



Giving Our Children a Fighting Chance: Poverty, Literacy, and the Development of Information Capital

Susan B. Neuman, Donna C. Celano

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This is a compelling, eye-opening portrait of two communities in Philadelphia with drastically different economic resources. Over the course of their 10-year investigation, the authors of this important new work came to understand that this disparity between affluence and poverty has created a *knowledge gap*--far more important than mere achievement scores--with serious implications for students' economic prosperity and social mobility. At the heart of this knowledge gap is the limited ability of students from poor communities to develop *information capital*. This moving book takes you into the communities in question to meet the students and their families, and by doing so provides powerful insights into the role that literacy can play in giving low-income students a fighting chance.

Important reading for a wide audience of educators, policymakers, school reformers, and community activists, *Giving Our Children a Fighting Chance*:

- Documents how inequalities begin early and are reinforced by geographic concentration.
- Compares community libraries to see how print is used in each neighborhood and how children develop as young readers.
- Looks at patterns that create radical differences in experiences and attitudes toward learning prior to entering school.
- Explores the function of technology as a tool that exacerbates the divide between affluent students and those with limited access to information.
- Provides a comprehensive analysis of community literacy, documenting the transformation of media habits from books to computers.
- Concludes with a look inside schools to answer questions about what schools can do to overcome this complex, unequal playing field.

Susan B. Neuman is a professor of Educational Studies at the University of Michigan, and has served as the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education. Her books include *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk*. **Donna C. Celano** is assistant professor of Communication at La Salle University in Philadelphia.

“*Giving Our Children a Fighting Chance* depicts a stark reality: the enormous and growing divide in literacy and reading skill development between children growing up in poverty and children from the middle and upper classes—and the social and economic ramifications. This book should be required reading, not just for those in the education and policy fields, but for anyone who cares about the lives of children and the health

of our society.”

—**Kyle Zimmer**, President and CEO, First Book

“‘By walking the streets, riding the buses, and taking the subways,’ Celano and Neuman give us a groundbreaking and sobering look at print and education technology resources in two neighborhoods, one wealthy and one poor. The result is a must-read eye-opener for anyone who cares about equal opportunity. The stuff of learning is essential but insufficient. Only with close teacher, parent, and student-to-student coaching can better print and technology resources make a difference.”

—**Eugenia Kemble**, Executive Director, Albert Shanker Institute

“The authors of this text make you CARE about these communities and children. They provide insights about how we must focus on literacy in order to make a real difference in the lives of students. This is one of the most comprehensive analyses to date of community literacy, documenting the transformation of media habits from books to computers.”

—**Linda B. Gambrell**, Distinguished Professor of Education, Clemson University

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