

As an 18-year-old in college, my education has intertwined with nearly every aspect of my life so far, influencing my priorities, friends, connections, and future. Growing up in a wealthy neighborhood and attending a highly-funded elementary school followed by an expensive private school have allowed me countless opportunities and furthered my education in innumerable ways. As someone who has benefitted from the systems that advance education inequality in our country, I am just starting to learn about the depths of my privilege and to work to reverse this unfair education system.

Socioeconomic status heavily contributes to education inequality in the United States. In 2019, the “average performance of the lowest income students in the United States lags about three to four years behind that of the highest income students” (Gupta, 2019). Housing is one of the ways that socioeconomic inequality impacts education quality. In 2019 and 2020, local property taxes accounted for 37% of total revenues for public schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). If a student lives in a high-income neighborhood, then property taxes in that area are generally higher and the local public school has more funding for resources, teachers, and opportunities. Conversely, education quality can also impact home prices; if public schools in an area are more well-funded, then home prices in the area will be higher because it makes the area more desirable. This then reinforces the issue and connection between wealthy neighborhoods and better public schools. These funding gaps are proven to have significant impacts on learning, graduation rates, and future incomes for students.

There are actions we can take to make lasting change. If public school funding did not depend on the property taxes of the surrounding neighborhood, but instead was funded by the state or federal government, then funding would be more equal. It is also vital that we invest more resources and money into low-income schools as those students are the most in need. Low-income students face other barriers to education in addition to public school funding inequality, so we must recognize that and provide them with the resources they need. We must focus on equity as we move forward and it is vital that we rethink and redesign our current public school funding in the United States.