

ACCESS TO QUALITY K-12 EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

Education is a personal asset that benefits not only the educated individual, but also his or her family and community. Skills and knowledge are central determinants of earning capacity, but also important drivers of the economy. Education also promotes civic responsibility, perpetuates a thoughtful populace and expands economic opportunity. Equal access to high-quality educational opportunities is a cornerstone of the public education system in the United States. Despite decades of education reforms, inequity persists in education spending and in the availability of qualified, high-quality teachers.

It is widely acknowledged that children from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently begin schooling already behind their peers.¹ Consequently, these students need about 40% more funding to reach the educational standards of their peers. However, schools with the highest concentration of students in poverty continue to receive less funding than schools with lower concentrations of students in poverty, and some theorize that the achievement gap between white students and students of color results from this inequitable education finance system.²

In addition, most states do not have policies in place that ensure all students will have effective teachers. Virtually all states award tenure to teachers without any evidence of their effectiveness, while others have no laws requiring new teachers to be appropriately licensed.³ Instead of encouraging effective teachers to continue teaching and ineffective teachers to improve or move on, state laws often promote the opposite in their licensing, evaluation, compensation and pension procedures.⁴

WHAT STATES CAN DO

States have the flexibility, and the challenge, to develop their own standards and processes for funding education in their state. Instead of relying primarily on property taxes as the main source of revenue for education funding, which can disadvantage high-poverty districts, states can defer to statewide sources of revenue.⁵ States also can target funding to these districts while creating and enforcing equity standards in all districts.⁶

States also have enormous authority over the teaching profession, and can set requirements to help improve the quality of the teaching force across the state. For instance, states can implement policies to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared and licensed; that they are evaluated regularly, particularly with regard to the effectiveness of their instruction; and that ineffective teachers are weeded out of the system, while strong teachers are encouraged to stay.

¹ Parrish, T., Hikido, C. & Fowler, W.J. (1998). *Inequalities in Public School District Revenues*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98210.pdf>; *School Finance: Per Pupil Differences Between Selected Inner City and Suburban Schools Varied by Metropolitan Area*. (2002). U.S. General Accounting Office. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from www.gao.gov/new.items/d03234.pdf.

² Weiner, R. & Stoop, E. (2006). *The Funding Gap 2006*. The Education Trust, p.7. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/CDEF9403-5A75-437E-93FF-EBF1174181FB/0/FundingGap2006.pdf; www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/CDEF9403-5A75-437E-93FF-EBF1174181FB/0/FundingGap2006.pdf.

³ *2008 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: What States Can Do to Retain Effective New Teachers*. (2008). Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from www.nctq.org/stpy08/primaryFindings.jsp.

⁴ *2007 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: What States Can Do to Retain Effective New Teachers*. (2007). Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from www.nctq.org/stpy/home.html.

⁵ Weiner & Stoop.

⁶ Ibid.

ELEMENTS OF A STRONG POLICY

Based on the expertise of the Education Trust and the National Council on Teacher Quality, CFED considers a state's educational equity policies to be strong if they meet the following criteria:

1. **Does per-pupil state education spending meet or exceed the national average?**⁷ While even the best-funded states may not have enough resources to completely meet their K-12 education needs, some states are setting the standard for the field by investing in their students at a rate greater than the national average.
2. **Are state education funds equitably spent across districts?** Education funding formulas and allocation mechanisms should take into account the disparate needs of individual districts, particularly those with the highest concentration of students in poverty or in special education. Because these students need more resources to reach the educational standards of their peers, states should provide at least 40% more funding to these districts, in line with the recommendation of the U.S. Department of Education.
3. **Do states ensure that teachers are qualified?** Many states have loopholes that allow teachers who cannot pass state licensing tests or other certification standards to continue teaching indefinitely. Across the board, schools in poorer districts are more likely to be saddled with under- or unqualified teachers. States should close these loopholes entirely, or, in the event of exceptional circumstances that necessitate allowing limited numbers of teachers additional time, give teachers a maximum of one year to meet all licensure requirements.
4. **Are teachers evaluated at least annually?** States have the responsibility to set guidelines for the frequency and breadth of teacher evaluations. States should require all teachers – whether probationary or tenured – to be formally evaluated on an annual basis.

WHAT STATES HAVE DONE

Six states are noteworthy for implementing a wide range of policies to promote education spending equity and improve teacher quality. A number of other states have made incremental progress. Thirty-two states have met or exceeded the national average in per-pupil spending; 18 states do not have licensure loopholes; and 15 states have instituted requirements for formal annual evaluations for all teachers.

⁷To ensure that states are compared fairly, state spending must be adjusted to account for differences in regional costs.

For more information on this policy measure, [Access to Quality K-12 Education](http://scorecard.cfed.org), and more, go to <http://scorecard.cfed.org>.

In the *2009-2010 Assets & Opportunity Scorecard*, the 50 states and the District of Columbia were rated on their existing education policies. The ratings were based on the criteria described above.