

A ONE VOICE REPORT

# Education Equity:

## Ensuring Every Student's Success in Mississippi



## Measuring Equity in Education

Education equity is the principle of ensuring every student has fair and equal access to high-quality education, regardless of their race, background, or zip code. It empowers students to reach their full potential, break cycles of poverty and inequality, and foster inclusive communities.

When measuring equity in public education, funding is crucial. Research consistently shows that even a small increase in education funding correlates with improved student performance, graduation rates, and overall school quality. Achieving education equity in Mississippi requires equitable distribution of resources, increased funding for high-poverty districts, and support for students with diverse needs. This includes support for Black students, other students of color, English learners, gifted students, and students with disabilities, and a continued investment by state lawmakers to raise sufficient revenue to support public education.

However, in Mississippi and across the country, education funding gaps contribute to systemic inequalities within the education system, limiting opportunities and hindering the state's ability to ensure that all residents thrive.

Beyond funding, education equity fosters a more inclusive, prosperous, and cohesive society, promoting economic growth, reducing inequality, empowering individuals, improving health outcomes, and driving innovation and creativity, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

In all, advancing education equity is a key component of a broader strategy to protect and support public schools in Mississippi. By examining the intricate interplay between funding, resources, and educational opportunity, we can better understand the root causes of educational inequities and develop targeted strategies to address them effectively. And by working together, we can continue to advocate for broader systemic reforms that promote equity, inclusivity, and excellence in education.

### A 10% increase in per-pupil spending for students living in poverty across all 12 years of education results in:

**-6.8ppt**

Percentage point reduction  
in annual incidence of  
adult poverty <sup>1</sup>

**+9.5%**

Higher postsecondary  
earnings <sup>1</sup>

**+4.0**

More months of  
school <sup>1</sup>

Source: Alliance for REsource Equity,  
[https://data-stories.educationresourceequity.org/?utm\\_source=outreach&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=data%2Bstories#Funding](https://data-stories.educationresourceequity.org/?utm_source=outreach&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=data%2Bstories#Funding)

## Education Funding in Mississippi: A Brief Overview

Like other states nationwide, education funding in Mississippi is predominantly sourced from state and local revenues, with federal funding constituting a minor share of the total.<sup>2</sup> Each of these funding sources serves a distinct role in shaping equity in school funding.

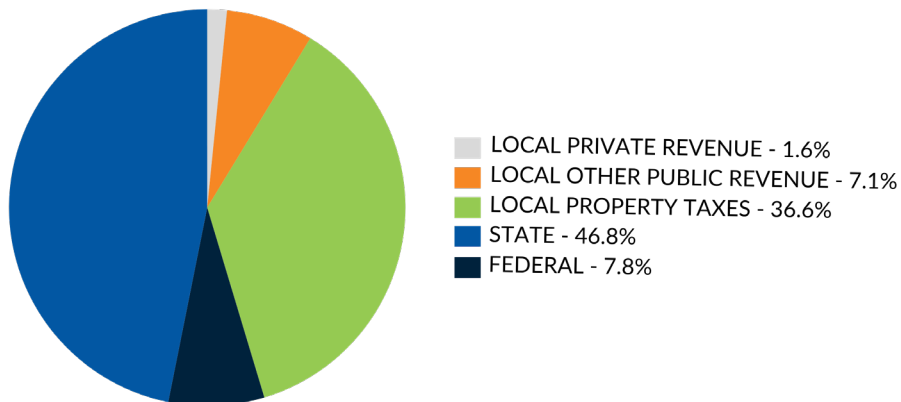
	Revenue from Local Sources	Revenue From State Sources	Revenue From Federal Sources	Revenue From Intermediate Sources	Total Revenue From All Sources
<i>Statewide Totals</i>	\$ 1,929,310,718.15	\$ 2,859,280,410.85	\$ 1,491,887,376.16	\$ 265,385.93	\$ 6,280,743,891.09
	<b>30.72%</b>	<b>45.53%</b>	<b>23.76%</b>	<b>0.01%</b>	

Source: Mississippi Department of Education



### More than 90% of school funding comes from state and local sources.

Revenues for public elementary and secondary schools by source of funds, 2017-2018



Source: Mississippi Department of Education



Federal dollars, for example, come to Mississippi in various forms such as child nutrition, vocational and technical education, and R.O.T.C. dollars, among others.<sup>3</sup> These funds help supplement state and local funds and can help mitigate funding shortfalls and inequities, particularly in schools experiencing high levels of poverty. The funds are also critical to support schools during recessions or national emergencies like the Great Recession in 2008 or the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

Local dollars, on the other hand, primarily come from local property taxes, with local communities contributing up to 27% of education costs in Mississippi.<sup>5</sup> Other local revenue sources include gaming revenue, student activity fees, and other taxes.<sup>6</sup> However, local funding can be inherently inequitable because districts in property-wealthy communities can raise more money than those in less property-wealthy districts, even at similar tax rates.<sup>7</sup>

Measuring equity within state dollars is more complex. Mississippi's state funds for public education come from sources like drivers education, homestead exemption, and the Education Enhancement Fund, a special state fund fueled by sales tax collections and is dedicated to bolstering support for schools.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, like other states, Mississippi funds public schools through a statewide funding formula established by the state legislature and through the allocation of state funds to districts.<sup>9</sup> While state dollars often help offset inequities in local revenue across districts, they sometimes fall short of ensuring equitable education for all students.

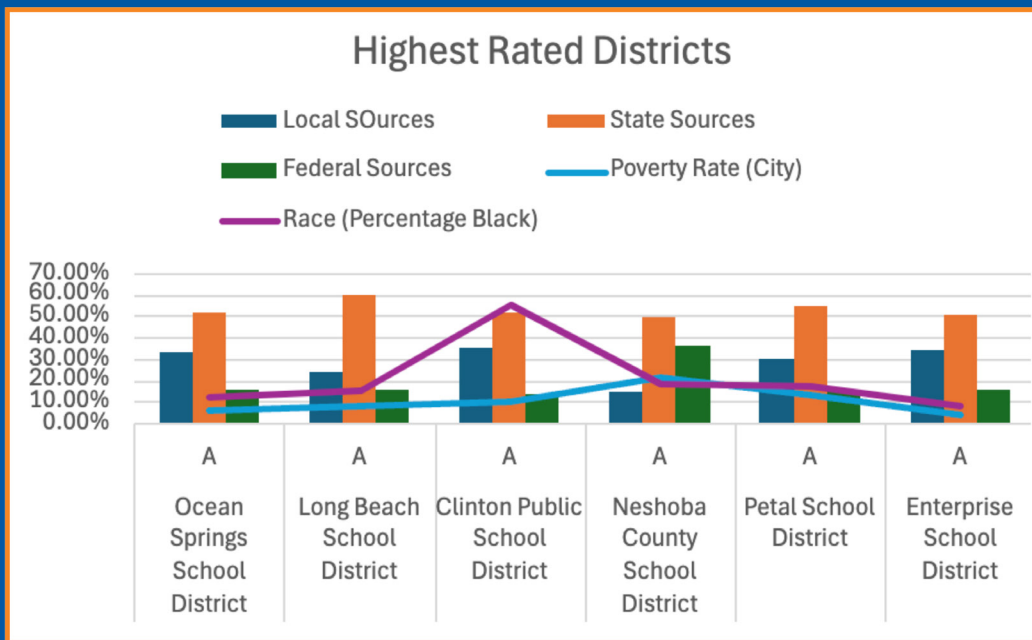
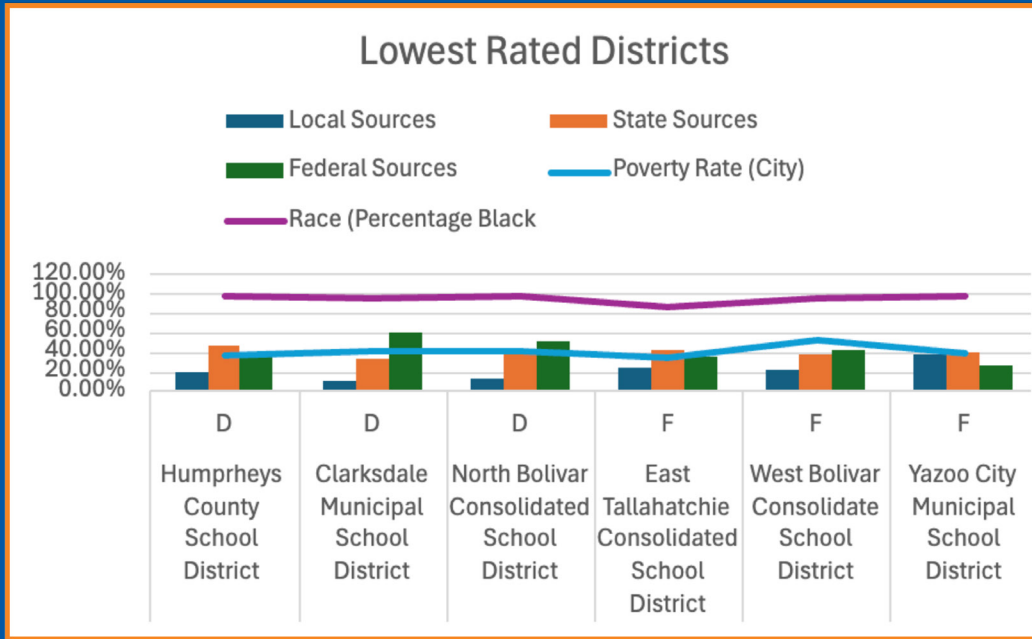
In Mississippi, school districts with lower performance ratings are often located in communities facing high poverty rates and have a significant percentage of Black students. While federal funding provides some support, increased state funding could further promote educational equity in these areas.

## LESSON 101

# EDUCATION EQUITY

**In Mississippi, school districts with lower performance ratings are often located in communities facing high poverty rates and have a significant percentage of Black students.**





## Mississippi's Public School Funding Formula

Since 1997, the primary source of state funding for public schools in Mississippi has been the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP), a statewide funding formula. This state law determines the funding allocation for each public school district to meet academic standards set by the Mississippi State Board of Education. The goal of MAEP, as stated by the Mississippi Department of Education, is to ensure that every child in Mississippi, regardless of where he or she lives, receives an adequate educational opportunity, as defined by the State Accountability System.<sup>10</sup>





**Add-on Programs:** MAEP also includes funding for transportation, special education, gifted education, vocational education, and alternative school programs.<sup>21</sup>

## More than Funding: State Public School Funding Challenges

Even the best school funding formulas are affected by a number of factors such as politics, state legislative and judicial decisions, and efforts. Mississippi is no different.<sup>22</sup> For instance MAEP has only been fully funded twice in the 27 years of its implementation. That means that since 1997, MAEP has been underfunded by over \$3.5 billion.<sup>23</sup> For the 2023-2024 school year, Mississippi' schools were underfunded by \$175 million.<sup>24</sup>

In large part, this underfunding is attributed to political influences. MAEP passed in 1997 in a bi-partisan effort.<sup>25</sup> However, since then, political ideologies have polarized the education debate, leaving local communities to deal with the fallout. In 2014, 21 school districts sued the state for its failure to fully fund MAEP.<sup>26</sup> In response, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled in 2017 that full funding of MAEP was not mandatory.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, legislative focus has shifted more towards expanding school voucher programs, increasing state support for private schools, and advancing the "school choice" movement, rather than increasing investment in public school funding to aid low-performing school districts in the state.<sup>28</sup>

Judicial decisions also influence public school funding. More recently, the Mississippi Supreme Court allowed federal pandemic relief funds to be used for infrastructure projects for private schools in the state.<sup>29</sup>

Another factor impacting education funding in Mississippi is the overall lack of investment in public services across the state. While Mississippi allocates a significant portion of its budget to education, the actual spending falls short when compared to other states. Mississippi ranks approximately 43rd in K-12 school spending and 45th in funding.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that although there may be a commitment to education by state lawmakers, higher state revenue is necessary to adequately fund essential programs such as education. However, policy choices made by lawmakers hinder this possibility. For example, in 2022, Mississippi lawmakers approved the largest tax cut for the wealthy.<sup>31</sup> Once fully enacted, this tax cut will result in the state losing approximately \$585 million per year.<sup>32</sup> This significant amount of revenue could be utilized to invest in students, support public schools, and bolster communities in their commitment to education.

During the 2024 Legislative Session, state lawmakers passed a new school funding formula, the Mississippi Student Funding Formula, slated to replace MAEP. Analysis from the Parent's Campaign outlines key features of the new plan, including:

- An increase in school funding of approximately \$230 million statewide
- Like MAEP, an objective formula that determines the base student cost of education funding in the state
- An inflation factor that accounts for rising costs
- An increase in funding for special education and gifted services, poverty, English language learner support, career and technical programs, and more rural districts
- An allocation of funds using net enrollment rather than average attendance<sup>33</sup>

# Measuring Equity in Mississippi's Public School Funding

Overall, similar to other states, the challenge with public school funding in Mississippi lies in whether policymakers can allocate funds to students who need them the most, especially those in high-poverty districts. Assessing the fairness of school funding typically involves analyzing three key measures: funding level, funding distribution, and funding effort.

## Making the Grade 2023

Mississippi

Enrollment: 442,627  
 School-aged Poverty: 25%  
 Percent Asian?PI: 1%  
 Percent Black: 48%

Percent Hawaiian/PI: 0%  
 Percent Hispanic/Latino: 4%  
 Percent Native American: 0%  
 Percent White: 43%

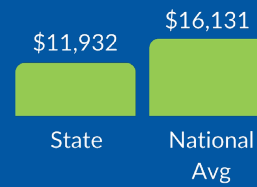
### Funding Level

State and local revenue per pupil, adjusted for regional cost differences.

Mississippi ranked 45 out of 51 on funding level with \$11,932 in cost-adjusted revenue per pupil--\$4,199 below the national average (\$16,131).



Per Pupil Funding



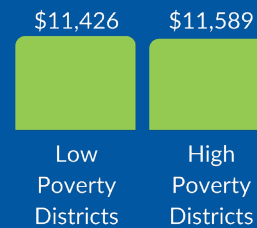
### Funding Distribution

Describes the allocation of funds to school districts relative to the concentration of student poverty.

Mississippi's funding distribution was flat: on average, high-poverty districts receive 1% or \$163 more per-pupil than low-poverty districts.



Per Pupil Funding by District Poverty



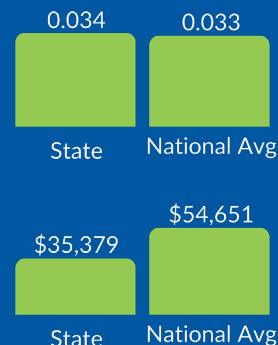
### Funding Effort

PK-12 education revenue as a percentage of the state's economic activity (GDP).

Mississippi makes an average effort to fund its schools its fiscal capacity (GDP) is average.



Effort Index



Source: Education Law Center



**Funding Level:** Funding level is loosely defined as the amount of money a state spends per student.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, Mississippi spends \$11,932 per-pupil and ranks 45 out of 51 in per-pupil spending levels.<sup>35</sup> This is \$4,000 less than the national average of \$15,114.<sup>36</sup>

**Funding Distribution:** Funding distribution is a measure of how well a state does at meeting the funding needs of students in high poverty districts.<sup>37</sup> In our state, low poverty (\$11,426) and high poverty (\$11,589) districts receive a similar amount of funding.<sup>38</sup>

**Funding Effort:** Funding effort measures public K-12 revenue as a percentage of GDP.<sup>39</sup> Mississippi ranks 21st in funding efforts amongst states.<sup>40</sup>

## Beyond Funding: Equity and Educational Opportunity

More than funding, measuring equity in public K-12 education also contributes to the overall well-being and prosperity of communities. Ultimately, by investing in education equity, communities can unlock the full potential of all their members, leading to greater economic growth, social progress, and collective prosperity.

**Student achievement:** Research consistently demonstrates that well-funded schools correlate positively with student achievement, graduation rates, and college readiness. For instance, following full funding of the MAEP in 2008 and near-full funding in 2009, Mississippi students had the highest gains in fourth-grade reading in the nation.<sup>41</sup>

**Reducing barriers to access:** Financial resources can be used to reduce barriers to access, such as transportation costs, school fees, and the cost of educational materials. By eliminating these financial barriers, more students can participate fully in educational opportunities.

**Resource allocation:** Adequate funding allows schools to provide essential resources such as qualified teachers, updated textbooks, technology, safe facilities, and extracurricular programs. Schools in underprivileged areas often lack these resources, contributing to disparities in educational quality and outcomes.

**Facilities and infrastructure:** Underfunded schools suffer from inadequate facilities and infrastructure, including outdated buildings, limited internet access, no access to computers or tablets, and inadequate maintenance. Black students are more likely to attend schools with poor facilities, which can impact their learning environment, health, and safety, contributing to inequities in educational experiences and other life outcomes.

**Teacher quality and support:** Insufficient funding causes challenges in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. These schools may face difficulty offering competitive salaries, professional development opportunities, and support services for educators, which can affect the quality of instruction and academic outcomes for students.

**Access to opportunities:** Underfunded schools struggle to offer educational opportunities, such as advanced coursework, extracurricular activities, and college preparatory programs. Students attending these schools may have limited access to these opportunities, which impacts academic achievement, college readiness, and long-term economic earning potential.

**Support services:** Financial resources are essential for providing support services such as counseling, special education, English language instruction, and nutrition programs. These services help address the specific needs of students facing various challenges, such as poverty, disabilities, or language barriers.

**Health and well-being:** Education equity has a direct impact on health outcomes. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better access to healthcare, make healthier lifestyle choices, and experience lower rates of chronic diseases. By promoting education equity, we can improve overall health and well-being in communities.

**Civic engagement:** Education equity fosters civic engagement and participation in democratic processes. When individuals have access to quality education, they are more likely to be informed, engaged citizens who contribute positively to their communities and participate in voting and advocacy efforts.

**Reducing poverty and inequality:** By leveling the playing field, education equity enables individuals from marginalized or disadvantaged communities to break the cycle of poverty and achieve upward social mobility and help reduce disparities in outcomes and opportunities, regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other factors.

## Conclusion

By examining the connection between funding, resources, and educational opportunity, we can better understand the root causes of educational inequities and develop targeted strategies to address them effectively. Improving education equity in Mississippi requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses funding disparities, enhances educational resources, and promotes inclusive policies.

Recommendations for improving education equity in Mississippi include policy solutions that support students, schools, families, and communities such as :

- Fully funding the state funding formula every year to provide all necessary resources and support for school districts to provide an exceptional education to all.
- Expanding access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs to ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic status, are prepared for school.
- Expanding access to after-school programs, tutoring, and extracurricular activities to provide additional learning opportunities and enrichment.



- Investing in early intervention programs to identify and support children with developmental delays and disabilities early on.
- Increasing funding for school counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals to support students' social and emotional well-being.
- Investing in infrastructure improvements for schools in underserved areas to provide a safe and conducive learning environment.
- Ensuring all schools have access to modern technology, quality textbooks, and learning materials.
- Eliminating corporal punishment to help foster a safe learning environment and to reduce unfair and inequitable treatment against marginalized groups such as Black students, other students of color, and those with disabilities.
- Expanding community schools to increase opportunity for all students.
- Increasing teacher salaries to attract and retain high-quality educators, particularly in high-poverty and rural districts.
- Increasing access and affordability to community colleges and four-year institutions.
- Providing incentives such as loan forgiveness, housing subsidies, and professional development opportunities for teachers willing to work in underserved areas.
- Tackling poverty and food insecurity through increased state investments in federal safety-net programs.
- Enacting revenue-raising tax policies to help increase state revenue for public education.
- Fostering strong partnerships between schools, families, and communities to create a supportive network for students.



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