

The U.S. Public School System and the Implications of Budget Cuts, the Teacher
Shortage Crisis, and Large Class Sizes on Marginalized Students

by

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ABSTRACT

This study of the policies of the U.S. public school system focuses on state and federal funding to examine how budget cuts, the teacher shortage crisis, and large classroom sizes are interrelated. A qualitative method of approaching these issues and a meta-analysis of the findings, combined with my personal experience as a high school English teacher in the public school system points to a ripple effect where one problem is the result of the one before it. Solutions suggested in this study are made with the intention to support all U.S. public school students with an emphasis on students with special needs, English language learners, and students from low-income families. My findings show that marginalized students in U.S. public schools are experiencing a form of education injustice. This study highlights the burden placed upon the states to fund education and asserts that qualified professionals are increasingly difficult to recruit while teacher attrition rates continue to grow. The changing teacher-to-student ratio means students enjoy one-on-one time with teachers less often due to overcrowded classrooms. The interrelationship of these issues requires a multifaceted approach to solving them, beginning with a demand for more federal funding which will allow previously cut programs to be reinstated, incentives to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers which will reduce classroom sizes, and implementation of new programs targeted to ensure the success of students with special needs, English language learners, and students from low-income families.

For students everywhere in the nation sitting in overcrowded classrooms who strive to
achieve their goals against all odds.

For parents of students with special needs, ELLs, and/or low-income families who have
been let down by a system meant to provide your children with access to the greatest
means to succeed.

For public school teachers working tirelessly and selflessly for the students.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
1. INTRODUCTION	1
<i>A Brief Review of U.S. Public Educators</i>	1
<i>Organization of Findings</i>	3
2. PROBLEM STATEMENT	5
<i>Research Question</i>	5
<i>Methodology</i>	6
<i>The Ripple Effect</i>	7
3. A META-ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION	9
<i>Literature Review</i>	9
<i>Federal Funding to the U.S. Public School System</i>	12
<i>Proposition 123</i>	16
<i>The Impact of Budget Cuts on Students with Special Needs</i>	19
<i>The Birth of ESL Programs and the Current Policies Affecting Them</i>	22
<i>The Impact of Budget Cuts on ELLs</i>	24
<i>The Denial of Human Rights to ELLs in PUSD</i>	28
<i>The Impact of Budget Cuts on Students from Low-Income Families</i>	31
<i>U.S. Public Schools' Teacher Shortage Crisis</i>	35
<i>Teacher Attrition, Recruitment, and Highly Qualified Teachers</i>	36
<i>Large Class Sizes in U.S. Public Schools</i>	40

CHAPTER	Page
4. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS	45
<i>Funding</i>	45
<i>Smaller Class Sizes</i>	47
<i>SEI Program Reform in PUSD</i>	50
<i>Theoretical Reform for ESL Programs</i>	51
<i>Language Emersion Program in Santa Fe Elementary</i>	54
<i>Using Santa Fe's ESL Program as a Model for Districtwide Reform</i>	56
5. CONCLUSION	58
<i>Summary of Contributions</i>	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY	62

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Key Issues' Impact on Students	7
2. 2017 Total U.S. Discretionary Spending	15
3. Results of 2015 PISA	20

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Brief Review of U.S. Public Educators

When I was earning my degree in Secondary English Education, I was taught that my goal should be to provide my students with a learning environment in which every student has a fair chance to succeed. I also quickly learned that fair does not necessarily mean equal. The modern American general education classroom strives to be inclusive of students with special needs and English language learners (ELLs) which means that teachers must be able to accommodate and differentiate their curriculum for individuals. An educator's curriculum is designed to target particular learning objectives, but lessons, handouts, and presentations require accessibility on many different levels depending on the students' needs in each classroom. For instance, if I am showing a PowerPoint presentation to my class and ask the students to take notes on each slide, I should consider which students might struggle with the task and what I can do to accommodate them. For many high school students, notetaking may not seem like a great challenge; nevertheless, students with learning disabilities and ELLs often fall behind in their classes because of the common misconception that "easy" tasks such as notetaking do not require additional scaffolding.

I put a lot of time and energy into accommodating my students with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) and ELLs, encouraging them to reach their potential with the steps I provide them. To support them with notetaking, I get to school early and make copies of the PowerPoint presentation then discretely distribute them to certain students

in an attempt to eliminate anxiety when a slide is changed too quickly. I also highlight key words on some of the printed presentations to give to ELLs so that they might use a translation dictionary to help them better understand the lesson. The accommodations and differentiation that general education teachers strive to include into their lessons every day are just some of the challenges they take on to ensure that every student can be successful in their classes.

These seemingly small efforts on the part of the general education teacher could mean the difference between marginalized students' triumph and failure, but the extra time and effort that it takes to accomplish classroom differentiation becomes an overwhelming obstacle as public education funding declines, creating a teacher shortage in schools across the country and consequently increasing the student-to-teacher ratio in classrooms. As the number of students in classrooms rises, teachers are forced to make difficult decisions about how to approach individualized education, which could mean less time accommodating marginalized students. Without the accommodations and differentiated learning taking place in many classrooms across the U.S., students who struggle to keep up with their peers academically will lose the intrinsic motivation that is so vital to achievements in their education.

Organization of Findings

To discern the scale of the issues challenging the U.S. public school system, I first assess funding from the federal level in Chapter 3. States and districts are left virtually unregulated in their attempts to close the funding gaps, and the ensuing resolutions are often inconsistent from one state to the next. The second section of Chapter 3 examines an Arizona funding policy, Proposition 123, as the state attempts to put money into the Peoria Unified School District (PUSD). Further sections from Chapter 3 separately indicate how the funding gaps have impacted students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families.

The final issues I address in the Meta-Analysis are teacher attrition and larger class sizes. A direct result of underfunded public education is the increasing rate of dissatisfied teachers. Alternatively, teacher dissatisfaction stems not just from low pay, but also from internal problems not easily viewed from an outside perspective. Growing discontent among teachers has led to a record amount of resignations while, at the same time, a high rate of disinterest in college students perusing the career signifies that the number of teachers in U.S. public schools is rapidly declining (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007). Ultimately, with more teachers leaving public schools and less teachers entering the field, larger class sizes are inevitable. Studies verify that a disproportionate student-to-teacher ratio can directly impact student achievement, (Sparks, 2016) and for students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families, the consequences are ominous.

In Chapter 4, I first propose solutions for funding, including increasing discretionary funding and decreasing states' dependency on property taxes as revenue for schools. This would greatly improve equality for marginalized students because districts would be able to reinstate cut programs. The second section in Chapter 4 focuses on teacher retention to solve the teacher shortage crisis and large class sizes, which would mean more one-on-one time for students, more highly qualified teachers in the classroom, and more support-staff on campus. The last solution I propose is introduced as a case study of one primary school in PUSD that uses a dual immersion approach to teaching ELLs, and I argue that the program should be available on every campus in PUSD to replace current Structured English Immersion (SEI) classes.

Chapter 5 indicates that the holistic approach I have taken to examine the U.S. public school system contains obtainable, yet lofty, goals. But with a shift in public perception on education funding – much like the one taking place with the *#RedForEd* movement in Arizona – educators who speak up and demand change can produce a new ripple effect in which one *benefit* is a result of the one before it.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research Question

Through analysis of the U.S. public school system with research focusing on funding, certain inquiries arise in regards to state and federal spending and how that affects teacher retention and teacher recruitment. Subsequently, research into teacher retention and recruitment in public schools leads to questions about how a teacher shortage can result in larger class sizes. Next, the issue of larger class sizes prompts questions about how the increasing student-to-teacher ratio impacts students' learning. Concerns about the quality of U.S. public education then narrows to the most marginalized students, specifically students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families. In general, the research asks how the current education crisis has impacted teachers, students, and families in the U.S. How does the overall failure of the U.S. public education system to sufficiently fund schools affect marginalized students, and how has that failure shaped current discussions about the role teachers play in making sure all students are college and career ready? Another integral question that the research seeks to answer is how to address issues relating to education reform with an emphasis on an SEI program currently offered to primary students in one PUSD school.

Methodology

During my research for this study, I sought an in-depth understanding of the causes and effects of issues in U.S. public education in an effort to explore why certain problems have manifested and how those problems impacted certain groups of students. General conclusions are made from the examination of particular cases within PUSD, but my findings suggest that solutions can be successful districtwide. With a meta-analysis of the three key issues of funding, teacher attrition, and large class sizes, I evaluate a holistic approach to the ongoing debate on the education system and include consideration of three groups of marginalized students. Intersectionality in the school system requires research to span across many diverse avenues so that similarities and differences between students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families can be identified.

This study ties together common concerns about the U.S. public education system, student achievement, and my own personal contributions as a public high school teacher. Interviews with other public school teachers in PUSD solidify my interpretation of a system in need of reform and humanize the profession by looking at problems and solutions through the lens of classroom experience. Rather than limit my focus to the issue of funding, I ask what problems arise because of reduced spending in education as well as who is most affected by those problems before combining theoretical concepts with proven academic developments. I argue that the most effective way to tackle the dilemmas in public education is to recognize that one problem is the result of the one before it and that each solution should address the most marginalized students.

The Ripple Effect

This study examines how students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families are affected by decreasing education funding and the resulting teacher shortage, as well as what can be done to ensure that school districts can hire and retain qualified teachers in order to help the most marginalized students. Figure 1 displays the consequential outcomes of the three key issues on the three groups of marginalized students to demonstrate how the students are directly impacted. The problems are outlined in Chapter 3 and are supported with research showing the impact each issue has on certain students. My approach is intersectional in an attempt to show how one obstruction in education has multiple effects.

Problem Statement	Students with Special Needs	English Language Learners	Students from Low-Income Families
FUNDING	Extra-curricular and enrichment programs are cut	Structured English Immersion programs are inadequate	After school programs are cut
TEACHER SHORTAGE	Less one-on-one time	Highly qualified teachers are needed	Less psychologists and counselors
LARGER CLASS SIZES	Lack of least-restrictive environment	Denial of human rights	Inequality sends wrong message

Figure 1. Chart created by the author shows the three key issues discussed in the study and points to how each group of marginalized students is most impacted by them.

This study is significant because when compared at the global level, U.S. students continue to fall behind in education. Empirical work showcases general U.S. data involving the budget for public schools, teacher retention, and the performance of marginalized students, while a meta-analysis of the findings focuses on solutions for PUSD. While my research does not address other countries' education policies, I stress the urgency to reform the current system so that national development and modernization do not falter. When students in the U.S. are exposed to a rich and comprehensive education, they will rise above expectations, and the country will benefit from the inevitable opportunities that come from their success.

CHAPTER 3

A META-ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION

Literature Review

In the following chapters, I emphasize the interrelationship between three problems within the U.S. public school system: education funding, teacher attrition, and growing class sizes. Although widely debated, these fundamental topics are rarely given a holistic analysis. My research combines texts with topics ranging from education budget cuts, to the impact those cuts have on marginalized students, to theory which envisions beneficial reform.

Reports on the most current wave of budget cuts endured by states beginning just after the 2008 recession reinforce that there is a need to put money back into the classroom and teachers' pockets. The budget gaps created by slow economic recovery are covered extensively in articles, all of which conclude that a dependence on tax revenue with no relief in the form of federal spending puts pressure on states. These texts point out that relying on taxes largely hurts low-income families while reducing overall spending, and alleviating education programs takes away the supportive strategies put in place for marginalized students. One solution offered is for additional federal aid to go toward restoration of programs that were cut. Nevertheless, by 2011, the federal government allowed aid for education to expire, leaving each state and district to rely heavily on revenue and endure deeper cuts.

Other texts that helped to frame my arguments evaluate U.S. student achievement, first, on a global scale, and then more narrowly to show the impact of decreased funding

on marginalized students. A piece from the Pew Research Center shows where U.S. students stand in comparison to other developed and developing countries; this information combined with texts that shed light on teacher attrition rates and the depletion of enrichment programs underscore the need for reform. Individually, each reading presents some form of education injustice, concentrating on either students with special needs, ELLs, or students from low-income families. Together, I argue the texts support the ripple effect when one problem is the result of the one before it.

Theory from Paul Matsuda and Iris Marion Young help me to form a link between problem and solution. When funding is resolved, districts can begin to restore education programs that were cut, including SEI programs which Matsuda argues should be taught through a division of labor between the master teacher¹ and the ESL teacher. Pluralism theories suggest that individuals with different cultural backgrounds can coexist without losing a sense of self.

An empirical approach to the literature will assess the isolation that the authors have created in addressing the issues of education funding, teacher attrition, and larger class sizes. Scholars discuss these issues at length, but I show how a lack of funding ripples into other problems that are often seen as separate and requiring unrelated resolutions. These texts fail to recognize the connection between each dispute, and therefore, cannot evaluate the proper solutions. A research project that focuses on the

¹ In a classroom setting with a teacher and an assistant – in this case, an ESL teacher – the master teacher teaches the main classroom curriculum while the assistant works with certain students based on needs to make sure that the student grasps the content.

interrelationship between the three key topics of education funding, teacher attrition, and larger class sizes will elevate the discussion and solidify the need for future research.

Federal Funding to the U.S. Public School System

In 2007, the U.S. economy went into a recession that caused the largest collapse in state revenues on record and created budget shortfalls in almost every state in the country. By 2008, the budget cuts in education caused by the recession led to teacher dissatisfaction and high rates of professionals resigning from teaching (Camera, 2016). A decrease in available qualified teachers has resulted in larger class sizes, and larger class sizes often mean that students with learning disabilities, ELLs, and students from low-income families are inadequately serviced. States have attempted to rectify the problem with revenue funds, but as of the 2015-2016 school year, marginalized students continue to suffer in the general education classroom because of legislative decisions.

The article, “States Continue to Feel Recession’s Impact” by Oliff, Mai, and Palacios, addresses the issue of budget gaps due to the recession and evaluates the influence of a slow economic recovery on services funded by state taxes. At a time when obligations are growing, education in Arizona remains one of the hardest hit sectors of the collapse. The authors indicate the urgency of increasing funds for education with state projections of 540,000 more K-12 students in 2013 than in the previous year. Three years later, this enrollment trend continues, and states must come up with new ideas to close budget gaps. Furthermore, Oliff, Mai, and Palacios note that in 2012, the budget gap was smaller than in previous years, but still historically large. As states attempt to close the budget gaps, they cause further delay in economic recovery because often times the solution is to raise taxes which largely hurts low-income families and reduces overall spending. One solution, the authors say, is for additional federal aid to go toward

restoration of programs that were cut. Nevertheless, by 2011, the federal government allowed aid for education to expire, leaving each state and district to rely heavily on revenue and endure deeper cuts (Oliff, Mai, & Palacios, 2012).

Budget cuts have been interrupting the progress of the U.S. public school system for a decade with most of the blame going to the recession which has kept unemployment rates high and tax revenue low. In her article, “How Do We Fund Our Schools?” on the website entitled *Where We Stand-America’s Schools in the 21st Century*, Judy Woodruff explains how most states in the U.S. fund education. Woodruff points out that the reason there is such a dramatic difference in the education systems in each state, and sometimes districts within the same state, is that, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 93% of education expenditures, the bulk of the money for 14,000 public elementary and secondary school districts, come from state and local governments. The sources of state and local funding are sales and income taxes, with almost no funding coming from the federal government. Compared with global standards, the author writes, “It’s a little known fact that when it comes to the funding of our schools, the U.S. Government contributes about 10 cents to every dollar spent on K-12 education – less than the majority of countries in the world” (Woodruff, 2005). The government’s unwillingness to aid with funding was solidified in 2008 when the Great Recession began affecting school districts’ budgets in almost every state in the country. Unemployment rates soared and many people lost their houses; the revenue that came from citizens’ paychecks and property taxes decreased significantly, and states were no longer able to meet K-12 funding needs.

In the U.S., education funding at the federal level comes from discretionary spending which "...is the portion of the budget that the president requests and Congress appropriates every year through legislation," according to the 2017 United States Budget Estimate. Observation of the federal discretionary budget points to a disproportionate allocation of funds in the U.S. which suggests that both the Executive and Legislative Branches have an opportunity annually to determine a redistribution of spending. The 2017 United States Budget demonstrates that discretionary funding for education is second only to national defense; however, figure 1 shows that spending on national defense is more than 6 times higher and occupies half of the entire budget while 8% goes toward education. Disparity in the discretionary budget is evident and should be addressed when making the argument that more federal aid needs to go to students and teachers struggling in U.S. public schools. 553 billion dollars went to national defense while only 81.7 billion dollars went to education, suggesting that there is a clear priority to fund the military instead of investing in the academic prospects of America's children ("2017 United States Budget Estimate", 2018). Although these numbers are discouraging upon first glance for advocates of increased federal funding going toward education, it proves that there is a possibility for future legislation to reform current budget decisions in favor of a more level playing field.

Total Discretionary Spending
 \$1.08
 TRILLION
 United States dollars
 FY 2017 Discretionary Spending

National Defense	49%	535 billion
Education	8%	81.7 billion
Transportation	7%	79 billion
Social Security, Unemployment, and Labor	6%	67.7 billion
Veterans' Benefits	6%	65.5 billion
Government	6%	62.1 billion
Medicare and Health	6%	59.9 billion
International Affairs	5%	49.1 billion
Energy and Environment	4%	38.9 billion
Science, Space, and Tech	3%	27.3 billion
Housing and Community	1%	12.6 billion
Agriculture	Less than 1%	6.04 billion

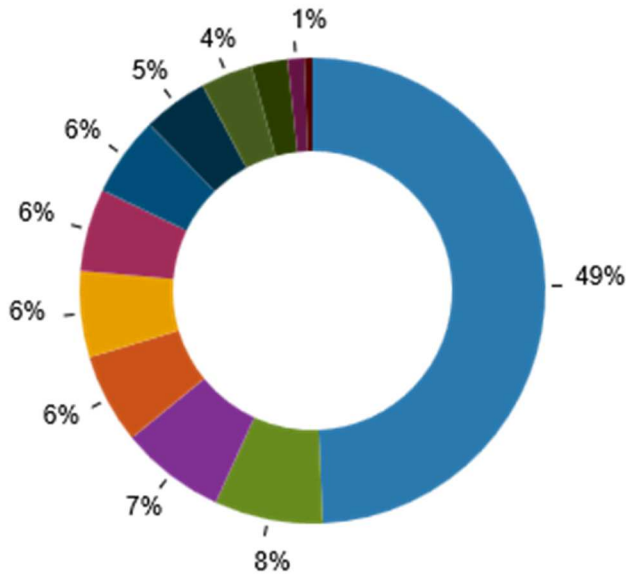


Figure 2. 2017 Total U.S. Discretionary Spending

Proposition 123

As the federal government strips away education funding, states must find new ways to close budget gaps. For Arizona, that funding came from Proposition 123 which voters passed in 2015. Proposition 123, an override used to provide additional funding to support classrooms, teaching, learning, and operations, promised to support teacher salaries, benefits, supplies, and general operations. The website, *Ballotpedia*, offers information about this maintenance and operations (M&O) override, stating that it “...was designed to allocate \$3.5 billion for education funding, \$1.4 billion coming from general fund money and \$2 billion coming from increasing annual distributions of the state land trust permanent funds to education” (“Arizona Education Finance Amendment, Proposition 123”, 2016). Estimations from *The Arizona Republic* claim that override funds would boast an additional \$300 per student through the life of the measure (Hansen & Wingett Sanchez, 2016). The article, “How Proposition 123 Affects Arizona's Land Trust Fund” by Ronald J. Hansen goes on to explain that there are pros and cons to this funding solution. On one hand, Hansen writes, much needed funds are going into the public school system from an underused source; however, “While most of it goes to help public schools, each parcel is earmarked for a specific program. That means some land is set aside for other programs, such as higher education or miners' hospitals. It's possible...to sell land that doesn't help K-12 schools” (Hansen, "How Proposition 123 Affects Arizona's Land Trust Funds", 2016). Ultimately, voters in Arizona understood the need to fund public schools and agreed that the positive outcomes outweigh the negative ramifications of dipping into the state's land trust fund.

In the aftermath of the passing of the override, *Ballotpedia* reports that, “Representatives of the Arizona PTA, the Arizona Education Association, and the Children's Action Alliance applauded the approval of the measure, but they said that Proposition 123 was only a first step to improving school funding. Julie Bacon, president-elect of the Arizona Education Association, said, ‘It was never intended to be a long-term fix to fix Arizona’s funding issues.’” Other supporters of the measure, including Dana Wolfe Naimark, president and CEO of the Children's Action Alliance, are quick to point out that that Proposition 123 only partially resolves the problem, and that Arizonians should be aware that other school funding issues still exist (“Arizona Education Finance Amendment, Proposition 123”, 2016).

The uncertainty of Proposition 123 is one reason why some voters oppose the measure. The reserves withdrawn from Arizona’s land trust fund provide resources for Arizona schools, but overrides like Proposition 123 are not permanent solutions for states still hurting from budget cuts in education. Although Proposition 123 is set to provide additional funding for 10 years, “Many school districts will ask voters to approve a renewal in year 4 or 5 of an override to maintain a consistent level of funding. If not renewed, the amount decreases by 1/3 in the 6th year and 2/3 in the 7th year” (“Expect More Arizona”, 2016). In the meantime, another problem with the measure is that it has not been an effective tool in recruiting new teachers or retaining current ones. *The Arizona Republic* article “Yikes!': Some Arizona Teachers See Little from Prop. 123” by Hansen and Wingett Sanchez explains that while the policy was sold as a way to direct significant money to teacher salaries, most of the funds have instead gone to other

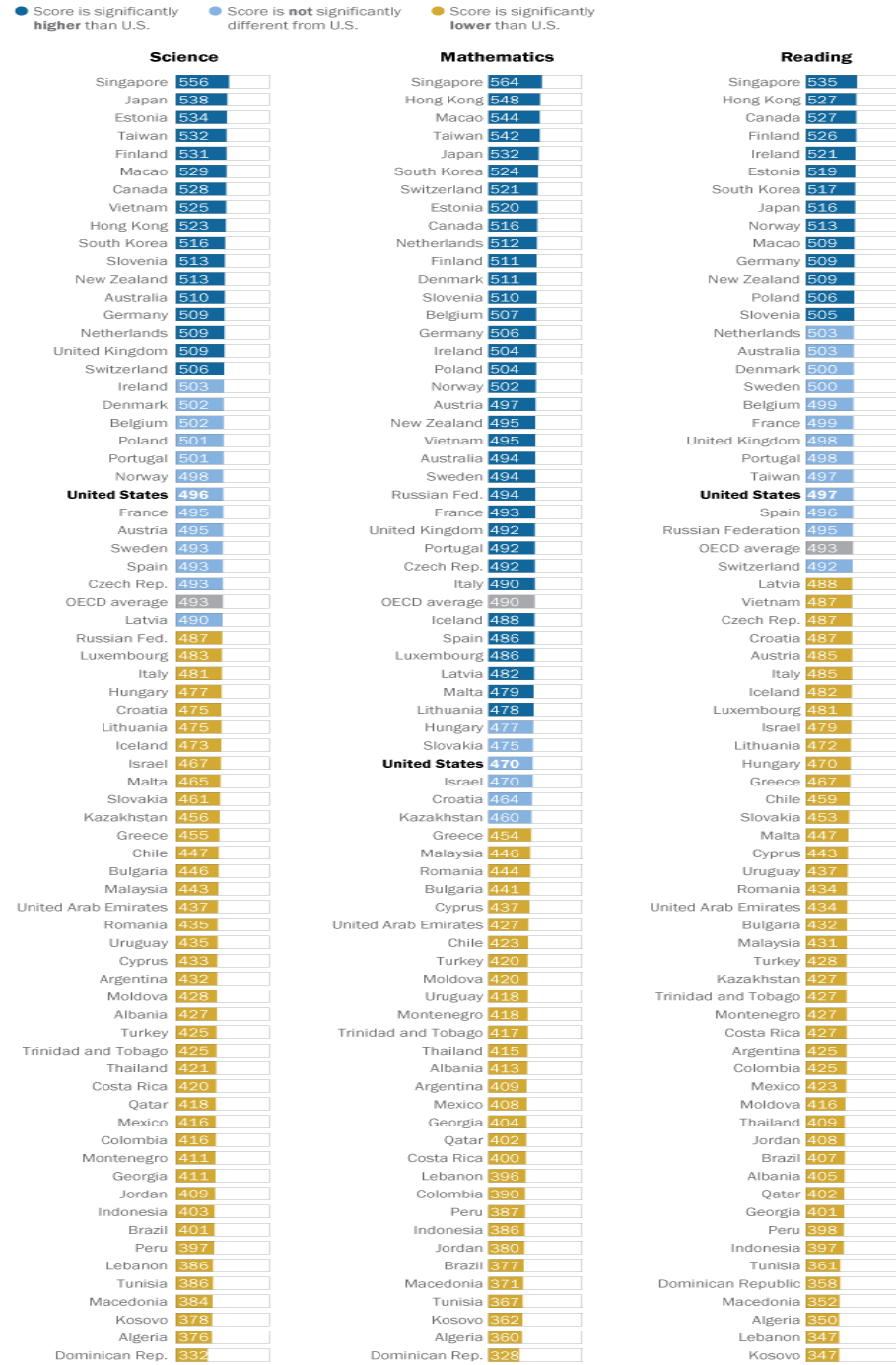
educational needs. Teachers in Peoria, for example, “will pocket an extra \$53 every two weeks on average, or about \$1,700 per year,” leaving U.S. teachers almost as severely underpaid as before the measure passed (Hansen & Wingett Sanchez, "Yikes!": Some Arizona Teachers See Little from Prop. 123", 2016).

The Impact of Budget Cuts on Students with Special Needs

Since The Great Recession, many enrichment programs designed to support U.S. public school students have been cut or lost significant funding. Also, staff hired by U.S. public schools to aid in the success of marginalized students such as behavioral specialists and psychologists have been let go in an attempt to make up for historically low funding. A correlation can be seen between a depletion of public school spending and student achievement as research indicates that investing in academic programs and support staff help to increase American student test scores. In the article, “U.S. students’ academic achievement still lags that of their peers in many other countries” Drew DeSilver analyzes the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), “...which every three years measures reading ability, math and science literacy and other key skills among 15-year-olds in dozens of developed and developing countries.” DeSilver states that, “Recently released data from international math and science assessments indicate that U.S. students continue to rank around the middle of the pack, and behind many other advanced industrial nations.” When U.S. students are compared at the international level, Americans are baffled by the unremarkable ranking outcomes. Figure 2 illustrates the data’s most recent results from 2015 which show that the U.S. students are placed 24th out of 71 countries in science, 38th in math, and 24th in reading (Desilver, 2017). Students with special needs, who are not exempt from high stakes testing, have an impact on the numbers specified in DeSilver’s article because they usually make up the bottom 5% of public school student achievement.

How the U.S. compares on science, math and reading scores

Average scores of 15-year-olds taking the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment



Note: Scale ranges from 0-1,000. Results from China not included because only four provinces participated in PISA 2015.
Source: OECD, PISA 2015

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 3. Results of 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Evaluation of U.S. student achievement in science, mathematics, and reading proves that more can and should be done to foster the skills necessary to improve test scores, especially among students with SLDs in reading, writing, and mathematics. On the national level, Arizona's students fair no better and continue to be one of the lowest funded groups in the country. According to the organization, Expect More Arizona, 72% of 4th and 8th graders in Arizona are scoring below proficient in reading ("Expect More Arizona", 2016). This means that almost three quarters of students taking the AzMERIT assessment – Arizona's high-stakes standardized test – struggle to comprehend the grade-level texts assigned by their teachers in their classes every day. If these students are below grade-level in reading, it can adversely affect their performance in all of their classes including mathematics, science, and social studies.

When a student has an SLD in reading, writing, or mathematics, she may qualify for special education services but will presumably be placed in general education classes for most or all of the school day. Certain content may be unobtainable to a student with an SLD in reading, for example, and she can ultimately struggle to keep up with her peers to earn a passing grade. Highly qualified teachers differentiate learning to accommodate students with a variety of needs; however, when states cannot provide adequate funding for education, many factors are put into place that could deter the learning process, causing certain student demographics to be overlooked.

The Birth of ESL Programs and the Current Policies Affecting Them

Polices were not created until recently that addressed the notion of inclusion of all nationalities in America's education system. In his journal article, "Composition Studies and ESL Writing: A Disciplinary Division of Labor," Matsuda begins his piece with background information on the practice of teaching English as a second language (ESL) as a profession which did not exist until the 1940s. The author states that the development of U.S. foreign policy brought significant change to the status of the ESL teaching profession. Courses were initially designed primarily for Spanish speaking students but soon opened up to ESL students who spoke other languages as well. In 1995, English teachers participating in a workshop "quickly agreed that satisfactory handling of the foreign student's problems with English involved more than materials and methods of classroom instruction." The author points out that when educators came together to discuss issues, the lack of English language proficiency was one of the most important concerns, and many felt that ESL students' struggles went beyond linguistics (Matsuda, 1999).

Through collaboration, Matsuda explains how these educators were able to pinpoint a wide variety of topics to analyze in order to improve education for ELLs. According to the author, topics that gained prominence include "the need for and the availability of English language proficiency tests, models of special ESL curriculum, the issue of granting college credits for ESL courses, evaluation standards in English classes, admission criteria for international students, the need for orientation programs, and the role of English teachers in the students' cultural adjustment process" (Matsuda, 1999, pp.

707-708). Presently, these discussions have become the foundation for K-12 ESL program design in the U.S.

These initial proposals were the product of concerned, qualified educators who understood that reform had to happen to correct the wrongs being done to ELLs. Since that time, state and district policymakers have severely restricted how ESL programs should be run, while, at the same time, Arizona schools wrongly interpret laws which further diminishes the good intentions of teachers. The resulting ESL curriculum being taught in PUSD, ignores many of the previously stated concerns about teaching ELLs and subsequently denies them their right to a nationality and their right to a fair education.

The Impact of Budget Cuts on ELLs

The growing population of ELLs in U.S. public schools has brought the issue of teaching ESL to the forefront of the education debate. Nan Li and Angela W. Peters describe the need for reform in ESL programs in their journal article, “Preparing K-12 Teachers for ELLs: Improving Teachers’ L2² Knowledge and Strategies through Innovative Professional Development.” The authors acknowledge that the ELL population continues to grow with an increase of ELL school enrollment up 898% from 1999 to 2009 according to the data from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA). ELLs come from many diverse backgrounds and are “...the fastest growing segment of the school population, especially in urban schools. According to National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Data, 21% of school enrollment or 10.9 million school students ages 5 to 17 are ELLs.” The authors indicate that as the ELL population grows, the teacher workforce cannot keep up, and current K-12 educators’ backgrounds remain inconsistent with that of ELLs. Li and Peters go on to write that with training and preparation, teachers will be able to better address the needs of ELLs (Li & Peters, 2016).

Each state in the U.S. constructs its own education laws, and each district interprets those laws differently. Education scholars, Margarita Jimenez-Silva, Katie Bernstein, and Evelyn Baca, explore the strict laws on teaching ELLs and how they are interpreted and implemented in schools in their peer-reviewed article entitled, “An analysis of How Restrictive Language Policies are Interpreted by Arizona’s Department

² L2, or Language 2, refers to a person’s non-native language if that person is bilingual.

of Education and Three Individual School Districts' Websites.” According to the authors, current restrictive language policies in Arizona impact “...an estimated 4.4 million students or 9.2% of the public school population (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) who are classified as ELLs” (Jimenez-Silva, Bernstein, & Baca, 2008). With so many ELLs entering U.S. K-12 schools, it is more important than ever to observe how language education laws are put in place and to what extent they deny students their right to a fair education.

Since the recession, many services have had to be cut from K-12 schools in the U.S. which means less support for students. According to Mary Ann Zehr, author of the article posted in *Education Week* entitled, “Foreign-Language Programs Stung by Budget Cuts; Advocates Voice Concern over Loss of Key Funding to Train K-12 Educators,” these services can be beneficial for achieving student success. Zehr goes on to write that in 2011 the 40% cut in foreign language programs was ironic because the federal government reduced funding for foreign languages in K-12 schools after identifying “a huge demand for proficient speakers of foreign languages.” This is discouraging because these cuts come after President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, stressed in speeches the importance of bilingualism (Zehr, 2011).

Research of current programs being offered in public schools reveal that ELLs are one demographic that endure a form of education injustice due to legislative policies that limit the ways that English is taught to them in the classroom. In order to better understand what issues need to be addressed when considering reform of Arizona’s current SEI programs, a comparison should be made of the Arizona Revised Statute

regarding English language and its resulting SEI programs to theoretical intervention programs offered by rhetoric and composition scholar, Matsuda, and political theorist, Young. Language policies can be interpreted and presented very differently in each state, and sometimes districts within the same state, which can mean an inconsistent and ineffective process for teaching ESL. Analysis of Arizona's policies show that districts have created unnecessary restrictions such as one-year programmatic time limits and SEI programs that focus on assimilation which impede the success of ELLs (Sen, 2004). In his piece, "Composition Studies and ESL Writing: A Disciplinary Division of Labor," Matsuda argues that ELLs should be taught through a division of labor between the master teacher and the ESL teacher so that she can learn English while keeping up with her peers in other core classes taught in both English and her native language (Matsuda, 1999). Similarly, Young states in her book, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, that schools should introduce a bilingual, bicultural maintenance program where students learn English with a bilingual teacher who speaks the students' native language. This type of program would aim to engage students in their culture so that they do not lose their sense of identity through assimilation (Young, 1990). Both ideas are based on the theory of pluralism or the notion that individuals with different cultural backgrounds can coexist without losing a sense of self. Conversely, PUSD, as well as most districts in the U.S., teach ELLs in restrictive, English-only classrooms where they are unable to receive assistance in their native language.

The policies set in the Arizona Revised Statute will prove to be an effective tool in uncovering how restrictive Arizona schools are being when it comes to their SEI

programs by showing that certain laws are being wrongly interpreted. If PUSD can create SEI reform within its schools, a positive outcome can be predicted for K-12 students learning English as a second language. Current programs are unsuccessful and need reform because ELLs fall behind in academic classes, do not gain or maintain a cultural identity, and are not encouraged to maintain their first language.

The Denial of Human Rights to ELLs in PUSD

One document that should be considered when implementing laws for public education is *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Within the contents of the declaration, the leaders of the United Nations (U.N.) state that “all members of the human family” are inherent of equal and inalienable rights which is “the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” The signatories are quick to mention the danger in disregarding human rights, stating that actions that go against the articles laid out in their document will result in “barbarous injustice.” The end goal for the authors of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is for all of humankind to keep these rights in mind and strive to live by them (The United Nations, 1948). By taking a closer look at two articles within the human rights declaration - Article 26, which guarantees the right to an unbiased and tolerant education and Article 15, which guarantees the right to nationality – it can be argued that PUSD is undermining students’ rights.

Article 26 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* details all of the key components to achieving justice in education. The authors added specific ideas that relate to ELLs, indicating that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” Despite the initiative, the above analysis of Article 26, when paralleled to current PUSD practices, dictates that the fundamental freedoms of ELLs are ignored, and the idea of tolerance of students’ nations is not taken seriously. Article 26

goes on to state that “Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” The current ESL programs being offered in PUSD create a learning gap for ELLs because students are forced to attempt to learn content in a language with which they are not familiar, making it difficult to accurately gauge the merit of a student learning English as a second language. If an ELL cannot properly fill out her application or compose her submission essay because she has not mastered writing in English, then she is not on an equal playing field with her English-speaking peers. Finally, Article 26 implies that “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” (The United Nations, 1948); however, when the vast majority of SEI curriculum offered in PUSD is taught through restrictive ESL programs, parents are left with no choice. Moreover, when English is the parent or guardian’s second language, there is increased difficulty in understanding one’s full rights.

Current ESL programs being offered to ELLs in PUSD, as well as many U.S. K-12 schools, deny students who are from a country other than the U.S. the right to identify with their nationality. Article 15 in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality...” (The United Nations, 1948) but the approach taken to teach ELLs in Peoria Unified schools does just that. During the school day, most ELLs are taught through assimilation and intensive English language instruction. These students are given books and assignments in English, and teachers are instructed not to answer questions in their native language, even if it means that the student struggles with content or falls behind academically. In her book, *Justice*

and the Politics of Difference, Young alludes to the unfair treatment of ELLs who must participate in an ESL program designed “...to increase English proficiency to the point where native-language instruction is unnecessary.” Furthermore, Young writes that ESL teachers do not attempt to help the students maintain or develop proficiency in their native language, but rather, the goal seems to be assimilation to American language and culture (Young, 1990, p. 180). By forcing these students into assimilation, the ESL programs being offered to ELLs within PUSD are ignoring the students’ right to nationality.

The Impact of Budget Cuts on Low-Income Families

On the local level, corporate and personal property taxes, which are set by the school board, local officials, or citizens, are the main source of public education spending, creating a funding gap in which districts in high poverty communities are provided with the least amount of money. In her article, Woodruff states that the budget gap creates scenarios where "...schools might boast gleaming buildings and equipment, or they might be dilapidated – struggling with the burden of outdated equipment and unpaid bills" (Woodruff, 2005). Funding gaps produce injustice to vulnerable families who have suffered the most from the recession, especially low-income families who have a child with special needs, because of the elimination of services that would otherwise be provided to them. In "An Update on State Budget Cuts," Authors Nicholas Johnson, Phil Oliff, and Erica Williams explain that with the recession and loss of jobs came a decrease in taxes to pay for K-12 education, but the need for services have not been eliminated. With cuts continuing each year in some states, even after the recession has ended, vulnerable residents are experiencing detrimental losses of educational services, especially within the special education departments of K-12 schools.

As a result of The Great Recession, authors Johnson, Oliff, and Williams state in their article that in 2011, many states reduced spending for education which hurt families and diminished necessary services. These cuts, in turn, have deepened states' economic problems because families and businesses have less to spend (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2011). In his book, *Social Inequality in a Global Age*, Scott Sernau calls attention to the fact that relying on local funding generates a form of inequality in the

public school system. His indication is that when public schools are funded primarily by local property taxes, some schools are systemically snubbed because the process draws on local wealth. Sernau explains that, “Poor communities have low property values, and even if they tax themselves at very high rates, they cannot generate much income for local schools...school funding is one of the few places where, in precise dollar amounts, we tell children essentially what we think they’re worth” (Sernau, 2014, p. 219). In essence, if a low-income family cannot invest in their children’s education by providing high amounts of tax dollars to local schools, their children will not receive the progressive enticements enjoyed by their peers in wealthier communities.

Author, Morgan Jerkins, argues that the recession has created another unintended outcome because families that are in poverty have a greater chance of having children with learning disabilities. In her article, “Too Many Kids,” Jerkins explains that students from low-income communities are more prone than their privileged peers to have problems at home and tend to carry these issues with them to class (Jerkins, 2015). In the book, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It*, Eric Jensen, argues that children from low-income families are less likely than others to have their needs met, “...which correlates with delayed maturation and can inhibit brain-cell production.” Consequently, these students statistically do not receive the tailored assistance they need in order to be successful in their classes, and they struggle behaviorally as well as academically (Jensen, 2010). The vulnerable families that send their children to U.S. public schools deserve to have helpful resources provided to them by qualified educators and professionals on campus, but with

the recession came cuts to positions such as behavior specialists and guidance counselors, leaving students in need with less professionals on school campuses to go to for support.

Vulnerable families often rely on after-school programs while parents or guardians work extra hours at low-paying jobs, but after school activities are another service that some schools can no longer afford. The article, “Too Many Kids” discusses the cuts being made in K-12 schools, and the author states, “Also on the chopping block are extracurricular activities, including summer programs designed to keep students on track to graduation” (Jerkins, 2015). A clear correlation can be made when examining the decrease in funds as they affect districts nationally between the elimination of services and programs with the unattained success of at-risk students from low-income families. The more the government refuses to help fund education while approving cuts to states’ budgets, the more students in public schools will fail to receive the assistance they deserve. This cycle of cuts disproportionately affects marginalized students as it takes away needed resources like educational programs. Consequently adding to this issue, the low teacher wages and larger class sizes that result from the recent budget cuts have caused teachers to leave the profession, creating a shortage of highly qualified teachers to educate K-12 students.

Students from low-income families feel the impact of public education funding inequalities beyond primary and secondary education as Sernau points out in *Social Inequality in a Global Age*. Sernau claims that, “A major part of the struggle that low-income college students face, particularly many students of color, stems from the fact that they received their earlier education in urban...public schools that were overcrowded and

underfunded and so provided them with few of the extra opportunities their better-off classmates enjoyed before college” (Sernau, 2014, p. 217). In this way, the cycle of poverty is difficult to break. A college diploma increases the chances of higher pay, but many students from low-income families never earn one due to the inequality they experienced at the hands of local public education funding. The pattern continues when they have children and send them to schools in low-income communities where teacher pay is meager, class sizes are large, and supplies are lacking.

U.S. Public Schools' Teacher Shortage Crisis

While the deficiency in public education funding creates budget gaps and affects students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families, qualified teachers are exiting the profession in record quantities, the number of college students earning degrees in primary and secondary education are decreasing, and regulations for highly qualified teachers are loosening to make up for the shortfalls. Recently, teacher retention and recruitment have become a cause for concern, and a debate has been sparked about what has shaped the influx of resignations and diminution of new hires entering the field of education. By 2015, as the country gradually made its way out of the recession, districts began the rehiring process to make up for years of layoffs and teacher shortages, but many states found filling positions, especially for science, mathematics, and special education teachers, was more difficult than it had been in the past. As administrators attempt to solve the teacher shortage issue, U.S. public schools are facing another problem caused by the reduced funding in education: highly qualified teachers do not find the profession attractive and are leaving the field in record numbers (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007). A direct result of the teacher shortage crisis has been that the needs of students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families are unintentionally overlooked due to ever-growing class sizes.

Teacher Attrition, Recruitment, and Highly Qualified Teachers

The decreasing budget to U.S. public schools is not the only obstacle in the way of the success of students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families, and, in turn, funding shortfalls do more than just harm marginalized students. Teacher attrition is an additional cause of low test scores among U.S. students and produces further challenges for students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families. The organization, Expect More Arizona states that “More than 60 percent of new Arizona teachers are leaving the profession after three years” (“Expect More Arizona”, 2016). This data proves that recent changes to public education, such as the decrease in state and federal funding, has made retaining teachers who are new to the profession problematic. This sequentially creates more issues for the economy, and Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas estimate high levels of teacher attrition at nearly 8% of the U.S. workforce compared to high-achieving jurisdictions like Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada where only about 3 to 4% of teachers leave in a given year (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

In the U.S., the matter of teacher attrition is not improving, and Sutchter, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas state that “The teaching workforce continues to be a leaky bucket, losing hundreds of thousands of teachers each year—the majority of them before retirement age.” The authors call attention to the difficulty that districts have been having in keeping qualified teachers, especially in the areas of mathematics, science, and special education, and they list several reasons to explain why teachers are leaving the field in record numbers around the country. In their analysis of teachers surveyed, the authors

point out that less than one-third of teachers leaving the profession every year are retirees, and that among those leaving before retirement age, the most common factor in their decision to leave is some form of dissatisfaction (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

Much of the blame for high teacher attrition rates goes to low teacher salaries and a growing amount of work to offset the earnings. In her article, "Class Sizes Show Signs of Growing," Sarah D. Sparks sheds light on the impact of spending and offers an alternative to the expensive solution of placing more teachers in schools. Sparks writes that "Other researchers, such as Eric A. Hanushek, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, have argued schools should spend money to improve their current teachers, rather than hiring more of them." This idea can be efficient in keeping teachers in the classroom, but many surveys conclude that, as of 2016, no such plans have gone into effect (Sparks, 2016). In relation to the teacher shortage, the website, *Ballotpedia*, cites *The Arizona Daily Star* and states that "Districts cannot find qualified teachers to hire, and when they do, low salaries and overloaded working conditions push many of them out of the profession within a few years" ("Arizona Education Finance Amendment, Proposition 123", 2016). Educators in Arizona are feeling the pressure of low wages, and the article, "Yikes!": Some Arizona teachers see little from Prop. 123," reports on one teacher who is concerned about daily costs and "has a second job because she can't live on a teacher's salary" (Hansen & Wingett Sanchez, "Yikes!": Some Arizona Teachers See Little from Prop. 123", 2016). Many teachers are

feeling that same strain which is an added element to the frustration causing so many education professionals to resign.

Teachers resigning is, unfortunately, only one factor in the teacher shortage issue because the supply of new teachers continues to shrink as attrition rates increase. One way that districts have been trying to cope with this problem is by focusing their attention on getting more teachers into the profession, but with low teacher pay and a swelling list of obligations set upon teachers, many college students do not see teaching as an attractive and accessible possibility. In the article, “A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.,” the authors write that “Between 2009 and 2014, the most recent years of data available, teacher education enrollments dropped from 691,000 to 451,000, a 35% reduction. This amounts to a decrease of almost 240,000 professionals on their way to the classroom in the year 2014, as compared to 2009” (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). With no incentive of a decent, livable wage, college students perceive entering the profession of teaching as risky and not worth the expected effort.

With the realization that less college students are earning their degrees in education, districts had to find other solutions to solve the teacher shortage issue including reducing qualifications to allow the hiring of untrained teachers. Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas explain that the reduction in qualified professionals to teach core and special education classes has caused schools to reduce qualifications which further increases attrition rates. Now, with a decline in teacher preparation, schools are beginning to notice that attrition rates have grown even larger,

and, Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas point out that, “Teachers with little preparation tend to leave at rates two to three times as high as those who have had a comprehensive preparation before they enter” (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). The new, underqualified teachers ultimately create higher turnover rates which result in more money being spent on the replacement process and a decrease in student achievement.

Large Class Sizes in U.S. Public Schools

The decrease in funding for education has led to high rates of teacher attrition which has led to larger student-to-teacher ratios in public K-12 classrooms in the U.S. In an article posted on *Education Week* entitled, “Class Sizes Show Signs of Growing,” Sparks makes the correlation between a lack of funding for education and the problem of increasing classroom sizes. The average number of students per classroom, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, was 17.6 in 1980 and fell to 15.8 by 2008. The impact of the recession, however, has made the number of students per classroom rise, and continuing financial constraints mean that the number will not decrease any time soon (Sparks, 2016). Not surprisingly, this has presented lawmakers and educators with a new debate: is keeping class sizes small worth the money it will cost to hire and retain teachers?

Much data has been collected to show that smaller class sizes is an important factor for student achievement, as well as teacher preservation. In her article, “Too Many Kids,” Jerkins explains that school districts are packing more and more students into classrooms which pushes teachers out of the profession. Jerkins begins her piece by introducing readers to an educator named Erica Oliver who taught first grade reading programs to small groups of students. Early interventions such as the reading programs that Oliver taught contain specific curriculum designed for students with SLDs in reading, and “The small classes meant that students who struggled could be easily targeted, lessons could be tailored to individual needs, and progress could be expedited...” (Jerkins, 2015). Reading programs in small classroom settings have proven

to be extremely beneficial for students with SLD's in reading and help students reach grade-level reading comprehension in the least restrictive environment.

Reading programs that cater to students with SLDs are taught by special education teachers, and Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas note in “A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.” that “In a 2014–15 educator supply and demand survey, all 10 special education subgroups were listed as severe shortage areas, comprising more than half of all severe shortage areas” (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). As more general education and special education teachers resign, student enrollment continues to increase which means that Oliver’s classes, and classes like hers all around the nation, lose the benefit of learning in the least restrictive environment. Over the years, Oliver’s class sizes grew and, “She found it harder to manage her classroom, properly supervise reading groups, and encourage her students to complete projects efficiently. All of this slowed down the group’s collective achievement” (Jerkins, 2015). Although the trend of lowering student success levels with larger class sizes is seen in *all* classes, when the student-to-teacher ratio rises, its affects are even more damaging to students with special needs. Classes that were designed for a low maximum number of pupils cannot effectively help students reach grade-level reading comprehension if the number of students is too high because students will be given less individualized attention.

Jerkins argues that legislative restrictions could be one way to ensure that all K-12 students in the U.S. are receiving a fair education. By making regulations that prevent classroom overcrowding, schools can begin to bridge the learning gap between students

from high and low income families; however, with no incentive from the government, “14 states, including Arizona, California, and Illinois, had zero class-size restrictions. And a number of the states that did have requirements, such as Texas and New Jersey—where a court superintendent is allowed to increase class size—had gradually relaxed the teacher-to-student ratio rules.” Even as studies provide solid data to show that small class sizes are imperative for student success, legislators are careful not to impose limitations that will cost more, especially while deep cuts in education are still being made every year.

Jerkins cites research from Project STAR (Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio) which gives proof of the impact that small class sizes can have on student achievement. Project STAR concluded of classes with 18 students or less that, “Because teachers could spend less time on classroom management and more time on instruction...they were able to engage more with the students, which in turn boosted their engagement in the learning material” (Jerkins, 2015). Additionally, One-on-one teacher assistance and prompt feedback are recognized teaching strategies that can only work in a small classroom setting in which students are able to focus on the curriculum with minimal distractions. If class sizes continue to increase, students with special needs will ultimately be denied their right to a fair education.

On the other side of the debate, Sparks’ article in *Education Week* notes that “...skeptics argue that the small, generalized reductions that result from most state policies don’t provide enough improvement to justify their cost.” As a result, policymakers do not see the need to spend more money in order to keep class sizes small,

and programs such as the federal class-size-reduction program, which provided more than \$4 billion in the 1990s, was removed from the No Child Left Behind Act. Critics of class-size-reduction programs argue that balancing the cost of shrinking class sizes would be the most expensive education improvement strategy with Florida estimating a cost of \$40 billion in the next decade to keep their class-size program in place (Sparks, 2016). Costly programs like these, Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas argue, are worth looking into. In their article, they state that “At first, the pricetag for these investments may seem substantial, but evidence suggests that these proposals would ultimately save far more in reduced costs for teacher turnover and student underachievement” (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

With less regulation protecting the K-12 learning environment, teachers and students are forced to adapt to the post-recession budget cuts and consequential class size increases. Moreover the issue of larger class sizes affects general education classes as well as special education classes which Jerkins alludes to at the end of her article with the story of Ubaldo Escalante Bustillos who worked in a disadvantaged school in his hometown of Phoenix. Jerkins writes that “Escalante Bustillos is among the many rookie teachers who quickly left the profession,” placing the blame for his quick exit on the escalated pressures that come with large class sizes. Escalante Bustillos taught 7th and 8th grade math in classes with over 30 students which included students with behavioral disabilities, students with SLDs, and ELLs. The recent increase in class sizes means that more classes are likely to look like Escalante Bustillos’ with “48 students in his combined-grade math classes...Students often had to share desks with one another, [and]

he estimated that students received half the amount of instruction they should have gotten” (Jerkins, 2015). Students in Escalante Bustillos’ class, and many other K-12 classes in the U.S., do not receive adequate one-on-one instruction from their teachers, which, for students who struggle to keep up academically with their peers, could mean falling even further behind.

CHAPTER 4

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Funding

One glaring issue with the U.S. public school system is the lack of funding as well as the unequal distribution of money going toward schools. With a larger portion of federal spending being placed in education, Sernau suggests in *Social Inequality in a Global Age* that U.S. students would enjoy comparable privileges during their school day. He writes that, "...the only way to address the inequalities that exist in school is with equitable funding – that is, funding that does not vary from district to district. [The] preference would be for the United States to fund the public schools out of the national wealth, as is the practice in most countries" (Sernau, 2014, p. 220). Presently, U.S. discretionary spending on education makes up 8% of the budget (Desilver, 2017), however, raising the limit would eliminate violations of U.N. agreements and relieve states and districts of the burden of finding ways to close the budget gap.

In the meantime, if legislators cannot agree that funding education should yield a higher precedence, alternative approaches to closing budget gaps exist at the local level. Sernau argues that, "It is possible...to envision a multilevel approach to school reform that would involve local districts finding new and creative ways to involve parents, businesses, and their local communities; states working to equalize funding among districts beyond local property tax bases; and the federal government investing in the crumbling infrastructure of older urban and rural schools just as it does in highways and other infrastructure" (Sernau, 2014, p. 220). This logic alludes to the idea that fair does

not always mean equal, and certain communities may have higher needs than others.

Relying on revenue other than property taxes and distributing that revenue equally could initiate real change among underserved schools.

Smaller Class Sizes

Research shows that funding for public schools should increase, especially at the federal level (Sernau, 2014), but there are many methods to solving the issues of the teacher shortage crisis that would not be costly. Previous studies indicate that the teacher shortage crisis can only be resolved by increasing teacher pay; however, one way to help keep teachers from leaving the field of education is to focus on administrative support. Backing from administrative colleagues can ease tensions among educators and create cohesion within the teaching community so that retention of qualified professionals has more to do with motivation than money.

Along with the commentaries on teacher attrition is the discussion of teacher dissatisfaction. Potential resolutions to help solve the problem from Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas detail a few long-term solutions that aim at attracting and recruiting new qualified teachers and retaining the teachers already in the field. They end their article by stating that “Changing attrition would change the projected shortages more than any other single factor. Increased demand would not be an immediate reason for concern—if there were enough qualified teachers to enter the classroom, or if we could reduce the number of teachers leaving the classroom.” Easing the shortage, the authors argue, will help to prioritize student learning and produce a strong teacher workforce (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

According to K-12 teachers, support from administration can be a useful approach to lowering attrition rates. Analysis from Sutchter, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas established that “teachers who find their administrators to be unsupportive are more than

twice as likely to leave as those who feel well-supported.” The long-term solution to ease the shortage is to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, and the most effective way to accomplish this goal is to hold administration accountable. To lower attrition rates, the authors say that administrators must show quality leadership skills by providing professional learning opportunities where colleagues can be involved in their schools’ decision-making process. I argue that if minor reform in administrator training is perused, rates of attrition will lower, and schools will be able to maintain a stable learning environment for students.

The short-term solutions currently being offered, such as lowering the standard to become a teacher, only bring temporary relief, and Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas find that it often exacerbates the problem in the long run. Instead, they insist that schools should focus on retention, and state that it is “...important to focus on how to keep the teachers we have in the classroom. In fact, as the authors show in the report, reducing attrition by half could virtually eliminate shortages.” Furthermore, the authors hint at examining high-achieving districts in Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada in order to evaluate what policies work to lower attrition rates. They estimate that by reducing our levels of attrition “...to the levels of those nations, the United States would eliminate overall teacher shortages” (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). The idea of focusing on teacher satisfaction is especially appealing when the bulk of funding for public education still comes from the states which often means districts cannot afford to raise teacher salaries. Decreasing teacher attrition saves money

by avoiding recruitment efforts and multiple hiring processes rather than adding costs to strained budgets.

SEI Program Reform in PUSD

The U.S. public school system is tasked with the vital role of preparing children for college and their futures. Every day, teachers work hard to make sure that all of their students receive a fair education, but current policies ignore the growing individual needs of students as the debate about how to properly teach certain demographics, such as ELLs, continues to delay the progress of education reform in the U.S. By taking a closer look at the growing issue of teaching ESL in Arizona, it can be seen that the student population of ELLs would greatly benefit from changes in current policies and programs within PUSD.

One school in PUSD, Santa Fe Elementary, has been approaching new methods to teaching ELLs with its language immersion program which instructs students in English for half the day and in Spanish for the other half. Instead of only learning English, ELLs at Santa Fe Elementary are becoming bilingual students ("Santa Fe Elementary School / Homepage", 2018). Examination of the attainment of this school's language immersion program, proves that PUSD can successfully implement a districtwide ESL program that will give students the opportunity to learn English while maintaining their cultural identity in an inclusive academic setting.

Theoretical Reform for ESL Programs

In order to begin the process of ESL program reform, an analysis should be made of two similar theories to replace current classroom practices. Matsuda's "Composition Studies and ESL Writing: A Disciplinary Division of Labor" and Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* both outline competing ideas for a program within the public school system that teaches ESL while helping the ELL maintain her native language and culture. Matsuda's understanding of the need for reform is inspiration for his study, and he notes that "The presence of ESL students should be an important consideration for all teachers and scholars of writing because ELS students can be found in many writing courses across the United States" (Matsuda, 1999, p. 699).

The first and most important observation that Matsuda makes is that teaching ELLs is not fundamentally different from teaching native English speakers. He goes on to write that the "linguistic and cultural differences they bring to the classroom pose a unique set of challenges to writing teachers" (Matsuda, 1999, p. 700). These challenges, Matsuda argues, should be addressed through a division of labor between a highly qualified, bilingual ESL teacher and a general education English teacher. According to the article, the specially-trained ESL teacher should be a permanent staff member with linguistic training who can work one-on-one with ELLs in a bilingual, general education classroom. As the number of ESL programs grow, teacher preparation programs and specialized ESL training increases, which means that if schools began to hire bilingual ESL teachers, there would be a significant supply (Matsuda, 1999, p. 710). Teachers from Matsuda's study showcase English composition teachers and ESL teachers working

together to teach and assist students. The required professional development with which teachers participate can easily include training for teachers who would like to initiate a division of labor within their own classroom.

Young's model for how to approach reform in the teaching of ESL is also based on the theory that the students' cultures should not be overlooked. What she calls a bilingual-bicultural maintenance program involves many of the same ideas described by Matsuda. Young points out one issue with Matsuda's approach which is that if the students' cultural identities are disregarded, they develop English language skills but lose proficiency in their native language. Young describes how certain programs are meant to transition ELLs by instructing students in math, science, and history in their native language until certain English proficiency is met. The issue, however, is that "They seek to increase English proficiency to the point where native-language instruction is unnecessary" (Young, 1990, p. 180). To improve this process, Young writes that schools should focus on the goal of maintaining and developing proficiency in the native language. One way to achieve this goal is to apply the division of labor method in general education English classes and apply resources such as literature written by authors from the students' cultures. Nevertheless, Young points out that "The majority of Americans support special language programs for students with limited English, in order to help them learn English; but the more programs instruct in a native language, especially when they instruct in subjects like math or science, the more they are considered by English speakers to be unfair coddling and a waste of taxpayer dollars." If policymakers and voters overcome this dilemma, bilingual-bicultural maintenance programs would

“reinforce knowledge of the students’ native language and culture, at the same time that they train them to be proficient in the dominant language, English” (Young, 1990, pp. 180-181). By combining Matsuda’s and Young’s theories, an argument can be made that SEI programs can do more than simply teach ESL, but rather could improve student-teacher relationships, incorporate co-teaching strategies in classrooms, and foster healthy cultural exchange.

Language Emersion Program in Santa Fe Elementary

Although there is growing concern about the injustice currently being brought upon ELLs in U.S. K-12 schools, districts like PUSD continue to ignore the rights of an increasing student demographic by implementing ESL programs that deny students the right to a nationality and a fair education (Zehr, 2011). However, there is one school that has taken a different approach to teaching ELLs within the district. Santa Fe Elementary is home to a partial Spanish immersion program which was approved by the governing board in 2008 and was designed to allow students to receive instruction in English and Spanish. Santa Fe boasts its signature language immersion program on its website's homepage, stating that students enrolled in their progressive classes will learn reading, writing, and social studies in English for half of the school day, then math, science, and language arts in Spanish for the other half. This is a very specific program offered to pre-K through 7th grade students, and Santa Fe is the only school in the district using this bilingual approach (Sen, 2004).

When comparing Santa Fe's language immersion program to the proposed programs of Matsuda and Young, the one effective aspect that stands out is the acknowledgement of students' cultural identity. By allowing ELLs to read literature in their native language, students are relating to their culture and gaining a sense of self. This pluralist method ensures that students are not merely learning English, but also perfecting proficiency of their first language while being included in general education classrooms. Furthermore, the bilingual technique ensures that students never fall behind in core subjects due to a language barrier because they have the opportunity to ask

questions and receive answers in whatever language is most comfortable to them.

Overall, the ESL program offered at Santa Fe Elementary is taking an effective approach to teaching ELLs that will not only help students become proficient in English, but will also allow them to participate in their culture through classroom lessons.

Using Santa Fe's ESL Program as a Model for Districtwide Reform

The success of dual immersion programs like the one implemented in Santa Fe Elementary proves that the much-needed reform to teaching ELLs can be applied districtwide with much ease. First, Matsuda's division of labor would advise finding bilingual ESL teachers and training them in the field of linguistics. By giving these ESL teachers a permanent spot in the general education English classroom, both the English teacher and the ESL teacher can focus on student achievement. Classrooms that formulate a division of labor to teach ELLs will help ease concerns from untrained and unprepared teachers. Next, continuing professional development opportunities will ensure that English teachers and ESL teachers learn the best strategies to co-teach a bilingual class to English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students with curriculum in English and Spanish.

Schools in PUSD will also need to keep in mind Young's idea of cultural maintenance and provide learning opportunities that encourage the engagement of all students. Although she argues that students should maintain their native language and cultural identity, Young does not deny the importance of teaching English proficiency to ELLs. In her book, Young points out that "Few advocates of cultural pluralism and group autonomy in the United States would deny that proficiency in English is a necessary condition for full participation in American society. The issue is only whether linguistic minorities are recognized as full participants in their specificity, with social support for the maintenance of their language and culture. Only bilingual-bicultural maintenance programs can both ensure the possibility of the full inclusion and participation of

members of linguistic minorities in all society's institutions and at the same time preserve and affirm their group-specific identity" (Young, 1990, p. 181). Students in PUSD would greatly benefit from a program that is inclusive of all nationalities, and in turn, Arizona communities would benefit from the overall rise in student achievement, college enrollment, and career readiness. Additionally, Santa Fe Elementary's implementation of such a program during the Great Recession when Arizona's education budget was severely reduced, is evidence of its overall low cost for the district, making it a method of education reform that would serve marginalized students while doing little to widen the budget gap.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Issues that stem from U.S. public schools need to be examined closely because if they are left unresolved, the damage could have a long-lasting impact on communities across the nation. The U.S. public school system is in the midst of a crisis that can only be explained through a multifaceted analysis of current policies. This study finds that current funding of U.S. public schools is inadequate to address the needs of marginalized students. Very little federal aid is given to support K-12 education in the U.S. which leaves states with the burden of managing the funding. Unfortunately, the answer is almost always to cut the budget, alleviate programs, and terminate staff positions. At the same time, highly qualified teachers are leaving the field, and there is a decrease in new teachers entering, creating a nationwide teacher shortage. Finally, large classroom sizes, underqualified teachers, and insufficient programs leave students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families in a state of educational injustice in which they are less likely to leave school with college and career readiness.

The given solutions to the problems presented are an incomplete examination into the diverse set of circumstances that has endless possible outcomes: First, education funding should be raised at the federal level in order to eliminate spending disparities that leave students from low-income communities in need of support. Additional funding that comes from the states should not rely on taxes, but rather should come from businesses and be distributed to underserved schools. Next, administrative support and monetary incentives would improve teacher attrition and recruitment rates, bringing in and keeping

more highly-qualified teachers to the profession. Lastly, funding reform and teacher retention efforts would reduce class sizes and greatly progress individualized instruction, as well as allow for new enrichment programs to be introduced to increase student achievement.

Summary of Contributions

In the end, the students are the true victims of the serious issues laid out in this study. The inequality that is created when education spending comes from local property taxes indirectly sends a message to marginalized students that their worth is measured in a decreasing dollar amount. U.S. public school teacher dissatisfaction created by large class sizes suggests to hardworking educators that they must add to their list of obligations and, at the same time, increase student success rates at the global level. The larger class sizes that result from teachers exiting the field take away much needed opportunities for teachers to work one-on-one with students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families.

The problems discussed in this study are well-known, yet most research is narrow and concentrates on identifying a single cause and effect analysis. By proving that a lack of funding, a teacher shortage crisis, and larger class sizes are interrelated, I argue that a few simple solutions can significantly mend a dismal situation. It is likewise the goal of this research to direct attention to implications of current education policies at marginalized students. Left unattended, the U.S. public education system is denying students with special needs, ELLs, and students from low-income families their right to a fair education by stripping them of high-quality instruction in the least restrictive environment. Every student in the U.S. public school system is affected by current policies, but marginalized students experience the repercussions on a grander scale. What should stand out the most in this study is the ease at which these seemingly complicated issues could be resolved. Because the problems are intertwined, when a solution is

applied to one concern, the strain from other matters is alleviated. By widening the scope of the topic, elemental perspectives on the U.S. public school system can generate a new variation on an old theme. Most importantly, the research is meant to emphasize that while debates are often made for education reform, it is the marginalized students, more than any other demographic, who truly deserve change.

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