

JPIC Corner

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Coordinator's Note

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Beyond Knowledge: Spiritual and Moral Growth in Educational Equality

In the August 2009 issue of *JPIC Corner*, we discussed the right to education for all persons. Justice, peace, and the integrity of creation lie at the heart of fostering equal opportunities for all in the development of intellectual, ethical, and spiritual growth.

It is important that all persons “of whatever race, condition or age in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education.”¹ Education should be adapted to each person’s ability to learn. It is also important to remember that education is lifelong process. Learning “never reaches a terminal point. As long as one remains alive. . . learning can go on—and should. The body does not continue to grow after the first eighteen or twenty years of life. In fact, it starts to decline after that. But mental, moral, and spiritual growth can go on and should go on for a lifetime.”² We must also realize that parents are the prime educators of their children, but schools, in partnership with parents, continue to have an essential role in the formation of persons.³

Education must nourish the whole person in order for one to live a fulfilling life. Educating the whole person is important for us to use our God-given talents wisely and to respond to life’s challenges of promoting justice, peace, and the integrity of education. This holistic understanding makes us aware that education encompasses not only the mental and physical dimension of our personhood but also the spiritual and moral.



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All education has a social component. In the Christian vision, love of God and love of neighbor are fundamental in one’s spiritual and moral development. This commandment of love requires that we be trained “to do the right and love goodness,’ and to walk humbly with [our] God.” It directs Christians to a “sacred duty to count social obligations among their chief duties today and observe them as such.” Christians are summoned to seek and do the works of justice and peace for our world. Therefore, Catholic social teachings have a prime role in Christian

Continued next page

Did You Know?

- **1 in 5 public elementary schools in the United States are high-poverty schools.**
- **22% of students in public elementary schools attend high-poverty schools. Yet only 6% of white students attend high-poverty schools compared to 44% of black students.**
- **Between 1999 and 2000, the average percentage of seniors in high-poverty schools who graduated with a diploma has declined from 86% to 68%.**
- **For college, lower income families experience a larger unmet financial aid than higher income families.**

1. Vatican Council II, Declaration on Christian Education (DCE), October 28, 1965, n. 1.

2. Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*. (NY: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1982), p. 15.

3. Cf. DCE, n. 5.

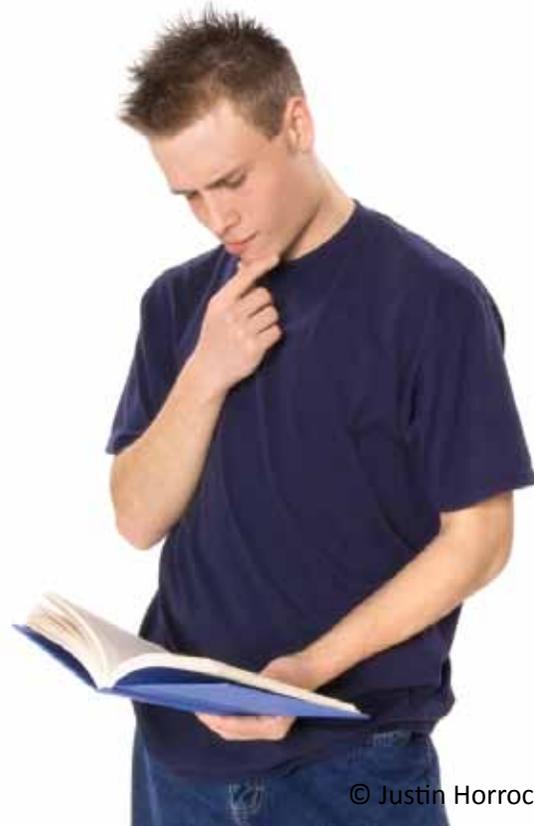
Coordinator's, Continued...

formation and praxis. They are based on the Person of Jesus and that Jesus' vision of God's will for a world of justice, goodness and peace for the Reign of God....

Few people would argue today that education in our nation is in great need of reform. In modern times, it is crucial that all persons receive a proper education that enriches the whole person in order to live fully human lives as sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. It is a basic human right which cannot be denied to any person. Educating the whole person draws out "the potential in all of us, to replace error with truth to move from ignorance and incompetence to knowledge and competence. Beyond knowledge, education should lead to wisdom, which is the foundation of human good and happiness." When moral education plays an integral part of the whole of education, it reveals how all the arts and sciences reflect who we are as human beings and how we need to act as human beings. For Blessed John Paul II, "becoming a human being is precisely the naming purpose of the whole process of education."

Justice, peace, and the integrity of creation—by fully embracing these core elements of humanity, we can each be a beacon in the intellectual, spiritual, and moral education of others while also humbly recognizing the continuation of our own learning and growth as God's children.

[Read the full article online](#)



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Did you know?

Approximately 1 in 4 twelfth grade students in the United States score below the basic level of proficiency in reading (26% in 2009). [Source](#)

Beyond School

"Education must nourish the whole person in order for one to live a fulfilling life."

Education is not the simple amassing of various facts but rather a tool to help us live a fulfilling life. Part of our education is identifying our God-given talents and finding ways to use them wisely. A good education helps prepare us to respond to life's challenges, including the challenge of living out Gospel values and promoting justice and peace.

One way we can help educate the whole person is by helping our children learn the values of the Gospel and how they apply to daily life. We can do this through our own example and also by involving our children in parish life. Here are a few examples:

- Going to Mass every Sunday as a family
- Enrolling our children in age-appropriate religious education classes
- Encouraging our children to participate in the local parish's youth group and/or vocational discernment group
- Make volunteering or service projects a regular family activity



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Beyond School, continued...

Another way we can help educate the whole person is by helping our children or other younger family members plan and prepare for life after school. What are their interests, goals and talents? What is God calling them to do? Here are two ideas for places to start:

Volunteering

Volunteering can help kids learn teamwork, leadership, responsibility and a sense of service, all of which will serve them well throughout their lives. Volunteering is also a way to discover new interests or further pursue current interests. Does your high schooler think he wants to be a teacher? Perhaps he can tutor a younger student who is struggling with their homework. Is your daughter interested in medicine? The local hospital may have a volunteer opportunity for her.

Gathering Information

If your child gathers information about different careers and vocations, they will be more prepared to make major life decisions. Online research, informational interviewing, job shadowing, internships, etc., can all assist in gathering important information such as the types of duties would he or she perform during a typical day and what education or training is necessary. Is your child a young adult? See if your parish or diocese has a vocational discernment group or program that can help them discover whether they are called to live and work as a married or single person, or as a priest or Religious brother or sister.

A Few Resources:

- [Community Service: A Family's Guide to Getting Involved](#)
- [Asking for--and Maximizing-the Informational Interview](#)
- [Helping Your Teen Decide What to Do After High School](#)

Education in the Faith

Our spiritual and moral education is a life-long process. How much do we know about our faith? This fall, consider taking a moment to learn more about the Catholic faith and spirituality. Here are a few ideas for places to start:

- See if the priest(s) at your parish are teaching any faith or Bible related classes for parishioners.
- Find out if your parish has a library, and if it does, check out a book.
- Join a parish group such as a Bible study group or a service group.
- Check out the [MSC website](#) for information about Catholic Social Teaching and related articles.

Ask an MSC

Have questions about your faith?

Ask one of our members.

www.ask.misacor-usa.org

Disparities in Education in the United States

What factors do we consider when we discuss and evaluate students' access to a quality education? We might start by looking at the amount of money per student that is spent by a particular school district, but of course that doesn't tell us the whole story, since the cost of living varies according to location. A couple other indicators of differences between the quality of education to which students have access might include the quality of school facilities and teacher certification and experience. More information below.

School Facilities

Does the heat work? Are there enough classrooms for each class? Do students have the benefit of science laboratories or a performing arts center? In a 2005 survey, 44-45% of public school principals reported that environmental factors (such as heating, lighting, ventilation, etc.) caused some degree of interference in the school's ability to deliver instruction ([Source](#)). An examination of the facilities of 10th grade students in 2002 revealed some results that we might find surprising, such as that nearly a third (31%) of 10th graders attended schools where the floors and walls were not clean and about a quarter attended schools where not all the bathroom stalls had doors ([Source](#)). While there was record spending on school facilities in the United States between 1995 and 2004, it varied considerably, with the schools that were in poor condition a decade ago receiving the least investment in their facilities. For instance, consider two of the findings of a 2006 report by BEST (Building Educational Success Together):

- The money spent on schools serving low-income students was more likely to fund basic repairs, such as new roofs or asbestos removal, while schools in more affluent districts were more likely to receive funds for educational enhancements such as science labs or performing arts centers
- School districts with predominantly minority student enrollment invested the least (\$5,172 per student), while school districts with predominantly white student enrollment spent the most (\$7,102 per student). ([See report](#))

School Facilities in Pictures

Below are links to a couple of pictures taken by students in DC and Baltimore that might prompt us to reflect on the need for improvement in some school facilities. Photos are through Critical Exposure and (Critical Exposure reserves all rights).

- [Educational Mess](#) (by Avontae, 9th grade, DC)
- [Broken Window](#) (by Ian, 10th grade, Baltimore)
- [Library Shelves](#) (by Nick, 11th grade, Baltimore)

Differences in Teacher Educational Attainment and Experience



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Like any other group of professionals, levels of experience and highest degree of educational attainment among teachers varies. The idea is to keep a good balance between experienced teachers and new teachers. That's why if there are significant differences between schools as to how much preparation and experiences teachers have *on average*, these differences may be cause for concern. For instance, consider the following:

- In public secondary schools in 2007-2008, over a fifth (22%) of teachers in high-poverty schools had fewer than three years of experience, compared to only 15% of teachers in low-poverty schools.
- While over half (52%) of teachers in low-poverty secondary schools have earned a masters degree, that percentage falls to 38% among teachers in high-poverty schools.

Disparities in Education in the United States

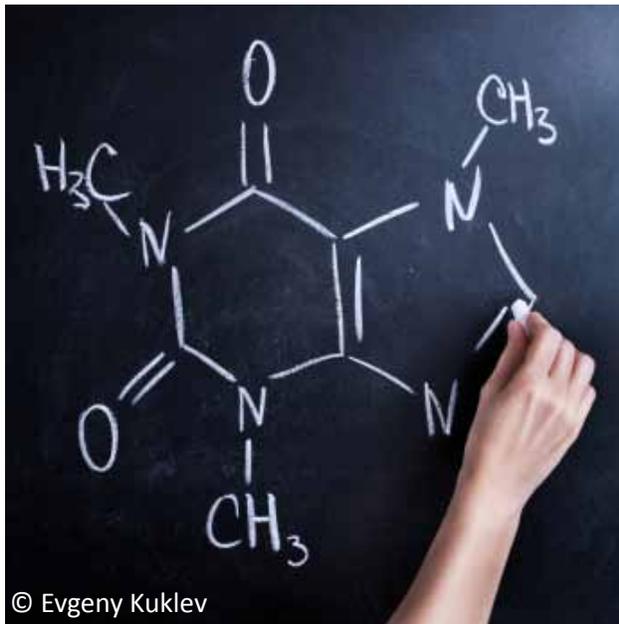


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In 2004, about two-thirds (68%) of U.S. high school graduates had completed advanced science coursework, defined as at least one course classified as more challenging than general biology. ([Source](#))

Resources for Parents:

- [College.gov](#)
- [Helping Your Child With Homework](#)
- [Reading Resources](#)

Access to Advanced Coursework

There are some differences in the amount and kind of coursework that is expected and offered in high schools in the United States.

Graduation requirements

Minimum graduation requirements are usually set at the state level, and different states have different requirements. For instance, in 2005, while Alabama required that high schoolers take four years each of math and science, Illinois only required two years of math and one year of science. ([Check out your state's requirements](#)). However, it is important to note that local school districts often set additional requirements.

Advanced Course Offerings

The quality of a student's education is determined in part on what kinds of classes are offered at his or her school. If students are interested in going to college, having the opportunity to complete college level work through Advanced Placement (AP), dual credit and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses while in high school can help them prepare. Not all high schools in the United States offer these kinds of classes, while some offer many such opportunities. In 2002-03, 29% of U.S. public high schools offered none of these advanced courses, with small schools (under 500 students) being less likely to offer them than medium and large schools.

Access to College

Did you know that students from wealthier families often have a surplus of funds for college whereas students from poorer families still don't have enough even after financial aid is awarded? Consider the following:

- The poorest families spend the greatest percentage of their incomes on college (48% on average for families with annual incomes under \$39,230).
- Although spending for Pell Grants has doubled between 1999-2000 and 2009-10, the maximum grant amount covers a smaller portion of college costs than it used to (dropping from 45% of costs of attending a 4 year public university in 1999-2000 to 34% in 2009-2010).



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Education and Poverty: A Look at High-Poverty Schools

High-poverty schools is a term that refers to public schools where more than 75% of the students are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) program. In the United States, over a fifth (22%) of public elementary school students, and 8% of high school students attend high-poverty schools. Here are a few reasons why high poverty schools are a cause for concern:

Mastery of Material

Students who attend high-poverty schools typically do not perform as well students from low-poverty schools on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading, mathematics, music, and art assessments. For instance, in the 2009 NAEP reading assessment, only 12% of 8th-graders at high-poverty schools scored at or above Proficient (compared with 47% of 8th-graders at low-poverty schools).

Drop Out, Graduation and College Attendance Rates

Students at high-poverty high schools are much more likely to drop out and much less likely to attend a 4-year college. In 2007-08, 91% of 12th-graders attending low-poverty schools graduated with a diploma, compared to only 68% of 12th-graders in high-poverty schools. As if that news is not bad enough, while the graduation rate in low-poverty schools has remained relatively stable between 1999-2000 and 2007-08, the 68% graduation rate in high-poverty schools represents a significant decrease (from 86% in 1999-2000). The difference between college attendance is also significant: 52% of graduates from low-poverty schools attend a 4-year college, compared to only 28% of graduates from high-poverty schools.

Race and Ethnicity

The students attending high-poverty schools are also much more likely to be Black, Hispanic or American Indian/Alaskan Native. For example, in 2007-08, only one percent of White high school students were enrolled in a high-poverty school; compared to 15% each of Hispanic, Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students.



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All children deserve access to good education.

Tell us what you think!

What can we do to ensure that every child in the United States has access to a quality education?



Email Br. Warren at jplic@misacor-usa.org.

Please Join Us in Prayer

Please join us in prayer for all students, that they might have access to quality academic and spiritual instruction, and learn how to use their God-given talents wisely.



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