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EDUCATIONAL ADEQUACY, CAPABILITY, AND BASIC EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE: A  
REVISION OF ANDERSON AND SATZ

by

JARED CORBETT

Under the Direction of Suzanne Love, PhD

ABSTRACT

There are two leading accounts of the principles of educational adequacy by Elizabeth Anderson and Debra Satz. Anderson's and Satz's accounts have been criticized for being insufficiently value-pluralist, and both lack a metric of justice. In this paper, I revise the principle of educational adequacy in order to address these problems. I argue that although the principle of educational adequacy cannot be the only principle in a complete theory of educational justice, it can tell us what basic justice in education requires in measurable terms. I highlight two core commitments that Anderson and Satz share: a commitment to 1) democratic egalitarianism and 2) sufficientarian equal citizenship. Then, I reformulate these commitments in a way that accounts for the role that other egalitarian values have to play in a complete theory of justice in education. Finally, I claim that progress towards educational adequacy can be measured using the capabilities approach.

INDEX WORDS: Education, The Capabilities Approach, Egalitarianism, Adequacy

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REVISION OF ANDERSON AND SATZ

by

JARED CORBETT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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2020

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REVISION OF ANDERSON AND SATZ

by

Jared Corbett

Committee Chair: Suzanne Love

Committee: Christie Hartley

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2020

**DEDICATION**

For my parents, John and Laura, and my girlfriend, Sara. Thank you for your relentless support. Without you, I would not have been capable of this.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Justice in education is an elusive notion. It is widely agreed upon that educational opportunities should be distributed according to principles of justice, but there is little agreement on which principles of justice are appropriate.<sup>1</sup> One principle that should play a role in a complete theory of justice in education is the principle of educational adequacy. The principle of educational adequacy demands that every student have a sufficient education. There are two leading accounts of the principle of educational adequacy. One of these accounts is given by Elizabeth Anderson<sup>2</sup> and the other by Debra Satz.<sup>3</sup> On both accounts, an education is only adequate if it prepares students for equal citizenship. Anderson focuses on the consequences of adopting a principle of educational adequacy for students likely to take up elite positions in society, and Satz focuses on the consequences for ordinary citizens. Anderson argues that adequacy requires that the school system should be arranged such that the elite is composed of people from all walks of life, and qualified to respond to and serve the needs of the worse-off in society. Satz argues that adequacy requires that *all* citizens achieve a set of competencies necessary for basic civil and political equality, and for obtaining a level of economic welfare sufficient for equal citizenship.

Although there is much to admire about Anderson's and Satz's views, they have at least two problems. First, they are insufficiently value-pluralist.<sup>4</sup> In their arguments for educational adequacy, Anderson and Satz both criticize several interpretations of educational equality, and they suggest that the principle of adequacy is a better alternative to the principle of equality

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of theories of justice in education, see Liam Shields, Anne Newman and Debra Satz, "Equality of Educational Opportunity," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, "Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective," *Ethics* 117 (July 2007): 595-622.

<sup>3</sup> Debra Satz, "Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship," *Ethics* 117 (July 2007): 623-648.

<sup>4</sup> See Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift. "Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy: A Critique of Anderson and Satz." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2009): 117-128.

outright. The principle of educational equality requires that all students have an equal education, and it admits of many interpretations. While theorists largely agree that no single interpretation of the principle of educational equality can yield a complete theory of justice in education, it is not obvious that the principle of educational equality should be wholly supplanted by the principle of educational adequacy.<sup>5</sup> In the words of Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, “[j]ustice ... demands adequacy, but it also demands equality—even if those demands must sometimes be balanced against each other, and against other demands it makes.”<sup>6</sup> Second, Anderson’s and Satz’s views do not specify a metric of justice. That is, Anderson’s and Satz’s views do not explicitly include a mechanism for tracking progress towards educational adequacy. A metric of justice is important for setting meaningful thresholds for educational achievement and making interpersonal comparisons in terms of educational achievements and opportunities.

In this paper, I revise the principle of educational adequacy in order to address these problems. I argue that although the principle of educational adequacy cannot be the only principle in a complete theory of educational justice, it can tell us what basic justice in education requires in measurable terms. I do this in two parts. In the first part, I highlight two core commitments that Anderson and Satz share: a commitment to 1) democratic egalitarianism and 2) sufficientarian equal citizenship. I argue that these commitments suffice to justify three essential demands for basic justice in education: the comprehensive integration of the school system, the setting of minimum thresholds of educational achievement (commensurate with adequate opportunities for all), and effective access to higher education for members of disadvantaged social groups. Then, I

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<sup>5</sup> For a statement of the problems with different formulations of the principle of educational equality, see Christopher Jencks, “Whom Must We Treat Equally for Educational Opportunity to Be Equal?” *Ethics* 98, no. 3 (April 1988): 518-533.

<sup>6</sup> Brighouse and Swift, “Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy,” 118.

reformulate these commitments in a way that appropriately accounts for the role that other egalitarian values have to play in a complete theory of justice in education.

In the second part, I address the lack of a metric of justice in Anderson's and Satz's views. I claim that progress towards educational adequacy can be measured using the capabilities approach—an approach to measuring social injustice and inequality in terms of what people can be and do.<sup>7</sup> The capabilities approach states that basic justice requires societies to furnish every person with a set of basic capabilities to function in ways consistent with a good human life.<sup>8</sup> Conceiving of educational opportunities and achievements in terms of the capabilities necessary for equal citizenship makes it possible to set meaningful thresholds for basic educational achievement, and measure progress towards them in a concrete way. I conclude by addressing two potential objections and suggesting directions for future study.

## **2 THE TWO CORE COMMITMENTS OF EDUCATIONAL ADEQUACY**

In this section, I examine two core commitments in Anderson's and Satz's views of educational adequacy: the commitment to 1) democratic egalitarianism, and 2) a sufficientarian conception of equal citizenship. I argue that these commitments suffice to yield three essential demands for basic justice education, and I modify them to account for other egalitarian values. This section is divided into three subsections. In the first subsection, I locate the commitment to democratic egalitarianism in Anderson's and Satz's views. Then, I show how the commitment supports essential demands for basic justice in education. Finally, I modify the commitment to account for other egalitarian values. In the second subsection, I repeat this procedure for the

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the capabilities approach, see Ingrid Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

<sup>8</sup> Not all capabilities theorists subscribe to this view. Some capabilities theorists do not propose an account of basic justice or specify a list of basic capabilities. For a concise discussion of this distinction in capability theory, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011): 19.

commitment to a sufficientarian conception of equal citizenship. In the third subsection, I briefly discuss the role these commitments have to play in a theory of educational justice.

## 2.1 Democratic Egalitarianism

### 2.1.1 *Democratic Egalitarianism in Anderson's and Satz's Views*

The first commitment that Anderson and Satz share is a commitment to a view of democratic egalitarianism. This commitment is easiest to locate in Anderson's view, because she gives a comprehensive argument for an account of democratic egalitarianism in her 1999 paper, "What Is the Point of Equality?"<sup>9</sup> In that account, Anderson claims democratic egalitarians assert two central positions, one negative and one positive. Negatively, democratic egalitarians aim to end oppressive social relations. For Anderson, oppressive social relations are "forms of social relationship by which some people dominate, exploit, marginalize, demean, and inflict violence on others," often on the basis of "differences in socially ascribed identities, distinct roles in the division of labor, or differences in personal traits"<sup>10</sup> Positively, democratic egalitarians aim to create a social order in which people can stand in relations of equality.<sup>11</sup> This aim amounts to a call for "a democratic community, rather than a hierarchical one."<sup>12</sup> For Anderson, a democratic community is established and maintained through an open discussion among equals, where all are entitled to participation, and where everyone recognizes an obligation to listen and respond to the arguments of others without requiring deference of anyone.

Together, these two aims amount to a call for equal citizenship. In a society of equal citizens, all citizens stand in relations of equality, and there are no oppressive social relations. Of

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (January 1999): 287-337

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" 313.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 312-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

course, the commitment to democratic equality is rather vague unless it is supplemented with a precise notion of equal citizenship. For Anderson and Satz, this notion is sufficientarian equal citizenship, which will be covered in the next subsection. However, the basic idea of democratic equality is enough to support demands for integration and minimum thresholds of educational achievement. It is instructive to consider how Anderson and Satz argue for these demands.

Anderson invokes her own notion of democratic equality to argue for the integration of the school system.<sup>13</sup> Anderson's view of educational adequacy considers the implications of a commitment to democratic equality for students with high levels of educational opportunity and achievement. She argues that in a democratic society of equal citizens, one major public good that flows from education is a "democratic elite," a group of individuals who are uniquely qualified to hold especially demanding positions in political and civil society.<sup>14</sup> On Anderson's view, the democratic elite must be constituted in a way that protects and upholds equal democratic citizenship. On this basis, democratic egalitarians require "responsiveness to and effective service of the interests of people from all sectors of society" from the democratic elite.<sup>15</sup> If the democratic elite is not responsive to the needs of all, then they fail to meet their obligation to listen and respond to the arguments of others in society. Moreover, if the democratic elite do not use their positions of power to effectively serve the interests of others, then their power over others is unjustified, and the social structure resembles that of an inegalitarian hierarchy rather than a democracy.

A democratic elite is only capable of the responsiveness that justifies their power over others if they meet four qualifications as a group: "(i) an awareness of the interests and problems

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<sup>13</sup> The subtitle of Anderson's paper on this topic is "A Democratic Equality Perspective." While she is not always explicit about the connections between her account of democratic equality and her account of fair opportunity in education, it is safe to say the latter is influenced heavily by the former.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, "Fair Opportunity in Education," 596.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

of people from all sectors and (ii) a disposition to serve those interests ... (iii) technical knowledge of how to advance these interests and (iv) competence in respectful interaction with people from all sectors.”<sup>16</sup> Anderson convincingly argues that qualifications (i), (ii), and (iv) are distributed throughout the population and cannot be obtained in an academic setting. The only way the class of democratic elites can meet these qualifications is if it is rigorously integrated across lines of race, class, and gender. Working backwards from this requirement, Anderson’s commitment to democratic equality entails that the K-12 school system be integrated across the same lines.<sup>17</sup>

Satz uses her commitment to democratic equality to argue for both the integration of the school system and for minimum thresholds of educational achievement. Like Anderson, Satz argues that “[e]ducational adequacy ... is tied to the requirements of equal citizenship.”<sup>18</sup> However, Satz departs from Anderson by considering the implications of a commitment to democratic egalitarianism for people who are not likely to join the democratic elite. She relates educational adequacy to equal citizenship in a way that reflects both positive and negative democratic egalitarian aims. Satz takes up the positive aim of promoting relations of equality by arguing that education should foster positive egalitarian attitudes like mutual understanding, mutual respect, and tolerance.<sup>19</sup> In Satz’s view, these attitudes are “group achievements, best accomplished through the presence of diverse individuals.”<sup>20</sup> Thus Satz, like Anderson, calls for integrative measures in the K-12 school system.

Satz takes up the negative aim of opposing oppressive social relations by arguing that educational opportunity inequalities that “relegate some members of society to second-class

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<sup>16</sup> Anderson, “Fair Opportunity in Education,” 596.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

<sup>18</sup> Satz, “Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship,” 625.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 637.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

citizenship,” are unacceptable.<sup>21</sup> Here, Satz cautions against allowing a too large a gap in real educational opportunities to open between groups of citizens.<sup>22</sup> Satz reasons that if some students have access to significantly fewer real educational opportunities than others, such that they cannot plausibly reach a level of educational achievement adequate to make them capable of acting as equal citizens in adulthood, their status as equal citizens is directly undermined by educational inequalities. Inequalities of this kind are unjust because they are incompatible with democratic equality. As a consequence, Satz holds that there should be minimum thresholds of educational achievement that raise all students above second-class citizenship status.

### ***2.1.2 Democratic Equality and Basic Justice in Education***

Anderson’s and Satz’ arguments use a commitment to democratic equality to support two demands for basic justice in education. First, the commitment to democratic egalitarianism justifies the integration of the school system for the purpose of creating a responsive democratic elite and for promoting egalitarian relations among ordinary citizens. It is important for the democratic elite to be qualified, because democratic societies require some people to hold positions of power, and those people should be qualified to do so. A segregated school system would necessarily produce an unqualified democratic elite, because potential members of the elite can only achieve competence in required skills like respectful interaction with people from all sectors of society if they are educated in diverse settings. A society run by an unqualified elite is oppressive because it assigns hierarchical ranks according to unjust criteria. However, democratic egalitarianism does not justify school integration solely on the basis of its benefits for elites. Democratic egalitarianism requires that students learn how to treat people from all walks of life with understanding, respect,

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<sup>21</sup> Satz, “Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship,” 638.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid..

and tolerance. One of the best ways to foster these abilities in students is to educate students from all walks of life together.

Second, the commitment to democratic egalitarianism justifies a demand for a substantive minimum threshold of educational achievement. Democratic egalitarians oppose oppressive social relations. So, democratic egalitarians have reason to oppose a socially mandated course of schooling that fails to prepare students for equal citizenship, instead relegating them to second-class citizenship. As it stands, this demand is rather vague, but it is useful to recognize that it is entailed by the democratic egalitarian view. Shortly, I will show how Anderson and Satz use the idea of sufficientarian equal citizenship to give it substantial content.

### ***2.1.3 A Value-Pluralist Formulation of the Commitment to Democratic Equality***

These two demands—for integration and for a minimum threshold of educational achievement—are essential to the idea of basic educational justice. However, these demands should not be made to the total exclusion of other important egalitarian values. I propose a modified formulation of the demand that explicitly accounts for other values:

*Democratic Equality:* For any educational opportunity X, X should be distributed in a way that is most likely to promote equal citizenship. Here, equal citizenship is promoted by any distributive choice that either prevents oppressive social relations or aids in creating a social order in which people stand in relations of equality. If these aims have been achieved to the extent that the conditions of basic justice obtain, or if there is no reasonable way to distribute X to advance these aims further, then the most appropriate available egalitarian principle should guide the distribution of X.

This formulation of democratic equality supports demands for the integration of K-12 public schools, and for a public education that avoids relegating students to the status of second-class citizens. It also yields to other values under two conditions: when the conditions of basic justice obtain, or when democratic egalitarian aims cannot be reasonably advanced by a change in the



distribution of educational opportunities. In section 2.3, I will discuss the implications of these conditions at length.

## 2.2 Sufficientarian Equal Citizenship

### 2.2.1 *Sufficientarian Equal Citizenship in Anderson's and Satz's Views*

The second commitment that Anderson and Satz share is a commitment to a sufficientarian conception of equal citizenship.<sup>23</sup> This commitment gives content to Anderson's and Satz's democratic egalitarian aims. In general, a conception of equal citizenship is sufficientarian if it holds that some person is an equal citizen with respect to others in society so long as they meet or exceed certain sufficiency requirements. Satz states this commitment most concisely. In her view of educational adequacy, Satz defines equal citizenship in terms of three sufficiency requirements. Satz claims that person is an equal citizen when they "(1) have equal basic political rights and freedoms ... ; (2) have equal rights and freedoms within civil society ... ; and (3) have equal rights to a threshold of economic welfare."<sup>24</sup> This is the vision of equal citizenship included in Satz's commitment to democratic egalitarianism.

Satz does not fully specify the content of each of these sufficiency requirements, but she does give some indication of what each includes. For her, basic political rights and freedoms include "rights to speech and participation in the political process," civil rights and freedoms include "rights to own property, and to justice," and the threshold of economic welfare must be high enough to allow a citizen to "share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society."<sup>25</sup> That the content of these

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<sup>23</sup> This is my term. However, the term is based on Anderson's use the language of sufficiency to describe her standard of distribution for fair educational opportunity. See "Fair Opportunity in Education," 614-620.

<sup>24</sup> Satz, "Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship," 636. She borrows these from the British sociologist T.H. Marshall.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Quoting T.H. Marshall from "share in the full" to "prevailing in society."

categories is incomplete is not a problem for Satz. While some political, civil, and economic rights are universal, other no less necessary rights may be required to protect equal citizenship under conditions specific to a particular society.

As before, Satz focuses on the implications of a commitment to sufficientarian equal citizenship for the education of people unlikely to join the democratic elite. Satz holds that in general, “[c]itizenship requires a threshold level of knowledge and competence for exercising its associated rights and freedoms.”<sup>26</sup> Importantly, Satz adds that “the empirical content of this threshold itself depends on the distribution of skills and knowledge in the population as a whole.”<sup>27</sup> For Satz, these two claims have important distributive implications. Taken together, these claims require the public education system to furnish all students with the basic competencies necessary for political and civil equality and accessing an adequate level of economic welfare. The kinds and degrees of competency required for meeting the threshold of basic equality in these domains are determined by prevailing social and material conditions. Although her focus is on ordinary citizens, Satz also mentions that “[c]itizens are not equal when there is a closed intergenerational elite,” and her “conception of adequacy ... does require that everyone with the potential have access to the skills needed for college.”<sup>28</sup>

Anderson relies on a similar account of equal citizenship, which she gives in her account of democratic equality. In that account, Anderson claims that equal citizenship obtains when each citizen in a society reaches certain thresholds of capability “as a human being, as a participant in a system of cooperative production, and as a citizen of a democratic state.”<sup>29</sup> The content of her conception of equal citizenship does not differ substantially from Satz’s. Anderson holds that “to

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<sup>26</sup> Satz, “Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship,” 636.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 638.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”, 317.

be capable of functioning as a human being requires effective access to the means of sustaining one's biological existence," "to be capable of functioning as an equal participant in a system of cooperative production requires" a number of economic rights that amount to (at least) a threshold of economic welfare," and "to be capable of functioning as a citizen requires rights to political participation ... and also effective access to the goods and relationships of civil society."<sup>30</sup> Like Satz, Anderson does not fully specify these sufficiency requirements and allows that they may vary across time and place. However, she is committed to the fundamental idea that in all societies, basic justice requires each citizen to be capable of sufficient functioning as a human being, an equal participant in collective production, and an equal in civil and political domains.

Anderson sets her sufficiency standard for fair educational opportunity with an eye towards integrating the democratic elite. Anderson's sufficiency standard requires that "members of all social groups must have effective access to a primary and secondary education sufficient to qualify them for success at a four-year residential college with such a curriculum."<sup>31</sup> Anderson defines effective access as "within the realistic reach of students exercising substantial but not extraordinary effort and within the financial reach of their families."<sup>32</sup> For Anderson, educational opportunities have been distributed in a way that protects equal citizenship so long as citizens from all social groups have a chance to obtain the academic qualifications needed to join the democratic elite. Although her focus is on elites, Anderson also briefly argues that an adequate level of achievement is important for everyone. Like Satz, she claims that the requirements of equal citizenship "set a minimum threshold of acceptable educational outcomes that varies with the general level of attainment in society."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?", 317-8.

<sup>31</sup> Satz, "Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship," 614.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 614-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 620.

### 2.2.2 *Sufficientarian Equal Citizenship and Basic Justice in Education*

Anderson's and Satz's arguments show how the commitment to sufficientarian equal citizenship—in conjunction with the commitment to democratic equality—justifies two important demands for basic justice in education. First, these commitments jointly require that every citizen must be furnished with a threshold level of political, civic, and economic capability. Second, these commitments jointly require that students from all social groups must have effective access to a course of education that sufficiently prepares them to enter into a program (such as a four-year residential college) where they can obtain the qualifications required for work in the democratic elite.

It is also worth noting that these commitments have a consequence many egalitarians dislike. These commitments allow that students can exceed the adequacy threshold to the extent that the equal citizenship of others is not under threat. In Anderson's and Satz's formulations of the principle of adequacy, this is an important allowance. Both Anderson and Satz argue that families with different tastes for education should be allowed to raise their children in accordance with those tastes.<sup>34</sup> They also argue that the intrinsic good of education outweighs the inequalities that might flow from above-threshold differences in educational achievement and opportunities.<sup>35</sup> It is not obvious that either claim is true without qualification, and I leave the question open as to whether they are. A fully specified conception of justice in education will contain the principles

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<sup>34</sup> See Anderson, "Fair Opportunity in Education," 615; Satz, "Equality, Adequacy, and Education," 634. Here, Anderson and Satz both have in mind guardians who bear the costs of providing above-threshold education to their children by, in the words of Anderson on 615, "using their own private resources or by demanding that their public schools provide more." Neither seems to have in mind families whose taste for education is below the threshold, as may be the case for certain religious communities like the Amish. It is not obvious to me how Anderson or Satz would handle this case. On my view, what counts as an adequate education for, e.g., an Amish child, would have to be understood in the context of the long negotiation between the Amish community and the democratic society in which they are situated. Families without religious objections or other potentially plausible appeals to relevant egalitarian values would have no choice but to educate their children *at least* up to the point of adequacy, regardless of their tastes.

<sup>35</sup> See Anderson, "Fair Opportunity in Education," 615; Satz, "Equality, Adequacy, and Education," 634.

necessary to guide the distribution of educational opportunities once adequacy has been achieved, and my formulation of democratic equality allows those principles (whatever they are) to play their proper role. I take no position on the principles that ought to regulate above-threshold inequalities. In my view, the principle of educational adequacy is best suited to justify demands for rectifying below-threshold levels of educational achievement.

However, I do find it important to acknowledge the possibility of below-threshold inequalities. Anderson's and Satz's views say little about the fact that it may be impossible for some students to attain all of the capabilities necessary for equal citizenship in virtue of certain impairments they have. In my view, while it is the general case that a democratic society is obligated to furnish every citizen with a threshold level of political, civic, and economic capability, I allow that *ought* implies *can*. Every citizen of a democratic society deserves the real opportunity to attain as many capabilities necessary for adequate functioning as an equal citizen in that society as are possible for them in a manner that respects their dignity and humanity. If a school cannot actually bring a student up to the desired level of capability despite using all reasonable means of accommodation available, then the principle of educational adequacy has not been violated.

### ***2.2.3 A Value-Pluralist Formulation of the Commitment to Sufficiency Equal Citizenship***

Educational adequacy is a matter of basic justice. Whatever justice requires regarding the distribution of education, it must condemn inadequacy. Rather than making claims about the regulation of above-threshold inequalities, my formulation of sufficientarian equal citizenship reflects this more modest position:

*Sufficientarian Equal Citizenship:* A citizen *C* is considered an equal citizen with respect to others in society if *C* has 1) equal political rights and sufficient capabilities to exercise them, 2) equal civil rights and sufficient capabilities to exercise them, and 3) access a threshold of economic welfare that is consistent with

a) meeting basic human biological needs and b) a dignified existence as defined with respect to the standards of living prevalent in society. As a matter of basic justice, a democratic society must furnish C with all capabilities necessary for equal citizenship in virtue of their membership in that society. A democratic society is not obligated to furnish C with *any* capability that C cannot attain when supported with all appropriate accommodations that can reasonably be made available to C.

In conjunction with the commitment to democratic equality, this formulation of sufficientarian equal citizenship supports demands for thresholds of educational achievement that correspond with the capabilities necessary for equal citizenship. This formulation also supports demands for effective access to higher education for members of disadvantaged social groups. In addition, this formulation uses the language of capability, which supports the metric of justice I introduce in section 3. For now, it is enough to think of a citizen's capabilities as everything that they can be and do using the means already at their disposal. Finally, this formulation reflects my position that educational adequacy is a matter of basic justice.

### **2.3 The Principle of Educational Adequacy and Full Educational Justice**

In the foregoing subsections, I have provided the following reformulations of the two core commitments of Elizabeth Anderson's and Debra Satz's educational adequacy views:

*Democratic Equality:* For any educational opportunity X, X should be distributed in a way that is most likely to promote equal citizenship. Here, equal citizenship is promoted by any distributive choice that either prevents oppressive social relations or aids in creating a social order in which people stand in relations of equality. If these aims have been achieved to the extent that the conditions of basic justice obtain, or if there is no reasonable way to distribute X to advance these aims further, then the most appropriate available egalitarian principle should guide the distribution of X.

*Sufficientarian Equal Citizenship:* A citizen C is considered an equal citizen with respect to others in society if C has 1) equal political rights and sufficient capabilities to exercise them, 2) equal civil rights and sufficient capabilities to exercise them, and 3) access a threshold of economic welfare that is consistent with a) meeting basic human biological needs and b) a dignified existence as defined with respect to the standards of living prevalent in society. As a matter of basic justice, a democratic society must furnish C with all capabilities necessary for equal citizenship in virtue of their membership in that society. A democratic society is

not obligated to furnish C with *any* capability that C cannot attain when supported with all appropriate accommodations that can reasonably be made available to C.

I have shown that these two commitments support three essential demands for basic justice in education: the comprehensive integration of the school system, the setting of thresholds of educational achievement that correspond with the capabilities necessary for equal citizenship, and effective access to higher education for members of disadvantaged social groups.

I have also modified these commitments from Anderson's and Satz's formulations in four important ways. First, I have adjusted the commitment to democratic equality to explicitly allow for value-pluralism. Second, I have incorporated the language of capability into the sufficientarian conception of equal citizenship to allow for the metric of justice I introduce in section 3. Third, I have changed the commitment to sufficientarian equal citizenship to reflect my claim that educational adequacy is a matter of basic justice. Fourth, I have acknowledged that the commitment to sufficientarian equal citizenship allows for below-threshold inequalities when citizens with impairments who are given all appropriate and reasonable accommodations cannot meet the adequacy threshold. Here, I will remark briefly on the implications of the first and third modifications.

My formulation of the commitment to democratic equality allows for other values to guide the distribution of educational opportunities under two conditions: 1) where the conditions of basic justice obtain or 2) when democratic egalitarian aims cannot be reasonably advanced. The wording of both of these conditions is intentionally broad. Regarding the first condition, it is an open question what basic justice in education requires. I maintain that basic justice in education requires adequacy, but I allow that it may require more. Regarding the second condition, what constitutes a genuine barrier to the reasonable advancement of egalitarian aims is subject to debate. If either condition is met, it will not always be obvious what other egalitarian principle to invoke. It is

important for my view that what it takes to meet all of these conditions be left open to some interpretation. A fully specified theory of justice in education will have to grapple with complex situations, and my formulation of the commitment to democratic equality is flexible in recognition of this fact.

Although my formulation of the commitment to democratic equality is open to some interpretation, it can still provide the guidance needed to resolve important issues. For illustrative purposes, consider two clear cases—one involving barriers to the reasonable achievement of democratic egalitarian aims, and another in which basic justice obtains. First, suppose that in a rural community with relatively homogenous demographics, the only way to integrate the school system immediately would be to bus students for six hours each day to a school in the nearest city.<sup>36</sup> Logistics and cost aside, this would be unreasonable. Such a policy would make it practically impossible for parents and their children form relationships with one another. The parent-child relationship is not centrally valued by democratic egalitarians, but no reasonable democratic egalitarian would wish to compromise it entirely. In this case, even though the principle of educational adequacy would require busing, the injustice that busing would do to the parents and children involved would obviously outweigh the injustice that busing would redress. Resources would be better spent on policies and practices that would bring about integration in that rural community in the long-run.

Now consider a case in which education reform has had nationwide success, and all of the conditions of basic justice have been met.<sup>37</sup> All students have adequate educational opportunities, people who complete the publicly mandated course of schooling do not have to worry about

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<sup>36</sup> This case is inspired by a similar example given in Brighthouse and Swift, “Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy,” 121.

<sup>37</sup> This case is inspired by a similar example given in Brighthouse and Swift, “Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy,” 125.



consignment to second-class citizenship, the democratic elite is both rigorously integrated and responsive to the needs of the worse off in society, and all other conditions of basic educational justice have been met. If, under these circumstances, the legislature injected substantial additional funding into the school system, democratic egalitarians would not be able to make precise recommendations about how to distribute that funding. At this point, other egalitarian principles would be better suited to guide the distribution of resources. For instance, with adequacy soundly achieved, it might be appropriate to invoke principles of educational equality to distribute a windfall of additional resources. Under my formulation of the commitment to democratic egalitarianism, this is not a problem, so long as those other principles do not skew the distribution of resources in a way that promotes oppressive social relations.

My formulation of sufficientarian equal citizenship stipulates that educational adequacy is a matter of basic justice. I also add that citizens are entitled to the capabilities necessary for equal citizenship simply in virtue of their membership in society. Educational adequacy is not something that citizens of a democratic society can choose to pass up—the commitment to a society of equal citizens is vacuous unless every citizen is furnished with all of the *actual* capabilities to function as an equal citizen that they are able to attain when appropriately accommodated.<sup>38</sup> To be inadequately educated is to be incapable of full membership in a democratic society. Basic social justice requires that educational opportunities be distributed according to the principle of educational adequacy. Every citizen of such a society must be adequately educated, except in

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<sup>38</sup> It is possible and even likely that some students will refuse to learn or will forget the material they learned and thus lose their capabilities over time. As I will discuss in the upcoming section, my formulation of educational adequacy allows and sometimes requires a significant amount of paternalism to overcome student refusal to learn, especially at a young age. Additionally, democratic egalitarians hold that the capabilities associated with equal citizenship are guaranteed for life, meaning that adequacy requires people to have effective access to opportunities for continuing education should their capabilities atrophy below the point of adequacy. However, *ought* implies *can*, and should all warranted paternalism and actually accessible offers of continuing education fail to reach some students, the principle of educational adequacy is not violated by their choice to abstain from equal citizenship.

cases where capability deficits are justified by barriers to the reasonable achievement of democratic egalitarian aims.

Before moving on to a discussion of capabilities as a metric of educational adequacy, it is worth reflecting on the political value of this revised principle of educational adequacy. The principle of educational adequacy draws on democratic values to support demands for comprehensive integration of the school system, the setting of minimum thresholds of educational achievement, and effective access to higher education for members of disadvantaged social groups. In the contemporary U.S., the school system is plagued by residential segregation,<sup>39</sup> failing schools relegate poor and racially marked students to second-class citizenship,<sup>40</sup> and students from disadvantaged social groups have limited access to opportunities for higher education.<sup>41</sup> There are significant legal barriers to exercising the principle of educational equality, including the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, which states that the constitution only guarantees students a right to an adequate education.<sup>42</sup> The disadvantages that some students face, and the unfair advantages that other students have, are only reinforced by the activity of a closed, intergenerational, homogenous, and unresponsive elite.<sup>43</sup>

Under these circumstances, full educational justice seems impossibly far away—but the principle of educational adequacy can help us understand what needs to be done to move towards

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Sean Reardon and Ann Owens, “60 Years After *Brown*: Trends and Consequences of School Segregation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014): 199-216.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin, “New Evidence about *Brown v. Board of Education*: The Complex Effects of School Racial Composition on Achievement,” *Journal of Labor Economics* 27 no. 3 (July 2009): 349-383.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Stephen B. Billings, David J Deming, Jonah Rockoff, “School Segregation, Educational Attainment, and Crime: Evidence from the End of Busing in Charlotte-Mecklenburg,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129 no. 1 (2014): 435-476.

<sup>42</sup> *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*. 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Richard Reeves, *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That is a Problem, and What to Do About It*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

basic justice in education. However, the principle of educational adequacy is only as useful as its demands are specific. The idea of sufficientarian thresholds for educational achievement is appealing, but unless they can be expressed in terms of measurable units, the usefulness of the principle of educational adequacy remains limited. The principle of educational adequacy requires a metric of justice to make politically substantive demands.

### **3 EDUCATIONAL ADEQUACY AND THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH**

In this section, I claim that progress towards educational adequacy can be measured using the capabilities approach—an approach to measuring social injustice and inequality in terms of what people can be and do. Capability theorists hold that basic justice requires societies to furnish every person with a set of basic capabilities to function in ways consistent with a good human life.<sup>44</sup> If we conceive of educational opportunities and outcomes in terms of the capabilities necessary for equal citizenship, then we can set meaningful thresholds for basic educational achievement, and measure progress towards them in a concrete way. This section is divided into two subsections. In the first subsection, I provide background on the capabilities approach. In the second subsection, I describe how the capabilities approach can work as a metric of justice for educational adequacy.

#### **3.1 The Capabilities Approach**

The capabilities approach is “an approach to quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice. It holds that the question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for basic decency or justice, is “What is each person able to do and be?””<sup>45</sup> The approach was initially developed by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen as an alternative measure

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<sup>44</sup> Not all capabilities theorists endorse this view. See footnote 8 for details.

<sup>45</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 19.

for quality-of-life in developing economies.<sup>46</sup> However, the approach has since been generalized by Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and others, such that it can be used to measure inequality and test for basic justice in a wide variety of contexts.

The capabilities approach includes a way to measure people's freedom to achieve well-being, where this freedom is conceived of in terms of what people are actually able to be and do.<sup>47</sup> The capabilities approach measures people's freedom to achieve well-being in terms of their functionings and capabilities.<sup>48</sup> Sen succinctly defines functionings as a person's "beings and doings."<sup>49</sup> Put more explicitly, a person's functionings consist of all of the states of being that person achieves, and all of the things that person does. The term is intentionally broad, so that it can capture the diverse ways in which people can realize (or fail to realize) their well-being. Some examples of basic functionings include eating nutritious food, appearing in public without shame, reading materials written in one's native language, being a tolerated and accepted in one's community, and living in a safe home.

Capabilities are all of the functionings a person can actually achieve given their life circumstances. A person's capability set consists of all of the real opportunities that person has to be and do different things.<sup>50</sup> As a consequence, a person's capability set is inclusive of and nearly always larger than the set of all of the functionings they achieve. This is just to say that people *can* be and do more than they *in fact* achieve. Capabilities theorists conceive of freedom in terms of capabilities, because adults are free to refrain from exercising their capabilities to function. To borrow an example from Sen, a starving person and a fasting person are both deficient in the same

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<sup>46</sup> For a rigorous statement of Sen's approach to development economics, see Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*, (New York: Sage Press, 1992): 39-55.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

functioning.<sup>51</sup> Both are not eating. However, a fasting person is perfectly capable of eating, and only refrains on principle. A starving person is not eating because they are not capable—they do not have any real opportunities to eat. The capabilities approach would say that the starving person has less freedom to achieve well-being than the fasting person, even if they are both equally hungry. The fasting person has the real opportunity to eat, while the starving person does not. On the capabilities view, the starving person does not have the freedom to fast.

The capabilities approach gives a rich account of human freedom, but it is only a partial approach to theorizing about social justice.<sup>52</sup> One consequence of this is that the capabilities approach does not fully specify which capabilities societies have an obligation to equalize. However, some capability theorists maintain that there exists a set of basic capabilities that societies ought to equalize as a matter of basic justice.<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Anderson's account of democratic equality can be understood as one view of what those capabilities are. Since the revised principle of educational adequacy takes on a commitment to democratic equality based on Anderson's, it is apt to measure progress towards educational adequacy in terms of capabilities.

### **3.2 Capabilities as a Metric of Justice for Educational Adequacy**

The revised principle of educational adequacy sets thresholds for educational achievement according to the requirements of democratic equality and sufficientarian equal citizenship. I argue that these thresholds can be helpfully expressed in terms of capabilities. For example, sufficientarian equal citizenship requires that as a matter of basic justice, all citizens of a democratic society must have equal political rights and sufficient capabilities to exercise them.

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<sup>51</sup> Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006): 75.

<sup>53</sup> Martha Nussbaum is the primary proponent of this view, and the previously cited books *Creating Capabilities* and *Frontiers of Justice* both contain comprehensive statements of her view. Elizabeth Anderson's "What Is the Point of Equality?" rests on the same basic assumption, although her view is distinct in content from Nussbaum's.

The commitment to democratic equality states that a citizen is insufficiently capable of exercising their political rights if they cannot avoid oppressive social relations or cannot relate to others as an equal. Under the guidance of these commitments, it is possible to specify a list of capabilities that are necessary to exercise one's political rights. Such a list might include capabilities like being able to cast an informed vote, being able to communicate intelligibly in public forums, being able to serve on a jury, being equipped with an understanding of how the government works, or being able to understand and critically interpret the arguments of candidates for political offices.

Each of these capabilities require other capabilities, some of which are universal, and some of which may be specific to particular social arrangements or individual conditions. For example, being able to communicate intelligibly in public forums universally requires competence in a publicly recognized language. However, other requirements for intelligible public communication vary—important public discourse may take place in physical places, in written publications, or on the internet. In some societies, a citizen may be sufficiently capable of intelligible public communication when they are competent oral communicators in one language, while citizens in other societies citizens may have to be competent in multiple languages, written language, or the use of computers to achieve sufficiency. A fully specified list of the capabilities necessary for equal citizenship will include all of the capabilities necessary for exercising political and civil rights, and for achieving a threshold level of economic welfare, as specified in the commitment to sufficientarian equal citizenship.

The resulting list will include a set of capabilities necessary for basic justice in education.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This list may also include capabilities that no amount of education can grant students because of broader political, civil, or economic injustices. For example, if labor market discrimination excludes people with disabilities from work, education alone may not be able to ensure that people with disabilities are capable of securing basic economic welfare. Basic justice in education cannot resolve such discrimination, and educators are not obliged to do the impossible. In such cases, educators are responsible for treating such students with equal dignity and getting them as close to the relevant adequacy threshold(s) as possible.

Recall that basic justice only requires that citizens achieve these capabilities up to a threshold level set relative to the distribution of capabilities in society. This threshold must be set high enough that every citizen who meets it is capable of avoiding oppressive social relations and relating to others as an equal, but the principle of educational adequacy by itself gives no reasons for setting the threshold any higher. Furthermore, basic justice in education does not require that each and every citizen be furnished with a threshold level of these capabilities at all costs. In any case where there are barriers to reasonably advancing democratic egalitarian aims, other values may justify allowing below-threshold levels of achievement. In such cases, resources may be better spent on long-term solutions that would eliminate such barriers.

Expressing adequacy thresholds for educational achievement in terms of capabilities has several advantages. One advantage is that it gives content to the ideas of educational achievement and educational opportunity. On this view, a student's educational achievements are measured in terms of the functionings they have demonstrated. Basic justice in education requires that each student demonstrate that they are capable of functioning in all of the ways that the principle of educational adequacy requires. Following the same line of reasoning, educational opportunities are opportunities for students to achieve new functionings. On the capabilities approach, an opportunity is understood to be a real chance to do something—if a person cannot do something using the means already at their disposal, they do not have the opportunity to do it. So, on this view, an educational opportunity is a chance for a student to achieve a new functioning using means already at their disposal.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Anderson uses this language to describe her concept of “effective access” in “What Is the Point of Equality,” 318. Other capability theorists use the language of “real opportunity” to mean the same thing. See, for example, Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 18.

These understandings of educational opportunity and achievement come with two further advantages. First, if an educational opportunity is a chance to achieve a new functioning using means already at one's disposal, then a significant amount of paternalism is permitted in providing students with educational opportunities.<sup>56</sup> For example, this conception of educational opportunity would say that leaving a young child alone in a room full of books is not equivalent to giving that child an opportunity to learn how to read. Giving a young child an opportunity to read requires setting realistic targets for that child, and then ensuring that the child has the means to reach those targets—like teaching them how to recognize letters and sound out words, and eventually asking them to read small fragments of text out loud independently. On this conception of educational opportunity, there is no sense in which young children can waste their opportunities to achieve basic capabilities, because it is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that young children have the means to achieve the functionings associate with those capabilities. Importantly, such high levels of paternalism would not be warranted for older students. Insofar as older students are capable of independent learning and self-motivation, the educational opportunities presented to them ought to reflect the more advanced means to demonstrate new functionings that they have at their disposal.

Second, since educational achievements are understood to be demonstrated functionings, they can be measured in concrete terms. Tests of adequate educational achievement simply need to measure students' abilities to demonstrate a level of functioning consistent with a threshold level of the capabilities associated with equal citizenship. This is perhaps the most important implication of adopting capabilities as a metric of justice for educational adequacy. If the principle of

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<sup>56</sup> In "Equality, Adequacy, and Education," Satz raises the concern that "the language ... of "opportunity" seems misplaced in primary and at least part of secondary school education ... we expect students to go o school and master certain capabilities; it is not enough that they have the opportunities to do so" (631). I write with this concern in mind.



educational adequacy can be used to generate a list of capability thresholds that students must meet as a matter of basic justice, and progress towards those thresholds can be measured in terms of functionings, then the principle of educational adequacy can be used to make highly specific political demands. Although such demands will be for basic—rather than complete—educational justice, basic educational justice is an urgent need in the U.S. and around the world.

For example, in the U.S., the principle of adequacy could be used to justify policy interventions that reduce the unjust advantages that flow to students who are educated in elite private schools. These policies would narrow the achievement gap between elite private school students and public school students, which arguably relegates students in the lowest-performing public schools to second-class citizenship. The exact content of such policy interventions would be better determined by policy experts, but a system of private school vouchers granted to multiply-disadvantaged students would not be out of the question. There is a growing body of empirical evidence that suggests that when disadvantaged students are granted vouchers that cover some or all of the costs of attending high-performing private schools, their academic and long-term outcomes improve.<sup>57</sup> Such policies also have the potential to increase the diversity of private schools, reduce educational opportunity hoarding on the part of the elite, and eventually contribute to the integration of the elite. Of course, like all policies, targeted private school vouchers are not without trade-offs and downsides. Still, they are a good example of the sort of intervention that the principle of educational adequacy may serve to justify.

It is beyond the scope of my argument to provide a complete list of all of the demands, changes, and policies that the principle of educational adequacy could support. However, as the above example shows, the principle of educational adequacy can be used to make specific demands

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<sup>57</sup> For a comprehensive review of the empirical literature on these policies, see Dennis Epple et. al., “School Vouchers: A Survey of the Economics Literature,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 55, no. 2 (2017): 441-493.

for basic justice in education, and those demands can be met with the help of pragmatic, empirically-supported policies. The capabilities metric gives social scientists and policymakers a way to measure the success of such policies—in terms of the change in students' ability to demonstrate functionings associated with the capabilities essential for equal citizenship.

#### 4 OBJECTIONS

In this paper, I have argued that although the principle of educational adequacy cannot be the only principle in a complete theory of educational justice, it can tell us what basic justice in education requires in measurable terms. First, I argued Elizabeth Anderson's and Debra Satz's arguments for educational adequacy make two core commitments: a commitment to 1) democratic egalitarianism, and 2) sufficientarian equal citizenship. I showed that these two commitments suffice to justify three essential demands for basic justice in education: the comprehensive integration of the school system, the setting of minimum thresholds of educational achievement, and effective access to higher education for members of disadvantaged social groups. Then, I reformulated these commitments to properly account for the role other values have to play in a complete theory of educational justice. The resulting revised principle of educational adequacy specifies what basic justice in education requires, but it does not regulate the distribution of educational opportunities once the conditions of basic justice obtain. Second, I claim that the sufficiency thresholds set by the revised principle of educational adequacy should be understood in terms of capabilities. When sufficiency thresholds are understood in this way, progress towards educational adequacy can be measured in concrete terms.

Compared to Anderson's and Satz's adequacy views, my view is rather modest. I claim that the principle of educational adequacy can give us a partial picture of what educational justice requires, and I argue that those requirements can be understood in terms of capabilities. In making

this modest claim, I hope to account more carefully for the other values and principles that ought to play a role in a complete theory of justice in education. However, this compromise invites at least two objections. It could be argued that the primary obligation the principle of educational adequacy entails—i.e., the obligation to furnish all students with a threshold level of capabilities necessary for equal citizenship—is either too strong or too weak.

First, one could object that the obligation to furnish all students with basic capabilities is too strong. One way the obligation could be too strong is if it requires too many resources to be spent on bringing students with low levels of capability up to the adequacy thresholds. Consider, for instance, the case of a student with severe learning disabilities, an unsupportive family, and serious behavioral issues. It seems that it would be unreasonably costly to attempt to bring such a student up to the requisite capability thresholds, and that such attempts might nonetheless fall short in view of the limits imposed by the student's impairments and family situation. In such a case, the principle of educational adequacy only requires that this student be supported with all reasonable and appropriate accommodations in order to bring them as close to the threshold as possible. What counts as 'reasonable' will depend on the resources at the disposal of the school where that student is being educated. The principle of adequacy does not require the impossible of schools or educators—it just requires their best efforts.

Another way the obligation to furnish students with basic capabilities could be too strong is if it would entail limiting the educational opportunities of high-aptitude students. If basic justice in education requires reducing the achievement gap such that no student is relegated to second-class citizenship, it may seem necessary to "level down" high-achieving students.<sup>58</sup> My formulation of the principle of educational adequacy does not require levelling down. On my view,

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<sup>58</sup> Anderson and Satz both oppose levelling down. See Satz, "Equality, Adequacy, and Education," 648, and Anderson "Fair Opportunity in Education," 615.

basic justice in education is consistent with inequalities in educational achievement that are justifiable according to democratic egalitarian principles. On these grounds, the principle of educational adequacy requires integrating the school system and granting effective access to higher education to members of disadvantaged social groups so that unequal levels of achievement are likely to rebound to the benefit of the worse off. Levelling down would run contrary to these purposes. It is an open question whether a fully specified theory of justice in education would require levelling down, but the principle of educational adequacy does not in itself justify levelling down.

The second kind of objection one could raise against my view is that the obligation to furnish all students with basic capabilities is too weak. One case in which this obligation could be too weak is if a student with disabilities is able to meet thresholds despite her impairments. Anita Silvers and Michael Stein raise the case of the student Amy Rowley.<sup>59</sup> Rowley is deaf, but she can lip-read, and with the help of a hearing aid and some assistance in class, she was able to achieve above average performance in school. However, she missed much of the material communicated during instruction, and she would have been able to achieve at a higher level if she had a sign-language interpreter in class. It seems like the principle of educational adequacy would say that basic justice has been achieved in Rowley's case, even though she was capable of higher performance.

However, the commitment to democratic equality does entitle Rowley to a sign-language interpreter (or equivalent). Recall that the positive aim of democratic egalitarians is to create a society in which people can stand in relations of equality. This aim calls for a democratic community that is established and maintained through an open discussion among equals, where all

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<sup>59</sup> Anita Silvers and Michael A. Stein, 'Disability and the Social Contract,' *University of Chicago Law Review* 74 (2007): 1651-3.

are entitled to participation, and where everyone recognizes an obligation to listen and respond to the arguments of others without requiring deference of anyone. Although the commitment to democratic egalitarianism requires specific thresholds of capability for justice in education, it also has more wide-ranging implications for how people ought to be treated while they are in school. The idea of civic equality is internal to the principle of educational adequacy, and civic equality obliges schools to accommodate people like Amy Rowley such that they can listen and communicate as equals.

Another way this obligation could be too weak is if it allowed schools to divert all new resources to high-aptitude students once everyone is at- or above-threshold. The principle of educational adequacy does not specify how to distribute educational opportunities once thresholds have been met, and therefore it does not exclude this possibility when standing alone. However, I hold that whenever conditions of basic justice obtain, other principles should guide the distribution of educational opportunities. Basic justice is just that—basic. It should not be surprising that the principle of educational adequacy does not make recommendations that are fully just. However, following the recommendations of the principle of educational adequacy when basic justice does not obtain will lead to greater justice in education.

## 5 CONCLUSION

I have made the case that the principle of educational adequacy can be used to concretize many important requirements of basic educational justice. This is an important first step in understanding the role that the principle of educational adequacy has to play in a fully specified conception of educational justice, but much more work remains to be done. I conclude by suggesting two possible directions for future study. First, while I claim that the principle of educational adequacy has an essential role to play in determining the requirements of basic justice

in education, it is not obvious that it is the only principle that should be involved. More work needs to be done to determine what basic justice in education entails. A full conception of basic justice in education would be of significant value to the project of developing a complete theory of educational justice. Second, more work needs to be done to determine what other values it would be unreasonable for democratic egalitarians to compromise in the pursuit of educational adequacy. It is clear that there are cases in which this happens, and I allow that it can, but a more systematic approach would do much to clarify what adequacy entails. Although there is more work to be done, the project of understanding the principle of educational adequacy is worth pursuing. Whatever justice in education requires, it condemns inadequacy.

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