



## A WELL-RESOURCED SYSTEM

### Adequate and Equitable School Funding

Public schools in the United States are among the most inequitably funded of any in the industrialized world, and since the nation's beginning, racial disparities and unequal access have gone hand in hand.

Because education is a state responsibility outlined in each state constitution, litigation to address inequalities has occurred in virtually every state at some time over the past 50 years. Following litigation, those states that have substantially equalized their funding systems have seen dramatic improvements in learning and achievement. For example, Massachusetts climbed to the number 1 rank in student achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the 1990s after it enacted school funding reforms that added money for students in poverty, English learners, and those identified for special education — coupled with investments in new standards, assessments, extensive teacher training, and preschool for students from low-income families.

Many of the cases leading up to the famous desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, focused on these gaping inequalities in funding, but ultimately, it was the decision to focus on the harms of segregation that helped move the *Brown* case to victory. Despite *Brown*, both unequal resources and high levels of racial and economic segregation persist. According to the Education Law Center's most recent analysis, the highest-spending state funds its schools at three times the rate of the bottom-spending state, and inequalities within states are widespread. Only nine states have “progressive” funding systems that allocate at least 10% more per-pupil funding to high-poverty districts than to low-poverty districts. Others offer little support to meet students' needs, and at least 20 states spend less on high-poverty districts than on low-poverty districts.

Funding disparities are not limited to state spending: Within districts, schools serving children from low-income families and students of color often get fewer resources than those serving more affluent students. This is particularly true of the growing number of intensely segregated schools — those serving more than 90% students of color who are also from low-income families — which are often severely under-resourced and struggling to close academic gaps while underwriting the additional services needed to address hunger, homelessness, and other traumas experienced by children and families in chronically underserved communities. With larger class sizes and fewer

counselors, nurses, and support providers, these schools also feature a revolving door of underprepared teachers whose lack of training and high attrition rates depress students' achievement levels further.

## Racially and Economically Integrated Schools

Segregation and poverty go hand in hand, with a growing number of schools serving concentrations of low-income students, more than 90% of whom are students of color ("apartheid schools"). In most states, these schools receive less funding than those serving more advantaged students. According to the Education Law Center's most recent analysis, only nine states have "progressive" funding systems that allocate at least 10% more per-pupil funding to high-poverty districts than to low-poverty districts. Others offer little support to meet these students' needs, and at least 20 states spend between 3% and 32% less on high-poverty districts.

Apartheid schools simultaneously labor to close academic gaps while underwriting the additional costs of chronic underinvestment: hunger, homelessness, and other traumas experienced by children and families. With larger class sizes and fewer counselors, nurses, and support providers, these schools also feature a revolving door of underprepared teachers whose lack of training and high attrition rates depress students' achievement levels further.

Research has shown significant benefits from court-ordered desegregation. Over a 40-year span, the most comprehensive national study to date found that students of color achieved more and graduated at higher rates when they learned in desegregated schools; and the longer they were in these schools, the greater the associated gains. Desegregated settings have also been found to promote critical elements of deeper learning. A synthesis of 4 decades of research found that the academic benefits of attending diverse schools include not only higher achievement in math, science, language, and reading and higher graduation and college-going rates, but also enhanced social and historical thinking, critical problem-solving skills, collaboration, and intergroup relationships.