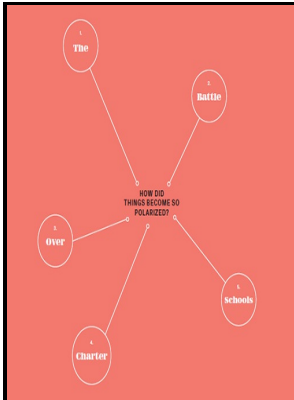


Existing disparities in public school finance and proposals for reform

Federal Reserve Bank of Boston - The Key School Finance Question: Are Dollars Allocated Based on Students?



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5 The Politics of School Finance in the 1990s

School finance cases have expanded from a narrow focus on issues of fiscal neutrality and tax equity in the 1970s to broader considerations of the entire education system and the many variables that affect a child's education in the 1990s. As a consequence of their leadership roles in school finance reforms, state legislatures and governors emerged from this decade as full-fledged education policymakers.

Meet the Asian

If these people are reluctant to support their local schools, they are often even less willing to pay higher taxes in support of schools outside their community. They examine the distribution of spending within states as well as the average level of spending across states, using data for the more than 10,000 unified elementary and secondary school districts at 5-year intervals over the 20-year period 1972—1992. First, if the bill had included provisions for accountability, educational standards, and programmatic initiatives, it might have inspired more confidence that the money would be well spent and might have had more support.

Meet the Asian

The legislative scheme that the court finally approved was quite innovative in its approach to achieving fiscal equity, combining a guaranteed base level of spending per pupil for each district in the state that taxes itself at a state determined minimum, a guaranteed yield system that provides each district with the opportunity to supplement the basic program at a level of its own choosing, and a controversial plan that involves a form of state recapture of part of the revenue generated by wealthy districts. Variations in property values, local tax rates, and costs of competing municipal services have led to large disparities in per-pupil spending and in educational opportunity.

3 Equity ISpending on Schools

Moreover, in many states, as spending levels have increased in property-poor districts, wealthier districts have increased their local tax rates and

maintained spending inequities.

The Key School Finance Question: Are Dollars Allocated Based on Students?

There are a number of reasons why the long period of active reform has yielded only modest change.

3 Equity ISpending on Schools

In Kentucky, as well as in Alabama and Massachusetts, the court listed curricular goals of education and specified student capabilities that should result from a constitutional public school system. There is also increasing recognition of the fact that achieving equal results may require unequal expenditures.

The Key School Finance Question: Are Dollars Allocated Based on Students?

To the extent that poorer districts tend to be urban, their representatives have other battles to fight in the state legislature in order to secure state aid to other municipal programs. Telephone interview, Albert Cortez, Intercultural Development Research Association in Texas, June 3, 1997.

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