

Study shows amount of learning time falls at high-poverty schools

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Professor John Rogers

Teachers in high-poverty schools are more likely than their peers in low-poverty schools to report more time lost for academic instruction due to poor access to libraries, technology and qualified substitute teachers, a new study by the UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA) found.

Moreover, economic and social stressors on students—such as unstable housing, hunger and lack of access to medical or dental care—also undermine learning time, according to the study by the institute, housed in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

During the 2013-14 school year, IDEA conducted a survey of approximately 800 teachers to examine how learning time is distributed across California high schools. The results, which are available in a report titled, "It's About Time: Learning Time and Educational Opportunity in California High Schools," reveal an inequality in the time spent on academic subjects.

John Rogers, UCLA professor of education and a co-author of the report, said that while educational accountability systems provide an overflow of data, very limited information has been made public about learning time.

"It is thus very difficult to know whether some students have access to more learning time than others," he said. "But, as the Supreme Court said 60 years ago in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, education must be provided to all 'on equal terms.' Importantly, the court noted that this constitutional standard requires us to take account of resources that are not easily counted.

"The *Brown* decision challenges us to understand the seemingly intangible factors that contribute to inequality," Rogers said.

The survey was conducted at low-poverty schools where zero to 25 percent of students receive a free or reduced-priced lunch, at low- and mixed-poverty schools where zero to 50 percent of students receive a free or reduced-priced lunch and at high-poverty schools where 75-100 percent of students receive a free or reduced-price lunch.

Rogers said that [student achievement](#) and preparation for college are directly impacted by the inequality of instructional time for students in high-poverty schools.

"California holds students to a common set of assessment standards and

requirements for university admission," he said. "Yet, 'It's About Time' finds that students have access to markedly different amounts of instructional time depending on the neighborhood in which they live. It is true that schools can use available learning time in more or less effective ways. But the amount of available learning time creates a ceiling, limiting the capacity of the school to promote student achievement and development.

"No one could or would defend a system of public education that required students attending high-poverty schools to finish their [school](#) year two weeks before their peers in low-poverty schools," Rogers said. "Nor would anyone defend sending [students](#) from high-poverty schools home a half hour early each day. Yet, in effect, California now supports an educational system that produces these effects, though it does so in a manner that obscures the underlying inequity."

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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