"Send Them Home?" Rethinking What Public Education Owes to Flourishing Children

Abstract

This essay asks what justice requires for children who are already thriving in school and argues that the dominant frameworks in educational philosophy do not answer the question. Priority, equality of opportunity, adequacy, and capabilities treat public education chiefly as redistribution to the disadvantaged and therefore offer no affirmative reason to continue educating students once thresholds are met. I diagnose two background assumptions that sustain this silence, that no harm occurs when enrichment is withheld from thriving students, and that any remaining responsibility lies with families rather than the state. I then develop a positive account grounded in two ideas. First, democratic equality requires the sustained cultivation of civic capacities as societies grow more complex. Second, following Israel Scheffler, respect for persons requires supporting the development of human potential understood as a noncomparative, path-dependent propensity. Together these yield a principle of sustained development, the claim that every child is owed not only competence for citizenship but also meaningful next steps appropriate to their capacities. I show how this principle reframes policy debates about restricting advanced coursework, standards that become ceilings, and weighted funding formulas that already presume a universal base entitlement. The result is a conception of public education that prioritizes need while refusing to abandon those who thrive.

Keywords: educational justice; adequacy; equality of opportunity; sufficiency; democratic education; human potential; philosophy of education

Introduction

What do we owe to children who are already doing well in school? Imagine three students. The first is the child of highly educated, affluent parents, advantaged by resources and cultural capital. The second is the child of recent immigrants with limited financial means, whose parents nevertheless devote extraordinary effort to their child's education, enabling them to excel. The third is a student from a low-income background whose parents provide little support, yet who demonstrates exceptional natural ability and succeeds despite the odds. These three children differ in family circumstance and the pathways to success, but they share one fact: each is thriving.

We can conceptualize children like these as thriving, flourishing, academically advanced, above threshold, or simply meeting the standards necessary for civic participation. The precise terminology or the exact placement of their performance does not matter for the arguments that follow. This essay is motivated by a simple question: what does justice require for children like these? Dominant theories of educational justice—priority, equality of opportunity, priority, adequacy, and capabilities—give a disquieting answer, or, at least, are quiet. In each case, these frameworks supply no positive reason to continue educating students once they surpass distributive thresholds. Indeed, these frameworks treat public education as a purely redistributive tool. At best, flourishing students appear as residual claimants: their continued development is permissible only if resources remain after urgent needs are met. At worst, they disappear altogether, as though any obligation to challenge them ends the moment they achieve adequacy or opportunities or outcomes are equalized. I argue below that this omission is not trivial. If these theories capture the full scope of educational justice, then continued public investment in thriving children is at best optional, or good only insofar as it is instrumentally useful to other more disadvantaged children, or at worst morally wrong. Stated starkly: *why not just send them home?*[1]

This paper argues that such a view is both normatively misguided and practically unstable. It is normatively misguided because thriving children retain positive claims to public education that I argue can be grounded in two principles absent from the distributive consensus: democratic equality, which requires sustained cultivation of civic capacities, and respect for human potential, which demands meaningful opportunities for continued development. It is practically unstable because treating public education as a residual benefit for flourishing children undermines its legitimacy as a public institution and risks parental exit from the common school system.

The argument proceeds in four steps. Section II surveys the dominant distributive principles and shows how each fails to provide an affirmative justification for educating thriving children. Section III suggests reasons for this omission, arguing that it reflects a narrowing of the purpose of schooling to redistribution, and considers the institutional consequences of that narrowing. Section IV attempts a positive account, grounded in democratic equality and human development, that affirms why all children, even those that are flourishing, retain rights to meaningful education. Section V traces the policy implications, showing how a universal right to continued education reshapes debates over funding formulas, accountability regimes, and recent trends toward restricting advanced coursework.

[1] This was the question put to me by an unnamed advisor when I described this question to him many years ago.

Public education, on this view, is not exhausted by redistributive aims. It is a constitutive project of democracy and a moral commitment to human flourishing. If extant distributive theories suggest otherwise, it is the theories—not the practice—that require revision.

II. The Distributive Literature and the Three Children

Philosophical debates about educational justice have focused on how to distribute educational goods fairly among children. Although there are disagreements about the correct distributive principle, the literature has converged on four families of accounts: priority, equality of opportunity, adequacy, and capabilities. Each seeks to articulate what it means for an education system to be just, and each has attracted sustained attention in philosophy and policy. Though these theories are diffuse and cover a range of topics, they are united in their focus on distributive questions: who should receive more or less of an educational resource and why. As I aim to show below, when these frameworks are applied to thriving children, none of them provides a positive principle for why the state should continue to advance their learning once distributive goals are met. At best, flourishing students appear as residual beneficiaries; at worst, they fall outside scope once thresholds or fairness constraints are satisfied.

A. Priority

Priority-based accounts emphasize giving precedence to the least advantaged. The principle of prioritarianism holds that benefits to those who are worse off matter more, morally, than equivalent benefits to those already better off. In education, Gina Schouten (2012) has developed this view by arguing that a prioritarian principle should guide the distribution of educational opportunity, such that the greatest weight is placed on improving the prospects of children who begin with the fewest advantages.

Applied to our three children, the implications are striking. Child 1, the affluent achiever, is plainly among the best off; priority gives no reason to continue investing in her advancement. Child 2, though from a disadvantaged background, has overcome those obstacles through parental effort and personal talent; she no longer qualifies as among the worst off, at least insofar as academic flourishing is the marker of advancement, so her claims to educational resources recede as well. Child 3, despite lacking parental support, is thriving academically on the basis of natural ability; by virtue of strong performance, this child also falls outside the scope of priority.

Defenders of priority sometimes stress that the view need not be strictly zero-sum. Thriving children may still receive educational benefits, provided that doing so does not come at the expense of those who are worse off. But this only underscores the contingent nature of their claims: their entitlement remains secondary and is easily displaced whenever the needs of the least advantaged expand. It is also not evidence from this defense how a principle would remain prioritarian: in cases where children's academic performance is excellent, they are by definition not targeted by a prioritarian distributive scheme and any benefit for that child, given scarcity, will come at the expense of someone worse off.

In short, strict priority leaves no standing claims for thriving children. Once a child is already doing well (or more accurately, given that a child is doing better than another), the principle dictates that further resources should be directed toward those who are worse off, where they will do more moral good.

B. Equality of Opportunity

Equality of opportunity is probably the most familiar distributive principle in education. Intuitively, it is based on the idea that children should not be disadvantaged by morally arbitrary factors such as race, gender, or family background. Yet, what constitutes morally arbitrary is controversial, as "natural talent" is also morally arbitrary, though many formulations of equal opportunity allow it to determine outcomes (e.g., see our discussion of Rawlsian fair equality of opportunity below). Hugh Lazenby (2016) clarifies this problem by proposing an "obstacles view" of equality of opportunity. On this interpretation, the content of the principle depends on which obstacles are judged illegitimate. If equal opportunity is grounded in the value of neutralizing social background factors, then the relevant obstacles are only socioeconomic; if it is grounded in a luck-egalitarian value, then all obstacles beyond an agent's control count as illegitimate and must be addressed. The moral disagreement, Lazenby argues, is about which value underwrites the principle and therefore which obstacles it requires us to remove.

This framework makes the implications for our three children clearer. The affluent child of highly educated parents faces no serious obstacles to her academic development and so registers no further claim. The immigrant child of poor but dedicated parents poses a harder case. If the principle is concerned narrowly with socioeconomic disadvantage, her flourishing does not erase her claim, since her background still depresses her opportunities relative to the affluent child. If, however, the principle is understood to neutralize a combination of family circumstances and parental effort, then the resources available through her parents' extraordinary investment remove any basis for intervention. For the gifted child from a low-income home with little parental support, equal opportunity seems to offer the strongest case, though it is not absolute. Even though she is already thriving, it is reasonable to conclude that her achievement would have been greater under fairer starting conditions; on this basis, the disadvantages accrued from her lack of family support warrant compensation despite her advanced performance. Yet on a luck-egalitarian interpretation, the principle points to the opposite conclusion. If all morally arbitrary factors are to be neutralized, then her prodigious natural talent also counts as an obstacle. In that case, the luck-egalitarian might conclude that she is owed nothing further: her flourishing is already the product of good fortune, and the fact that she has exceptional ability cannot ground additional claims.

In sum, equal opportunity asks us to scrutinize why a child is doing as well as they are (or as poorly), and if the reasons for their fortune (or misfortune) are due to morally compensable obstacles, then public education provisions are warranted. If, however, the morally relevant background obstacles (whatever those may be) have been neutralized, then no further education provisions are needed. What this framework conspicuously omits is any account of what education itself is, beyond a mechanism to future welfare-relevant outcomes. Educational resources are to be distributed so as to neutralize the obstacles that unfairly depress achievement, and in this sense education is treated like other goods whose distribution can be adjusted to secure fair life chances. Indeed, this is why Brighouse and Swift (2009) argue that adequacy alone is insufficient, since educational achievement determines positional advantage in income and welfare later in life, it must be treated as a distributable resource whose allocation shapes

The difficulty with this way of thinking is that it invites a troubling implication for children who are already flourishing. If obstacles are to be neutralized, then those who have not faced the relevant obstacles will have nothing further to gain from the public provision of education. Whether one finds this omission objectionable depends on two further questions. First, does withholding opportunities for the continued development of flourishing children's aptitudes

constitute a harm? Second, if there is such a harm, does responsibility for preventing it fall on the state rather than parents or private associations? We cannot resolve these questions in the discussion of equality of opportunity itself. Thus, we take them up after concluding our review of the salient distributive theories.

C. Adequacy

From a pure distributive standpoint, adequacy theories dovetail from equal opportunity theories in that they ask that educational outcomes reach sufficient levels for morally relevant purposes such as citizenship, autonomy, or participation in social and economic life. This is the fundamental distinction.

There are different types of adequacy theories in education, each identifying a different normative level students ought to reach. Debra Satz (2007), for example, argues that adequacy is justified by the demands of democratic citizenship, as children must acquire the knowledge and dispositions necessary to deliberate, reason, and cooperate on fair terms. This demand, however, is constrained by relational concerns: the very requirements of democratic citizenship for which adequacy is needed also limit extreme inequalities. Reich and Satz (2019) reach similar conclusions insofar as the state has a compelling civic obligation.

Liam Shields (2012) develops adequacy in a different direction by grounding it in Rawlsian autonomy. On his view, autonomy requires not only civic competence but a level of self-knowledge sufficient to revise and rationally pursue a conception of the good. Because such self-knowledge is typically acquired through the development of one's talents, justice demands what Shields calls "sufficient self-realization." Educational opportunities must therefore extend far enough to reveal children's aptitudes to themselves so that they can exercise autonomy in planning their lives. Yet Shields also stresses that this duty is limited and contingent. Once talents have been developed to the point where sufficient self-knowledge is secured, further cultivation is no longer a requirement of justice. Further, this opportunity is face-sensitive because the obligation stems from self-knowledge, and if self-knowledge could be made available without development (e.g., from technology, or if children could reliably generate self-knowledge on their own), the duty would diminish.

Each of these conceptions of adequacy contrast with equal opportunity fundamentally. Whereas equal opportunity theories treat education as an instrument for more equitable future income or welfare, adequacy provides a more substantive account of what education is good for: core competencies that are valuable for civic engagement or self-realization. Adequacy theories ground specific types of academic attributes as morally relevant. Thus, adequacy theories recognize that learning and being able to think are constitutive of a person, as these aptitudes shape opportunities, allow for self-understanding, enrich civic life, and enable reciprocal cooperation among citizens. In this respect, adequacy marks a genuine improvement over equal opportunity because it treats education as a distinctive good, anchored in civic purposes or self-realization, rather than as a transactional resource in the marketplace of distributive fairness.

The implications of adequacy for our three children remain deeply uncertain. Much depends on how we specify the relevant thresholds and how we judge when they are met. The affluent achiever (Child 1) may well demonstrate civic competence and self-realization earlier than her peers, but at what point such mastery counts as "sufficient" is never specified. The immigrant child with dedicated parents (Child 2) may also reach the bar early, but whether that

development captures the kind of self-knowledge Shields identifies is open to interpretation. The gifted child from an unsupportive home (Child 3) is especially difficult. She may perform far above standards in conventional terms, but whether she has achieved the kind of self-realization required for autonomy is not obvious. Her talents may be extraordinary, yet if they are not developed to the same extent as they would have been under fairer conditions, her self-knowledge and autonomy may remain stunted (equal opportunity here helps develop understanding about what self realization might mean for this child). There is a lot of uncertainty in these cases, but some things we can be sure of: these children will likely reach adequacy levels before their peers, and they will likely reach these levels well before formal schooling is complete. Like equal opportunity, whether this is troubling depends on questions about harm and state obligations.

D. Capabilities

The capabilities approach, most prominently developed by Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2006), conceives justice as ensuring that each person is placed in a position to develop and exercise a set of central human capabilities (e.g., reasoning, imagination, affiliation, practical agency, and others). In education, this view has been understood as requiring that children achieve sufficient opportunities to secure these functionings. Much like adequacy theories, then, education is linked not only to future welfare and earnings but also to democratic citizenship and human dignity, since without basic literacy, numeracy, and civic competence, children cannot realize the functionings that define a flourishing life. Ingrid Robeyns (2006) similarly emphasizes that schools must guarantee at least a minimally adequate level of functioning, both for individual well-being and for participation as democratic citizens.

In this respect, the capabilities approach shares the threshold structure of adequacy theories but also broadens their scope. Where adequacy grounds its threshold in civic competence or autonomy, capabilities theories identify a wider range of functionings that are constitutive of a good life. This helps to explain why education is not merely instrumental to income or positional advantage: reasoning, imagination, and affiliation are valuable in themselves, and developing them is integral to human flourishing.

Yet when applied to our three children, the implications remain much the same as for adequacy. At some point, if not currently in our example, the affluent achiever (Child 1), the immigrant child with committed parents (Child 2), and the gifted child from an unsupportive home (Child 3) have likely reached those functionings delineated by different theoretical frameworks. The capability to reach those functionings was accrued differently by each child: a rich environment, supportive parents, brute natural talent. But in each case the functioning is achieved, and a capabilities framework does not offer a reason for publicly provided education beyond them.

E. Rawls and the Question of Talent

John Rawls offers a distinctive and more nuanced account of educational obligations. Unlike single-principle accounts of priority, equality, or adequacy, his theory combines both the difference principle, which prioritizes the least advantaged, and fair equality of opportunity (FEO), which requires that prospects not be determined by class or family background. It is within FEO that Rawls gestures toward a distinctive role for talent. As Robert Taylor (2004, 2011) emphasizes, FEO is unusual in two respects: it takes lexical priority over the difference

principle, and it equalizes conditional on talent, permitting individuals to flourish according to their natural abilities once unfair obstacles are removed.

Taylor defends FEO by linking it to Rawls's Aristotelian principle. That is, human beings take pleasure in exercising their realized capacities and a basic good is frustrated if they are denied the chance to cultivate those capacities. This framework brings Rawls close to the sufficiency-based self-realization account developed by Shields, but with an important difference. Shields sets a threshold for autonomy. Specifically, once self-knowledge is secured, further claims weaken. Rawlsian FEO, by contrast, interrogates development relative to starting conditions. In our examples, both Child 1 and Child 3 appear sufficient under an autonomy-based threshold, but FEO asks whether Child 3, given her disadvantaged background, has genuinely reached self-understanding. Perhaps true self understanding would require development eclipsing the aptitudes of Child 1. On this basis, Rawls's framework provides a case for continued development than a pure sufficiency view, but it, like adequacy and equal opportunity, has little to offer Children 1 and 2. This silence is because neither FEO nor autonomy offer positive reasons to cultivate talent for its own sake.

F. Convergence Across Principles

Taken together, the four distributive frameworks—priority, equality of opportunity, adequacy, and capabilities—converge on a striking result: none offers a positive, justice-based rationale for the continued education of flourishing children. Priority directs attention to those worse off. Equality of opportunity treats their needs as out of scope once background obstacles are cleared. Adequacy deems them "good enough" once civic or self-realization thresholds are met. Standard capabilities accounts offer richer threshold benchmarks than standard adequacy views but still offer nothing once thresholds are met.

The preceding has shown that contemporary distributive accounts of schooling treat it as a leveling-up device to get children to certain relevant thresholds or a compensatory device to ameliorate background disadvantages. These perspectives limit education's scope. The puzzle of flourishing children proposed at the top of the essay is therefore introduced not as a marginal anomaly but a symptom of this deeper narrowing. To justify public education for all, we need a positive account of why every child's ongoing development matters as a claim of justice. To develop that argument, I first contend that

III. Objections: Harm and Obligation

The preceding section showed that four major distributive frameworks—equality of opportunity, adequacy, priority, and capabilities—fail to articulate a positive basis for continuing the education of children who are already thriving. This silence is not accidental. It flows from background assumptions about the nature of harm and the locus of educational responsibility. In this section I identify two such assumptions: first, that thriving children suffer no meaningful harm if their education is not extended; second, that even if some harm exists, responsibility for addressing it lies with parents and private associations, not the state. This section is intended to be diagnostic; in Section IV I offer a critique of these justifications by positing a more general positive account for educating all children.

A. The "No Harm" Assumption

The three children considered earlier are, by stipulation, flourishing. They are not languishing, disadvantaged, or at risk of falling below civic thresholds. In distributive terms, they are secure. Against this backdrop, many theorists implicitly assume that withholding further public investment does not constitute a harm. The analogy to income distribution is powerful here: if a wealthy adult receives no public transfer, we do not ordinarily regard this as an injustice. Rather, we often see it as the hallmark of justice that the better-off exchange some of what they have so the welfare of the poor can be improved. This logic extends to education. If the flourishing child is already "rich" in educational attainment, what exactly is lost when the state declines to invest further?

The implicit answer is that nothing of justice is lost. On this view, withholding additional support is not a harm but simply the absence of a luxury. The educational equivalents of boredom, under-challenge, or lost enrichment opportunities are seen as inconveniences, not wrongs. The fact that other children remain illiterate, disengaged, or excluded seems to confirm this judgment. Relative to such deprivations, flourishing children's frustrations look trivial. This assumption that truncating advanced development does not rise to the level of injustice helps explain why distributive theories register no claims from thriving children.

B. The "No State Obligation" Assumption

Suppose that someone concedes boredom in school is a type of harm. A second assumption underlying the lack of attention to flourishing children in distributive theories is that responsibility for addressing it lies not with the state but with parents and private associations. Public education, on this account, exists to remediate disadvantage, to secure civic thresholds, or to develop autonomy through self-realization. Beyond those functions, any further cultivation of children's talents is viewed as a matter of private provision, akin to music lessons or tutoring.

This position can be underscored through two lines of reasoning. First, distributive justice is generally conceived as resource-constrained. Since public budgets are finite, the case for allocating funds to those already flourishing appears weak. To extend public claims in such circumstances looks like a misallocation, one that diverts resources from children in genuine need to those who are not. Second, a strong tradition of parental responsibility reinforces the view that flourishing children should look to their families for further opportunities. Parents are typically charged with developing their children's distinctive abilities; the state's role is remedial, stepping in only when family resources prove inadequate to meet civic minima.

To be sure, some accounts of adequacy (e.g., Reich and Satz 2007) emphasize the importance of the state in sustaining democratic equality, and they defend compulsory schooling precisely because families cannot alone secure civic aims. Yet even here, the assumption persists that enrichment for the already flourishing is not a public obligation. The state must ensure that all children can read, deliberate, and participate in civic life; it is just these specific features of education that parental inputs cannot be trusted to develop, as parents may pursue other educational ends that have private and not social benefit. The obligation does not extend to the development of talents for all children.

The "no harm" and "no state obligation" views explain why flourishing children disappear from distributive frameworks.

C. Consequences: Exclusion and Residualism

The omission of flourishing children from distributive principles creates two clear downstream consequences.

The first risk is strict exclusion. Once a student meets the relevant standard, justice regards its work as done. Why is this more than a theoretical possibility? Because the costs of fulfilling existing distributive aims are vast. Adequacy frameworks demand large investments to raise all students to threshold; when resources are finite, allocating additional funds to those above the line becomes indefensible. Priority and equality of opportunity principles intensify the pressure. If fairness requires improving outcomes for the worst off or closing gaps between the least and most advantaged, then every marginal dollar flows towards narrowing disparities. By construction, there is nothing in these frameworks that is on offer to flourishing children. In short, the combination of high redistributive demands and finite budgets makes exclusion not a remote risk but the most probable outcome absent countervailing principles.

A softer reading leaves room for other values once primary duties are met. This is Shields' "shift view" (2012). He argues that a realistic adequacy framework does not switch our obligations off after thresholds are met; rather, the weight of our moral obligations change when thresholds are crossed. In the self-realization case, once self-realization is reached, the imperative for public provision of education weakens. It may still be there but demand less of the education budget, or it may persist but for different less demanding reasons. On this interpretation, flourishing students may continue to receive public education, but only contingently, as long as it is practical to do so, or as long as other less compelling reasons demand it. Yet this residualism offers little security. Because no theory specifies what flourishing students are entitled to, their claims are undefined and thus fragile. And in practice, the scale of distributive obligations means the "surplus" that residualism presupposes may never materialize, and residualism will look much like exclusion. When many children fall below adequacy levels and when opportunity gaps are large, opportunities for flourishing children are the easiest to sacrifice. In effect, residualism converges with exclusion whenever budgets tighten, which is to say, almost always.

IV. A Positive Account: Education as a Democratic and Developmental Right

In this section I aim to develop a positive account of education that offers a reason to educate all children, regardless of their developmental level. Before turning to this account, I wish to acknowledge and assess some common arguments for why flourishing children should remain in school that I would like to exclude from this positive account. These arguments typically defend their continued education in instrumental terms, by reference to benefits for others or for the system as a whole.

First, priority theorists sometimes suggest that educating talented children is justified because it ultimately benefits the worse off. Advanced students may go on to generate innovations, create wealth, or contribute disproportionately to society, thereby raising the floor for all. On this view, enrichment for the talented is indirectly part of serving the disadvantaged. Second, and relatedly, some argue that having high-achieving students in the classroom directly benefits their peers. Their presence may raise expectations, model high performance, and elevate the learning environment for those around them. Enrichment for the talented thus improves the education of the less advantaged. Third, integration-based accounts emphasize the reciprocal benefits of common schooling. Anderson (1999, 2007) and others argue that civic equality requires that children of different backgrounds learn together. From this perspective, flourishing and less flourishing children gain when they remain in schools together, as they develop the skills of

democratic interaction, empathy, and civic friendship, while their presence also affirms their shared equal status. Fourth, it can be argued that educating thriving children is politically necessary (e.g., Shores and Loeb, 2016). If public schools fail to challenge them, families with means will exit to private schools or homeschooling, weakening political support and a tax base for universal education.

Each of these lines of reasoning has real force, but none is sufficient. All treat the flourishing child's education as derivative or conditional. The talented child is cast as a resource for the disadvantaged, or as a civic tool for integration, rather than as a person with independent standing claims. This instrumentalism misses the central point put forward here, namely, that children are not merely means to the flourishing of others; they are ends in themselves. Respecting their sovereignty requires recognizing that they retain claims to continued development, not only because others benefit from their presence but because they themselves have a right to grow.

The contingency of these justifications reinforces the critique. Integrationist accounts, for example, emphasize the civic benefits of cross-group interactions, not the intrinsic value of continued challenge for the advanced child. Then, in homogeneous environments, such reasoning provides no reason to sustain educational opportunities for flourishing children. Similarly, arguments about the threat of political exit are contingent, because if families lacked private school alternatives or simply preferred not to use them, then the obligation to educate flourishing children would vanish. More generally, relying on such arguments risks trivializing the flourishing child's education. So long as some nominal enrichment is provided and suffices to keep families enrolled or maintain classroom diversity, the real developmental claims of flourishing children can be sidelined.

In sum, if we are to safeguard the educational opportunities for flourishing children we cannot rely on these instrumentalist justifications. Instead, we will need to construct a richer normative core that can defend education as a right for all children regardless of classroom composition and regardless of whether their learning propagates benefits to others.

A. Education as a Democratic Right and Developmental Right

Amy Gutmann's (1999) theory of democratic education provides one framework for establishing this positive claim for continued educational opportunities. The first thing to sort out from the start is a tension in the theory. Gutmann explicitly acknowledges that distributional goals are likely to be fundamentally in conflict once democratic thresholds are reached and that the distribution of scarce educational resources above threshold requirements are a matter for democratic deliberation. The subsequent arguments, then, can be interpreted as arguments to be considered for democratic deliberation about the question of whether and how much to educate flourishing children. Further, I think that part of these arguments can be found within Gutmann's own framework, and so I will try to articulate them below. This obligation stems from two core components of her theory: the dynamic and increasing demands of democratic functioning, and the developmental requirements of cultivating a robust deliberative democratic character.

First, Gutmann recognizes that increasingly complex democratic societies place increasing demands on its citizens, both in terms of critical reasoning as well as subject matter expertise. This dynamism means that a well ordered society can grow and is sustained by expertise. Expertise, then, helps to provide a foundational basis for educating flourishing children.

Providing challenging education to flourishing students is not merely an investment in their individual success; it is a necessary condition for maintaining a just and rising standard of civic participation for the entire polity. To halt the educational development of the most advantaged in the name of ensuring equality or an exclusive focus on the worst off would be to artificially freeze the democratic threshold at a given moment in history. Over time, this would constitute a kind of injustice, resulting in a stagnant conception of citizenship that fails to keep pace with the increasing complexity of modern society.

Second, Gutmann argues that the ultimate purpose of democratic education is the cultivation of deliberative democratic character. This purpose is a character trait and not a discrete set of skills, as it embodies consideration, reflection, a commitment to learning, and an appreciation for the truth. In this way, then, the character of deliberative democracy is itself a developmental aim that cannot be satisfied by a sufficiency principle. By way of contrast to learned skills, democratic deliberation is a practice rooted in the ongoing confrontation with novel and complex social problems. Flourishing children, therefore, must be confronted in turn with increasing novelty and complexity; stagnation runs counter to the virtue embodied in deliberative democratic character. This conception diverges from Shields' view that autonomy is grounded in sufficiency. Gutmann's conception of deliberation is richer and more demanding. It is an active, relational, and continual process. Denying a flourishing student the resources to continue this development is to treat both democratic character and the democratic citizen as finished products, undermining the very basis for democratic society and weakening the human traits that make democratic society possible.

Taken together, these components of Gutmann's theory provide a basis for extending educational opportunities to all children. This conclusion rests on two distinct but mutually reinforcing arguments rooted in the internal logic of democratic justice. The first is an instrumental argument of civic necessity: the continued intellectual advancement of all its citizens is essential for the health and progress of the democratic state, preventing the civic baseline from becoming stagnant and irrelevant. The second argument is a moral one, grounded in the principle of equal respect. Education is nonexclusive, and a just democratic society treats its citizens as developing persons, not as finished products. To view the formation of deliberative character as an inherently developmental goal that demands continual learning and engagement is to recognize the equal moral worth of every person as an agent capable of lifelong growth. A just democratic state, therefore, fulfills its obligation not only to its own survival but also to its citizens by providing resources that allow for this continual developmental process, thereby ensuring that both the floor and the ceiling of civic life are positioned to rise together.

These arguments hope to establish a democratic basis for continued educational opportunities for those children for whom traditional theories of distributive justice in education have been silent. Next, I develop a second, distinct set of reasons for providing educational opportunities to flourishing children based on the idea of human potential.

B. The Development of Human Potential as a Right

Human potential is a commonplace idea, but it has largely been ignored by distributive theorists. For example, none of the prominent theories of distributive justice in education surveyed above feature human potential in their decisionmaking as far as I know. Yet, the notion of potential is latent and scattered about across different conceptions of justice. For Rawls, the idea of potential is embedded in fair equality of opportunity, as one's opportunities to develop one's talents is

based on the idea that one has an unrealized potential set of abilities that, for some, have been limited by social circumstances. For Gutmann, though she rejects the principle of maximizing potentialities, she also faults unequal school funding for failing to address the unequal developmental potential of students. The concept of human potential, therefore, intersects with principles of distributive justice, but it does so idiosyncratically and, often, inconsistently. Here, I try to sketch out a thin view of human potential and how it can be used to ground educational obligations.

If "human potential" is to ground a justice-based claim for the continued education of flourishing children, a good starting point is to develop a workable conception of the idea. To do this, I will use Israel Scheffler's *Of Human Potential* (1985). By defining potential as a dynamic, relational concept and grounding its development in a principle of respect for persons as developing agents, Scheffler allows us to articulate a robust right to educational development that does not expire once a child is already doing well.

Scheffler distinguishes three senses of potential: capacity, propensity, and capability (1985; p. 45-62). "Capacity" is minimal, meaning only that an outcome is not impossible; "capability" is maximal, meaning the outcome is already within one's immediate reach and the realization of it only requires the individual's choice. Neither illuminates the educational case very well. The core sense is "propensity," whereby an outcome is potential when, given appropriate conditions and over time, the individual is likely to realize it. This makes potential conditional, time-bound, and person-relative. To say a child has potential for abstract thought is to say that, under supportive conditions, she could come to exercise it. Potential is also non-comparative, meaning that the relevant contrast is counterfactual and not interpersonal; that is, it is a statement about who the child could become relative to who she would become with different circumstances. Potential is path-dependent, canalized through sequences of development where missed stages can rarely be regained at the same cost. Finally, it is expansive, encompassing intellectual, creative, practical, and moral domains.

If potential is a developmental propensity, then to develop it means to supply the specific inputs that sustain and extend the canalization process. In educational practice, this requires an architectural approach to growth that includes: (1) *breadth*, ensuring children encounter enough domains for latent aptitudes to surface; (2) *sequencing*, so that curricular "gates" open when a child demonstrates readiness; and (3) *sustained practice* at the right level of difficulty, so that competencies can consolidate into stable powers. When a school withdraws the next rung or fails to provide adequate challenge, it does not merely withhold an optional enrichment. It actively interrupts the canalization process, narrowing the person's developmental pathway and foreclosing possibilities.

Scheffler grounds the duty to develop potential in the principle of respect for the person. To recognize a child as a person is to recognize her as a locus of unrealized possibilities, not as a finished product. Education is the primary social institution that honors this status by creating the conditions for those possibilities to unfold. A school that provides only repetitive or stagnant instruction does not merely fail to confer an extra benefit. Rather, it denies recognition of the child's developing agency and forecloses counterfactual selves she had reason to become. This constitutes a deontological harm, flowing not from calculations of social utility or peer comparison but from the institutional failure to treat the child as an end in herself.

The implications of this account of human potential are stark for our three children. For child 1, the affluent achiever, her potential may look already well-realized because her parents have given her access to enrichment from the start. From a Schefflerian view, this does make her claim weaker, as her developmental trajectory is already being canalized in supportive ways. Yet even here, potential is not exhausted because development is iterative and path-dependent; without continued challenge, her trajectory may narrow prematurely. Thus, her claim is not null, but its urgency is lower than for the other two children. For child 2, with fewer resources but engaged parents, her case illustrates the fragility of potential. Extraordinary parental investment has sustained her development against odds, but whether her trajectory continues depends on whether the school can open the next gates. Child 3, who demonstrates prodigious talent despite little environmental support, provides the clearest test case. Her extraordinary performance shows latent capacities, but without structured challenge her potential risks plateauing or being squandered. For Scheffler, failing to nourish her potential forecloses distinctive futures and constitutes a harm of truncation.

The final and most difficult question concerns the severity of this harm relative to other claims on scarce resources. Here, Scheffler's account can be extended by drawing on Jeff McMahan's (1996) "native potential" framework, which suggests that the magnitude of a cognitive harm is proportional to the gap between an individual's native potential and their realized ability. On this view, neglecting a flourishing child is not a trivial matter. Denying a gifted child the chance to develop her abilities to the level they could have reached produces an irreversible loss of self-realization. Still, in non-ideal contexts, the harms of inadequacy (e.g., not reaching basic literacy, numeracy, or civic competence) will be given greater consideration. Similarly, in non-ideal circumstances, if the consequences of unequal education are severe and there are no other mechanisms to provide redress (e.g., through a more generous welfare state), then equalizing educational opportunities may be given greater consideration. Surely, not all harms weigh equally, but the argument put here is that the harm of stagnation is justice-relevant.

C. Synthesizing the Arguments: A Principle of Sustained Development

The preceding sections have developed two distinct arguments for a justice-based right to the continued education of flourishing children. The first, drawing on Amy Gutmann, grounds the claim in the logic of democratic theory. The second, drawing on Israel Scheffler, grounds it in a deontological conception of respect for the person. While either argument could stand on its own, there is strength in unity. This unified portrait suggests that claims of flourishing children are not a peripheral concern of distributive justice but are central to both the health of the polity and the moral treatment of the individual. What remains is to synthesize these arguments into a single principle of justice for education.

The democratic argument from Gutmann provides the political justification for sustained development. It rests on two pillars: civic necessity and respect for the democratic citizen. The baseline for adequate civic participation is not static; rather, it rises with the educational level of the most advantaged citizens. Failing to educate flourishing students therefore harms the entire polity by inducing civic stagnation. Further, deliberative democratic character creates educational obligations; specifically, that a just democracy must treat its citizens as agents capable of lifelong growth, not as finished products whose education is complete once thresholds are met. To halt this development is to fail to treat all citizens with respect.

The human potential argument from Scheffler provides the complementary moral justification, grounded in respect for the person. By defining potential as a non-comparative, path-dependent, and conditional propensity, Scheffler allows us to see the harm in neglecting a flourishing child not as a failure to maximize social utility, but as a failure of respect. The harm is one of truncation, by foreclosing counterfactual selves the child had reason to become. This deontological harm flows from the institutional failure to recognize and sustain the child's interest in developing their own potentialities. The duty to provide ongoing, developmentally appropriate challenge is thus owed to the child as an individual, irrespective of her standing relative to her peers.

These two strands of justification can be woven together into a single *Principle of Sustained Development,* which can be defined, roughly as: a just educational system owes every child not only a threshold of competence adequate for citizenship, but also an ongoing trajectory of growth appropriate to their capacities. This principle is not perfectionist; it does not demand the maximal development of every talent. Rather, it establishes an entitlement to meaningful next steps and draws its political force from Gutmann's vision of a dynamic democracy and its moral force from Scheffler's account of respect for persons.

This unified principle provides a more robust critique of the distributive consensus than either of its components alone. Priority, by design, places the flourishing child last in line. Equality of opportunity treats them as out of scope once relevant obstacles are cleared. Adequacy, even in nuanced accounts such as Shields' shift view, treats them as having only residual claims once thresholds are passed. Similarly, capabilities theories pause at sufficiency, ensuring core functionings but not continued growth.

D. Do These Principles Survive the Objections?

The arguments advanced in the preceding subsections may appear attractive, but two sets of objections require careful consideration. The first targets the principles themselves: even if democratic equality and the development of human potential seem normatively appealing, do they overreach what justice requires? The second asks whether these principles can withstand the "no harm" and the "no state obligation" objections raised earlier.

1. Principle Overreach Objection

One might object that the *Principle of Sustained Development*, however well-intentioned, is simply too demanding. The standard adequacy-based view, after all, trades on the powerful intuition that once children have the essential tools for civic competence the most urgent requirements of educational justice have been met. On this account, the further enrichment of already-competent citizens may be a desirable social good, but it cannot be a matter of fundamental justice. To insist on a right to an ongoing trajectory of growth is to blur the line between what is just and what is merely good, placing an infinite and unworkable demand on the state.

This objection, however, rests on a static and instrumentalist conception of both democracy and personhood that the arguments in this essay directly reject. First, from the democratic perspective, adequacy is not a fixed destination but a relational and dynamic state. Second, the concept of deliberative democratic character is not a credential one earns, but a developmental

practice. From the perspective of human potential, truncating a flourishing child's development is not a neutral omission but an active, deontological harm.

The specific demands of this claim are intentionally left open. It has been conceded that other claims are likely weightier. For example, ensuring all children reach morally relevant thresholds is a critical need for any democratic society. Similarly, in contexts where inequalities in educational outcomes are consequential for future wellbeing, addressing equal educational opportunity is a weighty concern. Yet, despite these weighty concerns, the arguments put here stake a justice-based claim on the interests of those children for whom equality and adequacy principles have been silent. Thus, the claim is not too demanding in the sense that it seeks to undermine other justice-based claims on educational redress, nor is it too demanding in the sense that it seeks to elevate what would be "merely good" to claims based on justice.

2. No Harm and No State Obligation Objections?

Even if these principles are internally coherent, they might fail to overcome two objections considered earlier. The first is the no harm objection: once children are thriving, removing them from school does them no real harm. The second is the no state obligation objection: even if further education is valuable, why must the state provide it?

Begin with harm. Both principles reconceptualize what it means to harm a child educationally. On the democratic view, harm is two-fold. First, the sophistication of democratic functioning can be stunted. Second, children's own autonomy rights are undermined. Both of these are harms. On the developmental view, the harm is the truncation of one's own self-realization through the development of one's own potential. Education, on these interpretations, is not merely a positional good or a way to achieve fair distribution or a mechanism for reaching relevant thresholds; it is constitutive of a life worth valuing.

What of state obligation? On the democratic view, the duty is not discretionary. Public schooling is the primary civic institution through which a polity secures the background culture of democratic equality (Gutmann 1999; Callan 1997). The associated virtues of public schooling (e.g., public-reasoning, reciprocity, civic friendship) are not private club goods that families can reliably supply, and their cultivation depends on common institutions that bring diverse children into shared practices under fair terms. A state that outsources advanced civic formation to private means misdescribes its own role and predictably reproduces the very inequalities of standing that democratic education is meant to correct. In Rawlsian terms, maintaining the fair value of the political liberties requires public institutions that actually secure citizens' effective access to the political culture; leaving the rest to parental resources undercuts those fair terms of cooperation (Rawls 1999).

The developmental view yields an obligation for separate reasons. The state designs and controls the main gatekeeping structures of educational development via compulsory attendance, curricular standards, assessment, and credentialing. By compelling children's time into this system and by monopolizing the currencies of advancement (e.g., grades, diplomas, course access), the state occupies a fiduciary position with respect to children's future options. Withdrawing meaningful challenge from those who are flourishing while they remain developmentally unfinished is therefore not a mere failure to confer extra benefits; it is a state-mediated deprivation. It wastes compulsory time that children cannot reallocate, forecloses pathways that are shaped by school sequencing (e.g., readiness-dependent courses), and signals

that advancement beyond a threshold is a private luxury rather than a public concern. Because the state structures these opportunity frontiers, it bears responsibility for ensuring that every enrolled child has access to continued growth, not only that the least advantaged reach a minimum (Nussbaum 2000; Reich & Satz 2019).

Two anticipated replies do not blunt this conclusion. First, appeals to parental primacy show at most that families have duties too; they do not erase the state's duties as the architect of the common school. Where the good at stake is civic equality and the stewardship of children's future options, the obligations are concurrent and not substitutive. Second, appeals to scarcity shift the question from whether an obligation exists to how it is met. Recognizing a universal claim to developmentally appropriate challenge does not require identical expenditures for all; it requires that the basic design of schooling (curriculum, grouping, access to advanced study) be arranged so that no child is left without meaningful next steps, even while priority, equality, or adequacy weights continue to direct extra resources to those more in need.

In short, the democratic and developmental principles do more than gesture toward attractive ends. They specify institutional responsibilities that the state uniquely bears, to sustain the common practices of equal citizenship and to steward children's futures within the very system it compels them to inhabit. On this view, "sending them home" once benchmarks are met is not a benign omission. It is a failure to honor their standing as citizens-in-formation and as persons with unrealized capacities for whom the state has assumed a public fiduciary role.

V. Policy Commonsense and Emerging Tensions

On the ground, policy and public intuition have converged on the idea that every child should continue to be educated at public expense. There is no vocal call among parents or policymakers that flourishing children be expelled from school unless their presence somehow serves the interests of less flourishing children. Compulsory attendance laws, age-based grade progression, uniform curricular frameworks, gifted and talented programs are all predicated on commonly held beliefs that schooling is not exhausted once a child reaches proficiency or is positionally better off. The common school ideal never envisioned education as a tool reserved for remediation; it was justified as a civic and developmental project for all.

By contrast, contemporary theory has a much narrower focus, treating education primarily as a mechanism for redistribution or ensuring thresholds. Beyond these goals it has been largely silent. The puzzle of flourishing children helps expose what is at stake: if education is conceived solely as redistribution, the very rationale for universal schooling collapses. And this is not a hypothetical concern. When public schools present themselves as institutions whose purpose is chiefly to remediate disadvantage, they risk losing legitimacy among those who no longer fit that category.

This narrowing carries systemic consequences. Families with the means to exit increasingly do so through private schools, homeschooling, or vouchers (Goodman & Francis, 2025). Such departures are not mere consumer choices, as they erode the civic common ground that public schooling was meant to secure. Recognizing the rights of thriving students is therefore not just about fairness; it is about preserving the democratic infrastructure that compulsory schooling was designed to protect. Yet even once this point is acknowledged, tensions remain. Affirming that every child retains a claim on continued development does not settle how those claims interact with the urgent needs of children still below adequacy, or the fact that stark differences in

educational outcomes are closely linked to one's social origins. The challenge is not whether to educate thriving children but how to balance their claims within finite systems. Three policy domains illustrate these tensions.

A. Leveling Down Through Restrictions on Advanced Coursework

Equity reforms in several districts and states have curtailed access to honors tracks, gifted programs, or early acceleration (e.g., Algebra I before high school) on the grounds that such opportunities exacerbate racial and socioeconomic segregation (Wall Street Journal, 2023). These reforms respond to real concerns about stratification (Domina et al., 2019), but they often remove opportunities without creating universal alternatives. From the perspective advanced here, this is a paradigmatic case of "leveling down," with equity pursued via the elimination of enrichment rather than broadening it. The principle of sustained development judges this a violation because it forecloses meaningful next steps owed to advanced learners. A just system may restructure admissions, redesign programs to reduce exclusivity, or create parallel enrichment for non-participants, but it cannot legitimately erase opportunities altogether. The wrong here is not only empirical (research shows acceleration benefits advanced students without harming others; Kulik & Kulik, 1984; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016) but normative, since denying progression to some children because not all can yet access it treats flourishing students as instruments of equity rather than as citizens and persons entitled to continued growth.

B. Standards as Sufficiency Thresholds That Become Ceilings

A second mechanism of truncation arises from accountability systems that define adequacy in terms of grade-level proficiency. Once a child meets that standard, the system treats the obligation as discharged (e.g., Jennings and Sohn, 2014). For thriving students, the result can be years of redundant instruction and wasted compulsory time. This is not leveling down through program cuts but rather the quiet operation of standards as ceilings rather than floors. From the sustained-development view, the problem is structural: a sufficiency benchmark cannot exhaust what schools owe. Two design correctives follow. First, growth above proficiency must be explicitly measured and valued in accountability frameworks. Second, curricular standards should specify extension or advanced descriptors that guide instruction for those already proficient. Without these, thriving students remain invisible in the very metrics meant to ensure accountability. The harm here is subtler than outright elimination of advanced courses, but no less serious, as it represents the institutionalized presumption that flourishing children's trajectories can simply stop.

C. Weighted Student Funding Formulas as a Policy Baseline

Weighted formulas aim to rectify structural disadvantage by allocating additional dollars for poverty, disability, language status, or other indicators of need (Ladd, 2008; Roza et al., 2021). Yet every formula also includes a base amount, or a uniform per pupil allotment for all students regardless of background. This feature is nearly universal in U.S. school finance, and it quietly embodies the principle advanced in this essay. The base guarantee represents the commonsense conviction that every child, even those already flourishing, is entitled to public education and to meaningful continued challenge. Additional weights then layer redistributive aims on top of this baseline, ensuring that extra resources flow to those with greater needs. In this respect, practice is ahead of theory, since distributive accounts treat flourishing children as residual claimants, funding formulas already operationalize the dual commitment of universal entitlement plus

targeted support. Recognizing this alignment strengthens the normative case. The principle of sustained development is not an abstract ideal; it resonates with the everyday design of school finance itself.

D. Contrasting Distributive Principles with Policy Practice

Thinking about standards, advanced coursework, and funding formulas through the lens of distributive principles helps clarify what is distinctive about the proposed *Principle of Sustained Development*.

A strict priority principle would design each of these policies to maximize benefits for the least advantaged. Standards would be set at levels that most urgently improve the skills of those furthest behind, even if this makes them less relevant for advanced students. Advanced coursework would be a low priority, since resources devoted there could have been redirected to raise the floor. Funding formulas would concentrate as much as possible on children identified as worst off, with little regard for providing a base amount to those already meeting or exceeding expectations.

Adequacy-based theories would structure policies to ensure that all students meet a specified threshold of competence. Standards would be defined as sufficiency benchmarks, and once those were met, adequacy would not require further support. Advanced coursework would not be seen as an entitlement of justice but as an optional enrichment. Funding formulas, if guided only by adequacy, would attach weights to students below threshold and could assign no entitlement to those already above it. A guaranteed base for all students, which is common in practice, does not follow naturally from adequacy theory itself.

Equality of opportunity would focus policies on removing unfair obstacles. Standards would be designed to ensure that background conditions such as race, class, or gender do not prevent students from demonstrating their ability. Advanced coursework would be justified only insofar as access to it is made fair, but not because flourishing children have a claim to further challenge once barriers are cleared. Similarly, funding formulas would direct additional resources toward neutralizing the effects of disadvantage but would not generate claims for children already thriving and facing no remaining obstacles.

By contrast, actual policy practice, with varying degrees of commitment, builds in a baseline entitlement. Standards are designed for all students, though there is little specified regarding enrichment. Advanced coursework exists in most systems, though this is being contested in some places. Weighted funding formulas include a base amount for every student before applying additional weights. These institutional choices, for the most part, reflect the commonsense view that every child is entitled to some level of continued education, a view closer to the Principle of Sustained Development than to the distributive theories that dominate in philosophy.

Conclusion

The dominant frameworks of educational justice, including priority, equality of opportunity, adequacy, and capabilities, converge on a disquieting implication. Once children surpass certain thresholds, either because they are positionally advantaged or above normative benchmarks, they fall beyond the scope of justice. Flourishing students are treated as if nothing further is owed.

This position is not merely abstract. It has begun to shape policy and public discourse, fueling reforms that level down advanced opportunities in the name of equity.

This essay has challenged that view. Practices embedded in law and culture, such as compulsory attendance, grade progression, and universal curricula, presuppose that education is not exhausted by remediation. Parents expect their children to continue learning, and the state requires it. These are not accidents. They reflect deeper principles that contemporary distributive justice theories obscure.

First, education is a democratic right. The advancement of civic society and the fair treatment of all demands sustained cultivation of civic capacities, not a one-time achievement of proficiency. Second, education is a developmental right. Persons are not static, and respect for human dignity entails supporting the realization of latent propensities even when prior benchmarks are satisfied. The state, having structured schooling as the vehicle for this development, bears an ongoing obligation to every child.

Recognizing these rights reframes policy challenges. It is not enough to secure adequacy for the disadvantaged, since justice also forbids abandoning those who thrive. Public education must be designed to meet two demands, to give weight to specific learning needs while guaranteeing development rights for all. Weighted funding, differentiated instruction, and enriched curricula can serve both aims, but only if we reject the false choice between equity and excellence.

References

Anderson, E. (1999). What is the point of equality? Ethics, 109(2), 287–337.

Anderson, E. (2007). Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective. Ethics, 117(4), 595–622.

Arneson, R. (1999). Against Rawlsian equality of opportunity. Philosophical Studies, 93(1), 77–112.

Arnold, S. (2012). The Difference Principle at Work. Journal of Political Philosophy, 20(1), 94–118.

Brighouse, H., & Swift, A. (2009). Educational equality versus educational adequacy: A critique of Anderson and Satz. Journal of Applied Philosophy, 26(2), 117–128.

Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. G., & Gross, M. U. M. (2004). A nation deceived: How schools hold back America's brightest students (Vols. 1 & 2). Iowa City, IA: The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

Cross, J. R., Frazier, A. D., Kim, M., & Cross, T. L. (2022). Gifted Education and Acceleration: Current Research Findings. Gifted Child Quarterly, 66(4), 245–260.

Domina, T., Penner, A., & Penner, E. (2019). Categorical inequality: Schools as sorting machines. Annual Review of Sociology, 45, 311–330.

Francis, A., & Goodman, J. (2025). School Enrollment Shifts Five Years After the Pandemic. [Working Paper].

Gutmann, A. (1999). Democratic education (Rev. ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jennings, Jennifer, and Heeju Sohn. "Measure for measure: How proficiency-based accountability systems affect inequality in academic achievement." *Sociology of Education* 87.2 (2014): 125-141.

Kulik, J. A., & Kulik, C. L. C. (1984). Effects of accelerated instruction on students. Review of Educational Research, 54(3), 409–425.

Ladd, H. F. (2008). Reflections on equity, adequacy, and weighted student funding. Education Finance and Policy, 3(4), 402–423.

Lazenby, H. (2016). What is equality of opportunity in education? Theory and Research in Education, 14(1), 65–76.

Matthews, M. S., & McBee, M. T. (2007). School factors and the underachievement of gifted students in a talent development context. Gifted Child Quarterly, 51(2), 167–181.

McMahan, Jeff. "Cognitive disability, misfortune, and justice." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 25.1 (1996): 3-35.

NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children). (2023). Gifted Education Works: Evidence on Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes. Washington, DC: NAGC.

Nussbaum, M. (2000). Women and human development: The capabilities approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2006). Education and Democratic Citizenship: Capabilities and Quality Education. In Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership. Harvard University Press.

Rawls, J. (1999). A theory of justice (Rev. ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rawls, J. (2001). Justice as fairness: A restatement (E. Kelly, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reich, R., & Satz, D. (2019). Equality and adequacy as distributive ideals for education. In S. Macedo & R. Reich (Eds.), Philosophical perspectives on moral and civic education (pp. 174–187). London: Routledge.

Robeyns, I. (2006). The Capability Approach in Education. In A. Colclough & C. Engle (Eds.), International Development Studies and the Capability Approach. Palgrave Macmillan.

Roza, M., et al. (2021). Student-based allocation of education resources: What do we know? Edunomics Lab, Georgetown University.

Satz, D. (2007). Equality, adequacy, and education for citizenship. Ethics, 117(4), 623–648.

Scheffler, I. (1985). Of human potential: An essay in the philosophy of education. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Schouten, G. (2012). Fair Educational Opportunity and the Distribution of Natural Ability: Toward a Prioritarian Principle of Educational Justice. Journal of Philosophy of Education, 46(3), 472–491. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2012.00863.x

Shields, L. (2012). The prospects for sufficientarianism. Utilitas, 24(1), 101–117.

Shores, Kenneth, and Susanna Loeb. "Distributive decisions in education: Goals, trade-offs, and feasibility constraints." Theory and Research in Education 14.1 (2016): 107-124.

Snyder, K. E., Barger, M. M., & Schultz, R. A. (2024). Academic boredom and gifted learners: A systematic review. Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 47(1), 3–29.

Steenbergen-Hu, S., Makel, M. C., & Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (2016). What one hundred years of research says about the effects of ability grouping and acceleration on K–12 students' academic achievement. Review of Educational Research, 86(4), 849–899.

Taylor, R. S. (2004). Self-Realization and the Priority of Fair Equality of Opportunity. Journal of Moral Philosophy, 1(3), 333–347.

Taylor, R. S. (2011). Reconstructing Rawls: The Kantian foundations of justice as fairness. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

van der Meulen, R. T., van der Bruggen, C. O., Spilt, J. L., & Verouden, J. (2020). Student boredom in the classroom: A review of causes, consequences, and interventions. Educational Psychology Review, 32(2), 561–589.

Wall Street Journal. (2023). Schools Cut Honors Classes to Address Racial Equity. The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from: https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/schools-cut-honors-classes-to-address-racial-equity-it-isnt-a-quick-fix-77d32e83

Yeoman, R. (2014). Meaningful work and workplace democracy: A philosophy of work and a politics of meaningfulness. London: Palgrave Macmillan.