Narrowing *The Gap*

Ei EQUALITY INDICATORS

Economic Inequality

National Labor Participation Rates Lower among Those Without a High School Diploma

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' latest data on employment for those aged 25 and older shows labor force participation levels for those without a high school degree fall short of those with one: 47.0% vs. 57.1%. Among those in the labor force, those without a high school diploma also fare poorly, with an unemployment rate of 6.3 compared to 5.0 for high school graduates, 4.3 for those with some college or an associate degree, and 2.5 for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Not only high rates of unemployment, but also low wages plague those without a high school diploma. Just 27% of jobs in America require less than a high school diploma, and these often are those offering lower salaries. Median annual wages for these jobs was $20,350 compared with the national median wage of $35,080 for all occupations according to 2014 data from the Bureau for Labor Statistics.

Labor Participation, Unemployment, And Wages Of Those in NYC Without A High School Diploma

Mirroring national trends, those without a high school diploma in NYC face a host of economic challenges. Locally, as in the U.S. more broadly, they are less likely to be in the labor force, and more likely to be unemployed when they are.

According to data from the 2015 Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey, 35.2% of those with less than a high school diploma are in the labor force compared with 66.5% of those with a high school degree or above. The unemployment rate for those with less than a high school degree is 10.7 compared to a 6.0 unemployment rate for those with a high school degree or above.

As in the rest of the U.S., income is also influenced by level of education. The median income among those with less than a high school diploma is $22,500 compared with $30,000 for those with only a high school degree.

Health Inequality

National Disparities in Health Outcomes by Educational Attainment

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) uses 20 health indicators to gauge Americans' progress toward healthier lifestyles. HHS ranks high school graduation among them.

HHS sees social determinants like high school graduation as playing an outsized role in health and accounting for "unequal and avoidable differences in health status within and between communities."

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) also uses high school graduation as a predictor for longevity, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and smoking. RWJF compared college graduates with those who have not competed high school and found college graduates can expect to live 5 years longer than those who have not completed high school.

The vital role education plays in improved health outcomes was substantiated by the 2015 work of a team of researchers from the University of Colorado, New York University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. These researchers quantified the number of deaths in the 2010 U.S. population that could have been avoided if study participants had gone on to earn a high school diploma, finding it to be a staggering 145,243.

New Yorkers Lacking a High School Diploma At Risk For Adverse Health Outcomes

NYC's 2014 Community Health Survey breaks down health indicators by educational level. For most major health indicators, those with less than a high school diploma fare worse than those with one. Generally, health improves with each successive level of education (although some health indicators buck the trend).

For example, those with less than a high school diploma are most likely to receive a diabetes diagnosis, and the likelihood decreases as education increases. 16.7% of those with less than a high school diploma report having been diagnosed with diabetes compared to 10.9% with a high school diploma, 9.9% with some college, and 7.1% with a college degree.

Perhaps one cause of this disparity is that obesity is more prevalent among those without a high school diploma. Almost a third (32.5%) of those without a high school diploma are obese compared with 27.7% of those with a high school diploma, 28.2% of those with some college, and 16.8% of those who graduated from college.

Differences in insurance rates may be to blame for some of the existing health disparities. Going without health insurance is more prevalent among those with less than a high school diploma (25.0%) compared to those with a high school diploma (16.7%), those with some college (10.6%), and those who graduated from college (8.4%).

Relationship between High School Graduation Rates and Crime Reduction

In 2008 Fight Crime, Invest in Kids, an anti-crime organization, released "School or the Streets: Crime and America's Dropout Crisis." The report quantified what increasing the high school graduation rate might mean for crime reduction in the U.S. It found that a 10% increase in high school graduation rates would lead to a 9% decrease in rates of criminal arrest and reduce murder and assault rates by 20%. In this way, the report estimated that more than 3,000 murders and almost 175,000 aggravated assaults could be prevented merely by increasing education.

The Equality Indicators has recently conducted its own research on this topic, finding a relationship between high school graduation rates and crime levels. We looked at 20 years of data on both these topics and found a negative correlation between education and crime: higher rates of high school graduation were associated with lower crime rates.

Fight Crime's report noted that high-quality pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) has been shown to be one of the most important tools in increasing high school graduation rates. Consequently, greater investment in early education programs that better prepare students for success in high school and beyond has been touted as an important policy tool for crime reduction. Cities like New York have implemented universal Pre-K programs in an effort to improve high school graduation rates and other outcomes.

Efforts to increase education seem to be working. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 86% of students enrolled in public high school in 2013-14 graduated compared to 72% in 2010-11. Iowa boasts the highest rate, 91%, while New Mexico has the lowest, 69%; New York's graduation rate is 77%.
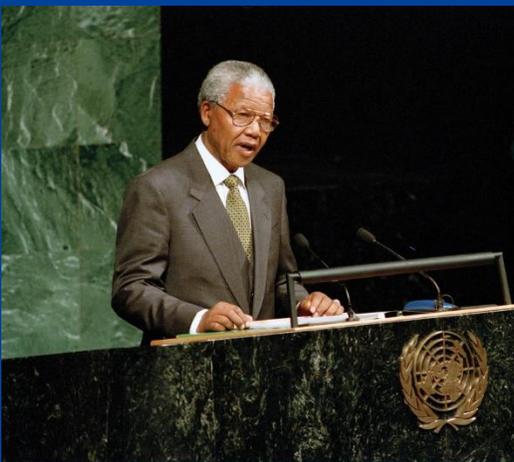
"Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

Educational Attainment and Criminal Justice Involvement: 68% Of Inmates Lack High School Diploma

More than two thirds (68%) of state prison inmates do not have a high school diploma according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Low educational attainment, especially among African-American and Hispanic men, has been cited as one of the contributing factors to mass incarceration.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences compared rates of male incarceration between 1980 and 2000 by education level as well as by race. Their findings are eye opening. While rates among the college educated stayed relatively steady, rates for those without a high school diploma skyrocketed, especially among African-American men. In 1980 10% of African American men without a high school diploma were in prison or jail. By 2008, the rate had jumped to 37%.

Many point to schools themselves as feeders for prisons and jails, especially for African-American and Latino men. The Public Broadcasting Service found these students face disproportionately high rates of being expelled (40% of those expelled) and being involved in "in-school" arrests (70%). Black and Latino students are 2x as likely as white students not to graduate.

Education as a Focal Point for Re-Entry Strategies: A Bright Spot in the Criminal Justice Reform Movement

In 2015 the Obama administration allowed Pell grants for education to be used to fund prison college programs. The move emphasized education in prison as one effective way to curb recidivism.

NPR interviewed Lois Davis, Senior Policy Researcher at RAND Corporation, on the efficacy of these programs. Based on their meta-analysis, she reported the following: "If an individual participates in any type of correctional education program—whether it be adult basic ed, GED preparation, college education, or vocational education—they had a 13% point reduction in their risk of being re-incarcerated."

RAND's analysis included savings to taxpayers on education programs versus the cost of incarceration, and found a $4 to $5 savings for each taxpayer. Cost-benefit analyses like these are important, as funding remains the number one issue for these programs. As Davis noted, "Some states provide state funds for college programs or maybe by individual donations or foundations. But currently, for the most part, it's up to the inmate and their families to pay for these programs."

There is growing evidence these programs work. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), which administers 10% of its GED testing programs in correctional facilities, looked at GED pass rates for the incarcerated versus the general population. In 2010, ETS reported that 75,000 inmates took the GED. Pass rates for the incarcerated actually exceeded those of the general population, 75% vs. 73%, although the difference was small.