

# Can middle class families make urban schools better?

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Due to the economy, more middle-class families are passing on private schools in favor of the local public school.

According to various educational studies, it's a move that urban school districts in particular should applaud. Studies show urban schools benefit educationally from an influx of middle class [students](#) and parents because of the resources (most notably time and money) that accompany them.

According to a Temple University study presented at this month's American Educational Research Association conference, middle-class parents can indeed have an impact on urban education. But whether that impact is beneficial or sustainable depends on the attitude of the parents themselves.

Professors Erin Horvat and Maia Cucchiara of the College of Education found that schools with middle-class parental participation fare better when the parents focus on making the school as a whole better instead of just making the school better for their child only.

The researchers analyzed two urban schools and interviewed parents in each for their study, "The Perils and Promises of Middle-Class Parental Involvement in Economically Integrated Urban Schools: A Comparative Analysis".

For Horvat, taking a look at this subject was personal as well as

academic. While searching for schools for her two daughters, she found herself talking with other middle-class parents and asking questions like, 'what makes a school a 'good school?' Is it engaged parents, top-notch facilities, or is it a race or class issue?'

Because of the power that middle-class parents bring in terms of resources and know how, class was more of a deciding factor, the researchers say.

"The resources that these parents can bring are linked to class," Horvat said. "If you're a parent that has time to volunteer in your child's class, you're going to do that. If you're working two jobs, you're not going to have that time. Middle class parents also feel more than poorer parents that they have the right to throw their weight around."

However, it shouldn't be assumed that the resources provided by middle-class parents are going to all students, Cucchiara said. What made the two schools profiled in the study so different is that the middle-class parents of one viewed their involvement in the school as universal while the parents of the other saw it as individualized.

"This involvement can sometimes benefit all kids, but you can't assume that it's that way all of the time," she said. "Plus, these resources are no substitute for making sure schools have quality teachers."

Also, according to the study, there can be consequences to other students in the school if middle-class parents exert their influence solely to benefit their own children. For example, a group of parents put together a reading program for students in K-6 grades, but didn't concern themselves with providing additional reading help for the students in the 7th and 8th grades because it didn't benefit them.

The study also shows that while middle-class parents and the resources

they bring can attract other students and parents from their class, it often does so at the expense of working class students. In one instance cited by the study, parents put together a public relations campaign designed to bring in more middle class [parents](#) while encouraging district officials to disallow low-income students the ability to transfer into the school.

Source: Temple University

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