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Guest Editors' Foreword

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GUEST EDITORS' FOREWORD

This issue of *Educational Considerations*, as well as the next, is devoted to the financing of public elementary and secondary schools in America. Twice each decade, the editors plan a broad, yet state-specific, overview of the funding of public schools for state and local policymakers. In this manner, individual policymakers and researchers can study what other states are accomplishing in the complex arena of school funding. We are well aware that generalities are difficult to draw since education is essentially a state and local function; yet, we believe it is important to present some of the leading commentary on the activities of various state legislatures, since school funding is one of the most vitally important public policy debates occurring today.

It is often said, by those who have limited knowledge of school funding, that states have not changed distributional formulas in 20 years, leading to fiscal inequity and inadequacy as self-evident truths. Whether this is true is open to debate, but *Educational Considerations* again is providing a forum for leading authors to have an opportunity to reflect on stagnant or regressive conditions or, alternatively, to describe the progress being made in individual states. Under these conditions, the current state overviews vary greatly as to the status of the states in which authors were asked to provide analysis.

McKeown notes that Arizona is in the wake of a recent state supreme court ruling which found the school funding system unconstitutional. She notes that the state has yet to implement a plan that might meet the intent and directive of the court. Picus notes that California faces great obstacles stemming from the complexity of educating nearly 5.5 million children, combined with the struggles stemming from being in its 25th year since Serrano I. He discusses the reality of reforming an already complex system, making the distributional formula one of the more complex ones in our nation. The Colorado analysis by Mathers and King offers an overview of the issues confronting the state legislature, with the authors discussing the legitimate differences accounted for in the state aid formula, as well as offering the issues that must be addressed within the near future. In contrast, the Nakib article on Delaware displays the breadth and differences that are found in the states. He points out that Delaware has only 19 school districts within only three counties. Yet major reforms have guided funding issues in the state of Delaware, as reform has driven new monies for public education.

The complexity continues, as Florida's distribution formula is discussed by Harrington and Trimble, including the ever-present inadequate tax base of this growing state. Holmes and Dayton, on the other hand, discuss the rapidly growing state of Georgia, where its use of reforms and programs have met with widespread public support. An overview of Illinois is presented by Ward in which he discusses the current situation facing that state's legislature as it attempts to put more money into schools while facing much anti-tax sentiment. Theobald, Bull, and Vesper discuss recent changes in Indiana which has taken bold steps toward a reward for effort aid formula. Even more complex, Payne and Cambron-McCabe discuss Ohio in light of its recent state supreme court ruling which overturned the system of school revenue. The authors comment on and analyze the different education finance policy alternatives that the legislature may have to consider.

The series in this first volume concludes with descriptions of other states' opportunities and problems. Green discusses aid formula changes since *Tennessee Small Schools v. McWhorter* in 1992. Specifically, he discusses the mechanisms, with accompanying strengths and weaknesses, of the present state aid formula. Versteegen discusses Virginia school funding in light of the state supreme court's upholding the state aid formula in a recent challenge. Finally, Busch, Kucharz, and Odden discuss the state of affairs in Wisconsin. They consider the movement toward retarding property taxes in a state which utilizes the property tax as the largest source of school revenue.

These studies reflect several trends since our last overview. One trend, without a doubt, is the reality that the reform movement has finally discovered that fiscal resources must follow to enable meaningful reform. Another trend is a growing awareness and hostility toward the property tax. This will continue to have a significant impact on schools in all states. Finally, one is struck by the differences, and yet the similarities, of the issues in each state. As the editors have written for many years, the financing of public education continues to be one of the most important public policy topics that every state legislature faces virtually every year.

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