

From: janresseger@gmail.com
Subject: FW: [New post] What Does Educational Equity Mean?
Date: May 19, 2021 at 7:48:40 AM
To: irotberg@gwu.edu

Dear Iris,

I really appreciated the chance to think about this issue. It is very important, and in our state right now. Thanks for your article! See below or here: irotberg@gwu.edu .
--Jan

Jan Resseger

<https://janresseger.wordpress.com/>

"That all citizens will be given an equal start through a sound education is one of the most basic, promised rights of our democracy. Our chronic refusal as a nation to guarantee that right for all children... is rooted in a kind of moral blindness, or at least a failure of moral imagination.... It is a failure which threatens our future as a nation of citizens called to a common purpose... tied to one another by a common bond." —Senator Paul Wellstone, March 31, 2000

From: janresseger <comment-reply@wordpress.com>

Sent: Wednesday, May 19, 2021 7:46 AM

To: janresseger@gmail.com

Subject: [New post] What Does Educational Equity Mean?

janresseger posted: "Monday, May 17, 2021, marked the 67th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which banned racially segregated schools and unequal access to education. Over more than two decades, NAACP attorneys Charles Hamilton Hou"

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New post on **janresseger**



[What Does Educational Equity Mean?](#)

by [janresseger](#)

Monday, May 17, 2021, marked the 67th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which banned racially segregated schools and unequal

access to education. Over more than two decades, NAACP attorneys Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall built up a series of court precedents leading to the 1954 decision in *Brown*, which declared that educational opportunity, "where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms." However, two-thirds of a century later in most places in the United States racial separation and inequity remain the conditions of our children at school.

Among advocates for educational equality, there has, for decades, been an ongoing conversation about the definition of equity. [Iris Rotberg, a professor of education policy at George Washington University, recently published](#) a column in which she quotes Thurgood Marshall's definition all those years ago: "We sit... not to resolve disputes over educational theory but to enforce our Constitution... I believe the question of education quality must be deemed to be an objective one that looks at what the state provides its children, not what the children are able to do with what they receive."

Rotberg interprets Marshall's words: "The government's responsibility, therefore, is to ensure equal opportunity, not to debate its link to student achievement." She is interpreting Marshall's definition of justice to mean equality of educational inputs and not a comparison of test score outcomes. She is advocating that states be held accountable for equalizing resources and that we reject what has come to be known as outcomes-based school reform which punishes schools and school districts where scores don't quickly rise.

In its [Opportunity to Learn Campaign](#), the Schott Foundation for Public Education called America's attention to disparities in educational inputs by demanding that we stop judging schools exclusively by standardized-test-score [achievement gaps](#) and instead try to conceptualize and measure [opportunity gaps](#) faced by the children across many parts of our country. This spring, for example President Biden has recently taken the same approach, asking us to recognize opportunity gaps by including a provision in the American Rescue Plan, the recent COVID relief bill, to [expand the Child Tax Credit](#) to \$3,000 per child (\$3,600 for children under six-years-old), and make it fully refundable for families too poor to pay enough taxes to benefit from this measure. Biden has been concerned that until now the current Child Tax Credit has left out the poorest children in this country. Their extreme poverty has created an opportunity gap that affects every

aspect of their lives.

In education policy itself, equality of school inputs is a matter of school funding. Congress addressed this issue back in 1965 by establishing Title I to provide federal compensatory funding for schools serving concentrations of children living in poverty, but that program has long suffered from underfunding.

And during 2018 and 2019, in huge statewide Red4Ed walkouts in West Virginia, Kentucky and Oklahoma and big strikes in Los Angeles, Oakland and Chicago, schoolteachers helped us better grasp opportunity gaps. They protested that their students were suffering from shortages of school social workers, guidance counselors and school nurses; overcrowded classes of 40 students; lack of enriched curriculum and art and music; and shuttered school libraries.

Historically, as Thurgood Marshall recognized, unequal school funding has also accompanied school segregation as a driver of educational inequality. When Reconstruction collapsed in 1868, legislators in the states of the former Confederacy did everything they could to segregate schools and drive money to the schools serving white children. In *Schoolhouse Burning*, Derek Black explains how, in post-Reconstruction constitutional conventions across the South, legislators not only segregated schools but also introduced the idea of making school funding reliant on local property taxes: "Make school funding dependent primarily on local tax revenues and give local officials more discretion in operating their schools. This would do two important things. First, it would make vast inequality possible. Wealthy areas could spend as much on education as they wanted, and poor areas---areas heavily populated by blacks---would remain, well, poor. Second, wealthy white communities would effectively be relieved of the duty of supporting black education." (*Schoolhouse Burning*, p. 145)

In her recent column, Rotberg rejects the other failed education "reform" strategy lawmakers have been trying out for several decades: look at student outcomes as measured by standardized tests and then sanction schools and school districts that can't quickly raise test scores: "(T)he United States focused on initiatives that had no direct link to equity, but that reformers hoped would raise student test scores and reduce the

achievement gap---(in Marshall's words) 'what the children are able to do with what they receive.'... The second approach did little overall to make the country more equitable or to strengthen academic attainment." She is talking about outcomes-based accountability: " 'fixing' the education system and rewarding or punishing teachers for students' test scores... Three main reforms have dominated the education system and education policy research: charter schools as an alternative to traditional public schools; holding teachers accountable for student performance; and curriculum standards to guide instruction. The results show little evidence that the reforms led to a more equitable society or to national gains in student achievement."

Ohio provides a perfect case study for Rotberg's argument for the state's provision of adequate and equitable public school resources. In recent decades, Ohio education policy has relied heavily on the test-and-punish philosophy that Rotberg bluntly rejects. Ohio ranks schools by their test scores and brands the poorest districts with "F"s and wealthy exurban schools with "A"s on the school report cards the state issues. Ohio has rapidly expanded private school tuition vouchers and the state has expanded charter schools, but Ohio's mechanism for school privatization reduces fiscal resources in the public school districts serving poor children. The state locates EdChoice voucher qualification only in school districts with Title I schools and deducts the vouchers right out of the local school budgets. And it permits the location of privatized charter schools only in the school districts where standardized test score outcomes are low. The state has seized three of the states poorest school districts and imposed emergency overseers without any observable school improvement.

While all this was going on, Ohio entirely abandoned the state's constitutional mandate requiring adequate and equitable school funding. This month the Legislature is considering a new Fair School Funding Plan as part of the budget which must be passed by June 30. Experts have regularly pointed out the collapse of the state's school funding formula---leaving school districts overly reliant on unequal local property taxes. In a House Finance Committee hearing on December 2, 2020, Ohio school funding expert [Howard Fleeter explained](#): "The FY10-11 school year was the last year in which Ohio had a (working) school funding formula... which was based on objective methodologies for determining the cost of providing an adequate education to Ohio's 1.6 million public school

students." Policy Matters Ohio's [Wendy Patton adds](#): "By 2020, the state share of school funding had fallen to its lowest point since 1985."

In Ohio and across many states, it is a good time to reconsider Justice Thurgood Marshall's definition of equity: "I believe the question of education quality must be deemed to be an objective one that looks at what the state provides its children, not what the children are able to do with what they receive."

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[janresseger](#) | May 19, 2021 at 7:45 am | Tags: [achievement gaps](#), [danger of measuring equity by test score outcomes](#), [danger of test-and-punish school policy based on test score outcomes](#), [defining educational equity](#), [equity as measured by resource inputs](#), [expanding and making Child Tax Credit fully refundable](#), [Ohio Fair School Funding Plan](#), [opportunity gaps](#), [opportunity to learn](#), [Opportunity to Learn Campaign](#), [Over-reliance on local properly taxes makes school funding inequitable](#), [Thurgood Marshall](#), [Thurgood Marshall's definition of educational equity](#) | Categories: [Addressing Child Poverty & Inequality](#), [Danger of Privatization](#), [Equity & Opportunity to Learn](#), [Keeping Public Education Public](#), [Policy Should Improve, Not Punish](#) | URL: <https://wp.me/p3JgEc-7NQ>

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