



SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION DISPARITIES

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL #4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the historical context for South Africa's current education disparities?
- What dynamics influence the existence and severity of education disparities in South Africa?
- How do disparities in access to quality education affect South Africa as a nation, as well as South African people from a variety of backgrounds?
- What future measures—such as policies, practices, and technology—might help improve quality education access for marginalized South Africans?

BACKGROUND

Near the end of the twentieth century, South Africa underwent tremendous social and political change with the end of apartheid. Under apartheid's overt racially discriminatory social and economic systems, black South Africans were segregated and provided vastly inferior educational opportunities. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 institutionalized this segregation and stripped black students of rights, funneling them through geographically isolated, inferior, poorly funded schools.

However, after Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994, the South African government radically restructured education, improving funding to the extent that the country now spends more on education than many other developed nations. Why then, do academic scores and outcomes remain so dramatically unequal for black South Africans? Clearly, the effects of apartheid are deeply embedded within the education system — increased funding has failed to make much difference in improving the lives of black students, and the overall health of South African society as a whole.

These historic disparities show up in various ways within the education and social systems of South Africa. Though non-white South Africans make up more than 90% of the population, these groups still lag far behind the white population in academics, access to quality teachers, and future economic prosperity. The best, safest schools require additional economic investment in transportation, uniform, and supply fees — making them unattainable for many black students, especially those in rural locations and townships. Further, students with disabilities (and other disadvantaged populations) are regularly excluded from education. Improving education outcomes for all South Africans and ensuring sustainable civic health in the country will require innovative

thinking and careful implementation of meaningful changes.

RESOURCES

Personal Stories

- [We Are Still Fighting for a School for My Child \(Human Rights Watch\)](#)
- [The Faces Behind South Africa's Fees Must Fall Movement \(CNN\)](#)
- [Documenting History and Amplifying Young Voices in South Africa \(Global Fund for Children\)](#)

Articles

- [In South Africa, Families are Throwing in a Load of Laundry and Picking Up a Book \(Good Things Guy Podcast\)](#)
- [South Africa has One of the World's Worst Education Systems \(The Economist\)](#)
- [Africa Grapples with Huge Disparities in Education \(Africa Renewal\)](#)
- [Education for Black People in South Africa is in a Terrible State \(Huffington Post\)](#)
- [Access to Education, Skilled Jobs Creation Can Accelerate Poverty Reduction and Inequality in South Africa \(World Bank\)](#)
- [Jacob Zuma's Legacy Is a Weakened South Africa \(NY Times\)](#)

- [Generating New Ideas for Sustainable Education in South Africa \(UNESCO\)](#)
- [Why Schools in Rich Areas Get More Funding than Poor Areas \(Global Citizen\)](#)
- [Good School, Rich School; Bad School, Poor School \(The Atlantic\)](#)

Data and Maps

- [Statistics South Africa](#)
- [Education at a Glance 2019 \(Country Note\)](#)
- [Education Statistics - South Africa \(World Bank\)](#)
- [Education System Profiles -- South Africa \(World Education Services\)](#)

Photos and Videos

- [Some Children are More Equal than Others](#)
- [Education in South Africa: Two Unequal Systems](#)
- [South Africa: Children with Disabilities Denied Education](#)
- [New Initiative to Try to Keep South Africa's Children Safe \(Al Jazeera\)](#)

Websites

- [South Africa \(UNESCO\)](#)
- [South Africa \(UNICEF\)](#)
- [South African Ministry of Education](#)
- [Apartheid \(The History Channel\)](#)
- [Youth Advocacy Toolkit -- The Education We Want](#)

