. For example, in the assessment known as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which tests children in grades four and eight every four years (since 1995), American students fare better. In the most recent test, among the fourth graders, the U.S. ranked 11th in math and 7th in science out of 48. Among 8th graders the United States ranked eighth in both math and science, out of 37 countries (**DeSilver, 2017**). These results are certainly better, but given what our country spends on education, we should expect even stronger outcomes.

What Do You Think?

What might explain why students in so many other countries have higher test scores than students in the United States? Compare and contrast our culture and American education system with those found in other countries.





These high school students in Singapore are among those with the highest test scores in the world. How would sociologists explain this? Why does the United States rank so comparatively low?

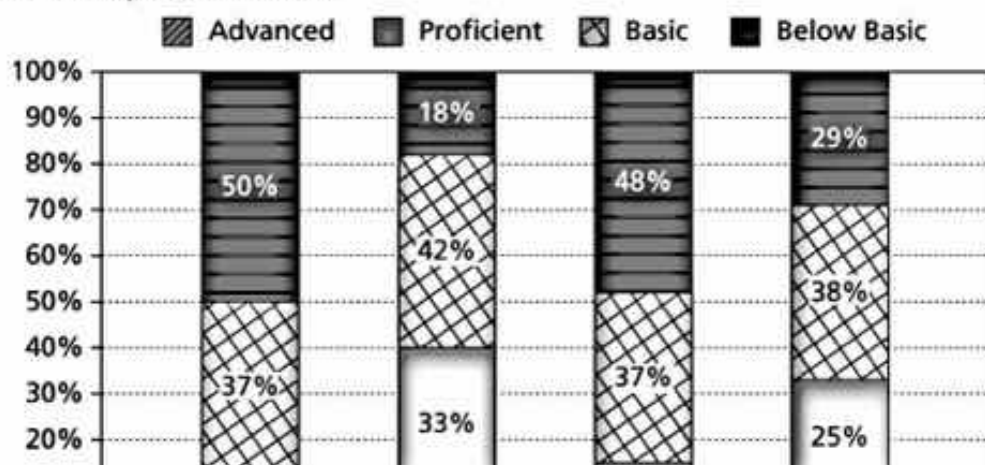
SOURCENEXT/Alamy Stock Photo

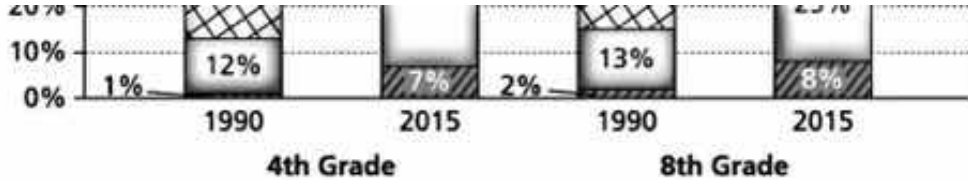
There are a few important things to note with respect to these comparisons, however. First, because of the great diversity of U.S. students and schools, the U.S. students' scores vary quite a bit. Much of this variation is explained by whether the students attend segregated schools in which high proportions of students are of poor or of very low income (often measured by whether students are eligible for free lunch in school, a reflection of their family's financial need). The lower the income of students, and the greater the number of low-income students in the schools, the less well they do on standardized international tests.

The second point to note is that American test scores are improving, as shown in **Figure 11-8**. An assessment of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has found that U.S. students have made substantial gains in their math scores since 1990. Scores have increased slightly every year, although fourth-grade scores have leveled off in recent years (DeSilver, 2017). For example, in 1990, 50 percent of fourth graders scored below a "basic" level in math; by 2015 only 18 percent did so. Likewise, the percentage of eighth graders who scored below "basic" dropped from 48 percent to 29 percent.

Figure 11-8

Math Proficiency Slowly Growing Among U.S. Fourth and Eighth Grade Students, 1990 and 2015





Source: Data from DeSilver, D. (February 15, 2017) *U.S. Students' Academic Achievement Still Lags That of Their Peers in Many Other Countries*. Pew Research Center.

These recent national assessments of educational achievement have shown some encouraging improvement in students' math scores. Nevertheless, the level of student achievement remains a subject of widespread debate. In a study of inequalities in educational achievement in the United States, researchers with the McKinsey consulting company concluded that:

The underutilization of human potential as reflected in the achievement gap is extremely costly. Existing gaps impose the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession—one substantially larger than the deep recession the country is currently experiencing. For individuals, avoidable shortfalls in academic achievement impose heavy and often tragic consequences via lower earnings, poor health, and higher rates of incarceration.³

³McKinsey & Company. 2010. "How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better."

(*McKinsey and Company, 2010*)

11.5.2 Education in Less Developed Nations


Many children around the world do not share in the educational successes noted above. Instead, it is not uncommon for them to attend crowded, underfunded schools with teachers who may have little education themselves. Students' attendance may be sporadic, they may have few books for their lessons, and they often quit school after a few years because of the long travel distance from home, the cost of school, or because they are needed to work at home. For example, in Afghanistan, only 21 percent of girls and 55 percent of boys complete primary school, as do only 34 percent of girls and 55 percent of boys in Niger (**Population Reference Bureau, 2015**).

Investing in education is important because education gives people the skills they need to help themselves out of poverty and into prosperity,

which includes the following benefits (Center for Global Development, 2018):

- **Improved health:** With education, people are better prepared to prevent disease and to use health services effectively. For example, young people who have completed primary education are less than half as likely to contract HIV as those with little or no schooling.
- **Delayed marriage and childbearing.** Educated mothers marry later, and have fewer and healthier children.
- **Higher wages and economic growth:** In many poor countries, with each additional year of schooling, people earn ten percent higher wages. These earnings, in turn, contribute to national economic growth. No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid growth without reaching an adult literacy rate of at least 40 percent.
- **Democracy and political stability:** Education supports the growth of civil society, democracy, and political stability, allowing people to learn about their rights and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to exercise them.⁴

⁴“Education and The Developing World: Why is education essential for development?,” (2018) Center for Global Development.

Girls are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to schooling and often do not have the same opportunities and resources as boys do to attend school. This issue is explored in the slideshow, “**Education for Girls.**” 

Slide Show Education for Girls

Globally, girls are often absent from schools. The local culture, religious customs, or economic circumstances may contribute to the opinion that education for girls is unnecessary. Some parents may see it as a waste of time and money, since their daughter will marry young and move to another household. In other regions, education for girls is viewed as dangerous and a threat to “normal” family functioning. Educated girls may start making demands for change. In other regions, educating girls is considered immoral and contrasts with religious views about right and wrong. But often, the reason comes down to simple economics. Families need the labor of girls. The slideshow provides insight about girls and education in the developing world.





In many countries girls and boys attend separate schools. But separate is not equal. Funding for girls' education lags that spent on boys. Girls' schools may close to maintain a higher educational standard for boys.

Dinodia Photos/Alamy Stock Photo



Some girls are not able to go to school because they are busy taking care of younger brothers and sisters. It is not unusual for a family to contain five or six children, a result of inadequate access to birth control and traditional customs that promote large families as beneficial.

Somwaya/Fotolia





Many communities in developing nations lack access to clean drinking water. Family members, usually girls and women, often spend nearly an entire day walking to a water source and walking back home carrying up to 50 pounds on their backs, only to do it again later that day. In addition to keeping them out of school, the walk for water also makes the girls and women vulnerable to predators, both animal and human. Girls are raped on their way to and from their water source.

Bartosz Hadyniak/Getty Images





Some girls do not go to school because they are expected to earn money for their family. They may be required to beg on the street, to steal from shop vendors, or to sell themselves sexually to men. Girls are considered valuable only insofar as what resources they can bring to the family.

NH7/Fotolia

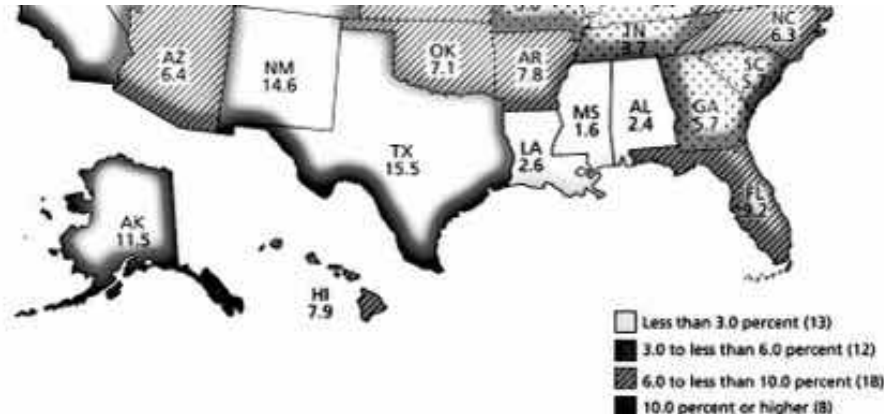


Girls and women work very hard in developing nations. This 8-year-old girl already is responsible for gathering firewood for her family. This task takes up much of her day because firewood is used for cooking, bathing, and boiling drinking water. Meanwhile, her younger sister helps her mother clean the house while her two older brothers are at school.

Renate Wefers/Fotolia

Critical Thinking

Reflecting on the four themes of this text—the importance of using an empirical approach, linking individual experiences with social structure, understanding that social inequality contributes to social problems, and acknowledging that understanding social problems requires a comparative perspective—devise a program in the developing world to help girls attend school. What social, personal, economic, and political factors must be addressed?



Source: "English Language Learners in Public Schools," *The Condition of Education 2017*, National Center for Education Statistics, (March 2017).

The desirability of teaching non-English-speaking pupils in their native language is a subject of intense debate, particularly in California and other states with large Hispanic populations. On one side are those who believe that preserving the language and culture of minority groups is a worthwhile, even necessary, goal of public education. On the other side are those who believe that minority students must be "immersed" in English-language instruction if they are to be prepared to compete effectively in American society.

Bilingual education has a long history in the United States, shifting between tolerance and repression depending on politics, the economy, and the size of the immigrant population (**Gandara and Escamilla, 2017**). It was used to help immigrants learn English in the nineteenth century (**National Association for Bilingual Education, 2014**). In 1839, Ohio was the first state to pass a law requiring bilingual education if parents requested it from the schools. Many other states and communities gradually followed suit. In 1968, the U.S. Congress passed Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known informally as "the Bilingual Education Act," which mandated bilingual education to give immigrants access to education in their "first" language.

A GLOBAL VIEW

Raising My Children in France



but also for all children. Yet, these programs are very expensive and out of reach of many low- and even moderate-income families at roughly \$10,000 per year (Bivens et al., 2016; Business Brokers.net, 2018). A study from the Economic Policy Institute, a think tank created to give low-income people a voice in policy, examined the costs of childcare versus college and found that the in-state public college tuition in 23 states was lower than the cost of full-time childcare for a 4-year-old (Bivens et al., 2016).

Because of the importance of childcare, and its high costs, the federally funded program **Head Start** ⓘ was created for low-income families. Head Start offers a comprehensive program that would provide health and nutritional services to preschool children while also developing their cognitive skills and engaging parents (Head Start, 2015). In addition, educational programs for parents are usually included covering such topics as child development and nutrition. Many programs are integrated to include children with special physical or cognitive needs. The problem, however, is that there are not nearly enough Head Start spots for eligible families.


Head Start

The federally funded preschool program for low-income children and their families.

The United States ranks below almost all the advanced economies of the European Economic Union in funding for early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). ECEC has become an important issue in many parts of the world because of the rise in labor force participation of mothers, the push for single mothers to work rather than receive public aid, and a growing interest in ensuring that all children begin elementary school with basic skills and are ready to learn. ECEC programs enhance and support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. A 3-year study of 12 developed nations compared the availability and structure of ECEC programs. Several interesting points were noted. To begin with, access to ECEC is a statutory right in all countries except the United States. Although compulsory school begins at age 6 or 7, ECEC availability begins at age 1 year in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden (after generous maternity and family leave benefits are exhausted); at age 2.5 years in Belgium; at age 3 years in Italy and Germany; and at age 4 years in Britain. Most countries have full coverage of education for 3- to 6-year-olds (Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth, and Family Policies, 2005).

In contrast, in the United States there is no statutory entitlement until ages 5 to 7, depending on the state. Access to publicly funded ECEC programs such as the Head Start program is generally restricted to at-risk children, usually defined as poor or near-poor. Furthermore, the demand for these programs among vulnerable groups far outstrips their

availability.


In most of the 12 countries reviewed, government pays the largest share of the costs, with parents covering only 25–30 percent. Countries may also make arrangements for sliding-scale payments for low-income families to help make programs affordable. Most countries require staff to complete at least three years of training at universities or other institutes of higher education. Their earnings reflect their levels of education. The box, **A Global View: “Raising My Children in France,”**  describes the French way of delivering early childhood education.

In contrast, U.S. parents pay an average of 60–80 percent of ECEC costs. Some of these costs can be recouped through tax benefits, but many low-income families find the tax system confusing and therefore end up using informal or unregulated childcare. In the United States, there is also no agreed-on set of qualifications for staff. Their status and pay are low, and turnover is high. Other countries make a clear investment in their ECEC. Sweden devotes roughly 1.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to ECEC, with Denmark, France, and Norway close behind. In contrast, the United States devotes less than half of 1 percent of its GDP to early childhood services (**OECD, 2016**). Ironically, the United States is a leader in research on child development but has not developed the programs that research suggests are needed and that are increasingly available in other developed nations.

What Do You Think?

Respond to the person who says, “Why should I pay higher taxes to pay for you to educate your young child? S/he is *your* child; therefore, you should pay for his or her early education yourself.”

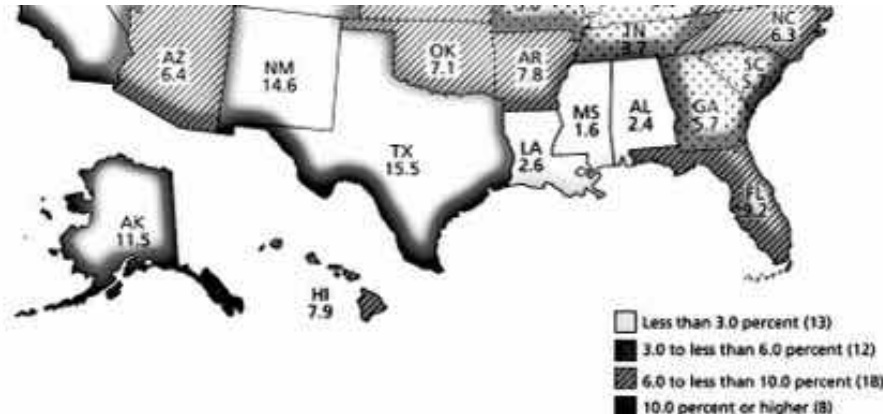
11.6.2 Bilingual/Bicultural Education

Roughly 4.6 million children participate in English Language Learner programs in school each year, which is almost one of every 10 children (**National Center for Education Statistics, March, 2017a**). Most of these children are in elementary school. As you can see in **Map 11-2** , the states with the largest number of English Language Learners are in the Southwest United States, and include California, Nevada, Texas, and New Mexico (**National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a**).

Map 11-2

Percentage of Public School Students Who Were English Language Learners, by State: School Year 2014–15





Source: "English Language Learners in Public Schools," *The Condition of Education 2017*, National Center for Education Statistics, (March 2017).

The desirability of teaching non-English-speaking pupils in their native language is a subject of intense debate, particularly in California and other states with large Hispanic populations. On one side are those who believe that preserving the language and culture of minority groups is a worthwhile, even necessary, goal of public education. On the other side are those who believe that minority students must be "immersed" in English-language instruction if they are to be prepared to compete effectively in American society.

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A GLOBAL VIEW

Raising My Children in France





Room the Agency/Alamy Stock Photo

My sister and I were born and raised in France, but she moved to the United States for college, met an American who she later married, and now has two children. In contrast, I went to university here in France, later married a native Frenchman, and also have two children, roughly the same age. Although I am separated from my sister by thousands of miles, Skype allows us to share the ups and downs of parenting on a weekly basis. What a difference we are having raising our children!

Each time after I had my babies, my employer gave me four months off, completely paid, so that I could stay at home to bond. A newborn turns your world upside down, so I appreciated this time at home with him. We could sleep, eat, relax, and play whenever we needed to and not have to worry about getting on a tight schedule while I went back to work right away. Law in France requires maternity leave, so every woman has 16 weeks of paid time off. I then decided to stay home for another two months without any pay, and my job was held for me.

France also provides a helper to come to the house for two weeks after a baby is born to check on us and help us out. My helper did the laundry for me and cooked some meals. She also watched the baby, so I could go for a walk and have some quiet time, or have lunch with friends. This service was all free.

When my baby was 6 weeks old, I could take him to a childcare center and they would watch him for a very small charge, the equivalent of about a dollar an hour. Since I wasn't yet back to work, I usually just took him there for a couple of hours a day so that I could go to the gym or run my errands. However, after 6 months, I went back to work full-time, and he stayed there from 8:00 until 5:30, and, again, it was just a nominal charge. I felt that he was in good care because all the childcare workers have a university degree and seem to love their jobs. They are paid well. Also, my husband and I receive a Family Allowance from the government for my child, and that helps with incidental costs. Three years later when I had my second baby, my Family Allowance was even higher.

At the same time, I watched my sister in the United States when she had her baby, and her experience was very different. She had only 6 weeks off work and it was completely unpaid other than some saved up vacation pay. How can you heal and bond with a new baby in only 6 weeks? She said that legally she could have taken up to 12 weeks off, but since it was all unpaid, she could not afford it. She also had no helper. I think it would be lonely and very difficult to handle a brand-new baby all by yourself. When she went back to work after 6 weeks, she had to pay over a thousand dollars a month for childcare!

15%	13%	14%	11%	8%	8%
Did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (at least once during the 30 days before the survey)					
4%	7%	6%	5%	7%	6%
Were bullied on school property (during 12 months before the survey)					
-	-	-	20%	20%	20%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2018. "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)." 22 March.

Solutions such as installing metal detectors and hiring additional security guards have been attempted, and these measures may help prevent violence by outsiders, but they do not convey authority to teachers. Educators are searching for ways to empower teachers. Several possibilities have been suggested: creating smaller high schools, or "schools within schools"; expecting more from students than mere attendance; and encouraging dropouts to return to school as adults. The last suggestion is especially attractive because adult high school students often become role models for younger students, and their presence tends to reduce the amount of disorder in the schools they attend. Since the shooting in Parkland, Florida, there has been talk of arming teachers; however, nearly two-thirds of teachers strongly disagree with this approach (63 percent). Only 11 percent of teachers say they strongly favor this approach, with the remainder somewhere in between these views (Brenan, March 16, 2018).

What Do You Think?

What are your views about arming some teachers with guns at schools to protect students in case of another shooting? Do you think it is a good idea? Why or why not?

11.6.4 School Choice

Efforts to create smaller schools, schools with special approaches to learning, or schools that promote a particular religious orientation invariably become entangled in the ongoing debate over school choice. People who are dissatisfied with the public schools or seek special educational opportunities for their children are often attracted to proposals for expanding the array of parental choices, including parochial and secular private schools.

Charter Schools

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos is a committed fan of charter schools. These are special schools that are innovative in their use of resources and yet are funded as public schools. As choices within the public-school system widen, supporters argue, there will be more pressure on the conventional schools to become more competitive and to improve their educational methods. Critics, in contrast, claim that charter schools divert badly needed public school dollars to wealthier families that are more likely to have the ability to forgo attending the neighborhood school to attend a charter school. Charter schools can also discriminate in a number of ways against those students who are less advantaged. For example, they draw students citywide, so providing any type of school buses for transportation becomes difficult. Therefore, it is primarily children who have parents who can drive them to school (i.e., more privileged children) who can attend. Also, parents are often required to volunteer time to the schools, which, again, many low-income families cannot easily do.

Nationwide, about 7,000 charter schools are in operation, serving 3 million students (**National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018b**). These schools are most likely to be found in the western or southern states. California has the largest *number* of charter school students (about 600,000), although Arizona has the highest *proportion* of students in charter schools (16 percent).

Most charter schools are small, with fewer than 300 students. They are usually units of a local school system, but each charter school reflects its founders' educational philosophies, programs, and organizational structures.

Research evaluating the effectiveness of charter schools in improving student academic outcomes shows mixed results. Some studies find that students in charter schools do not perform measurably better on reading and math tests than do students in regular public schools with similar student populations. Others show more positive effects (**Bluestone, Sjoquist, and Warner, 2016**). The differing results likely stem from the fact that charter schools are very diverse. Some serve the urban poor, others the rural poor, and others have more economically advantaged students. It has been noted that there appear to be more positive impacts for more disadvantaged schools and students and more negative impacts for the more advantaged (**Clark et al., 2015**).

These mixed results are disappointing for advocates of charter schools, but the demand for greater school choice and parents' desire for alternatives to some of the public schools in their communities will continue to stimulate the growth of charter schools and other alternatives to public schooling, such as homeschooling.





While most students in charter schools may not perform better than other students, on average, there are important exceptions. The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) Academy educates 200 middle-school students, mostly poor black and Latino children, and has the highest test scores in the Bronx, New York. To achieve these impressive results, students attend school for nine-and-a-half hours a day, including Saturdays and throughout the summer, and get two hours of homework a night.

Chris Hondros/Getty Images

School Vouchers

Proponents of school vouchers ask that parents be allowed to choose among public and private schools that offer all kinds of educational options. The theory is that increased competition among schools to attract students would improve the schools' efficiency or cost-effectiveness while stimulating a more open market for educational practices. The main criticism of voucher plans is that they are likely to be used most effectively by more highly educated and affluent parents, leaving the poorer public schools to less well-equipped parents; this possibility would worsen the existing situation of stratification and inequality in education.

An alternative to school vouchers is reform of the property tax system for funding schools in the United States. Most public-school systems are funded through a levy on residential property known as the school tax. In municipalities throughout the nation, property owners have become increasingly loath to pay higher taxes on their homes to fund increases in teachers' pay or improvements in the local schools. Meanwhile, renters may eagerly vote for education taxes, but do not have to contribute to them. In large cities, where revenues from property taxes are lower, this system is largely responsible for inequities in funding between suburban and urban schools and explains why urban schools often lack the art, music, athletic, and science programs usually found in suburban schools. In the past, state education budgets were used to offset these differences, but as states cut back on public spending, the schools in poorer central-city communities suffer inordinately.

Homeschooling

Homeschoolers are students whose parents report that their children are taught at home rather than in a public or private school. Although many parents in the homeschooling movement are motivated by religious prin-

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Charter Schools

ciples and want to include specific religious instruction in their teaching or wish to avoid the secular aspects of public schooling, many others simply believe that they can do a better job teaching their children than the schools can or wish to emphasize specific language or other skills in their home teaching. Approximately 1.8 million students are home-schooled in the United States (**Redford et al., 2017**). Homeschooling is facilitated by the wealth of educational materials and resources now available on the Internet.

Students who are homeschooled perform, on average, at least as well as those graduating from public schools. Critics of the movement often argue, however, that while withdrawing students from the public schools may be a good solution to what parents perceive as problems of those schools, homeschooling also takes students out of the school community, perhaps to the detriment of that community, which loses access to the students' talents (and tax dollars). For their part, homeschooling parents argue that their children should be allowed to participate in the school community, even on school grounds (e.g., sports teams, school band), because they pay taxes. Some school districts have complied with these requests.

11.6.5 Sex and Gender Influences in Schooling

Girls do better in school than boys and complete more years of education. For example, from primary school through college, girls average higher grades on all subjects, including math and science. This difference is not just a recent phenomenon, and it occurs in many countries, not just the United States. A large meta-analysis of 369 different studies published between 1914 and 2011 examined the academic grades of over one million boys and girls in more than 30 countries. The analysis found that girls earn higher grades in every subject, even the science-related fields where boys are assumed to surpass them, and girls' higher grades have been consistent over time (**Voyer and Voyer, 2014**). Therefore, the authors of this study suggest that the recent claim of the "boy crisis" with boys suddenly lagging girls' achievements is false. Other cross-cultural studies also show that girls tend to outperform boys in school in a wide variety of subjects (**Heyder, Kessels, and Steinmayr, 2017; Stoet and Geary, 2015**).

However, what *has* changed in recent years is young women's likelihood of enrolling in and graduating from college. For example, in 1990 slightly more men than women (age 25–29) had achieved at least a bachelor's degree. But today, women have blown past men. In 2016, 40 percent of young women had at least a bachelor's degree, compared to only 36 percent of young men (**National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a**). The largest increases in women's college enrollment have been among black and Hispanic women.

Why do girls and women perform better in school than boys and men, on average? We can only speculate. Social, cultural, and economic factors likely operate together. Some parents continue to assume that boys are smarter, especially in math and science and therefore encourage their girls to put more effort into their studies. Differences in studying styles may also affect outcomes; research shows that girls tend to study to understand the material, which tends to produce higher grades, whereas boys emphasize the final performance. Structural conditions are also an important consideration (**Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014**). As labor market barriers to women have been lowered, the benefits of a college education are more obvious for women than they might be for men. In contrast, boys' aspirations may be leveled because of their higher incidence of behavioral and disciplinary problems.

Women have made great strides in advancing their education. Yet, something is amiss; many fields of study remain segregated. For example, fewer women major in "STEM" fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) that can be quite lucrative financially. Why? Is it simply that women do not want to be engineers, mathematicians, or scientists?

A slew of research studies gives us important insights into why women remain poorly represented in STEM fields. Sex and gender bias by schools, teachers, and professors may play a role beginning in elementary school and then continue through college (**Blackburn, 2017; Lavy and Sand, 2015**). One recent study using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study found that high schools with highly gendered extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, clubs) had fewer girls enroll in STEM education programs (**Legewie and DiPrete, 2014**).

Another study examined the opinions of college science faculty toward women in STEM fields. Yale researchers contacted professors in physics, chemistry, and biology at six major research universities (both public and private) and asked them to evaluate an application (fake) from a recent graduate seeking a position as a laboratory manager. All professors received a one-page application from a candidate who was designed to be "promising," although not particularly stellar. Half of the applications were listed as being from "John," while the other half were from "Jennifer." On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest, the professors gave John an average score of 4 for competence, while Jennifer received only a 3.3. The professors described John more favorably as someone they might hire for their labs or would be willing to mentor. They also offered John a starting salary that was 15 percent higher than that offered to Jennifer (**Moss-Racusin et al., 2012**). Remember, these applications were identical.

Should it surprise us that faculty evaluate the applications differently? Sex and gender biases permeate all aspects of our society, including education. In fact, in an interesting twist that looks not at how faculty evaluate students, but rather *how students evaluate faculty*, this bias is clear. A researcher examined 14 million comments on the website "Rate My Professor" in 25 different disciplines in the Humanities, Social Sciences,

Physical Sciences, and STEM fields (Schmidt, 2015). He found that students in all disciplines were far more likely to say that male professors, as compared with female professors, were "brilliant," "smart," "intellectual," "knowledgeable," "important," "funny," "interesting," and students referred to them as "professor." Meanwhile, female professors were more often referred to as "biased," "unfair," "moody," "unhappy," "strict," having "busywork," and were called "teacher." To female professors' credit, they were also described more often as "friendly," "helpful," "caring," and "nice," although they were also more likely to be described as the opposite of these: "unfriendly," "unhelpful," "uncaring," and "mean." Clearly, students tend to focus on female professors' interpersonal skills, and think less of their brilliance or intellect.



Despite the fact that women earn the majority of college degrees, college majors remain highly segregated by sex. Few men major in fields traditionally held by women, such as social work or nursing, and it remains that few women major in STEM fields, which tend to pay much higher than average wages. Some schools are brainstorming ways to make these fields more attractive to women.

highwaystarz/Fotolia

What Do You Think?

Sex biases in education can go both ways. Why do you think that there are so few men in the fields of nursing, social work, and early childhood education?

Social Policy

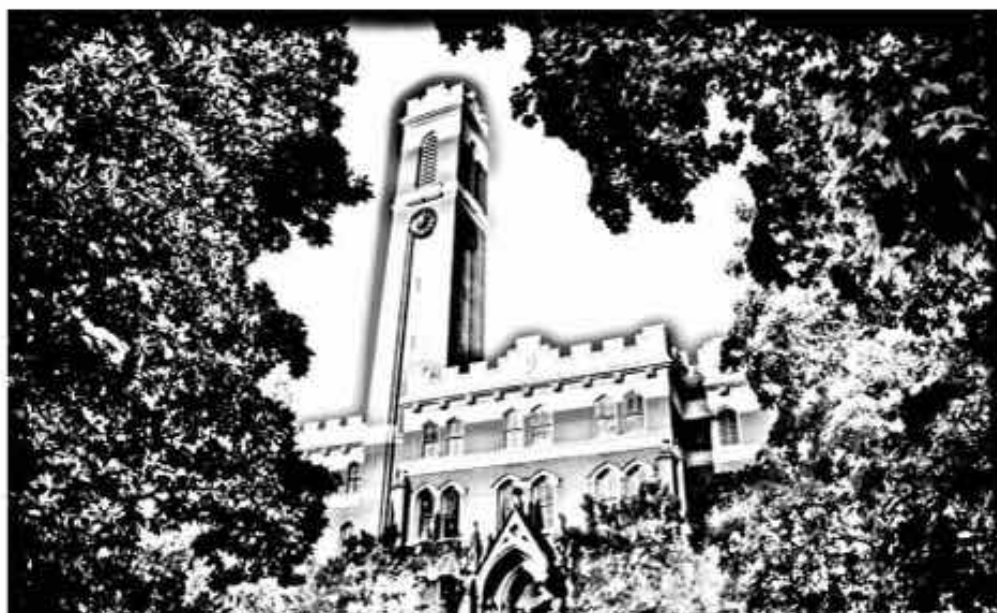
11.7 Evaluate access to higher education in the United States.

Of all American social institutions, education may be the easiest to change through social policy, if only people could agree on what they want schools to do. Those who believe American society has become too secular may advocate prayer in the schools. Others, who believe that schools have a responsibility to steer children away from the dangers of AIDS or early pregnancy, may advocate more thorough sex education. Still others, who lament the supposed failure of the schools to produce adequately trained students, may come up with proposals for educational reform in both K–12 and higher education. One issue pertinent to reform has to do with access. While access to K–12 is guaranteed, this cannot be said with respect to higher education. With college tuition costs soaring, many people wonder if attending college is even a possibility.

11.7.1 Access to Higher Education

The rising cost of college tuition threatens access to public state universities. Taxpayer support for public universities has fallen precipitously over the last decade and legislators look to tuition, grant funding, and private donations to make up the difference. Several prominent university presidents have stated that the decline amounts to privatization of the institutions that played a crucial role in the creation of the American middle class. During the years after World War II, the United States built the world's greatest system of public higher education. "We're now in the process of dismantling all that," said John D. Wiley, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin–Madison.⁵

⁵Quoted from Dillon, S. "At Public Universities, Warnings of Privatization," by Sam Dillon, *New York Times*, 16 October 2005.



Tuition costs have soared at both private and public universities. Yet, college remains attractive because graduates earn significantly more than do those who have not graduated from college. This photo of Vanderbilt University shows the allure of the college environment.

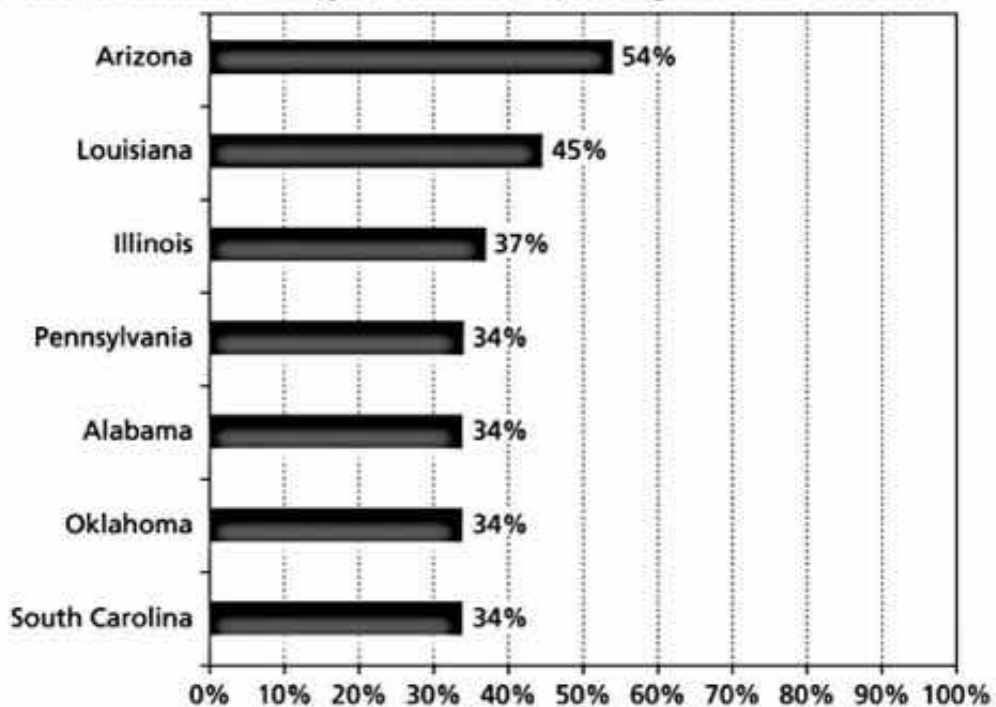
SeanPavonePhoto/Fotolia

He has a point. The share of all public universities' revenues derived from state and local taxes hovered around 50 percent, down from 74 percent in 1991. These changes translate to significantly higher tuition costs for students and their parents. Tuition has increased by 35 percent since the 2007–2008 school year, even after adjusting for inflation (Mitchell, Leachman, and Masterson, 2017). The decline in government spending on higher education not only results in high tuition, but is also responsible for drastic spending cuts at colleges and universities that could diminish the quality of education available to students at a time when a highly educated workforce is more crucial than ever to the nation's economic future. For example, many public colleges and universities have cut faculty positions, eliminated course offerings, increased class sizes, closed campuses, shut computer labs, decreased the number of advisors and student support staff, and reduced library services.


Since the recession lifted, only a few states are reinvesting in higher education once more—South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and to a very small extent, Nebraska and Indiana. For all other states, higher education funding remains well below pre-recession levels. In fact, per-student funding in Arizona, Louisiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Oklahoma, and South Carolina is down by more than one-third since the start of the recession, as shown in Figure 11-9 (Mitchell, Leachman, and Masterson, 2017).

Figure 11-9

Percent Reduction in Higher Education Spending Since the Recession



Source: Mitchell, M., V. Palacios, & M. Leachman. 2014. "States Are Still Funding Higher Education Below Pre-Recession Levels." *Center for Budget and Policy Priorities*. 1 May. Retrieved from (www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4135).

As tuition has soared at public state universities, financial aid has grown, too, although it does not come close to meeting the demand. Between the 2007–2008 and 2012–2013 school years, **Pell Grants** —the nation's primary student grant aid program—more than doubled from \$16 billion to nearly \$36 billion but has since dropped down to \$27 billion for the 2016–2017 school year (**College Board, 2018**). Likewise, the number of people receiving Pell Grants jumped from 1.2 million to 9.4 million between 2007–2008 and 2012–2013, but, again, has declined to 7.1 million in 2016–2017. Moreover, because tuition varies so much from one state to the other, and the Pell Grant does not, at \$5,800 many students in those states with higher tuition found college to be simply unaffordable. In the 1980s, the Pell Grant covered more than half of the cost of a four-year degree from a public college; now it covers less than a third of that cost (**Mayotte, 2014**).

Pell Grant

The nation's primary student grant aid program.

11.7.2 Future Prospects

Students' families may try to chip in for the cost of college, but incomes have not risen significantly in recent years while tuition has skyrocketed, so families cannot easily absorb these costs. The bottom line is:

- **More students are working and going to school part-time**, which prolongs their schooling and delays entry into their career of choice, often at considerable hardship.
- **Students are taking on greater debt**. Average student debt at graduation in 2016 ranged from \$20,000 in Utah to \$36,350 in New Hampshire, and new graduates' likelihood of having debt ranged from 43 percent in Utah to 77 percent in West Virginia. The government earns interest (i.e., makes a profit) on student loans.
- **College dropout rates are increasing** as students find they cannot continue to pay tuition costs.
- **Tuition costs are keeping some students from enrolling, particularly low-income students**. Young people with family incomes in the top 25 percent of incomes (the top quartile) go to four-year colleges at almost twice the rate of equally qualified students from the bottom quartile.

Reforms slated for higher education must keep access as a top priority.

One of the primary ways to increase access is to increase spending, especially for financial aid programs. The data show that, in other than a few states, spending on higher education has been cut drastically since the recession, and it has never rebounded.

Going Beyond Left and Right

So many hopes are pinned on education, and schools are asked to do so many things, from assisting in the socialization of young children, to teaching the creativity and skills needed for the 21st century workforce, all the while contending with mental illness and policing. It is little wonder that education is such a contested area of life in democratic societies. There are, however, some areas of convergence between people on the left and right sides of the debate over school issues. For example, there is increasing consensus that schools need to raise their standards, although there is still little consensus about whether the federal or state governments should be the proper enforcers and monitors of these standards. But consensus on the issues has waned, especially with respect to higher education.