

Inequality in schools threatens US prosperity, scholars say

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Decades of reform have failed to create a strong and fair school system in the United States, with poor and minority students at an increasing disadvantage, a new report says.

The report, which outlines ways to close the achievement gap, was issued

Tuesday by the Equity and Excellence Commission, a 27-member panel that included three Stanford scholars: Law Professor Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, Graduate School of Education Professor Linda Darling-Hammond and Hoover Institution Senior Fellow Eric Hanushek.

The nonpartisan commission, which also included union leaders, school officials and civil rights activists, was created by Congress to provide advice to the Department of Education on how to remove inequality in education.

"For all of our initiatives and good intentions, our nation has been unable to ensure that each and every American child can attend a quality public school," the report said.

The report said 10 million students in America's poorest communities are "having their lives unjustly and irredeemably blighted" by an education system that assigns them low-performing teachers, run-down facilities and low academic expectations and opportunities.

It said America has become an outlier in the way it funds, governs and administers K-12 schools.

"No other developed nation has inequities nearly as deep or systemic; no other developed nation has, despite some efforts to the contrary, so thoroughly stacked the odds against so many of its children," the report said.

Cuéllar, who co-chaired the commission, said the government, at every level, must implement a multiyear strategy for advancing national equity using a combination of incentives and enforcement.

"We have a staggering achievement gap at home," Cuéllar said. "The [achievement gap](#) between children from high- and low-income families

is 30 to 40 percent larger among children born in 2001 than among those born 25 years earlier."

Cuéllar, co-director of Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation at the Freeman Spogli Institute and an expert on institutional accountability, said the federal government must be clear about national expectations for student outcomes, insist on realistic plans from states and allocate resources to level the playing field.

The report pushes for better training for teachers just starting out, adoption of a school finance system that provides adequate funding for every child no matter the ZIP code and more support services for the poorest children and those with special needs.

It also recommends pre-kindergarten programs for every poor child within 10 years and urges the federal government to create a grant program with incentives for states and localities to promote parent education and a sense of shared engagement between schools and parents.

Darling-Hammond said funding schools equitably and ensuring that all children get a high-quality education is not only a moral calling but increasingly a matter of economic self-interest.

"In a knowledge-based economy, we can no longer afford to educate only a small share of students well, while under-educating many others," she said. "Those who do not succeed in school are increasingly likely to be unemployed, on welfare, or incarcerated, rather than able to engage productively in the economy."

Darling-Hammond said she is hopeful the report will call attention to "the urgent need to create an equitable starting point for all children – with investments in their welfare and preschool education – that

continues with equitably funded schools staffed by well-prepared and committed educators."

More information:

www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/documents.html

Provided by Stanford University

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