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EDITORIAL

A Closer Look at Access and Equity in Urban Mathematics Education: Revisiting the Recievement Gap

Jamaal Young
Texas A&M University

Jemimah Young
Texas A&M University

In the field of education, one of the most persistent and widespread challenges is the inequities that impact math instruction in urban areas. These disparities in resources and outcomes continue to exist in bustling cities, negatively affecting the potential of many students. Recent statistics highlight a growing achievement gap in math between students from low-income urban areas and their wealthier counterparts. For example, fourth-grade students in high-poverty schools (with 76-100% of students receiving free/reduced lunch) had an average NAEP math score of 224, compared to 249 for students in low-poverty schools (with 0-25% of students receiving free/reduced lunch) - this represents a 25-point gap (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Across various measures and grade levels, students from low-income urban schools consistently underperform in math compared to their peers in more affluent, mostly white suburban schools. However, it is important to note that the concentration of poverty is a significant contributing factor (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996; Miller & Quealy, 2018). As a result, only a small fraction of students from underserved communities are able to achieve proficiency levels in mathematics that are comparable to those in wealthier districts. Addressing these disparities requires a focused commitment to equity in the mathematics classroom, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have access to the resources and support needed to succeed.

Equity in mathematics education involves promoting fairness and justice by addressing systemic barriers and disparities that hinder certain groups of students from achieving success in mathematics. This includes addressing inequities related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, language, disability, and other factors. Initiatives focused on equity strive to eliminate "achievement gaps" and ensure that all students have access to the support, resources, and opportunities necessary to excel in mathematics.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) emphasizes access and equity in mathematics education as fundamental principles to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage with and succeed in learning mathematics. NCTM emphasizes the importance of access and equity in efforts to provide all students with fair and meaningful opportunities to learn and succeed in math. However, were NCTM has fallen short historically has been in emphasizing that access is the key to equity. Or more precisely increasing access is essential to achieving equity. Access, in the context of mathematics education, means ensuring that every student has the chance to participate in high-quality mathematics instruction and learning experiences. This involves providing appropriate curriculum, resources, instructional materials, and technology. It also requires creating inclusive learning environments that support diverse learners and cater to various learning styles and abilities. Hence, a focus on access shifts attention from what students' "achieve" and places attention on what students "receive". As Chambers (2009) emphasizes, our focus should be on the gaps in educational inputs or what students receive - rather than solely on educational outputs or how students achieve.

Dr. Terah Venzant Chambers is credited with popularizing the term "receivement gap". According to Chambers (2009), the term "receivement gap" refers to the unequal educational opportunities and resources provided to traditionally marginalized students of color and low-income students compared to their more affluent peers. This challenges the idea of an "achievement gap," which suggests that disparities in test scores result from deficiencies in students' abilities or effort levels across racial groups. Chambers argues that the real problem is that students of color do not receive the same quality of education, resources, skilled teachers, rigorous curriculum, and as students from more privileged backgrounds (Chambers, 2009b). One major cause of the "receivement gap," according to Chambers, is the practice of educational tracking, where students are placed in different curriculum tracks (high, average, low) based on perceived ability levels. Furthermore, tracking often leads to an overrepresentation of students of color in the lower tracks, which receive less rigorous instruction and fewer resources, perpetuating the "receivement gap" (Edosomwan et al., 2023; Edosomwan et al., 2022). Chambers argues that if underrepresented students of color were to receive the same high-quality educational inputs and opportunities as their peers, the "achievement gaps" would be significantly reduced or even eliminated. In essence, the concept of the "receivement gap" underscores how disparities in educational outcomes stem from inequalities in the resources and opportunities students receive in terms of school resources, teacher quality, curriculum rigor, and opportunities, rather than inherent deficits in the students themselves.

The importance of addressing "receivement gaps" in mathematics cannot be overstated because mathematics plays a crucial role in opening doors to numerous opportunities, both academically and professionally. Failing to provide fair and

equal access to high-quality mathematics education perpetuates systemic injustices and prevents countless young minds from realizing their true potential. Considering this, the purpose of this editorial is clear: to thoroughly explore the core issues surrounding the recievement gap in urban schools, analyze the underlying causes of these disparities, and propose innovative strategies to dismantle the "mathematics recievement gap" between urban schools and their peers. By shedding light on the access and opportunity challenges faced by urban students in mathematics education through the lens of the recievment gap and presenting practical solutions, we aim to ignite significant change. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that every child, regardless of their zip code or socioeconomic status, has equal opportunities to excel in mathematics and beyond.

Understanding the Inequities

Urban students tend to demonstrate lower performance on mathematics assessments compared to their suburban peers, even when considering variations in poverty levels. This gap in achievement is likely due to disparities in resources and opportunities between urban and suburban schools (Jošić et al., 2022). For example, urban schools typically have fewer resources and less funding per student compared to affluent suburban schools (Rist, 2017). Additionally, they often have a higher proportion of disadvantaged students. Schools with a higher concentration of poverty often lack the necessary resources and support systems, which negatively impacts student achievement.

According to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Equity does not mean that all students obtain equal education outcomes, but rather that differences in students' outcomes are unrelated to their background or to economic and social circumstances over which students have no control" (p. 13). Thus, while having more resources does not guarantee higher achievement on its own, research indicates that more affluent schools are better equipped to provide learning materials, technology, qualified teachers, and a rigorous curriculum – all of which impact student learning (Kormos, 2022; Oaks et al., 2024). Extant data suggest that urban mathematics classrooms, especially in high-poverty schools, are likely to have a limited number of instructional resources, materials, access to technology, and other learning supports in comparison to their more affluent suburban counterparts. This disparity in resources contributes to the noticeable disparities in academic achievement between urban and suburban students.

The factors contributing to these disparities are complex and multi-faceted, reflecting deep-rooted systemic issues within our education system. One key factor that exacerbates the achievement gaps in urban mathematics education is socioeconomic status (Gorski, 2017). Students experiencing poverty often lack access to essential resources, such as quality instructional materials, tutoring services, and

technology (Kumar, 2023). This resource disparity further widens the gap between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, perpetuating cycles of inequality.

Another significant contributor to the achievement gaps is the lack of culturally relevant curricula and teaching methods in urban classrooms. Many students in urban areas come from diverse cultural backgrounds, yet the curriculum fails to reflect their lived experiences or incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy (Young & Young, 2023). This disconnect can lead to disengagement and a lack of connection with the subject matter, hindering students' ability to succeed in mathematics.

Implicit biases among educators and administrators also play a role in the disparities in mathematics achievement. Research has shown that teachers' perceptions of students' abilities can be influenced by stereotypes and prejudices, resulting in differential treatment in the classroom (Fergus, 2024; Schoenfeld, 2022). These biases may manifest in lower expectations for certain groups of students, less challenging assignments, or unequal access to advanced coursework, all of which can impact students' mathematical development.

Disparities in teacher quality and professional development opportunities further contribute to the achievement gaps in urban mathematics education. Schools in urban areas often face challenges in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, particularly in mathematics (Brantlinger, 2020; Young et al., 2022). Additionally, educators may have limited access to professional development opportunities, which prevents them from staying up-to-date with best practices in mathematics instruction and culturally responsive teaching methods. Addressing these inequities requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort from all stakeholders in the education system. It necessitates recognizing the existence of these disparities and committing to implementing systemic changes that promote equity and access for all students.

Strategies for Equity

In our pursuit of equity in mathematics education, it is crucial to adopt comprehensive strategies that address the various challenges faced by students from diverse backgrounds. The following strategies provide pathways towards creating inclusive learning environments in which every student can flourish: (1) culturally responsive teaching, (2) addressing socioeconomic barriers, (3) professional development and teacher support, and (4) community engagement and partnerships.

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes and embraces the diverse cultural backgrounds and identities of students. By incorporating culturally relevant examples and contexts into math instruction, educators can make mathematics more accessible and meaningful for all learners (Abdulrahim & Orosco, 2020; Thomas &

Berry III, 2019). Moreover, by building upon students' cultural assets and identities, a sense of belonging and empowerment is fostered in the classroom, resulting in enhanced engagement and achievement.

Socioeconomic barriers often impede students' access to high-quality mathematics education. Schools must ensure equitable access to resources, including technology and instructional materials, in order to address these disparities (Berry III et al., 2020). Additionally, providing support services, such as tutoring and mentorship programs, can assist students facing economic challenges and level the playing field, promoting fair outcomes.

Additionally, effective teaching practices are essential for promoting equity in mathematics education. Educators must receive training in culturally responsive pedagogy and anti-bias practices to create inclusive classrooms where all students feel valued and supported (Males, Sears, Lawler, 2020; Moldavan, 2020). Moreover, investing in ongoing professional development opportunities enables teachers to enhance their skills and stay up to date with best practices, ultimately improving teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

Finally, collaboration with community organizations and families is crucial for supporting students' mathematical learning beyond the classroom. By establishing strong partnerships, schools can leverage community resources and expertise to provide additional support to students (Che et al., 2023). Bond and Chernoff (2015) suggest integrating mathematics and social justice by involving students in community-based projects and authentic contexts, enabling them to gain insights into real-world social justice issues within their communities. Furthermore, creating opportunities for parents to actively participate in their children's education strengthens the connection between home and school. It empowers parents to advocate for equitable resources and opportunities for their children. Achieving equity in mathematics education requires a collective effort from all stakeholders, including educators, administrators, families, and community members. By implementing these strategies, we can work towards creating a more equitable educational landscape where every student has the opportunity to excel in mathematics.

Innovative Approaches

In urban mathematics education, it is crucial to employ innovative approaches that engage students, address diverse learning needs, and prepare them for success in a complex world. The following innovative strategies show promise in enhancing mathematics instruction in urban settings: (a) Project-Based Learning, (b) Technology Integration, and (c) Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a dynamic approach that immerses students in real-world problem-solving activities. By tackling authentic mathematical challenges, students gain a deeper understanding of the concepts and their practical

applications (Capraro et al., 2021). PBL also fosters collaboration and critical thinking skills as students work together to analyze problems, propose solutions, and communicate their findings (Almulla, 2020; Sasson, Yehuda, & Malkinson, 2018). In urban classrooms, PBL can provide a relevant and engaging framework for learning mathematics, empowering students to take an active role in their education.

Technology integration holds immense potential for personalizing learning experiences and increasing access to resources in urban mathematics education. Digital tools can be used to tailor instruction to individual learning styles and pace, offering targeted support and remediation when needed. Furthermore, technology enables the delivery of interactive and multimedia-rich content, making mathematics more accessible and engaging for diverse learners (Young, 2017). By leveraging online resources and virtual learning platforms, urban mathematics educators can enhance students' mathematical proficiency and bridge gaps in educational opportunities.

In urban schools, students often demonstrate a wide range of academic abilities and needs. Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) provides a framework for delivering personalized interventions and supports to meet these diverse needs (Byrd et al., 2023). By implementing tiered interventions, educators can differentiate instruction and provide targeted assistance to students requiring additional support in mathematics. MTSS also emphasizes data-driven decision-making, allowing educators to closely monitor students' progress and adjust instruction accordingly. In urban contexts where resources may be limited, MTSS offers a systematic approach to ensuring that all students receive the necessary support to succeed in mathematics. Innovative approaches such as project-based learning, technology integration, and multi-tiered systems of support hold promise for enhancing mathematics education in urban settings. By embracing these strategies, educators can cultivate engaging and equitable learning environments where all students have the opportunity to excel in mathematics and beyond.

Conclusion

In the field of urban mathematics education, the need to address equity gaps is more pressing than ever before. As we wrap up our examination of this crucial issue, it is imperative that we restate our dedication to equity and excellence for every student. These gaps persist in urban math education, perpetuating disparities in academic achievement and opportunities for students from marginalized communities. These inequalities impede not only individual students' academic progress but also contribute to broader social and economic disparities.

Addressing recievement gaps necessitates collective action from educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders. We must prioritize equity in educational policies, allocate resources to support innovative strategies, and advocate for

systemic changes that promote equal access to high-quality math instruction for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Achieving equity in urban math education is an ongoing process that requires continuous dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders. We must continue to engage in meaningful conversations, share promising practices, and work together to remove barriers to success. By fostering a culture of collaboration and collective responsibility, we can ensure that all students have equal access to the transformative power of math education. Let us reconfirm our shared commitment to equity in urban mathematics education. Together, we can create inclusive learning environments where every student has the opportunity to thrive and fulfill their potential.

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