**Topic 6: Close the Gaps for Students of Color in accessing Technology, College and Future Employment**

**Questions to be answered:**

If the basics are not enough...How do you address the digital divide? How do you transition more students of color into college and ensure graduation? What does it take to integrate Long Island's workforce at all levels?

A number of the educational disparities discussed in other issue areas do not bode well for the college and employment opportunities of low-income students and students of color. As is discussed in this section, the level of education attained, and the quality of education received, have significant consequences for the likelihood that an individual will be able to attend college and for the likelihood that an individual will be able to find a job, particularly one that pays decent wages. Moreover, disparities in college and job prospects created by educational inequities are compounded by persistent discrimination in the job market and the increasing significance of technological expertise in the employment market.

***Critical Educational Inequalities***

Several of the educational inequalities discussed elsewhere have critical implications for the college and employment prospects of students. Of particular significance are racial disparities in high school graduation rates as detailed in a recent report by the Harvard Civil Rights Project and The Urban Institute.[1] This report found that across the nation, high school graduation rates were significantly higher for White students than for Black, Hispanic and Native American students. The report also found graduation rates for these students of color in New York State were among the lowest in the country. Specifically, the report found that only 35% of Black students, 32% of Hispanic students, and 36% of Native American students in New York State graduate from high school.[2] The study also found that overall graduation rates were lowest in those districts with high percentages of poor students and in those districts with high percentages of English language learners. Finally, the report found a 40 point difference in graduation rates between majority White and majority minority school districts in New York State. Even if they do receive a high school diploma, other educational inequalities discussed elsewhere also harm the future prospects of low-income students and students of color. For example, discriminatory practices in areas such as tracking/ability grouping, special education, and discipline impede the educational progress of students of color and prevent them from taking the kinds of coursework that will make them desirable college applicants, successful college students, and viable employment prospects.

***The Long-Term Costs of Educational Inequalities***

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[1] Gary Orfield, Daniel Ioson, Johanna Wald, and Christopher B. Swanson, Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis (2004) (http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/call_dropout04.php)

[2] Note that the report also found that due to questionable methods for calculating high school graduation rates, official state numbers were significantly higher.

Getting a job is a challenging task for a high school dropout. Data indicate that adults without high school diplomas are twice as likely to be unemployed as adults who possess diplomas and four times as likely to be unemployed as adults with college degrees. Moreover, the job prospects of high school dropouts have been diminishing over time as the economy has become increasingly global in scope, and the pool of prospective employees has expanded.

Not surprisingly, educational attainment also has a significant effect on employment earnings. According to the Harvard report mentioned above, high school dropouts earn only 70% as much as high school graduates. Furthermore, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, college graduates over the age of 25 earn nearly twice as much as similarly aged workers with only high school diplomas. And these gaps are widening. In 1975, high school dropouts earned 90% as much as high school graduates and while college graduates have experienced growth in their inflation-adjusted earnings since 1979, high school dropouts have seen their inflation-adjusted earnings decline over this same time period.

The persistence of discrimination in the employment market exacerbates the employment and wage disparities created by educational inequality. Employment statistics indicate that at every educational level unemployment rates are higher and wage rates are lower for African Americans than they are for Whites. Research suggests that this is not solely a product of differences in the quality of education that prospective employees receive. For example, a recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that, based on the submission of identical resumes to advertised job openings, job applicants with distinctively White sounding names were 50% more likely to be called for an interview than applicants with distinctively African American sounding names.[3]

***The increasing importance of technology***

Technological skills and experiences are increasingly critical in the employment market. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, five of the ten fastest growing occupations in the United States are computer-related. It is also estimated that in today's job market 60% of jobs require some kind of technological skill. As a recent report of the Benton Foundation and the National Urban League makes clear, the increased significance of technology is exacerbating the inequalities discussed above for a number of reasons.[4]

According to this report, low-income families and families of color are much less likely than their White and more affluent counterparts to have computers in the home. For example, whereas 80 percent of families with incomes above $100,000 have home computers, only 25% of families with incomes below $30,000 do. The likelihood of having a computer in the home also increases as the educational attainment of the heads of household increase.

Low-income children and children of color are also less likely to have access to computers in their schools. For example, schools with minority enrollment of 90% or greater have a student to

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[3] Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, "Are Emily and Brendan More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?" (2003).

[4] The Benton Foundation and the National Urban League, *Losing Ground Bit-by-Bit: Low-Income Communities in the Information Age* (1998)
(http://www.benton.org/publibrary/losing-ground/losing-ground.pdf)

computer ration of 17 to 1, while the ratio for all schools in the country is 10 to 1. This disparity is even greater when the quality of available computers is taken into account. Schools in low-income neighborhoods are also less likely to have internet access than schools in affluent areas and less likely to have the kinds of infrastructure necessary to maximize computer capabilities.

The Benton Foundation/Urban League report also notes that, because of lower teacher quality, low-income schools provide less effective computer instruction than wealthy schools. In poor schools, computers are often used for rote learning and for drill exercises whereas in wealthy schools, computers are integrated more fully into the curriculum and used for complex learning activities and other purposes that translate more directly into skills of higher value in today's economy.

To address the technological divide, the report calls for legislation that will make technological equipment and telecommunications resources available at lower prices in low-income neighborhoods and their schools. The report also notes that this growing inequality places an even greater premium on equalizing school funding so that low-income schools can get the quality equipment, staff, and training that they need. Finally, the report notes that community-based programs for students and for adults have made some important strides in meeting the technological needs of low-income communities.

Issues for consideration:

- To what extent do educational inequalities on Long Island translate to inequalities in postsecondary education and the job market? Which of Long Island's students are attending college and accessing stable, living wage employment?
- To what extent is there a technological divide in Long Island's communities and in Long Island's schools?
- What local, regional, and state programs and policies are in place, or ought to be in place, to ensure that all of Long Island's children are able to participate in the employment market of today and the future?

For further reading:

The Benton Foundation and the National Urban League, *Losing Ground Bit-by-Bit: Low-Income Communities in the Information Age* (1998) (http://www.benton.org/publibrary/losing-ground/losing-ground.pdf)

Gary Orfield, Daniel Ioson, Johanna Wald, and Christopher B. Swanson, Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis (2004) (http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/call_dropout04.php)