The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

ABELL SALUTES: Biotechnical Institute of Maryland, training the unskilled workers for the skilled biotech jobs

"The only thing standing between many people who need jobs and the people who need skilled workers," according to Dr. Margaret B. Penno, Associate Professor of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, "is the training." With that as a credo, in 1997 Dr. Penno set out to facilitate such training and make the connections happen. Beneficiaries would be labor, management, the city, the state, and Maryland's bioscience companies in need of qualified workers. These workers include local residents whose lack of education or skills have trapped them in jobs with limited advancement opportunity.

Dr. Penno had been observing in her labs the constant turnover of college-trained laboratory technicians; historically, they take the jobs to get the Hopkins experience, then, all too soon, move on to graduate or medical school. Serendipitously, a high-school graduate then working in a blue-collar position asked Dr. Penno for the opportunity to be trained for a technical position in the lab. Although the position ordinarily required a college degree, Dr. Penno took the leap of faith and hired and trained the aspiring

To Improve Poor Children's Test Scores, Move Poor Families.

By David Rusk

It takes a school, a neighborhood, and a family to raise and educate a child successfully. When families are weak, neighborhoods and schools must be stronger to compensate.

Yet in America – and in the Baltimore area – we surround children from the weakest families with the weakest neighborhoods and weakest schools.

Year after year, Baltimore City school children have Maryland's highest dropout rates and lowest test scores. Finally, in 1997, the Maryland General Assembly committed approximately an extra $50 million a year for five years to the Baltimore City Public Schools.

By coincidence, $50 million a year would be the annual cost of a proposed regional housing mobility policy for poor children and their families – a policy that would not only produce better job opportunities for the children's parents but also *significantly improve the children's own school performance as well*.

This *Abell Report* will show that, for all elementary schools in Baltimore City and Baltimore County, test results on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) are closely related to each school's percentage of low-income children.

Furthermore, studies of Albuquerque and Texas schools show that living in middle-class communities and attending middle-class schools significantly improve poor children's academic achievement.

The hard reality is that, living in high poverty neighborhoods, many poor chil-

dren bring so many problems from troubled homes and stressed neighborhoods into classrooms that it is difficult for effective teaching – or learning – to occur. A step toward major improvement would be to integrate poor city school children (and their families) into middle-class neighborhoods and middle-class schools.

Three years ago the The Abell Foundation published *Baltimore Unbound* in which I urged the Maryland General Assembly to enact a three-part program for metropolitan Baltimore: 1) regional land use planning and growth management, 2) regional revenue sharing, and 3) most importantly, a regional "fair share" low- and moderate-income housing policy.

The housing proposals were modeled on Montgomery County's path-breaking Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit policy. For 25 years Montgomery County has required private developers of new subdivisions and apartment complexes to build at least 15% of the housing for low- and moderate-income families. Under these "rules of the game," private homebuilders have delivered over 10,000 affordable housing units, including 1,500 bought directly by the county's public housing agency, which has first option to purchase 5% of new housing units.

The results are striking. Economic segregation has increased in most urban areas. By contrast, Montgomery County has one of the USA's highest – and most stable – levels of economic integration.

Where do *Baltimore Unbound*'s proposals stand? There has been slow progress. The Greater Baltimore Committee, the region's leading business group, now advocates all three key proposals. Enacted in last year's legislative session, Governor Glendening's Smart Growth program should be a significant step toward better regional growth management.

It is now time for the legislature to change the "rules of the game" for Greater Baltimore's housing market. Montgomery County's 85-10-5 rule may sound too modest. However, with an annual average of 8,000-10,000 new housing units built in Greater Baltimore, a similar policy would yield 400-500 widely scattered new homes for the region's lowest income families. Buying 500 new homes annually through a regional public housing agency would cost about $50 million a year.

Such a regional "fair share" housing policy would have real impact. Of every 100 residents of Greater Baltimore, only about four are poor and white. *Three out of four poor whites already live in middle class neighborhoods and attend middle class schools.* And of every 100 residents, only about six are poor and black. However, *almost five out of six poor blacks live isolated from the mainstream in high-poverty ghettos in Baltimore City* – and their children are failing overwhelmingly in the city schools.

Access to five out of every 100 new suburban homes would go a long way toward moving some of Baltimore City's poorest children into the educational and economic mainstream. ∎

Baltimore: What Does MSPAP Actually Test? Family Income

Let's play fortune-teller. Let's go watch children eating lunch in any public elementary school in Baltimore City or Baltimore County. You tell me what percentage of the children is poor enough to get a free school lunch.[1] I'll predict that school's pass rate on the Maryland school assessment exams (the MSPAP).

Pimlico Elementary in the city? 86% free lunchers? I'd say a 9% pass rate. The actual pass rate? 12%.

Owings Mills Elementary out in the county? 54% free lunchers? How about a 28% pass rate? It's really 31%? Pretty good prediction.

How about Perry Hall Elementary up county? Only 8% receiving free lunches. Let's see – a 54% pass rate. Only 49%! Still in the ballpark.

Chart A is my crystal ball. Chart A tracks the relationship between the percentage of low-income pupils in 213 elementary schools in Baltimore City and Baltimore County and each school's MSPAP pass rate.[2] The straight line charts the predicted scores. The scattered dots show the actual scores for each school.[3] The closer the dots cluster around the line, the closer the relationship.

The correlation is .81. This means 81% of the variation in test scores among the 213 schools is "explained" by each school's percentage of low-income children. The statistical relationship is very strong.[4]

Some 52.9 % of all elementary school pupils in the city and county systems combined were low-income, and the average MSPAP pass rate was 28.2%. The analysis predicts that for every point a school's percentage of low-income students declined (-1%), the school's MSPAP pass rate increased about six-tenths of a percentage point (+ 0.60%).

To illustrate, let's vary a school's low-income rate by 20 percentage points above or below the study-wide average of 53%. A school with 73% low-income pupils is predicted to have a 16% pass rate. The predicted pass rate would be 40% for a school with 33% low-income students.

The statistical "standard error" is 8.5%. That means that elementary schools with 73% low-income pupils will have MSPAP pass rates that fall between 4% and 20% more than 95% of the time. Conversely, schools with 33% low-income students will have passing rates between 32% and 48% over 95% of the time.

To be an educational fortune-teller, you don't have to know the background of a school's principal or its teachers, its expenditure per student, or its average class size to have a pretty good idea what the school's academic level will be. At least 80% of the current answer lies in the circumstances of the children's homes – and their neighborhood.

Parents might assume that the county's Riderwood (designated by R on Chart A) was the region's "best" elementary school because it had the region's highest pass rate (79%). However, Riderwood also had one of the wealthiest student bodies. (Only 2.7% were low-income). Conversely, the city's Charles Carroll of Carrollton (C) might be judged the region's "worst" elementary school because it had the lowest pass rate (4%). However, 87% of Charles Carroll students were also low-income.

Taking into account student background, the biggest "overachievers" among area elementary schools were the county's Middlesex (M) and the city's Patapsco (P). With 63% low-income students, Middlesex's pass rate (51%) was 28 percentage points above the predicted level. With 89% low-income students, Patapsco's pass rate (39%) exceeded the predicted level by 32 percentage points.

By contrast, some economically advantaged elementary schools like the county's Orems (O) or Villa Cresta (VC) or some of the city's less disadvantaged elementary schools like Violetville (V) and Hazelwood (H) were significant "underachievers."

The real gap, however, was between overall city and county student profiles. The region's 61 most poverty-impacted elementary schools were all city schools, while 43 of the region's 44 most economically advantaged student bodies attended county elementary schools. This deep

CHART A
PREDICTING BALTIMORE AREA SCHOOLS' TEST RESULTS
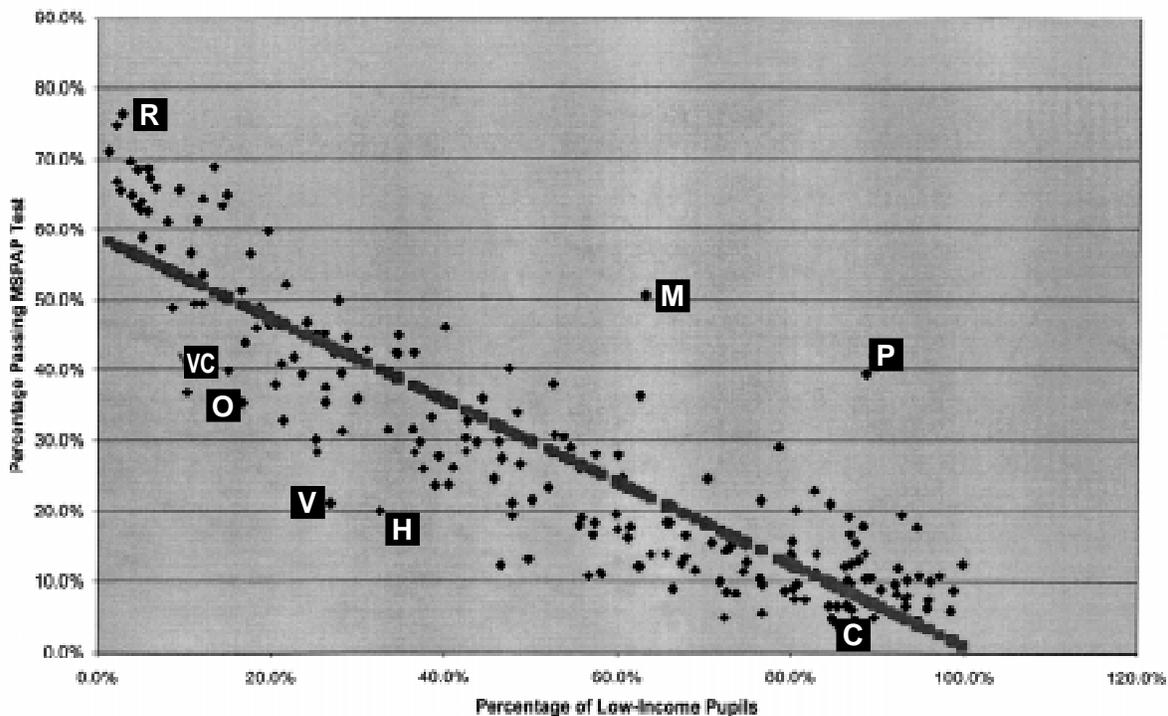
Baltimore: What Does MSPAP Actually Test? Family Income

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schism by income – and race – was the biggest reason for the city schools' perceived "failure" and the county schools' perceived "success."

Another 112 city and county elementary schools shared a common socioeconomic spectrum. Their student bodies fell between 20% and 80% low-income students.

County schools consistently outperformed their city counterparts. Does this prove that the county system was better run than the city system, as many critics (including some legislators) assert?

I doubt it. First, comparisons are risky with so few schools in some groupings. Second, the city's low-income pupils probably were relatively poorer than the county's low-income pupils.[5] Third, it is even more probable that the county's *non*-low income students were wealthier than the city's *non*-low income students.[6] Fourth, the effects of concentrated poverty in the city are not taken into account.

Using school lunch statistics is not a wholly satisfactory way of measuring family income. Even when a city school and a county school both have an equal percentage of free lunch students, the county school's students are likely to come from a higher income population.

Could research-based educational reforms instituted by the new city school administration make a real difference for city students? Or could whatever is already producing much higher than expected student achievement at Patapsco Elementary School, for example, be somehow bottled and distributed throughout city schools?

There is growing evidence that effective replication of such "best practices" might lead to widespread gains in academic achievement, but this remains to be proven on a large scale. No strategy can rely on attracting superior administrators, principals, and teachers, which may have been the key to Patapsco's success. In contemporary America, unlike earlier eras, public education is no longer subsidized by generations of talented women who have few other career options. We cannot count on our public school systems to attract superior talent.

For another strategy we must look to other studies that analyze closely the interplay of economic class and public education. ■

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1 My term "free lunch" actually includes both those who qualify for free lunch (a family income of less than $20,865 for a family of four in 1997-98) and for a reduced-price lunch (a four-member family income up to $29,693 in 1997-98). Typically, 85% of the subsidized children qualify for free lunches and about 15% for a reduced price on a sliding scale. All would be considered "low-income."

2 To determine the percentage of low-income children, a three-year average was taken of the percentage of children receiving free-or reduced price school lunches from 1994-5 to 1996-7.

3 For the study I averaged each school's percentage of children passing all parts of the MSPAP test battery (reading, writing, and math) for three successive years (1994-95 to 1996-97).

4 For the statisticians among Abell Report readership, the F value of the least-squares linear regression is a whopping 899, and the t value is a highly significant -29.98.

5 Some 53.5% of the city's poor fell below 50% of the poverty line compared with 49.3% of the county's poor in the 1990 census.

6 Factoring out both jurisdictions' poor population suggests that the per capita income of Baltimore County's *non*-poor was about 40% higher than the per capita income of Baltimore City's *non*-poor in the 1990 census.

Albuquerque: Measuring the School/Neighborhood Effect on Poor Children

Question: In Albuquerque, New Mexico, how can a typical public housing child's test scores be raised by an average 13 percentile points?

Answer: Move the child's family from a poor neighborhood where 80% of classmates are low-income to a middle class neighborhood where only 20% of classmates are low-income.

That is the conclusion of a study conducted of 10 years of third and fifth grade test results for 1,108 public housing children in Albuquerque's 78 elementary schools.[1]

In contrast with many regions that are fragmented into multiple cities and towns and multiple school systems, metro Albuquerque is highly unified. Due to aggressive annexation, the city of Albuquerque contains almost 80% of the region's population. City government scatters small public housing projects and subsidizes poor families' rent in private housing throughout the near-metropolitan city. As a result, public housing families live in a greater variety of neighborhoods than is typical of many metro areas. And over 92% of all school-age children attend the Albuquerque Public Schools, one of the US's six metro-wide school districts.

The study covered a period from 1982-83 to 1992-93 and drew upon an exceptionally detailed database. Albuquerque Housing Service, the public housing authority, provided information on each child's age, sex, race and ethnicity, household size, one-parent or two-parent household, parental employment status, household income, length of residence at current address, and whether the child lived in a public housing project or rent-subsidized apartment.

Albuquerque Public Schools provided each child's third and/or fifth grade test scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) (1982-88) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (1989-91), two widely used national tests.

The school system also provided information about each elementary school's socioeconomic profile and its average test

	TABLE 1 PUBLIC HOUSING STUDENT TEST RESULTS BY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS (measured in mean percentiles)	
	School Ranked by SES* [3]	School Ranked by CTBS [4]
Top Quintile	54%	59%
2nd Quintile	51%	49%
3rd Quintile	47%	50%
4th Quintile	42%	42%
Bottom Quintile	42%	40%
*SES, Socioeconomic Status.		

scores. For our study we selected percentage of children receiving free and reduced price lunch as the best socioeconomic indicator.

Albuquerque's elementary school districts had highly stable enrollments, and only 11% of the pupils were enrolled outside their district. Thus, to smooth out the data, we created composite scores for each school covering six years of data on test scores and school lunch participation.

Using the same general linear regression model as the Baltimore area study, we found that the regression analysis "fit" (or adjusted R-square) between the percentage of free lunch pupils and average school test scores was a high .75 for third grade scores and .78 for fifth grade scores.

Conducting multivariate regression analysis, we tested how the 1,108 public housing pupils' test scores (the dependent variable) were affected by the independent variables – their schools' socioeconomic status and academic performance level. The control variables were the student's sex, race and ethnicity, presence of one or two parents, family income, tenure at current address, and whether or not the principal parent was working.

Of the student and family-related control variables only two had a measurable effect on public housing children's performance. For third and fifth grade tests, respectively, girls tested 4.6 and 4.8 percentiles better than boys, and Anglos tested 8.3 and 7.6 percentiles better than minorities.[2]

The socioeconomic status of the public housing child's classmates had a significant impact. For every 1% that the school's free lunch rate declined, the typical public housing child's test scores improved +0.22 percentiles (which translates into a 13 percentile improvement with a 60% swing in socioeconomic status, as illustrated above).

Attending a high-performance school had an even greater impact. Each 1% increase in the school's academic level was associated with a +0.53% increase in the public housing pupil's scores. For example, the effect of a typical public housing child's attending a school ranked in the 80th percentile academically rather than attending a school ranked in the 20th percentile academically would be a 32 percentile improvement in the child's test scores.

However, all high-performance schools

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Albuquerque: Measuring the School/Neighborhood Effect on Poor Children

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in the Albuquerque system were located in high socioeconomic neighborhoods. Though effective schools made a difference, overall school academic performance did not rise far beyond the socioeconomic level of their students.

Table 1 summarizes the impact of school environment on the public housing pupils' test scores. In reality, it also reflects the impact of different *neighborhood* conditions. In almost all cases, the public housing children lived in the neighborhoods where they attended school. The study could not separate the neighborhood effect from the school effect. ■

1 David Rusk and Jeff Mosley, "The Academic Performance of Public Housing Children – Does Living in Middle Class Neighborhoods and Attending Middle Class Schools Make a Difference?" The Urban Institute, Washington, DC (1994). The study was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of America, the nation's foremost foundation for research in early childhood education.

2 The public housing pupils' racial and ethnic composition was 12% Anglo, 11% black, 69% Hispanic, 7% Native American, and 1% Asian. Some 78% lived in single-parent households; 70% of household heads were unemployed; and half had family incomes less than 50% of the poverty level.

3 Using the percentage of children receiving free lunch as the measure of a school's socioeconomic status, the highest status schools are Georgia O'Keeffe and Hubert Humphrey (1% of students receiving free lunch), and the lowest ranked schools are Dolores Gonzales, East San Jose (86%), and Eugene Field (94%). Over the study decade the system-wide average was 38 percent of elementary school students receiving free lunch.

4 Ranked by CTBS/ITBS scores, the mean test percentiles for all schools in each quintile are top quintile, 78%; 2nd quintile 68%; 3rd quintile 55%; 4th quintile 46%; and bottom quintile, 37%. Over the study period Albuquerque's elementary school students averaged 58th percentile on the CTBS/ITBS tests.

A Report by David Rusk *Continued*
Texas: Classmates Count in Texas Schools

In 1995-96 only 39% of low-income students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in the San Antonio School District.

Across the city limits, in suburban Alamo Heights School District, 61% of low-income students passed TAAS.

Alamo Heights had over four times the local property tax wealth ($455,955 per student) of San Antonio ($100,049 per student), but that had no impact on total expenditure per student. Alamo Heights expenditure per student was $5,284, while San Antonio's expenditure per student was slightly higher ($5,333). (This analysis does not consider the dominant issue in school finance litigation: "equity" versus "adequacy." "Adequacy" requires above-equal, supplemental expenditures to overcome the disadvantages caused by concentrated poverty.) While Alamo Heights provided 91% of its school budget from local taxes, federal grants (12%) and state aid (58%) provided the bulk of San Antonio's school budget.

Alamo Heights had slight advantages over San Antonio in pupil/teacher ratio (15.2 to 1 versus 16.5 to 1), somewhat more experienced teachers (16.1 years of teaching versus 14.1 years of teaching), and a greater edge in teachers with advanced degrees (61% versus 41%).

However, the decisive difference was the composition of the two student populations. Only 17% of Alamo Heights students were low-income compared with 88% of San Antonio's students.

For this *Abell Report* I studied similar data for 189 different school districts in the five largest metropolitan areas in Texas (Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio).[1] The degree of aggregation of data was very different from the Albuquerque study. The Albuquerque study examined individual records for 1,108 low-income students in 78 elementary schools over a 10-year period. The Texas study analyzed district-level summaries for 189 school districts for a three-year period (1994-95 to 1996-97).[2]

However, the Texas results paralleled the Albuquerque findings. The correlation between percentage of low-income students and TAAS pass rates district-wide is .66.[3] For every 1% decline in low-income students in a school district, the TAAS pass rate for the district's *low-income* students increased .27%.[4] (Albuquerque's equivalent improvement was .22%.) For every 1% increase in a district's *overall* TAAS pass rate, the pass rates of its low-income students increased .70%.[5]

Of course, the above statistics are tainted methodologically by the fact that low-income students form part of both sides of the equation. In other words, the independent variable is not fully independent of the dependent variable. In the Albuquerque study, the inclusion of the dependent variable (an individual low-income student's data) in the independent variable (an entire elementary school's data) was statistically insignificant.

However, the TAAS pass rates of *non-low income* (i.e., middle-class) students can be calculated for every school district. For every 1% increase in the overall TAAS score of middle class students in a district, the TAAS pass rate for the district's low-income students improved .65% (versus .53% in Albuquerque for a somewhat comparable measure).[6]

Combining both a district's socioeconomic profile and test scores of its middle-class students yields weighted measures of the impact of middle-class classmates. For example, if a school district's enrollment was 80% middle-class and 92% of those middle-class students passed TAAS (the case of the Alamo Heights district over the three-year period), the weighted effect was 74%. By contrast, if another district's middle-class enrollment was only 9% and only 59% of those middle class students passed TAAS (the case of San Antonio district over the three-year period), the weighted middle class effect was 5%. Middle-class classmates' influence on low-income classmates was almost 15 times greater in the Alamo Heights district than in the San Antonio district. Thus, for every 1% increase in the weighted TAAS pass rates of middle-class students, low-income students' TAAS pass rates increased .32%.[7]

Having larger and larger proportions

Texas: Classmates Count in Texas Schools

of middle-class classmates (especially when such students are performing at high levels) significantly improved low-income students' performance in the Texas study as in the Albuquerque study. Does the neighborhood/classmate effect work in reverse? Can the academic level of non-low income students be dragged downward significantly?

Yes...but only, the data indicate, when low-income students begin to form a majority of the school population. Table 2 groups the 189 Texas districts by percentage of low-income students. In school districts with less than 30% low-income students, TAAS pass rates for middle-class students remained consistently above 80%. In transitional school districts with 30%-55% low-income enrollments, TAAS pass rates for middle-class students dropped into the mid-70% range. Only in school districts dominated by low-income children (i.e. 55% and above) did TAAS pass rates for middle class children fall below 70%.

And it is probable that, as discussed in comparing Baltimore's city and county school populations, some of this apparent decline in middle-class students' pass rates may have actually reflected differences in non-poor students in different districts. It was likely, for example, that San Antonio's non-poor students were from more modest income families than Alamo Heights' non-poor students.

The Albuquerque database is superior to the Texas database in comparing socio-economic effect. Real children don't live in whole cities and aren't educated in whole school districts (as the Texas study assumes). They live in specific neighborhoods and attend specific schools (as the Albuquerque study analyzes).

Also, there is wide variability in the Texas data. In 1996-97 the Texas school systems ranged from giant Houston (209,375 students) to tiny Kendleton, one of 11 "districts" in the study composed of a single elementary school. Yet all 189 districts are given equal weight in the study.

Moreover, the Albuquerque study reports the full ranking of actual test scores (from 1st to 100th percentile). The Texas

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TABLE 2

TAAS PASS RATES FOR LOW-INCOME AND MIDDLE-CLASS STUDENTS BY SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF 189 TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Percentage of Low-Income Students	Number of Districts	Low-Income Pass Rate	Middle-Class Pass Rate
0.1-5.0	5	79.2%	90.3%
5.1-10.0	6	61.9%	86.4%
10.1-15.0	14	63.3%	84.5%
15.1-20.0	14	62.3%	81.7%
20.1-25.0	25	59.7%	78.3%
25.1-30.0	21	58.5%	80.0%
30.1-35.0	24	60.2%	78.8%
35.1-40.0	15	56.1%	76.0%
40.1-45.0	18	55.2%	72.8%
45.1-50.0	12	53.5%	75.8%
50.1-55.0	10	52.9%	75.0%
55.1-60.0	7	44.9%	68.2%
60.1-65.0	4	55.4%	68.1%
65.1-70.0	4	52.4%	61.3%
70.1-75.0	4	50.4%	66.4%
75.1-80.0	1	36.7%	48.8%
80.1-85.0	1	45.1%	54.5%
85.1-90.0	2	53.0%	60.0%
90.1-95.0	2	42.6%	56.5%
Totals (Unweighted)	189	57.8%	76.9%

TABLE 3

**PROJECTED EFFECT OF VARYING
CLASSMATES' SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILES
AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON
IMPROVING LOW-INCOME STUDENTS' TEST SCORES
IN 78 ALBUQUERQUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
AND 189 TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

	Albuquerque	Texas
Correlation between socioeconomic profile and scores	.75 (3rd) .78 (5th)	.66 (all grades)
Changing from 80% to 20% low income classmates	+13%	+16%
Changing from 80% to 20% overall percentile/pass rate	+32%	+39%
Changing from 20% to 80% "middle class effect"	na	+19%

Texas: Classmates Count in Texas Schools

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study (like the Baltimore study) merely reports the percentage of students that achieved a passing grade.

Nevertheless, the similarities in findings between the two studies are striking and are summarized in Table 3, using a 60 percent differential for illustrative purposes (i.e. a 20% low-income school vs. an 80% low-income school, etc.). They add up to one conclusion: classmates count. ■

[1] I analyzed date from the five largest metro areas because 1) they were most comparable to the Baltimore metro area, and 2) the five have roughly comparable costs of living. Most of Texas' 23 smaller metro areas have lower costs of living (particularly, Mexican border areas). Since income eligibility standards for the Federal free and reduced price lunch program are not adjusted for relative costs of living, lower cost areas have automatically higher proportions of children who qualify as "low-income," even if the effective standard of living of their families is higher.

[2] All data was taken from *Snapshot '95, '96, and '97: School District Profiles* issued by the Texas Education Agency. Though aggregated by total district, the reports provide 87 different data schedules covering student characteristics, test scores, staffing and faculty profiles, taxes and revenues, and expenditure levels. Analyses of the effects of non-socioeconomic factors are available by contacting the author.

[3] The standard error is .063; *F* value is 368; and *t* value is - 19.2.

[4] The adjusted R-square is .27; standard error .082; *F* value 71; and *t* value - 8.42.

[5] The adjusted R-Square is .64; standard error .058; *F* value 328; and *t* value 18.1.

[6] The adjusted R-Square is .39; standard error .074; *F* value 126; and *t* value 11.2.

[7] The adjusted R-Square is .36; standard error .076; *F* value 108; and *t* value 10.4.

ABELL SALUTES: Biotechnical Institute of Maryland

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but academically underqualified applicant. The experiment turned out be a success. Dr. Penno reasoned that if there was one such motivated and promising worker at this level, there must be many. So it was that in 1997, with funding from The Abell Foundation, Dr. Penno established the Biotechnical Institute of Maryland, Inc., a non-profit organization with a mission to facilitate the technical instruction of workers through specialized curricula customized to specific company needs. In a joint effort with the Baltimore City Community College, Empower, Baltimore Management Corporation, and the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, a curriculum was custom designed to train 10 people for a local firm. In January the graduates began their new careers at Chesapeake Biotechnical Laboratories at salaries in the $20,000 range.

When the institute is fully operational and reaches it potential, it promises to be an integral part of the process that educates citizens of Baltimore and Maryland for the burgeoning biotech field now flourishing in the region.

According to Dr. Penno, "This program and excellent existing community college, four year, and graduate biotechnical programs support the work force and give hope to workers at the lowest level."

Dr. Penno now says of the groundbreaking programming, "All we are attempting to do is to provide the skills to pay the bills. The skills in this case are highly technical, with plenty of room for personal growth. A high level of excellence is demanded of our students but the rewards are many."

The Abell Foundation salutes Dr. Penno, the attempt, and its promise. ■

An Editorial by David Rusk:
Doing the Right Thing

Despite some evidence that research-based education reform can improve the academic performance of low-income students, scholastic achievement remains closely related to the socioeconomic status of a child and the child's classmates. The central findings of this *Abell Report* are not new. A generation ago they were first demonstrated by sociologist James S. Coleman's massive study of a million American schoolchildren, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, for the U.S. Office of Education.

Housing policy is school policy, I contend – not housing as shelter but housing as community. Instinctively, most parents know this. Where middle-class parents choose to buy a house, first and foremost, is based on finding "a good school" and "a safe neighborhood." (High-poverty neighborhoods typically have "poor schools" and high crime rates.) The features of the house itself, its price, local tax levels, etc. are generally lowered-ranked factors.

So why do the US Congress, the Maryland General Assembly, and legislatures across the country prefer to try to fix high-poverty school districts by moving more money in rather than helping move more poor children out? Or, for that matter, why do they prefer to address the broader question of high-poverty neighborhoods with moving money in rather than helping move poor families out? In recent memory, Baltimore's federal empowerment zone designation was widely cheered, but a modest federal housing mobility program, Moving To Opportunity, was jeered out of existence.

The explanation is found in still potent attitudes about race and class that bedevil American society.

Only about one out of eight children in metro Baltimore is officially poor (that is, with a family income level about half of the income eligibility cutoff for free and reduced price school lunches). However, in 1990 census reported 71% of the region's poor children lived in Baltimore City. The city's poor were primarily composed of 86% of the region's poor black children; almost two-thirds (63%) of the region's poor white children lived in the six suburban counties.

Much of the region's white middle class appears content enough to keep "city problems" in the city – as is a growing proportion of the region's black middle class. In the 1970s and 1980s, 30,000 middle-class black families chose suburban neighborhoods over city neighborhoods. In two decades, Baltimore City's share of the region's black middle class dropped from 85% to 60%. By all evidence, the black middle class exodus is continuing in the 1990s, further reducing Baltimore City's population by over 8 percent in just six years.

Suburban political comfort (largely white) has its sad counterpart in central city political comfort (largely black). Having spoken and consulted in over 90 metro areas, I've found that most black mayors are unenthusiastic about proposed regional strategies. Too often, for example, regional "fair share" low- and moderate-income housing policies are viewed suspiciously as potentially "diluting black political power."

With scant evidence that large numbers of whites will yet vote for black candidates, such black political anxiety is understandable. Yet in the long run, basing black political power on segregated housing patterns is playing a losing hand. In most cities (as in Baltimore) the very constituents black city administrations should most rely on – the black middle class – are voting with their feet.

"Black children don't need to sit next to white children to learn," the argument is often made. True. But in the Baltimore City and Baltimore County school systems, five out of six majority-black elementary schools also have majorities of low-income children. Only one out of six majority-white elementary schools is also predominantly low-income. Racially segregated education is also income-segregated education.

Who are the children and how many are there? Educators do not control these crucial factors, but they are not beyond the influence of broader public policy. Public policy guides private development patterns. State laws in particular could play a large role in redirecting local planning and zoning policies that would require more mixed-income housing.

Addressing the toughest political issue in America – the convergence of poverty and race – requires political leadership and political courage of the highest order. The children of the Baltimore region – all the children – are the region's future. They deserve nothing less than such leadership and courage in the 1999 General Assembly. ■

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