

issues. Leigh Dingerson, on the CCC staff, is the Team Leader for the Education Team, editor of *Education Organizing*, and served as coordinator of the Action Guide development.

Center for Community Change
1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20007
202-342-0567
www.communitychange.org

An Organizer's Thumbnail Sketch: Milestones in the History of Public Education

A sense of the past is useful for organizing in the present because it provides a context for our work. The historical context for education organizing in the U.S. includes class, race and ideological struggles born of two – frequently competing – goals for public school systems.

One of society's goals has been to help students develop the skills needed to function successfully in a democracy. It is characterized by a belief in democratic ideals including equal opportunity, self-improvement, class mobility, generational progress and achievement through hard work. Another view embraces the role that public K-12 education has played historically in preparing children to become cooperative and effective workers and passive consumers as adults—thereby favoring capitalist goals over democratic ideals.

Inevitably, these two goals come into conflict with one another. But they have shared, over time, a limited notion of democracy articulated by Thomas Jefferson and others of his day and perpetuated in our economic system. Both made distinctions between “laborers and the learned,” between men and women, between black, brown, yellow and white skin. Whether intentional or not, the legacy our society has brought forward through history is evident in the tensions emanating from class and race distinctions in our schools.

Tension between a school's responsibility to an individual (providing *some* children with boundless resources), versus responsibility to society as a whole (insuring that *all* children have access to the highest level of instruction) also serves to separate rather than unite. Despite court rulings overturning the concept of ‘separate but equal’, today's public schools often manifest a sharp contrast in their racial segregation and their uneven distribution of resources.

Is reform being driven by well-documented research about how children learn, or by the political desire to seem tough and push for quick fixes?

All of these competing constructs of public education are evident in the curriculum, the structure of schools and learning, and of course the politics of public school reform. The constant tension between the democratic ideals and the pressure to maintain class and racial divides explains much about how schools are governed and funded and about the rhetoric and reality of reform efforts.

With this in mind, activists and organizers must constantly ask questions that help expose these contradictory interests. For instance:

- ◆ How does education policy in our districts play out along race and class lines? What are the ways that resources – broadly defined – are skewed to widen these divides?
- ◆ Does a school's curriculum encourage creative and independent thinking or does it focus on test scores, rote memorization, and ability grouping?
- ◆ Are standards and assessments being used to evaluate what's working and what's not and assure better outcomes for students and teachers, or to bar access, sort and label kids, or to punish students, teachers, schools or districts?
- ◆ Do politicians and corporate executives dictate policy and practice or do parents, students and teachers take the lead, modeling democratic ideals – or at least have a seat at the table?
- ◆ Is reform being driven by well-documented research about how children learn, or by the political desire to seem tough and push for quick fixes?

Much has been written about the goals, beginnings, and development of public schools in the United States. A list of helpful resources is included in the [Where to Find It](#) section of this action guide. This is not intended to be the definitive history of public education, but rather a thumbnail history, designed to help activists and organizers identify and exploit contradictions in ways that will help them frame their work and move schools issues in their communities.

Education in the Colonies – the 1600s

The first schools in the European colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire were created by the Puritans in

the mid-1600s. Promoting the twin tenets of work and faith, Puritan schools taught basic literacy – relying heavily on the Bible as a textbook – along with skills needed for work and survival. Very few children had access to these schools, which were often centered in private homes. And even those who did attend found their academic schedule heavily shaped by the colonists' need for young people to work in the fields and trades.

The colonists recognized the role that schooling plays in conveying not just skills but also moral values to children. As Protestants who belonged to sects other than Puritanism arrived in the colonies, they began to object to the theological grounding of the Puritan schools. Without common agreement on a single set of values, these arrivals established schools to share their own values with their children. By the middle of the eighteenth century, private schools, guided by the ideologies of disparate religious groups, were the norm.

Defining Social and Class Roles – the 1700s

Thomas Jefferson was an early advocate of *public* schools, available to all children. But “public” didn’t mean equal. Jefferson was a proponent of both conflicting tenets described in the introduction to this chapter. He wanted education to serve to “maintain democracy,” but also envisioned two sets of schools segregating “the laboring from the learned” and educating them accordingly. Jefferson’s crumb to the poor was a promise of upward mobility: he conceded that his system might “[rake] a few geniuses from the rubbish.”¹

Jefferson’s concept of public schooling didn’t catch on right away, but in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, Jefferson revived his campaign. He argued that public schooling was necessary to teach the values of the new democracy and prepare citizens for civic involvement.

Jefferson’s concept of who was to partake of this training in democracy was hardly democratic. Public education was not envisioned to include women, Native people, enslaved Africans, indentured servants or laborers. Yet even such a stratified system wasn’t enough for some. In the southern states, for example, wealthy plantation owners shunned the idea of public schools

altogether. They were content to arrange for the private education of their *own* children and declined to worry about the larger societal implications of failing to educate all children.

Industrial Schools – the 1800s

Public education received a major boost in the early 1800s with the contributions of Horace Mann, who was appointed as the First Secretary of the State Board of Education in Massachusetts in 1837. Mann campaigned throughout the state on behalf of public schools, and his work resulted in significantly improved financial commitments to schools, and the increased institutionalization of public education in the state. Mann also established the first teacher training school in the United States, and advocated for a system of free libraries. His series of twelve Annual Reports carried his message outside of Massachusetts. In the reports, he called for a free education for all children, rich and poor alike, which he believed would equalize growing class schisms in society. He supported taxation as a means to support a system of public schools, a non-sectarian approach to public schools, and argued that the nation's economic wealth would increase as citizens were educated.

Largely through the influence of Mann, in the first half of the 1800s new state constitutions were being drafted, and most included provisions for public education. Though most schooling continued to be private and highly segregated, public schools began to emerge. They were immediately politicized, with the curriculum designed to reflect the values of the dominant political party or social groupings in their jurisdictions.

During the 1800s, a dramatically increasing population and urban concentration in some states, due to both internal and external migration, was met with a corresponding explosion of public schools. Between 1846 and 1856, over three million immigrants arrived in the United States, a number then equal to one eighth of the entire U.S. population². These immigrants, and the influx of people from rural areas and the south, joined the growing workforce that fueled new manufacturing industries in the north. Factory owners wanted public schools to provide basic skills and a workforce that accepted its place -- a mission that came in direct conflict with the vision of schools that prepared all citizens to participate fully in civic society.

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Reconstruction – 1865 - 1950

At the conclusion of the Civil War there was a rush to bring public education to the South, particularly to some four million recently emancipated slaves. Congress created a federal Department of Education in 1867 to spearhead and regulate this massive expansion of public schools.

Southern states-rights congressmen, however, opposed federal involvement in education. They wanted to control who was educated and what they were taught. As a result of their efforts, the Department of Education enjoyed cabinet-level status for only one year before being demoted to a “bureau.” Education did not return to Cabinet level again until 1979—more than a hundred years later.

Despite this struggle over the federal government’s role in education, public schooling *did* find its way into the lives of millions of citizens. White literacy was almost universal by the beginning of Reconstruction, and grew rapidly in the rural South where school access had been more limited.³ But the rise in Black literacy rates was especially dramatic. While estimates of the growth in Black literacy vary, one more conservative estimate is that Black literacy increased from 10 percent in 1880 to 50 percent in 1910. The Census Bureau reported that by 1930 the Black literacy rate had jumped to 80 percent.⁴ At the same time, the literacy for white adults was 90 percent. Robert Higgs writes:

...even if the true literacy figure a half century after emancipation reached only 50 percent, the magnitude of the accomplishment is still striking, especially when one recalls the overwhelming obstacles blocking black educational efforts. For a large population to transform itself from virtually unlettered to more than half literate in 50 years ranks as an accomplishment seldom witnessed in human history. — Higgs, Robert, *Competition and Coercion, Blacks in the American Economy, 1865-1914*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

After Reconstruction, signaled by the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877, whites regained political control of the South and laid the groundwork for legal segregation through the Jim Crow laws. African Americans were relegated to separate schools. In 1896

“In recognition of the special educational needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance...to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children.” (Section 201, Elementary and Secondary School Act, 1965)

the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* declared the concept of “separate but equal” constitutional and permitted segregation in virtually all aspects of public life, including schools.

Migration, Immigration and Industrialization

American society, cities and culture continued to change dramatically at the turn of the twentieth century. From 1870 to 1920, 40 million immigrants from Europe came into the United States. Hundreds of thousands were children whose parents looked to public schools to help them forge a better life. Public schools played a major role in the assimilation of immigrant families, as they do today. The forced removal of Native American children from their homes on reservations to attend boarding schools is a grim reminder of the negative aspects of assimilation goals. In many ways the schools were a cultural battleground, with debates over bilingual education similar to the debates going on in schools today. Beginning in the mid-1850s and up through the turn of the century many states enacted bilingual education laws. However, after the massive immigration noted above and the U.S. involvement in the first World War, xenophobia caused a number of states to pass English-only instruction laws. These bilingual education debates reflected biases about which immigrants’ cultures should be valued. For example, European languages such as German and French were frequently taught in the classroom, but Mexican students were punished for speaking Spanish in school.

At the same time, African Americans left the south, changing the face of northern cities and increasing pressure on schools to meet the needs of the developing industries in which they worked. Junior highs and high schools were restructured, with large numbers of students moving from one classroom to another like widgets moving along an assembly line. Teachers specialized and students were placed in groupings that were said to be based on ability, but deliberately or not often reproduced the socio-economic or racial caste of students’ families. Much of this structure remains today: “ability grouping” may begin as early as kindergarten when children are assigned to reading-readiness groups. Once labeled “low-track,” children often have difficulty moving to tracks that will prepare them for more sophisticated secondary school classes or college.

In 1926 the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a standardized college entrance exam, was used for the first time. The SAT was developed by Carl Brigham, a eugenicist who did research that allegedly proved immigrants were “feeble-minded”. In the next few decades intelligence and achievement tests became widespread in their use. To this day many argue that the SAT and other standardized tests are culturally biased, favoring white students over students of color.

Battles for Equality and Control – 1950s

After decades of behind-the-scenes groundwork, as the civil rights movement was building in the South, the Supreme Court struck down *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1954. In *Brown v. Board of Education* the justices declared segregated schools inherently unequal and ordered them dismantled “with all deliberate speed.” The ruling ignited a firestorm of protest, from northern as well as southern states, and led to decades of sometimes-violent struggles for integration and equality.

Opposition to the *Brown* decision was couched in terms of “states rights,” – the notion that state governments should maintain the ability to do as they please. State’s rights continues to be used symbolically today to avoid talking about difficult issues of race, class and values.

The *Brown* decision was hailed as forcing states and districts to integrate their schools and equalize resources. But in fact, the Supreme Court failed to throw its full weight behind the decision. As the Mississippi organizing group Southern Echo notes⁵, “Instead, the court left it up to the combatants at the local school district level where the local districts had the advantage, often supported by corrupt, racist federal judges who had no reluctance to flaunt and attack the Supreme Court and the United States Constitution.” Echo argues that the Court’s use of the phrase, “all deliberate speed,” while meant to acknowledge the complexity of the task it was demanding, instead signaled to local segregationists that change could wait. While some cities turned to forced busing and gerrymandering school attendance boundaries to reach for a more diverse student body, equity and integration proved more elusive. The courts could order busing, but they couldn’t force parents to participate.

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In response to integration, millions of white families moved away from urban centers, spurring a massive expansion of suburbs, where the new, all-white school districts were unaffected by the Supreme Court's ruling. Housing segregation fostered school segregation. African-Americans were denied access to suburban homes through 'redlining'—banks and realtors simply shut them out of all-white neighborhoods. Through the 1980s, and despite attempts by some urban districts to keep and attract white students with programs such as magnet schools, the exodus from city schools continued. By 1992, the Court was forced to declare itself unwilling to order more drastic solutions to reverse the rapid resegregation of public schools: "Where resegregation is a product not of state action but of private choices, it does not have constitutional implications. [...] It is beyond the authority and beyond the practical ability of the federal courts to try to counteract these kinds of continuous and massive demographic shifts," wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy in the *Freeman v. Pitts* decision.

The Federal Government Steps In – The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

In the 1950s and early 1960s, states and local school boards shared authority over public education, its funding, organization, and content. By then most states had departments of education, established funding mechanisms and regulations guiding attendance, curriculum and other components of the public education system. Within broad guidelines, localities made specific policies and decisions.

Predictably, there were vast differences among districts in the same state and among the states themselves. There was little consistency in the way that students and their families were involved, supported, and challenged in the schools.

In an effort to manage these disparities, the federal government, in 1965, stepped into the fray. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) directed federal funds and programs to disadvantaged students in recognition that children from low-income homes required more educational services than children from affluent homes. Title I of ESEA became the largest federal K-

12 education program, receiving \$8 billion its first year.

In pressing for the ESEA, President Johnson acted less out of altruism than in response to demands from the civil rights movement, widespread civil unrest and the Civil Rights Act passed the previous year. Without directly attacking local or state control of schools, Congress said that the states had failed to meet the educational needs of their most impoverished children and would, therefore, have to live with more federal involvement. ESEA was also a cornerstone of the President's "War on Poverty. In addition to providing new federal resources for schools, the law encompassed the new Head Start program for disadvantaged preschoolers and in 1968 incorporated bilingual education provisions (Title VII), offering federal aid to school districts to assist them in addressing the needs of children with limited English-speaking ability.

Communities Step In – Local Control

While battles over desegregation raged through the 1960s and '70s, the issue of who controlled the public schools continued to be a subtext. One important struggle was the 1968 confrontation in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, a predominantly Black and Puerto Rican community in Brooklyn, New York, which exposed and ignited simmering tensions between communities of color and mostly white teachers over the control of schools.

That conflict emerged when the New York City schools, under pressure from parents, created three experimental school districts and gave local communities control over school budgets, curricula and staffing. One of those districts, Oceanhill-Brownsville, was also assigned the City's first black superintendent. When the new parent council in Oceanhill-Brownsville decided to signal their power to the union by voting to transfer 18 teachers out of the district, the fight erupted into the public arena. To the press, the school council claimed that the teachers were undermining the goals of the community control experiment. But a larger context of the dispute was the emergence of Black and Puerto Rican nationalism across the country, with its call for self-reliance and racial empowerment. The predominantly white teachers of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) were perceived as indifferent and unsympathetic to the needs of the community and its children.

To no one's surprise, the United Federation of Teachers objected. Union president Albert Shankar called a citywide teachers strike. The strike lasted two months, ending when NYC Mayor John Lindsay, who had originally supported the plan for community control, capitulated to the union and brought an end to the experiment.⁶

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict catapulted to the front pages of newspapers around the country. It fueled a debate that rang with the rhetoric of the ongoing civil and workers' rights struggles and pitted parents against teachers with a viciousness that has not been seen since – but has shaped a public perception of conflicting interests between parents and teachers that continues to the present. Even today, many who were involved in the struggle have difficulty talking about Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

Yet, despite the difficulty of the struggle, the demand for more community control has persisted. Two decades later, in 1988, The Chicago School Reform Act signaled a new era in local control. The Act established Local School Councils (LSCs) that gave parents and community activists new power. Among the responsibilities turned over to the Councils was the right to select and evaluate principals, help develop and approve school improvement plans, and control discretionary budgets averaging \$500,000 per school. The Chicago Teachers Union, while initially skeptical and not supportive of the move, now embraces the site-based management structure. In fact, during 2004, the Union has joined with a broad coalition of community organizations to oppose the Mayor's "Renaissance 2010" plan which would, in part, abolish Local School Councils at some schools. (*For more about the Chicago School Reform Act, see the section on [Power Analysis](#)*).

'A Nation at Risk'

The optimism of the 1960s and early 70s, the momentum created by the civil rights movement, and federal mandates that the poor and children of color receive an equal education began to wane in the late 1970s. Students of color were increasingly segregated in inner city and racially isolated rural schools as attempts to integrate schools failed. The growth of the suburbs had drained property wealth from cities and funding from schools serving their residents.

In the face of these defeats, new approaches to education were gaining ground. The civil rights and women's movements influenced many parents and teachers to seek more diverse curriculum content that would give prominence to the roles of women and people of color, and to seek better understanding of how race and gender oppression are manifested in a learning environment. A growing number of educators and community activists rejected adjectives like "needy" and "disadvantaged" to describe children and families. They urged schools and teachers to recognize the strength, talents and resources that exist in every individual, family and community. Furthermore, they argued, teaching styles and expectations heavily influence students' success or failure.

President Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 on a platform that rejected these kinds of ideas. He, his staff and his supporters were committed to going back to some imagined time when everyone could and should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and there was no talk – or recognition – of inequality. He hoped to reduce the size and scope of government and let markets reign. In 1983 Reagan created the National Commission on Excellence in Education to evaluate the nation's education system and propose reforms to help the U.S. maintain international supremacy – economically (the "trade war") and politically (the Cold War).

The Commission's report, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," gave the administration the rhetoric it wanted, warning that U.S. student achievement was slipping and that the country faced the imminent prospect of being overtaken in the global market by other nations. Among the alarmist sound bites the report produced were:

"The educational foundations of our society are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."

"...If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

The Commission's *recommendations*, on the other hand, were a mixed bag. Largely disregarded by the administration and the media was the Commission's support for smaller class size and

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greater access to more sophisticated curriculum and teaching. Also widely ignored were recommendations that teachers receive more autonomy, more access to professional development and more competitive salaries. Instead, the Reagan administration emphasized the report’s discussion of learning “standards,” spawning a standards movement.

Standards were (and are) a potentially valuable mechanism to insure that all students receive high-level curriculum, and might even have led to the elimination of tracking. But the administration took a more conservative tack. Governors, corporate executives and the media were cultivated at regional and national summits promoting a results-driven approach to education that sought to emulate the late 1970s restructuring of American businesses to increase productivity. “Standards” became curricular requirements that could be measured with standardized tests. More recently, many states have implemented “high stakes” testing programs that tie student promotion and graduation to statewide achievement tests. While these various assessments have sometimes proved useful to evaluate school resources and identify needs, they are increasingly used to punish students, teachers and schools. As noted by the Education Commission of the States, “Standards are only one piece in a puzzle that also encompasses assessment, curriculum, accountability, teacher education and professional development, and intervention and support for struggling students and schools.”

Thus, despite its use of specious data and its unfounded conclusions, “A Nation at Risk” left a ‘standards’ legacy that significantly impacts learning today. Though subsequent studies disputed its findings, “A Nation at Risk” fulfilled its mission to open the debate on a fundamental restructuring of public education. Rhetoric found in “A Nation at Risk” and the standards movement’s failure to get quick results provided Reagan, subsequent administrations and conservative governors with justification for free-market experiments including vouchers, tuition tax credits and privatization.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

George W. Bush’s administration swept into office with a plan to seize the Democratic Party’s traditional dominance over public education as a domestic issue. The vehicle for this “education

presidency” was the scheduled reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The development of the new ESEA began on a progressive note. In fact, NCLB contains several progressive principles, including the idea that schools should be judged based on their ability to bring *all* children along educationally, and that the quality of the teaching staff is a key component of successful learning and an area where huge gaps exist between wealthy and low-income schools. But through the course of the debate, conservatives managed to move the details of the law in a much more ominous direction.

In January 2001, with broad bipartisan support, President Bush signed the new incarnation of ESEA, with the title “No Child Left Behind” (the moniker was lifted from the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) slogan ‘Leave No Child Behind,’ though the Children’s Defense Fund has been strongly critical of the new law). NCLB makes sweeping changes in the way schools and districts must operate if they receive federal education dollars. The law requires annual assessments in grades 3-12 and imposes sanctions on low-income schools that do not meet annual goals for improvement in assessment scores. It sets goals for improving teacher quality. It consolidates funding, allowing states the leeway to use federal education dollars for a wide range of programs. And it refocuses the longstanding federal program for bilingual education towards English language acquisition. The fact that the law rests on some solid foundations makes it harder to criticize. As a political move, NCLB was a brilliant strategy. But for kids, it could be a disaster.

No Child Left Behind dramatically expands the federal role in public schools, while at the same time encouraging families to look to less regulated private and semi-private institutions to educate their children.

The immediate effect of the law has been to dramatically increase federal oversight of education, worrying advocates of smaller government and flying in the face of the legacies of Presidents Reagan and Bush senior. However, the Bush Administration’s ultimate goal is undeniably the downsizing of not only the federal role in education, but likely the public role as a whole. The Administration has severely underfunded the law. And NCLB’s promo-

tion of privatization of education and flirtation with vouchers belies a longer term agenda to reduce the role of government in education. In effect, the law sets unrealistic restrictions and mandates on schools and districts, while at the same time encouraging “failing” schools be turned over to private entities that are less accountable and virtually unregulated. It offers “choice” to low income parents to move their children out of poorly performing or “persistently dangerous” schools – without insuring that there will be better quality, safer schools for them to attend. It funnels federal dollars to private supplemental service providers and to advocacy organizations that promote vouchers. And at every step, the law emphasizes measurement, assessment, and curricula that feed business – and federal dollars – to the private sector.

In the first two years after NCLB was enacted, it appeared to have achieved the Republican goal of disarming the Democrats of their traditional dominance over the issue by positioning the Republicans as the party of change, fundamentally restructuring public education in the country. Astute spin from the Department of Education suggests that to argue against NCLB is to support the status quo.

Despite the Department of Education’s attempts to vilify opponents of the law (the Secretary of Education during Bush’s first term, Rod Paige, went so far as to call the National Education Association a “terrorist organization” in the spring of 2004), a wide assortment of teachers, administrators, parents, advocates and education experts have expressed grave concerns about the law. Clearly, the rhetorical goal of leaving no child behind is seen as much more complicated by those on the ground.

As implementation proceeds, a rising opposition to the law, and support for revisions have grown. How school districts, teachers, parents and communities respond to No Child Left Behind is certain to be the major theme of the next several years in the debate on public education in the U.S. Will the law lead to the erosion of federal support for poor children in public schools? Will public schools become even more stratified based on race and class, with the “haves” winning and the “have-nots” losing...again? Or will the focus on assessment and sanctions eliminate unproven or ineffective teaching practices and raise student assessment scores? And if it does so, what will those assessment scores

really tell us about our kids' ability to succeed in post-secondary education and beyond?

The Center for Community Change has developed a range of resource materials on No Child Left Behind, which are specifically targeted to organizers. In addition, education advocates can provide analyses and other tools for understanding the complex provisions of the law. For more information, click on this link to our [website section on No Child Left Behind](#), or to the [Center's NCLB briefing papers](#). Or, see the [Where to Find It](#) section of this guide.

Recent Education Trends

However NCLB plays out, education is an issue that Americans care about, and therefore one that politicians know they have to address. In a poll taken in 2002, 38 percent of those polled said the president and congress should make education their 'highest priority', and another 45 percent said education should be a 'high priority.' The only two issues ranked higher by those polled were terrorism and the economy. In the Latino community, education consistently out-polls all other issues – even immigration reform.

It's no wonder that public schools are a political battle ground. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are 47.4 million children enrolled in the nation's public elementary and secondary schools. And together, billions of federal, state and local dollars support the massive infrastructure of 85,000 school buildings across the country.

Moreover, public schools continue to educate the vast majority of the nation's children, as compared to private and parochial schools, or home schools:

Race and Ethnicity Matter

While the sheer number of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools climbs, with regional variations, we are also seeing a shift in the demographics of public school students over time.

	1972	1976	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
<i>White</i>	77.8%	76.2%	72.8%	69.6%	67.6%	65.5%	61.3%
<i>Black</i>	14.8	15.5	16.2	16.8	16.5	16.9	16.6
<i>Hispanic</i>	6.0	6.5	8.6	10.1	11.7	14.1	16.6
<i>Other</i>	1.4	1.7	2.4	3.5	4.2	3.5	5.4

Source: US Department of Education Common Core of Data, 2002

While the percentage of White students in the public schools is inching downwards, African-American students became a larger percentage of the public school population through the mid-'80s, and have basically stayed constant since then. The big shift is among Hispanic students, who have gone from making up 6 percent of the public school population in 1972 to over 16 percent in 2000. That's a *huge* demographic shift, which is having a big impact on our schools. Similarly, the growth of "Other" students [meaning mostly non-Hispanic immigrants and Native Americans] has grown from 1.4 percent to 5.4 percent, an even more dramatic jump.

These demographic shifts have important implications for education organizing. The issues that matter to parents and their children will depend in part on how schools and districts are addressing the needs of changing school populations, including students with limited English proficiency.

Woven throughout the history of public education in the U.S. are stories of class and race struggles to achieve a decent education—to realize the democratic ideal of equal opportunity. The tension between this ideal and the political, economic and social realities of a given period in time continue to the present. The history and contradictions of public education in America provide an important lens to interpret and understand the current laws, debates, and practices that will be discussed in this guide.

Endnotes:

¹ Keleher, Terry, 1999. "History of Public Education in the United States." Oakland: Applied Research Center.

² Ibid, Keleher, 1999

³ Carter, Susan B, et al, "Race and Ethnicity: Population, Vital Processes, and Education. Policy Studies Institute, University of California, Riverside, February 2003. <http://www.economics.ucr.edu/papers/03-11.pdf>

⁴ Irons, Peter. "Jim Crow's Schools," American Educator, Summer 2004. American Federation of Teachers http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/summer04/crowschools.htm

⁵ "Justice Funding: Experimenting with the language of struggle to clarify policy and strategy choices." By Southern Echo, Inc., 2004.

⁶ "Transforming Urban Schools Through Investments in Social Capital," Part 4. Noguera, Pedro A. In Motion Magazine. May 20, 1999. <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/pncap1.html>

Power Analysis: Who Can, Who Should, Who Will

Schools and school districts have many decision-makers, both groups and individuals. Sometimes their authority and responsibilities are clear-cut; other times they overlap or are shared. This section gives a general overview of who these people and groups are and what they control. Remember, though, that school districts differ from place to place. To understand the division of authority and responsibility in your school district, begin with some research online or at the library. Look at your city's "government services" or "elected officials" listings for a description of how the schools are run and managed. Then, you can follow up with specific questions in a phone call or meeting with local or district information officers.

At The School

Principals lead schools, academically and administratively. A good principal can set a school climate that is conducive to learning and intellectual engagement – not just for students but for the teaching staff as well. Large schools also may have **deans** or **assistant** or **vice principals** who share in these leadership responsibilities.

The amount of freedom a principal has to make decisions and shape a school's atmosphere varies from district to district. Usually they have a great deal of leeway within policy guidelines set by boards of education and superintendents. The exception to this generalization may be curriculum. The move toward state standards and federal tests has heavily circumscribed flexibility in this area.

It doesn't take long, when you enter a school, to begin getting a flavor of the school "climate" or "culture." Is it a place where students, teachers and administrators are respected and challenged? Is it a functional office that provides its "workers" what they need to do their jobs? Schools are work sites for teachers, support staff, paraprofessionals and others. As such, the climate created by building leadership affects all who work there, as well as students who attend the school, and their parents. In a well-run

In Denver, New York and other cities, organized parents have won campaigns to replace school principals, help choose new school leadership and ensure better management and higher expectations within schools. Perhaps the most radical organizing to change school culture has been done by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in Texas, where a network of “Alliance Schools” focuses on establishing a learning community that engages students, parents, teachers and other staff.

school, **teachers** may work together in teams by grade, or subject level in an effort to strengthen coordination between classrooms and provide an opportunity for teachers to learn from each other and critically reflect on their work. In other buildings, there may be no sense of collegiality: classroom doors are closed, teachers work largely on their own and are suspicious of efforts by parents or other teachers to sit in the classroom to monitor or provide support. These buildings typically fail to provide an intellectually stimulating environment for teachers and students, and result in high teacher turnover and low student achievement.

The degree of autonomy teachers enjoy to shape their classroom teaching depends on multiple factors, including class size, student attributes, the principal, the level of support she provides, and any standardized curriculum mandated by the school district. Increasingly, as standardized exams become more influential in decisions about promotions and graduations, teachers are under pressure to “teach to the test” and therefore have less leeway in how they convey their course material.

In most school districts, teachers and other school staff (custodians, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers) are unionized.¹ **Unions** work to protect faculty and staff from inequitable labor practices, and negotiate wages and benefits through collective bargaining. In some school districts, the local teachers union includes teachers as well as paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and other school personnel. In other districts, non-teaching positions may be represented by other unions, including the Teamsters, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) or others.

Most teachers unions have “building representatives” or “shop stewards,” who serve as the union liaison and leadership within each individual school building. These elected building “reps” sit on a district-wide council that helps decide on union activities and positions. It is usually worth building relationships with these leaders. That way, when an issue seems to present a conflict between staff interests and student needs, activists may be able to find solutions that satisfy both. Also, some issues may be of concern to both parents and teachers, providing the opportunity to work together to resolve problems.

Dozens of organizing groups have begun their work on education issues by targeting small but meaningful changes at the building level – perhaps addressing safety for children walking to and from school, playground facilities, or other issues. These campaigns should be conducted strategically as a way to build parent interest in the school, develop alliances with teachers or administrators and establish a presence for the group.

For a good description of the kinds of campaigns that groups often start out with, check out “Unlocking the Schoolhouse Door,” a report by the National Center for Schools and Communities (April 2002) that looks at how community groups typically begin their engagement on education concerns. [<http://www.ncscatfordham.org/binarydata/files/unlockingschool.pdf>]

Teachers unions engage in collective bargaining with the school district to create a contract that guides their working conditions. Contracts are typically negotiated every one to three years, but portions of the contract may be reviewed or renegotiated on an annual basis. Most union contracts determine wage and salary scales, but teachers’ contracts also may influence building assignments, evaluation processes, and tenure policies and practices. Increasingly, unions are insisting on the right to bargain around additional issues such as class size, facilities conditions, the composition of school and district decision-making teams, professional development and others that directly affect student learning. Contracts are public documents that should be available from the district and/or union office. Some local unions post contracts or summaries on their web sites.

Some states (Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia) do not allow collective bargaining by teachers. In these states, decisions about salaries and working conditions are decided by the district administration, with varying degrees of influence by teachers depending on the district leadership. Nevertheless, these states all have teacher union affiliates. But the unions typically are far less powerful than those in states where collective bargaining is guaranteed.

Some states have laws that proscribe what can and cannot be included in collective bargaining agreements. To find out what your state’s “scope of bargaining” policies are, go to this link, which contains a state-by-state table on collective bargaining policies for teachers:

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/37/48/3748.htm>.

Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), also known as Parent Associations or Parent-Teacher-Student Organizations, are sometimes seen, particularly by administrators and teachers, as the primary vehicle for parents to participate in the school. The national PTA was founded in 1897 as the National Congress of Mothers. It was a radical concept at the time, when social activism was scorned and women did not have the vote. The PTA has been instrumental as a national lobbying force around issues such as access to kindergarten, school meals, child labor and other issues. In the last several years, many school-based parent organizations have formed independently of the national PTA, though they play similar roles at individual schools.

In Spokane, Washington, the Washington Rural Organizing Project (now known as Spokane Interfaith and Education Alliance) organized the PTA at Sheridan elementary school, and won District funds to coordinate activity around vehicular traffic outside the school, among other issues. The effort dissolved, however, when the organizing group turned their attention to a school funding levy and the District withdrew its support.

PTAs are almost always unstaffed, and work with extremely limited resources. They often thrive or falter based on the skills and personalities of a few hard-working parents. In low and moderate-income communities, school PTAs are not often seen as welcoming or representative of the school population as a whole. PTAs tend to be dominated by whites – even in majority-minority schools – and by more middle class families. They are often seen by community groups as relatively conservative bodies that focus on fundraising support for the school. School principals often heavily influence the PTA, and can control their access to school resources to some degree, which also contributes to the frustration that many community organizing groups have with the tendency of PTAs to be fairly conflict-averse.

Many organizing groups have successfully worked with or through established PTAs on a range of issues. However, where PTAs do not reflect the overall demographic makeup of the school, or are substantially controlled by a small subset of parents or the principal, community groups have found them to be unhelpful and some times even obstructionist.

Site-based decision-making, also known as shared decision-making or school-based management, exists in many districts and schools. The concept was brought over from private-sector “participatory management” innovations—to place more power, autonomy and accountability at the school level and allow for greater decision-making by teachers, and sometimes by students, parents and community members as well. These structures differ widely in their responsibilities and effectiveness. At one end of the spectrum is Chicago (*see box below*) where neighborhood residents elect local school councils that in theory can hire and fire principals and other staff and exert significant control over school budgets. Some site-based structures also have control over curriculum and programming decisions. In other places planning teams and similar committees may be advisory only, not accountable to anyone, allowed to address a limited range of issues, controlled by administrators or frustrated by uncooperative staff.

District Level: Administrators and Elected Officials

Superintendents, occasionally known as chancellors, chief executive officers or chief administrative officers, are legally obligated to carry out the policies of the board of education or in some cases mayors or county executives. Superintendents are usually a district's most visible representative and are critical in defining its culture, shaping decisions, encouraging innovation and improvement, and creating a supportive work environment for faculty and staff. The superintendent, with the **administrative, district, or central office staff**:

- Monitors school progress and budgets and reports to the board and the public;
- Selects curriculum and materials (within the confines of state law);
- Oversees training and development of principals and teachers;
- Negotiates contracts with employees unions;
- Manages facilities;
- Ensures equitable distribution of materials, equipment and information to schools;
- Creates short- and long-term plans;
- Hires, assigns and fires principals and other staff, usually with board approval; and
- Prepares budgets for the board's approval.

In federal parlance, the district administration is known as the "Local Education Agency" or LEA.

Boards of education, known in some places as school boards or school committees, typically set budgets, policies and goals for their districts. They can usually levy taxes, and must issue regular

financial reports. Boards determine the school calendar, approve curriculum, make decisions about buildings and renovations and decide many other issues.

School boards are not usually involved in day-to-day operations, but *are* accountable for ensuring that local, state and federal laws are obeyed. These requirements range widely, covering academic standards, the licensing of teachers and other staff, health and safety, employment law, and much more. A board's key responsibilities are to:

- Raise funds, approve district budgets and oversee expenses;
- Authorize contracts with employees and their unions;
- Hire the superintendent, other top administrators and, in some smaller districts, principals;
- Communicate with the public about public education and local schools.

Ideally boards also should provide vision and a philosophy or approach to education. They should answer hard questions on the content of curriculum, the best ways to meet the needs of the district's students, and ways to engage the community and attract the best staff.

Many boards are elected, but a growing number of mayors, county executives and city councils have won the right to appoint them. Their argument has been that since they are responsible for budgets and the success or failure of schools, they should determine who governs them. Some activists have struggled against this trend believing elected boards are more accountable. Others have supported change arguing that school districts are too complex to be run by lay people or that elected school boards are open to corruption.

Local government's primary role in education is creating and refining funding mechanisms, most often property or real estate taxes. (See section on, [School Funding](#)) In addition, many cities, counties, and other local entities have regulations that apply to schools, for example fire codes and rules about health, safety and building occupancy.

Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) sometimes hold power at the district level. Often, individual school PTA presidents come

together in a district-wide body, which may be anointed by the superintendent or school board as the “official” voice for the community and parents.

Site-based decision-making. In some places, participatory decision-making extends to the district-level. In most of New York State, for instance, districts are required by law to have a district-level planning team in addition to teams for each school. These teams are supposed to include community, parents, administrators, support staff, and teachers. For more on site-based decision-making, see *Building Level* above.

Unions represent faculty and staff in most school districts. In many large districts there are four or more unions – one each for principals; teachers and other professional staff; paraprofessionals such as teachers’ aides; and maintenance or custodial workers; as well as specialized unions for the trades, such as electricians. As mentioned above, guidelines for how districts negotiate with unions – and the parameters of collective bargaining – are usually set by states. Wages, salaries, and benefits account for about 85 percent of a typical district’s budget. Conservatives charge unions with getting in the way of school change, accusing them of protecting their own members (with contract language on teacher placement, seniority rights and due process provisions) over ensuring student achievement. In recent years, though, a growing number of local unions have begun to assert the role of teachers in changing schools for the better and leading the focus on student achievement. These locals say they have a responsibility to make sure all kids learn and to help get rid of teachers who can’t or won’t support this goal. They also are forging alliances with parent and community groups. Some of these locals belong to the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN), www.turnexchange.net.

In a number of cities, local community organizations have developed good working relationships with their teachers union locals, and are engaged in joint efforts to reform schools. The Center for Community Change’s “Partnerships for Change” project supports and learns from these alliances [*for more information on Partnerships for Change, see a brochure on the project at www.communitychange.org/education/partnershipsforchange.html*].

Winds of change in Chicago?

The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 was a response to demands for better schools and increased parent and community involvement. Local school councils (LSCs) established by the Act gave parents and community activists responsibilities that those in other districts could only dream of. These included the right to: select and evaluate principals, help develop and approve school improvement plans, and control discretionary budgets averaging \$500,000 per school.

LSCs include six parents and two community representatives elected by parents and community residents, two teachers elected by school staff, the principal, and in high schools a student elected by his or her peers. The district requires LSC members to have 16 hours of training. Several Chicago-based non-profits provide this training, as well as additional workshops and support.

Are they working? A 1997 study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that 50-60% of LSCs are “high functioning” and that another 25-33% are doing well though in need of more support. Studies also suggest that elementary schools with sustained improvement in reading test scores during the 1990s had “effective” LSCs as judged by school staff. At the same time, schools taken over by the central administration in the late 1990s showed “very limited” achievement gains.

Despite this promising view, LSCs remain controversial. District office staff have been known to interfere with the LSCs, and the district’s chief operating officer has publicly belittled them. This has undermined the public’s support of LSCs, discouraged people from running for seats on the councils, and demoralized those who do serve. It has also made them less effective. In 2004, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley announced a plan to restructure as many as 60 Chicago Public Schools, abolishing the LSCs in those schools. Community groups are fighting the so-called “Renaissance 2010” plan.

Many school reform groups and foundations that pushed for the 1988 Act, as well as LSC members, continue to believe in the potential of the LSCs to improve schools. They fought off attempts to weaken the Act and are working to strengthen LSCs. Members and experts alike recommended more training for LSC members, especially on conflict resolution, teaching and learning and consensus building, and groups like the Chicago School Leadership Cooperative have received substantial grants to try to fill the gap.

Sources: **Chicago’s Local School Councils: What the Research Says**, Donald R. Moore and Gail Merrit, Designs for Change, January 2002, www.designsforchange.org.

Catalyst: Voice of Chicago School Reform, *Growing up: Local leaders say it’s now or never for LSCs* and *Prescriptions for improved LSCs*, both by Mario G. Ortiz, March 2002, www.chicagocatalyst.org.

State Level: Education Departments, Courts, Legislatures

Governors and **legislatures**, the chief decision-makers in state government, have primary responsibility for public education at this level. States, through budgets set by governors and legislators, contribute the largest share of funding for schools – as much as 50% of school budgets. Most states also set requirements for teacher certification and licensing, create accountability systems such as standards and tests, set the rules for school bonds, develop standard courses of study, and determine the parameters of negotiations and benefits policies for school employees. Beyond these issues, there is wide variation in how much control states exert.

Governors and/or legislators usually appoint **state boards of education** and **state superintendents**, though these are elected positions in a few states. Superintendents and state boards or departments of education (in federal parlance, known as “State Education Agencies” or SEAs) typically create guidelines for how districts implement education legislation on topics such as those listed above. How active they are and how much influence they have over the actions of the governor and the legislature varies from state to state.

A good source of information specific to your state include local “education funds” – a network of progressive education advocates affiliated with the Public Education Network (PEN). There are ed funds in 34 states. You might also contact your state PTA and state teachers’ unions. Many states also have fiscal analysis institutes that are excellent sources of information about budgets and tax equity issues. Contact information for each of these resources are listed in the Resource section. [PEN is at www.publiceducation.org].

Parent Teacher Associations (see other levels, too) often have state-level staff who lobby the governor or state legislature. Some also provide technical support to local chapters.

School boards usually have a state association, made up of district boards, that lobbies governors and state legislators.

Unions are major players in most states. The teachers’ unions in

particular usually have professional lobbyists and contribute generously to political campaigns. The two umbrella groups for local teachers unions are the American Federation of Teachers (www.aft.org) and the National Education Association (www.nea.org). Both organizations typically have state-level offices in each state, though one may be dominant, based on the number of members/locals it has within the state.

State court decisions can affect school policies on school funding, materials, student access and assignments, civil liberties issues such as dress codes and drug testing, freedom of speech, religion and more. In the last 30 years state and federal courts also have issued many rulings defining the states' responsibility for providing free public schools and the distribution of available resources. (See, [Suing for Equity](#), in the School Funding section.)

Federal Level: Department of Education and Congress

Department of Education In 1979 the federal “office of education” became a department and the secretary of education achieved cabinet-level status. “Ed,” as it is referred to, conducts research, administers programs – including grants to schools and other groups – and represents the President in matters relating to schools. The secretary of education under George W. Bush is Roderick Paige, former superintendent of the Houston, Texas, schools.

Federal court decisions, including those made by the Supreme Court, may influence a wide range of school policies and practices from dress codes to drug testing to school prayer. For more information see **Courts** in the **State Level** section above.

Federal laws applying to schools include those that define and outlaw discrimination based on race, sex, or disability and those that protect employees – for example, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disability Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act. The federal government also regulates how schools use federal funds.

The largest federal program that provides funding for public schools is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

of 1965. It created and regulates most federal K-12 programs. Title I, designed to improve achievement among poor children and children of color, is the heart of ESEA and provides the most funding, about \$13.8 billion in fiscal year 2003. Congress allocates funds for ESEA each year and must reauthorize the law every five or six years. In addition to Title I's focus on disadvantaged children, ESEA also typically addresses programs for bilingual students, education on military bases and Indian reservations, funding for special programs such as dropout prevention or drug programs, and other provisions.

Until the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), federal involvement in school policies and practices was minimal beyond the areas listed above. However, the new ESEA/NCLB requirements on assessment, school performance and teacher quality will significantly influence schools across the country. Under the new law, Title I schools face sanctions for failing to meet the new mandates.

The current version of ESEA dictates, to an unprecedented degree, practices historically controlled at the state and local level. Many educators and parents view this federal "intrusion" into local school policy as particularly invidious, made more so by the President and Congress' failure to fully fund the authorization levels set in the law. Despite the onerous mandates required of districts by NCLB, the federal share of local school funding remains at about 7%. (For more information on the law's major provisions, see the section of this Action Guide called "No Child Left Behind".)

National Association of State Boards of Education

(www.nasbe.org) and the **National School Boards Association** (www.nsba.org) are the major national organizations of school boards. They lobby at the federal level and publish journals and other materials. For instance, **The American School Board Journal** (www.asbj.com) is written without a lot of jargon and frequently has useful articles.

The National Parent Teacher Association (see other levels) lobbies at the federal level, publishes a magazine and other materials and maintains national offices in Chicago and Washington, DC (www.pta.org).

Unions (see other levels) are also major players in Congress. The teachers' unions have government affairs offices, professional lobbyists and make generous campaign contributions.

Getting to a Power Analysis

As you begin to look at and hear about issues within the schools in your community, develop a plan for leaders to conduct a local power analysis. Look at who's on the local school board; who contributes to their campaigns; what authority do individual schools (through principals or site-based management councils) have over the issues that you're concerned about? Meet with a representative of the teachers union to evaluate their interest in working with community residents. Sit down with a district official, or see if the district publishes a guide to district finances and school budgets. These fact-finding exercises will help you and your leaders figure out how to approach the issues they care about.

In addition, it's important to be aware of many parents' reluctance to approach schools or engage in issues that directly affect classroom practice. Cultural or historic experiences sometimes make parents uneasy about approaching teachers (cultural differences between mostly white, mostly middle class teachers and the communities from which their students come are often legion), or feeling that they might not have anything to offer the school. Schools are good at sending subtle messages about the limits of parent involvement. Some organizing groups have found that the level of leadership development needed to engage in campaigns addressing real instructional issues is much higher than with many other issue campaigns. Take your time. Get active inside the school house only as your leadership and membership are ready. Most organizing groups begin with "outside the school" issues such as facilities or safety first. Building relationships, learning about education reform and getting comfortable with you instincts about what goes on inside a classroom or school takes longer.

School funding

Where does it come from? Where does it go?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Money Matters: A Reporter's Guide to School Finance (2003, Education Writers Association, Washington, D.C., www.ewa.org) was of immeasurable help in preparing this section. We also are indebted to **Protecting Public Education From Tax Giveaways to Corporations** (2003, National Education Association, Washington, D.C., www.nea.org) for an explanation of state funding formulas.

Access to a free public education has been constitutionally guaranteed to children for a century. But for about just as long, a debate has raged over how that education will be funded, what the spending priorities ought to be, and who will pay for it. The same fundamental tenets that have shaped – and complicated – the formation of our public school system (see chapter 1) also emerge in the debate over how it is funded. Do *all* children have a right to the *same* resources? Do they have the right to whatever is needed to provide an “adequate” education? Or, do state constitutions guarantee only a basic level of support, onto which districts or states, or individual schools may build to the extent of their political and economic power.

The conservative political climate that has been building nationwide since the 1970s has affected public schools dramatically. The rising power of corporations and the diminished import of the public sector to provide for society's needs have created a difficult climate in which to secure adequate funding for public schools. The result has been fierce battles, unending lawsuits, complicated political maneuvering and usually a stalemate when it comes to making sure resources reach low-income children. Thus inequities remain. The gap in spending between the highest poverty and lowest poverty districts averages \$966 per pupil nationwide, which means in some states the gap is even greater. (*The Education Trust publishes an excellent annual report on the funding gaps between high and low poverty districts, by state. For the 2004 report, see:*

<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/30B3C1B3-3DA6-4809-AFB9-2DAACF11CF88/0/funding2004.pdf>.)

The battle over school funding is an important dimension of the modern-day struggle for equal opportunity for low-income students and children of color. The following description of school funding fights in New York State exemplifies the nature of the challenge to obtain equal educational opportunity.

The McDonalds Standard. Is it Enough?

In New York State, a grassroots coalition of more than 230 groups is organizing to shape the way an “adequate education” is defined and how the state should pay for it. The battle in New York provides a model for engaging community groups in school funding debates.

The Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) was formed to establish a grassroots voice to help amplify the legal battle over school funding in the Empire State. The case took off in 1995 when New York’s highest court said litigators with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) had standing to challenge the education finance system on the grounds that thousands of students were being denied the “sound, basic education” required by the state’s constitution.

In 2001 Judge Leland DeGrasse ruled in favor of CFE, declaring that New York State had “over the course of many years consistently violated the state constitution by failing to provide opportunity for a sound basic education....” He ordered the state to reform its funding system. Then, in 2002, an appellate court rejected DeGrasse’s decision. Many were outraged by the appellate court ruling, which implied that money is not that important and that an eighth or ninth grade education fulfilled the requirement of “sound and basic.” *The New York Times* decried the decision, writing that it “suggested that the state would satisfy its constitutional duty if the educational opportunity provided students would qualify them for jobs as fast-food cooks or bike messengers.”

A year later, New York’s highest court weighed in again. Money does matter, it said, expressing concern that thousands of students are “placed in overcrowded classrooms, taught by unqualified teachers, and provided with inadequate facilities and equipment.” The decision said that all students are entitled to a “meaningful high school education . . . which prepares [them] to function productively as civic participants.” (*Campaign for Fiscal Equity V. State of New York*). What *that* means must now be defined in New York.

The Alliance for Quality Education is taking the lead in organizing so that the voices of parents, students and teachers can be heard

in that debate. Together with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, community leaders in dozens of districts across the state are coming up with a definition of what they believe schools need in order to be successful and are conducting local organizing campaigns to demand those resources.

The battle for new school funding systems is being fought throughout the country. Moving from the state courts to the streets and back again, these campaigns are defining “adequacy” and at the same time looking for ways to provide it to all children regardless of where they live.

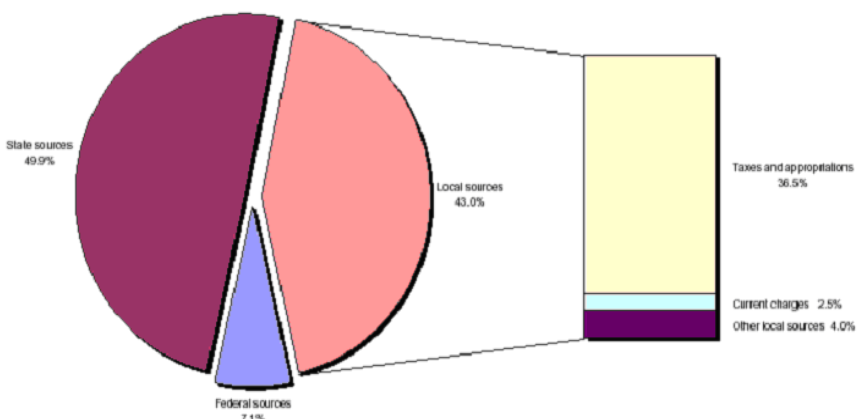
This chapter provides a basic summary of school funding: where the money comes from, and how it is spent.

Where does the money come from?

The State. The share of school funding covered by state dollars varies significantly. The trend, however, has been toward rising state shares: in 1940 states provided 30 percent of school funds, by 1970 it was 40 percent, and in 2000, 49.9 percent. K-12 public education is the single largest expense for state governments, an average of 35.4 percent of their 2000 budgets.

Figure 1. Percent Distribution of Public Elementary-Secondary Education Revenue: 2000-01

Total: \$402.4 billion



Source: Public Education Finances, 2001. U.S. Census Bureau

State-level funding for education is dependent on the revenues generated from sources such as sales and personal income taxes—which together account for nearly 70 percent of total state revenues. Both are strongly affected by the health of the economy, prompting experts and activists to look for ways to stabilize and increase state incomes. An additional challenge is that, reflecting the increase in corporate power mentioned earlier, corporate income taxes have declined in recent decades. As recently as 1989, 9.7 percent of state tax revenues came from corporate income taxes; in 2002 it had fallen to 5.1 percent. Meanwhile, states have tried to raise revenues other ways, such as through state lotteries. However, research shows that lottery revenues earmarked for education tend to supplant, rather than supplement, the existing state education resources.

Local governments provide nearly as large a share of school funds as the states – an average of 43 percent in 2000-01¹. Local contributions were highest in Nebraska (57.7 percent) and lowest in Arkansas (18.7 percent). Most local education funding comes from property taxes. Nationally these taxes provide nearly a third of all funding for K-12 education. In many states local voters must approve increases in property tax rates which also are known as millage rates. As a result, school boards or local governments must ask voters to approve school budgets or special expenses, such as buildings, that will increase millage rates.

In large cities and urban counties with a single district, school funds are often part of the overall budget. These budgets are typically developed by mayors or county executives and their staffs, are finalized by a city or county council and do not require a public vote. Therefore activists have to insert themselves in the process early on in order to have an impact on spending priorities and overall funding.

Regardless of the budget process, the mechanics of property taxes are the same. A mill equals one-tenth of a cent. So, for example, if voters agree to increase the millage rate by one percent, they would pay an additional one dollar for every \$1,000 worth of property. Local officials, or in a few cases state governments, periodically reevaluate the worth of property for tax purposes. The result is known as assessed value and is usually less than market value. So, continuing with the example above, a

house assessed at \$100,000 would be taxed an additional \$100 for each one percent millage rate increase.

Local governments like property taxes because they are relatively dependable, predictable and easy to administer and collect. But property taxes often impose unfair burdens on the elderly and those on fixed incomes as well as property owners whose incomes do not keep pace with property values. These problems can be particularly pronounced during recessions and real estate booms.

In the last 10-15 years homeowners have tended to bear heavier property tax burdens than businesses. Reasons for this include a boom and bust in commercial and office space in the 1980s, underassessment of industrial and commercial property, declines in manufacturing and increased home ownership². The same dynamics that have resulted in reduced corporate income taxes at the state level are allowing companies to reduce their property tax burden as well. [*Education Organizing addressed one facet of this decline in corporate contributions to school revenues. See <http://www.communitychange.org/education/pdf/edorg9.pdf>.*]

Reliance on property taxes contributes to huge inequalities across states and among schools in the same state. Communities with the neediest children often have the weakest property tax bases and, therefore, raise the least amount of money even when they tax themselves at high rates. To date efforts to address these inequalities have been only marginally successful. Every state that has changed its funding formula in response to a lawsuit has in some way restricted the use of property taxes.

Federal government. The federal contribution to state education budgets ranged from 3.8 percent to 17.3 percent in 2000-01. The average was 7.1 percent and most districts received 5-8 percent of their budgets from the federal government.

The source for this funding is Congress' annual appropriation to the Department of Education, authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Congress enacted the ESEA in 1965, and has reauthorized it every 5-6 years since then. The law was a cornerstone of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," and for the first time, targeted federal funds and programs specifically to disadvantaged students.

Title I of the ESEA became the single largest federal expenditure on elementary and secondary education, with appropriations of \$1 billion dollars in 1965. These appropriations have risen to roughly \$13 billion in 2003, though these increases have barely kept pace with inflation and rising student enrollments in elementary and secondary public schools.

This federal intervention was tacit recognition that the states' performance on this front was uneven and insufficient. Title I of the ESEA became the single largest federal expenditure on elementary and secondary education, with appropriations of \$1 billion dollars in 1965. These appropriations have risen to roughly \$13 billion in 2003, though these increases have barely kept pace with inflation and rising student enrollments in elementary and secondary public schools. (*The National Center for Education Statistics has good information on state-by-state Title I allocations, as well as district allocations. See <http://nces.ed.gov>. The U.S. Department of Education website also allows you to search states for Title I allocations by district. See <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/titlei/fy04/index.html#allocation>.)*

A separate law governs federal funding for children with disabilities. In 1975 Congress passed the first such law, then called the Education of All Handicapped Children Act. The law has been amended numerous times—most recently in 1997—and is now titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A critical aspect of IDEA is the principle that all eligible school-aged children and youth with disabilities are entitled to receive a free appropriate public education (“FAPE”). In addition to FAPE, the other key principles of the law are: appropriate evaluation, individualized education programs, least restrictive environment, parent and student participation in decision making, and procedural safeguards. States must comply with certain minimum rules and standards in order to receive federal IDEA funds. Each state also has its own special education law that may go beyond the federal statute.

Under the law, provision of FAPE must occur, to the extent possible, in the same school and classroom setting that a child would otherwise attend were the child not disabled. In other words, every effort should be made to mainstream disabled students. In the past, children with disabilities were often segregated from other students and stigmatized for their difference. In the early 1970s, more than one million disabled children were excluded from school, and hundreds of thousands were housed in state institutions.³ Children of color and poor children were more likely than white, wealthier children to be separated, and to receive inappropriate educational services. [<http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/2002/fb092302.htm>]

The federal government has failed to meet the funding goals set out in IDEA. Originally the law called for a federal target of covering 40 percent of the extra costs of educating children with disabilities. Although federal appropriations for special education increased from roughly \$315 million in 1977 to \$7.4 billion in 2001, the federal contribution today pays for only about 13 percent of the excess costs of special education. States and localities must make up the difference.

Some states try to distribute property taxes more equitably to improve education equity

In recent years efforts to more equitably fund public education have focused largely on the state level, and have been fought primarily in the state courts. In some cases the result has been a state role in the distribution of local property taxes. Kansas, Montana, Texas, Wyoming, and Vermont (see below) require local governments to pool all or some property tax revenues in a state fund. These funds are then distributed more equitably throughout the state. Michigan replaced most local property taxes with a statewide property tax and a higher sales tax in 1994. Per-student spending gaps between the lowest- and highest-poverty districts are below the national average in all of these states except Michigan and Montana. *(Source: The Education Trust based on 1999-2000 U.S. Dept. of Education and U.S. Census Bureau data. See spending gap charts comparing the states at <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/EE004C0A-D7B8-40A6-8A03-1F26B8228502/0/funding2003.pdf>.)*

Where does the money go?

All the resources that are funneled down from the federal, state and local level end up in school district hands, where they are allocated to schools. Funds are apportioned to the districts in a variety of ways, depending on the source of funds and the formulas used for their distribution, which are described in detail below. Once they reach the school level, funds are used for a number of different purposes; the bulk of resources are used for operating expenses.

Controversy in Vermont

In 1997 Vermont's Supreme Court ruled that every child in the state should have basically equal access to funds for teachers, libraries and textbooks. The legislature responded with Act 60; it says districts that spend the same dollar amount on their students should have the same tax rate. The practical result is that property-rich districts subsidize districts with less valuable property. The act does not require equal spending.

Under Act 60 the state sets property tax rates, combines the monies collected and redistributes funding at a fixed amount per student. The statewide property tax covers about two-thirds of what is needed for Vermont's basic per student grant plus its contribution for special education, transportation, and other categorical aid. (See definition of categorical aid below.) The remainder comes mostly from income and sales taxes.

If a district wants to raise additional funds it must send some of the money raised to the state to be shared with poorer districts. Some districts avoid this provision of the Act by asking for donations rather than raising taxes. Act 60 tries to protect those with valuable land but fixed or limited incomes by allowing low- and moderate-income homeowners to pay up to two percent of their income instead of the property tax.

Act 60 is complicated and controversial. It has cost some politicians their careers and has angered residents of wealthy towns. Still, it has withstood six court challenges. Most importantly, it seems to be working. When the lawsuit reached the state Supreme Court in 1997, one school district in Vermont was spending \$2,979 per student while another spent \$7,726 – a difference of \$4,747 or 160 percent. In 1999-2000, the gap between Vermont's lowest and highest-poverty districts was only \$939 – below the U.S. average.

Every state constitution requires a free public education though the precise language differs.

Operating expenses are the costs of running schools day to day including everything except capital expenses. Wages, salaries and benefits account for about 85 percent of these costs. When school budgets have to be cut, reductions usually come from the remaining 15 percent of the budget since collective bargaining contracts with employees cannot usually be changed.

Capital expenses cover new school construction, renovations, and major repairs. Capital funds almost always have to be borrowed. Instead of taking out a bank loan, school districts typically sell bonds. Voter approval is usually required before a district can sell bonds. The buyers – most often banks or other institutions – charge a fixed interest rate that ordinarily costs the district less than a typical bank loan. The district also agrees to a repayment schedule. Repayment costs appear in district budgets as “debt service” and cover principal, interest and any fees to banks or other financial agents.

How are state funds divided? One answer is – not fairly. As you will see below, complicated formulas are used to determine how state money is shared among school districts. In most states, formulas were designed or have been adapted, at least in part, to make them more equitable. Nonetheless, in 1999-2000 the *average* national per-pupil-spending gap between the highest- and lowest-poverty districts was \$966 per student.

The states with the largest gaps in 1999-2000 were Illinois, New York and Montana. For example, New York’s wealthiest district was able to spend \$8,598 (including both local and state revenues) per student to fund public schools, while the poorest spent \$6,445 per student. In Illinois the wealthiest district had state and local revenue totaling \$7,460 per student while the poorest had \$5,400. Montana’s wealthiest district had \$6,361 per student, its poorest, \$4,826.

Every state constitution requires a free public education though the precise language differs. About 25 percent say the state is responsible to provide a “thorough and efficient” public education for all students. In recent years this has been understood to mean that states must provide districts with enough money to succeed. Unfortunately there is little agreement about the meanings of “enough” and “succeed.”

Most state money for schools is described as **basic** or **general** aid. It is usually distributed using complicated **formulas**. Most formulas take into account each district's ability to raise funds locally. The measure of this ability is usually the value of taxable property, known as **net tax capacity**. State formulas may also consider factors such as personal income, number of students defined as "poor," and other indicators of a district's relative wealth or poverty. Some formulas also consider each district's size and cost of living, including expenses such as teachers' salaries, real estate prices and special education needs.

A majority of states use some version of a **foundation** or **guarantee** formula. This method sets a minimum level of funding per student, the foundation or guarantee. Aid is then allocated based on the difference between the foundation and what each district can raise locally; some states require localities to impose a minimum tax.

"**Costing out**" is the process of determining the minimum level of state funding per student. Calculations vary from state to state. Here are short descriptions of some "costing-out" methods states use to determine foundation spending or guaranteed minimums. Many states have been influenced by lawsuits filed during the last 30 years (see box below, *Suing for equity and adequacy*) and while some have increased resources available to poor schools, it will be years before we know whether schools improve as a result.

- **Successful schools.** Some states identify schools and/or districts where students regularly meet state standards. Then, they calculate average per-student expenses in those places and that becomes the foundation. One criticism of this method is that it underestimates resources needed to help the poor and children of color because most "successful" schools and districts are suburban, not poor, and mostly white. States using this method or variations on it include Illinois, Mississippi and Ohio.
- **Professional judgement.** A panel of experts lists resources needed to create a "model" school. The cost of creating this school becomes the base funding level that the state must guarantee each district. Critics say this approach is hard to justify because it is based on opinion. States using versions of this model include Maine, Oregon and Wyoming.

- **Teacher allocation.** A few states guarantee that every district will have enough teachers regardless of cost. They use class-size ratios, approved by the state legislature, and district enrollment levels to determine how many teachers each district needs. Then, funds are distributed to make up the difference between that number, plus the cost of state-mandated special programs and local property revenue. Even though districts may hire additional teachers or offer salary supplements at their own expense, critics of this approach complain that it is inflexible.

Alabama, North Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia use versions of this formula. In 1999-2000, with the exception of Alabama, all of these states had a lower than average gap between low- and high-poverty districts; however, their overall spending also tends to be lower than average. Because wages, salaries, and other labor costs make up the vast majority of most districts' expenses, teacher allocation formulas may tend to reduce gaps between rich and poor districts. Another factor, at least in North Carolina, is that many, if not most districts lack the local tax base required to fund budgets much greater than what the state offers, thereby reducing variations in spending among districts.

- **Hybrids/Blends.** Some states use a combination of methods. For example, to come up with its foundation, Maryland calculated budgets based on both the successful schools and professional judgement models. The state found that the second model would cost about 25 percent more and, therefore, used the successful school model. Districts may, however, raise money for the higher budget if they share some of their wealth with poorer districts. In 1999-2000 the gap between Maryland's high- and low-poverty districts was less than the national average. For the first two years Maryland paid for the new plan with tobacco settlement funds; it is unclear where future funds will come from.

States also use: (1) **flat grants** that give districts a set amount for each student or teacher, and (2) **matching programs** that match dollars raised by local districts, thereby encouraging them to raise more money. California, for example, uses a matching program to help fund school construction. In some states the match is dollar for dollar, but more typically matches vary with the size of a district's property tax base, so that richer districts receive proportionally less.

Suing for equity and adequacy

Beginning in 1971 parents and advocacy groups began challenging school district spending gaps in state and federal courts. Just two years later the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* that education is not protected by the U.S. constitution, putting an end to the federal suits. With that door closed, so-called “equity suits,” based on language in state constitutions, were pursued in some 20 states. In most of these cases, existing state funding systems were ruled unconstitutional and legislatures were ordered to revise them. Legislative action – or inaction – in response to these orders, has sparked extended debate that can last for years without any discernable positive impact on students in the meantime.

More recent lawsuits, involving 25-30 states, have urged the reworking of formulas to ensure “adequate” funding for all districts. Adequate funding usually means money needed by a particular district to meet goals, inputs or a combination of the two. It is also sometimes described as ‘opportunity to learn’ or succeed. **Goals**, also known as benchmarks, usually apply to student results. Examples include graduation rates, attendance rates and test scores. **Inputs** measure district effort, such as teacher qualifications, accreditation, or access to college-preparation or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Of 28 suits filed since 1989, states have lost 18 times.

Texas and Vermont (see sidebar on *Controversy in Vermont*) made some of the most dramatic changes, opting for what is sometimes called a Robin Hood solution. In both states local property taxes are now collected by the state and then distributed more or less evenly among school districts—yielding dramatic decreases in per-pupil spending gaps. In 1999-2000 both states had spending gaps below the national average. Both programs also have political enemies constantly looking for ways to undermine equalization.

Neither equity nor adequacy suits are easily settled. Both tend to give rise to additional cases. In New Jersey, where the first suit was filed in 1970, it took eight years for the state to respond to a 1990 Supreme Court order. Now, a commission appointed by the governor is revisiting the 1998 plan, which based minimum per student allocations on the spending of the state’s wealthiest 100 districts.

Despite the ongoing legal wrangling, more money is available to poor districts in New Jersey.

Districts that adopt a comprehensive school reform program from an approved list receive extra state funds. As a result, in 1999-2000 state and local spending per student was higher in New Jersey’s high-poverty districts than in low-poverty districts. That year basic per-student spending in New Jersey was \$10,903—compared to national average of \$7,392. This costing-out model, based on research and proven practices, is sometimes called **evidence-based** or **comprehensive reform**. Arkansas and Kentucky are considering adopting similar approaches.

What other kinds of aid do states give? State funds typically come to districts as **category** or **general** aid. The first is for a specific use such as transportation, special education, or buildings. The second can be used for any purpose. Some states use 'state-adjusted payments' to help small districts cover costs, such as busing students over long distances, which larger districts may not have.

Aid is usually based on a count of students in class each day, Average Daily Attendance (ADA), and the number of students enrolled, Average Daily Membership (ADM). States make these counts at least twice a year. In some places these numbers are weighted to account for expenses that vary from district to district such as busing, cost-of-living, or the number of students requiring English language instruction. When weighting is used the abbreviations are WADA and WADM.


What's the Future of School Spending?

A number of states are now wrangling over how to redesign their school funding formulas in order to achieve greater equity. But experience has shown that the legal side of these cases can and does go on for years. With the latest fiscal crisis forcing states to reduce, rather than increase spending on public schools, community organizing for school funding becomes more and more important.

A number of state funding coalitions, like the Alliance for Quality Education in New York, the Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, and others, have formed to demand that state policymakers maintain and increase support for public schools.

In Mississippi, the organizing collective Southern Echo is experimenting with a call for "Justice Funding," arguing that neither equity nor adequacy is enough in school districts with historic disparities between educational opportunities for children of color and white children. (For a description of Justice Funding, see *Education Organizing #18, Winter 2004-2005* at <http://www.communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/>.)

Vigilance at the local district level is critical as well. New research (see *Where to Find It*) is demonstrating that, even in a district that



purports to spend equally on all students, schools in low-income communities tend to receive fewer resources than schools in more affluent neighborhoods. In addition, local corporate tax abatement programs, like Tax Increment Financing, often draw away local revenues used for schools, and channel them back to corporations or developers.

Whether at the local, state or federal levels, communities can provide a powerful voice for more resources for low-income students.

Endnotes:

¹ The District of Columbia and Hawaii are special cases: 89% of D.C.'s funding is local since it lacks statehood. Hawaii has just one school district and nearly 90% of funding comes from state government.

² Robert Strauss, professor of economics and public policy, Carnegie-Mellon University, quoted in *Money Matters: A Reporter's Guide to School Finance*, 2003, Education Writers Association, Washington, D.C., www.ewa.org.

No Child Left Behind – Understanding the Federal Education Law

“No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) is the designated name of the 2001 law that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – the largest federal K-12 education program. The ESEA was originally passed in 1964 as a key component of President Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty” initiative. ESEA sought to provide states with additional educational resources to serve disadvantaged students. Later, other programs were added to ESEA, including support for children with limited English skills, programs to reduce violence and drug use and others.

The reauthorization of ESEA in 2000 became a political football that bounced from the end of the Clinton administration, through the 2000 election campaigns and into the first two years of the Bush Administration. Both Democrats and Republicans struggled to gain ownership of the education issue, creating a debate that was high-profile, high stakes and ultimately, probably highly problematic for low-income students in the nation’s elementary and secondary schools.

The result of the tug-of-war over ESEA – which passed with strong bipartisan support – is a law that fundamentally changes the federal relationship to local schools and districts. No Child Left Behind represents a massive expansion of the federal oversight of schools. While many of the fundamentals of the law represent the work of progressive education advocates like the Education Trust and the Citizens Commission for Civil Rights, conservative forces managed to wrest control of the details of how those fundamentals play out. Many public school advocates believe that the law will eventually serve to undermine the very existence of public schools, transfer millions of public dollars into private hands and leave millions of children – mostly poor and minority – behind. Further, these advocates believe that these effects will not be accidental.

One set of key foundations of No Child Left Behind focuses around the accurate tracking of achievement and progress by all students within a school, not just the best and the brightest. Provisions include:

- ◆ a requirement that student achievement be tracked by *disaggregated* racial and economic groupings. Under previous versions of ESEA, schools could report average student achievement scores, masking the vast gap along race and class lines;
- ◆ required assessment of students annually in grades 3 – 8 in reading, math and eventually science;
- ◆ the setting of annual benchmarks for student achievement on standardized assessments, and penalties for certain schools (those with large populations of low-income children) that fail to meet those goals;
- ◆ a requirement that 95% of all students in the school, including special education and limited English proficient students take these annual assessments. Again, many schools have traditionally presented higher student achievement averages by excluding certain categories of students from the tests – or even suggesting that some kids stay home on test days. Under the new law, such exclusions are prohibited.

A second fundamental requirement of No Child Left Behind is that students be provided with teachers who are “highly qualified,” meaning that they have a degree in the subject or subjects that they are teaching, and can demonstrate content knowledge. The law recognizes what so many academic studies and community organizing campaigns have demonstrated over the last decade: that there is a shortage of highly qualified teachers in the nation’s public schools, and that low-income schools and schools with a majority students of color have disproportionately low numbers of these excellent teachers. No Child Left Behind requires that all teachers and paraprofessionals in Title I schools be “highly qualified” by the start of the 2005-2006 school year.

These cornerstones of No Child Left Behind created the foundation for what could have been a revolution in public education beneficial to low-income children and children of color. But through the course of reauthorization, as the Republicans attempted to claim control over the reformation of the public educa-

tion system in the United States, the President attempted to stake a claim as “the education President” and the Democrats struggled to remain at the table despite Republican control of Congress, the details of the Act emerged to support a conservative agenda that includes a focus on:

- ◆ punitive measures *against*, rather than *support for* low-income schools and schools with a majority of African American and/or Hispanic students;
- ◆ increased regulation of public schools, coupled with policies that encourage families to move their children to largely unregulated charter or private schools;
- ◆ diversion of federal education funds from low-performing schools and the transfer of that money to private for-profit entities;
- ◆ a windfall for corporations that create and sell standardized assessments, “supplemental services” (tutoring services) and other off-the-shelf curricula and “school reform” products;
- ◆ supporting a set of pro-voucher, pro-privatization nonprofit organizations with millions of federal dollars, ostensibly to help “educate” the public around various provisions of NCLB;
- ◆ mainstreaming of limited-English-proficient students, requiring them to become English language speakers within 3 years, with no acknowledgement or emphasis on the value of bilingualism.

Other provisions of the law that have angered progressive activists require schools to turn over student information to military recruiters, to require schools to allow discriminatory organizations like the Boy Scouts of America access to school facilities, and to stigmatize schools as “persistently dangerous” based on violent *student* behavior (that statistically is minimal and decreasing), rather than on the much more pervasive dangers that millions of students face in school each day, including crumbling facilities, lead paint, poor air quality, chemical exposure and other hazards.

After its passage in January, 2001, No Child Left Behind quickly drew a chorus of opposition from those with the closest contact with classrooms across the country – teachers, school administrators, superintendents and others. In the ensuing years as the provisions of NCLB have incrementally taken effect, the challenges

Does Adequate Yearly Progress Discriminate?

According to the Philadelphia School Notebook, in schools with significant demographic diversity, high student mobility and/or large numbers of limited-English-proficient students, the rigid requirements of AYP will result in schools being designated as “low-performing,” even if they are making significant progress. Under the law, if any single subgroup of students fails to make the targeted assessment goals in any given year, the entire school is designated as low performing. In the case of many suburban schools where schoolwide averages have masked the underachievement of small cohorts of minority students, AYP has effectively exposed disparities between the achievement levels of different groups of students and forced schools to address the academic needs of all students. But the more sub-groups a school has (differing racial groups, English language learners, low-income children), the more separate targets the school must meet.

The Philadelphia Public School Notebook, a quarterly newspaper, has an excellent description of AYP’s impact on diverse schools in its Winter, 2004 issue. See: www.thenotebook.org.

of implementation are becoming clear. Supporters of the law have argued that the law is working, by forcing districts to focus on disadvantaged students and schools. This is certainly true and laudable. Opponents however, argue that its implementation is routinizing education to the point where students as well as teachers are frustrated, stressed out and frequently unmotivated. Across the country, school administrators are decrying what they believe are unrealistic goals of the law, and the Administration’s failure to provide enough additional federal money to help districts pay for the changes it requires.

The Administration, meanwhile, has dismissed all criticism of No Child Left Behind as “whining,” and charging that supporters of the law want “change,” while opponents favor the status quo. In November of 2003 then- Secretary of Education, Roderick Paige, actually referred to the National Education Association – the nation’s largest union of teachers – as a “terrorist organization,” further polarizing the debate. In such a climate, rational conversation about how to strengthen public education and boost student achievement is impossible.

No Child Left Behind: Title by Title

(for an organizational chart of No Child Left Behind, [click here](#))

Title I: “Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged”

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was a cornerstone of President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” program. For the first time, the federal government signaled that it was prepared to step in and insist that states provide an equal education to disadvantaged children – low-income students and children of color.

Title I has always been the centerpiece of the ESEA, and accounts for over 50% of the law’s total funding. Title I is even more central under No Child Left Behind.

Virtually all of the high-profile provisions of No Child Left Behind

