



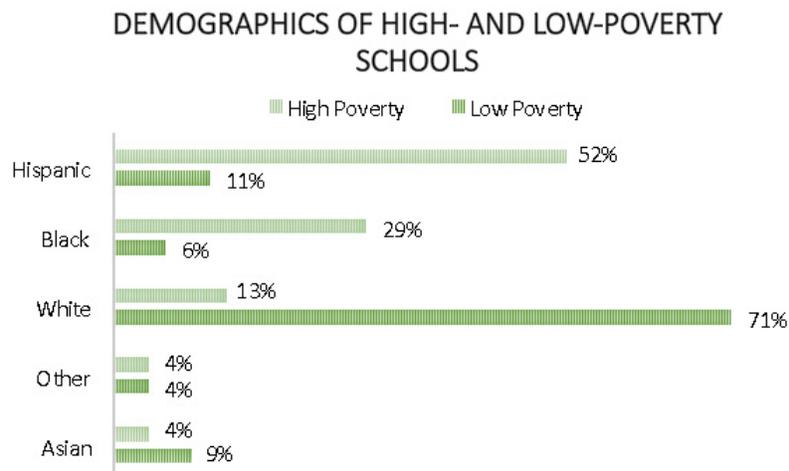
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY, RACE AND COLLEGE PREPARATION IN FIVE CHARTS



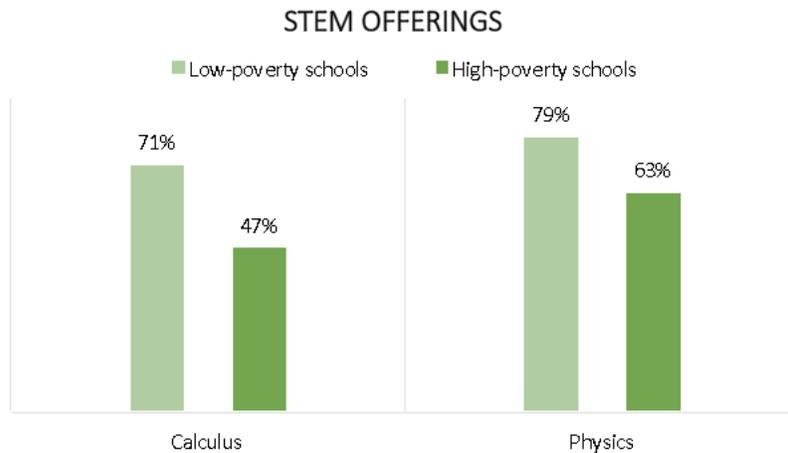
More than 14 percent of the nation's high school students attend schools where at least three quarters live in poverty. Most of these 1.8 million pupils are students of color. These low-income students and students of color are much less likely than their white and more affluent peers to attend and complete college. A new analysis illustrates one of the reasons why: These high schools with concentrated poverty are less likely to offer the coursework students need if they are to attend and succeed in four-year colleges. The analysis is presented in a [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\)](#) report released last month at the request of U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, ranking member on the House Education Committee.

Below are five charts from the report that shed light on the connection between poverty, race, and college attendance. "High-poverty" schools have free or reduced-price meal rates of at least 75 percent. "Low-poverty" schools have rates under 25 percent.

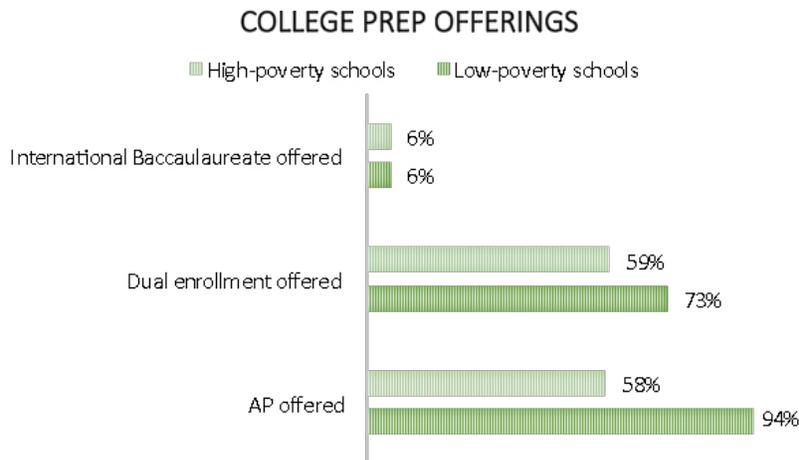
1. *Students of color are more likely to attend high-poverty high schools.*



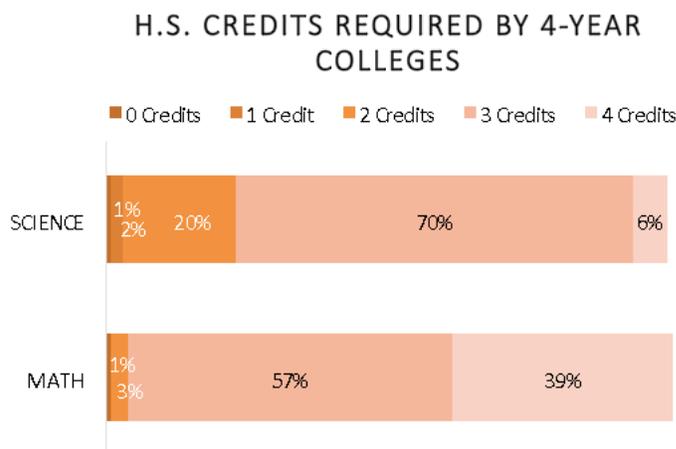
2. High-poverty schools are less likely to offer calculus and physics.



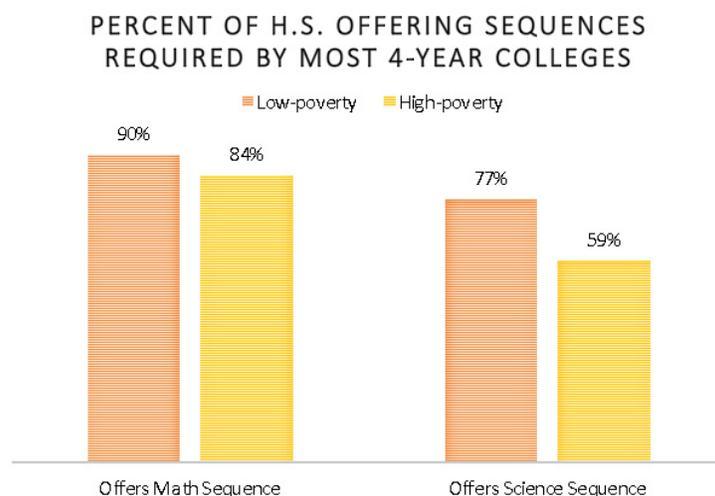
3. High-poverty schools are less likely to offer Advanced Placement courses and access to dual enrollment in high school and college classes. High- and low-poverty schools are equally likely to offer International Baccalaureate classes, but relatively few of either provide access to this option.



4. Most four-year colleges' admissions requirements call for students to take three math credits and three science credits in high school.



5. Most four-year colleges require students to take a math sequence that includes, at the very least, algebra I, geometry, and algebra II. Most require a science sequence that includes, at the very least, biology, chemistry, and physics. A smaller percentage of high-poverty schools offer the math and science sequences required by most four-year colleges.



What Can Be Done to Bridge the College-Prep Gap?

The between-school differences in access to college-preparatory classes present a very real barrier facing low-income communities and communities of color. It will be necessary to address these inequalities if our society is to close opportunity gaps. But we think it important to highlight three points:

1. Access to college-prep classes must be connected to corresponding access to the supports and resources necessary for students and their teachers to be successful.
2. In schools throughout the U.S., tracking (or “ability grouping”) systems deny low-income students and students of color access to college-prep courses even when those classes are indeed offered in their schools.
3. The GAO report analyzes what it calls “high-poverty schools”—those where at least three quarters of the students live in poverty. This is itself the core problem. Any serious effort to close opportunity gaps must begin by addressing this concentrated poverty, as well as the associated racial segregation.

In the meantime, educational leaders might look to some of the schools recognized by NEPC’s Schools of Opportunity program, where high-poverty high schools do offer their students a rigorous and equitable college-prep curriculum. For example:

- At Rainier Beach High School in Seattle (where the poverty rate is 75 percent), all 11th and 12th grade students take at least one International Baccalaureate course.
- At Seaside High School in California (where the poverty rate is 74%), all students

take core courses that prepare them for admittance to the University of California.

NEPC Resources on Tracking and Detracking

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