



CAN CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION MAKE EDUCATION MORE EQUITABLE?



It's well-established that schools can be credited—or blamed—for only a portion of the variation in student outcomes. In fact, so many other factors make a difference that it is difficult to move the needle on any measure of student performance without taking them into account.

Yet many education policies do just that, mandating “solutions” focused on the limited set of factors that schools can and do control, and then shaming educators or the students themselves when the changes fail to make a major difference.

That's the conundrum tackled by *[Our Children Can't Wait: The Urgency of Reinventing Education Policy in America](#)*, a book published in December by Teachers College Press. The book's scholar-authors, including NEPC Fellow [Erica Frankenberg](#) of Pennsylvania State University, take a different approach. Its 17 chapters, edited by [Joseph B. Bishop](#) of UCLA, focus on the full range of factors that explain why educational outcomes vary, with White and more affluent students generally experiencing more and better opportunities to learn than their Black, Hispanic, and lower-income peers.

“We expect young people to leave their challenges neatly outside the schoolhouse door,” Bishop writes. Yet those challenges, implicating “policy areas outside of education that often haven't been linked to an education agenda,” must be addressed in order to close opportunity gaps. He continues:

This includes health services that can be made more readily available to fami-

lies in schools and school systems, city transportation planning that prioritizes school routes, preventing student exposure to environmental pollutants and affordable housing strategies that seek to dismantle heavily segregated, under-resourced neighborhoods.

For example, in the chapter she coauthored with [Jennifer B. Asycue](#) of North Carolina State University, Frankenberg suggests integrating schools with a combination of regional, state-level, and federal reforms. Cross-sector collaboration between housing agencies and educators can help low-income families afford economically diverse communities, and encourage the construction of schools in neighborhoods convenient to students from families with different races/ethnicities and incomes.

“Schools and communities are interrelated,” they write. “[T]herefore, a comprehensive and collaborative plan for sustaining integration in both communities and schools is needed.”

Bishop sets forth a proposal to implement the policies featured in the book. He proposes a cycle that includes establishing clear policy goals with input from the stakeholders who will be most impacted, monitoring their adoption, and evaluating the outcomes with an eye toward ongoing improvement.

“An education policy playbook that looks both within and outside the school walls for solutions that begin to dismantle the entrenched forces of systemic racism in our country has never deserved greater attention or focus,” he concludes.

NEPC Resources on Education Policy and Policymaking

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