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## **The Checkered Impact of US Compensatory Education Policies on Educational Inequality**

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### **Abstract**

Against the backdrop of a nation reckoning with its deeply rooted racial inequities, the 1960s and 1970s saw the dawn of new US federal compensatory education policies aimed at minority communities. Intended to support disadvantaged students by targeting the lack of opportunities and resources, compensatory education policies aimed to address the deeply entrenched barriers that resulted from intergenerational poverty and oppressive policies against minority groups. Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, compensatory programs tackled a pervasive disparity in the grade-level achievements of students of color in comparison to their white counterparts, which came to be known as the black-white achievement gap. The newfound national desire to address racial inequality catalyzed education reforms to close the achievement gap. Federal funding for disadvantaged students had a notable impact on the short-term achievements, but the implementation of the policies was deficient and lacked a holistic understanding of cultural and psychological factors. This essay examines the extent to which compensatory education policies addressed long-term educational inequalities and how they influenced modern education policy. Using qualitative and quantitative findings from primary sources, the paper analyzes the experiences of minority communities in compensatory programs. The analysis illustrates that while compensatory education policies failed to fully address intergenerational disparities, they were influential in setting a precedent of working toward educational equality and provided constructive lessons for future policies.

## History of Educational Inequalities

In the mid-20th century, rising awareness of socioeconomic inequality led to the conclusion that a major factor precluding minority communities from achieving the “American dream” of merit-based affluence were chronic wealth disparities, often stemming from inequalities in the education system. Decades of racial segregation and discriminatory Jim Crow policies created substantial setbacks in wealth equality for people of color. The income disparity between Black and white Americans was significant; in 1968, a typical middle-class white family earned \$64,000 more than a middle-class Black family.<sup>1</sup> The racial wealth gap and its associated socioeconomic problems were especially pronounced among less-educated Americans, with a white high-school graduate earning almost 10 times the income of a Black American with the same background.<sup>2</sup> Even as discriminatory policies were lifted, wealth inequality continued to persist in the American economy because children of color had fewer educated role models and decreased access to resources needed to succeed in education and the workforce. Because public school districts were funded by property taxes within the attendance zone, housing as a resource was particularly intertwined with education. Districts also became stratified through the federally sanctioned process of redlining, which conditioned access to home loans based on factors such as race and perceived wealth, essentially creating racial and economic ‘segregation’ of school districts even after legal segregation ended.<sup>3</sup> The dearth of resources experienced by low-income and minority communities led to severe inequalities in education, which ultimately affected their long-term economic prosperity and ability to achieve the “American dream.”

The issue of educational inequality had previously been acknowledged by the federal government, but the ultimate catalyst for federal action was the 1964 Equality of Education Report by James Coleman. Coleman was a Johns Hopkins sociologist who had been sanctioned by the Office of Education to assess the state of public

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<sup>1</sup> Kriston McIntosh, Emily Moss, and Nunn Ryan, “Examining the Black-white Wealth Gap,” Brookings, last modified February 27, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/>.

<sup>2</sup> Liz Mineo, “Racial wealth gap may be a key to other inequities,” The Harvard Gazette, last modified June 3, 2021, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/06/racial-wealth-gap-may-be-a-key-to-other-inequities/>.

<sup>3</sup> Lindsay M. Burke and Jude Schwalbach, *Housing Redlining and Its Lingering Effects on Education Opportunity. Background. No. 3594*, 15, March 11, 2021, 4.

education in the US.<sup>4</sup> The results exposed a disturbing pattern of racial and socioeconomic inequality in academic performance. Coleman found a consistent disparity between the academic achievement of students of color and their white counterparts, which came to be known as the black-white achievement gap.<sup>5</sup> The idea that the achievement gap was due to socioeconomic inequalities was a progressive concept that contradicted the popular belief that students of color were innately academically disadvantaged. These findings were what ultimately prompted the federal government to initiate programs that compensated for the socioeconomic inequalities causing the achievement gap.<sup>6</sup>

In 1965, the increasing national attention on educational inequality led to the introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The law was a crucial element of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and his mission to utilize public education as a means for reducing wealth inequality. The significance of the ESEA as the first federal compensatory education program was markedly notable. To this day, the law remains one of the most expensive pieces of federal legislation affecting education. The main purpose of the act was to close achievement gaps in reading, writing, and mathematics for low-income public-school students. The most crucial section of the ESEA was Title I, which mandated the distribution of funding to school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families and accounted for ¾ of the total funds granted by the ESEA. The ESEA was notable in marking a federal interest in solving socioeconomic inequalities in education and would serve as the basis for several more compensatory education policies.<sup>7</sup>

The ESEA not only recognized the educational disadvantages of low-income students but also those of limited-English proficient (LEP) and special needs students. A huge migrant influx following immigration reform policies in 1965 combined with a new wave of activism by Mexican-American students ultimately led Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough, a former rural educator who saw the struggles of bilingual students, to introduce Title VII of the ESEA in 1968.<sup>8</sup> Also known as the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), Title VII provided federal grants to

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<sup>4</sup> Johns Hopkins University, "Coleman Report Set the Standard for the Study of Public Education," The Hub (HUB, December 2, 2016), <https://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2016/winter/coleman-report-public-education/>.

<sup>5</sup> Office of Education, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, by James S. Coleman, 1964, 256.

<sup>6</sup> Johns Hopkins University, "Coleman Report," The Hub, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Elementary and Secondary Education Act, H.R. 2362 (Apr. 7, 1965).

<sup>8</sup> Gloria Stewner-Manzanares, "The Bilingual Education Act: Twenty Years Later," 1988, 42, [https://ncela.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE021037/Fall88\\_6.pdf](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE021037/Fall88_6.pdf).

school districts to establish education programs for students with limited English-speaking abilities. It was the first federal effort to ensure that LEP students received assistance in their first language and with the standardized English curriculum.<sup>9</sup> Compensatory education policy also began to address the academic challenges faced by special needs students in 1975, when Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children (EHA). Before the EHA was passed, special needs students faced significant barriers in education; in 1970, US schools only educated one out of every five children with disabilities, creating a significant education gap that would continue to affect them later in life.<sup>10</sup> The law aimed to build on the successes of the ESEA by specifically addressing the individual needs of toddlers and youth with disabilities and their families.<sup>11</sup> Both the BEA and the EHA specifically protected the rights of children with disabilities and provided funding for special needs services, marking a significant improvement in the ability of federal education policy to affect change upon underserved populations.

### **Successes of Compensatory Education Programs**

The introduction of compensatory education policies was successful in the short term, creating uptakes in both IQ and standardized testing scores for educationally disadvantaged students. In the early years of compensatory education, one of the struggles identified by lawmakers was the ability to effectively measure the outcome of policies. While no perfect answer was determined, the research conducted in the Coleman Report directed the Department of Education to use the outputs of education, often evaluated through achievement-based testing, to measure the impact of funding inputs.<sup>12</sup> IQ testing and standardized testing in reading and mathematics showed that compensatory education was incredibly impactful in the short term. National evaluators from the American Institute of Research (AIR) found initial gains of 15 or more IQ points within the span of a few months.<sup>13</sup> Compensatory policies also had an impact on the education grade curve, bringing disadvantaged students closer to a reading and mathematics level expected for their grades. The increase in reading

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<sup>9</sup> Bilingual Education Act, H.R. 3229 (Jan. 2, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> Barbara K. Keogh. "Celebrating PL 94-142: The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975." *Issues in Teacher Education* 16, no. 2 (2023): 65–69. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ796253>.

<sup>11</sup> Education for All Handicapped Children Act, H.R. 7217, 94th Cong. (July 29, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, Brookings Institution Press, 1998, 42-53.

<sup>13</sup> "Closing the Gap: A Historical Perspective on the Effectiveness of Compensatory Education on JSTOR," Jstor.org, 2023, 3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20387003>.

scores was especially profound; between 1971 to 1975, average reading scale scores for Black and Hispanic 13-year-olds increased by 10 points.<sup>14</sup> The uptakes in IQ, reading, and mathematics scores demonstrated the capability of federal compensatory education policies to help close the racial achievement gap and affect societal change.

Compensatory education programs often produced these results due to unique and effective approaches to implementing federal programs at the local level, which is epitomized by the efficacious execution of federal policies in Oregon. While the ESEA and Head Start provided general guidelines for compensatory funding, states such as Oregon were able to deploy specific programs to effectively address achievement gaps and earned federal recognition for their efforts. Oregon utilized the Model Schools program in cities such as Portland to address racial imbalances in schools with particularly low achievement rates. The program allowed voluntary administrative transfers for students within certain districts to decrease administrative burdens, increase teacher-to-student ratios where needed, and allowed students of color to gain access to historically white schools which received more public funding. The Oregon policies were so unique and effective that the Portland Board of Education Directors won an award from the National Education Association for the most creative educational accomplishments. The successes of the Oregon Model School system exemplified how federal compensatory education policies could be enacted on the state or city levels to affect massive changes.<sup>15</sup>

The advent of compensatory education policies not only provided broadly effective education programs but also addressed the needs of specific underserved populations such as bilingual and special needs students. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act was notably influential in increasing enrollment and achievement for LEP students. In the early years of the Bilingual Education Act, for instance, funding for 76 projects across the nation doubled the number of students enrolled in bilingual classrooms.<sup>16</sup> The program not only increased enrollment for LEP students but also benefited their learning in the classroom. By the 6th grade, LEP students were achieving at or near grade level in reading and mathematics when tested in English while continuing to increase

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<sup>14</sup> “Standardized Test, SRA Reading and Arithmetic Indices,” National Museum of American History, 2018, [https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_1213730](https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1213730).

<sup>15</sup> Dolores Pappas, “Early Childhood Education and Compensatory Education in the Portland, Oregon, Public Schools, 1965-1984,” January 1, 2000, 24, <https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.5298>.

<sup>16</sup> “The Condition of Bilingual Education in the Nation: A Report to the Congress and the President,” Ed.gov, June 30, 1991, 113, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED335945>.

their proficiency in their native language, which was often Spanish.<sup>17</sup> Kathy Escamilla, a first-grade bilingual teacher in rural Colorado, remarked how the symbiosis of Spanish and English instruction helped her students: “Teaching reading in Spanish and observing how literacy in Spanish benefitted learning English and navigating content areas in English affirmed my belief in the potential of bilingual education even under less than optimal conditions.”<sup>18</sup> The Education for All Handicapped Children Act had similar impacts in improving education for special needs students. In the 1967-77 school years, the EHA served over three million primary, secondary, and college students, increasing enrollment for students with disabilities who were previously excluded from education.<sup>19</sup> Though the program served a vast array of students, it still aimed to address the needs of individuals through Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that granted learning accommodations such as extra time on testing or learning aides.<sup>20</sup> The provisions of the BEA and EHA were impactful in increasing accessibility for underserved students and ensuring they enrolled and learned at the same rates as their peers.

The successes of compensatory policies in education such as the ESEA were seen to be effective in increasing test scores, expanding local administrative programs, and addressing the needs of LEP and special needs students. The progress made by these policies effectively demonstrated that compensatory education was in part able to close achievement gaps and benefit educationally disadvantaged students.

### **Ineffective Implementation of Compensatory Education Policies**

Though compensatory policies were significant in signaling a new federal focus on educational inequality, their overall success was nonetheless undermined by several factors. Ineffective resource allocation and insufficient administrative guidance meant that federal funding was not used effectively to close the achievement gap. Additionally, biases in standardized testing and issues with topic retention prevented the short-term successes of compensatory policies from realizing long-term changes in socioeconomic education inequality.

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<sup>17</sup> *Assessing Evaluation Studies* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 1992), 52, <https://doi.org/10.17226/2014>.

<sup>18</sup> Kathy Escamilla, “Growing up with the Bilingual Education Act: One Educator’s Journey,” *Bilingual Research Journal* 41, no. 4 (2018): 369–87, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1202433>.

<sup>19</sup> Peter W.D. Wright and Pamela Wright, *Wrightslaw: Special Education Law* (n.p., 2007), 123.

<sup>20</sup> “Project MUSE - the History of Inclusion in the United States,” Jhu.edu, 2023, 65, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/13164/>.

One of the critical issues undermining the effectiveness of compensatory education programs was ineffective resource allocation. When these policies were first introduced at the federal level, there was a severe dearth of research on what strategies would be most effective at improving educational achievement for underserved students and how the funding provided by Title I of the ESEA should be used. This problem was compounded by the vague guidelines around the allocation of federal funding; much of the decision-making power in the use of funds lay at the state or even local level and thus varied greatly from district to district.<sup>21</sup> Some states were able to effectively allocate resources, provide incentives, and form unique programs that addressed not only education but factors surrounding it, such as the aforementioned program in Oregon. However, most states poured money into statistically ineffective policies and did not provide sufficient instruction or training for teachers when implementing remedial curriculums.<sup>22</sup> Qualitatively effective measures were not emphasized because funding was solely linked to the quantitative results of schools, such as class size reductions. Reducing class sizes was an important method of improving performance, but could not be truly effective if content and teaching methods were not changed as well. Similarly, increased funding for disadvantaged districts would not close achievement gaps if the school did not hire more effective personnel.<sup>23</sup> The lack of administrative guidance and ineffective resource allocation meant an uneven distribution of gains from compensatory programs. A California evaluation report on compensatory education found the greatest improvement in achievement in medium-sized urban districts, whose students performed far better on standardized testing than their counterparts in the state's largest cities. This is because the administrative structure in large cities was often waterlogged with tedious bureaucratic procedures and overworked staff, creating massive delays in the expected progress of compensatory programs.<sup>24</sup> With billions of dollars being spent on these compensatory policies, many constituencies found the losses due to unsuccessful resource allocation to be a serious issue for the continuity of the program.

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<sup>21</sup> Diane Ravitch, ed, *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*. N.p.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Maris A Vinovskis, "Do Federal Compensatory Education Programs Really Work? A Brief Historical Analysis of Title I and Head Start," *American Journal of Education* 107, no. 3 (1999): 187–209. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1085662>.

<sup>23</sup> "Closing the Gap," 6.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson Riles, "Educating Inner City Children: Challenges and Opportunities Historical Documents," 2009, 37, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/re/hd/documents/yr1969hd.pdf>.

Another crucial shortcoming in implementation was the methods of evaluating compensatory programs. Commonly used metrics, such as monthly achievement standards, made federally granted funding for school districts contingent solely on standardized testing. This not only encouraged teachers to “teach to the test” rather than pursue real comprehension and understanding for their students but also created an inherently racist and misogynistic standard to measure educational achievement.<sup>25</sup> Subsequent research has revealed the extent of problematic evaluations through standardized testing. In general, most tests were fitted to normal curve equivalents using the scores of majority group populations, ignoring cultural and linguistic differences. For instance, vocabulary words tested on national evaluations often used words associated with white communities that Black students were less likely to know. Even nonverbal or visual tests offered to preschool and elementary level students were based on white, American cultural norms. A study conducted on the scores of Liberian and American students on an object-sorting test similar to the ones offered to American primary school students in the 1970s found that American students sorted objects into separate categories of food and implements while Liberian students paired them together due to cultural associations of those objects.<sup>26</sup> These types of cultural biases, which often appeared in reading comprehension and visual tests, were detrimental to the success of students of color. Ibram X. Kendi of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at Boston University pointed out that the flawed metrics of standardized testing were antithetical to closing the achievement gap. “We still think there’s something wrong with the kids rather than recognizing there’s something wrong with the tests,” said Kendi. “Standardized tests have become the most effective racist weapon ever devised to objectively degrade Black and Brown minds and legally exclude their bodies from prestigious schools.”<sup>27</sup> Standardized tests were not only biased against students of color but also towards female students. According to a study by the Stanford Graduate School of Education, female students tended to perform better on standardized tests with open-ended questions while male students scored higher on tests with multiple-choice questions. The test format was often more favorable to male students, creating gender disparities in test scores that

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<sup>25</sup> National Education Association, “History of Standardized Testing in the United States | NEA,” Nea.org, 2020, <https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/history-standardized-testing-united-states>.

<sup>26</sup> Hee Kyung, Darya Kim, and Zabelina, “Cultural Bias in Assessment: Can Creativity Assessment Help?,” 2015, 2, <https://uscseps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/standardized-testing.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> John Rosales, “The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing | NEA,” Nea.org, 2021, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/racist-beginnings-standardized-testing>.



did not accurately reflect student achievement. Other reasons for the gender score gap were reading comprehension questions that included mostly male characters, questions surrounding societally gendered topics such as sports and politics, penalties for not answering, and time constraints that favored the way male students took tests (female students tended to follow the instructions and leave the question blank, penalizing them when graded).<sup>28</sup> These patterns perpetuated sexist thinking patterns and punished female students for traits that often were beneficial in postsecondary education and the workforce. The inherent biases in the metrics of standardized testing seriously undermined the ideas of compensatory education by favoring white male students and creating false achievement disparities.

One of the major issues with compensatory policies was the retention of material. Ideally, changes made at the childhood development or elementary school level would follow a student throughout their primary and secondary years; perfect retention of achievement would mean that a decreased achievement gap at the preschool level would maintain itself through high school.<sup>29</sup> However, compensatory education policies often failed in this regard. Programs like the ESEA created an immediate boost in test scores but would fade over the course of secondary education, lacking substantive long-term impacts. The Perry Preschool Project was a study conducted from 1962-1967 in Ypsilanti, Michigan measuring the impact of compensatory preschool education on a group of children throughout their school years. The project found that childhood development programs had an average positive impact on meeting federally mandated standards up until third grade. Researcher David Weikart concluded that achievement gains made in preschool education were not enough if later education was not on par; similarly, compensatory secondary education could not be effective without building on earlier gains.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, administrative transfers and postsecondary education opportunity programs thrust educationally disadvantaged students into rigorous learning environments without bridging the gap between their past education and their new schools; this led the national school dropout rate to reach an all-time high. The combined issues of retention and

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<sup>28</sup> “Question Format May Impact How Boys and Girls Score on Standardized Tests, Stanford Study Finds,” Stanford Graduate School of Education, March 29, 2018, <https://ed.stanford.edu/news/question-format-may-impact-how-boys-and-girls-score-standardized-tests-stanford-study-finds>.

<sup>29</sup> “Closing the Gap,” 5.

<sup>30</sup> David Weikart, “High/Scope Perry Preschool Project” in “High/Scope Perry Preschool Project | Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022, <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/library/publications/highscope-perry-preschool-project>.

dropout rates meant that while the average test scores of students of color were increasing, they were nowhere near those of their white peers.<sup>31</sup> Compensatory education was helping ease the achievement gap, but it could not entirely close it.

The failures of resource allocation, biased testing, and retention were serious detriments to the success of compensatory policies. While the programs were found to improve the education of disadvantaged students in some regards, they were ultimately still a long way from achieving Lyndon B. Johnson's original goal of eradicating poverty and educational inequality.

### **Lack of Holistic Approach to Education Reform**

Compensatory programs also failed to affect long-term changes and they often ignored the larger cultural, racial, and economic contexts behind the achievement gap. For many students of color, pervasive racism and xenophobia continued to impact their everyday educational experiences because federal policies did not address the underlying causes of racial achievement disparities. Similarly, federal funding for schools did nothing to improve the lifestyle factors of low-income students that affected education, such as nutrition, home life, and transportation. The lack of a holistic view of the root causes behind educational disparities ultimately led to the failure of compensatory policies to fully address the achievement gap.

While policies such as the Bilingual Education Act and the ESEA attempted to address the struggles of students of color, they often used methods of assimilation rather than empowerment to integrate them into existing education structures. Federal education support for students of color, especially those who were bilingual, focused on providing funding and resources for English learning and largely ignored the cultural context that was integral to these students' education. In particular, Mexican-American student activists saw English-language-learner programs resulting from the BEA as a way to extinguish their heritage and undermine the political presence of Spanish-language students and their families.<sup>32</sup> In an interview with journalist Dolores Delgado Bernal,

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<sup>31</sup> George Morrow, "Standardizing Practice in the Analysis of School Dropouts - George Morrow, 1986," *Teachers College Record*, 2022, 5, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/016146818608700306?journalCode=tcza>.

<sup>32</sup> "Petition to District Court of Orange County on Gonzalo Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District of Orange County et. al," 1945.

Chicano student Rosalinda Mendez Gonzales recalled the everyday struggles she faced in academic settings:

Some teachers would say, “You dirty Mexicans, why don’t you go back to where you came from?” So there was a lot of racism we encountered in the school. We had severely overcrowded classrooms. We didn’t have sufficient books. We had buildings that were barrack-style buildings that had been built as emergency shelters during World War II.<sup>33</sup>

Gonzales’ experiences illustrated that despite federal efforts and funding, the benefits provided by compensatory education did not extend to students of color. The failure to fully address cultural and racial disparities thus undermined the successes of compensatory programs and perpetuated cycles of inequality for students of color.

Another reason why compensatory education policies experienced long-term failure was that they saw education merely in terms of test scores and funding rather than in a holistic way. While standardized testing could be an important metric in the effectiveness of these policies, instruction on the content being tested is not the only factor in closing achievement gaps and decreasing educational inequalities.<sup>34</sup> Home and family influences were often a crucial component of education disparities; low-income families tended to have parents with lower educational attainment, providing fewer educated role models and fewer academic resources within the household.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, a lack of consistent and nutritious food supply as well as healthcare, especially at crucial ages of development, could have a huge impact on academic performance. A 2001 study found that children who did not receive enough iron in their diet received lower math scores than children with normal iron levels, illustrating the impact of nutrition on education.<sup>36</sup> Transportation was also a crucial issue, especially for low-income students that were transferred to higher-funded districts. Without affordable, safe, and timely means of transportation to school, many administrative transfers struggled to get to the school they had

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<sup>33</sup> Dolores Delgado Bernal, “Grassroots Leadership Reconceptualized: Chicana Oral Histories and the 1968 East Los Angeles School Blowouts,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 19, no. 2 (1998): 113–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3347162>.

<sup>34</sup> Jencks and Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, 147.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>36</sup> Jill S. Halterman et al., “Iron Deficiency and Cognitive Achievement among School-Aged Children and Adolescents in the United States,” *Pediatrics* 107, no. 6 (June 1, 2001): 1381–86, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.107.6.1381>.

been allowed to attend.<sup>37</sup> These external influences on academic achievement demonstrated that compensatory education alone was not enough to fully address inequalities in schooling; increased federal support for programs addressing issues such as food insecurity and transportation that had a huge impact on education was also necessary to truly close achievement gaps.<sup>38</sup>

The failure of compensatory policies to address a broader set of cultural, racial, and lifestyle factors on academic performance ultimately undermined their success in closing achievement gaps.

### **Lasting Significance of Compensatory Education Policies**

The advent of compensatory education represented a huge leap forward in addressing racial disparities in society and providing reparations for systems of oppression that had long suppressed people of color. Policies such as the ESEA attempted to continue the trend of educational equality started by desegregation and ensure that disadvantaged students had the available resources and funding to close the generational achievement gap. While these programs were ultimately unable to create long-term retention and address a variety of holistic factors that affected educational achievement, the impact of compensatory education on American history was nonetheless long-lasting. Since the inception of the policy in 1964, several other federal programs have improved upon the failures of their predecessors and continued the legacy of compensatory education. The ESEA has continued to be renewed over the years by Republican and Democratic administrations alike, with critical changes made to increase its efficacy; for instance, the adoption of criterion-based testing in the 1980s increased test-based accountability for standardized testing, directly increasing the effectiveness of federal funding. Furthermore, long-range education strategies such as the Bush Administration's America 2000 expanded the focus of education policies beyond testing and addressed factors such as school violence, drug policies, graduation rates, and citizenship.

While the evolution of compensatory education over the years has improved upon its original failures and addressed educational equality, there is still work to be done to maximize its effect on

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<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey M Vincent et al., "Beyond the Yellow Bus: Promising Practices for Maximizing Access to Opportunity through Innovations in Student Transportation," Center for Cities & Schools, 6, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED558542>, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Jerome G. Delaney, *Education Policy: Bridging the Divide between Theory and Practice* (n.p.: Brush Education, 2017), 27.

disadvantaged students. Some lifestyle factors of low-income families have been largely ignored in the research and development of compensatory education policies. School transportation is one area that must be addressed in the future as it particularly impacts low-income students; even if school-choice policies allow disadvantaged students to attend higher-quality schools, low-income families still struggle in covering the costs and time of transportation. Similarly, more accessible meal plans, supplementary services, and support in higher education would help close achievement gaps and address the issues that low-income students often face in primary and secondary education.

The compensatory education policies of the 1960s and 1970s were influential in establishing the positive effects of federal education equality reform and setting a precedent for programs that promoted equality. These programs raised awareness of the disparities in the lack of opportunities and resources for minority communities and created policy tools to address the severe barriers arising from intergenerational poverty. More than six decades after the first imperfect compensatory programs, the US has continued to evolve a variety of education policies that aim to achieve educational equality, a foundational tenet that powers the “American dream” of merit-based affluence.

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