

Highlights from *A Primer on Opportunity Gaps* for Educators

This summary of [A Primer on Opportunity Gaps, Achievement Gaps, and the Pursuit of a High-Quality Education](#) by the Education Rights Institute (ERI) has been tailored specifically for use by **educators**, including principals, teachers, counselors, and other school staff. You can find the full report and short accompanying videos at law.virginia.edu/education. The page numbers throughout point you to where in the primer you can find more detailed information and the corresponding references. You can read the summary tailored to district leaders [here](#).

Opportunity Gaps and a High-Quality Public Education

How Should We Understand Student Outcomes?

Academic achievement gaps, which are primarily measured through standardized test scores, offer a limited view of student outcomes and success. While this data is important, test scores can be influenced by gaps in opportunity including differences in access to educational resources and benefits, such as advanced classes, experienced teachers, extracurriculars, and other elements that directly affect the quality of a student's education. To support students effectively, schools must consider opportunity gaps—from community and school-based factors, to societal issues like housing or food insecurity. While schools can't solve every challenge, they can address opportunity gaps within their schools and connect students to resources that help close these gaps. (pp. 4-6)



How Do Opportunity Gaps Impact Students?



Funding gaps represent an impactful type of opportunity gap. Funding disparities based on socioeconomic background, geography, and race serve as a major contributor to opportunity gaps. Students in underfunded schools often lack access to high-quality teachers, rigorous curricula, and essential resources, hindering their academic progress and career prospects. Research also shows a strong correlation between increased school funding and an array of positive outcomes such as higher graduation rates, college enrollment, adult earnings, and reduced poverty rates. (pp. 7-9)

What Defines a High-Quality Public Education?

The Education Rights Institute defines a high-quality public education as one that equips students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to thrive in higher education, the workforce, and as engaged civic participants. Two key components of a high-quality education are **college and career readiness** and **civic engagement**. (pp. 6, 11-14)



How Can Schools Deliver a High-Quality Education?

College and Career Readiness (pp. 11-12)

Definition: Students can successfully begin higher education or a job without remedial assistance.

Implementation for Educators

Ensure mastery of foundational content, such as math, reading, science, and social studies.



Foster a diverse environment where students learn alongside peers with different experiences.



Require students to apply knowledge in new settings.



Promote critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills.



Civic Engagement (pp. 12-14)

Definition: Students can critically consume knowledge, communicate with others who hold diverse perspectives, and actively participate in the community.

Implementation for Educators

Facilitate discussions about current events.



Support a culture of participation in the democratic process.



Create opportunities for community engagement activities.



Cultivate a classroom where students can express differing views.



What Are Other Strategies to Create Equal Educational Opportunities?

Ensure Access to a High-Quality Curriculum: Educators can supplement curricula to ensure all students can enjoy a comprehensive approach to course subject matter. (p. 10)

Promote Social and Emotional Learning: To promote a supportive school environment, educators can implement programs that promote mental health awareness and connect families with resources to address challenges inside and outside of school. (p. 6)



The **Education Rights Institute's (ERI)** multidisciplinary team of legal scholars and social scientists advances equal educational opportunity by engaging policymakers, K-12 educators, and families to support delivery of a high-quality public education in the United States. You can learn more about ERI on our [website](#). ERI encourages you to share this summary widely with other teachers.