Teachers, curricula, and pedagogy are essential components of opportunities to learn, but they are not the only important ones. The social organization of schools and classrooms also contributes to the quality of educational experiences. Whether a school is racially and socioeconomically (SES) diverse or segregated makes a critical difference for K-12 achievement across the curriculum: The preponderance of high quality social science research published since the late 1980s is clear and consistent regarding these effects of school racial and SES composition on K-12 educational outcomes. Students who attend racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are more likely:

- To achieve higher test scores and better grades.

1 The research reported in this essay is supported by grants from the American Sociological Association, the National Science Foundation, and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council. This essay reports the results of a comprehensive investigation and review of the social, educational, and behavioral science literatures regarding the relationship of school racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition to school outcomes across the life course. Detailed abstracts of the research synthesized in this document are archived in a searchable database at: http://spivack.org. Direct all correspondence to RoslynMickelson@uncc.edu.


To graduate from high school, and to attend and graduate from college compared with their otherwise comparable peers who attend schools with high concentrations of low income and/or disadvantaged minority youth.

Other specific findings from the research include:

- Attending a diverse school promotes achievement across the curriculum in mathematics, science, language, and reading.
- Benefits accrue to students in all grades, but most markedly those in middle and high schools.
- Students from all racial and SES backgrounds can benefit from diverse schools—including middle-class whites—although low-income disadvantaged minority youth benefit the most from attending diverse schools.


6 Ibid, footnote 3

7 Ibid, footnote 3

Moreover, diverse K-12 schools foster other positive outcomes that are integral links in the adult life-course trajectory. In addition to achievement, the positive short-term nonacademic outcomes of diverse K-12 schooling include:

- A reduction in prejudice and fears.9
- Increases in cross-racial trust and friendships.11
- Enhanced capacity for multicultural navigation.12
- Avoidance of the juvenile justice system.13

These benefits foster highly desirable long-term outcomes for adults such as:

- Greater educational and occupational attainment.14

9 Ibid, footnote 8. The evidence of academic benefits is weakest for Asian and Latino immigrant students who appear to benefit from attending school with their coethnics, most likely because of concentrations of ESL youth trigger language services that, in turn, support achievement.


Workplace readiness for the global economy.\(^{15}\)

Adult cross-racial friendships.\(^{16}\)

Choice of integrated neighborhoods\(^{17}\)

Democratic values and attitudes\(^{18}\)

Avoidance of the adult criminal justice system.\(^{19}\)

These long-term outcomes help build civic capacity in communities and are essential building blocks of social cohesion, a quality increasingly vital to a vigorous, just, multiethnic, democratic society.

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16 ibid, footnote 11.


19 Ibid, footnote 13

For more information on the National Coalition on School Diversity, go to www.school-diversity.org