



THE EDUCATION COMBINATION

10 Dimensions of Education Resource Equity
to Unlock Opportunities for Every Student



**ALLIANCE FOR
RESOURCE
EQUITY**

Uniting advocates and education leaders
to unlock excellence for every student



About Us

Education Resource Strategies is a national nonprofit that partners with district, school, and state leaders to transform how they use resources (people, time, and money) so that every school prepares every child for tomorrow—no matter their race or income. Since 2004, ERS has worked with more than 40 school systems and states to improve resource equity for students by analyzing data, exploring trade-offs, planning strategically, building consensus, and monitoring progress.



The Education Trust is a national nonprofit that works to close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Through research and advocacy, EdTrust supports efforts that expand excellence and equity in education from preschool through college; increase college access and completion, particularly for historically underserved students; engage diverse communities dedicated to education equity; and increase political and public will to act on equity issues.



WHY AN ALLIANCE?

Across the nation, local decision makers and equity advocates are committed to improving schools—including school board members, state and district leaders, civil rights advocates, families, educators, and even students themselves. However, a lack of coordination can limit the impact of these efforts. The Alliance for Resource Equity works to bring many combinations of stakeholders together around a framework for shared understanding, and a plan for collaborative action.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

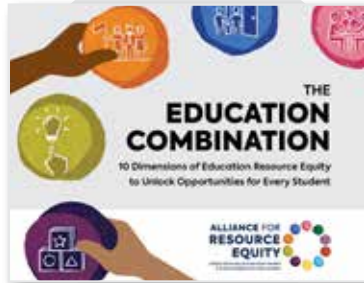
This work is the result of collaborative efforts among dozens of people, both within and outside of Education Resource Strategies and The Education Trust, as part of the Alliance for Resource Equity.

First, we owe our deep thanks to the many people in the field who inspire us by engaging in this difficult (yet rewarding) work each day: Thank you to our partners within the schools, systems, and communities that both organizations have worked with throughout the years; to the leaders and researchers from peer education organizations who served as valuable thought partners; and to the many district and nonprofit leaders, advocates, teachers, and families from across the country who contributed with an ongoing willingness to reflect, share their stories, and help others learn.

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Education Resource Strategies and The Education Trust are solely responsible for the ideas presented in this paper and for any errors.



1

THE EDUCATION COMBINATION

Learn about the 10 dimensions

This paper turns the spotlight on education resource equity by sharing the 10 dimensions that unlock better, more equitable experiences in school for all students.



2

THE RESOURCE EQUITY DIAGNOSTIC

Identify strengths and gaps

This tool helps you better understand the current state of education resource equity and excellence for students in *your* school system across all 10 dimensions.

- **Advocates' Guide:** Tailored guidance for advocates on how to use the diagnostic in partnership with your local school system.
- **Sample Meeting Agenda:** An example of a meeting agenda to help community advocates and district leaders work collaboratively to kick off the process of improving education resource equity.



3

THE RESOURCE EQUITY GUIDEBOOKS

Explore next steps

This series of guidebooks digs deeper into your diagnostic results by probing underlying causes of challenges in your school system and considering ways to improve students' experiences in school.

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Drawing on both research *and* the lived experiences of students, parents, and educators from across the country, this paper describes how the right combination of resources can make a difference for students' learning experiences.

The Education Combination provides state and district leaders, educators, families, and community advocates with an overview of each dimension, including:

- A vision for what it should look like
- Research-backed reasons for why it matters
- Key questions to consider
- Examples of challenges and trends from states, districts, and schools



THE EDUCATION COMBINATION

10 Dimensions of Education Resource Equity to Unlock Opportunities for Every Student

No two children are alike.

Parents and teachers understand this intuitively. And they respond by working to provide the right combination of supports at the right time to meet each child's unique needs so they can achieve their biggest dreams.

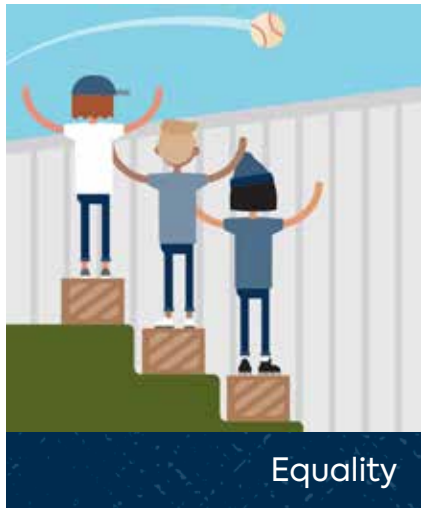
Yet many schools and school systems don't follow this example. They are set up as if all students need the same things. Worse yet, students with higher needs and students of color* are often less likely than their peers to have access to the high-quality learning experiences that research tells us are

necessary to prepare them for college and career.

But schools and school systems *can* meet students' differing needs—and many do every day. When schools, systems, and communities deeply understand students' most pressing needs and mobilize the right amount and combination of resources in response, every student can receive a high-quality education that unlocks their power to live a life of their choosing.

*For more information about defining "students with higher needs" and "students of color," see *Contextualizing Student Need and Race/Ethnicity* on page 2.





Contextualizing Student Need and Race/Ethnicity

Every child in every community has the right to a high-quality education and a fair shot at success. But some students have higher needs. Students from low-income backgrounds; English learners; students with disabilities; and students experiencing foster care, homelessness, or the juvenile justice system face additional barriers to success. In school, students with these challenges need different levels and combinations of support.

Additionally, across our country, people of color—particularly Black, Latino, and Native Americans—have faced a history of racism and discriminatory legal, economic, and social policies, such as unequal treatment by law in employment, voting, housing, and financial services. Communities today still carry the accumulated weight of discriminatory policies and practices. Across generations, these policies and practices compound and continue to harm the very same students and families.

As a result, students of color are more likely to be represented in higher need categories.

And all students of color, regardless of need, must balance academic demands with the burden of navigating ongoing racism and institutional bias. For these reasons, Black, Latino, and Native American students may need different levels and combinations of supports in school.

Instead of combatting patterns of discrimination, schools too often become places where those patterns get reinforced—whether intentionally or not. For example, even today, many Black, Latino, and Native elementary school students do not have access to teachers who look like them, or to books that feature characters who look like them. And many Black, Latino, and Native high school students do not have access to the courses they need for college admission.

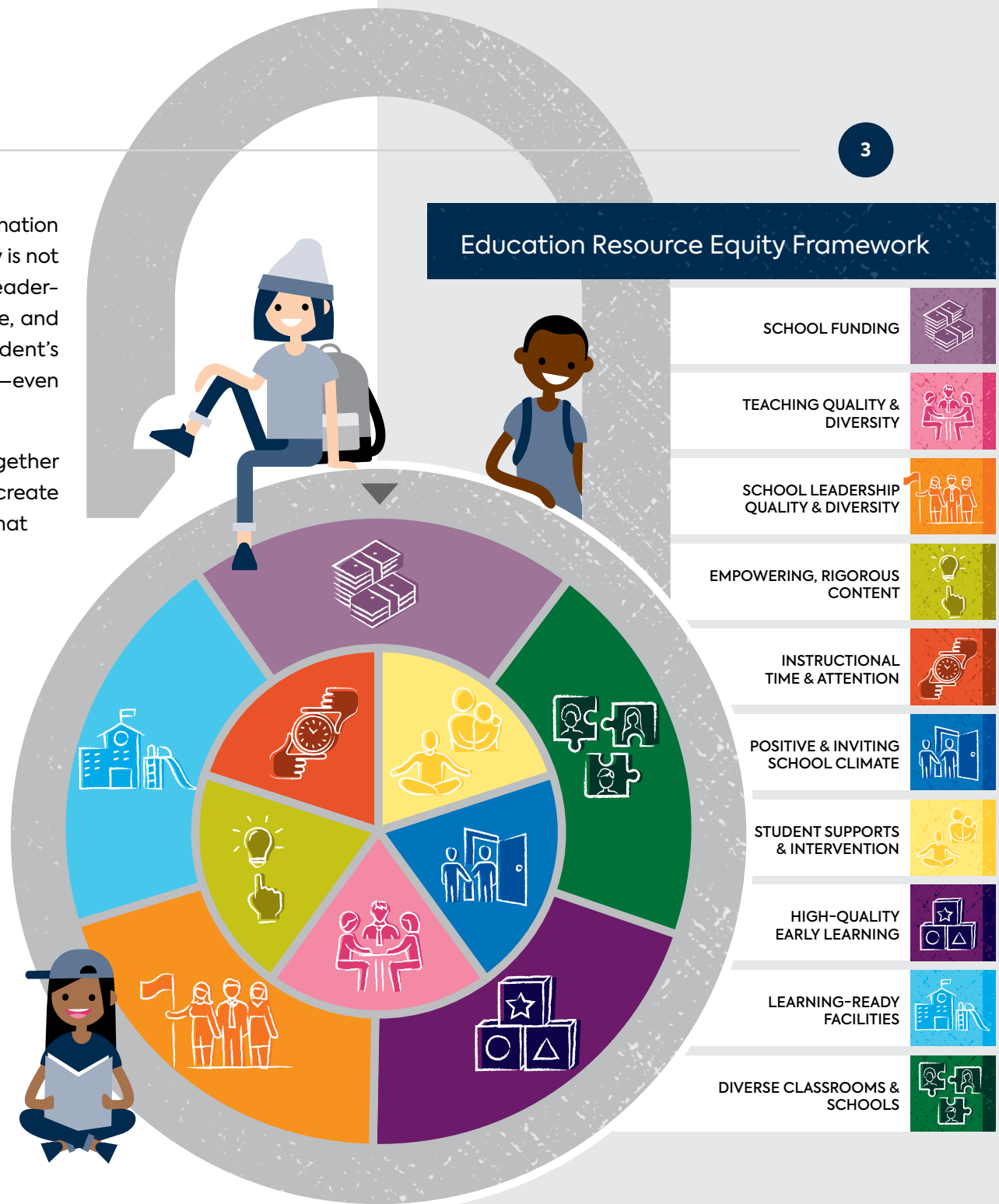
Therefore, a focus on student need and race is necessary to find the combination of supports that gives *each* student in every community a fair shot at success, while creating high standards for *all* students.

INTRODUCTION

To meet students' distinct needs with the right combination of supports, school systems need money. But money is not all they need—students also need strong school leadership, engaging instruction, a positive school climate, and more. These are some of the **dimensions** of a student's daily experience that school systems can improve—even without new funding.

When schools, systems, and communities work together to mobilize the right combination of resources that create high-quality learning experiences for all students, that is what we call **education resource equity**.

Education resource equity is what we need to make sure that school unlocks every child's power to live a life of their choosing—and that race and family income no longer predict a student's life trajectory.

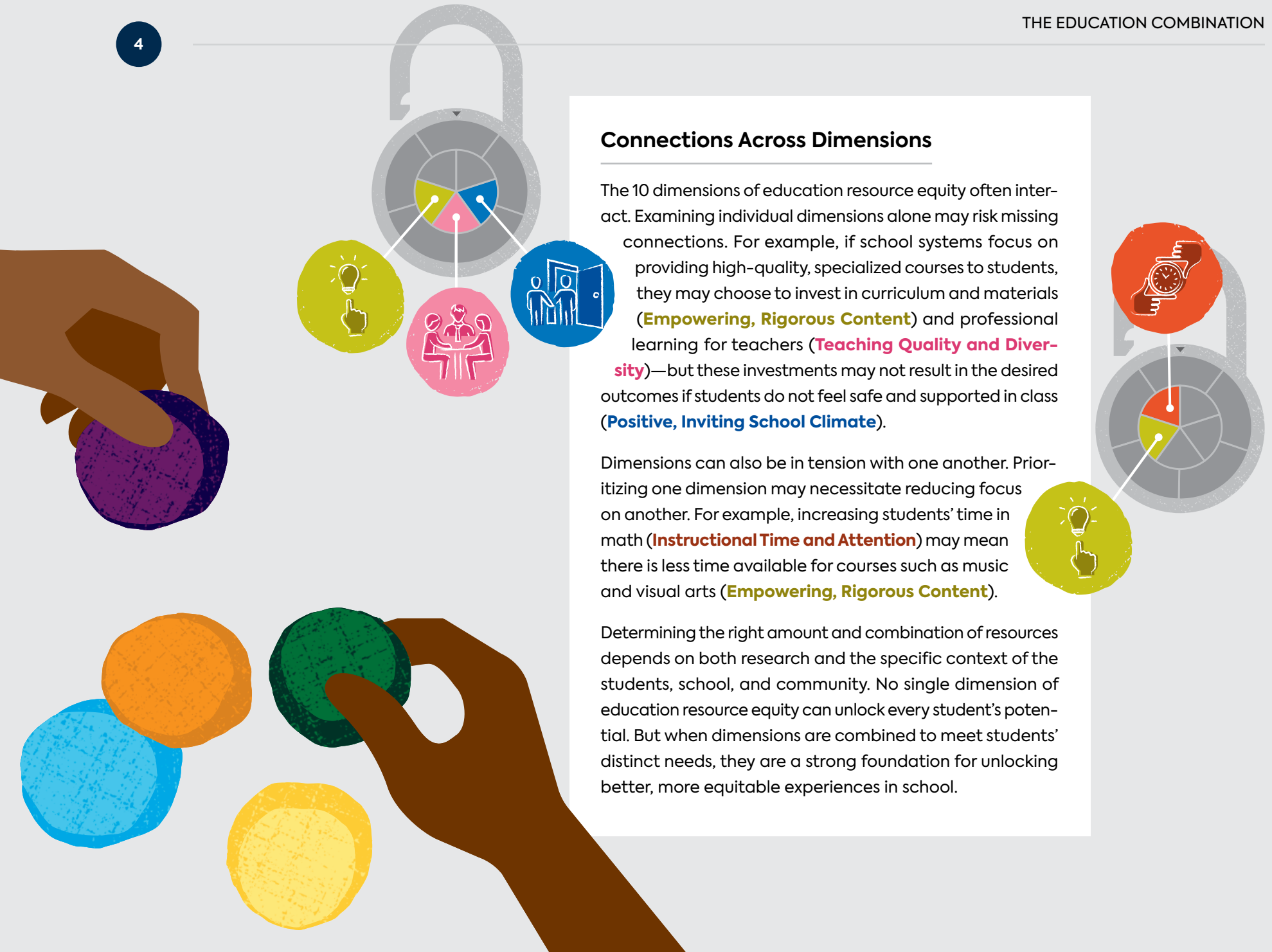


Connections Across Dimensions

The 10 dimensions of education resource equity often interact. Examining individual dimensions alone may risk missing connections. For example, if school systems focus on providing high-quality, specialized courses to students, they may choose to invest in curriculum and materials (**Empowering, Rigorous Content**) and professional learning for teachers (**Teaching Quality and Diversity**)—but these investments may not result in the desired outcomes if students do not feel safe and supported in class (**Positive, Inviting School Climate**).

Dimensions can also be in tension with one another. Prioritizing one dimension may necessitate reducing focus on another. For example, increasing students' time in math (**Instructional Time and Attention**) may mean there is less time available for courses such as music and visual arts (**Empowering, Rigorous Content**).

Determining the right amount and combination of resources depends on both research and the specific context of the students, school, and community. No single dimension of education resource equity can unlock every student's potential. But when dimensions are combined to meet students' distinct needs, they are a strong foundation for unlocking better, more equitable experiences in school.



Figuring out how to provide the right combination of supports to meet students' distinct needs is complex—and without a shared understanding of the problem or a clear path for action, it can feel confusing. To understand how education resource equity can unlock opportunities for all students, especially students with higher needs and students of color, our Alliance for Resource Equity team listened to parents and teachers in a diverse set of school districts, reviewed research, and explored the insights we've gained during our deep work with school systems and advocates across the country over the past 15 years.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” model for addressing educational inequities. To make progress toward education resource equity, many different people—from state and district leaders to school board members, business leaders, civil rights leaders, and local advocates, to families, educators, community members, and even students themselves—will need to work together to organize resources in ways that support clear strategies for student success. Advocates and practitioners engaging in this work together includes developing common understandings of how to improve students' daily experiences in school and building shared plans for what to do next.

When schools, systems, and communities avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach by providing students with the right combination of supports based on their needs—which are different for different groups of students in different moments—that is education resource equity. And education resource equity accelerates learning for *all* students, so every child can achieve their biggest dreams.

What About Educational Excellence?

Education resource equity aims to create excellent educational opportunities for all students. Because some students—such as students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English learners—have additional needs, ensuring that all students receive an excellent education requires giving these students the right combination of resources, including additional resources. Moreover, providing an excellent education to all students may require investing more resources in the system overall. Education resource equity is about bringing all students up, not bringing any students down.





10 DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATION RESOURCE EQUITY

Unlock Opportunities
for Every Student



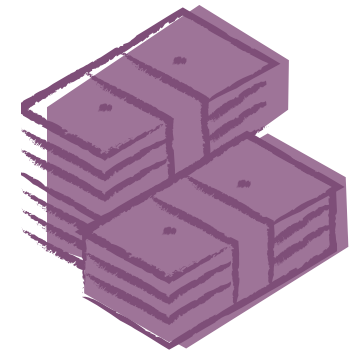


DIMENSION 1

SCHOOL FUNDING

THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—attends school in a district that distributes funding based on the needs of its students, by way of flexible and transparent funding systems, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.



KEY QUESTION 1.1

Does the funding system distribute adequate funding based on student needs *and* enable flexible use of funds in ways that are clearly understood?

Money matters as the first step toward a high-quality education for all students. And the funding system itself is a key mechanism that can enable or hinder education resource equity.¹ Research shows that many school systems provide too little funding to meet their students' distinct needs.² Increased funding can boost academic performance, increase the level of education students complete, and reduce poverty in adulthood—especially for students from low-income backgrounds.³

Funding systems should be:

- **Equitable**, with additional spending on students with higher needs, so all students get the resources they need to meet high standards and thrive.⁴
- **Flexible**, so that school leaders can invest in a combination of resources that drive student learning and meet the distinct needs of their students.⁵
- **Transparent and accessible**, with clear, easy-to-understand rules for where, how, and why funds are distributed, so school communities can hold districts accountable for distributing funds equitably.⁶
- **Predictable and stable**, so that school system leaders understand how changes in their system's context affect funding, and so that big changes in funding from year to year don't disrupt strategies and services that are particularly important in high-need schools.

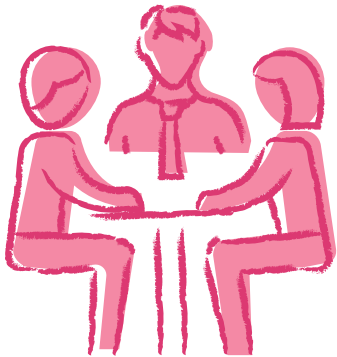


EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Sources of funding.** Because it is common for a significant portion of funding to come from local property taxes, many districts that have higher concentrations of students of color and students with higher needs do not even receive *equal* funding, let alone *equitable* funding. This is especially true if state funding is low.
- **Formulas for distributing funds.** State and district funding systems do not always provide extra resources for students with greater needs. Or the extra resources they do provide are not enough to improve students' educational experiences. When overall district funding is low, it can be harder for districts to differentiate resources and provide more funding to the schools that need it.
- **Other funding variations.** Funding levels can vary significantly across schools for reasons that are not necessarily aligned to student need, such as school size, teacher compensation, and building use. For example, a large building with low student enrollment will end up spending more money per student on overhead costs (such as building maintenance) than a building of the same size with greater student enrollment would. Understanding the reasons for these differences enables districts to address many of these variances. But districts may need support from the state, especially on issues related to school buildings and enrollment boundaries.

DIMENSION 2

TEACHING QUALITY & DIVERSITY



THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—has access to strong teaching, which includes having strong, well-supported teachers, who are able to meet their students' distinct needs and provide engaging, culturally relevant, and standards-aligned instruction, so all students can reach high standards and thrive. The teaching workforce reflects students' racial and linguistic diversity.

* *A note about great teaching on page 12*

* A note about great teaching



In recent years, states and districts have learned more about what teachers need to succeed, and the national conversation has shifted to focus on teacher growth and development, and ensuring that systemic supports to enable great teaching are in place. These considerations are critical for understanding teaching quality because improving students' access to strong teaching is achieved through a combination of supporting individual teachers' growth *and* creating the conditions that enable strong teaching to take place, such as safe and supportive working conditions, meaningful professional learning and team collaboration, and evaluation processes focused on growth.

KEY QUESTION 2.1

Does each student have access to strong teachers?

Teaching quality can impact student learning more than any other in-school factor, especially for students who are further behind.⁷ Highly effective teachers can change students' life trajectories, making it more likely that students earn higher salaries and save more money for retirement.⁸ Teachers are more likely to stay in schools that have environments where they are professionally supported.⁹

KEY QUESTION 2.2

Does each student have access to teaching practices that are engaging, culturally relevant, and standards-aligned?

Students learn more when teachers hold high expectations of them, deliver strong instruction, assign grade-appropriate work, and encourage active engagement.¹⁰ Culturally relevant teaching that recognizes students' backgrounds and relates content to students' own cultural contexts can also lead to improved academic engagement and outcomes.¹¹

KEY QUESTION 2.3

Does the teacher workforce reflect student diversity?

While all students can benefit from diverse teachers, students of color who have a teacher of the same race or ethnicity are more likely to attend school regularly, perform higher on assessments, be referred to a gifted program, take Advanced Placement courses, graduate from high school, and aspire to attend college.¹² They also tend to experience additional support for their social and emotional development.¹³

Likewise, English learners can benefit from having teachers who speak their first language—including experiencing more emotional support and achieving bigger gains on literacy and other assessments.¹⁴

Native American students who are regularly exposed to their Native languages, such as classes taught in those languages, are more likely to express a high degree of knowledge about their Native culture.¹⁵

EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Teacher turnover.** Districts and schools with greater levels of student need and greater concentrations of students of color tend to also have greater concentrations of new teachers and ineffective teachers. These schools and districts often lack enough extra teaching support and tend to experience higher rates of teacher turnover. With the right combination of resources, schools could be enabled to create systems for addressing these challenges, such as roles for teacher-leaders who can support novice or ineffective teachers, and ongoing time for teachers to plan and learn together in shared-content teams.
- **Teacher support.** It is harder for all students—including students with higher needs and students of color—to reach their full potential when their teachers do not have the support from their district or school that they need to effectively meet students where they are by adapting instruction. This support can include materials and supplies, feedback on instructional strategies, and dedicated collaborative planning time to assess individual students' needs and plan instruction accordingly.
- **Expectations and differentiated instruction.** In districts and schools, students with higher needs and students of color may be hindered if their teachers have low expectations or if efforts to adapt grade-level content for students' needs are ineffective. The challenge of balancing grade-level instruction with meeting students' needs can result in teachers using less rigorous materials (such as lower-level reading passages), skipping more challenging portions of lessons (such as asking questions that emphasize recall, rather than higher-order thinking), or giving students easier tasks to complete (such as simplified math problems). Although teachers often need to differentiate instruction to meet students where they are and build their skills, a lack of access to grade-appropriate content deprives students of opportunities to develop grade-level proficiency. This can be revealed when students do not pass the state assessment, despite earning high grades in their courses.
- **Workforce diversity.** The diversity of the teacher workforce in many districts and schools does not reflect the diversity of the student population. This means that many students do not have teachers who speak their language, and many students of color do not have teachers who look like them.
- **Unrecognized workloads.** In some districts and schools, teachers of color and linguistically diverse teachers can get pigeonholed into roles such as behavior management or translator. When teachers take on these responsibilities, it often goes unrecognized and uncompensated, and can prevent them from exploring opportunities for leadership and professional development.

DIMENSION 3



SCHOOL LEADERSHIP QUALITY & DIVERSITY

THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—has access to strong school leadership from principals and instructional leadership teams who meet their needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive. The school leadership workforce reflects students' racial and linguistic diversity.

KEY QUESTION 3.1

Does each student have access to strong school leadership?

A strong school leadership team can lead to improved teacher instruction and student learning. Highly effective principals can add two to seven months of learning in one school year.¹⁶ Highly effective principals are both strong instructional leaders and strong building leaders.

A strong instructional leader can increase teacher collaboration and effectiveness. One study found that school leaders who received training on lesson planning, data-driven instruction, teacher observation, and coaching saw significant increases in students' academic performance in their schools.¹⁷ Another study found that students whose teachers were coached by teacher-leaders had significant achievement gains.¹⁸

Strong building leaders can profoundly impact school culture—a key component of teacher retention, including for teachers of color.¹⁹ School leaders help set the expectation that adult behavior at the school reflects the belief that all students can learn.²⁰

KEY QUESTION 3.2

Does the school leadership workforce reflect student and staff diversity?

Research suggests that principals of color can benefit students of color in several ways. Black principals are more likely to recruit and retain Black teachers.²¹ One study found that the presence of a Black principal can have a positive impact on Black students' math achievement, even if Black teachers weren't present.²² Another study found that schools with a Black principal have a greater representation of Black students in gifted programs.²³ Additionally, linguistically diverse principals may be able to more readily engage with linguistically diverse families.²⁴



SCHOOL LEADERSHIP QUALITY & DIVERSITY

EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Principal turnover.** Districts and schools with greater levels of student need and concentrations of students of color tend to be more likely to have principals who are new or ineffective. Without systemic supports, the workload and stress for principals who lead a high-need school can be unsustainable and contribute to turnover. In some cases, principals who are successful in high-need schools choose to move to lower-need schools or are promoted to central office positions, further contributing to high turnover rates.
- **Limited pipelines.** Schools with greater levels of student need often have less-experienced instructional leaders and fewer effective teachers who are ready to take on leadership roles.
- **Workforce diversity.** The diversity of the principal workforce in many districts and schools does not reflect the diversity of the student population. This means that many students of color miss out on the unique benefits a principal of color can bring to their school experience.

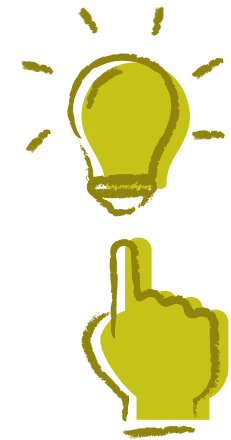


DIMENSION 4

EMPOWERING, RIGOROUS CONTENT

THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—has access to high-quality and culturally relevant curriculum, materials, coursework, and class offerings to meet their needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.



KEY QUESTION 4.1

Does each student have access to high-quality and culturally relevant curriculum and instructional materials?

Curriculum and instructional materials that are comprehensive, aligned to high standards, and appropriately challenging for students' grade level can improve learning.²⁵ This is especially true for students with less-effective teachers, who are often concentrated in high-need schools and assigned to students of color.²⁶ Culturally relevant curriculum and materials—such as literature with characters who look like students or face relatable challenges—can increase engagement, improve outcomes, and boost students' sense of belonging and identity.²⁷

KEY QUESTION 4.2

Is each student enrolled in courses that set them up for success in college and a meaningful career, including equal access to advanced courses?

College admission often requires coursework beyond the minimum needed to obtain a high school diploma.²⁸ Similarly, students who are planning to enter the workforce immediately after high school need high-quality coursework to prepare them for their careers.²⁹ Enrollment in advanced courses—such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate in high school—can improve test scores, as well as higher education readiness and success.³⁰

KEY QUESTION 4.3

Does each student have access to arts and enrichment opportunities beyond core content?

Enrollment in enrichment courses—such as music, dance, and visual arts—can increase student attendance, reduce discipline incidents, and raise academic performance.³¹ Participation in field trips can improve test scores and proficiency—as well as critical thinking skills, empathy, and tolerance.³² These effects are particularly significant for students from low-income backgrounds.



EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **High-quality curricula.** Lower-funded districts often have fewer resources available to develop, evaluate, and implement high-quality curricula. In addition, districts do not always prioritize culturally relevant curriculum and materials, such as budgeting for culturally relevant books in school and classroom libraries.
- **Balanced instructional priorities.** Districts with lower student performance may prioritize core subject areas for good reason—but doing so can limit students' access to a well-rounded set of coursework that includes subjects such as social studies and the arts.
- **Teacher support.** Even when a district provides high-quality curricula, schools with higher levels of student need may not receive the resources needed to effectively support teachers' efforts to tailor and adjust instruction in ways that help each student understand the material. When this happens, teachers may end up using instructional materials that fall short of the bar set by grade-level standards.
- **Course enrollment.** Regardless of their school, students from low-income backgrounds and students of color are sometimes placed in less rigorous courses than similarly performing classmates. This can prevent them from graduating with the courses they need for college admission. For example, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to be enrolled in classes such as gifted and talented, eighth grade algebra, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment than their similarly performing peers.

DIMENSION 5



INSTRUCTIONAL TIME & ATTENTION

THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—gets the combination of high-quality instructional time and teacher attention they need through evidence-based approaches, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.

KEY QUESTION 5.1

Does each student who needs more high-quality instructional *time* receive it?

Adding hours to the school day or year can boost student achievement—particularly for students who are most at risk of failing—because it provides opportunities for students to accelerate their learning in subjects they are struggling in.³³ Scheduling twice as much time for a subject that students are struggling in—known as “double-blocking”—can also improve student achievement.³⁴ Summer programs can reduce “summer learning loss,” which disproportionately affects low-income students and contributes to the achievement gap.³⁵

KEY QUESTION 5.2

Does each student who needs more high-quality instructional *attention* receive it?

Significantly smaller class and group sizes (e.g., reductions of 8 to 15 students per class) allow teachers to provide more individualized attention to students, which can improve student performance. The greatest gains are for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, particularly in grades K-3.³⁶

Other approaches to increase attention for students based on their needs—such as intervention blocks, within-class groups, or extra tutoring—can also significantly boost learning for students who are behind.³⁷



EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Supplemental learning opportunities.** Families in more affluent schools are better able to supplement educational opportunities with tutoring and other after-school activities, but this is harder for less-affluent families.
- **Class schedules and structures.** Despite differences in student performance and learning needs, there is typically not much variation in the amount of time students spend learning specific subjects among schools within the same district. Because most schools within the same district tend to offer similar class schedules and structures for all students, students who need more instructional time or attention may not consistently have their needs met.
- **Nontargeted trade-offs.** Sometimes students with higher needs receive even less time or attention—for example, schools might target investments for reducing class size to advanced courses. But because those advanced courses serve higher-performing students, it results in the largest class sizes for the students who need the most support. Additionally, students of color and students with higher needs are often underrepresented in these advanced courses in the first place.



DIMENSION 6

POSITIVE & INVITING SCHOOL CLIMATE

THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—experiences a physically safe and emotionally supportive environment at school, including fair and consistent rules and discipline policies, positive relationships with staff and students that foster belonging, effective social-emotional learning opportunities, and meaningful family engagement that meets students' needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.



KEY QUESTION 6.1

Does each student experience a safe school with transparent, culturally sensitive, and consistently enforced rules and discipline policies?

Physical and psychological safety is a prerequisite for teaching and learning. All students deserve to attend school without fear of discrimination, harassment, bullying, or physical harm. When students feel unsafe at school, they are more likely to be absent and perform worse academically.³⁸

Safe, positive working conditions also impact teacher retention.³⁹ Research indicates that high teacher turnover in schools with greater levels of student need can disrupt and negatively affect student learning.⁴⁰

Schools that incorporate student and family voice to create fair and consistent discipline policies and rules for behavior have better student performance and lower rates of violence, bullying, absenteeism, and suspensions.⁴¹ For example, schools can work with students and families to create nondiscriminatory dress codes, such as policies on hairstyles. They can also use restorative discipline practices that focus on relationship building. Schoolwide supports for positive behavior, and practices that clearly communicate behavioral expectations agreed upon by staff, students, and communities, have been shown to reduce racial gaps in office discipline referrals.⁴²



KEY QUESTION 6.2

Does each student have positive relationships with staff and other students?

When students feel that they belong and are accepted, supported, and connected to their school community, they perform better academically and have better social-emotional and behavioral outcomes.⁴³ Educators who are warm, involved, supportive, and accepting of their students can improve engagement and learning.⁴⁴ These relationships can be strengthened when personal and systemic biases are reduced.⁴⁵

KEY QUESTION 6.3

Does each student have access to effective social-emotional learning opportunities?

Students perform better when they possess positive mindsets and are prepared to navigate challenging emotions and social situations.⁴⁶ Schoolwide structures and classroom instruction that integrate social-emotional learning and cultural relevancy into academics can improve both academic and nonacademic outcomes, especially for students from low-income backgrounds.⁴⁷

KEY QUESTION 6.4

Does each student attend a school that actively and meaningfully engages families?

Family involvement in education is linked to improved academic and nonacademic performance in school.⁴⁸ Family involvement increases significantly when schools eliminate barriers and meaningfully engage students, families, and communities.⁴⁹



EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Discipline disparities.** In many districts and schools, students of color tend to experience discipline referrals and suspension more often, regardless of family income level.
- **Conscious and unconscious bias.** Without training and support, systemic bias can impact how adults, including teachers and school leaders, consciously and unconsciously approach workplace interactions. In schools, this can lead to students whose racial, socioeconomic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds differ from the dominant culture feeling less connected or engaged in their school community.
- **Staff culture and relationships.** In higher-need schools and districts, challenges with staff turnover and attendance can make it harder to build strong staff culture and meaningful teacher-to-student relationships.
- **Families' prior experiences.** Cultural differences and/or family members' own prior experiences with educational inequities can make school environments feel less welcoming, which may hinder their engagement in the school community.



DIMENSION 7

STUDENT SUPPORTS & INTERVENTION

THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—has access to an effective integrated system of supports (which includes an accurate and unbiased identification process) to address their individualized, nonacademic needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive. Each student has access to meaningful guidance to set them up for success beyond high school.



KEY QUESTION 7.1

Does each student who needs targeted social-emotional support receive it?

Individualized social and emotional learning supports—such as individual and small-group supports provided by counselors, social workers, or psychologists—can improve students’ social and emotional well-being.⁵⁰ Social-emotional supports that encourage holistic development and build positive academic mindsets in ways that sustain students’ backgrounds can lead to success in school and life.⁵¹

KEY QUESTION 7.2

Does each student who needs targeted physical and mental health support receive it?

Cognitive skills are often closely tied to physical health. Issues such as vision and oral health problems, asthma, poor nutrition, and chronic stress can interfere with participation in school activities and are linked to low academic performance.⁵² School health programs that target students’ physical needs—such as exercise, nutrition, vision screenings, and free glasses—can improve students’ health outcomes.⁵³ Resources that address mental health needs, such as school psychologists and trauma-informed care, can improve students’ academic performance.⁵⁴



KEY QUESTION 7.3

Does each student who needs targeted family support receive it?

Family support programs can positively impact children’s cognitive, psychological, social, and emotional development. These programs can include parenting classes, job skill trainings, social support groups, or referrals to social and health services in the local community. Programs focused on children with special health or developmental needs and programs that provide parents with peer support can positively impact children’s cognitive development.⁵⁵

KEY QUESTION 7.4

Does each student have access to effective guidance to support post-secondary success?

Effective guidance in the form of school counselors and transition services for students with disabilities who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) can improve outcomes in both college and career—especially for students from low-income backgrounds.⁵⁶ Other resources that educate students about their options and prepare them for life after graduation can also support these positive outcomes.⁵⁷



EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Identification systems.** When districts and schools don't have effective systems for identifying student needs—for example, the absence of a clear referral process or lack of data collection—then supports may not be offered consistently or at all. Without this effective system, a “squeaky wheel” situation can occur, where the students who receive targeted supports aren't necessarily the ones who need it most, but rather the students whose parents are most able to advocate for additional supports.
- **Availability of supports.** Schools that serve high proportions of students with higher needs don't always receive the additional supports required for addressing their additional needs. For example, school staffing formulas don't always align with student needs—two schools with very different student populations may each receive one social worker based only on total enrollment numbers, but not student needs.

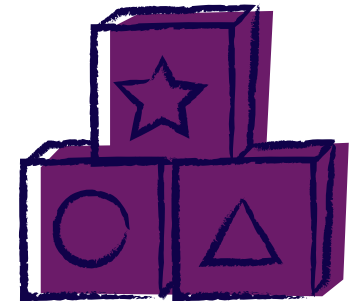


DIMENSION 8

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—has access to high-quality preschool programs that meet their needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.



KEY QUESTION 8.1

Does each student have access to high-quality preschool programs?

Attending a high-quality preschool program, especially a full-day program, can help prepare children for school academically, socially, and emotionally—especially students from low-income backgrounds.⁵⁸ Research suggests that when high-quality school experiences continue beyond preschool, the benefits persist in the form of better academic achievement, improved high school graduation rates, and higher salary earnings in adulthood.⁵⁹

EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Program quality and availability.** For students of color, the availability and quality of preschool programs is not consistent from state to state. In states and districts that *do* offer pre-K, schools do not always have enough seats available to serve the number of students who could take advantage of the opportunity. Students of color are underrepresented in quality pre-K programs and Latino students are often underrepresented in programs of any quality.
- **Enrollment barriers.** When seats *are* available in states and districts that offer pre-K, students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and English learners can face barriers to enrolling—such as a lack of transportation or program hours that do not align with the inflexible and irregular work hours that many low-income families are saddled with. If they are able to enroll, the programs may not be high-quality, affordable, or culturally and linguistically competent.

DIMENSION 9

LEARNING-READY FACILITIES



THE VISION

Each student—including students with higher needs and students of color—attends school in buildings that are structurally sound, provide a safe and appropriate physical environment for learning, and have effective equipment to meet student needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.

KEY QUESTION 9.1

Does each student have access to adequate *facilities* that are safe and well-maintained to facilitate student learning and meet student needs?

Students perform better in buildings with adequate space, that are in good repair, with well-lit classrooms at the right temperature.⁶⁰ New construction can improve student academic performance, attendance, and effort.⁶¹ To support both learning and health, students must be in schools that meet air and water quality standards and are free of mold, lead, and asbestos.⁶²

KEY QUESTION 9.2

Does each student have access to adequate *equipment* to facilitate student learning and meet student needs?

Lack of equipment and materials hinder student learning. For example, student learning can be negatively impacted when science classrooms do not have sufficient lab equipment, music classes do not have instruments, or classrooms lack enough paper, pencils, tissues, desks, or chairs for all the students in the class. Equipment for physical education and recess are needed for schools to offer physical activity, which is important for healthy minds and bodies.⁶³



LEARNING-READY FACILITIES

EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Suitable facilities.** Students in lower-income communities often attend schools with less-adequate facilities than their peers in more affluent districts.
- **Implied value.** Students and families who attend schools with visibly worse facilities and equipment than other schools in the district may feel less valued.
- **Connections to coursework.** Within schools, it is not unusual for students in higher-level courses to have access to newer or better technology or labs. This means that when students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are tracked into lower-level courses (see Empowering, Rigorous Content, page 18), they may also miss out on access to this same equipment.



DIMENSION 10

DIVERSE CLASSROOMS & SCHOOLS



THE VISION

Each student is enrolled in classes that are racially/ ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.

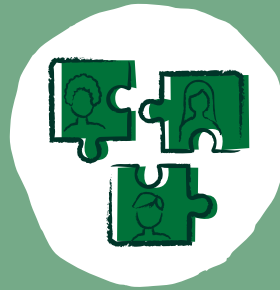
* *A note about influences on school district diversity on page 39*

KEY QUESTION 10.1

Is each student enrolled in a school and attending classes that are racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse?

The more racially and economically segregated a district is, the larger its achievement gaps tend to be.⁶⁴ We live in an increasingly diverse world, and research suggests that socioeconomically and racially diverse schools can benefit students academically, social-emotionally, and civically—including raising test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment, as well as reducing prejudices and increasing the likelihood that students will seek out integrated settings as adults.⁶⁵

* Influences on school district diversity



Some factors that influence the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of a school district are outside the direct control of the district itself, such as district boundary lines, patterns of residential segregation, economic decline, and shrinking populations. As a result, some districts have less racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic diversity. Less diversity at the district level makes it harder to ensure diversity at the school and classroom levels. Although districts often have limited control over these factors, community members and district leaders can play an important role in breaking up current pockets of segregation and preventing further segregation. Progress can be made through actions such as promoting the creation of incentives or mandates for school districts to consolidate, investing in interdistrict transfer programs that allow students to attend a school in another district, or supporting other initiatives to promote integration.⁶⁶

EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES

- **Residential segregation.** School attendance zones are often drawn in ways that maintain or fail to address longstanding patterns of residential segregation. Sometimes school zoning can segregate students even further. This means that even if a district is diverse overall, not every school within the district will reflect that diversity—limiting the likelihood students go to school with children from a mix of racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds.
- **Class assignment.** In schools, students may be placed in classes that lack diversity. Students of color and students from low-income backgrounds sometimes get assigned to less-rigorous courses with high concentrations of peers from similarly underserved backgrounds, even when they have the same academic performance as their peers from more privileged backgrounds.
- **Interconnected dimensions of education resource equity.** Students from low-income backgrounds and students of color who attend highly segregated schools (or who are in highly segregated classes within their school) often experience less access to other dimensions of education resource equity.



NEXT STEPS

Communities around the country are energized to tackle inequities in our society and in our schools. New policy opportunities are opening up at the federal, state, and local levels, and research increasingly offers examples of practices that help all students succeed.⁶⁷

Education resource equity necessitates the right combination of people—including state and district leaders, school board members, advocates, families, and educators—and action steps. By initiating new and challenging conversations, deepening our shared understanding of students' most pressing needs, and mobilizing the right combination of resources in response, our schools, systems, and communities can help every child achieve their biggest dreams by unlocking their power to live a life of their choosing.



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NOTES

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