

## Education Reform

### *Introduction*

Like many other sectors of American social programs, the established systems of racism and segregation have left a stain on the legacy of public education in the United States. Despite groundbreaking cases and initiatives like *Brown v. Board of Education* and No Child Left Behind, students of color still bear the brunt of institutional bias. Measured by staggering achievement and discipline gaps between white and non-white students, it's clear that little success has been achieved at a legislative level in combating educational equity nationally. Public discourse has long framed conversation around educational issues as a matter of funding, and while this is absolutely crucial to narrowing racial disparities in education, little focus has been diverted towards the consequences educational budgets have on marginalized demographics.

Inadequate fiscal resources is a significant problem for public education, but in actuality this burden is largely borne by underprivileged students according to their race, culture, geography, and socioeconomic status. Disenfranchisement directly impacts the likelihood of students meeting minimum academic requirements, let alone completing a high school or college education; the current standards of educational budget allocations on a state level primarily leave non-white students bound to schools and districts with significantly less funding than their white counterparts, inhibiting their ability to learn in a socially safe and well-functioning environment. In accordance with the work of the Institute for Education Equity and our current campaign against educational inequality, this section will further review the systemic flaws prevalent in the California public education system, and will conclude with our recommendations for more equitable public education policy.

## **Review of Literature**

Funding for public education in the United States is largely determined by the state, with federal allotment for education budgets capping at around 7.8%. States themselves are left to cover the majority of the budget for their respective public education systems—typically around 50% (US Dept of Ed). The true problem lies in the approximate remaining 40% of the budget, which is covered directly by districts within the state themselves. For our Institute’s campaign purposes, we will be focusing primarily on California, in which districts specifically receive 58% of its budget directly from the state, and 32% from property taxes and local resources (CA Board of Ed). California has a remarkably high rate of income inequality, with the highest income bracket making roughly 13 times that of the lowest income bracket before taxes (Public Policy Institute of CA). This creates a situation in which low-income areas with significantly lower property taxes have remarkably less fiscal resources for public education programs within their district, due to the high percentage of the budget that is comprised by local tax dollars exclusively; in other words, schools in low-income districts receive less funding for education because of the household demographics comprising the area. Furthermore, this disparity in income coupled with the current system of education funding creates large inequality in educational quality and accessibility for students, given that people of color are disproportionately poorer than their white counterparts.

This is the case both in California and nationally. In fact, inequality in education substantially reflects conditions outside the education system, such as residential segregation, employment discrimination, and inequality in the justice system (William T. Shaker Foundation). Due to the intersection and impact of race and socioeconomic status, the majority of non-white students in California are enrolled in school districts with significantly lower budgetary

allocation, which directly impacts their likelihood of academic success. Even more detrimental, California is currently lacking in fiscal resources for education compared to other states, with per pupil spending roughly 13% less than the national average. Additionally, the Public Policy Institute of California reports, “state funding for special education has not kept up with the cost of living and the increased costs of disabilities. This means that districts with higher-need special education populations must cover increased costs.” With students of color making up a disproportionate amount of higher-need educational services within their schools, this is leaving a significant number of students lacking in the educational accommodations they need to thrive.

Considering the shortcomings of state resources for public schools, it must be noted that districts made up of 60% or more black or hispanic students have a higher percentage of available monetary resources allocated to school policing programs. This further perpetuates the problems of the school-to-prison pipeline aforementioned in the Institute’s previous research, and has no significant impact on achievement or campus safety within the schools. According to a 2021 study by Francis Pearman of Stanford University, “research shows a 10 percentage point increase in the Black-white discipline gap in a school district predicts an achievement gap that is 17 percent larger than the average Black-white achievement gap.” Moreover, this data was shown to be largely accounted for based on poverty and education level, and once these differences were accounted for at the community level, the relationship differences between achievement and discipline all but disappeared. Based on this research, the ineffectiveness and potential harm that school policing can have within a district can be assumed. In fact, Los Angeles Unified School District recently diverted \$25 million from their school policing budget towards an achievement plan for black students. In preliminary surveys for this reallocation, 45%

of black students reported feeling less safe at school with police present, a quarter of which reported by black female students specifically (LAUSD).

It should be noted that while budgetary issues and allocation procedures make up a large part of the problem in systematically hindering the wellbeing and success of non-white students, there are flaws within curriculum and teacher-requirements as well. California (and nation-wide) currently has no set requirements for teaching professionals to be educated in ethnic or social studies before credentialing (CA Dept of Ed). Racial bias in educators is a long-standing barrier for students of color in accessing fair-treatment at school, and further perpetuates harmful stereotypes and ideologies among white and minority students alike (Pearman, 2021). California recently passed AB-101, which requires an ethnic studies course before high school graduation. Without the proper educating of the teachers that would be implementing this curriculum, the sentiment falls short, as there is still room for racial bias and uniformed accounts of US history to be taught within the classroom. Furthermore, the bill does not specifically outline curriculum criteria for these courses, resulting in an ambiguous piece of legislation that lacks the proper foundation to appropriately address the bias and inequity it seeks to combat.

### ***Solution***

In examining the flaws inherent in creating and allocating public education budgets within the state of California, as well as the credentialing requirements for educators, the ways in which students of color are further marginalized within the school system become glaringly apparent. In accordance with the collective research and data aforementioned, the Institute for Education Equity recommends the following legislative measures:

- That the legislative body of the state of California henceforth be responsible for collecting and managing public education resources pulled from property taxes and other

local resources, and distributing them proportionately between all districts in the state. Due to the inherent inequity in monetary funds based on the 32% of education budgets coming from local resources, it is imperative that legislators amend the way these resources are allocated. By equally distributing the collective sum of local and tax resources throughout the state, the fiscal bias between school districts based on community income and race will be eliminated.

- Secondly, that the state of California enforce a statewide cap on school policing budget, and institute specific rules on campus policing for K-12 schools that ensures the emotional and physical safety of the students. Referring back to the LAUSD diverting school policing funds towards black achievement programs within the district, it is crucial that a statewide piece of legislation similar to this be implemented in order to reduce racial bias in disciplining and improve educational outcomes for students of color.
- Lastly, that the state of California implement a new requirement for educators and school counselors that require completion of an ethnic studies course before formal credentialing. This will help disrupt and dispute harmful ideologies centered around racial bias and stereotypes, inherently making schools safer and more supportive for underprivileged demographics within the district and wider community.

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