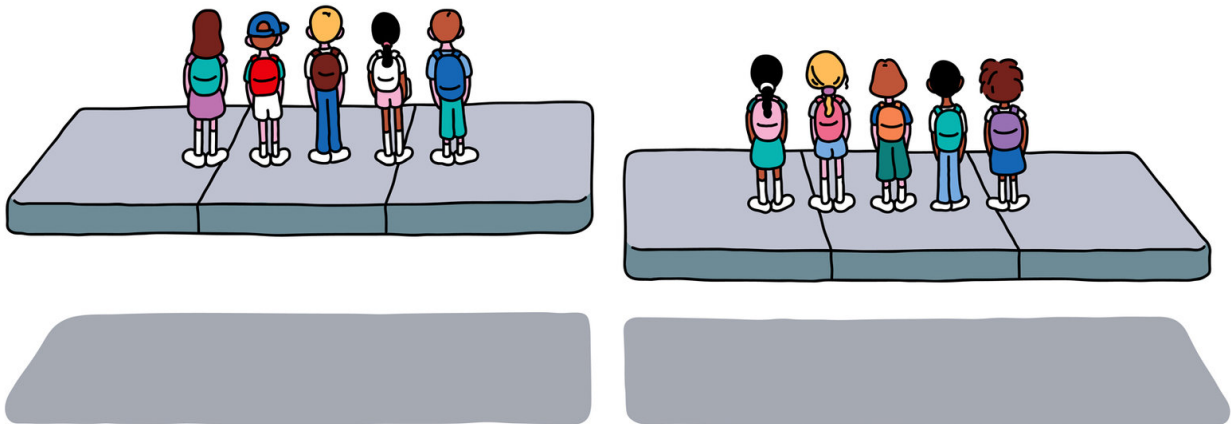


Our Next Generation of Leaders Are Failing School

The pandemic has cast a glaring light upon educational inequities, and how this issue disproportionately affects minority students.

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Students' starting places have a lot more to do with where they end up than you may think.

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The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly impacted families in more ways than one. For the most part, young children have been spared severe health consequences from the virus, but they are most vulnerable to a different impact of the pandemic: long-term effects of low quality schooling. Schools closed all around the world as a result of the pandemic; [in almost two hundred countries](#). In America, [millions of children were left at home](#) without the technological resources they need to succeed during remote learning. Certain student subgroups: English language learners, minority students, and students living in poverty, are [most susceptible to falling behind](#) due to lack of resources and other effects of the pandemic.

All American families experienced a shift in home life the past two years. Some had college students return to childhood bedrooms, others were responsible for keeping first graders on Zoom for seven hours every day. Now, schools are back in session [all across the country](#). Despite this seemingly positive step towards normalcy, the third pandemic-era school year is revealing problems of its own: vaccine mandates resulting in staffing shortages from bus drivers to teachers, leaving [thousands of students](#) without rides to school or cramped in overcrowded

classrooms. These new problems are proving that the pandemic and its consequences aren't going anywhere.

English language learners and minority students in American schools are inherently disadvantaged in several ways; the pandemic has exacerbated this. Students who live in homes where English is not the first language are [more likely to experience housing instability and lack support from both parents](#). This is devastating for remote learners. Parents don't have the education, or the time, to take over the job of school teachers for their children, especially when they need to work to put food on the table. And this is often the case in minority families, as layoffs and financial instability [disproportionately affect Hispanic and African-American individuals](#). Minority parents are also more likely to have jobs that aren't as amenable to working from home [as the jobs that white parents have](#).

School serves as a safe space for certain groups of students. These children often come from abusive or otherwise unhealthy households, and school is likely one of their only safe escapes. Some [rely on school lunch for possibly the only meal of their day](#). Covid abruptly halted these students' ability to attend school; but violence, crime, and homelessness didn't heed to the virus. These students are [more likely to get caught in a cycle of poverty](#) due to the break in the routine of attending school.

Education is one of the most important factors in [pursuing upward mobility](#). However, the past eighteen months have highlighted that students in affluent communities are far more likely to succeed than students in impoverished school districts. Wealthier families have readily available technological resources, and are more likely to spend big bucks to upgrade their technology. This places students living in poverty at a further disadvantage, as they [do not have access](#) to the same support and supplies to participate in remote learning as their affluent peers.

All of this points to an inconspicuous danger that accompanies the Covid-19 pandemic: the [repeating cycle of poverty for minority families](#). Without access to quality education, there is a [greater chance of students dropping out or getting stuck in a cycle of poverty](#) at some point in their lives. Recent studies have shown that [the achievement gap between white students and students of color was slowly decreasing](#). However, the ongoing effects of the pandemic loom overhead and threaten to unravel any progress that recent reforms have made.

As post-pandemic life becomes more of a reality, there are still hurdles that minority families struggle to clear. Families are still juggling full-time work and now [have to find a way for their kids to get to school](#) because bus drivers are protesting vaccine mandates. How will students resume their in-person education without access to reliable transportation? How are parents supposed to secure an income *and* be responsible for schooling their children?

The pandemic has highlighted that we need to work on a solution that will put educational inequities to rest. This needs to include a more holistic approach to assessing student success factors, like reporting more accurate health data and providing more opportunities for enrichment. The [recent increase in public attention](#) on the challenges that impoverished families face, such as housing and food insecurities, needs to remain prominent and these pressing issues must not be set aside in post-Covid life.