

Miller, Hannah (2016). Gender, Racial/Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Inequalities in U.S. High Schools: How School Resources Affect Disparities in Educational Achievement and Attainment

Abstract:

This dissertation examines how the relation between students' demographic characteristics and their educational outcomes varies across U.S. high schools, as well as the school resources associated with more equitable outcomes by gender, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity. I use data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 to examine multiple outcomes (math achievement, high school graduation, and two measures of postsecondary enrollment) that may require different resources for schools to influence. After constructing latent class models of five school resources (instruction, teachers' qualifications and satisfaction, physical resources, student-staff relationships, and student-peer relationships), I use multilevel models with a slopes-as-outcomes approach to examine the relation between the degree of differentiation in outcomes across schools and these resources, both independently and jointly in common "school types."

The first empirical chapter shows that male students' average advantage in math achievement is larger in schools with more academically-oriented instruction, positive student-staff relationships, and academically-oriented students. In contrast, male students' average disadvantage in high school graduation is smaller in schools with more positive student-staff relationships, more satisfied teachers, and fewer physical resource problems. Thus, whether better-resourced schools exhibit smaller or larger gender inequalities depends on the outcome.

The second empirical chapter finds that, for the more differentiating outcomes of math achievement and on-time four-year enrollment, schools with more experienced teachers, academically-oriented instruction, and positive student-staff relationships have both higher average outcomes and smaller SES-based inequalities. Results for less differentiating outcomes do not follow this pattern of higher average values associated with less SES-based inequality.

The third empirical chapter shows that, among schools with relatively diverse student bodies, less well-maintained but academically advantaged schools have higher rates of postsecondary enrollment but greater enrollment inequalities between White and Black or Hispanic students, perhaps because White students are privileged when resources are limited. On average, students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds have better outcomes in schools with more positive student-staff relationships and academically-oriented instruction, but Black and Hispanic students' outcomes are particularly high.

Overall, demographic inequalities in outcomes are not constant across schools, and the types and levels of resources schools provide are associated with the degree of inequality.