

ABSTRACT

THE EQUITY VALUE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: AN INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE EQUITY IN NEW JERSEY DURING THE 1990s.

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This study is an equity analysis of educational resources allocated to school districts in New Jersey for the period 1990-1998. Interest in equity is not new in public administration. Beginning in the 1960s, public administration began to register formal concern for equity under the rubric of the “New Public Administration.” These advocates of an equity value for public administration were and continue to be influenced by the egalitarian ideas of John Rawls concerning the role of government in social policy. Rawls suggests that social structures and social policies should be so constructed that whatever inequalities they allow create advantages for the least fortunate (Rawls, 1971; Rawls, 1999).

Focusing on the period 1990-1998, the main questions are: Have resource inequalities been eliminated among New Jersey’s school districts? Has access to educational resources by racial minorities and the poor improved, declined or stayed the same during the period?

We employ a cross sectional approach utilizing fiscal and human resource data collected annually by the New Jersey Department of Education. The population is drawn from all K-6, K-8 and K-12 school districts in New Jersey. Resource differences are determined by examining the coefficients of variation. Regression and correlation analyses are conducted to determine whether the distribution of resources is influenced by race and wealth.

The fiscal resources examined are instructional expenditures, state and local revenues, median salary for teachers and median salary for administrators. The human resources are instructional staff and non instructional staff. The independent variables used in the regression and correlation analyses are percent minority pupils and property wealth per pupil.

Findings show that significant resource inequalities based on wealth and to a lesser extent race persist among New Jersey's school districts. Poor districts continue to have less resources (except non-instructional staff) than wealthy districts. Non-instructional staff appears to be the only resource distributed equitably among all school districts.

The influence of race lingers for instructional expenditures and the salary for administrators. Districts with high percentages of African Americans and Hispanics continue to spend less for education and pay their administrators lower salaries than

predominantly white districts. Nevertheless, districts with high percentages of African Americans and Hispanics do not appear to have less state and local revenues, lower salaries for teachers nor larger teacher /pupil ratios. In fact, race does not appear to be a factor in the distribution of these three resources.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that minority students are disproportionately represented in low wealth districts. Therefore, the impact of wealth differences falls disproportionately on this group. Even if racial differences are reduced, as long as wealth differences persist, minority students will bear the brunt of the inequity.

Despite the lingering influence of wealth and race (to a lesser extent) on the distribution of resources, districts with predominantly African American, Hispanic and poor students have made some progress. They have greater access to state and local revenues, higher median teachers' salaries, and greater numbers of instructional staff and non-instructional staff than before. However, both high minority and low wealth districts lost ground with respect to the salary of their school administrators, during the period.