

ADDRESSING UNEQUAL FUNDING PRACTICES IN THE UNITED STATES
PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

by
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ABSTRACT

There are large disparities in public education funding among states and within states. These disparities are caused by a lack of equitable funding formulas, no alignment or accountability for funding formulas used by states, and a small amount of federal funding and oversight in the public education system at the K-12 level. These inequities lead to a disparity in the quality of education and the success rate of specific populations of students in the United States. This is not only a question of fairness in the public education system, but has long term, far reaching economic effects on the United States. This capstone analyzes the various gaps and disparities in public school funding, then offers a policy solution to address these issues using the example of current successful policies in other countries, and analyzes the effectiveness of the proposed policy and its political implications. Finally, the capstone makes a recommendation based on the analysis.

Advisor: Professor Paul Weinstein

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Date: May 7, 2019
To: Dwight Evans – House of Representatives
From: Lorri Marlow, Current Educator
Subject: Unequal School Funding Practices

Action-Forcing Event

In January, the Texas state legislature’s 2019 session recommended large increases in public school funding¹. While this sounds like every education advocate’s dream, the recommendations have one glaring fault – legislators recommended state funding based on the outcomes of public schools, specifically the reading level of students². Historically, state funding of public schools has been used to make up the gaps in funding based on property taxes, but outcome-based funding would, ironically, give more state funding to schools that have the most, not schools with the most need³.

Statement of the Problem

There is a large disparity between funding of public schools in the United States. This unequal funding is evident among states, but even more evident within states, which leads to huge differences in the quality of education within both states and individual school districts.⁴ Disparities in funding leads to disparities in the quality of school buildings and other facilities, teachers and their experience, curriculum, classroom equipment and school supplies, and other resources.⁵ The effect of these disparities is an

¹ Valerie Strauss, “It’s a really bad way to fund schools – but Texas may adopt it anyway,” *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/01/13/its-really-bad-way-fund-schools-texas-may-adopt-it-anyway/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.05040b197e1e.

² Strauss, “Texas.”

³ Strauss, “Texas.”

⁴ Bruce J. Biddle and David C. Berliner, “A Research Synthesis: Unequal School Funding in the United States,” *Beyond Instructional Leadership* 59, no. 8 (May 2002): 48-59, <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may02/vol59/num08/Unequal-School-Funding-in-the-United-States.aspx>.

⁵ Biddle and Berliner, “Unequal Funding.”

education system in the United States that indirectly educates white, affluent students much better than communities of color and low income communities.

Public schools are funded by three main sources. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2012 public schools were funded 10.1% by the federal government, 45.1% by state governments, and 44.8% by local governments.⁶ Aside from a few federal grants that have specific regulations dictating how, when, and on whom the money can be spent, the federal government's role is incredibly miniscule in the funding of public education throughout the country. Therefore, the majority of funding is left up to state and local governments, and, due to the powers divvied up in the Constitution, the federal government plays almost no role in regulating how state and local governments choose to fund their schools.

Every state has a different funding formula for choosing how much funding its schools receive – categorical funding, outcomes-based funding, foundation formulas, etc.⁷ Similar to federal funding, states also offer grants that have specific regulations dictating how, when, and on whom the money can be spent, which can be very restrictive for school districts and individual schools. State funding of schools in Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16) varied from around \$6,000 per pupil in Utah to around \$22,000 per pupil in New York (Figure 1).⁸ While these figures don't take into account cost of living, which is much lower in Utah than New York, "not all states spending more on schools have higher

⁶ "How much money does our school district receive from federal, state, and local sources?" Data First, <http://www.data-first.org/data/how-much-money-does-our-school-district-receive-from-federal-state-and-local-sources/>.

⁷ "How much money," Data First.

⁸ "2016 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data," United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>.

overall living costs.”⁹ And it’s important to keep in mind that while cost of living may be higher in New York leading to a higher amount spent per pupil in schools in New York, the disparities among districts and schools is the most striking.

Every district within a state also has different funding formulas. However, the majority of funding for each district comes from property taxes, meaning that more affluent communities with higher property values have more funding that can be directed towards those schools than schools in lower income communities. This leads to disparities within states, even states with above average per pupil funding, to be even worse than those among states. Take Illinois, for example, which has above average per pupil funding (U.S. average of \$11,762 vs. Illinois average of \$14,180). Just looking at state per pupil funding would lead some to believe that Illinois is doing a fairly good job at funding its schools and students. However, the lowest income communities in Illinois receive 22% less funding than the highest income communities.¹⁰ In contrast, Utah has one of the lowest per pupil expenditures of any state at \$6,953 per pupil in FY16, but some of the lowest disparities between school districts within the state.¹¹

Unfortunately, those lower income communities with less funding are also the communities in need of more funding and support due to the higher populations of students with special needs, English language learners, and those who have been hurt by these funding flaws previously and are severely behind grade-level in school.¹² Figure 2

⁹ Mike Maciag, “The States That Spend the Most (and the Least) on Education,” *Governing*, August 2016, <https://www.governing.com/topics/education/gov-education-funding-states.html>.

¹⁰ Lauren Camera, “In Most States, Poorest School Districts Get Less Funding,” *US News*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2018-02-27/in-most-states-poorest-school-districts-get-less-funding>.

¹¹ Camera, “In Most States.”

¹² Camera, “In Most States.”

illustrates just how disparate local funding formulas can be, especially with very few guidelines forcing districts to fund their schools equitably.¹³

However, this is more than just a question of what is fair. This inequitable funding of public education has long term economic costs for the United States. Students in poorly funded schools finish high school, and enroll in and graduate from college, at much lower rates than students from well-funded schools. In 2012, the national high school graduation rate hit 80% for the first time ever, however, "...in 44 states, low-income students graduate at or below the national average."¹⁴ Students who are at a higher disadvantage – minority, first generation, low income, have a disability, etc. – drop out at higher rates than those students without those disadvantages.¹⁵ This difference can be seen in Figure 3. And in high poverty schools, students are three times less likely to advance to the next grade level or graduate on time compared to students at low poverty schools.¹⁶ Therefore, these students are getting lower paying jobs, while living with substantially harder economic disadvantages and demands than those who finish high school and/or college. Ultimately, this means they can contribute less to the overall economy and, in many cases, will have to rely more heavily on federal, state, and or locally funded social services. This puts more burden on the United States' economy generally and welfare system more specifically.

¹³ Jess Gartner, "How are Public Schools Funded?" *Allovue*, October 30, 2017, <https://allovue.com/blog/2017/how-are-public-schools-funded>.

¹⁴ Ben Cosman, "The High School Graduation Rate Is Great, Unless You're Poor," *The Atlantic*, April 28, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/04/the-high-school-graduation-rate-is-great-unless-youre-poor/361321/>.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, "Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States," *National Center for Education Statistics*, October 2016, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/dropout/ind_01.asp.

¹⁶ Chris Duncombe, "Unequal Opportunities: Fewer Resources, Worse Outcomes for Students in Schools with Concentrated Poverty," *The Commonwealth Institute*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org/2017/10/26/unequal-opportunities-fewer-resources-worse-outcomes-for-students-in-schools-with-concentrated-poverty/>.

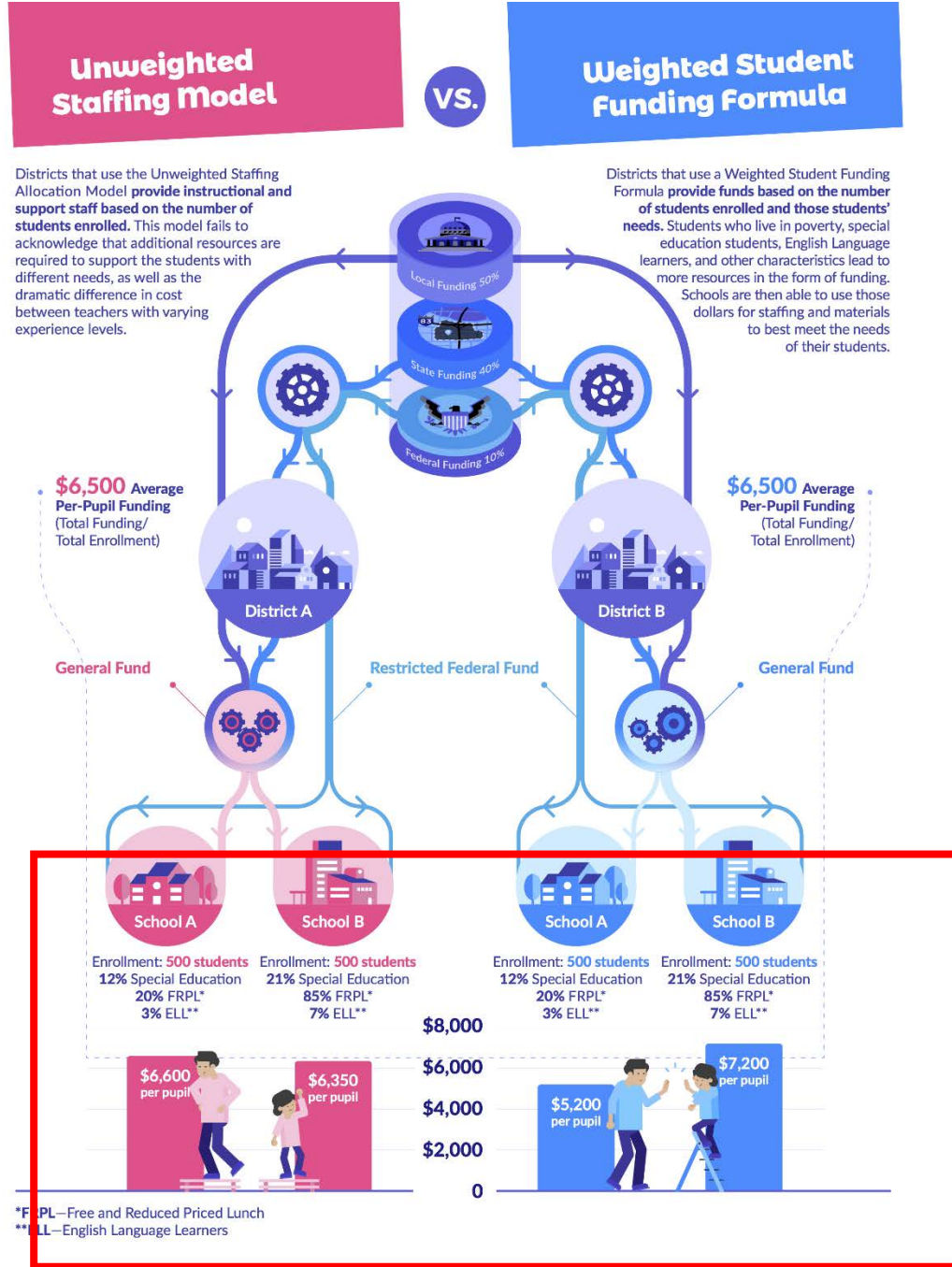
Figure 1: Per Pupil Amounts for Current Spending of Public Elementary-Secondary Schools Systems by State: Fiscal Year 2016

State	Total (\$)	State	Total (\$)	State	Total (\$)	State	Total (\$)	State	Total (\$)
Alabama	9,236	Georgia	9,769	Maryland	14,206	New Mexico	9,693	South Dakota	9,176
Alaska	17,510	Hawaii	13,748	Massachusetts	15,593	New York	22,366	Tennessee	8,810
Arizona	7,613	Idaho	7,157	Michigan	11,668	North Carolina	8,792	Texas	9,016
Arkansas	9,846	Illinois	14,180	Minnesota	12,382	North Dakota	13,373	Utah	6,953
California	11,495	Indiana	9,856	Missouri	10,313	Ohio	12,102	Vermont	17,873
Colorado	9,575	Iowa	11,150	Montana	11,348	Oklahoma	8,097	Virginia	11,432
Connecticut	18,958	Kansas	9,960	Nebraska	12,299	Oregon	10,842	Washington	11,534
Delaware	14,713	Kentucky	9,863	Nevada	8,960	Pennsylvania	15,418	West Virginia	11,291
D.C.	19,159	Louisiana	11,038	New Hampshire	15,340	Rhode Island	15,532	Wisconsin	11,456
Florida	8,920	Maine	13,278	New Jersey	18,402	South Carolina	10,249	<i>U.S. Average</i>	<i>11,762</i>

**Source: United States Census Bureau¹⁷*

¹⁷ “2016 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data,” United States Census Bureau.

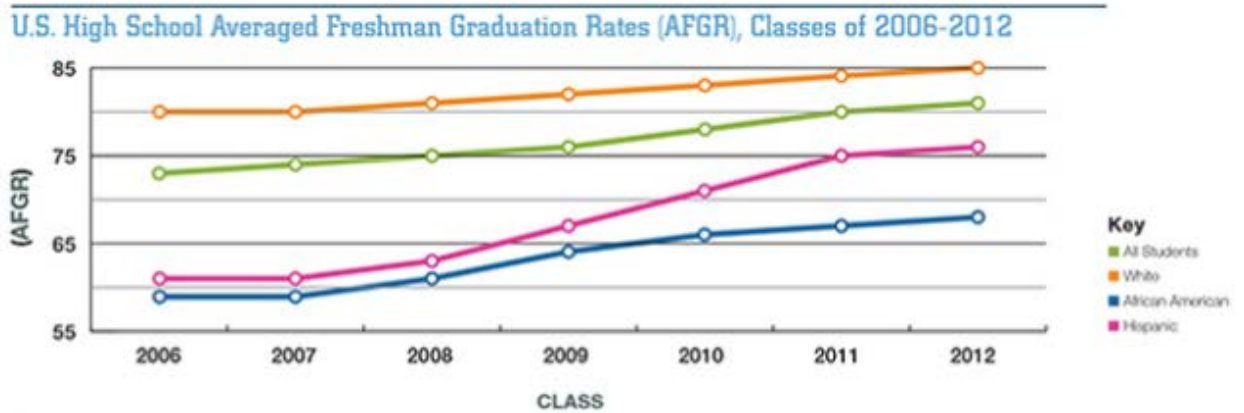
Figure 2



*Source: *Allovue*¹⁸

¹⁸ Gartner, "How are Public Schools Funded?"

Figure 3



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "NCES Common Core of Data State Dropout and Graduation Rate Data file," School Year 2011-12, Preliminary Version 1a; School Year 2010-11, Provisional 1a; School Year 2009-10, 1a; School Year 2008-09, 1a; School Year 2007-08, 1b.

*Source: *The Atlantic*¹⁹

History/Background

The Great Depression

By the 1930s, compulsory, free, public education was an expectation in all 50 states. By this point in time, “78.8 percent of all public education revenues and 82.7 percent of all school tax revenues” came from local property taxes.²⁰ After the 1930s, local property taxes became more limited due to the Great Depression and both World Wars, and continued to decline to about 42.5 percent in the 1980s²¹, which has remained mostly constant to this point in time.

In the 1930s, as a reaction to the Great Depression and impending failures of local governments and school districts, every state had adopted local property tax limitations,

¹⁹ Cosman, “The High School Graduation Rate Is Great, Unless You’re Poor.”

²⁰ Billy D. Walker, “The Local Property Tax for Public Schools: Some Historical Perspectives,” *Journal of Education Finance* 9, no. 3 (Winter 1984): 265-288,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40703424.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aa04d5e26503615ea32f7a5186aab5a4d>.

²¹ Walker, “The Local Property Tax for Public Schools,” 285.

implemented or increased sales and income taxes to assist in important state expenditures, like school funding.²² These supplements were needed given that at this point in time all children of a certain age were required to attend school, causing a huge increase in students, schools, and a need for funding of these institutions to support the law of compulsory attendance. Before 1930, state aid to public schools hovered around 17%, whereas after 1930 and the introduction of local property tax limitations, state aid to public schools “increased by almost 80 percent.”²³

Additionally, there was a large school of thought during this time that increasing state aid was “a necessary antecedent to both equal educational opportunity within states and overall quality of education in the nation.”²⁴ Therefore, many states began providing a higher percentage of school funding with the intention of “equalizing tax burdens” and also “reducing disparities among school districts in per-pupil expenditures.”²⁵

With regards to federal aid – since free, public education started out at the local and then state levels, the federal government was never expected to contribute much to these schools, despite laws that made public education compulsory in the early 20th century. Therefore, in 1930, only .3% of public school funding came from the federal government. That number has increased slightly over the decades, especially during times of significant educational reform, but has remained fairly stagnant – between 8-10% - since the 1970s.²⁶

²² Walker, “The Local Property Tax for Public Schools,” 285.

²³ Walker, “The Local Property Tax for Public Schools,” 285.

²⁴ Walker, “The Local Property Tax for Public Schools,” 287.

²⁵ Walker, “The Local Property Tax for Public Schools,” 287.

²⁶ Walker, “The Local Property Tax for Public Schools,” 287.

War and Post-War Era

During World War II, funds were diverted from public education to the war effort, making public schools even more strapped for funds.²⁷ Additionally, students were dropping out at an alarming rate, either to directly join the war effort, get a job to help their families during the war, or work in factories manufacturing things needed for the war. The country's focus was not on funding schools, much less funding them equitably.

After World War II began an era of baby boomers. Not only were people going back to school during the post-war years, but baby booms produced an even larger increase in school-aged students in the years that followed than seen after mandatory attendance laws were put into place during the 1930s. This put an even larger strain on public schools, who now needed even more funding to sustain the increase in students and additional teachers, facilities, and other resources these students would need to receive an education.

The teacher shortage led to a decrease in certifications needed to become a teacher, so that at the least funded and most overcrowded public schools, usually in low-income and minority communities, there was often little to no training needed to become a teacher.²⁸ These schools not only received less funding, but had poor instruction as well, leading to severe inequality in the education in these public schools.

Moving into the Cold War, and especially after the launch of Sputnik, the federal government began to insist that public schools implement more rigorous curriculum and put more of an emphasis on math and science courses.²⁹ Additionally during this time

²⁷ Matthew Lynch, "Uncovering the Devastating Impact of World War II on American Education," The Edvocate, September 2, 2018, <https://www.theedadvocate.org/uncovering-devastating-impact-world-war-ii-american-education/>.

²⁸ Judy Gelbrich, "Section II: American Education – The Second Half of the 20th Century: Post World War II and Beyond," OSU – School of Education, 1999, <https://oregonstate.edu/instruct/ed416/ae8.html>.

²⁹ Gelbrich, "Post World War II and Beyond."

period, segregation in schools was being called to an end by *Brown v. Board of Education*, and schools would have to begin dealing with integration and figuring out how to fund integrated schools. All of these changes would eventually lead the federal government to fund millions for educational reform.

The 1960s

During the 1960s, the federal government passed its first major educational reform bill – the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It most likely took the federal government until 1965 to do anything radical for public education given that the Constitution gives the responsibility of K-12 education to the states. The ESEA was passed at a time when President Johnson had declared a “War on poverty” in the United States.³⁰ Not only was the ESEA the largest funding bill for education ever passed by the United States Congress, but it was the first major attempt at ensuring equal access to education and implementing accountability measures for schools to ensure high standards for education.³¹

It was heavily criticized because it was seen as an attempt by the federal government to overstep its bounds laid out in the Constitution and infringe on states’ rights.³² However, Johnson attempted to assuage critics by ensuring funds would be distributed as grants, given that qualifications of said grants were met, and that once grants were distributed to states, local districts would have flexibility on how to use

³⁰ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind,” *Education Post*, 2019, <https://educationpost.org/the-abc-of-esea-essa-and-no-child-left-behind/>.

³¹ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind.”

³² The Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, “Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” *The Association of Centers for the Study of Congress*, 2019, <http://acsc.lib.udel.edu/exhibits/show/legislation/esea>.

them.³³ Additionally, the bill has to be reauthorized by Congress every five years, and has been, with the addition of amendments and revisions by Congress – every five years since its inception.³⁴

Its most prominent provision is known as Title I – a provision that grants money to schools and school districts with a higher percentage of low-income students in an attempt to close the achievement gap between schools with a high percentage of low income students and schools in the suburbs with mostly middle-class students.³⁵ The majority of funding from the ESEA goes towards Title I grants.³⁶ Unfortunately, at the beginning, progress was slow given that the federal government could give states and school districts money, but it didn't necessarily mean that they would change their ways and ensure the highest needs students were receiving the funding and support they needed. The funding was lacking certain accountability measures – both to ensure the program was effective (was money towards these populations leading to increased results?) and to ensure money was actually being used for the populations it was intended to be used for. Throughout the 60s, 70s, and 80s, different presidents continued to add amendments to better include neglected populations – women, immigrants, disabled, refugees, Native Americans, etc. – but little was done to ensure accountability of implementation, so programs went continuously unchecked, as they had from the act's inception.³⁷

³³ The Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, "Elementary and Secondary Education Act."

³⁴ Catherine A. Paul, "Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965," *Social Welfare History Project*, 2016, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/education/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-of-1965/>.

³⁵ Paul, "Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965."

³⁶ Paul, "Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965."

³⁷ Paul, "Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965."

The 1980s and 1990s: The Rise of Charter Schools

The 1980s brought with it the establishment of the Department of Education as a Cabinet level agency.³⁸ The goal of funding public education shifted from equity in funding to excellence in schools.³⁹ This was mostly due to a report, “Nation at Risk,” detailing how public schools and teachers were failing students.⁴⁰ This caused public school reform to ramp up during the 80s and 90s, higher standards to be set for teachers (reversed from what was required during the post-World War II era), high standards for students, and the start of the Charter school movement.⁴¹

In 1988, a new amendment to the reauthorization of the ESEA suggested that there should be simultaneous development of both Title I and classroom instruction.⁴² In doing such, funds would be granted to low-income schools based on a higher achievement standard (i.e. low-income students would need to show mastery of advanced skills, not basic ones) and higher parental involvement.⁴³ However, there were, again, many critics of basing grants for public education on mastery of standards for low-income students as a measure of excellence. And, again, there were issues with accountability.

In 1993, however, there was a National Assessment of Title I and its policies, especially its revisions during the 1980s.⁴⁴ The faults found in this assessment led to the first major overhaul of the ESEA – the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of

³⁸ U.S. Department of Education, “The Federal Role in Education,” *U.S. Department of Education*, May, 25, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>.

³⁹ Lawrence J. McAndrews, “Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, Post 1945,” *American History*, September 2015, <http://oxfordre.com/americanhistorical/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-293>.

⁴⁰ Gelbrich, “Post World War II and Beyond.”

⁴¹ Gelbrich, “Post World War II and Beyond.”

⁴² Paul, “Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.”

⁴³ Paul, “Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.”

⁴⁴ Paul, “Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.”

1994.⁴⁵ This was the first major attempt at alignment between federal, state, and local level policies and resources, and included three major changes two Title I – math and reading/language arts standards that would assess students’ progress and hold schools accountable to student achievement, the opportunity for more schools to use funds to implement school wide programs by lowering the threshold of percent of students living in poverty needed to implement these programs, and giving schools receiving Title I funding more freedom in how they use those funds.⁴⁶ Ultimately, the IASA intended to give more control to the local level, while still ensuring schools were held accountable to results.

The 2000s: No Child Left Behind

The goal of education reform in the early 2000s to the present has been to ensure both equity, prioritized in the 60s and 70s, and excellence, prioritized in the 80s and 90s, are present in public education. By 2000, there was concern that test scores across the U.S. were sluggish and there was still a large gap between the achievement of schools in high and low income communities.⁴⁷⁴⁸ The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was a reauthorization of the ESEA that attempted to address these concerns.

Under this new law, states are given freedom to create their own systems of accountability, but must track progress and prove to the federal government that funds are being used to help educate all students in the state.⁴⁹ The federal government uses these

⁴⁵ Paul, “Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.”

⁴⁶ Paul, “Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.”

⁴⁷ McAndrews, “Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, Post 1945.”

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Education, “Education in the United States: A Brief Overview,” *U.S. Department of Education*, September 2005, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/edus/index.html>.

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of Education, “Education in the United States: A Brief Overview.”

state-defined standards and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to determine which schools and districts are in need of improvement.⁵⁰ Schools or districts found in need of improvement are required to work with the government to create a plan for improvement that includes but is not limited to: more parental involvement, teacher development programs, research-based strategies to improve student learning, etc.⁵¹

While the federal government does not force states to implement any one set of uniform standards, in 2009 there were state-led efforts to begin implementing common standards called Common Core. These standards are “research and evidence based,” “aligned with college and career expectations,” “based on rigorous content and [the] application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills,” and are influenced by what other high-achieving countries are doing in their education system.⁵² The pros and cons about the use of Common Core is a highly debated topic in the education world.

Recent Attempts at State Funding Formulas

In 2015, the ESEA has been reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).⁵³ The ESSA requires that every public school test students annually in reading and math, and every few years in science.⁵⁴ The type of test is not mandated by the federal government, but rather by the state or local district.⁵⁵ Not only are schools held accountable to strong academics through testing, but they are also held accountable through some state mandated “school quality” measure – many states opt for attendance

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Education, “Education in the United States: A Brief Overview.”

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Education, “Education in the United States: A Brief Overview.”

⁵² Common Core State Standards Initiative, “About the Standards,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/>.

⁵³ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind.”

⁵⁴ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind.”

⁵⁵ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind.”

numbers or parent and student engagement surveys – but the academic measures are weighted more heavily.⁵⁶ After analyzing all metrics, states have to identify the schools that are in need of improvement and provide support however they see fit.⁵⁷ Overall, the ESSA attempts to provide guidelines for schools that still encourage high student achievement for all students and school excellence, but that are more realistic than those set by No Child Left Behind.⁵⁸

It should be reiterated that federal funding still provides for only 10% of public education funding. The majority of funding still comes from state and local governments and property taxes. While each state has the freedom to fund its public schools differently, the most popular funding model is called the “Foundation Grant.” Using this formula, the state sets a minimum amount that should be spent per pupil.⁵⁹ It then assesses how much the local district can pay, mostly through property taxes, and then fills in the gap between how much the local district can pay and the minimum amount that should be spent per pupil.⁶⁰ This formula ensures all districts receive at least a minimum amount of funding per pupil, but property-rich districts will have more funding for their students. Additionally, this formula does not take into account districts that may need even more funding per pupil given certain subgroups in their population.⁶¹

Another formula, not quite as popular, is called the “Guaranteed Tax Base Approach.” This formula “[eliminates] the inequities that foundation funding can produce” because the state promises to provide a certain amount of money for each

⁵⁶ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind.”

⁵⁷ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind.”

⁵⁸ EducationPost, “The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA, and No Child Left Behind.”

⁵⁹ Alexandra Tilsley, “How do school funding formulas work?” Urban Institute, November 29, 2017, <https://apps.urban.org/features/funding-formulas/>.

⁶⁰ Tilsley, “How do school funding formulas work?”

⁶¹ Tilsley, “How do school funding formulas work?”

percentage of property tax, regardless of how much money is raised through property taxes in that district.⁶² Using this formula, there is less of a gap between the property-rich and property-poor districts. Some states have chosen to make that gap even smaller by “recapturing” the revenue that property-rich districts make above the minimum level per pupil set by the state.⁶³ However, this is not very popular given that property-rich districts may start to see a decline in property value since “recaptured” revenue wouldn’t necessarily be spent in those districts.⁶⁴ Additionally, this may cause the state to continuously need to lower the threshold for “recapture,” eventually leading to lower and lower expenditure per pupil in the long-run.⁶⁵ Keep in mind that in both these formulas, local districts have control of how much they wish to charge in property taxes.

These formulas don’t necessarily account for the fact that some district have more high needs students than others, and states must account for this and find a way to deliver more funds to those districts. If not determined through the above mentioned formulas, states can use categorical funding for specific programs or groups of students, such as funding for special education or English language learners.⁶⁶ About half of states use what’s called progressive categorical funding, ensuring that more money is designated for districts with more students from low-income families.⁶⁷ The other half use a regressive formula, at least for part of the states’ categorical funding, which can provide very

⁶² Tilsley, “How do school funding formulas work?”

⁶³ Tilsley, “How do school funding formulas work?”

⁶⁴ Tilsley, “How do school funding formulas work?”

⁶⁵ Tilsley, “How do school funding formulas work?”

⁶⁶ Matthew M. Chingos and Kristin Blagg, “Making Sense of State School Funding Policy,” Urban Institute, November 2017, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/94961/making-sense-of-state-school-funding-policy_0.pdf.

⁶⁷ Chingos and Blagg, “Making Sense of State School Funding Policy.”

inequitable funding for districts with high income students vs. districts with more low income students.⁶⁸

Additionally, many states are choosing to move towards more outcomes based funding to provide the additional funding to districts with more low income students. However, outcomes based funding, typically based on the reading scores of schools, has been proven to actually ensure funding for the least needy students, not the students with the most need.⁶⁹ “For those concerned with equity... [this model] rewards districts that have the greatest number of students reading at the level of proficiency.”⁷⁰ The wealthiest districts are the ones with the most students reading at grade-level, meaning the wealthiest districts would continue to receive even more funding than they already do due to property taxes.⁷¹ Those districts can then reinvest the extra cash into improving their already strong programs, and continue to increase the gap between achievement in the highest performing and lowest performing districts year after year.⁷²

Policy Proposal

The goal of this policy proposal is to increase equity in public school funding in order to create a more just education system, in addition to ensuring better long term economic health of the United States. Equity in this case can be defined in the short term as ensuring schools with higher need populations are receiving more funding per pupil and that all students, no matter zip code or property wealth have equal access to both academic and non-academic programming. Long term, high school graduation rates

⁶⁸ Chingos and Blagg, “Making Sense of State School Funding Policy.”

⁶⁹ Strauss, “Texas.”

⁷⁰ Strauss, “Texas.”

⁷¹ Strauss, “Texas.”

⁷² Strauss, “Texas.”

should increase. This policy proposal will use the example of educational financing from other countries with more equitable funding systems and higher achievement on international exams than the United States.

The proposal would be authorized by introducing a new education financing bill – the Equity in Public Education Financing Bill (EPE) – to the House floor. The bill would first propose a restructuring of Title I funding practices in order to promote more equity in funding. First, Title I currently allocates funding based on the number of and concentration of low-income students in each states, as well as the average per pupil expenditure in each state.⁷³ Using this formula, states with the most average per pupil expenditure get the most dollars from Title I, leaving states with lower average per pupil expenditure with less funding even though lower spending states tend to have higher populations of low-income students.⁷⁴ While cost of living and geographic adjustments account for some of the difference, large disparities remain.⁷⁵ You should propose that Title I funding should, instead, take state expenditure out of the funding formula to ensure funding is given based on the proportion of low-income students in each state and geographic adjustments for cost of education.⁷⁶ This part of the proposal would not cost more federal dollars, but would redistribute current funding using a more equitable formula. If passed, this proposal would be included in the reauthorization of the ESEA, which, as mentioned above, is reauthorized every 5 years.

⁷³ Eloise Pasachoff, “How the Federal Government Can Improve School Financing Systems,” *The Brookings Institution*, 2008, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/01_education_pasachoff.pdf.

⁷⁴ Pasachoff, “How the Federal Government Can Improve School Financing Systems.”

⁷⁵ Pasachoff, “How the Federal Government Can Improve School Financing Systems.”

⁷⁶ Goodwin Liu, “Interstate Inequality in Educational Opportunity,” in *Helping Children Left Behind: State Aid and the Pursuit of Educational Equity*, ed. by John Yinger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 2044-2084, https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Interstate_Inequality_Goodwin_Lui.pdf.

In addition to changes in the ESEA, the bill would propose key changes about how public education in the United States is funded at the state and local levels, since that is where the majority of education funding comes from. Currently, due to the 10th amendment, the federal government does not have the authority to tell states how to fund public education. Therefore, the proposal relies heavily on the states to implement. So, if passed, the bill will be a recommendation to states, with an incentive for states to implement it. If states choose to implement the recommendation for school funding, they would be held accountable through the mechanisms that already exist in the ESEA.

To incentivize states to take on this complete overhaul of school funding and centralization of school funding decisions, the federal government should incentivize states by helping states fund the proposed changes. This will allow states to ensure equality in public schools funding – all schools would receive equal per pupil funding regardless of zip code or property wealth – and equity in public school funding – schools with higher populations of low income, minority, special needs, etc. students would receive more funding through Title I. The policy proposal, if adopted by states, would require the following changes:

- i. A change in the school funding formula: School districts and schools will no longer be funded primarily by the local property taxes. Instead, states will collect a percentage of local property taxes, state sales taxes, and state income taxes centrally and then distribute them out equally, per pupil, when funding all public schools in the state. Then, the federal and state governments should develop a formula that would give additional aid to schools with higher percentages of disadvantaged groups (i.e. low-income, students with

disabilities, minorities, etc.) to ensure equity, not just equality. These revenue decisions should be made by state legislators with the input of local experts, rather than just by local school boards.

- ii. Free, well-balanced breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of income.⁷⁷ Schools will offer free, well-balanced meals to all students in order to both avoid the stigma that comes with free meals for low-income students and ensure students are fed and can reach their potential in school.⁷⁸
- iii. Provide extra assistance or programs for students performing below grade level.⁷⁹ The type of program will not be mandated from the federal government, as this has failed previously with the Supplemental Educational Services program under No Child Left Behind.⁸⁰ However, each state should decide, or delegated to the school districts or individual schools to decide, what types of programs would best support their students performing below grade level. This could take the form of professional tutoring programs, peer tutoring programs, extra classes built into the school day, etc. Programs implemented should be tracked by the schools, and the state, in order to hold schools accountable to implementing programs and to track effectiveness of programs on students performing below grade level.

⁷⁷ Lisette Partelow, Catherine Brown, Sarah Shapiro, and Stephenie Johnson, “7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018,” *Center for American Progress*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/03/28/448156/7-great-education-policy-ideas-progressives-2018/>.

⁷⁸ Carol Pogash, “Free Lunch Isn’t Cool, So Some Students Go Hungry,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/01/education/01lunch.html>.

⁷⁹ Partelow, “7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018.”

⁸⁰ Partelow, “7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018.”

- iv. Provide more social and emotional support to all schools so that there is a smaller counselor to student ratio, especially in schools with higher populations of high needs students. Mental health issue in adolescents has increased exponentially over the last century, and when students' mental health is not taken care of, it can be impossible to learn. Trauma and other family and community issues tend to affect low-income communities and communities of color at a higher rate. Therefore, all schools need to invest in more counselor and social work staff in order to address these trends.
- v. Increase teacher pay and provide higher quality and more frequent professional development for teachers. If teachers are going to train to the highest level in order to educate the next generation of Americans, pay has to be competitive for such a demanding job to be sustainable. Teachers must be paid above the state average income to make it worthwhile for them to train hard and develop their skills, just as we would expect a doctor to do so. In addition, states should provide more frequent professional development to allow teachers to consistently and continually hone their craft.

In order to incentivize states to implement this proposal the federal government will need new funding mechanisms to help support states. Over the last fifty years, spending on the American prison system has increased faster than spending on American public education, three times as fast when compared to spending on elementary school and even faster when compared to spending on secondary school.⁸¹ This is because over the past fifty years the prison population has risen to its current state of over 2 million prisoners,

⁸¹ U.S. Department of Education, "State and Local Expenditures on Corrections and Education," *U.S. Department of Education*, July 2016, <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/expenditures-corrections-education/brief.pdf>.

more than any other country in the world.⁸² This costs tax payers \$80 billion a year.⁸³

Additionally, due to laws like minimum sentencing, 1 out of 5 of these prisoners are in prison for life for nonviolent drug offenses, and 4 out of 10 of these prisoners would most likely not be a danger to the public if released.⁸⁴ The federal government and state governments should begin slowly decreasing their prison populations to allow tax payer money to help fund schools at a higher rate than prisons.

Policy Analysis

This proposal uses a combination of systems from other countries with higher high school and college graduation rates, test scores, and equitable funding methods, and suggestions from educational experts in the field in the United States. Like any policy proposal, however, there are both pros and cons to establishing a more equitable public education funding system.

Advantages

1. Beginning with the reauthorization of the ESEA, the restructuring of the Title I funding formula will not only ensure that the students, schools, and districts with the most disadvantage receive the most funding, but it will not pose any extra cost to the federal government. While not incurring any extra costs, restructuring the Title I funding formula to eliminate the state expenditure factor, as suggested by Pasachoff, Liu, and others, would also make the allocation of funding more equitable, which is the main

⁸² Ava DuVernay, dir., *13th*, Forward Movement, Kandoo Films, Netflix, 2016.

⁸³ Partelow, "7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018."

⁸⁴ Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019," *Prison Policy Initiative*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html>.

policy goal.⁸⁵⁸⁶ Additionally, other federal formulas for allocation of funds to special education programs, English as a second language programs, etc. do not use the state expenditure factor.⁸⁷ So, taking this factor out of the equation would align Title I funding with other federal funding formulas for similar programs. Adding the geographic cost adjustment would also ensure that each federal dollar weighed the same for each student in each state, while at the same time helping to appease states that tend to spend more per pupil who may feel blind sided with the loss of the state expenditure factor.⁸⁸

2. Many high achieving countries have found a more equitable funding methods by rejecting the typical funding system that relies on local property wealth and relying, instead, on the broader tax base of the state, or province. Canada, one of the top scoring countries closest in culture to the United States, has consistently scored higher than the United States on all international student achievement tests.⁸⁹ Canada has a provincial-level funding systems, each of which use different models of funding depending on the needs of their province.⁹⁰ Using a broader tax base at the provincial level, rather than local property taxes, allows for more evenly spread and predictable budgeting from year to year, and ensures more students get what they need in school.⁹¹ Ultimately, these provinces set province-level property taxes of their choosing for education specifically and then supplement those funds with “general revenue funds” depending on need.⁹²

⁸⁵ Pasachoff, “How the Federal Government Can Improve School Financing Systems.”

⁸⁶ Liu, “Interstate Inequality in Educational Opportunity.”

⁸⁷ Pasachoff, “How the Federal Government Can Improve School Financing Systems.”

⁸⁸ Pasachoff, “How the Federal Government Can Improve School Financing Systems.”

⁸⁹ Drew Desilver, “U.S. students’ academic achievement still lags that of their peers in many other countries,” *Pew Research Center*, February 15, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/15/u-s-students-internationally-math-science/>.

⁹⁰ Juliana Herman, “Canada’s Approach to School Funding,” *Center for American Progress*, May 14, 2013, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2013/05/14/63131/canadas-approach-to-school-funding/>.

⁹¹ Herman, “Canada’s Approach to School Funding.”

⁹² Herman, “Canada’s Approach to School Funding.”

Japan, which ranks consistently higher on all international student achievement tests than both the United States and Canada, has also rejected the idea of funding public schools based on local property wealth.⁹³ While other cultural factors have helped keep education expenditures low nationwide, it doesn't change the fact that Japan utilizes a funding formula that first funds all students equally and then takes into consideration other extenuating circumstances, like lower-income areas, areas hit by natural disaster, special education populations, etc., to then fund equitably by help certain populations more on top of the normal per-pupil expenditure.⁹⁴ Two-thirds of public education is funded by prefectures and one-third is funded by the national government.⁹⁵ As of late, the national government has used revenue from increased sales taxes and an increase in employer contributions.⁹⁶ The prefectures and municipalities collect a variety of local taxes and, as of FY2013, spend about 16.5% of its taxes on funding public education.⁹⁷

3. Nutritionists say that eating a healthy, well-balanced breakfast before school “is linked to improved concentration, better test scores, increased energy, a higher intake of vitamins and minerals...[because students’] brains use up about half of the body’s energy.”⁹⁸ It is rare that anyone nowadays would dispute the fact that fueling the body properly is necessary to succeed in any line of working. While the free and reduced lunch program has been in place for a long time, and usually require that 40-60% of students

⁹³ Alana Semuels, “Japan Might Be What Equality in Education Looks Like,” *The Atlantic*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/08/japan-equal-education-school-cost/535611/>.

⁹⁴ Semuels, “Japan Might Be What Equality in Education Looks Like.”

⁹⁵ Center on International Education Benchmarking, “Japan: Governance and Accountability,” *Center on International Education Benchmarking*, 2018, <http://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/japan-overview/japan-system-and-school-organization/>.

⁹⁶ Reuters Tokyo, “Japan to spend around \$17 billion to subsidize education,” *Rueters*, November 24, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-economy-education/japan-to-spend-around-17-billion-to-subsidize-education-media-idUSKBN1DP03W>.

⁹⁷ Tokyo Metropolitan Government, “Tokyo’s Financial System,” *Tokyo Metropolitan Government*, 2018, <http://www.metro.tokyo.jp/ENGLISH/ABOUT/FINANCIAL/financial01.htm>.

⁹⁸ Lindsay Boyers, “Benefits of Eating Breakfast for Students,” *SFGate*, November 21, 2018, <https://healthyeating.sfgate.com/benefits-eating-breakfast-students-7697.html>.

apply and qualify for the program for the school to qualify for these vouchers, there are certain stigmas that come with the visibility of being a student who gets a free lunch.⁹⁹ And oftentimes, students will refuse to eat breakfast or lunch at school for free to avoid the stigmas that come with it.¹⁰⁰ This choice leads to lower levels of energy, poorer test scores, higher levels of irritability (or what teachers and staff label as “behavioral problems”), along with a number of other stereotypes the public has for low-income and minority students.

Offering a healthy, well-balanced breakfast and lunch to all students has several benefits. First, it reduces the visibility of students who truly need the free meals due to family finances, thereby reducing the stigma mentioned above.¹⁰¹ Second, it encourages all students to not only eat breakfast and lunch, but to eat healthier.¹⁰² Third, it reduces the amount of administrative paperwork schools have to keep track of in order to prove they have the right amount of low-income students necessary to provide free or reduced meals to.¹⁰³ While this program would not force students to eat breakfast and lunch it would open up the option of having breakfast and lunch to all students.

4. There is a lot of qualitative and quantitative research that shows tutoring programs in general have a positive effect on student achievement. Upper and middle class students essentially have a one-on-one tutor at home with them on a regular basis who typically have at least a bachelor’s degree, whereas a higher percentage of lower income students

⁹⁹ Pogash, “Free Lunch Isn’t Cool, So Some Students Go Hungry.”

¹⁰⁰ Pogash, “Free Lunch Isn’t Cool, So Some Students Go Hungry.”

¹⁰¹ Bettina Elias Siegel, “Shaming Children So Parents Will Pay the School Lunch Bill,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/30/well/family/lunch-shaming-children-parents-school-bills.html>.

¹⁰² Matt Barnum, “Free school lunch for all, meant to reduce stigma, may also keep students healthier,” *Chalkbeat*, May 4, 2018, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2018/05/04/free-school-lunch-for-all-meant-to-reduce-stigma-may-also-keep-students-healthier/>.

¹⁰³ Barnum, “Free school lunch for all, meant to reduce stigma, may also keep students healthier.”

tend to live in one parent households or households where the parent and/or guardian(s) work more than one job and either are not home as much or have not completed as much education themselves as the parents in upper and middle class households.

Providing students who are performing below grade level with a tutor would help catch students from lower income families up to grade level and level the playing field, so to speak, with students from families who are able to receive academic assistance at home.¹⁰⁴ However, ensuring that states have flexibility in what types of tutoring programs to implement is key for both success and flexibility. This could take the form of community volunteers, peer-tutoring, tutoring classes run by teachers, computer-based tutoring, etc.¹⁰⁵

5. About half of the children in the United will experience some traumatic event during their childhood.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately a higher percentage of these traumatic events will be experienced by children of minority or low-income backgrounds who are typically enrolled in schools with less resources to help them deal with these experiences. “Children exposed to at least two traumas were 2.5 more likely to repeat a grade or to be disengaged with their classwork, compared to those who had no such experiences.”¹⁰⁷ This leads to lower academic achievement and lower levels of persistence through high school and college.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Partelow, “7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018.”

¹⁰⁵ Partelow, “7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018.”

¹⁰⁶ Olga Khazan, “Half of All Kids are Traumatized,” *The Atlantic*, December 11, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/12/half-of-all-kids-experience-traumatic-events/383630/>.

¹⁰⁷ Khazan, “Half of All Kids are Traumatized.”

¹⁰⁸ Jane D. McLeod, Ryotaro Uemura, and Shawna Rohman, “Adolescent Mental Health, Behavior Problems, and Academic Achievement,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 53, no. 4 (2012): 482-497, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3752654/>.

Oftentimes, school psychologists or social workers serve more than one school and hundreds of students. They may also serve as an academic counselor, which puts even more of a burden on these staff members. While this allows them to serve more students, those students receive less quality time with these professionals. Schools need to separate these roles and ensure there are a higher number of school psychologist or social workers residing in each school.¹⁰⁹ With a higher number of these staff, dedicated solely to one school and solely in this role, and serving a lower number of students each, students suffering from mental illness or having experienced traumatic events will get more of the help they need. This will leads these students to be more capable to reaching their full potential academically and feel safer in the school environment.

6. Young professionals are entering the teaching field at much lower rates than in the past.¹¹⁰ Many who do choose the field are leaving the field altogether, sometimes after just a year.¹¹¹ They cite pay that is not competitive with other professions, a lack of professional development, a lack of room for growth and leadership, and unrealistic expectations placed on teachers.¹¹² Introducing a more competitive starting salary and pay scale will begin to entice more, and higher quality, young professionals into the education sector.¹¹³ This coupled with higher quality and more frequent professional

¹⁰⁹ Partelow, “7 Great Education Policy Ideas for Progressives in 2018.”

¹¹⁰ Lissette Partelow, Angie Spong, Catherine Brown, and Stephanie Johnson, “America Needs More Teachers of Color and a More Selective Teaching Profession,” *Center for American Progress*, September 14, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/09/14/437667/america-needs-teachers-color-selective-teaching-profession/>.

¹¹¹ Partelow, “America Needs More Teachers of Color and a More Selective Teaching Profession.”

¹¹² Ronald Thorpe, “Residency: Can it transform teaching the way it did medicine?” *Kappan* 96, no. 1 (2014): 36-40, http://www.nbpts.org/wp-content/uploads/ron_thorpe_pdk.pdf.

¹¹³ The New Teacher Project, “The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America’s Urban Schools,” *TNTP*, 2012, https://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_Irreplaceables_2012.pdf.

development and frequent opportunities for leadership development will ensure the majority of high quality teachers remain in the education sector.¹¹⁴

Other countries with higher academic achievement scores have these qualities in place in their education system already. For example, Germany, Switzerland, Korea, and Japan all score higher than the United States on academic achievement tests¹¹⁵, and all simultaneously pay their teachers a competitive starting salary with a competitive pay scale that allows teachers to earn more over the years based on meaningful evaluation systems¹¹⁶, evaluation systems that track more than just student standardized test scores. The United States has long relied almost solely on standardized test scores in order to evaluate their teachers, something that most high achieving countries reject. Singapore and Hong Kong, two of the highest achieving countries, value teacher development, teacher input in evaluation, and teacher collaboration, something they claim makes teachers think about how their actions affect their students, rather than making teachers think about themselves.¹¹⁷

7. In the 1970s, a “war on crime” declared by President Nixon, and President Reagan following him, led to an impulsive increase in prisoners and the prison system.¹¹⁸ As the language “war on crime” continued, people began to view mass incarceration as a solution to crime, and it became hard for politicians to win races without being “tough on crime.”¹¹⁹ However, mass incarceration is not directly causing lower crime rates, in fact

¹¹⁴ TNTP, “The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America’s Urban Schools.”

¹¹⁵ Desilver, “U.S. students’ academic achievement still lags that of their peers in many other countries.”

¹¹⁶ Shayanne Gal, Marissa Perino, and Leanna Garfield, “The best and worst countries to be a teacher, based on salary,” *Business Insider*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/teacher-salaries-by-country-2017-5>.

¹¹⁷ Tim Walker, “How Do High-Performing Nations Evaluate Teachers?” *neaToday*, March 25, 2013, <http://neatoday.org/2013/03/25/how-do-high-performing-nations-evaluate-teachers/>.

¹¹⁸ DuVernay, dir., *13th*.

¹¹⁹ DuVernay, dir., *13th*.

several states – New Jersey, New York, Texas, and California – have been able to decrease their crime rates faster than the national average while simultaneously decreasing their prison populations.^{120 121}

Creating legislation that focused on decreasing the prison population, shortening sentences for nonviolent offenses, and exiting people from the system as soon as it is realized they are not a threat to the public would allow for a shift of a minimum of \$20 billion of taxpayers money a year from prisons to schools.¹²² Long term, investing this money into schools will, theoretically, lead to a more educated, less criminalized population and reduce the school-to-prison pipeline that has become so prevalent in American life.^{123 124}

Disadvantages

1. Throwing out the historical and engrained public schools funding methods based primarily on local property taxes could cause some push back. The first issue with local property taxes going to the state to distribute evenly among school districts is that homeowners may never vote to increase taxes given that they will not go directly to their local schools district.¹²⁵ Additionally, this new method of funding would take away most revenue decision-making power from local school boards and give that power to state

¹²⁰ James Austin and Lauren-Brooke Eisen, “How Many Americans Are Unnecessarily Incarcerated?” *Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law*, 2016, https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Unnecessarily_Incarcerated.pdf.

¹²¹ Marc Mauer and Nazgol Ghandnoosh, “Fewer Prisoners, Less Crime: A Tale of Three States,” *The Sentencing Project*, 2015, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Fewer-Prisoners-Less-Crime-A-Tale-of-Three-States.pdf>.

¹²² Austin, “How Many Americans Are Unnecessarily Incarcerated?”

¹²³ Justice Policy Institute, “Pruning Prisons: How Cutting Corrections Can Save Money and Protect Public Safety,” *Justice Policy Institute*, 2009, http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/09_05_rep_pruningprisons_ac_ps.pdf.

¹²⁴ Marilyn Elias, “The School-to-Prison Pipeline,” *Teaching Tolerance* 43 (Spring 2013), <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2013/the-school-to-prison-pipeline>.

¹²⁵ Michael Griffith, “Is It Time to Stop Funding Schools With Local Property Taxes?” *EdNote*, October 12, 2017, <https://ednote.ecs.org/is-it-time-to-stop-funding-schools-with-local-property-taxes/>.

legislators.¹²⁶ American citizens seriously consider the property value of communities because they know that property wealth funds the schools where their children will attend – i.e. they may purchase in a community with higher property wealth explicitly so that their child will attend a comparatively well-funded school. Tax payers would most likely react negatively if taxes went towards funding students besides their own and also lose decision-making powers over those funds.

In addition to cons related to tax payers, property taxes are a relatively stable source of tax.¹²⁷ Even if the taxes don't go directly to the local school district and are, instead, collected centrally at the state level and distributed equally across school districts, property taxes remain a stable source of tax to use for school funding. However, with the additional programming proposed in this policy, additional funds would be needed. The proposal states that some of these funds would come from state income and state sales taxes. While a strong source of revenue for states, these types of taxes tend to be less stable than property taxes.¹²⁸ Additionally, these taxes vary widely by states, and states would need to decide what percentage they need of each to make up some of the extra funds needed for education.

2. The fact that the federal government currently only funds about 10% of public education in each state will obviously have to change if states are going to implement this proposal, which includes adding staff members, feeding more students, and paying teachers more, along with several other costly provisions. In order to create the additional funds needed, the policy proposes cuts to federal and state prison systems and the long

¹²⁶ Griffith, "Is It Time to Stop Funding Schools With Local Property Taxes?"

¹²⁷ Griffith, "Is It Time to Stop Funding Schools With Local Property Taxes?"

¹²⁸ Griffith, "Is It Time to Stop Funding Schools With Local Property Taxes?"

term process of decarceration. This proposal is very progressive given that it is counterintuitive to decreasing crime rates and most of the public won't be well versed in the research and consider it dangerous. Another disadvantage here is that the process of decarceration would have to begin with not only a want for decarceration, but with a change in laws for different crimes, an increase in court proceedings and probation for possible released inmates, and the creation of more rehabilitation options for released inmates. This is a long term, complicated system to dismantle.

Additionally, this plan of eventually saving \$20 billion or more due to decarceration and the scaling back of the prison system is a long term goal – the money will not be readily available. So, states will either have to front the money in the short term and their state's deficit will increase with the caveat that eventually the federal government will add to this funding, or front the money in the short term and their state's deficit will increase with the understanding that the federal government will eventually pay them back them back, thereby increasing the federal government's deficit. Either way, in the short term a deficit will be incurred for someone, which is a big disadvantage to this proposal.

Political Analysis

Democrats and Republicans are deeply divided on education reform, tax reform, and prison reform, so there will likely be no easy way to pass this policy, which includes all three reforms in some sense. Additionally, this policy requires buy-in from the individual states, who are used to having complete autonomy over local taxes and public education, and have to take into consideration private, business interests in their states,

which ultimately affects politicians' election and/or re-election. Finally, the public will have incredibly strong feelings one way or another on the education, tax, and prison reforms proposed in this policy, and politicians have to take their opinions into consideration as well; again, because it affects their election and/or re-election.

Many new state legislators and governors elected during the 2018 midterm elections committed to more adequately and equitably funding public education in their states. Additionally, 15 new educational measures were up for a vote, most of which were for new and increased funding for public education. 11 of these 15 funding measures were approved.¹²⁹ So, it is clear that new and better public education funding mechanisms is a crucial issue for voters across America. With Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) as the chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) as the chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, coupled with the fact that there is clearly strong support countrywide for increased investments in public education, there is hope for bipartisan progressive education policy.¹³⁰ It's important to add that Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) has helped pass bipartisan educational policies in the past, even the highly debated, long stalemated reauthorization of the ESEA in 2015.¹³¹ So, while he may not approve of the sections of the proposal that provide recommended changes for states, he may well support the proposed change to the ESEA – to repeal the state expenditure factor of the

¹²⁹ Jessica Yin and Scott Sargrad, "Education in the 2018 Midterm," *Center for American Progress*, November 9, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2018/11/09/460742/education-2018-midterms/>.

¹³⁰ Yin, "Education in the 2018 Midterm."

¹³¹ Louis Freedberg and John Fensterwald, "In bipartisan vote, Congress overwhelmingly approves new federal education law," *EdSource*, December 9, 2015, <https://edsource.org/2015/in-bipartisan-vote-congress-overwhelmingly-approves-new-federal-education-law/91650>.

Title I funding formula – and hopefully the chairman who follows him in a year will continue to push for bipartisan support of the reauthorization of the ESEA in 2020.

As of the fall of 2018, there were 3.2 million full time teachers teaching primary and secondary public school in the United States.¹³² 2018 brought with it an unprecedented amount of teacher strikes across the nation as well. These strikes began in West Virginia in February 2018, which resulted in a 5% pay increase for teachers in West Virginia, and inspired similar strikes in 2018 and 2019 in Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, Colorado, Georgia, Virginia, and California.¹³³ The main cause – inadequate teacher pay and school resources. 3.2 million teachers is too large a factor not to take into consideration. It is clear they are a force to be reckoned with and that they have the ability to garner national attention, swing votes as they did in several midterm gubernatorial races, and run for office as was the case in the Senate, House of Representatives, state legislative seats, gubernatorial seats, and superintendent of education seats.¹³⁴

Additionally, in this same time period, there were 50.7 million students receiving a primary or secondary public school education in the United States.¹³⁵ Of those students, 24.1 million are white students, which is expected to continue to decline year after year, and 26.6 million are African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacifica Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or a mix of two or more races.¹³⁶ Only 8% of white students attend

¹³² National Center for Education Statistics, “Back to school statistics,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, 2018, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>.

¹³³ Tracy Lee, “Half of Americans Would Pay Higher Taxes to Give Teachers Better Salary Amid Low-Pay Battle,” *Newsweek*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/half-americans-taxes-teacher-sa-897657>.

¹³⁴ Michael Hansen, Elizabeth Mann Levesque, and Jon Valant, “What do the 2018 midterm elections mean for education in America?” *The Brookings Institution*, November 7, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/11/07/what-do-the-2018-midterm-elections-mean-for-education-in-america/>.

¹³⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, “Back to school statistics.”

¹³⁶ National Center for Education Statistics, “Back to school statistics.”

high poverty schools, schools with more than 75% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, while a much higher percentage (45% for African American and Hispanic) non-white students attend high poverty schools.¹³⁷ Students and families of minority races and from low-income communities have the most to gain, or lose, from education reform; depending on the direction it takes. These are large, and growing, populations, who can have a drastic effect on the leadership of the country in the next election, and those to come for decades.

Here are some recent trends in public attitudes towards public education, taxes, and prison reform in the United States:

- Support is continually growing for both increasing teacher salaries and school spending in general.¹³⁸
- Support for charter schools has increased recently among both Republicans and Democrats.¹³⁹
- Most voters believe it will take more than money to improve education in this country, but innovation to create change.¹⁴⁰
- Out of all the taxes paid, Americans believe that property taxes are the worst, and the amount of people who believe this is increasing each year.¹⁴¹
- Most voters want to pay less in taxes, but more money for teachers and schools.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ National Center for Education Statistics, "Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch," *National Center for Education Statistics*, March 2018, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clb.asp.

¹³⁸ Lukas Boehning, "Roundup: Four New Polls Detail Public Opinion Toward Education," *Policy Innovators in Education*, September 7, 2018, <https://pie-network.org/article/roundup-four-new-polls-detail-public-opinion-toward-education/>.

¹³⁹ Boehning, "Roundup: Four New Polls Detail Public Opinion Toward Education."

¹⁴⁰ Boehning, "Roundup: Four New Polls Detail Public Opinion Toward Education."

¹⁴¹ Gallup, "Taxes," *Gallup*, April 2005, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1714/taxes.aspx>.

¹⁴² UT News, "UT/TT Poll: Texans Embrace Legislative Focus on Public Education, Property Taxes," *UT News*, March 4, 2019, <https://news.utexas.edu/2019/03/04/ut-tt-poll-texans-embrace-legislative-focus-on-public-education-property-taxes/>.

- There is bipartisan support for both criminal justice and prison reform, especially when it comes to getting rid of mandatory minimums.¹⁴³

Based on recent polling numbers, it looks like many Americans, across the political spectrum, would support this policy proposal in theory. However, bipartisan agreement on education, tax, or prison reform is very rare. For example, in terms of restructuring the Title I funding to take state expenditure out of the funding formula to ensure funding is given based on the proportion of low-income students in each state and geographic adjustments for cost of education – Republicans will most likely see this as an overreach of the federal government. Last time the ESEA was reauthorized, many of the federal safeguards put in place to make sure states did the right thing regarding education funding during the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) were removed, leaving very little room for the federal government to hold states, schools, and teachers accountable.¹⁴⁴ While bipartisan in nature due to the structural flaws with the NCLB, the reauthorization of the ESEA in 2015 left both sides wanting, but the wants were very different – Democrats wanted more structures in place that would hold states accountable and Republicans wanted less federal input and authority over states when it came to education.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, proponents of the state expenditure factor in the past have argued that without the state expenditure factor there is no way to account for states that have a higher cost of living and spend more on resources for each pupil.¹⁴⁶ With that in

¹⁴³ Committee on the Judiciary, “Poll Shows Americans Overwhelmingly Support Prison, Sentencing Reforms,” *U.S. Senate*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/rep/releases/poll-shows-americans-overwhelmingly-support-prison-sentencing-reforms>.

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Michelman, “The Never-Ending Story of ESEA Reauthorization,” *ASCD Policy Priorities* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2012), http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy_priorities/vol18/num01/The_Never-Ending_Story_of_ESEA_Reauthorization.aspx.

¹⁴⁵ Michelman, “The Never-Ending Story of ESEA Reauthorization.”

¹⁴⁶ Congressional Research Service, “History of the ESEA Title I-A Formula,” *Congressional Research Service*, July 17, 2017, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20170717_R44898_9eea86370068f3561f7b1c876ec02ba0f48a1bee.pdf.

mind, it will probably be unlikely that this new Title I funding formula passes through the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions unless Republicans get to add a stipulation or two of their own. However, one of the benefits of this proposal is that more Title I funding would go where it is truly needed without an increase in federal spending.

Moving onto the state funding change, there will undoubtedly be huge divides in public support. The most obvious of these issues is that affluent and mostly white communities with higher quality schools will oppose the idea of their property taxes helping to fund schools statewide, while lower income, minority communities will welcome this change. The white, affluent communities are less likely to vote on measures that would make funding more equitable because they like the quality of the schools their children attend already.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, state legislatures may argue that income tax and sales tax are too volatile to use as supplements for extra funding, especially those states without income tax, like Texas.¹⁴⁸ Finally, there is precedent to support the idea that states don't have to equitably fund their schools because education is not technically a fundamental right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, and states are free to decide how to fund their public schools according to the Supreme Court case *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*.¹⁴⁹

However, it can also be argued by the growing number of low income, minority constituents that current state and local funding of education inherently disregards the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the Supreme Court opinion of

¹⁴⁷ Magda Derisma, "Opposing Views: The Divide in Public Education Funding – Property Tax Revenue," *Children's Legal Rights Journal* 34, no. 1 (2013): 122-124, <https://lawecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=clrj>.

¹⁴⁸ Derisma, "Opposing Views: The Divide in Public Education Funding – Property Tax Revenue."

¹⁴⁹ Derisma, "Opposing Views: The Divide in Public Education Funding – Property Tax Revenue."

this landmark case, Justice Warren argued that public education is “the most important function of state and local governments and that without adequate access to it, a child would struggle to succeed in life.”¹⁵⁰ These constituents would be right in arguing that current state policies that fund public schools primarily on local property taxes does not allow adequate access to high quality education for all students, thereby reverting back to *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the idea of separate but equal.

Continuing on to free breakfast and lunch for all students, on principle no one would argue that making free breakfast and lunch available to all students is a bad thing. Similarly, no one would argue that eating breakfast and lunch is important in a child’s day and ensures energy to get through the day and perform at a higher rate than if breakfast and lunch were not had. However, many Republicans argue that the free and reduced-lunch programs that the federal government has provided in the past increases family reliance on the federal government to feed their children and takes away responsibility and blame from the parents.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, New York has already voted for and implemented free breakfast and lunch for all students, no matter their demographic, if students want food.¹⁵²

Despite disagreements, in theory, over whether or not schools should provide free meals as an option for all students, where there will undoubtedly be disagreements among the public and politicians is in how to fund such programs because these programs will undoubtedly require a huge amount of additional funding. If we use New York City elementary schools (K-5) as an example, during the 2014-2015 school year 25 million

¹⁵⁰ Derisma, “Opposing Views: The Divide in Public Education Funding – Property Tax Revenue.”

¹⁵¹ Teresa Mull, “Why cutting back school lunches would be a favor to families,” *The Hill*, February 24, 2017, <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/education/321021-why-cutting-back-free-school-lunches-would-be-a-favor-to>.

¹⁵² Abigail Hess, “Students in this city get free breakfast and lunch and library fine forgiveness,” *CNBC*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/10/24/students-in-this-city-get-free-breakfast-lunch-and-library-books.html>.

lunches were served.¹⁵³ At an average cost of \$4.03 per student this adds up to \$103 million a year.¹⁵⁴ If we factor in how much of that would be subsidized by the federal government given the number of free or reduced lunch qualifying students, the federal government would subsidize about \$63 million of the total.¹⁵⁵ This leaves the New York City Department of Education to foot the bill of about \$40 million, also taking into consideration that there is no revenue from students who would have paid partial or full price given their family's income.¹⁵⁶ This is a huge amount of extra funding needed, and this is only for elementary schools and only if the number of students taking breakfast and lunch stays constant and does not increase. Figure 4 shows additional costs if students receiving free meals were to increase in elementary schools alone:¹⁵⁷

Figure 4

Costs of Increased Participation for Free Lunch Expansion Under Community Eligibility Program				
<i>Dollars in millions</i>				
Elementary School Participation	Number of Students	(Cost/Meal*School Days)*Participants	Estimated Reimbursement	Net Cost to the City
No Change	141,870	\$102.9	\$66.2	\$36.7
10 Percent Increase	156,057	113.2	72.8	40.4
25 Percent Increase	177,338	128.6	82.8	45.8
50 Percent Increase	212,806	154.4	99.3	55.1

New York City Independent Budget Office

Extra assistance or programs to target students performing below grade-level is also a no-brainer for everyone involved. This is especially the case if individual schools are able to create programs that best fit their school and student need, which would please Republicans when considering that states and individual schools retain autonomy, and if there are accountability measures in place to ensure these programs are being

¹⁵³ Yolanda Smith, "In No Student Pays: Cost to Provide Free Lunch for All of New York City's Elementary School Students," *New York City Independent Budget Office*, February 2017, <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/if-no-student-pays-cost-to-provide-free-lunch-for-all-of-new-york-citys-elementary-school-students.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ Smith, "In No Student Pays: Cost to Provide Free Lunch for All of New York City's Elementary School Students."

¹⁵⁵ Smith, "In No Student Pays: Cost to Provide Free Lunch for All of New York City's Elementary School Students."

¹⁵⁶ Smith, "In No Student Pays: Cost to Provide Free Lunch for All of New York City's Elementary School Students."

¹⁵⁷ Smith, "In No Student Pays: Cost to Provide Free Lunch for All of New York City's Elementary School Students."

implemented and are working, which would please Democrats when considering the want to ensure states are doing the right thing. These programs don't necessarily need to cost schools extra money depending on how they are incorporated. For example, schools can use volunteers from for-profit companies, college students, or older students at the same school in after school tutoring programs. Another option would be to incorporate class into the school day. There are endless possibilities of ways that schools can choose to create extra supports for students performing below grade level at no extra cost to the school, district or state.

Providing more social and emotional support for students, paying teacher higher salaries, and providing more, high quality professional development for teachers are the aspects of this policy that will cost the most. It is clear that the public supports these initiatives. First, student support services. Teachers should be the first line of defense for spotting social and emotional issues students may be having because they are the group with the smallest ratio of adult to student (typically about 22 students per teacher at a time), but teachers wear many hats and rarely receive mental health training.¹⁵⁸ School counselors are well equipped to handle student mental health issues, but with about 5 million students with mental health issues and the amount of counselors typically assigned to schools, counselors usually have a caseload of about 400 and 80% of students with mental health issues will never be seen by a school counselor.¹⁵⁹ The ratio of schools psychologists, if a school is lucky enough to have one, is one to 1,481.¹⁶⁰ Second,

¹⁵⁸ NPR, "A Silent Epidemic," *NPR*, September 7, 2016, <https://apps.npr.org/mental-health/>.

¹⁵⁹ NPR, "A Silent Epidemic."

¹⁶⁰ Valerie Strauss, "If Americans really cared about students' mental health, these school ratios would be very different," *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/02/15/if-americans-really-cared-about-students-mental-health-these-school-ratios-would-be-very-different/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.79c3699fe054.

teacher pay. 78% of the public agree that teachers are not paid well enough, while only 6% believe they are paid too much.¹⁶¹ Additionally, 50% of Americans say they would pay higher taxes in order to raise teacher pay and help improve public schools.¹⁶² Third, high quality professional development for teachers. Teacher turnover is at a high, especially in poorly funded schools, with higher percentages of minority, low income, and special needs students. 60% of teachers left their last job because of a lack of professional development and/or because they don't feel they have a manager that cares to develop them.¹⁶³ In a poll by GenForward in 2016, when asked for opinions on how to best improve schools K-12, the second most cited improvement was "improve teacher training."¹⁶⁴ So, the trends on public and professional opinion is clear – these initiatives are needed. But, there is a lack of consensus on how to fund these much needed initiative, especially in the short term.

The prison reform suggested in this policy is both controversial and long-term, providing no immediate relief for funding the education recommendations suggested in this policy. With regards to it being controversial, the plan for decarceration is counterintuitive to decreasing crime rates, which politicians and the media can use to dissuade the public from supporting it, scare the public, and use it to shift public opinion against you. Believe it or not though, "91 percent of Americans say that the criminal justice system has problems that need fixing" and "71 percent of Americans agree that

¹⁶¹ Lee, "Half of Americans Would Pay Higher Taxes to Give Teachers Better Salary Amid Low-Pay Battle."

¹⁶² Lee, "Half of Americans Would Pay Higher Taxes to Give Teachers Better Salary Amid Low-Pay Battle."

¹⁶³ Joni Booth and Ben Wigert, "Win the War for Teacher Talent With Performance Development," *Gallup*, February 5, 2019, https://www.gallup.com/education/245672/win-war-teacher-talent-performance-development.aspx?g_source=link_NEWSV9&g_medium=TOPIC&g_campaign=item_&g_content=Win%2520the%2520War%2520for%2520Teacher%2520Talent%2520With%2520Performance%2520Development.

¹⁶⁴ Andrew Ijifusa, "Here's How the Public Views Teachers, Their Salaries, and Their Impact," *Education Week*, April 17, 2019, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/04/public_opinion_of_teachers_salaries_impact_walkouts.html.

incarceration is often counterproductive to public safety” because when criminals are released after longer sentences they tend to commit more crimes since “prison doesn’t do a good job of rehabilitating problems like drug addiction and mental illness.”¹⁶⁵ These results include 68% of Republicans who were polled.¹⁶⁶ With regards to the immediacy of a decarceration plan as a means of funding parts of this policy, the long term nature of prison reform will most likely dissuade politicians from supporting it as a means of funding different aspects of this policy. Without funding from this method, politicians will have to propose, and the public will have to support, a new means of funding. However, it has been done in several states that can be used as cases for why it can work in other states and nationally. For example, from 2006 to 2016 Connecticut, Michigan, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and South Carolina were able to reduce their prison populations from 14-25% after implementing reforms that led to fewer people serving longer than needed sentences in jail.¹⁶⁷ As a result, Mississippi has been able to save \$6 million since beginning their reforms and estimates \$266 million in savings from FY 2014.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, South Carolina has been able to save \$33 million since implementing reforms and estimates savings of up to \$458 million by avoiding future costs from mass incarceration.¹⁶⁹

So, in conclusion, there is, verbally and in theory, support for different aspects of this policy, but putting them into action is a different story given all the stakeholders

¹⁶⁵ Benenson Strategy Group, “Criminal Justice System Survey Results,” *ACLU*, November 13, 2017, <https://www.aclu.org/report/smart-justice-campaign-polling-americans-attitudes-criminal-justice-topline-memo>.

¹⁶⁶ Benenson Strategy Group, “Criminal Justice System Survey Results.”

¹⁶⁷ Dennis Schrantz, Stephen T. DeBor, and Marc Mauer, “Decarceration Strategies: How 5 States Achieved Substantial Prison Population Reductions,” *The Sentencing Project*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/decarceration-strategies-5-states-achieved-substantial-prison-population-reductions/>.

¹⁶⁸ Schrantz, “Decarceration Strategies.”

¹⁶⁹ Schrantz, “Decarceration Strategies.”

involved and the dirty, partisan politics that have become common place in the United States.

Recommendation

Despite the push back that will undoubtedly occur with many of the sections in this proposal, my opinion is that this policy proposal for two reasons. First, this proposal has more advantages than disadvantage long term. Second, the majority of the sections proposed are recommendations for the state with carrot incentives if the states choose to implement the recommendations. I feel very strongly that our current public school funding system, and public education system in general, is not doing enough for the students who need it most, and this policy proposal is the first of many necessary steps in beginning to correct the system.

First, the proposed change to the ESEA when it is up for reauthorization is a minor change that could have a major impact on the funding of schools with the most high needs student groups. The removal of the state expenditure factor will not require more federal dollars, but rather allocate those federal dollars more equitably. Therefore, because so many constituents are pressuring their Congress men and women for more and better funding, this should be a relatively easy proposal to the House, and hopefully to the Senate thereafter.

Second, due to the 10th amendment granting states any powers not explicitly granted to the federal government in our Constitution, and given that public education is not a power granted to the federal government, the rest of the proposal can only be recommended as best practice for states to adopt. However, Congress, after conversing

about these best practices, can offer carrot incentives – such as more funding to support the recommendations – if states do choose to adopt and implement the recommendations. The majority of push back will most likely be about how to get the money to help states fund these changes because this part of the proposal will require more federal funding.

Which brings us to my third point, which is that while there is ample evidence to prove that mass incarceration needs to end and that reforming our criminal justice system would save billions, you probably will not find enough support in Congress in our current political climate to support this form of reform and long term funding for these education recommendations. Additionally, the fact that decarceration would have to go through both the legislative and judiciary branches increases the unlikelihood of it being accepted, much less implemented, anytime soon.

My recommendation is to move forward with proposed change for the reauthorization of the ESEA in 2020 – repealing the state expenditure factor in the Title I funding formula – and the recommendations for changes to state practices to ensure equity in public education, but not to move forward with the section proposing decarceration as a mechanism for funding the proposed changes in the policy proposal.

CURRICULUM VITA

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