

# POLICY NOTES

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## Addressing Achievement Gaps

### *School Finance and the Achievement Gap: Funding Programs That Work*

American education reformers have spent decades redesigning school-funding formulas, devising programs, and upgrading tests and curricula, all in pursuit of a noble goal: ensuring that all children, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or wealth, get a public education that will help them succeed in school and in life. “How we finance public education is, in fact, a core issue in reducing the achievement gap,” ETS President and CEO **Kurt Landgraf** said, as he opened the latest of ETS’s symposia on Addressing Achievement Gaps.

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a core issue in reducing the achievement gap.’**

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In recent years, some states and school systems have experienced impressive gains in the academic success of low-income and minority students. But too often, “we still have the kinds of achievement gaps that caused us to engage in education reform in the first place,” incoming Massachusetts Secretary of Education **Paul Reville** said at a recent ETS conference on school finance and the achievement gap. “It is still the case that educational performance closely correlates with socioeconomic status, and the aspiration of education reform was to eliminate that correlation.”

The gulf between the aspirations of education reformers and the reality of achievement gaps lay at the heart of the conference, “School Finance and the Achievement Gap: Funding Programs That Work,” the tenth in ETS’s “Addressing Achievement Gaps Symposia,” which the company began in 2004 to examine different aspects of achievement gaps in public education. Sponsored by ETS and co-convened by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and the Education Law Center (ELC), the symposium explored the relationship between school finance

## THIS ISSUE

### **Highlights from an Achievement Gap Symposium Convened by ETS, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, and the Education Law Center**

In education reform, money matters, but so does spending it wisely – on programs designed to meet the ambitious goal of helping low-income and minority children achieve at the same levels as their more affluent peers. The latest in ETS’s series of symposia on Addressing Achievement Gaps brought researchers, advocates, and policymakers together to discuss what we know about spending money wisely and well. The symposium was held at ETS’s world headquarters in Princeton, N.J., May 21–22, 2008.

A dozen speakers from the worlds of politics, academia, and the law addressed an audience of legislative staff, litigators, and school administrators from across the country. Sessions were moderated by **C. Kent McGuire**, Dean of Temple University’s College of Education, and **Angelo Falcón**, President of the National Institute for Latino Policy.

*(continued on back page)*



and academic achievement, highlighted programs that successfully close gaps, and examined the costs and benefits of those programs.

Much of the discussion was sobering. Achievement gaps begin early and persist, both throughout a child's academic career and across generations. America's century-old public education system was not designed to close them, speakers asserted. Yet the dialogue also offered reasons for hope. Presentations confirming the cost-effectiveness of pre-kindergarten programs and describing impressive achievement gains in Montgomery County, Maryland, offered clear evidence that achievement gaps can be narrowed – if the political will, and the money, can be found.

### ***Achievement Gaps, Resource Gaps***

The task is difficult and the stakes are high, as ETS Senior Vice President **Michael Nettles** made clear in the symposium's opening presentation. Although achievement gaps can be defined in different ways – as the gap between the performance of American students and their overseas peers, for example, or between actual performance and desired proficiency – Nettles and other speakers focused on gaps in achievement between demographic subgroups: minority and non-minority, low-income and middle-class, native speakers of English and English-language learners.

The reality is that gaps form early, they compound over the course of a child's academic career, they follow that child into adulthood and the workplace, and they affect economic opportunity, family income, standard of living and other fundamentals of quality of life.

Nettles cited the abundant research illustrating the persistence and perseverance of those gaps. He noted, for example, that 80 percent of Asian-

American kindergartners can recognize the letters of the alphabet, compared with only 50 percent of Hispanic kindergartners. At the primary-school level, the White-Black and White-Hispanic score gaps on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have narrowed only slightly since 1992, and similar gaps show up in SAT® and GRE® scores. Minority students also are more likely to drop out of high school. And as adults, White and Asian Americans earn more than African Americans and Hispanic Americans.

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— *Michael Nettles*

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The picture has some bright spots: Nettles cited Atlanta and Austin as examples of urban districts that have been relatively successful in narrowing achievement gaps. He also noted that between 2003 and 2007, dozens of states narrowed the gap in math and science scores between low-income and higher-income eighth graders. But unless achievement gaps narrow further, he said, average levels of literacy and numeracy will decline in coming years, and economic inequality will rise.

The achievement gaps Nettles described reflect an underlying inequality in the distribution of educational resources, argued **Molly Hunter**, who heads Education Justice, the national outreach arm of the New Jersey-based Education Law Center, the nonprofit law firm that has led New Jersey's long-running school finance lawsuit. Drawing her examples from more than a dozen pending school funding lawsuits around the country, Hunter focused on inequality in three areas: preschool, school facilities, and teaching quality.

In all three areas, low-income and minority children receive fewer resources despite often having substantially greater needs, Hunter said. Low-income children also are less likely to attend preschool than affluent children, she noted, and they may not always have access to the high-quality programs that research shows can result in significant achievement gains. Hunter pointed to data showing that school districts enrolling a higher proportion of low-income and minority children spend less money per student on their facilities – \$4,800 per student in very low-income districts compared with \$9,361 in high-income districts. Moreover, she noted that the money low-wealth districts do spend is often necessary for physical maintenance rather than the educational enhancements in which wealthier districts invest. Low-income and minority students are also more likely to have teachers who lack experience, who earned low marks on qualifying exams, who attended less competitive colleges, or are teaching outside their fields of expertise, Hunter said.

According to Hunter, funding disparities often undergird these inequities. Nationally, high-poverty districts spend \$938 less per student than low-poverty districts, and the difference is even larger if low-income students' greater needs are factored into the equation. In effect, we are asking low-income and minority students to learn how to swim in a pool with knee-deep water.

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**'In effect, we are asking low-income and minority students to learn how to swim in a pool with knee-deep water.'** — Molly Hunter

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Such disparities have propelled the school-funding litigation movement throughout its 40-year history, according to **Margaret Goertz**, co-director of CPRE at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. In her presentation, Goertz

noted that 45 states have faced school funding lawsuits. Scholars, she said, tend to divide the cases into pre-1989 equity suits and post-1989 adequacy suits. Goertz questioned this division, arguing that in fact all of the cases "have shared a common goal, and that is ensuring that all students, but in particular low-income children and children of color, have equal access to a quality education."

The earliest school finance cases, Goertz said, drew on Arthur Wise's book *Rich Schools, Poor Schools* – itself inspired by the U.S. Supreme Court's historic 1954 desegregation ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* – to argue that schools should receive funding sufficient to meet students' needs. But judges rejected those claims, finding it too difficult to measure and enforce compliance with a need-based standard.

The next round of equity cases, inspired by the work of law professor John Coons and his students William Clune and Stephen Sugarman, focused instead on the differences in fiscal resources available to support schooling in rich and poor districts. These cases rested on the principle of "fiscal neutrality," which holds that the quality of education should not be a function of district wealth.

But even in some of these early cases, such as New York's *Levittown v. Nyquist* in 1982, lawyers tried to show that disparities in spending led to disparities in programs and achievement, moving the discussion from fiscal equity to educational equity, Goertz said. And some court decisions, including New Jersey's *Robinson v. Cahill* rulings in the 1970s, began to define equity not only as fiscal fairness, but also as access to adequate educational opportunities.

In 1989, the Kentucky Supreme Court's ruling in *Rose v. Council for Better Education* inaugurated

the line of adequacy cases by explicitly linking educational inputs to measures of educational quality, Goertz said. This new approach prompted courts and education reformers elsewhere to consider how educational adequacy could be measured. Among the standards courts have since adopted for gauging adequacy, Goertz said, are outcome measures such as proficiency test scores and dropout rates; input measures, including comparisons with other school districts or states; the extent of extra academic help for low-income students; or the establishment of specific programs like preschool.

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**'It remains an open question whether court-ordered adequacy standards can close achievement gaps.'** — *Margaret Goertz*

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These new court-ordered requirements “come full circle” back to the needs-based claims of the earliest school finance cases, Goertz argued. But because the new standards are themselves fraught with controversy – about how to judge the adequacy of inputs and outcomes, how to determine need, how to allocate dollars – they raise anew the old questions about how measurable and enforceable those standards are. And, Goertz said, it remains an open question whether court-ordered adequacy standards can close achievement gaps.

### ***“Data are the Fuel”***

Closing achievement gaps is a new project for an educational system that evolved to meet different ends, **Jacob Adams Jr.**, an education professor at Claremont Graduate University, told the symposium audience. The existing funding system was designed for such tasks as ensuring that public dollars were spent honestly, that salaries were paid fairly, or that money was routed to children with special needs, he said. This funding

system, Adams argued, has become an obstacle to reform: We spend a half-trillion dollars a year on K–12 schooling, but we cannot tell if that is enough to close achievement gaps, because what we spend does not always reach the students it is intended to help. If we’re going to close achievement gaps, if we’re going to accomplish our goals, we have to redesign school finance systems. Ambitious learning goals for students demand new finance mechanisms.

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Adams’s presentation previewed the upcoming report of the National Working Group on Funding Student Success, which Adams chairs. The working group is part of the School Finance Redesign Project of the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

The new funding system envisioned by Adams’ working group would focus resources on the overarching goal of improving student learning. The system would promote the tailoring of instruction to individual students’ needs and the collection of data required to evaluate initiatives, fix problems and hold adults accountable.

### **Thinking Strategically About Learning-Oriented Finance Systems**

- Align resources with student learning goals
- Adapt resource use to student needs
- Account for results and responsibilities
- Think in terms of continuous instructional improvement

On the local level, Adams said, every school's basic strategy would become "continuous instructional improvement": setting goals, deploying resources to meet those goals, strengthening curriculum and teaching, gathering performance data, and using that data to detect and solve problems. Already, he said, some schools employ a "first approximation" of these methods, and some of those are the very schools that have seen impressive jumps in the achievement of low-income and minority students.

On the state level, Adams said, the new system would require officials to remove impediments to the continuous-improvement strategy. For instance, states could toss out funding formulas crammed with prescriptive categorical programs and replace them with more flexible, student-need-based funding formulas that feed money into school-linked accounts. States should also encourage reform-minded union contracts, devise new accountability systems, and promote research and development, Adams said.

Reville, too, envisioned a new role for state education officials – one that takes into account the constraints of time and money with which they must contend. Although education reformers want newly assertive, data-driven state education agencies, "we have not concurrently built the capacity of these agencies to lead this movement," said Reville, the former president of the independent Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy who became Massachusetts Education Secretary in July. "We have doubled or tripled the responsibility of state education agencies while in many instances diminishing their capacity to do the work." Therefore, Reville said, state education departments should focus their work on "that critical core business in education" – the improvement of teaching and learning – and should strategically attack those

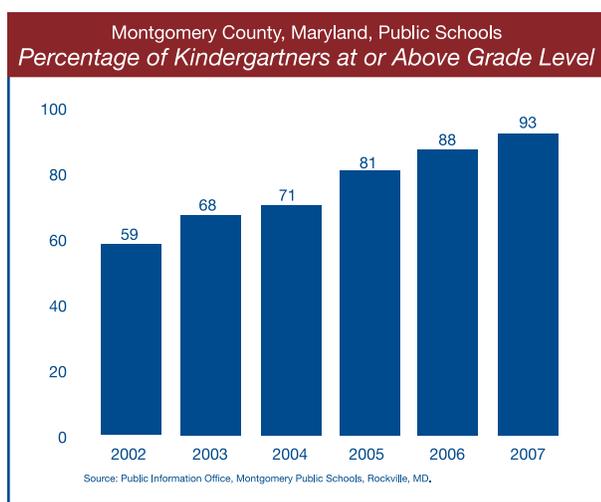
tasks that they can do better than local districts, such as leadership development, curriculum development, and data collection.

Indeed, the central importance of good data collection was a recurrent theme throughout the symposium: "Data are the fuel that drives this new engine," as Adams put it. In her symposium presentation, **Frieda Lacey**, Deputy Superintendent of the 137,000-student public school district in Maryland's Montgomery County, described what a system running on that fuel looks like. Lacey painted a picture of a district that has achieved enviable results relatively quickly by setting ambitious goals, building public support, and using data to assess progress and ensure accountability.

Montgomery County uses a system Lacey called "M-STAT," after the COMPSTAT data-collection system that the New York City Police Department employs to hold commanders accountable for crime in their precincts. In the school-district version, student progress is assessed against a series of benchmarks – such indicators of eventual college preparedness as reading at grade level by third grade, studying algebra in eighth grade, or enrolling in Advanced Placement courses in high school. At M-STAT meetings, principals learn whether they are meeting targets and hear about other schools' best practices, with help from a district-wide research department that can identify success down to the classroom level. "Did it cost us any more money? Just a lot of hard work," Lacey said. "That's what it cost us."

Despite two decades of changing demographics that have greatly increased the numbers of low-income students in parts of Montgomery County, the district has achieved some impressive results, Lacey said. The graphic on the next page provides an example. In five years, the percentage of

kindergartners reaching reading benchmarks grew from 59 percent to 93 percent, with African-American and Hispanic children performing close to that high level. In 2007 – 08, more than 68 percent of eighth-graders finished an algebra course, up from 36 percent in 2000 – 01. Minority enrollment in algebra has grown, too, although it still lags significantly behind the district average. “There’s so much more that we need to do,” Lacey said. “You can never be satisfied.”



Key to the district’s success has been its reliance on data – first to design programs, and then to evaluate their progress. “All that we do has to be research-based, and we use our research department to give us feedback. Those [programs] that don’t work, we discard. Those that work, we continue.” This year, Lacey said, a special-education initiative that proved costly and hard to replicate will be shelved, but a middle-school reform that is showing promise will be expanded into more schools.

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## What Works

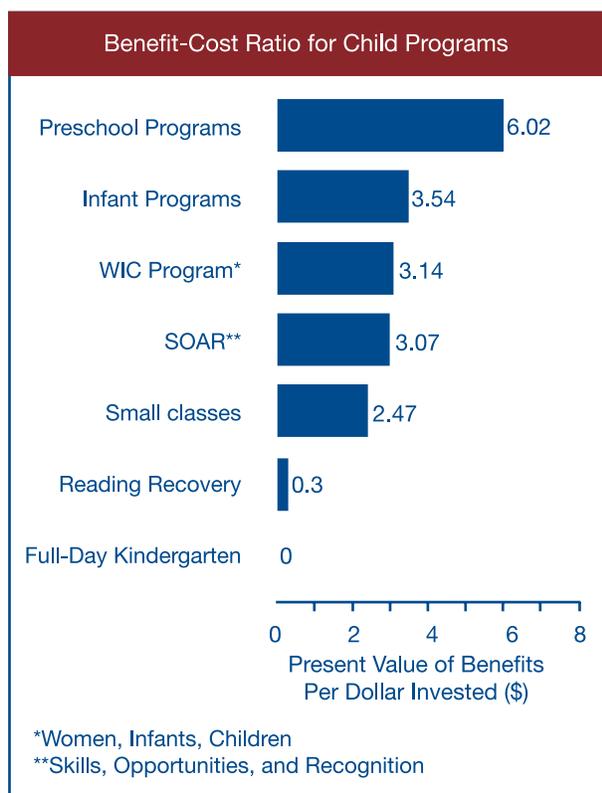
What does work? Increasingly, it is clear that, when it comes to narrowing achievement gaps, preschool does. “There’s a critical mass now of evidence about this,” said University of Minnesota Prof. **Arthur Reynolds**, who directs the long-term study of the Chicago Child-Parent Center’s early education program. “It’s not just one study; it’s not two studies. It’s a whole bunch of studies.”

In his symposium presentation, Reynolds surveyed that body of evidence and detailed the impressive results of the CPC initiative, which enrolled three- and four-year-olds from a desperately poor Chicago neighborhood in a program featuring small classes, parental outreach efforts, and a carefully managed transition to kindergarten at a neighboring elementary school.

Children who spent two years in the CPC program began kindergarten scoring at the 57th percentile – above the national norm – on literacy measures; comparable children who had no preschool scored at the 28th percentile. As they progressed through school, the CPC children were far less likely to be held back, to need special education, or to drop out; perhaps because of the program’s parent outreach component, they were also less likely to be abused. And as adults – the original study subjects are now 28 years old – the preschool graduates were less likely to be depressed or incarcerated, and more likely to hold jobs offering health insurance. Every dollar spent on the CPC program, Reynolds calculated, saved society more than \$10.

The elements of successful preschool are becoming clear, Reynolds said: two years of enrollment work better than one, and programs need good teachers, small classes, literacy-rich curricula, support services for families, and a

careful transition to school. The Chicago study also yielded evidence that some school-level programs, especially small classes in the early grades, can improve student outcomes. But other popular programs, notably all-day kindergarten and the tutoring program Reading Recovery, had little lasting impact, Reynolds said. The figure below shows the benefit-cost ratios for several child programs.



Research findings like those from the CPC study have inspired many states to launch their own public preschool programs, but many of the state programs are less well funded and well staffed than the CPC program, Reynolds said. Not surprisingly, their results are also less impressive – performance gains of three or four months at school entry, compared with gains of twice that for the Chicago program. “We’re not going to get these returns given the kinds of programs that are being implemented,” Reynolds said.

If research suggests reasons for optimism about early education programs, the picture is cloudier when it comes to high school programs, MDRC researcher **Janet Quint** said in her symposium presentation. That uncertainty, she said, stems principally from the dearth of good research on high school programs that close achievement gaps. Weak methodology is rampant: some studies fail to control for student background or for favorable operating conditions, and others do not carefully observe the distinction between outcomes (results achieved after an intervention) and effects (results produced by the intervention).

The well-done studies that do exist have identified only a few high school programs that seem to improve student achievement, Quint said. And for those programs – the high school reform models First Things First, Talent Development High School, and Career Academies – results have been modest, Quint said.

All three programs responded to well-recognized problems with traditional high school education. Large high schools can seem anonymous and alienating, so all three reform programs relied on smaller learning communities. Many students graduate unprepared for college and work, so the programs offered career awareness activities. And high school classes are not always rigorous and engaging, so the programs tried to offer demanding classes for all and intensive help for struggling students.

But the results were not far-reaching, Quint said. The structural reforms reduced the anonymity of high school but did not improve student achievement. The career activities had no effect on high school graduation or college attendance. And the extra instruction helped students learn more, but not enough to catch up. “We can take ninth graders who are poor readers and we can

make them less poor readers, but we really don't know how to make them good readers," Quint said.

Still, Quint urged respect for even modest effects. Breaking down the anonymity of large high schools can be a platform for future achievement gains, she said. Young men who had been enrolled in the Career Academies program did better in the workplace, staying at their jobs longer and earning more. The Talent Development High School improved attendance rates by 5 percent – the equivalent of two more weeks of high school per year – and “two weeks is a lot,” Quint said. Talent Development also improved graduation rates, and though those rates never topped 42 percent, “we don't have evidence of anything that works better,” Quint said. “It's not reasonable to expect high schools to remedy the educational deficits that have accumulated in and out of school between the ages of 0 and 13 or 14 or 15.”

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— Janet Quint

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## What It Costs

For policymakers, finding programs that work is only half the battle. Finding programs that work cost-effectively is just as important, especially in the current slowing economy, more than one symposium speaker noted.

“Does it make a difference if getting an effect size of .2 costs \$100 a student or \$1,000 a student?” **Henry Levin** of Teachers College, Columbia University, asked in his presentation. “This has enormous policy consequences.”

Many valuable interventions are expensive: Montgomery County's success comes with a price tag of \$12,200 per student, Deputy Superintendent Lacey said, well above the national average. The effective preschool programs that researcher Reynolds highlighted cost, in 2004 dollars, at least \$5,000 per child for a half day.

Yet the research literature on cost-effectiveness is often weak, Levin said. A 1997 study he co-authored examined the abstracts of 9,000 studies that claimed to identify cost-effective educational programs. Fifty-six percent of the abstracts never mentioned a cost analysis: the phrase “cost-effective” was apparently just a rhetorical claim, he said. A sampling of the papers whose abstracts did mention cost analyses found that only 2 percent described a plausible – let alone exemplary – analytic process. The flawed analyses had manifold failings, Levin said: they used numbers whose origin was murky, or mixed and matched price data from different years, or failed to specify all the ingredients necessary to run a program.

Levin and a collaborator, **Clive Belfield** of Queens College, City University of New York, apply the methods of economics to education programs, drawing on such often-ignored concepts as present value and opportunity cost. “If we invest in high school an equal amount to what we might invest in early childhood education, from the point of view of costs, [the high school investment] actually is costing less,” Levin said. “There's an opportunity cost that's involved when we invest earlier, when we invest up front. From the perspective of our cost analysis, you have to take account of those differences.”

Levin and Belfield calculated the costs and benefits of educational programs relative to a single metric – how many additional high school

graduates the programs create – because the economic value of earning a high school diploma is well-established. These costs and benefits are shown in the table below. The cost of each additional graduate includes the extra spending necessary to educate a student who stays in school through 12th grade, rather than dropping out earlier, and who may continue to college.

By that standard, some well-known programs look surprisingly expensive: the Perry Preschool program, the subject of a famous longitudinal study on the benefits of early education, cost \$12,500 per participant, but nearly \$91,000 per additional high school graduate; the Chicago preschool program that Reynolds described cost \$4,700 per participant, but nearly \$68,000 per additional graduate. Levin and Belfield’s figures also suggest that raising teacher salaries, an intervention that they assume will attract better teachers, costs \$82,000 per additional graduate – less than the Perry program, which carries higher opportunity costs because it is an early investment.

If rigorous economic analysis sets the cost of some programs unexpectedly high, the benefits

can be just as far-reaching, Belfield explained in his presentation. For each additional high school graduate a program produces, benefits fall into three categories. First come private benefits for the individual, in the higher earnings and better health that studies show accompany higher levels of education. Next come benefits for the government, in the higher taxes that those higher earnings generate, and in the reduced spending required for such programs as welfare, Medicaid and criminal justice, which disproportionately serve the less educated. Third come benefits for society at large, via such intangibles as increased productivity and reduced crime rates.

The number-crunching has its complications, but the bottom line, Levin and Belfield conclude, is that each additional high school graduate yields a present-value economic benefit of \$209,100. In this light, the cost-effectiveness of preschool becomes clear: subtracting the Perry program’s roughly \$91,000 cost from the \$209,000 benefit number yields a net benefit of \$118,400 for each additional graduate the program created. The Chicago preschool program does even better, yielding \$141,400 per additional graduate. But

### Fiscal Benefit-Cost Ratios

#### NET PUBLIC INVESTMENT RETURNS

<i>Per Additional Expected High School Graduate</i>	<i>First Things First</i>	<i>Chicago Parent-Child Centers</i>	<i>Teacher Salary Increase</i>	<i>Perry Preschool Program</i>	<i>Class Size Reduction</i>
Costs (C)	\$59,100	\$67,700	\$82,000	\$90,700	\$143,600
Benefits (B)	\$209,100	\$209,100	\$209,100	\$209,100	\$209,100
Benefit/cost ratio (B/C)	3.54	3.09	2.55	2.31	1.46
Net present value (B - C)	\$150,000	\$141,400	\$127,100	\$118,400	\$65,500

NOTES: Numbers are rounded to nearest \$100. Costs include delivering the intervention and any subsequent public subsidies for high school and college. Discount rate is 3.5%.

Source: Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin (Eds), *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education*, Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2007.

other interventions also stand up well: class size reductions yielded benefits of \$65,500 per additional graduate, teacher salary increases reaped \$127,100, and the high school reform First Things First topped the list, accruing benefits of \$150,100 per additional graduate.

As Levin and Belfield pointed out, however, their cost-benefit numbers hold up only if targeted reforms are implemented faithfully: “There can be enormous differences among 100 schools in terms of what actually is happening to students,” Levin noted.

### Dilemmas for Policymakers

Achievement gaps persist. Cost-effective ways of narrowing them exist. Funding mechanisms sometimes block those solutions. Why, then, don’t we change the funding mechanisms? Easier said than done, symposium participants made clear.

Many state legislators appreciate the seriousness of the achievement gap and recognize that only reformed funding systems can address it, **Michael Griffith**, a school finance analyst at the Education Commission of the States, told the symposium. But reform remains rare: states make major changes only every decade, he said, and thorough overhauls come only every 20 or 25 years, usually in response to a court order, a taxpayer revolt, or a financial windfall. This year, only Delaware, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island are likely to make big changes, Griffith predicted. Prospects remain unclear for the bold, systemic reform model proposed by the National Working Group on Funding Student Success: with help from the National Conference of State Legislatures, Adams said his working group hopes to find a state willing to pilot the initiative.

### The Current Economic Situation Creates Problems

- The majority of states are struggling with their budgets
- While most states are keeping education spending flat, some are actually making cuts
- Any solution to closing the achievement gap will have to be either low cost or no cost

Obstacles to change are manifold, Griffith said. Without new money to inject into a funding formula, any reallocation inevitably creates winners and losers, and legislators fear the losers’ wrath. “You’re re-slicing a pie, and unless you make that pie larger, some people will receive smaller pieces, others will receive bigger pieces,” he said. Often, legislators try to cushion the impact of a revamped formula by adding “hold-harmless” clauses that guarantee no district will lose money under the new arrangements, but such stopgaps can negate a new formula’s supposed advances in equity, Griffith said. Without such stopgap measures, however, the political will to enact change may evaporate. The student-need-based funding system called for by Adams’ working group, for instance, could require states to take control of locally raised tax money, several symposium participants argued – a move that would inevitably spur resistance from wealthy school districts, and from their political representatives.

“We don’t play Robin Hood,” **Ronald Cowell**, a former Democratic state legislator in Pennsylvania who now runs the nonprofit Education Policy and Leadership Center, said in his symposium presentation. “We’re not going to take [money] away from you just because you’re rich.”

A second obstacle to reform is the worsening economy. With most states now facing tight budgets, programs to close the achievement gap will have to be “low cost/no cost,” Griffith said – such alternatives as sharing services or streamlining categorical aid programs. Even these alternatives are not necessarily uncontroversial. Proliferating aid categories increase the complexity of a funding formula – California’s system is so complex, Griffith said, that observers disagree on how many categorical programs the state has – and they can undermine equity by reducing the amount of aid reserved for the poor, but paring back these programs has its own pitfalls. “We all – we taxpayers, we voters, we constituents – have some ownership of the status quo,” Cowell said. “Most people aren’t out there arguing for change. They’re trying to protect their categorical funding.”

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A third obstacle to state-level school finance reforms, Griffith and Cowell said, is the lack of clarity about what programs work – about the cost of a good education and about the relationship between educational inputs and outputs. Invest in road construction, and you know how many miles of highway you’ll get for your money; invest in an educational program, and the outcome is much less clear. Researchers and advocates need to present state legislators with clear evidence of what works, expressed in direct, jargon-free language, Cowell said, to cut through the “thick fog of information” that envelops many lawmakers. But legislatures vary widely in their reliance on and respect for data, Cowell noted,

and many lawmakers are swayed more by the anecdotes they hear from constituents than by the research reports their staffs digest.

Once convinced of what works, lawmakers may be wary of offering too much of the local flexibility that many school reformers, including Adams’s working group, advocate. Given that achievement gaps persist after more than a decade of reform efforts, it is clear that “not every district knows what to do with the new resources that we’re giving them,” as Massachusetts official Reville put it. Some schools and districts lack the technical capability to collect and use data to improve teaching and learning, symposium participants acknowledged, and local implementation of programs often falls short of reformers’ hopes. If a consensus exists about what programs work, can stewards of public money allow districts to ignore that consensus in the name of local flexibility? Understandably, legislators are wary. “Lawmakers say, ‘Well, we’ll send you more money, but we want to make sure it gets used for the stuff that works,’ ” Cowell said. “So we will have conditions attached to the money.”

Ultimately, success is the best guarantor of political support for efforts to close the achievement gap, Montgomery County administrator Lacey said. In her community, business leaders, county officials, school board members, and parents support budget requests because, she said, the district can prove that its spending is effective.

“Montgomery County is changing so rapidly, and even with that, our results have gone up,” Lacey said. “We would not get the funding we’re getting if they didn’t believe in us. You will not get the funding without the results.”

Symposium sessions included:

- \* Overview of the Achievement and Attainment Gaps
- \* The Resource Gaps
- \* From Equity to Adequacy – A Historical Perspective
- \* From Equity to Adequacy and Beyond: Promising Practices and Challenging Issues
- \* Effective Pre-K and Elementary Programs: What We Know
- \* Effective Secondary School Programs: What We Know
- \* Issues in the Measurement of Costs and Benefits of Effective Programs
- \* Examining What We Know About the Costs and Benefits of a Range of Interventions
- \* A Policy Perspective
- \* A Legislative Perspective
- \* A State Perspective
- \* A Local Perspective

This issue of *ETS Policy Notes* offers an overview of the topics the symposium covered. Supporting materials from most of the presentations are available as downloadable pdf files at [www.ets.org/schoolfinanceconf](http://www.ets.org/schoolfinanceconf).

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