Definition of Socioeconomic Status (SES)
SES can be defined broadly as one’s access to financial, social, cultural, and human capital resources. Traditionally a student’s SES has included, as components, parental educational attainment, parental occupational status, and household or family income, with appropriate adjustment for household or family composition (Cowan et al., 2012).

Discussion questions:
1. Why are you interested in SES measures and what brings you to this session?
2. Can you share any SES measures or frameworks you are familiar with or have used before?
3. Based on your experiences, how effective or ineffective have you found these SES measures to be?
4. Are you aware of any alternative SES measures apart from the ones you mentioned?
5. What advantages do alternative SES measures offer over traditional measures?

Traditional SES Measures

Economic Capital
- Family income indicators (e.g., household income, median household income, mean household income, income percentiles, poverty rate)
- Pell Grant recipients (eligibility criteria and application complexity)
- Free and reduced-price lunch and bottom quintile income such as National School Lunch Program (e.g., NAEP)
- Family wealth (e.g., wealth possessions, educational resources at home, net worth, homeownership rate, financial assets, property ownership, debt-to-assets ratio)
- School-level indicators
  - School poverty rate (e.g., NAEP)
  - Urbanicity (e.g., NAEP, PIRLS, TALIS)
  - Resources (e.g., NAEP, PIRLS, TALIS)

Social Capital
- Parental education/First-generation status (e.g., PISA, TIMSS, NAEP, PIRLS, NCES)
- Parent occupation (e.g., PISA, TIMSS, NAEP, NCES)
- Home language (e.g., NCES)
- Access to healthcare
- Four Factor Index of SES: marital status, retired/employed status, educational attainment, and occupational prestige (Hollingshead, 1975)
- The 1981 SES index for occupations (Blishen et al., 1987)

Cultural Capital
- Participation in highbrow activities, such as attending art galleries (DiMaggio, 1982)
- Books in the home (e.g., PISA & NAEP)

Human Capital – No comparable, distinct operational measures
- Parental education: influence on students' educational aspirations and attainment
- Student's academic preparation, ability, or achievement: reflecting individual capabilities and skills

Challenges with traditional SES measures
- Simplified indicators
- Lack of nuance: low/middle/high SES
- Limited focus on non-economic aspects
- Inadequate consideration of intersectionality
Considerations for Measuring Students’ Socioeconomic Status

Alternative SES Measures

NCES: Improving the Measurement of Socioeconomic Status using composite variables (Cowan et al., 2012)
- Family income
- Parental Educational Attainment
- Parental occupational status and employment status
- Neighborhood SES, such as self-reported ZIP code
- School SES: Title 1 status and percentage of students who are eligible for NSLP

Kirnbauer, T. M. (2021)

Advantages of Treating SES as a composite
- Single summary for reporting
- Greater reliability
- Representation of the full range of SES factors

Concerns and potential challenges
- Measures of each factor could be different
- Weighing the importance of factors
- Complexity and interpretations

References


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