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Introduction to the Special Issue

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Introduction to the Special Issue

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R. Craig Wood, *Board of Editors and Chair, National Education Finance Conference*

We are pleased to bring you the first of two special issues of *Educational Considerations* comprised of papers presented at the 2012 National Education Finance Conference in San Antonio, Texas. A total of twelve papers were selected for publication through a call for papers and a peer review process. In this issue, six of these appear. They address a range of contemporary education finance issues facing elementary, secondary, and higher education. A number of articles reflect the challenge of providing adequate and equitable funding for education in the aftermath of the worst economic recession in the history of the United States since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In addressing these ongoing challenges, many legislatures have looked to more efficient use of state resources through mechanisms like performance budgeting, sometimes to the detriment of at-risk student populations.

This special issue opens with “The ‘New’ Performance Funding in Higher Education.” In this article, McKeown-Moak notes that public higher education is increasingly being required to explain, defend, and validate its performance and value to a wide variety of stakeholders, from policymakers and politicians to students and taxpayers. As of 2012, thirty-two states were either using a form of performance funding or had proposed it. In large part, legislatures have turned to performance budgeting as a mechanism to increase the efficiency and accountability of higher education spending in relationship to outcomes, but this approach is not without its critics. This article examines in greater detail the performance funding systems in several states comparing older approaches with newer forms. According to McKeown-Moak, the current wave of performance-based funding is quite different from that of a decade ago. In the new form, calls for additional funding are linked to increased accountability and increased efficiency of operations. One of the main differences is a change in the focus from meeting the needs of higher education to meeting the needs of students, the state, and its economy.

In the second article, “But Where Will the Money Come From? Experts’ Views on Revenue Options to Implement

Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State of New York,” Zaken and Olson consulted a group of twelve public finance experts knowledgeable about the state and city on how best to raise the additional \$5.6 billion education funding annually that the court mandated. This qualitative, theory-based study, which utilized framework analysis as its guiding methodology, serves as a complement to a 2005 quantitative study published by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. All but one of the experts interviewed asserted that the state had the capacity to meet the court’s mandate through increased tax revenues. The broadest support was for increasing the state’s personal income tax, primarily through making it more progressive, and for reinstating a commuter income tax on those who work in New York City but do not live there. The least support was for increasing sales taxes given its regressive nature.

Targeting funding to those students who need additional resources to be academically successful remains an important state and federal policy tool, but its effectiveness relies upon the accurate identification of those considered at risk of academic failure. In “Ohio’s At-Risk Student Population: A Decade of Rising Risk,” Vesely used a research-based typology of student risk to identify and compare the number and incidence of these students between 2001 and 2011. Of the five risk factors analyzed, student poverty remained the most severe. In 2001, approximately 25% of Ohio students were classified as poor. A decade later, this percentage had risen dramatically to 43%. Although not as dramatic, the incidence of other risk factors, such as disability, ethnic/racial minority, and English language learner had also increased. Such research can assist Ohio legislators and policymakers in shaping education finance systems to achieve greater vertical equity.

The fourth article, “Entitlement Funding for English Language Learners in California: An Intradistrict Case Study,” authored by Jimenez-Castellanos and Okhremtchouk, used a microlevel case study approach to analyze the allocation of two categorical aid programs for English language learners (ELLs), one state and the other federal, across a sample of three schools in a California school district. The federal aid

program examined was that part of Title III funding targeted to ELLs while the state-funded categorical aid was part of the California's Economic Impact Aid program. In both cases, aid flows from the state to school district level where the district must follow pertinent state and federal guidelines for how it may be used. The overarching purpose of these aid programs is to provide supplemental services to ELL students. Through interviews and document analysis, the authors gained insight into the district level decision-making process related to school site allocations and how ultimately the district and individual schools used these funds.

In the fifth article, "Nevada, the Great Recession, and Education," Verstegen provides readers with a detailed political analysis of the economic crisis the state of Nevada faced during the 2007-2008 recession and subsequently, with particular attention to its effects on the K-12 and higher education systems. Nevada was particularly hard hit by the recession and its aftermath. In February, 2009, as the legislature began deliberations for the next biennial budget, the state's economic outlook was dismal. Unemployment was close to 10 %, and economic forecasts were approaching historic lows. Two years later, Nevada had the highest budget gap in the nation at 45.6%; the highest unemployment rate

at 14.5%; and the highest number of housing foreclosures in the country. With over half of the state budget allocated to education, there was no question that K-12 and higher education would be greatly affected. Strategies to address state budget shortfalls included a combination of approaches—spending cuts, withdrawals from reserves, use of federal stimulus dollars, revenue increases, and accounting changes.

In the final article, "Measuring Equity: Creating a New Standard for Inputs and Outputs," Knoepfel and Della Sala have conceptualized and created an "equity ratio" whose purpose is to evaluate the degree to which states align resources for education to measures of student performance. Specifically, the authors were interested in the degree to which three states provided equity of inputs to education and whether equal resources produced equal outputs. To test this new statistic, equity ratios were calculated for Kentucky, Massachusetts, and New York. Only Kentucky was found to have equality of inputs to education while equal measures of student outcomes were found in New York with great improvements noted in Kentucky. The authors concluded that the calculation of the equity ratio was affected by differing standards across states as well as different policy goals with regard to equal funding. 