URBAN EDUCATION

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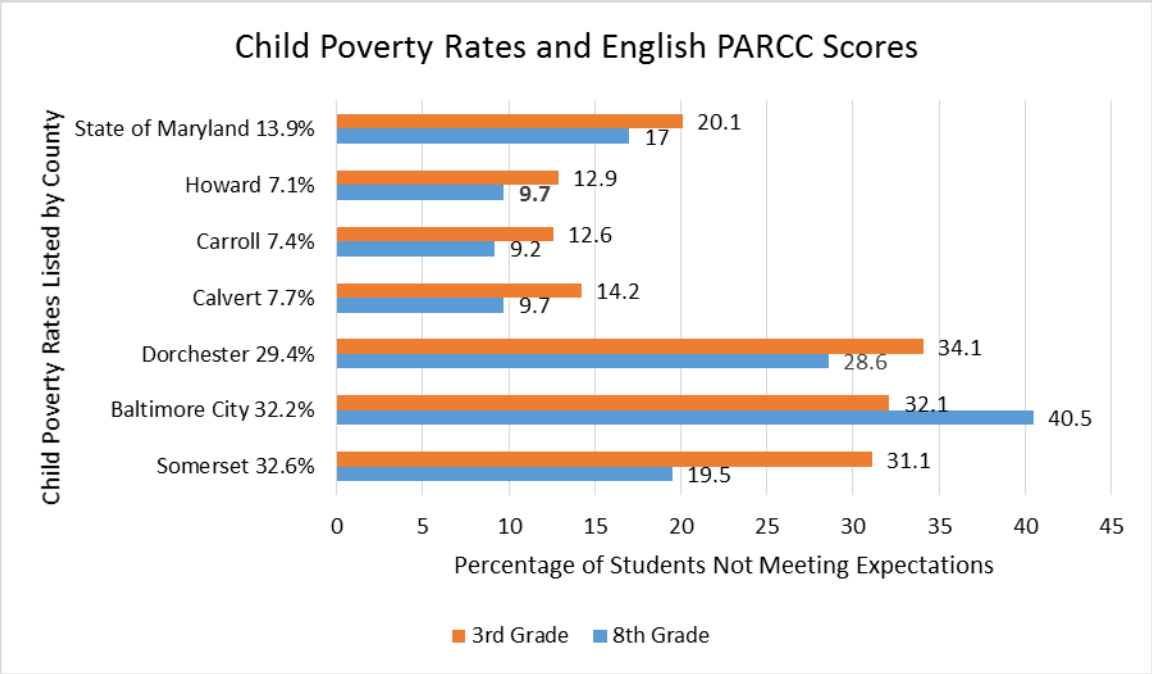
Academic Achievement and Urban Education

Children in urban communities face many problems that often are exacerbated by their environments. Many struggle with homelessness, poverty, poor health care, and a lack of transportation. These issues can lead to chronic health problems, negative behaviors, and poor academic performance. In Maryland, Baltimore City tends to have greater disparities in academic achievement than the other counties in the state. Students in counties with higher rates of child poverty on average perform worse than students in counties with lower rates of child poverty. Despite this trend, students in Baltimore City, which has the second highest child poverty rate in Maryland, consistently perform worse than students in Somerset County, which has the highest child poverty rate, in almost all areas of academic achievement.

English PARCC Scores

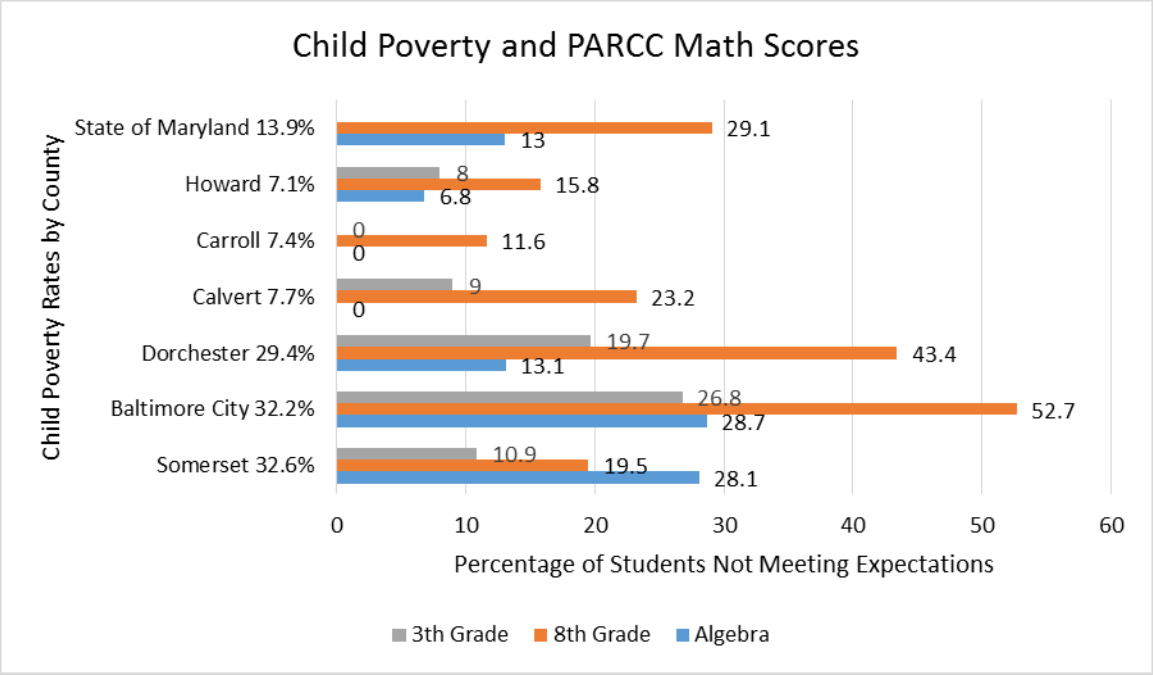


Wealthier students outperform poorer students on standardized tests. This chart compares the percentage of third grade and eighth grade students not meeting expectations on the English Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exams in the three counties with the highest child poverty rates and the three counties with the lowest child poverty rates. The child poverty rate for each county is listed next to the county name,[1] as is the poverty rate for the state of Maryland. The data show that there are higher percentages of students below expectations in the counties with high child poverty rates than in counties with low child poverty rates. For example, in Baltimore City, 40.5% of eighth graders failed to meet expectations on the English PARCC exam, which is more than double the State's average of 17%.[2]

[1] Poverty rates and PARCC results were taken from Advocates for Children and Youth Factsheets, available at: http://www.acy.org /wp-content/uploads/2014/01/2016-Combined-County-Data-Sheets-for-print-and-web.pdf.

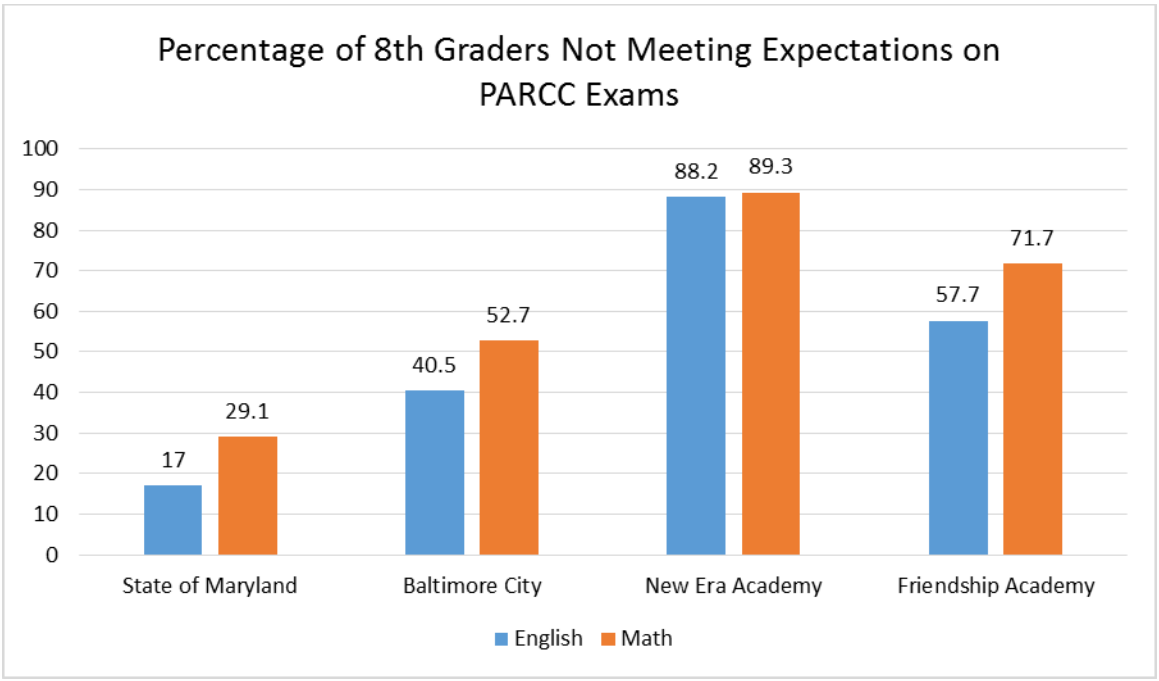
[2] PARCC results are also available from the 2015 Maryland Report Card, available at: http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/index. aspx?K=30AAAA.

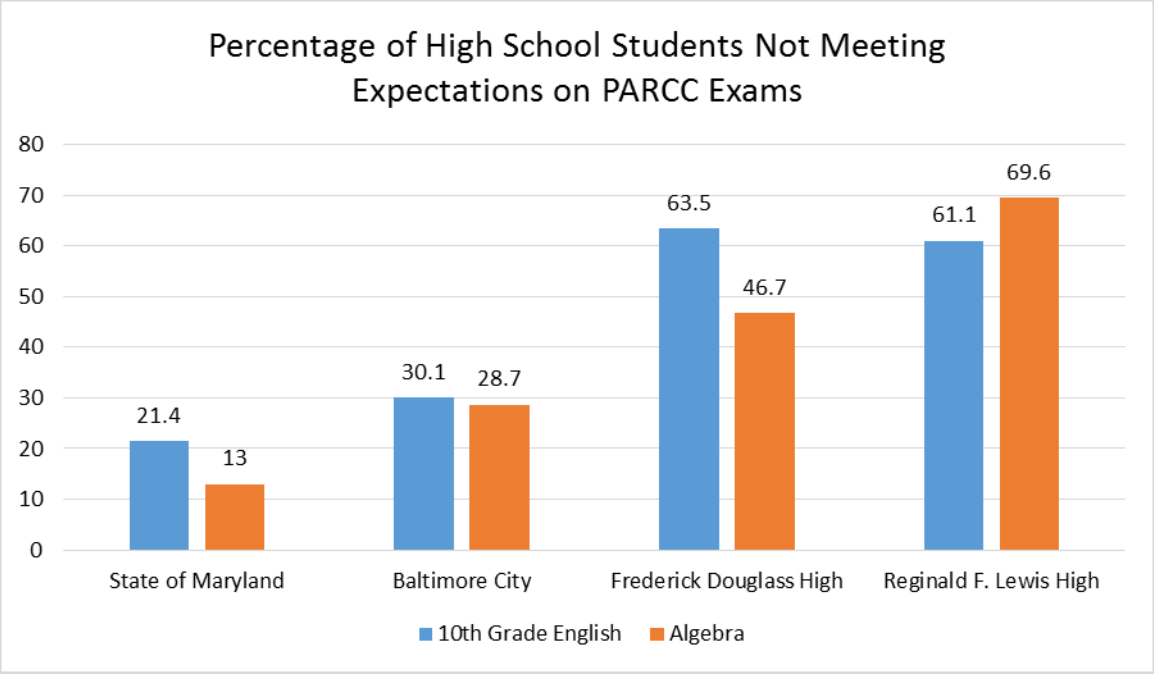
Math PARCC Scores



The Math PARCC results also indicate that students in counties with low child poverty rates generally perform significantly better on standardized tests than those in counties with high child poverty rates. PARCC Math scores were compared for third graders, eighth graders, and for Algebra 1, which is typically taken in high school. The data show that in Dorchester County and Baltimore City, which are among the three counties with the highest child poverty rates, there are higher percentages of students not meeting expectations, particularly in the eighth grade, than in counties with lower child poverty rates. In Somerset County, the highest percentage of students not meeting expectations is in Algebra at 28.1%, which is more than double the State percentage at 13%. Baltimore City has more than three times the number of students not meeting expectations in every age group than Howard County, the county with the lowest child poverty rate in the State.

Baltimore City. The vast majority of students in those Baltimore City schools where the University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhof Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) has operated or currently operates its Truancy Court Program qualify for Free and Reduced Meals (FARM). Students in some of these schools often perform lower than the city average on standardized tests, as depicted in the next two charts.

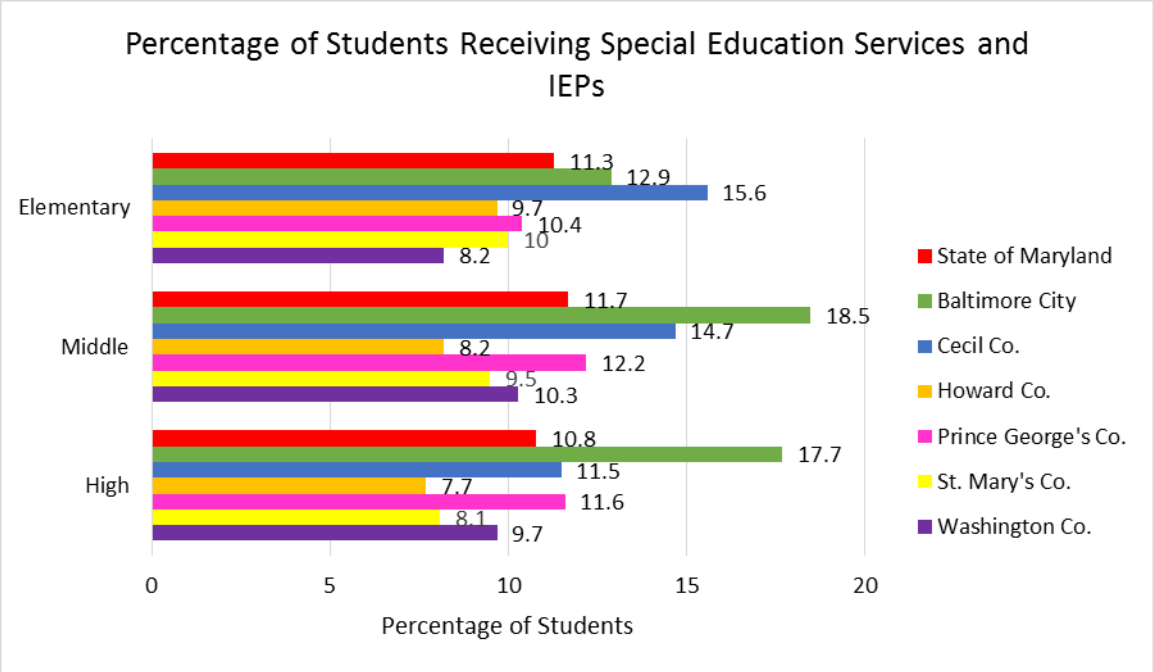




In sharp contrast, for example, Roland Park Elementary Middle School, where significantly fewer students qualify for FARM, the number of students who did not meet expectations on the PARCC was dramatically lower: fewer than 5% of third graders failed to meet expectations in English, and only 6.9% of eighth graders failed to meet expectations. Fewer than 5% of third graders failed to meet expectations in Math, and 35.1% of eighth graders failed to meet expectations.

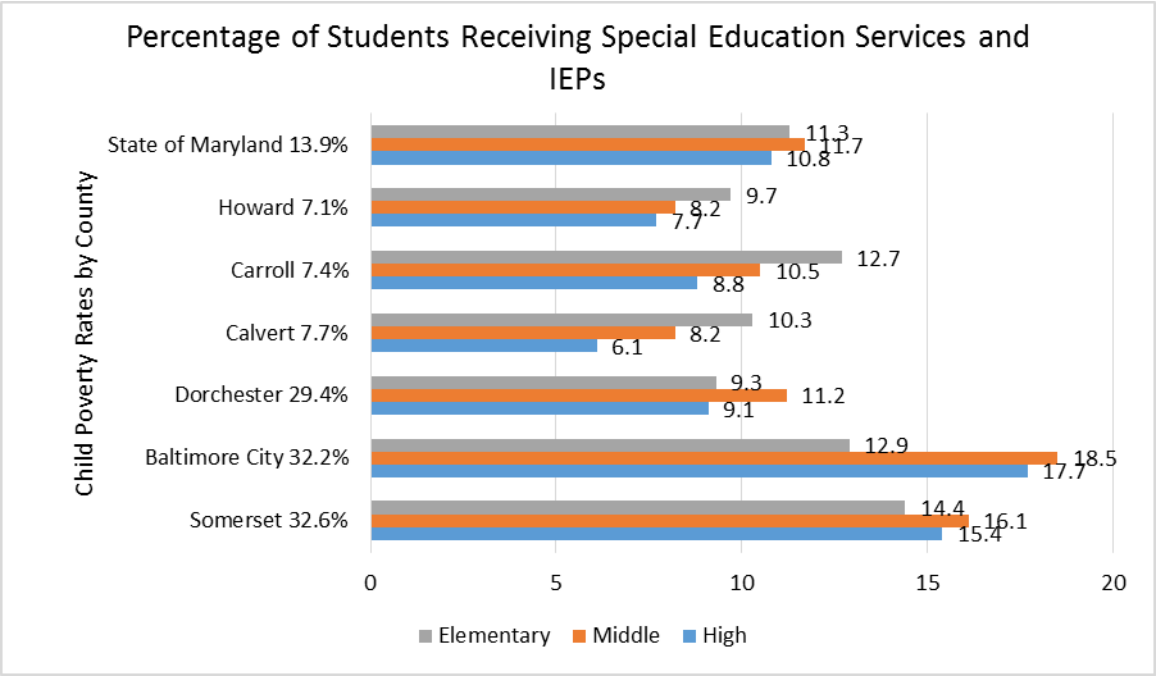
Special Education and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

As with standardized test scores, children living in counties with higher child poverty rates are significantly more likely to require Special Education Services or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) than their wealthier counterparts. The following charts demonstrate this by comparing rates of Special Education Services and IEPs across Maryland and then by child poverty rates.



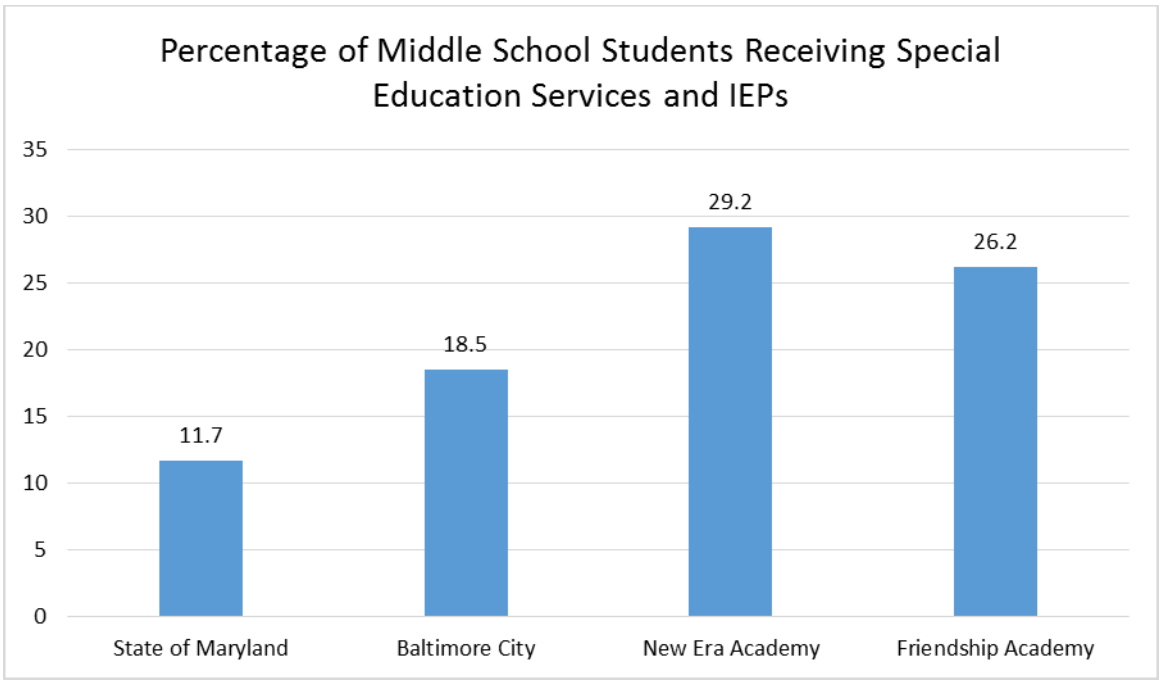
This chart depicts the number of students receiving Special Education Services and IEPs across the state of Maryland. Six different counties were chosen to reflect data from a geographical representation of the state. In middle school and high school, Baltimore City has a significantly higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services or IEPs than any other county or the state average.[3]

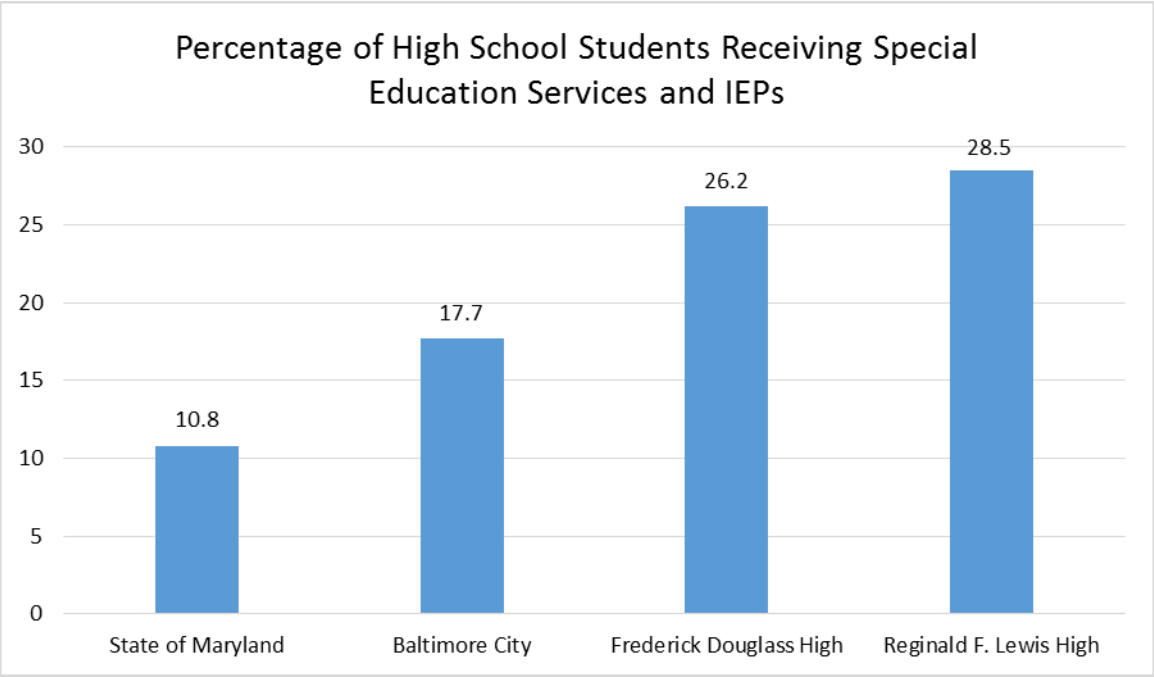
[3]Rates of students receiving Special Education Services and IEPs were taken from the 2015 Maryland Report Card, available at http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/.



Similar to standardized test scores, counties with lower child poverty rates typically have fewer students receiving Special Education Services and IEPs. This chart compares the percentage of children with Special Education Services and IEPs in the five counties with the highest child poverty rates against the five counties with the lowest child poverty rates. The data show that the counties with a lower percentage of child poverty have fewer students receiving Special Education Services and IEPs. Notably, of the ten counties compared, Baltimore City and Somerset County, the counties with the highest child poverty rates, also had the highest percentages of students receiving Special Education Services and IEPs.

In schools where CFCC operates or has operated the TCP, the percentage of students who receive Special Education Services and IEPs is significantly higher than the percentage of students overall who receive these services in Baltimore.





Conclusion

Poverty has a significant impact on both academic achievement and the need for Special Education Services and IEPs. Students in counties with higher rates of child poverty on average perform worse on standardized tests than their wealthier counterparts. Baltimore City has the second highest rate of child poverty in the state, and the students in Baltimore City post some of the lowest scores on standardized tests. Further, Baltimore City has a staggering number of students who receive Special Education Services and IEPs in middle and high schools, as compared to the other counties. Based on this data, while poverty has a direct impact on academic achievement, the extenuating factors of living in an urban setting may also play a significant role in academic success.

Next Steps

School districts with high child poverty rates require additional supports, funding, and services so students living there can compete academically with students from the more affluent counties. Early intervention programs should be implemented in all schools in counties with high child poverty rates to improve student achievement early on and better prepare students for the future. Similarly, full day pre-kindergarten should be offered to all four year olds to ensure that students are entering kindergarten prepared and on track for academic success. For students already in the school system, schools should ensure that parents are fully involved in their child's IEP process. Schools should also encourage student-directed IEPs when working with older students. Student-directed IEPs may increase school engagement, student accountability, and academic success. School districts need to provide students and families with greater information and access to community resources and wrap-around services to help alleviate issues that impact academic achievement. Moreover, because children in urban settings face additional challenges from their environment, such as lead exposure, trauma, and inadequate access to reliable transportation, further research should be conducted to determine the impact of those challenges are and how best to address them.