

## Education is Key to Ending Poverty

The fact that millions of Americans live in poverty is a serious problem in our country. While other issues certainly contribute to the problem, if elected officials truly want to end poverty, they must provide all students access to strong K-12 schools. *Education* is integral to improving economic opportunity in America.

### ***Dropping out of school leads to unemployment and poverty.***

- More than 1.2 million students drop out of school every year, *60 percent* of whom are from low income families. That's more than **twice** the national average.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 44 percent of dropouts under age 24 are jobless,<sup>2</sup> and the unemployment rate of high school dropouts older than 25 is more than three times that of college graduates.<sup>3</sup>
- The poverty rate for families headed by dropouts is more than **twice** that of families headed by high school graduates.<sup>4</sup>
- Over a lifetime, dropouts earn \$260,000 less than high school graduates and contribute about \$60,000 less in federal and state income taxes.<sup>5</sup>

### ***In today's economy, skills matter—even apart from diplomas and degrees.***

- Students' literacy skills are the best predictor of future wages—more than years spent in school.<sup>6</sup>
- Math is most important. One group found that if policymakers are only able to focus on improving a single competency for all students, then that competency should be math ability.<sup>7</sup>
- Increasing math scores for high school students leads to a 12 percent *increase* in future wages for graduates.<sup>8</sup> Even for dropouts, those with higher math skills had 6.5 percent higher average earnings.<sup>9</sup>
- Jobs that pay enough to support a family but don't require a bachelor's degree now demand the same level of preparation as college. One study found that the math and reading skills needed by electricians, construction workers, upholsterers, and plumbers were the same skills necessary to do well in college courses.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Poor students depend on schools for skills that lead to economic opportunity.***

- *Critical thinking skills* acquired in school are more important in determining earnings than the skills acquired outside of school.<sup>11</sup>
- School is also the dominant source for *basic* skills, even when accounting for family income, ethnicity, and parents' schooling.<sup>12</sup>
- Poor students lose ground in reading and math when not in school over the summer.<sup>13</sup>

## ***To help children out of poverty, school quality must be improved.***

- **Higher standards:** A national study found that high schools with a more rigorous curriculum have *lower dropout rates* than those that allow students to take low-level courses.<sup>14</sup>
- **Effective teachers in every classroom:** Assigning disadvantaged students to a good teacher for 4-5 years in a row would entirely ***close the achievement gap***.<sup>15</sup> However, low income and minority students are less likely to have good teachers.
  - More than 70 percent of math teachers in America's high-minority middle schools lack even a college minor in math or a math-related field.<sup>16</sup>
  - Nationally, teachers in high-minority schools are *twice* as likely to be inexperienced as teachers in low-minority schools.<sup>17</sup>
  - In North Carolina, African American seventh graders are *54 percent* more likely to face a novice teacher in math,<sup>18</sup> and in Tennessee they are *50 percent* more likely to have an ineffective teacher.<sup>19</sup>
- **More time and support for learning:**
  - Students in the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) get about 60 percent more class time than their peers.<sup>20</sup> In Washington, DC, KIPP fifth graders in just one year rose from the bottom 15 percent to the top 25 percent of students in the nation.<sup>21</sup>
  - A national study found that high schools where teachers have the *time* to provide students with high levels of support manage to *cut dropout rates in half*. It found that support is especially important for disadvantaged students who generally drop out at much higher rates.<sup>22</sup>

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