

Identifying Root Causes for Literacy Inequities in the Williamsburg County Education System

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ABSTRACT

There appears to be an alarming attention drawn to the low literacy rates of American citizens in the past years. The ability to read is often used synonymously with the ability to be a good citizen, hold a satisfactory job, and perform daily duties. Yet, literacy rates have fallen over the last several years. One county in particular that frames this issue is Williamsburg County of South Carolina. In Williamsburg County learning how to read ceases being taught in the third grade; from then on it is assumed that a student can read. Poor public school success rates have paved the way for private schools to outnumber public schools in the area. Because of this phenomenon, a racial literacy gap has subsequently developed in the county. Here, I propose that school budgets have an influence on the presence of this phenomenon. I hypothesize that the higher a school's budget is, the higher their general success rate in ELA studies will be. My research finds that while this may be true for Williamsburg County, other counties in the state do not mirror these same results. Additionally, I find no evidence to support the subsequent hypothesis that school budget has a correlation with literacy success rates of particular demographics. Given the results of this research, other questions as to indicating factors of school success are left unanswered for future research.

Introduction

Low literacy rates is an issue that has consistently arisen in political conversations within the United States of America. In America, all citizens have access to a free and fair education up until the completion and subsequent graduation of high school. School is made mandatory for children through high school, though some states have different drop out requirements. Individual states are required to set up school districts and teaching criteria that abides by the outline delivered by the federal government. In turn, these individual public schools are federally funded. The general idea behind this structure is that education will be equal throughout the United States for all students.

This idea of a free and fair education is perfectly balanced in theory. Yet, the actual prevalence of a free and fair education differs significantly based on geographic borders. South Carolina ranks 43rd of the 50 states in quality of education according to a recent study.¹ Even further, Williamsburg County of South Carolina can be used as an illustration of the inequities that are found within the American education system. These issues can be highlighted through the 3rd grade testing scores of the elementary schools in the county. Within Williamsburg the 3rd grade is the point in which how to read ceases to be taught. From that point forward it is assumed that you know how to read in order to further your education. In 2019, of the total 266 3rd grade students that were tested, 47% of them did not meet

¹ "2021's States with the Best & Worst School Systems," WalletHub, accessed September 11, 2021, <https://wallethub.com/edu/e/states-with-the-best-schools/5335>

ELA requirements.² Often overlooked, Williamsburg County has been severely left behind in the American education system which leads to consistent improper education for citizens.

What causes such a county to fall so low on the ranks? This education issue has proven to be such a large issue that non-governmental, non-profit organizations, such as Black River United Way, have dedicated approximately \$387,996 to helping alleviate the illiteracy issue within the county.³ It is in this situation that governmentally funded schools must accept help, whether through the form of direct funding or manpower, in order to provide a quality education for students. Additionally, some parents have begun putting their children in the few private schools that Williamsburg County has to offer in order to ensure that their children are not left behind by the school system.

Unfortunately, this private versus public school debate has, indirectly, left a large racial divide within the Williamsburg County school district. Each publicly funded school must participate in statewide testing; SC Ready is the test of choice for Williamsburg County. The last reported scores were in 2019 in which 249 self-reported black students were tested, while only 9 white students were tested. Of the 249 black students tested, 47.4% did not meet 3rd grade ELA requirements.⁴ Because of the low sample size of white students, and all other races reported, FERPA laws restrict the reporting of test scores in order to prevent identifiable information from being released.⁵ Yet, the population of the county does not reflect as distinct of a divide as the demographic of 3rd graders tested illustrates. Instead, a majority of white students have been enrolled in private schools. This illustrates the racial divide that has arisen from the poor school district.

The underlying goal of this research is to uncover any potential causes of differing school success rates in regard to literacy, starting with school funding. A special emphasis will be placed on the racial literacy gap in the county. In order to do so, schools will be analyzed using their annual budget. This budget will be used in a statistical analysis to find any potential correlation to student success. Furthermore, any potential literacy gap will be determined through a statistical analysis. Then, based on these results, the literacy and racial gap will be discussed in the framework of school budgets. All of this research will go to direct the Williamsburg County school district in a new direction. Helping to uncover the root cause of poor student success, specifically in the areas of ELA will help to push for new legislation uplifting the inequities. My research finds that while there may be a strong correlation between school budget and a positive success rate in Williamsburg County, other counties in the state do not mirror this phenomenon. Additionally, this concept does not remain true when isolating African American students' success rates.

Background Information

In order to fully grasp the influence of this research one must first look at the origins of education in the United States. In other words, why is education such a valued element of American society? American citizens have the privilege of obtaining a free, public education through the general ages of 5 to 18. Particular courses such as geometry, algebra, english language arts, etc. are required, while also allowing for some elective classes to be taken. Some public high schools have evolved to allow students to take "college credit" classes which put some students at a higher advantage when choosing to enter into a secondary education institution. The argument can be made that many other countries do not offer these same privileges to their citizens.

Alexis de Toqueville recognized the unique education dynamic and the power it held over American society in the 1830s when he maintained a scholarly visit to study the American republic. On this subject he writes, "Education

² "2019 SC READY Scores - Williamsburg (4501) by Grade Level and Demographic," South Carolina Department of Education, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://ed.sc.gov/data/test-scores/state-assessments/sc-ready/2019/district-scores-by-grade-level-and-demographic-category/?districtCode=4501&schoolCode=999>.

³ "Black River United Way," Black River United Way, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://blackriveruw.org/>.

⁴ South Carolina Department of Education, "SC Ready-Williamsburg County"

⁵ "Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)," U.S. Department of Education, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>.

has made them feel the utility of enlightenment and has put them in a position to transmit the same enlightenment to their descendants.”⁶ He further describes the importance of education in America by stipulating “One cannot doubt that in the United States the instruction of the people serves powerfully to maintain a democratic republic.”⁷ Additionally, while he recognizes that education in America is relatively widespread compared to other nations, it is relatively mediocre. Inevitably, the wealthy will achieve a higher and more preferable education than the widespread public. Even so, it should still be noted that these concepts, in their time, only generally applied to white males. Nevertheless, this work frames the intangible importance that education has held in American society and its importance in creating civilly aware citizens.

While America prides itself on the idea that everyone has an opportunity for a free and fair education, this idea has been severely limited in practice in the past. Numerous U.S. Supreme Court cases and both federal, and state legislation, have shaped the modern educational system. One of the most influential U.S. Supreme Court cases to shape the educational system was *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1)*. This Supreme Court case established that the ideal of “separate but equal” was a violation of the 14th Amendment; the separation of races for the purposes of education is inherently unequal because it imposes a feeling of inferiority on African American students.⁸ This ideal was furthered in the sister case, *Brown v. Board of Topeka (2)* when the Supreme Court established guidelines in continuously enforcing the previous decision.⁹

Other important shaping factors in the American educational system include *Engel v. Vitale*, which established that prayers could not be used in publicly funded schools.¹⁰ In *Tinker v. Des Moines* it was established that the freedom of speech can be restricted in school settings.¹¹ More recently, federal legislation, such as the “No Child Left Behind” act, was passed with the intention to protect all groups of students, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized in the past. The legislation cites four pillars that public schools are meant to emphasize: accountability, flexibility, research-based education, and parent options.¹² Each of these important shaping factors have had an impact on how the American education system operates in the United States.

South Carolina is primarily a rural state in which Williamsburg County captures this essence perfectly. As of July 1, 2019, approximately 30,368 people reside in Williamsburg County. Of these approximate 30,000 people, 33% of the population is white and 64.5% of the population is black or African American. Approximately 2.3% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino. All other racial minorities within the county estimate less than 1.0%.¹³ The county is one of the more impoverished counties in the state. Additionally, the county has been cited in multiple publications regarding the poor school system. Personal interviews with actors in the school system revealed a general lack of confidence in the public school system. This has given rise to the number of private schools in the area.

There are inevitably a variety of factors that influence school success within the American education system. Reasonable deduction stipulates factors such as geographic income, parent involvement, number of classes offered,

⁶ Alexis de. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: G. Dearborn & Co, 1838), 290.

⁷ Alexis de. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 291.

⁸ “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka 1”, Oyez, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/347us483>.

⁹ “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka 2”, Oyez, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/349us294>.

¹⁰ “Engel v. Vitale”, Oyez, accessed October 23, 2021, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1961/468>.

¹¹ “Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District”, Oyez, accessed October 23, 2021, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1968/21>.

¹² “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,” Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, accessed October 23, 2021, <https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/grants-grant-management/every-student-succeeds-act-essa-implementation/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-esea/no-child-left-behind-act-2001>.

¹³ “Williamsburg County, SC,” Census Reporter, Accessed August 31, 2021, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US45089-williamsburg-county-sc/.%20>.

teacher to student ratio, and school budget can hold this influence. It is estimated that the school budget will be the most influential of these factors because it encompasses each other. Thus, this factor has been chosen for research. The previously published literature and research on the subject leads to the distinct recognition of an education hypothesis; as the budget of a school grows greater, the higher the rate of success in the subject of English language arts will be. This hypothesis stems from the fact that an elevated budget allows more resources to be spent on education activities and items. Additionally, it is assumed that this same phenomenon will be witnessed when isolating the success rates of particular demographics, illustrating the importance of understanding the racial literacy gap in the county.

Research Design

To study the connection between school success, particularly in literacy, and school budget, I first looked at the potential indicators of school success based on South Carolina's grading curriculum. As previously discussed, South Carolina uses a variety of tests to measure growth including SC Ready, SC Pass, and EOCEP. From these standardized tests I chose to use the SC Ready test because it is the one specific test that directly analyzes English Language Arts and mathematics state requirements, although mathematics will not be analyzed in this particular study. Additionally, this test has been cited by the SC Department of Education as conforming with "Acts 155 and 200, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), and the Assessments Peer Review guidance".¹⁴ This particular standardized test suits the needs of this particular study because it places a specific emphasis on the meeting of expectations for the state of South Carolina in literacy requirements.

A brief discussion as to why Williamsburg County School District was chosen as the primary research subject in this study is warranted. As previously discussed, Williamsburg County is unique in that it is one of the only counties in South Carolina in which the African American population outnumbers the white population. Additionally, Williamsburg County is one of the more impoverished counties within the state. This has contributed to a soft discussion among the residents as to the effectiveness of the school system in the area.

In order to find a comprehensive list of elementary schools that serve Williamsburg County I took advantage of the Williamsburg County School District website to identify which public schools serve third grade students within their curriculum. A total of four elementary schools were deemed viable for this study: D.P. Cooper Elementary, Greeleyville Elementary, Hemingway Elementary, and Kenneth Gardner Elementary.¹⁵ In order for a public school to be deemed viable for this study they must receive federal funding and serve a third grade class. Each of those listed meets this criteria, and thus, will be used.

Composing a full list of private schools within the county was slightly more difficult because each are individually operated without significant reporting to the state. Eventually I constructed a list of five private schools serving students in Williamsburg County through a third-party website that works in reporting details about private schools: Hemingway Day School, Kingstree Christian Academy, The King's Academy, Williamsburg Academy, and Williamsburg Kindergarten Daycare.¹⁶ In order to be eligible for the study the private school in question must serve a third grade class. Only four of these private schools were deemed eligible to participate in the study due to the grades that they serve; Williamsburg Kindergarten Daycare was discarded from the study because they do not serve third grade students.

Utilizing the South Carolina Department of Education website, I recorded the SC Ready test scores for each of the public elementary schools previously mentioned. I pulled scores from the 2019 school year, as scores for the 2020 school year are not available, presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each elementary school's SC Ready test

¹⁴ South Carolina Department of Education, "SC Ready-Williamsburg County"

¹⁵ "Williamsburg County Schools," Williamsburg County School District, accessed August 29, 2021, <https://www.wcsd.k12.sc.us/domain/239>

¹⁶ "Williamsburg Private Schools," Search University, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://search.university/private-schools-map/south-carolina/williamsburg-county>

scores were further broken down by demographic category. These include gender, disability status, race, migrant status, English proficiency, and students in poverty. The demographic categories reported for the purposes of this study were race and pupils in poverty. Each schools' results were recorded in a spreadsheet. Results recorded included "Number of White Students", "Number of Black Students", "Other Minorities", "Total Students", "Pupils in Poverty", "Percentage of Students Who Meet Expectations", "Percentage of Students Who Do Not Meet Expectations", "Percentage of Black Students Who Meet Expectations", and "Percentage of Black Students Who Do Not Meet Expectations". The category defined as "Other Minorities" includes a total sum of students who identify as Asian, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and individuals with 2 or more races. These measurements were only taken for the English Language Arts test reports.

Private schools are not inclined to disclose standardized testing reports because they do not receive public funding. Thus, many private schools do not publicly display their test results for each year. In order to account for this difference I reached out to each individual private school asking for this information. This information is noticeably absent from this study as a lack of transparency makes it difficult to determine the gauge the overall success of the school. Yet, one can assume that because a significant proportion of students whose families can afford to indulge in a private education do participate, they are successful in their teachings. Nevertheless, this ideal will be discussed in further detail later.

In order to determine the budgets of each public school I used the Williamsburg County education district website to find previously published budgets. Budgets from the 2017-2018 school year were used, as the 2019-2020 budget is subsequently missing from the county's database.¹⁷ Additionally, this particular budget may yield more accurate results as it is free from the economic constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic and it reflects the school year in which the reported 2019 SC Ready test scores reflect. Each elementary school involved in the study had their budget recorded in the spreadsheet. The budgets are shown to be broken down by accounts and subsequent categories. Yet, for the purpose of this study the budget was taken as a whole. This results from the fact that money is often allocated to one resource, but may be changed after the final approval of the budget. Taking the budget as a whole may yield more accurate results by accounting for money reallocation. As for private schools, I once again reached out for this information as it is not publicly displayed.

The statistical program R was used to find any correlation between school budget and the percentage of students who "Meet Expectations" in the ELA category and those who "Do Not Meet Expectations"; both correlation coefficients will be analyzed for any potential correlation. These tests will be separated by school categories, then subsequently paired together. Additionally, the statistical program R was used to divide this overall measurement between African American students who "Meet Expectations" and those who "Do Not Meet Expectations". This same process was executed for white students in the county when the sample size was large enough to report on. Unfortunately, FERPA laws did come to pose an issue during this process, which is discussed in further detail in the "Limitations" section of this research.

Findings

After receiving no response from each of the private schools that I contacted in regard to budget and school success, I chose to conduct further tests to receive more insight on the correlation between budget and school success in literacy. The Horry County school district was subsequently used to compare public school success in regards to literacy, using any potential correlation with budget. This particular district was chosen because it represents one of the more efficient and higher performing school districts in the state. Additionally, it is a relatively close district to Williamsburg which

¹⁷ "Approved Budgets," Williamsburg County School District, Accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.wcsd.k12.sc.us/Page/1730>.

can help to eliminate some biasing factors. The data gathering process for Horry County mirrors that of the data gathering process for the public schools within Williamsburg County.¹⁸

Within Williamsburg County there were a total of 4 public schools that qualified to participate in the research study. The total budget for these elementary schools was \$9,527,180.88, with an average of \$2,381,795.22. Within the county, 249 black students tested under the SC Ready test, whereas only 9 white students tested. In 2 schools there was a reporting of 0 white students. There was an average of 59 students living in poverty for each school. These findings, taken from the Department of Education, are illustrated in *Figure 1* which displays each demographic category recorded by the Department of Education.¹⁹ The average percentage of students who met expectations was 15.97% and the average percentage of students who did not meet expectations was 42.63%. For the 3 schools that reported proportions of African American students' test scores, an average of 13.9% met expectations and an average of 42.13% did not meet expectations. In all 4 schools a percentage illustrating the number of white students that met or did not meet the ELA requirements is noticeably absent due to FERPA laws.

Within Horry County there were a total of 25 public schools that qualified to participate in the study. The average budget of these schools was \$5,011,875, with a total budget amounting to \$125,296,870. Of the 3,273 third grade students that took the SC Ready test, 570 of these students were African American and 1,871 were white. There was an average of 87.8 students living in poverty in each elementary school. These findings, taken from the Department of Education, are illustrated in *Figure 2* which displays each demographic category reported by the Department of Education for Horry County.²⁰ The average percentage of students who met expectations in each school was 30.9% and the average percentage of students who did not meet expectations was 17.93%. Of the 12 schools that reported proportions of African American students, the average percentage of African Americans who met expectations was 23.96% and the percentage of African Americans who did not meet expectations was 36.46%. The average percentage of white students who met expectations was 30.79% and the average percentage of white students who did not meet expectations was 12.25%.

¹⁸ "Official Budget," Horry County Schools Division of Fiscal Services, Accessed October 23, 2021, <https://www.horrycountyschools.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=401&dataid=56338&FileName=2018-19%20Official%20Budget.pdf>.

¹⁹ "2019 SC READY Scores - Williamsburg (4501) by Grade Level and Demographic," South Carolina Department of Education, Accessed September 5, 2021, <https://ed.sc.gov/data/test-scores/state-assessments/sc-ready/2019/district-scores-by-grade-level-and-demographic-category/?districtCode=4501&schoolCode=999>.

²⁰ "2019 SC READY Scores - Horry (2601) by Grade Level and Demographic," South Carolina Department of Education, Accessed October 23, 2021, <https://ed.sc.gov/data/test-scores/state-assessments/sc-ready/2019/district-scores-by-grade-level-and-demographic-category/?districtCode=2601&schoolCode=999>.

Grade 3
English Language Arts (ELA)

Demographic	Number Tested	Does Not Meet Expectations	Approaches Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	Meets or Exceeds Expectations	Approaches Meets or Exceeds Expectations	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
All Students	266	47.0%	32.0%	16.2%	4.9%	21.1%	53.0%	373.0	99.9
Male	139	55.4%	27.3%	12.9%	4.3%	17.3%	44.6%	354.3	102.2
Female	127	37.8%	37.0%	19.7%	5.5%	25.2%	62.2%	393.4	93.2
Hispanic or Latino	2								
American Indian or Alaska Native	0								
Asian	1								
Black or African American	249	47.4%	32.5%	15.3%	4.8%	20.1%	52.6%	372.2	99.5
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0								
White	9								
Two or more races	4								
Disabled	43	88.4%	9.3%	2.3%	NaN%	2.3%	11.6%	275.0	70.8
Not Disabled	223	39.0%	36.3%	18.8%	5.8%	24.7%	61.0%	391.9	93.5
Migrant	0								
Non-migrant	266	47.0%	32.0%	16.2%	4.9%	21.1%	53.0%	373.0	99.9
Limited English Proficient	2								
Non-LEP	264	47.0%	31.8%	16.3%	4.9%	21.2%	53.0%	373.2	100.0
Pupils in Poverty (PIP)	237	48.5%	30.4%	15.6%	5.5%	21.1%	51.5%	373.4	99.6
Non-PIP	14								

Figure 1

Figure 1 is a chart taken from the Department of Education. It details the demographic breakdown of 3rd grade ELA test scores in Williamsburg County.

Grade 3
English Language Arts (ELA)

Demographic	Number Tested	Does Not Meet Expectations	Approaches Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	Meets or Exceeds Expectations	Approaches Meets or Exceeds Expectations	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
All Students	3,273	19.1%	23.2%	29.3%	28.4%	57.7%	80.9%	466.7	117.4
Male	1,676	22.1%	24.3%	28.2%	25.4%	53.6%	77.9%	455.8	117.7
Female	1,597	16.0%	22.0%	30.4%	31.6%	62.0%	84.0%	478.2	115.9
Hispanic or Latino	515	27.6%	25.2%	27.4%	19.8%	47.2%	72.4%	433.8	120.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	11								
Asian	38	18.4%	5.3%	23.7%	52.6%	76.3%	81.6%	523.0	120.6
Black or African American	570	35.6%	29.1%	24.0%	11.2%	35.3%	64.4%	405.6	106.7
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	9								
White	1,871	11.7%	21.0%	30.8%	36.5%	67.3%	88.3%	495.0	110.9
Two or more races	259	20.5%	25.1%	33.2%	21.2%	54.4%	79.5%	453.6	108.4
Disabled	588	57.0%	18.7%	13.9%	10.4%	24.3%	43.0%	362.9	119.8
Not Disabled	2,685	10.8%	24.2%	32.6%	32.4%	65.0%	89.2%	489.5	103.8
Migrant	0								
Non-migrant	3,273	19.1%	23.2%	29.3%	28.4%	57.7%	80.9%	466.7	117.4
Limited English Proficient	466	28.1%	27.3%	24.9%	19.7%	44.6%	71.9%	432.6	122.5
Non-LEP	2,807	17.6%	22.5%	30.0%	29.9%	59.9%	82.4%	472.4	115.6
Pupils in Poverty (PIP)	2,238	23.3%	25.9%	28.5%	22.3%	50.8%	76.7%	447.4	113.4
Non-PIP	1,032	10.0%	17.4%	30.9%	41.7%	72.6%	90.0%	509.1	114.6

Figure 2

Figure 2 is a chart taken from the Department of Education. It details the demographic breakdown of 3rd grade ELA test scores in Horry County.

The correlation coefficient for budget versus third grade students who met expectations in Williamsburg County in 2019 is 0.9998. The correlation coefficient for budget versus third grade students who did not meet expectations in Williamsburg County in 2019 is -0.2797. When isolating the success of African American students in Williamsburg County the correlation coefficient for budget versus African Americans who meet expectations is 0.9894. The converse, African American students who do not meet expectations, is -0.0899. No correlation coefficient can be determined for the demographic category for white students because the sample size is too small.

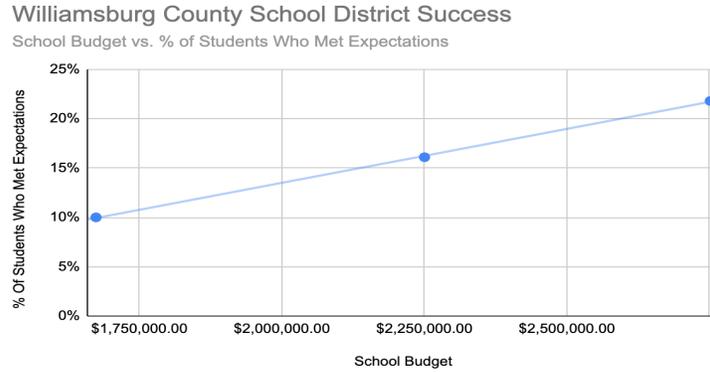


Figure 3

Figure 3 is a visual representation of the correlation between elementary school budget and the proportion of students that met expectations in Williamsburg County. Data taken from the 2019 school year.

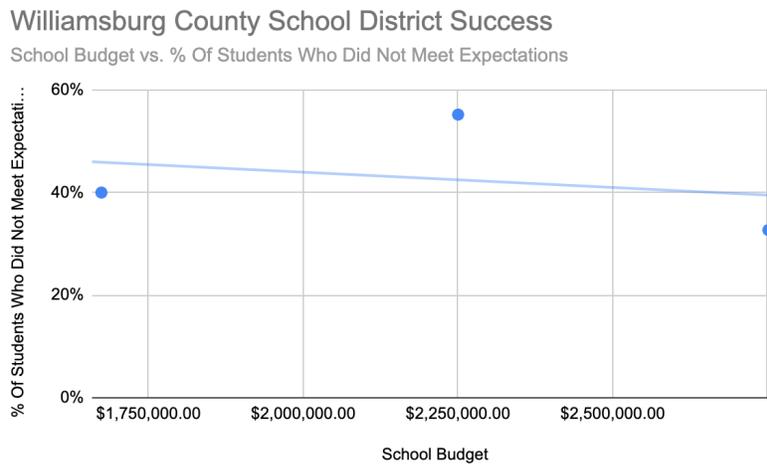


Figure 4

Figure 4 is a visual representation of the correlation between elementary school budget and the proportion of students that did not meet expectations in Williamsburg County. Data taken from the 2019 school year.

The correlation coefficient for budget versus third grade students who met expectations in Horry County in 2019 is 0.4154. The correlation coefficient for budget versus third grade students who did not meet expectations in Horry County in 2019 is -0.1979. The correlation coefficient when isolating the African American student demographic category for those who meet expectations is -0.1979. For those who do not meet expectations the correlation coefficient is 0.3115. Because there was a large sample size of white students who took the SC Ready test, correlation coefficients can be determined for this particular demographic category. For those who met expectations the correlation coefficient is 0.3115. For those who did not meet expectations the correlation coefficient is 0.0894.

Williamsburg County had two elementary schools in which there were 0 reported white students, each of Horry County's elementary schools had a reportable population for white and African American students. While Horry County has a larger population pool than Williamsburg County, and Williamsburg has a higher population proportion of African Americans than whites, this does not explain the low attendance of white students in Williamsburg County elementary schools.

Discussion

The importance of these findings must be broken down and analyzed from several points of view. The results of this study yield several different conclusions on a multitude of questions posed. First, the implication of the correlation coefficients for each individual district will be discussed. Then, they will be discussed in conjunction with each other. Then, a discussion on the private versus public school divide in Williamsburg County will manifest.

The correlation coefficient for Williamsburg County when discussing the proportion of students who meet ELA expectations yields a strong, positive correlation, nearly equivalent to a perfectly linear correlation. This ultimately means that, based on the data collected, the higher the school budget, the more likely that a higher proportion of students will meet ELA requirements. When you look at the converse of this, the proportion of students who did not meet ELA requirements, there is a negative correlation, which is to be expected. Yet, this correlation is relatively weak which is unexpected. Visually, this correlation appears to be random. This indicates that a lowering in school budget does not necessarily explain lower success rates in ELA.

Additionally, when isolating the scores of African American students in Williamsburg County similar results are found. Although the correlation coefficient for school budget versus the proportion of African American students who met expectations was weaker than that of the whole, it is still very strong. This, once again, indicates that when school funding increases, the rate in which African American citizens meet ELA expectations increases. Yet, there is a negative, very weak correlation between school funding and the proportion of African American students who did not meet expectations which, visually, appears random.

As for Horry County, in neither correlation test for the general population of students is a strong correlation found. This is important to the results of this study as it may cause disregard for the results found in the Williamsburg County tests. This indicates that there is some fundamental difference in the ways in which school funding affects elementary schools in one district versus another. While the root cause of this difference was not investigated, this finding is incredibly important to the research of funding and school success as it shows that a strong correlation may exist in one district and not in another.

Furthermore, when isolating the scores of African American students we find that there is a weak correlation between both school budget and the proportion of African American students who met expectations and school budget and the proportion of African American students who did not meet expectations. Yet, what is perhaps more important in this context is the idea that although African Americans take the minority in this case, this correlation is stronger than that of isolating white students' scores. What this ultimately means is that the school budget has a higher correlation to literacy success, both positive and negative, when isolating African American students, than the correlation found when isolating white students. This may indicate that the influence of budget has a higher impact on students of color than white students, which should be further explained through deeper research.

These correlation coefficients yield results that both support and deny the original hypothesis. This is a unique find as it may indicate that local politics and budget appropriation has a heavier impact on school success than the budget itself. Additionally, these results not only uphold the preexisting idea that there is a racial literacy gap between white students and African American students, but indicate that the level of funding may affect this phenomenon to some degree which should be further explored in conjunction with local politics and funding appropriation.

The primary purpose of this research study was to uncover any potential correlation between school budget and literacy success, which it discussed in detail. Yet, an byproduct of this research was to discuss the impact of the private versus public school debate on both school success and the racial literacy gap in the county. It should be noted

that little information does not equate to no influence. The voluntary declination of private schools to disclose such information may speak to a lack of transparency in the Williamsburg County School District. Furthermore, this may speak to the deeper issue in which American continuously declines to truly address the issue of underfunded, understaffed, and overlooked school districts in impoverished counties. This is what ultimately sparks the increase in the privatization of education in these districts. Once again, the lack of information does not correlate to a lack of importance and discussion.

It should be particularly noted that the number of private schools in Williamsburg County, although not by a significant number, outnumbers the number of public schools. This proves to be an important element as it poses questions as to the competency of the public schools in the district. This important finding may begin the discussion on the need for better funding or resources for the public schools in the county. Potential future research could take form of a qualitative study through the utilization of interviews of parents with children in private schools and public schools should private schools continue to deny information as to demographic populations and school success.

Limitations

Although this study was sound for its primary purpose, there are inevitably few limitations on the application of its results. The significance of private schools declining to disclose their budgets and school success has already been discussed; it still must be discussed in the frame of a limitation on the applicability of this study's results. Having this information on the private schools of Williamsburg County would prove to be beneficial in discussion between the private versus public divide in education. While comparing two different public school districts to discuss the effect of budgets on school success, having information on the correlation between private school budget and success can only help to further this discussion. Should this information yield a higher correlation coefficient it may further help to direct conversations regarding improvement of the Williamsburg County school district.

Because the private schools in Williamsburg County require payment to attend, one can reasonably assume that their budgets will be significantly higher than that of the public schools analyzed as they do not primarily rely on tax brackets and local citizens to provide obligated funding. Thus, it would be reasonably assumed that because their budget is significantly higher the success of their students will rise accordingly. This only furthers the illustrated racial divide in the county, as a super majority of the white students residing in Williamsburg attend these private schools. Nevertheless, this simply reflects a potential limitation on the applicability of the results found.

It was also mentioned that several schools lacked accurate information on the proportions of certain demographics of students who either met or did not meet ELA expectations. This inability to report these proportions stems from the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Acts, or FERPA. This federal law is aimed at protecting the privacy of students receiving a public education with a special emphasis on their performance. Any school that receives federal funding must abide by this law in order to continue receiving funds. This federal law stipulates that personally identifiable information, especially regarding grades and academic success, cannot be released to anyone except the parent of the minor. Because some schools had significantly small populations of particular demographics, their proportions of success were not able to be legally released because this would contain personally identifiable information. This poses a limitation on the application of these results because some schools are inevitably left out of some correlation tests. Should their proportions have been known and included they could have either strengthened or weakened the correlation coefficient.

The South Carolina Department of Education does report those with identified disabilities when reporting scores. Yet, these are not isolated when reporting the percentage of those who meet expectations and those who do not as a whole and based upon race. Thus, those with learning disabilities may influence the percentages of those who meet expectations and those who do not when reporting based as a whole and based upon race. Isolating their effects would be significantly difficult due to FERPA laws and the identifiable information used. Additionally, students with unidentified disabilities are inevitably included in these proportions as well. This may skew the overall reportings, but it is estimated that this skew is relatively small and should not affect the findings as a whole.

Concluding Remarks

Although this research study uncovered a significant number of questions to be further researched, the findings are still significant in themselves. The evidence illustrates that there may be a conflict among school districts in how a school budget affects their school success in regards to literary success. This goes to somewhat reject the initial hypothesis which estimated that as a school's budget increases their success in ELA requirements will also increase. This brings questions about the influence of local politics and other agents that hold a stake in education into the discussion. Furthermore, the racial literacy gap in Williamsburg County was both established and discussed in the light of this research. Although a definite cause of this inequity was not reached, the research does illustrate fundamental differences in reactions to school funding between African American students and white students. This ultimately brings about the opening of an important discussion in light of racial politics.

Future research should be aimed at helping to further unpack the complicated results found in this study. Doing so can help create a more efficient school system nationwide so as to increase the faith in the American educational system. Nevertheless, the information found in this study contributes heavily to the research on the education system in the United States. Although a definite answer was not reached, this still serves as an important marker to the transparency, efficiency, and equity of the American educational system.

Future Directions

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on all aspects of life; education is not immune to this influence. Williamsburg is a primarily rural county which affects the wide-spread access to the internet. Because the COVID-19 pandemic shifted Williamsburg County school districts operations to a strictly online setting during the 2020 school year, access to the internet has become essential to the success of students. Yet, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that only 51.3% of citizens residing in Williamsburg County have broadband access to the internet.²¹ This means that nearly half of all citizens in Williamsburg County, approximately 48.7%, do not have stable and regular access to an internet subscription. Although the school district dispatched school buses equipped with wifi "hot spots" during the 2020 school year, the use of such "hot spots" was not regular. Thus, this leaves questions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on literacy rates and the racial literacy divide within the county. These impending questions are imperative to answer in order to fully understand the impact of the education system in Williamsburg County. Inevitably, understanding this influence can help to explain the racial literacy divide as well.

As previously illustrated, a large portion, if not all, of the private schools in Williamsburg County cite religion as a large byproduct of their school. Although these schools may focus on different religions, most fall into the Christianity realm of religion. Such a religion has particular morals and beliefs that are placed upon the children that attend subsequent schools. These particular morals and beliefs may inevitably have an impact on education, whether it is the lessons being taught or the motivations that contribute to school success. As such, it would be an incredible resource to understand the influence that attendance of a religious private school has on an individual's academic success. Potential future research studies can focus on the influence that religion has on both school success and individual success.

Furthermore, it may be beneficial to conduct a long-term study into the secondary education of Williamsburg County school children. According to the U.S. Census Bureau about 80.1% of Williamsburg County citizens have achieved at least a high school degree, or equivalent. Yet, with the literacy success in grade schools dipping, one must stop to ask how this phenomenon is possible. Thus, a long-term study is warranted in order to understand where the shift between poor literacy success and high graduation rates occurs. Understanding the breakdown between high

²¹"QuickFacts: Williamsburg County, South Carolina," United States Census Bureau, Accessed September 10, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/williamsburgcountysouthcarolina,US/HSG010219>.

school degrees and the acquisition of a GED can help shed more light onto the factors that influence this percentage. Going further, this study should also focus on the racial divide in those who achieve a high school degree, or equivalent, in order to more fully understand the racial education gap in the county as a whole.

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