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The Education Crisis in America is a Race Crisis.

What sort of K-12 education are we (as democratic citizens) obligated to provide to students? Education has become a hot topic with the discussion of how COVID-19 will affect children learning foundational academic and social skills all online. Right now in America, we face an education crisis, where there is disproportionate access to schooling and learning materials. Zoom education has been a challenge; however, it also showcased the underlying problems the system has faced for centuries. It is essential that we face the problems presented by the inequality of education and reform the goals of schools away from test scores towards educating students to be active participants in our democratic society with critical life skills.

Education is the cornerstone of our democratic society; for generations children have gone to learn essential life skills, gain critical thinking skills and advance their positions in life. In class when discussing Bogg and the “factory model” of education, what struck me was not only the passivity that it encourages, but how little it meets the current needs of students. The social fabric of the United States has changed since the Industrial Revolution with women’s rights and the abolition of slavery, and the technology and skill sets required in the work force have evolved. Instead of seating children in neat lines and teaching from prescribed books off a lesson plan, Bogg emphasizes the need to break from the mold and educate students to be active members of society with the ability to creatively solve problems. As a democratic society, we

should prepare students to be knowledgeable citizens equipped with the tools to create social change. Westheimer and Kahne describe a citizen with a mindset geared toward justice in the analysis of social issues and who strives to get to the root of the problem through understanding the different institutions and groups that influence policy. By educating children about democracy and democratic functions from a young age, they acquire the knowledge and skills to analyze different rhetoric and establish their own thought.

It should be a given that the children of America are going to schools in safe environments that are well cared for and clean. However, for many students across the country that is not the case. Education is impeded by funding and access to materials, as well as the demographics of public school districts that emphasizes segregation and inequality in America. While some districts might receive similar federal funding, there are additional challenges urban and rural schools face. Hochschild and Skovronick describe the higher percentages of disabled children, maintenance and transportation costs that impede spending on individual children. Not only are communities around urban and rural schools at an economic disadvantage, but the inequality of funding leads to inferior education. While those who are wealthier have the opportunity to choose between public and private schools, lower-income students go to schools that are underfunded, understaffed and unhealthy. Week Six's plenary "I'm Special: Detroit's Education Crisis" offered an in depth look at the problems facing one of the lowest scoring districts in the country. The urban decay Detroit faces has caused a rapid decline in the school systems with unstable charter schools, bad infrastructure and a lack of opportunities for the students to even obtain literacy. Detroit serves as an example of what can happen when schooling is centralized and managed by a corporate focused superintendent rather than focusing on quality education. In looking towards the interest of our future as a nation, it is our obligation to invest in

our children's education and ensure that *all* students have access to literacy and a safe environment to learn in.

The largest barrier to equal education that focuses on creating critically thinking democratic citizens is one that plagues not only the education system: racism. Funding is a key aspect to unequal education, and as education remains a largely state and local function through taxes, districts from one town to another can look completely different. The Center on Education Policy emphasizes the gap between lower and higher income districts as the local ability to tax and availability of qualified teachers to public schools with high poverty and minority rates varies. As the demographic shifts of urban decay left poorer minority communities in cities with the middle and upper-class heading to the suburbs, the wealth disparity is apparent in the state of infrastructure, inability to fund different programs and low literacy rates as seen in Detroit. The economic and mental strains of COVID-19 negatively impacted lower-income communities as parents face struggles with general pandemic worries, as well as ensuring their children are still being educated in this new digital space. North describes the "digital divide" minority families disproportionately face as they struggle to get access to devices, the internet and often juggle multiple children and jobs. I have struggled with online learning for the past year. It often feels pointless and disengaging, and I am by no means a child with a short attention span and no access to either a device or internet. Wealthier families not only have access to the internet and multiple devices, they also live in well-funded public school districts with the option to pay for private schools. While private schools are known for high-quality education, by being privatized schools, the Center on Education Policy illustrates how their selectivity can exclude minorities as well as students with disabilities who they are not prepared to, or do not want to, serve. Public

schools are required to accommodate all students, a key aspect of inclusivity that also puts a larger financial burden on the districts with higher populations of disabled students.

The privatization of education and the push for corporate reform has aided in the decline of American public schools. As standardized testing and common core were introduced into the curriculum, teachers were required to teach to test, lowering teacher creativity and the ability to teach to needs. With the introduction and rise of charter schools, there seemed to be an opportunity to give urban families more choices. Yet, as Johnson discusses, charter schools engage in practices of segregation, shedding disabled, high-need and minority children out of the systems. While private school settings can be helpful in narrowing focus on specific educations, the privatization leads to increased segregation and money-oriented education goals. While standardized tests can help know information about different school districts, Hursh warns that standardized tests are products of corporate reformers who can manipulate scores to serve political needs and detract funding from public schools. The Center on Education Policy illustrates how both private and public schools have the nation's well being in mind, but public schools are expected to have programs for underprivileged children like meal plans and addressing health issues such as domestic abuse. The privatization of schools and a corporate reform can be good options for some individuals and districts. However, the overall centralization and privatization has harmed underprivileged students and detracted from the purpose of education in a democratic society.

Education is a crisis that needs to be addressed in order to build a nation of future citizens who are engaged and informed on social, economic and political issues. Through secondary education, I enjoyed a rigorous and well-funded Connecticut public school system. My high school, third ranked in the state on Niche with an abysmal C+ in diversity, is a key example of a

privileged school in a system where another district in the same county can be one of the most underprivileged in the state, only scoring higher with an A+ in diversity. All students across America should have access to the same quality education and opportunities, and any efforts to undermine the public school systems are also undermining the future of our nation.