

DOES ZONING AFFECT STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE?

Does Zoning affect Students' Academic Performance?

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The controversial topic of zoning within the American education system of today is one subject that is brought up consistently when going about the discussion of schools and their relation to academic achievement. The difficult decision of whether to send your children to the school district in which you reside, or to open enroll to a different school that is “better” for your children is a tough decision that countless parents across this country have to make on a regular basis. Urban schools, which are located in large, metropolitan areas, are looked upon and stereotyped as dangerous for students and staff, as well as mismanaged by city officials, administration, and the community as a whole. Rural schools, which consist of countryside and small towns, are blasted as isolated from other people and diversity, backwards in thinking and action, and deprived of money and resources. Suburban schools, which are located on the outskirts of large metropolitan cities, are treated as a playground of opportunity for children of the privileged and wealthy. Although the rumors from all these geographics are exaggerated and can often come across as misleading, there might be some truth involved in the generalizations made by society. Afterall, rumors are typically based in truth.

Oftentimes in this country, the school district in which one attends growing up can play a significant role in determining the outcome of their academic career, and perhaps even their future. School districts that are better funded and supported by their communities will have higher rates of academic success in students. However, school districts that are poorly funded and not supported as strongly by their communities will have the opposite effect when it comes to academic achievement. School districts that are better funded are more likely to have additional opportunities and activities for students and communities to partake in such as field trips, extracurriculars, and higher educational opportunities like CCP and AP courses, which can also benefit not only students, but the community as a whole. Unfortunately, going to a “good”

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school is not always a choice for the families in this country, and countless Americans understand that. I feel a connection to this issue because growing up, I was one of those students who attended a rural school. Where I come from, my school didn't have as much money, resources, or opportunity as neighboring districts had. On top of that, I grew up in the poorest town in my school district, leading to additional academic barriers as a child. Learning to adapt to a restraining environment was a tactic that became not only necessary, but a part of life the older I grew. However, there are countless more students and families who grew up just like me, and many worse, who are now struggling more than ever. This poses the question: does zoning affect academic performance?

Review of the Literature

“Reading levels of rural and urban third graders lag behind their suburban peers”

The first article that will be reviewed focuses on the reading skills of students in rural, suburban, and urban school districts. This article was created in order to highlight how students in suburban districts are academically performing at significantly higher rates than students in urban or rural schools. There were no direct research questions stated throughout this article, but the main purpose of the research was to figure out how much greater do students in the suburbs perform academically compared to students in urban or rural environments. The research in this article is specifically quantitative research because the researchers used statistics and written assessments to assess the students' performances throughout the process of this study, as well as to determine if students really do perform better or worse based on their geographic location.

The research from this article was conducted through viewing twenty-two thousand students in eight-thousand, four-hundred and five public schools from 1998 to 2006. Children were surveyed in kindergarten, and then again in the spring of first, third, fifth, and eighth grades. In order to

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collect the necessary data, the students that participated in the research were surveyed multiple times throughout their academic career in order to assess where their reading skills were at the time. Teachers, parents, and school administrators were also surveyed during this process. It is not clear how these surveys were conducted throughout this process, but it is assumed that they were completed via mail and not one-on-one with one or more of the researchers.

The data from this research was analyzed by comparing the survey results of children in each of the three environments that were in focus in the article (rural, suburban, and urban), and the results were compared to each other. These findings resulted in suburban students achieving at significantly higher rates academically than their urban and rural counterparts. Specifically, rural and urban 3rd graders are roughly thirty-three percent behind their peers in the suburbs when it comes to reading achievement. Suburban students also arrive in kindergarten with greater reading knowledge than students from rural or urban schools. There are additional results listed in the research as well that relate to the gap between students who attend suburban schools compared to students who attend rural or urban schools. This research article is relevant to my research question listed above because it shows me that there is a ever-widening gap between suburban, wealthy students and rural and urban, typically less wealthy students. This article showed me how money plays a factor in not only where some children go to school, but also how living in a more wealthy district connects to student success academically. It has been shown through this research that students who are attending schools in the suburbs achieve higher assessment scores for a number of reasons. Money, resources, and support all play a factor in student success in the classroom, and the schools that have more money to spend on their students will be able to achieve more because of those factors. This article allows me to

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understand just how far apart our student achievements are simply based on location, a factor that students, themselves, have no control over.

“Educational experiences and academic achievement of rural students as compared to suburban and urban students in the United States”

The second article presented is emphasized on rural students specifically, and whether or not they are academically disadvantaged compared to their suburban and urban peers. The purpose of this research was to determine whether rural students are performing at lower rates academically than their counterparts in different areas due to lack of resources, diversity, funding etc. The research question presented through this article was “can our nation's schools provide students with educational opportunities which will allow them to fulfill a productive role in this changing society and have the ability to change with it? (*Miller, 1997, p. 3*)” The research presented in this article seems to be quantitative because rather than focusing on surveys and word-of-mouth, this research is based on cognitive tests and grade point averages from students. The participants in this research study were various samples of eighth-grade students from urban, suburban, and rural school districts, and follow-up research was conducted once the students became seniors in high school just a few years later. Data collection took place through this study by using cognitive testing and examinations of the students' grade point averages, too. The data collection process occurred by using physical cognitive tests on paper for each individual student, and then their grade point averages were examined individually, comparing their results by location (urban, suburban, rural). The results of the data found a higher percentage of rural students falling at the lower end of the proficiency levels in mathematics, reading comprehension, as well as science. The data from the study also demonstrated that rural students are performing lower academically than urban and suburban students in the areas of

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mathematics, science, reading, as well as history, citizenship, and geography. The data was analyzed by comparing the test results and grade point averages of students from the 3 different settings.

These research findings suggest that rural students are indeed more academically disadvantaged than their counterparts. Whether it is the lack of resources, lack of support, lack of funding, etc., there are factors that play into the lower academic achievement of rural students that students from other areas do not experience as strongly. However, the study also showed that students from rural schools are more likely to participate in vocational or extracurricular activities than other students, which is also very important to students when attending school in order to boost not only their knowledge, but to strengthen their social and emotional skills as well. This research is relevant to my research question because it demonstrates how schools from different locations compare to each other academically, and specifically shows how rural schools are performing at the lowest rates. This study demonstrated to me that rural students are often overlooked and underserved when it comes to the educational disparity in this country, and the everlasting effects that this achievement gap has on students and families. This research is incredibly important to use in order to understand just what is happening and why the academic performances in our rural schools throughout the country is lower than anywhere else.

“Academic achievement of rural school students: a multi-year comparison with their peers in suburban and urban schools”

This article was written in order to figure out whether students who attended rural schools performed better or worse academically compared to their peers in the suburbs and urban areas throughout the United States. This document was also formed to dispel the misconception that students in rural schools are receiving educations that are inferior to other areas of the country,

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which is contrary to the article I previously reviewed. There were no direct research questions presented throughout the article, but in general the point of the research was to find whether students in rural schools are receiving an education that is comparable to students who attend school in other environments. The research presented in this article is based on a quantitative study because the researchers used the students' academic performances in reading, math, science, and social studies in order to determine the results of their study.

The participants in this study were a sample of students ranging from eighth grade to twelfth grade in three separate waves across four geographical regions in the United States (midwest, south, northeast, west). The students who participated in the study were also separated by public and private school status, as well as race/ethnicity (Caucasian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, African-American). Data collection used in this study included questionnaires completed by each student, one completed by their parents, and one completed by two of their teachers individually. Academic assessments were also administered to students in the areas of reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. The data from this study resulted in a number of findings. First, it was discovered that suburban schools were predominately attended by Caucasian students, whereas the majority of African-American and Hispanic students attended urban schools. It was also unearthed that students from rural schools performed as well as their peers from suburban and urban schools, and not significantly behind as other studies have shown previously. The study brought up that based on geographical location, the students did not perform better or worse than each other because of location.

This study suggested to me that students from rural areas may not be as academically disadvantaged compared to their suburban and urban counterparts as originally thought.

Although this study did not allow for schools in "extreme rural" areas to participate, the findings

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can still allow us to think more in-depth about the disparities between students based on their geographic location. Is the geographic gap truly as severe as we think? Should we take a stronger look at how we evaluate academic achievement in students? There are several questions that can be asked when analyzing this study, but the bottom line is that students who participated in this study did not perform better or worse academically based on geographic location. This research is important to be aware of because it allows us to gain a different perspective on the issue of academic performance and location. It has been shown in many other studies that geographic location does play a role in academic performance. However, this study shows us that that may not always be the case. Knowing that the playing field might be less steep than people have originally thought will allow us to expand our knowledge and understanding of how location plays a role in academics, and what we can continue to do to level the playing field for all students in this country.

“Education and the Inequalities of Place”

The fourth article was intended to examine the reasoning behind students who attend rural schools and the connection to higher dropout rates and lower academic performance compared to their suburban counterparts. The article also discusses the disparities between rural and suburban schools in terms of resources, funding, and poverty. There were no direct research questions presented in the article, but the main goal of the study was to determine why students attending rural schools are performing academically lower than their peers who attend suburban schools. The research shown throughout this article is based on a quantitative study because the data was pulled from assessments in mathematics and reading given by various educational organizations, as well as the statistics of dropout rates, location, etc. from each school district was also included in the study.

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The participants in this study included twenty-five eighth graders from one-thousand different middle schools across urban and rural areas. Follow-up research was also conducted with these students in tenth grade and twelfth grade as well in order to track progress. Assessments in reading and mathematics were given to the students, and then results from rural students were compared to suburban students. Information of the school districts' geographic location, community, student body makeup, etc. were also included in the study. The data collected from this research found that students from rural areas simply lack the adequate resources to properly promote educational achievement and attainment. Families from these rural districts had overall lower family income, less formal education in parents, and more siblings per household than their suburban counterparts. Although that is not the entire reason why students in rural schools are behind academically, it is indirectly affecting the achievement of rural students. This study found that parental involvement, adequate resources, and decreased funding all contributed to the rural students underachievement on the given assessments.

This research presented the concept that inadequate funding, as well as outside resources such as family and community, play large roles in student achievement. Students from rural areas were more likely to have lower household income, less parental formal education and involvement, as well as higher dropout rates than students who attend school in the suburbs. A lot of the funding issues come from taxes, which affects the funding school districts receive. The more income families make, the more property taxes they tend to pay. When school districts, especially rural districts, have families who aren't as financially wealthy, the school then-in-turn receives less funding from the community. Because of this lack of funding, schools are oftentimes unable to gather proper resources that they need in order to foster and promote academic achievement within their students. This research clearly shows that not enough is being done to level the

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playing field for students across the country. As more and more time goes on, geographic location continues to play an increasingly large role in students' academic achievement. This is an issue that continues to grow in our country, and it does nothing but hurt the children who need the most help.

“Keeping People Out: Income Distribution, Zoning, and the Quality of Public Education”

This fifth study was created in order to highlight the connections between zoning and income distribution in the United States. The research shows how some districts around the country impose “community zoning regulations,” which prevent low-income families from moving into certain school districts. These regulations can include, but are not limited to, minimum required housing consumptions, higher tax rates or additional barriers that are designed to exclude certain people from various school districts. The goal for these districts is to make them as exclusive as possible; increasing the quality of education for the individual students, and keeping low-income families away from their communities. This study took examples from across various locations across the United States such as New Jersey, New York, and Michigan, to show us how these zoning tactics are put in place. There were no direct research questions presented in the article, but the goal of this study was to discover if zoning has an effect on the quality of education in a community. This study appears to have been conducted quantitatively due to the equations and scientific reasoning behind the research given.

The participants for this study were not individual students, but school districts as a whole. The study shows that individuals often like to make housing decisions based on the quality of the education offered in the community. Of course, that logic will make the upper class neighborhoods more appealing, increasing funding towards their school districts. This logic also drives away people from lower-class and working class neighborhoods, driving down the

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educational funding in those areas as a result. According to this study, the higher the neighborhood tax rates, the higher the quality of education is likely to be. When certain neighborhoods require people moving in to make a certain housing purchase in order to live in that neighborhood, that can make the communities more exclusive as well by shutting out people who can't afford the prices of housing that is being required of them in order to live in that specific area.

This research in this article has proven that money plays an enormous role in the way that our public school systems are run. Although in the United States one can technically live wherever they please, more and more communities are imposing financial regulations and restrictions on people who would like to move into the area. Requiring a minimum housing consumption, increasing taxes, as well as implementing other barriers are all plots to keep low-income families out of certain neighborhoods, and in-turn making the poorer and more disadvantaged children attend worse schools. The wealthier a neighborhood, the better quality of school there will be attending due to higher taxes. The goal of these communities is to shut out the poor, and keep the wealthy to themselves. This not only hurts the low-income families who can't afford to move into the "nicer" neighborhoods, but also the wealthy people who refuse to open themselves up.

"Mathematics Achievement Gaps Between Suburban Students and Their Rural and Urban Peers Increase Over Time"

This study was conducted in order to highlight the gap of academic performance with suburban students in the subject of mathematics compared to their peers who attend rural and urban schools. This study was created in order to determine whether a child's academic performance in mathematics is affected by their attendance at an urban, suburban, or rural school. Based on this study, there are benefits to each type of school when it comes to learning, so why do suburban

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schools prevail in mathematical achievement? There were no direct research questions stated throughout the article, but the main objective of the research was to figure out if the geographic location of the school students attend is correlated with their academic achievement, specifically in the subject of mathematics. The research used throughout this study was deemed quantitative due to the assessments given to the students and the results given in the study were written numerically.

The participants in this study were not specified, but the article does mention that the students examined were first assessed in kindergarten, and then again in eighth grade in order to track progress between students as they aged. Students from urban, suburban, and rural schools were assessed during this study in order to conduct a thorough examination. The research showed that the gap in academic performance from rural and urban students was slightly behind suburban students when they were tested in kindergarten, but the gap widened as the students reached eighth grade. This information collected not only factored in the location of the students, but also socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and additional outside factors when conducting this research. This information given in this article suggests that students who attend schools in the suburbs are better equipped to perform higher academically than their urban and rural counterparts.

This study showed that suburban students are achieving higher scores on assessments in the area of mathematics than their peers who attend rural or urban schools. This could be due to a disparity in funding, family involvement, resources, and a number of other outside factors as well. This study is another example of suburban students prevailing as the best academically prepared of the geographic locations sampled in these studies. The older the students become, the greater the gap there was between the scores of suburban children compared to rural and urban

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children. While this is great news for people living in the suburbs, this news is not only disappointing, but frustrating to people who live in rural and urban areas because it is information that they are not only used to hearing, but they expect it.

Conclusion

Does zoning affect students' academic performance? Based on the research reviewed throughout this assignment, yes, zoning absolutely affects the academic achievement of students based on their geographic location. It has been proven several times through research that students who attend school in the suburbs are more likely to achieve higher assessment scores and higher rates of graduation than their rural and urban counterparts. Some studies show greater gaps than others when it comes to the achievement gap, but nonetheless, it is quite obvious that there is an achievement disparity based on geographic location. A discrepancy in monetary funding, necessary resources, and high-quality professionals all play a part in the achievement gap between students in the suburbs compared to the students in rural and urban areas. Unfortunately, not enough action is being taken in order to combat the issue of academic inequity. While students in the suburbs are receiving high-quality education with the money, resources, and assessment scores to back it up, rural and urban students are often underserved based on conditions which they can not control. Depending on the district, students in urban and rural areas face greater levels of poverty, lower funding per-student, and even a higher chance of violence in their schools and communities. It is clear that more work needs to be done, specifically legislatively, to level the playing field for all students, regardless of their geographic location because students can not help or control where they grow up, they can only help themselves based on the resources and opportunities they are given. When students do not have adequate access to necessary tools and information in schools, their academic performance

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decreases and their dropout and retention rates rise more and more as they grow older. It is time for this nation to put our students first and increase the fight against academic inequity, specifically based on zoning.

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