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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 second 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 each issue, six of these appear. They address a range of contemporary education finance issues facing elementary, secondary, and higher education. A number of articles in this special issue reflect the challenges of providing adequate and equitable education funding, particularly for some of the most vulnerable children in our society—those who live in poverty, students with disabilities, and undocumented immigrant children. In addition, articles in this issue address current higher education finance issues like student debt levels and faculty engagement in online education.

This special issue opens with “And Then There Were Ten: Equity and Adequacy of New York City Schools after Recentralization.” In this article, Alexander examines the equity and adequacy of the New York City school system after its 32 decentralized community school districts were reorganized into ten administrative regions in 2003, and she finds mixed results with regard to the benefits of recentralization. The conceptual model used was that of the production function where inputs were defined as adequate numbers of teachers; throughputs as core curriculum offerings; and outputs as student test scores in English language arts. The school was the unit of analysis. Results of the analysis found an increase in the percentage of students who scored at the “proficient” level in English language arts after recentralization. At the same time, there was little change in the mean number of schools that employed an adequate number of teachers in core subjects. Third, changes in the percentage of core curriculum offerings by school were inconsistent over time.

In the second article, “Predicting Student Achievement in Ohio: The Role of Expenditure Distribution,” De Luca and Hinshaw investigate the relationship of instruction and non-instruction related expenditures to student achievement in Ohio school districts in order to test the “65 percent solution,”

an education reform proposal that asserts at least 65% of a school district’s operational budget should be spent on classroom instruction in order to maximize student achievement. Multiple regression results in this study indicated that attempts to predict student achievement based upon this model yielded weak and inconclusive results. In sum, De Luca and Hinshaw found the wisdom of this reform in the real world to be questionable.

The third article also focuses on Ohio school finance. In “The Role of Expenditures in Predicting Adequate Yearly Progress for Special Needs Students in Ohio,” Ziswiler, De Luca, and Stedrak used logistic regression to determine which special education expenditure categories would best predict AYP in reading and mathematics. Expenditure categories were defined as instruction, support services, catastrophic costs, and transportation. However, only expenditures related to “catastrophic costs,” a state aid program that provides additional financial support to districts with special education students whose education needs exceed \$25,000 annually, were statistically significant. As expected, the negative impact of student poverty on special education student achievement was also statistically significant. In their conclusions, the authors pointed up the need for further research in this area and the need for development of conceptual or theoretical models to guide the research.

This issue of *Educational Considerations* features a new section titled *Perspectives*. *Perspectives* provides analysis of current issues in education finance, policy, and leadership. The final three articles in this issue are found under *Perspectives on Legal Issues in Education* and *Perspectives on Online Education*.

Perspectives on Legal Issues in Education contains two articles. In “State Challenges to *Plyler v. Doe*: Undocumented Immigrant Students and Public School Access,” Sutton and Stewart offer a timely analysis of the ongoing challenges undocumented immigrant students still face more than 30 years after the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that unequivocally guaranteed them access to a free public education. In spite of this historic ruling, some states have sought to obstruct that

right. Sutton and Stewart offer examples from California in 1994 and Alabama in 2011. California's Proposition 194 directly challenged *Plyler v. Doe* by declaring illegal immigrants ineligible to attend public schools while Alabama's House Bill 56 took a more indirect approach by requiring public schools to determine immigration status when enrolling new students and reporting it to the state. Both laws have been successfully challenged in the courts.

In the second article, "Transparency and Accountability: What If the Federal Gainful Employment—Debt Measures Rules Applied to Law Schools?", Mattox compares recent changes the American Bar Association (ABA) has made to reporting requirements for the law schools it accredits and finds that some of these are consistent with those found in the federal regulations for non-degree, career-oriented postsecondary programs. These include reporting accurate and timely statistics on employment rates and types of employment. However, unlike the federal regulations, new ABA guidelines do not provide prospective law students with institution-by-institution data on student debt levels or debt-to-earnings ratios that would empower them to "comparison shop." Mattox ends by noting that even though accountability

and transparency are desirable in all career-oriented higher education programs, implementation of the federal Gainful Employment—Debt Measures Rules is in limbo due to litigation by the Association of Private Colleges and Universities.

Perspectives on Online Education features the final article in this special issue, titled "Online Education and Contingent Faculty: An Exploratory Analysis of Issues and Challenges for Higher Education Administrators." In this article, Stedrak and Ortagus address the phenomenal growth of online education in higher education along with the growing use of contingent faculty in academe. Their analysis describes the challenges higher education administrators face in engaging tenured and tenure-track faculty in online teaching due to faculty concerns that the investment of time required for online course development and maintenance will reduce available time for research activity critical to tenure, promotion, and salary increases. The authors offer a number of evidence-based recommendations for higher education administrators to consider, ranging from release time for online course development to formal, institutional recognition of the value of development and teaching of online course in terms of faculty career and salary advancement. 