

**Improving the schooling
chances of New Zealand's
poorest children: policy
and community challenges**

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Some starting points

- At a group level, children from low-income families achieve relatively poorly at school and are less likely to attend university.
- Schools don't hold many of the answers in the ways commonly expected (teacher expectations, pedagogical innovation, school reform).
- On the other hand schools are not benign – they help to reproduce social inequalities from generation to generation.
- Low income families are not only poor, or have low socio-economic status, they are (typically) in a subordinate social class position within society.
- Theories of social class raise the cultural dimensions of poverty and schooling, the lower achievement of students from low income families is not just a question of material resources.
- The work of Pierre Bourdieu points to schools having a more organic relationship with students from the dominant social class than with students from subordinate classes or ethnic minority students.

É we are aware Š and over 30 years of research has consistently demonstrated Š that academic achievement in US schools is closely correlated with student socio-economic status. To really improve ghetto childrensŠ chances then, in school and out, we must (in addition to pursuing school based reforms) increase their social and economic well-being and status before and while they are students. We must ultimately, therefore, eliminate poverty: we must eliminate the ghetto school by eliminating the underlying causes of ghettoizationÉ Unfort unately educational Š small victoriesŠ such as the restructuring of a school or the introduction of a new classroom pedagogical technique, no matter how satisfying to the individuals involved, without a long-range strategy to eradicate underlying causes of poverty and racial isolation, cannot add up to large victories in our inner cities with effects that are sustainable over time.

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Poverty and a subordinate social class position depresses childrens' chances of success in schooling through:

1. their impact on children's learning at home and readiness for school.
2. the way low income/subordinate class parents relate to teachers and schools (and vice versa).
3. the way schools typically treat children from low income/subordinate class families.
4. the social polarisation of schools.

The impact of poverty and a subordinate class position on children's learning at home and readiness for school

1. More universal family assistance to better include families on benefits.
2. Funding schools to better reflect the real effects of poverty.

The way low income/subordinate class parents relate to teachers and schools (and vice versa)

3. Requiring strong representation of subordinate class and ethnic groups within schools.
4. Reporting to parents in more transparent ways.
5. NOT becoming more punitive.

The way schools typically treat children from low income/ subordinate class families

6. Working towards curricular justice.
7. NOT increasing testing and target-setting.
8. NOT increasing grouping, banding or setting by ability.

The social polarisation of schools

9. Taking more control over the way schools set their zones.

10. Encouraging more public debate about the costs of a socially polarised school system.

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