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OPINION

Our Economy as a Game of ‘Monopoly’

We need to make our country fairer

BY JILL RICHARDSON

As a sociology professor in community college, I have my students play Monopoly. Only, I give them a special, rigged version.



There are five players. The wealthiest begins with \$5,500, all of the railroads, and the two most valuable properties (Boardwalk and Park Place). The least wealthy begins with about \$200 and no property. The remaining three are in between.

Each time the players pass Go, the wealthiest player gets \$500. The poorest gets \$30.

It doesn't take long before the poorest two players run out of money entirely. It's an unfair, boring game.

This is the game all Americans are playing.

The wealthiest player's starting assets are proportional to the wealthiest 20 percent of Americans. The poorest player's starting assets are proportional to the poorest fifth of the U.S. population. The remaining three are proportional to the remaining three fifths of the country.

Likewise, the money they receive as they pass Go is linked to the income of

each fifth of the U.S. population.

For the richest players in the game, it's probably the best Monopoly game of their lives. For the rest, especially the two poorest, it's a nightmare.

I'm sick of playing this game in real life.

Where I live, in California, about one fifth of the population lives in poverty, and another fifth lives just

work by living far from the beach in an un-trendy neighborhood or suburb. Now you can't.

Some speculate that Airbnb is driving up rental costs, and everyone speaks of an "affordable housing crisis." But nobody's doing anything about it.

For the wealthy, life here is great. We've got beaches, mountains, desert, and year-round good weather. For the people who

increased by only 12.4 percent. Taking inflation into consideration, wages have remained stagnant since the 1960s, while most of the gains go to the wealthiest.

Average pay keeps up with cost of living better in some parts of the U.S. than others. California isn't even the worst.

I watch my students try to complete a college education while struggling to make ends meet.

The middle class vision of parents paying for their children's college education and their living expenses isn't a reality for many students. For some families it's the opposite — the child works to put him or herself through school while contributing to the family budget.

Attending school and working at the same time is difficult, and sometimes impossible. Some students attempt it while raising children or caring for sick or elderly family members. In the end, most community college students never get a four-year degree.

We need to make our country fairer than my rigged Monopoly game. In a game, it's just a bummer when the poorest players go broke first. In life, the costs are in human misery.

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above the poverty line. And the official poverty line doesn't even consider the cost of living.

Since I moved here, nearly 12 years ago, the cost of rent has doubled. Areas that used to be affordable no longer are. You could once find a way to make it

serve them their food, clean their homes, or landscape their lawns, the cost of rent alone is strangling.

In the U.S. overall, wages haven't kept up with either inflation or productivity over the years. Since 1973, productivity has increased by 77 percent while wages

Schools Need Resources, Not ‘Resource Officers’

There are better ways to keep students safe

BY LIDWINA BELL

After a school year marred by shootings, districts across the country have responded this year with calls for more "school resource officers" in classrooms. As a result, many students are returning to schools that feel more like prisons — and in fact form a quick pipeline to real prisons.

School resource officers, or SROs, are armed law enforcement officers who police hallways and classrooms. They often arrest students for minor disciplinary issues, as a new Institute for Policy Studies report called Students Under Siege explains. These officers are part of the larger school-to-prison pipeline that pushes students out of school and behind bars.

The very students SROs are supposed to protect are often the ones most harmed by them. In addition to referring kids to the juvenile justice system, SROs have been repeatedly filmed violently mistreating black and brown girls in particular.

That's why many students say SROs aren't the answer to school shootings.

At the March for Our Lives, Edna Chavez, a student from Los Angeles, spoke out against adding more SROs: "Instead

of making black and brown students feel safe," she complained, "they continue to profile and criminalize us."

Chavez called for a different approach. "We should have a department specializing in restorative justice," she said. "We need to tackle the root causes of the issues we face, and come to an understanding on how to resolve them."

When there's a conflict, participants meet to discuss the circumstances, identify the support they need, and consent to a healing process. They talk until they arrive at a mutual understanding of why the harm occurred and agree on steps toward addressing it to everyone's satisfaction.

Restorative justice (or RJ) treats incidents in which people are harmed (like, say, school fights) as requiring healing rather than punishment. It focuses on the actual harm that occurred and the need for healing, rather than on the breaking of a rule.

When an incident arises, the parties come together for a restorative circle that includes students, staff, community members, and a restorative justice practitioner.

They address the harms together and try to arrive at a solution.

A growing number of school districts nationwide, from Oakland, Calif. to Washington, D.C., are implementing these practices.

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rive at a mutual understanding of why the harm occurred and agree on steps toward addressing it to everyone's satisfaction.

Ta-Biti Gibson, a restorative justice coordinator in Oakland, told NPR how restorative justice changes the way students approach conflict in his school: "Instead of throwing a punch, they're asking for a circle, they're backing off and asking to mediate it peacefully with words."

When two students got into a fight at

Gibson's school, the students "circled up" and agreed to write and put up anti-bullying posters, participate in after-school service, and do joint morning announcements with tips on how students can get along better.

At the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C., this restorative process is led by the students themselves.

By using a restorative approach, the students aren't only held accountable for their actions — they get an opportunity to contribute to a safer and more inclusive school community. This opportunity is missed when SROs get involved.

Resource officers are a resource only by name. What would it look like if our schools were actually resourced?

In a well-resourced school, students are safe because staff can invest in their well-being. "Accountability" isn't separated from a student's ability to heal, thrive, and uplift the whole community. And students don't wind up in jail or with a record for routine school incidents.

One SRO can cost up to \$97,000. Instead of hiring officers that see students as criminals, schools can use that money for real school resources — mental health workers and restorative justice practitioners, to name a few — who build students up rather than push them out.

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