

The Child Wellbeing Initiative: Education, Health and Public Policy

Introduction

The Child Wellbeing Initiative (CWBI) in the UC Riverside Graduate School of Education (GSOE) is an interdisciplinary cross-campus partnership linking education, health and public policy research and practice. Its mission is to examine, understand, and propose workable solutions for enhancing children's wellbeing and closing education achievement gaps in the Inland Empire region. CWBI's first priority is to create a data-driven, theoretically grounded guide for school districts, civic governance, and public health and safety agencies to systemically strengthen instruction and promote health and achievement for high-poverty children. The overarching hypothesis is that interaction between community contexts and well known predictors of school success (e.g. human, social and physical capital) strongly influence school performance, enhancing some schools and limiting others. The contribution of these interactions to academic success (and failure) in low income/high mobility neighborhoods is too often ignored in school reform efforts. The CWBI leadership team has met twice monthly since October 2013 to design collaborative research to improve the well-being of children in the region. Leadership includes Interim Dean Douglas E. Mitchell and Rollanda O'Connor, Professors in the GSOE; Scott Allen, Associate Dean, Kendrick Davis, PhD, Director of Medical Education and Ashaunta Tumblin, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, UCR School of Medicine (SOM), and Dean and Professor Anil Deolalikar, UCR School of Public Policy, along with collaborating faculty.

CWBI Research Model

The CWBI interdisciplinary research model collates large-scale data on inequalities in school success and examines the influences of community organization, public safety, access to healthcare, and civic governance. These data are organized using Geographic Information System (GIS) maps, and interpreted using the "forms of capital", ideas developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986). The result is a contextual analysis of policies, resources, and programs creating inequalities in education within the nation's 12th largest

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metropolitan area, California's "Inland Empire" of Riverside/San Bernardino counties. GIS census data will be linked with school demographic and performance data and health statistics, and correlated with civic data such as crime statistics, libraries, recreation facilities, health clinics, and community groups. A major objective is to map contextual profiles for all schools within the region. Mapping reveals "hot spot" zones of interacting factors which identify challenging (and outperforming) school sites, documenting how family and community factors interact with school programs, policies, and practices. Geomapping software locates interactions among data elements not recognizable in public records. The project will guide education decision making in a manner analogous to how economic indicators direct economic development initiatives. As the project documents links between achievement inequalities and community contexts, it stimulates coordinated attention by education, health, and public policy leaders to opportunities to develop unified strategies for addressing education and child wellbeing improvements. The research model, once proven, can be exported to other regions.

Data

The initial CWBI interdisciplinary research project will assemble a database incorporating detailed census data, profiles of school contexts and outcomes, and health information. As analyses of these data identify high performing and underperforming locations, qualitative fieldwork will inform development of more complex models of school performance and provide refined guidance to for policy and investment. The macro sample for this study -- all elementary schools in the Riverside/San Bernardino metro area -- will be linked to "neighborhoods" constructed using Theisen polygons produced by Arc View © GIS software. Data for each neighborhood will be abstracted and associated with school variables, then a micro sample of 12 elementary school neighborhoods will be selected for qualitative field study -- four with achievement levels and gaps predicted from the neighborhood data (one from each quartile of overall gap magnitude), four with significantly smaller gaps, and four with gaps larger than predicted. These cases can stimulate areas for future intervention studies that address malleable factors linked with improved child outcomes.