

David S. Boateng  
Dr. Chapman - EDS112  
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# Educational Mishaps in the Midwest

First, I would like to take the time to thank my teammates (Antonio, Brian, Chris, Daniel, and Giovanni) for accepting my suggestion to conduct our analysis on my hometown. As a former resident and student of Columbus, I have insights into what it is like on the ground level. However, acquiring the data for this project provided a macro view of Columbus and the surrounding cities and towns.

Like most Midwest cities, Columbus and its surrounding areas such as Dublin and Sunbury are predominantly white. In each area, white people account for more than 50% of the ethnic demographic. Only in the urban setting of Columbus do we find the highest percentage of Black people at 28%. Between suburban Dublin and rural Sunbury, the percentage of Black people is almost negligible, with a combined average of less than 1%. Also, as for the student demographic, as we move away from the urban center to the rural area, we see an overall increase of about 70% in white students.

Additionally, the number of students in each district correlates with the population, setting, and age demographic of each city. As the urban center, Columbus has the youngest population and the highest number of students enrolled among the three districts, averaging 49K. Dublin

follows second in the 18-65 age range with 17K students in the district. Last is Big Walnut with 4K students, and of the three districts, it has a higher percentage of those 65 and over, but at least 50% of the population is between 18-65. Now, despite having the youngest population and therefore the need for more schools, economically speaking, Columbus City schools are not helping the community secure a bright future. A younger population is a signifier of an able-bodied workforce, yet Columbus has a 19.5% poverty rate and only 80% in the labor force. This can be partly attributed to the low proficiency scores in the district. Just in 2015, the 8th-grade proficiency rate for English, Math, and Science was less than 50% each. Concurrently, the graduation rate for Columbus City is 78%, compared to Dublin's 93% and Big Walnut's 98%.

Furthermore, community-wise, the higher rates of high school graduates in Dublin and Sunbury result in three times as many people with Bachelor's or higher degrees. As we know, higher education often increases earning potential. 76% of Dublin residents hold a Bachelor's or higher degree, with a median household income of \$138K and median house value of \$375K. These numbers are astronomical when compared to the median household income in Columbus of \$50K and median house value of \$150K. Sunbury fares a little better with a median household income of \$75K and median house value of \$230K. The higher property values in rural areas like Sunbury can be attributed to the majority white, 65 and older population that have held onto their properties for ages. Most likely, these properties get passed down in the number of families that live in the same areas. This relationship between graduation rates and financial prosperity is an example of both social capital and social closure. As mentioned by Noguera, Sociologist James Coleman deems social closure as "the mutually reinforcing partnership between parents and schools in healthy schools and communities" (10).

Moreover, district data shows that 70% more students in Columbus City schools receive free or reduced lunch. This factor also reflects the economic turmoil experienced by those who live in urban areas. It is unfortunate that even with the highest average spending on students, a 15:1 student-to-teacher ratio, and 54% district expenditure on instruction, Columbus cannot produce enough successful graduates. But this is not really surprising, even with one more staff person per each thousand students compared to Dublin city and Big Walnut, there is a 33% chronic absenteeism rate. According to Balfanz, “chronic absence in middle and high school is negatively linked to late achievement levels, as well as to increased odds of dropping out” (Balfanz 10). But what could be leading students to miss so much school?

Goldhaber et al. state that “disadvantaged students tend to have less-qualified and less-effective teachers than their more-advantaged peers. Additionally, teacher effectiveness has been found to be the most important schooling resource linked to student achievement” (14). Though Columbus City may have 100% of teachers that are full-time, only 93% have 3 or more years of experience. However, Big Walnut also has 100% certified full-time teachers, yet 79% have 3 or more years of experience, and they still have 20% more students graduating. Big Walnut is producing graduates while spending 5% of Columbus’s \$770,000,000 total district expenditure.

There is also the case that the way school is taught is the problem as well when it comes to chronic absenteeism. Tyack states, “if the pupil conformed to the teacher’s set standards of learning and deportment, in other words, if she passed a performance test, she succeeded” (Tyack 55). While children may enjoy playing pretend at one stage in their life, when it comes to being a student, that is not a role anyone is looking to play for fun. Therefore, this idea that you show up to school and put on this act to receive imaginary grades classifying as smart, adequate, or failing

feels shallow and unnecessary. We cannot blame students if educators do not demonstrate the practicality of the lessons being taught.

Also, films such as *The Rule* illustrate the negative outcomes a high poverty rate plus an urban setting can have on learning. We know that students who face issues outside academics suffer greatly. According to Tyng et al., “stress, a negative emotional state, has also been reported to facilitate and/or impair both learning and memory, depending on intensity and duration” (3). Much like St. Benedict’s in *The Rule*, I suggest that urban schools incorporate socially linked services into the schools if they have such large expenditures.

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