



Frederickson's Social Equity Agenda Applied

Public Support and Willingness to Pay

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Abstract

This study uses the case of urban public education, and input from more than 5,500 people, to assess citizens' willingness to follow leaders intent on advancing social equity. The evidence indicates that when vague notions of social welfare are replaced by actions focused on the creation of opportunity, there is broad support for social equity, including a willingness to pay increased taxes to support this agenda. Consistent with this understanding, public officials must engage citizens and encourage them to reject simplistic solutions to complex problems and to support policy that attacks the root causes of these concerns.

Keywords: citizen engagement, disadvantaged, public interest, social equity, willingness to pay

Public education is sometimes referred to as the great leveler because it is instrumental to the creation of opportunity and socioeconomic mobility (Sawhill 2006). Unfortunately, urban public schools, disproportionately burdened with children living in poverty, often lack the capacity to overcome deficits that contribute to and are the product of systemic societal inequality. Concerns about intergenerational inequality prompted Isabel Sawhill (2006, 2) to facetiously counsel young Americans "to pick their parents well. Circumstances of birth matter a lot, and the advantages and disadvantages of birth persist."

This study builds on the work of H. George Frederickson (1974, 1990, 1994, 2005), who has long encouraged public administrators to provide moral leadership that places social equity on an equal footing with other measures of performance. More specific to the purpose of this study, Frederickson acknowledges that educa-

tional inequality, including differences within and between school districts, contributes to a growing socioeconomic divide that does not bode well for the future of the United States. This article uses survey responses from more than 5,500 voters in a midwestern urban community to gauge their predisposition to respond to moral leadership that advances social equity. Table 1 provides a chronological outline of Frederickson's understanding of social equity. Guidance for moral leadership as related to the study begins with an intimate understanding of the community ethos in support of social equity. The discussion that follows defines the content of and logic behind a social equity agenda, tests public understanding of contributors to and strategies for addressing social inequity, and assesses support for the advancement of social equity, including willingness to pay increased taxes.

Community Ethos and Social Equity

All too often, a community's predisposition toward social equity is driven by vague notions about the origins of and contributions to disadvantage. Many are disinclined to support social equity because of the negative connotations of social welfare. If public leaders are to garner support for social equity, they must encourage citizens to introspectively examine public education and its capacity to create opportunity for disadvantaged children to become productive members of the community. Public leadership can expect to encounter resistance to attempts to advance social equity because, in the abstract, it invokes images of social welfare. This study sheds light on how public leaders can reshape these images and can encourage the community to rise above self-interest, creating opportunity for all schoolchildren.

Perceptions of self-interest often cloud vision, making it difficult for those who are advantaged to fully appreciate the plight of the disadvantaged, including the insidious nature of social inequality. Those who believe that all schoolchildren have the same capacity to learn, reason that failure to learn is a conscious choice and therefore deserving of its consequences. Thus, when parents fail to meet their obligation to coproduce the education of their children, they and their children must be held accountable. While some children from all socioeconomic classes have parents who are unwilling or unable to assist them with their schoolwork, those who are economically disadvantaged are disproportionately burdened (Wong 1994). This study focuses on the children and the creation of opportunity regardless of the behavior or capacity of their parents. Therefore, the message from public leaders must be one that encourages the community not to punish children for the behavior of their parents.

Social equity, as it is defined here, focuses on socioeconomic disadvantage and recognizes that the viability of urban education also depends on the creation of educational opportunity for intellectually and educationally advantaged schoolchildren. Opportunity is lost and the competitiveness of a community is damaged anytime students fail to reach their educational potential. When advantaged children's needs are not met, including educational performance and public safety, they are more likely to abandon urban public schools, contributing to the decline of urban communities and the schools that serve them.

Some forms of disadvantage are more likely than others to garner broad-based support. For example, children with mental or physical limitations are more likely to be deemed worthy of community support, including disproportionate investment to

TABLE 1
Frederickson's "Moral Leadership"

Introduces social equity as a concern that should guide the behavior of public administrators (1971).

Argues that social equity is a dimension of performance much like responsiveness (1980).

Argues that citizens are "groping" for public institutions that serve the public interest (1982).

Rejects the legitimacy of the policy-administration dichotomy, arguing that administrators are not neutral in decision-making processes and have a responsibility for actions focused on the well-being of the underclass (Frederickson and Hart 1985).

Warns against simplistic fiscal solutions, such as "cutback administration," and urges public leaders to engage citizens to guide institutional change (1982).

Urges public administrators to reach out to community through participative democracy and "benevolent patriotism" (Frederickson and Hart 1985).

Identifies "underclass hypothesis" as a concern (i.e., service delivery neglect of disadvantaged) and challenges public administrators to particularly address inequality in public education (1990).

Develops "compound theory" of social equity that recognizes multiple "equalities" deserving consideration when evaluating impact on community (1990).

Identifies "intergenerational equity" as a concern and encourages public administrators to balance concerns of present-day and future generations (1990, 1994).

Intensifies the call for moral leadership that enlists broad public support to advance social equity (2005).

improve their societal functioning. Frederickson (1990) sees this form of disadvantage as the normative benchmark for social equity. In this case, moral leadership to advance social equity could mean providing an improved understanding of genetic vulnerability and, therefore, community obligation. Conversely, one could argue that opportunity costs associated with investment in students with limited capacity keep those with greater capacity from realizing their potential. In any case, this study uses support for mentally and physically disadvantaged schoolchildren as the benchmark for commitment to social equity because it is witnessed by broad public support.

Public leadership intent on advancing social equity must encourage individuals to focus less on their personal well-being and more on community well-being, including the creation of educational opportunity for all students. Therefore, when children, for whatever reason, fall behind their classmates or fail to reach their capacity, the community must be prepared to work with and through their public schools to create opportunity. The first section of the findings includes a number of measures that define the ethos or community predisposition to various forms of social equity. Leadership intent on advancing social equity can use this understanding to devise a strategy for enlisting commitment. Senior administrators should take special note of how those who are committed to social equity see issues of urban education, because these individuals will provide the foundation for meaningful change. Leadership intent on advancing social equity must become proficient at rejecting positions of self-interest and supporting actions that promote community well-being. Contextual details about the community examined here are found in Table 2.

TABLE 2
An Urban Public School System and the Community It Serves

Midwestern urban community with more than 650,000 people living in metropolitan area.

Approximately 50,000 schoolchildren attend urban public schools.

Two-thirds of school attendees receive free or reduced-price lunches.

Prior to passage of 2000 bond referendum, community made no significant investments in public educational facilities for several decades.

Community experienced decades of flight from urban public schools to suburban schools driven by concerns about educational quality and safety.

Suburbanization of tax base diminished capacity of urban schools.

Prior to 1999, public school leadership narrowly defined its constituents to be households with schoolchildren. Beginning in 1999, school leadership began engaging the broader community, strengthening ownership of urban public schools.

Community conducted its first large-scale citizen survey as vehicle for community engagement involving a large cross-section of citizens.

Community survey was followed by face-to-face engagement of citizens and community stakeholders to strengthen community support and articulate investment priorities.

In 2000, a \$244.5 million bond referendum was passed to fund investment in facilities.

In 2005, a large citizen survey was conducted assessing public support for investment in additional facilities and to confirm that public dollars generated from first referendum were invested consistent with agreed-upon priorities. A section of the survey confirmed that the school district had fulfilled its investment promises.

Following the survey, a second large-scale citizen engagement process was used to directly engage citizens to articulate the next steps in facilities investment, including building and refurbishing neighborhood schools.

Second bond referendum for \$340 million was passed in 2008 to fund investment in facilities.

Answering the Challenges of Urban Education

The challenges associated with urban education are considerable and include performance- and discipline-related concerns that contribute to and are the product of an educationally diverse student body. This research proposes a two-part strategy to create educational opportunity for all students. Success for the first part of this strategy focuses on the extent to which public leaders have the capacity to help the community understand the challenges associated with serving an educationally heterogeneous population. Educational heterogeneity of the student body is a challenge for all schools but is particularly burdensome for urban public schools, and there are legitimate questions about whether these schools can reasonably be expected to meet these challenges (Bohte 2001; Smith and Larimer 2004). Variation in the strength of family-support systems is an important contributor to educationally heterogeneous student bodies. Weak family-support systems mean that disadvantaged children are particularly likely to enter kindergarten with social and educational deficits that compound over time.

Economic and cultural differences tend to interact and evolve into behavioral concerns that interfere with performance and raise questions about student safety (Verdugo 2002). The second part of the strategy focuses on actions taken to recruit and retain schoolchildren from advantaged households, so that urban public schools

can be said to be “owned” by the whole community. This part of the strategy seeks to restore the tax base needed to fund urban schools. This means that the creation of educational opportunity involves students who are in many cases polar opposites in academic preparedness.

Classroom behavior is both the problem and a manifestation of larger societal concerns and consequently defies simplistic solutions. All too often, community disenchantment with behavioral concerns contributes to public support for simplistic solutions. These solutions often include punitive agendas focused on extinguishing unacceptable behavior or the expulsion of students with behavioral problems. While this approach benefits the students who remain, it exacerbates the divide between advantaged and disadvantaged classes of citizens and often seals the fate of economically disadvantaged children. Conversely, it is equally unacceptable to retain dysfunctional schoolchildren at the educational expense of their advantaged classmates. Dysfunctional students contribute to the exodus of teachers and advantaged children, concentrating disadvantaged children in urban public schools without the tax base necessary to address these concerns.

Long-term solutions to these concerns are facilitated by early childhood intervention. It is critical to close the educational gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children. Intervention becomes increasingly expensive, and educational gains become more improbable as schoolchildren advance in grade but not in education. Therefore, cost-effective solutions necessarily must give consideration to early childhood education (Magnuson and Waldfogel 2005). However, it is not clear that communities are willing to pay now for societal benefits realized sometime in the future.

It is one thing to indicate support for social equity delivered through public schools and quite another to be willing to pay increased taxes to honor that commitment. Lasting and comprehensive solutions to the concerns of urban public education require broad-based community ownership of schools. Even when the vast majority of taxpayers are advantaged or do not have children in public schools, they must be willing to accept responsibility for the well-being of other people's children in order to preserve the community and its schools. The final section of the findings assesses public awareness of the challenges and willingness to invest increased tax dollars to create opportunity.

Even when the vast majority of taxpayers are advantaged and do not have children in public schools, they must be willing to accept responsibility for the well-being of other people's children in order to preserve the community and its schools.

Research Methods

Overall, 25,366 registered voters were selected to participate in the survey project. The sampling frame included all those who voted in the most recent election and who lived within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Unified School District. Initially, a proportional, stratified random sample of 22,000 registered voters was drawn from six districts. In an effort to boost survey participation, 100 percent samples, 3,366 cases, were drawn from six precincts with high concentrations of people of color. An estimated 10 percent (2,533) of the voter registration list was expected to have mailing address errors. Ninety-eight of the returned surveys were

removed from the analysis because of reliability concerns, such as missing data. A total of 5,685 voters completed surveys and are included in the analysis. The profile of the respondents found in the Appendices matches the community profile fairly closely, with a couple of exceptions (see Appendix 1). First, as is often the case, older citizens responded disproportionately. Second, low-income households are underrepresented in the sample.

Findings

Support for Social Equity, Including Willingness to Pay

There is broad public resistance to spending for social welfare, and, by extension, it is not too difficult to understand how confusion surrounding this concern can dampen support for actions on the part of public agencies to advance social equity. After decades of disinvestment in urban public school facilities, it is important that leaders effectively argue that the future of the community is intertwined with its schools. Therefore, the community must embrace the schools and be willing to intervene to rescue them from the negative spiral formed from the interaction between socioeconomic and educational disadvantage.

The Likert-type items in Table 3 assess level of agreement with the table's statements and consequently provide relative rather than absolute assessments of support. In an effort to establish the upper end of public support for the benchmark as proposed by Frederickson, the first item presented in Table 3 assesses support for providing assistance to physically or mentally challenged children. Much as expected, nearly 84 percent of the respondents feel that the community is responsible for making sure that children get the assistance they need when they have mental or physical impairments that make learning difficult. There is broad support for the creation of opportunities for these children, although it is unlikely that respondents fully appreciate the financial implications of this commitment.

The second and third measures of social equity focus on the long-standing model that assumes parental coproduction of public education. If respondents are focused on the child and the long-term well-being of the community, logically there should be no difference in the willingness of the community to accept responsibility for children who are victims of weak family-support systems. More than three-quarters (76.5 percent) of the respondents feel that the community is responsible for making sure that schoolchildren get the assistance they need when they have parents "unable" to help them with schoolwork. In contrast, fewer than 62 percent believe that the community has the same responsibility to children whose parents are "unwilling" to assist. In other words, some respondents are prepared to punish "undeserving" parents and their children for failure to uphold their part of the parent-teacher contract. In this case, moral leadership means that public leaders must help the community understand the necessity of focusing on the creation of opportunity for children with weak family-support systems.

Items 4 and 5 in Table 3 assess support for community intervention when children fail to keep pace with their classmates. Clearly, socioeconomically disadvantaged children are more likely to face difficulties related to educational pace than their advantaged counterparts. In spite of obvious differences in educational challenges,

TABLE 3
Public Support for Social Equity Agenda

<i>"The community is responsible for making sure that schoolchildren get the assistance they need when they . . ."</i>	Percentages			
	Undeserving		Deserving	
	SD	D	A	SA
Social equity baseline: accepted community responsibility				
. . . have mental or physical impairments that make learning difficult	3.0	13.2	60.0	23.8
Weak family-support systems				
. . . have parents who are unable to help them with their schoolwork	4.4	19.1	59.2	17.3
. . . have parents who are unwilling to help them with their schoolwork	9.8	28.6	45.6	16.0
Educational disadvantage				
. . . have fallen behind their classmates	4.6	24.4	53.2	17.8
Socioeconomic disadvantage				
. . . come from low-income families and have fallen behind their classmates	4.8	22.7	53.6	18.9
. . . come from low-income families and enter kindergarten behind their classmates	4.5	20.7	55.3	19.5
Retention, recruitment, and tax-base restoration				
. . . are ahead of their classmates and are capable of learning at a faster pace	3.6	17.9	54.3	24.2

Notes: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, S = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree; Range of $N = 5,543-5,567$.

it is difficult to predict willingness to accept responsibility for those who fall behind. The evidence indicates that the community is equally likely to accept responsibility for schoolchildren who are economically disadvantaged (72.5 percent) and those who are not disadvantaged (71.0 percent) but who have fallen behind their classmates.

The reality is that without intervention, socioeconomically disadvantaged schoolchildren tend to start behind and will likely stay behind their advantaged classmates. In this case, the creation of opportunity means that the community must be willing to create opportunity through early childhood intervention. Three-quarters (74.5 percent) of the respondents support the creation of opportunity by providing assistance to schoolchildren who come from low-income families and enter kindergarten educationally disadvantaged. In spite of indicated community support, it is important for officials to articulate the challenges that disadvantaged schoolchildren face and how responsible actions on the part of the community can transform them from community liabilities to assets.

The last item in Table 3 focuses more directly on the recruitment and retention of academically advanced schoolchildren. Urban school districts commonly use gifted programming and accelerated learning to attract educationally and socioeconomically advantaged schoolchildren. The findings indicate that there is broad-based support

(78.5 percent) for accepting responsibility for providing assistance to those who are educationally advanced and are capable of accelerated learning.

The seven items reported in Table 3 are summed (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4), forming an index (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.923$) that characterizes community support for the advancement of social equity. The ANOVA results reported in Table 4 assess overall commitment to social equity based on household income. Economically disadvantaged households are expected to be more supportive of social equity in public schools because they are more likely to identify with these concerns. Consistent with expectations, households with the lowest income are the strongest supporters of social equity, but the differences in support are not large. Accordingly, there is room for optimism for public leadership that is capable of logically articulating the role of schools in the creation of opportunity and the advancement of social equity.

While there are probably many avenues for improving the cost-effectiveness of public education, many, if not most, urban public schools will require additional tax dollars to make important advances in social equity. It is one thing to commit to social equity and quite another to be willing to pay increased taxes to support that commitment. This study uses three measures to assess willingness to pay: two measures of early childhood education (disadvantaged students and an overall assessment) and a third measure that focuses on the second part of the strategy, the development of educational opportunities for academically advanced students to progress at an accelerated pace. Two-thirds or more of the respondents indicated that they probably or definitely are willing to pay increased taxes to support these investments. An index has been created from the combined scores on the three items (Definitely Not Willing to Pay = 1, Probably Not Willing to Pay = 2, Probably Willing to Pay = 3, Definitely Willing to Pay = 4), summarizing willingness to pay (Range of Scores = 3–12, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.746$) (see Appendix 2). Surprisingly, the ANOVA results reported in Table 4 indicate that there is no significant difference in willingness to pay based on household income. In other words, support for the advancement of social equity is not primarily driven by self-interest on the part of the disadvantaged.

Table 5 displays partial correlation coefficients that illuminate connections in the minds of citizens between selected conceptual themes (i.e., support for a social equity agenda, understanding of strategies for addressing inequity, support for policy options, willingness to pay) while statistically controlling for rival explanations associated with income. Statistical controls for the influence of household income have been introduced because the findings reported in Table 4 indicate that low-income households, those most likely to benefit, are particularly supportive of advances in social equity. The diagonal in the correlation matrix separates scores based on respondents who have children in urban public schools (above the diagonal) versus households that do not (below the diagonal). Discussion of the findings reported in Table 5 concentrates on the partial correlations (controlling for household income) for the larger body of taxpayers, those without schoolchildren (correlations below the diagonal).

It is one thing to express support for social equity, but of little consequence if supporters are unwilling to financially back this agenda. The findings reported in Table 5 indicate that the index measuring willingness to pay is strongly correlated ($r_{xz,y} = 0.51$, without schoolchildren) with the index measuring social equity. In other words, those who believe that the community has an obligation to create opportunity for schoolchildren are more likely to be willing to pay increased taxes to

TABLE 4
Public Support for Social Equity Agenda and Awareness of Educational Challenges by Income

<i>Means by income</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
1. Social equity agenda—Index***	21.1	20.6	20.3	20.0	20.1	20.2
Social equity strategy						
Part 1. Close educational divide within urban schools						
2. Weak family support systems	2.85	2.87	2.86	2.91	2.86	2.83
3. Students start behind and stay behind	2.46	2.45	2.46	2.43	2.44	2.41
Part 2. Recruit and retain: Close divide between urban and suburban schools						
4. Educational implications—Index***	8.81	8.94	9.14	9.22	9.42	9.36
Policy options						
Support for simplistic solutions to complex problems						
5. Remove students to promote learning***	2.21	2.32	2.39	2.44	2.49	2.53
6. Retain students to protect community***	2.69	2.62	2.54	2.47	2.43	2.42
Support for social equity solution						
7. Retain and provide special assistance***	3.28	3.18	3.12	3.09	3.09	3.09
Willingness to pay for social equity agenda						
8. Willingness to pay increased taxes—Index	8.76	8.64	8.62	8.22	8.68	8.55
Income Legend: (1) Less than \$20,000, (2) \$20,000–\$39,999, (3) \$40,000–\$59,999, (4) \$60,000–\$79,999, (5) \$80,000–\$99,999, (6) \$100,000 and above.						
Individual 4-Point Likert Scales: Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4; ANOVA Significance Level for F-Ratio: *0.05, **0.01, ***0.001.						

TABLE 5
Public Support for Social Equity Agenda Partial Correlation Coefficients Controlling for Income

<i>With urban schoolchildren</i>	<i>Without urban schoolchildren</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Social equity agenda—Index		—	-0.05*	0.18*	-0.05	-0.23*	0.28*	0.43*	0.40*
Social equity strategies									
Part 1. Close educational divide within urban schools									
2. Weak family-support systems		0.02	—	0.30*	0.39*	0.20*	-0.08*	-0.10*	-0.02
3. Students start behind and stay behind		0.28*	0.29*	—	0.25*	0.00	0.16*	0.11*	0.16*
Part 2. Recruit and retain: Close divide between urban and suburban schools									
4. Educational implications—Index		0.03	0.32*	0.21*	—	0.39*	-0.13*	-0.11*	-0.06*
Policy options: Performance/discipline concerns									
5. Remove students to promote learning		-0.22*	0.14*	-0.02	0.30*	—	-0.45*	-0.30*	-0.20*
6. Retain students to protect community		0.21*	0.07*	0.17	-0.03	-0.48*	—	0.34*	0.20*
7. Retain and provide special assistance		0.46*	0.01	0.24*	0.02	-0.33*	0.33*	—	0.37*
Willingness to pay for social equity agenda									
8. Willingness to pay increased taxes—Index		0.52*	0.00	0.26*	0.06*	-0.18*	0.17*	0.40*	—

Partial Correlation Coefficient, Significance * $p \leq 0.05$ or better; With Urban Schoolchildren $N = 1,257-1,292$; Without Urban Schoolchildren $N = 4,011-4,104$.

fund investments that advance this agenda. Accordingly, leaders must be willing to delineate the content of social equity, focusing on the creation of opportunity and making clear the distinctions between social equity and social welfare. Government agencies will also need to develop better vehicles for engaging citizens in important public decisions if they want taxpayers to be willing investors in social equity (Glaser, Bruckner, and Bannon 2010).

Social Equity Strategy Part 1: Development of Disadvantaged Schoolchildren

Part 1 of the two-part strategy focuses on closing the educational divide within urban schools that stems from differences in family-support systems. More specifically, Table 6 sheds light on community awareness of weaknesses associated with the parent-teacher model and the assumption of strong family-support systems. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents recognize that performance and discipline problems stem from parents who are unwilling or unable to uphold their parental obligations involving coproduction of education. There is no statistical difference in propensity to see parental involvement as a key contributor to performance and discipline concerns based on household income (see Table 4). Surprisingly, the partial correlation coefficient reported in Table 5 indicates that there is no statistical connection ($r_{xz,y} = 0.02$) between support for social equity and the recognition that performance and discipline concerns are driven by parents who are unwilling or unable to assist their children with schoolwork.

The majority of the respondents (55.9 percent, see Table 6) do not recognize that performance- and discipline-related concerns usually begin in kindergarten, and that without special assistance, many of those who start behind will never catch up. In other words, most respondents fail to recognize that children who are socio-economically disadvantaged tend to enter schools educationally disadvantaged and that without early intervention, this will, in many cases, translate into a lifetime of disadvantage. Evidence found in Table 3 indicates that there is no statistical connection between household income and perceptions that performance and discipline concerns are linked to educational disadvantage stemming from unequal starting points. Respondents without children in the public school system (Table 5, $r_{xz,y} = 0.28$) are somewhat more likely than those with children ($r_{xz,y} = 0.18$) to report connections between support for social equity and an improved understanding that students with performance and discipline problems usually are children who start behind and stay behind. Leadership hoping to advance social equity must help the community, regardless of its level of commitment to social equity, to better understand the origins of performance- and discipline-related concerns.

Social Equity Strategy Part 2: Recruitment and Retention of Advantaged Schoolchildren

The second part of the social equity strategy focuses on closing the divide between urban and suburban schools in an effort to stem the tide of suburban flight. More specifically, the results reported in Table 6 test public understanding of concerns that detract from recruitment and retention of advantaged schoolchildren. The findings in this section are particularly important, because perception and reality interact in ways that make it difficult to address one without changes in the other.

TABLE 6
Public Awareness of Performance/Discipline Concerns and Support for Policy Options

Section / "Students with performance and discipline problems . . ."	Percentages			
	SD	D	A	SA
Social equity strategies				
Part 1. Close educational divide within urban schools				
1a. Weak family-support systems				
. . . generally have parents who are unwilling or unable to assist them with their schoolwork	3.4	24.1	55.0	17.5
1b. Children start behind/stay behind				
. . . generally are children who enter kindergarten behind their classmates and without special assistance will never catch up	6.6	49.3	37.8	6.3
Part 2. Recruit and retain:				
Close divide between urban and suburban schools				
. . . make it difficult to recruit and keep quality teachers	3.9	25.7	52.2	18.3
. . . increase concerns about safety in schools	1.2	11.1	64.2	23.5
. . . make it difficult for others to learn and reduce the quality of education	1.7	10.9	56.0	31.5
Policy options				
3a. Simplistic options to complex concerns				
. . . should be removed from school so that others can learn	11.9	47.7	28.8	11.6
. . . should be kept in school to avoid problems for community	9.0	39.5	40.8	10.7
3b. Social equity options and community well-being				
. . . should be provided special assistance to increase chances that they will become productive members of community upon graduation	2.9	11.3	56.3	29.5

Legend: SD = Strongly Disagree = 1, D = Disagree = 2, S = Agree = 3, SA = Strongly Agree = 4; Range of N = 5,411–5,576.

Teaching quality is instrumental to education. Generally speaking, urban and suburban public and private schools draw from the same regional pool of teachers. However, if urban schools are viewed as an unfavorable teaching environment for one reason or another, it will become increasingly difficult to recruit teachers who are willing to accept the challenge. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (70.5 percent) appreciate the challenges of recruiting and retaining quality teachers in urban schools.

Items 2 and 3 directly assess concerns about safety and the quality of the learning environment. If the community perceives that schools pose public safety concerns, these images damage student recruitment and retention and pose formidable barriers to improved education. Such concerns are also closely tied to flight from urban schools. The vast majority of the respondents feel that students with performance and discipline problems increase concerns about safety (87.7 percent) and make it difficult for others to learn (87.5 percent), reducing the quality of public education. These issues commingle in the minds of the average citizen, and actions taken to transform urban education must treat these concerns as coequal.

An index has been created (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.782$; Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4; range of scores = 3–12) that summarizes the level of concern (higher scores registering higher levels of concern) that performance and discipline problems represent an important barrier to recruitment and retention of students. The evidence found in Table 4 indicates that lower-income households are somewhat less concerned with issues that might interfere with recruitment and retention, compared to their higher-income counterparts. As long as advantaged households perceive that urban schools have performance and safety concerns, they will continue to abandon urban schools and migrate to suburban schools.

Once again, Table 5 provides evidence that commitment to a social equity agenda is unrelated ($r_{xy} = 0.03$) to views that performance and discipline problems have negative implications. Stated differently, support for a social equity agenda may be driven more by issues embedded in a person's basic values system and less by an intimate understanding of the implications of performance and discipline concerns.

Policy Options: Simplistic Solutions vs. Social Equity

The items in the final section of Table 6 place respondents in the uncomfortable position of public officials by asking them to advise the school system on how best to handle performance and discipline concerns. If they view students with performance and discipline problems as a threat to student safety and learning, and also see them as a threat to the community, what would they have educators do with these schoolchildren? While 40.4 percent of the respondents indicate support for policy that removes students from school, the majority recognize that removal from school has long-term consequences for troubled children and the community in which they live. Support for removing students with performance and discipline problems tends to increase with household income (see Table 4). Similarly, slightly more than half of the sample (see Table 6) feels that schools should retain troubled students to avoid problems for the community. Support for retention tends to decrease as household income increases (see Table 4). A majority of the community recognizes that simplistic solutions have unacceptable consequences.

The vast majority of the respondents (85.6 percent, see Table 6) support a social equity option that provides special assistance to students with performance and dis-

cipline problems to increase the chances that they will become productive members of the community upon graduation. Households with incomes of \$60,000 and above are somewhat less supportive of the special assistance option (see Table 4).

Table 5 explores the connections between support for social equity and the policy options. Partial correlations indicate a moderate to weak inverse relationship ($r_{xzy} = -0.22$) between support for a social equity agenda and support for policy that removes troubled students to promote learning. Findings also indicate a weak direct relationship ($r_{xz,y} = 0.21$) between support for a social equity agenda and retention of troubled students to protect the community. Table 5 reveals a moderately strong direct relationship ($r_{xz,y} = 0.46$) between support for social equity and policy that retains troubled students and offers them special assistance. There is also a moderately strong partial correlation ($r_{xz,y} = 0.40$) between those who support a social equity option and willingness to pay increased taxes.

Table 7 provides an assessment of how much latitude public leaders have in creating support for social equity. This assessment begins with an improved understanding of the extent to which those who advocate the removal option might be persuaded to consider the alternative of retention and investment. Nearly 56 percent (lower-left quadrant) of the respondents who initially rejected student removal support the provision of special assistance. Nearly 30 percent (lower-right quadrant) of the respondents who support the removal option are potentially amenable to a retention and assistance option if it were available. Approximately 10 percent (upper-right quadrant) feel that those with problems should be removed and do not support the special assistance option. About 4 percent (upper-left quadrant) support the retention option without additional assistance.

The second section of Table 7 provides a better reading of the extent to which those who support special assistance to students with problems are prepared to back a social equity agenda through increased taxes. Approximately 58 percent of the respondents who support special assistance are also willing to pay more taxes (see Table 7, lower-right quadrant). Less than 9 percent of the respondents indicated that they do not support assistance to these students and would not pay more taxes to support early childhood education (see Table 7, upper-left quadrant). Approximately a quarter of the respondents report that they support the provision of special assistance but are not willing to pay for that assistance.

Generally, then, when citizens are provided legitimate options to complex problems, they are more likely to reject simplistic solutions and support intervention that is consistent with the gravity of the situation. These findings also provide evidence that citizens can be engaged in meaningful ways in important public decisions, although there is no consensus about appropriate vehicles for engagement.

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Conclusions

If the United States is to prosper in a rapidly globalizing world, it must create ways of socially and economically integrating disadvantaged segments of the community, and quality public schools are an essential first step in the creation of opportunity.

TABLE 7
Policy Options for Performance/Discipline Concerns and Willingness to Pay (cell percentages)

	SD	D	A	SA
<i>“Students with performance and discipline problems should be removed from school so that others can learn.”</i>				
ASSIST				
<i>“Students with performance and discipline problems should be provided special assistance to increase chances that they will become productive members of community upon graduation.”***</i>				
Strongly disagree	Assist: No 0.4	Remove: No 0.4	Remove: Yes 0.6	1.6
Disagree	Assist: No 0.5	3.0	5.4	2.5
Agree	Assist: Yes 2.9	30.0	18.3	4.6
Strongly agree	Assist: Yes 8.0	14.6	4.2	2.8
<i>“Students with performance and discipline problems should be provided special assistance to increase chances that they will become productive members of community upon graduation.”</i>				
PAY				
<i>“Increase number of pre-kindergarten and early childhood programs for DISADVANTAGED children to ensure they are prepared to start school”****</i>				
Definitely not willing to pay	Pay: No 2.1	1.9	2.9	3.5
Probably not willing to pay	Pay: No 0.9	3.7	10.3	7.8
Probably willing to pay	Pay: Yes 1.5	4.3	21.5	18.6
Definitely willing to pay	Pay: Yes 1.4	1.9	6.8	10.9
Range of N = 5,328–5,345; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree				

Currently, public schools are forced to address weighty social and educational challenges, often with weak community support. Therefore, public leadership must develop improved methods of encouraging the community to accept responsibility for its public schools. This leadership challenge is considerable, since the vast majority of taxpayers are middle- and upper-income Caucasians and the children in urban public schools increasingly are low-income children of color. The evidence examined here indicates that while these challenges may be considerable, they are not insurmountable.

Building support for urban public education necessarily begins by reframing how citizens see social equity. Public leadership must work to change images in the minds of citizens from social welfare and handouts to the undeserving to investments that create opportunity for children to become productive members of the community. This means that public leaders must become more adept at working with the community to create the opportunity for educationally disadvantaged children to reach parity with their advantaged classmates. Social equity also means that educationally advantaged students must be provided an opportunity to advance at an accelerated pace. This research finds that when social equity focuses on the creation of opportunity, and when opportunity is extended to both advantaged and disadvantaged students, there is broad-based community support, including willingness to pay increased taxes to support investment.

Urban schools are commonly criticized on grounds of performance- and discipline-related concerns. The media are instrumental in shaping a community's image of public education, and, consequently, public leaders would be well advised to address issues of performance and discipline through collaborative public debate. The first part of the proposed two-part strategy advanced here focuses on closing the educational divide within urban schools by creating opportunity for those who are disadvantaged. This part of the strategy recognizes that issues of performance and discipline are influenced by the strength of family-support systems, but holds that public leadership is instrumental in encouraging the community to focus on the creation of opportunity for children—the future of the community—regardless of how undeserving their parents might be. Findings indicate that the community generally understands the significance of weak family-support systems but fails to fully grasp that without early childhood education, socioeconomic disadvantage typically translates into educational disadvantage. In other words, children raised in households with weak support systems are likely to start behind and stay behind. When these children recognize that they are hopelessly lost in their educational pursuits, they often respond by disrupting the education of their classmates and in some cases bring disruptive behavior into the classroom, raising concerns about public safety. It is not difficult to understand how this chain of events raises legitimate questions about the viability of urban education.

In most cases, citizens who are committed to social equity can be assumed to offer much-needed community support for public leadership focused on advancing such an agenda. This research provides evidence that individual commitment to social equity is not necessarily tied closely to an intimate understanding of contributors to inequality. For example, those who are most willing to support social equity are only slightly more likely to understand that children from disadvantaged households begin formal education socially and educationally unprepared and that without special assistance deficits become cumulative and eventually insurmountable.

able. Therefore, public leadership necessarily involves processes that engage and inform.

The second part of the proposed strategy involves restoration of the tax base through the recruitment and retention of economically and educationally advantaged households. The primary goal of this strategy is to restore the tax base that funds urban public education. This strategy also seeks to discourage the creation of separate and unequal schools where the advantaged attend suburban public or private schools and the disadvantaged are relegated to urban public schools. The findings indicate broad-based recognition that performance- and discipline-related concerns commingle in the minds of citizens and contribute to perceptions that are inconsistent with the recruitment and retention of advantaged students. Conversely, the findings indicate that low-income households are slightly less likely to appreciate these concerns. Leadership is instrumental in engaging both advantaged and disadvantaged households and establishing behavioral norms that are consistent with quality education. When the community is actively involved in the definition and enforcement of behavioral norms in the classroom, this helps teachers draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and lays the contextual foundation for quality education.

Citizens who lack knowledge of the challenges of urban public education are vulnerable to the counsel of those who argue for simplistic solutions to complex problems. This study places citizens in the unenviable position of having to advise officials on the appropriate policy response by forcing them to choose between equally unattractive and simplistic policy responses. When forced to choose, respondents to the survey were placed in the same quandary that school officials face daily: whether to retain and damage the education of classmates, or to dismiss and destroy opportunity and the future. Alternatively, when citizens are given a social equity option, one that creates opportunity for students with performance and discipline problems, the vast majority of citizens in general, and of those committed to social equity in particular, are supportive of retention and the provision of special assistance to students to create opportunity. Even more convincing, a majority of citizens agree that special assistance is necessary to help troubled students and are willing to pay increased taxes to create opportunity. Generally, then, these findings indicate that the door is open for public leadership to encourage commitment to social equity focused on the creation of opportunity, including willingness to pay to fund this agenda.

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APPENDIX 1
Respondents Profile: 5,685 cases

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Race			Age		
Caucasian	4,632	83.7	Below 25	136	02.5
African-American	475	08.6	25–35	606	10.9
Hispanic	135	02.4	36–45	799	14.4
Native American	91	01.6	46–55	1,222	22.1
Asian	59	01.1	56–65	1,158	20.9
Mixed Race	71	01.3	Above 65	1,620	29.2
Other	69	01.2			
			Education		
Member of household attends			Some high school	201	03.6
Yes	1,315	23.7	High school	1,023	18.3
No	4,231	76.3	Some college	1,682	30.1
			College	1,248	22.3
			Some graduate study	449	08.0
			Graduate degree	983	17.6

APPENDIX 2
Willingness to Pay

Questionnaire Items

Respondents were asked to indicate willingness to pay (1 = Definitely Not Willing to Pay, 2 = Probably Not Willing to Pay, 3 = Probably Willing to Pay, 4 = Definitely Willing to Pay) for the following investments.

1. Increase the number of pre-kindergarten and early childhood programs for DISADVANTAGED children to ensure they are prepared to start school.
2. Increase the number of pre-kindergarten and early childhood programs for ALL children to ensure they are prepared to start school.
3. Develop educational opportunities for academically advanced students to progress at a faster pace.

Predictive Validity of Willingness to Pay

Indications of willingness to pay do not necessarily mean that individuals will accept increased taxation to support expenditure. However, there is evidence that measures similar to the ones employed here do have predictive validity. Research finds that when registered voters are queried using willingness to pay indicators much like those used here they were found to have predictive validity as witnessed by the passage of a referendum by a two-to-one margin for \$284.5 million by voters in 2000 (Glaser, Aristigueta, and Miller 2003–4). In November 2008, the community passed a second referendum (capital investment in urban public schools) for \$340 million. Once again, measures of willingness to pay, including some of the measures reported here, correctly predicted to outcome. Generally, then, these cases provide evidence that measures of willingness to pay do have predictive validity (Glaser, Bruckner, and Bannon 2010; Glaser, Wong, and Bannon 2009).

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