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ELC REPORT GRADES STATES ON FAIR SCHOOL FUNDING

Far Too Many States Get Failing Grades

Newark, NJ, November 4, 2019 – [*Making the Grade 2019: How Fair Is School Funding in Your State?*](#), released by Education Law Center (ELC) today, provides compelling evidence that K-12 public school funding continues to be deeply unfair in many states and a major factor contributing to disparities in education resources, opportunities and outcomes for the 50 million public school children across the United States.

In *Making the Grade 2019*, ELC evaluates states on three crucial measures of fair school funding to show the condition of the state’s school funding system:

- Funding Level measures per pupil state and local revenues, adjusted to account for regional cost differences. The ELC report finds that funding levels vary widely across states, from \$8,569 per pupil in Arizona, to \$27,588 per pupil in Vermont.
- Funding Distribution measures the allocation of funds to school districts relative to the concentration of student poverty. States are classified as “progressive,” “regressive” or “flat” under this measure. The report finds a wide span in funding distribution, with Nevada providing 31% less (regressive) and Alaska providing 72% more (progressive) per pupil funding to high-poverty districts.
- Funding Effort measures the level of investment in the K-12 public education system as a percentage of the state’s economic productivity (GDP). The report finds that the highest effort state (Vermont) makes nearly three times the effort of the lowest effort states (Arizona and North Carolina).

ELC designed *Making the Grade* to assist policymakers, advocates and others as they answer a key question: How fair is public school funding in your state?

Many States Are Not Making the Grade

There is wide variation in the level of school funding across the states, but the bottom line is far too many states are not making the grade on fair school funding. Many states have low funding levels and do not distribute higher levels of funding to “high need” school districts, or those serving greater numbers of low-income students. Poor students in these states experience a “double disadvantage” – insufficient funding and no additional funds to address the impacts of segregation by socio-economic status.

This crushing combination is especially alarming in states with the highest student poverty rates. Sixteen of the twenty-five states with above average poverty rates are graded D or F on funding level, and most of those states do not increase funding to their higher poverty districts. This includes many states in the south and southwest regions, such as Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi.

“States are obligated to maintain and support a public school system that gives all children a meaningful opportunity to succeed” said David Sciarra, ELC Executive Director and co-author of *Making the Grade*. “Our report documents the stark reality that too many states fund their public schools based on what they’re willing to spend, and not what children need. We hope this data serves as a wake-up call to governors and legislators to put needs-based school funding reform at the top of their policy and budgetary agendas.”

Making the Grade 2019 uses data from the 2017 U.S. Census Bureau’s Annual Survey of School System Finances, 2017 U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, and the 2017 U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis’ State Gross Domestic Product.

Making the Grade 2019: How Fair is School Funding in Your State? is coauthored by Dr. Danielle Farrie, ELC Research Director; Robert Kim, a writer and adviser on education law and policy and former deputy assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights; and David Sciarra, ELC Executive Director. Please visit www.edlawcenter.org/research/making-the-grade to view the full report and explore findings with interactive tools.