

Valerie Caruso
Augusta
LD 501

Valerie Caruso Professional Educator

I have worked in high poverty schools for over 20 years.

Education is one of the most powerful tools for lifting individuals out of poverty, yet students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds continue to face significant barriers to academic success. A key factor in addressing this issue is ensuring that school administrative units—such as districts and schools—receive adequate and equitable funding to support the unique needs of these students. In my opinion, it is essential that school systems are fairly funded, with additional resources allocated to those serving economically disadvantaged communities. This not only promotes educational equality but also helps break the cycle of poverty for many students.

Inequitable Funding Structures: A Barrier to Success

Currently, the way school funding is structured often results in significant disparities between wealthy and impoverished school districts. Wealthy districts can rely on local property taxes to fund their schools, ensuring a high level of resources, well-trained teachers, and advanced technology for their students. In contrast, districts in lower-income areas struggle to provide the same level of education due to limited resources. This funding gap is not just an issue of money; it leads to larger problems such as overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, and a lack of extracurricular opportunities. When school administrative units serving economically disadvantaged students receive less funding, it becomes harder to offer the support necessary to ensure these students can compete on a level playing field.

The Impact on Economically Disadvantaged Students

Economically disadvantaged students are often dealing with multiple stressors outside of school, including food insecurity, unstable housing, and lack of access to healthcare. These external challenges can make it more difficult for students to focus and thrive academically. In these environments, schools need additional resources to provide the necessary support structures—such as mental health services, after-school programs, and additional academic tutoring. Without these services, economically disadvantaged students are at a severe disadvantage, making it harder for them to break free from the cycle of poverty.

Why Fair Funding Is Crucial

Fairly funding school administrative units that serve economically disadvantaged students is crucial for several reasons. First, it ensures that all students have access to a quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Education should be a right, not a privilege, and equitable funding is a step toward leveling the playing field. Second, adequately funded schools can offer more specialized services, such as individualized support for students with disabilities or additional counseling for students experiencing trauma. These programs are essential for helping students overcome barriers to academic success. Finally, investing in the education of economically disadvantaged students is an investment in the future workforce. By giving all students an equal opportunity to succeed, we create a more educated, capable, and productive society.

A Call for Change

To address these disparities, policymakers must prioritize fair funding for school administrative units that serve economically disadvantaged students. This could include rethinking how funding is allocated, with a focus on ensuring that schools in low-income areas receive the resources they need. Federal and state governments should provide more targeted funding to support schools facing these challenges, and local governments should work to close the property tax-based funding gap that exacerbates inequities. Additionally, funding should be flexible, allowing school districts to tailor resources to the specific needs of their students, whether it's hiring

additional staff, offering summer school programs, or investing in technology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, fairly funding school administrative units for economically disadvantaged students is essential to ensuring educational equity. Without equitable funding, these students face an uphill battle in their educational journeys. By investing in the schools that serve economically disadvantaged communities, we invest in the future of our society. Education has the power to break the cycle of poverty, but only if all students are given the resources they need to succeed. It's time for us to make this a priority and ensure that every student, regardless of their background, has an equal opportunity to thrive.