

Education Week's blogs > State EdWatch

## Nation's 'Disinvestment' in Public Schools Is Crippling Poor Students, Reports Say

By Andrew Ujifusa on June 8, 2015 8:16 AM

Follow @StateEdWatch

Six years after the national economy bottomed out, here's one generic view of K-12 finance: **Budgets are more stable and can rely on more revenue** than in 2008, and spending on K-12 has gradually recovered in many states over the last several years. So are prominent school funding advocates satisfied that states are now giving schools robust and well-targeted financial support?

Not even close.

"This should be easier, not harder," Wade Henderson, the president and CEO of the Leadership Conference Education Fund, told me in an interview.

The Education Fund is one of two advocacy groups, along with the Education Law Center, saying in reports released today that despite rosier revenue pictures and more ambitious student achievement goals, most states continue to hamstring schools, and poor students in particular, by failing to provide them more resources to help them meet these goals.

### Two Systems, One Big Failure

The two groups teamed up to issue **"Cheating Our Future: How Decades of Disinvestment by States Jeopardizes Equal Educational Opportunity"** that argues a majority of states continue to have flat or regressive funding schemes when it comes to providing additional financial support for students in schools with high concentrations of poverty.

"Cheating Our Future" highlights states like Pennsylvania, where insufficient public school funding has led to significant job losses in public schools, an effort in Mississippi to boost K-12 spending through a ballot initiative, and the cycle of funding lawsuits in Colorado in the face of the legislature's difficulties in overhauling its public school budget.

And in the foreground, Henderson said, is the ever-growing division between wealthier schools prepared to meet the demands of states' demand for highly skilled workers, and students in high poverty schools that not only lack basic resources, but suffer from "hidden inequity" such as the "expanded learning time that many more affluent students enjoy--including after-school programs, tutoring and mentoring, summer activities and field trips, or opportunities to learn outside the classroom."

"We are seeing increasingly that there are two separate public education systems," Henderson said. And the one left with more students in poverty and stagnant aid from states simply can't fulfill education mandates created by officials with primarily political ideology in mind, he stressed.

### Four Measures Where Many States Fail

Separately but simultaneously, the Education Law Center released its fourth annual report on school funding fairness (**"Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card"**) that examines how and how much states fund K-12. The news there is correspondingly glum, according to the group: "Even with improvements in the economy, few states are translating that economic growth into greater investments in school funding. While total GDP has rebounded to 2008 levels or higher in all states except Nevada and Wyoming, 20 states invested fewer total dollars into the education system."

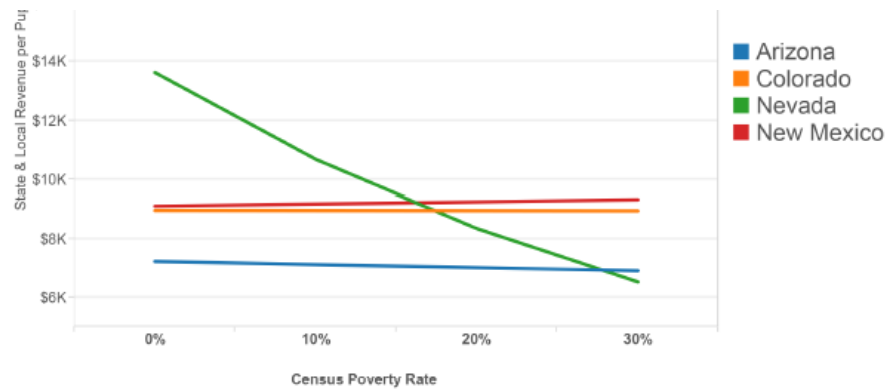
The group used four metric to determine states' funding fairness:

- 1) per-pupil funding levels
- 2) funding distribution and whether they provide extra support to high-poverty districts
- 3) funding effort based on states' total economic output
- 4) economic disparities of public versus private education (called "coverage" in the report)

For example, here's what the report found for the southwestern U.S. region for the second indicator:

Figure 17. Southwest





Indeed, most states have either flat or regressive systems for this indicator. Even among states that have progressive funding schemes with respect to poverty, Utah and Tennessee, for example, have low levels of funding effort, according to the report.

"Really since NCLB has come in and states have moved to standards-based reform, it's been very difficult to get states to align their financing systems with the educational goals and standards they're setting for their students, schools, and districts," said David Sciarra, the executive director of the Education Law Center, who wrote "Is School Funding Fair?" along with Rutgers University Professor Bruce Baker and Danielle Farrie, the center's research director.

Is there universal agreement that the Leadership Conference and the Education Law Center are on the ball here? Again: not even close.

For example, Jay P. Greene, a professor at the University of Arkansas, wrote a May 29 post on his blog that dissects [research about links between K-12 spending and improved student outcomes](#). His conclusion, one might say, is at the beginning of his post: "I find nothing to persuade me to abandon the long-standing and well-established finding that simply providing schools with more resources does not improve student outcomes."

---

Don't miss another State EdWatch post. [Sign up here](#) to get news alerts in your email inbox. And make sure to [follow @StateEdWatch on Twitter](#) for the latest news from state K-12 policy and politics.

**Categories:** [Budgets](#) [School Finance](#) [State Policy](#)

**Tags:** [equity](#) [poverty](#) [school finance](#) [school funding](#)