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SCHOOL FINANCE AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

WEBINAR

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Sarah Reber [00:00:12] Good afternoon. And on behalf of the Brown Center on Education Policy, we welcome you and thank you for joining us here at Brookings for our discussion of school finance and educational equity. I'm Sarah Reber, senior fellow in Economic Studies, and I'll be moderating today's panel discussion. Both intuition and research studies tell us that increasing spending on K-12 schools leads to better opportunities and outcomes for students. And in the United States, where students of different backgrounds have unequal opportunities, providing the most disadvantaged students with a larger share of resources may be necessary to close longstanding opportunity gaps. Indeed, some policies like Title I dollars provided from the federal government are designed to deliver additional resources to students in need.

However, districts and states provide over 90% of the funding for education. Whether all these resources from different streams reach their intended beneficiaries is a different question. And data limitations have often obscured the public's view of how districts allocate resources to schools. Today, I'm joined by three panelists. And together, we're trying to open that black box a bit to discuss how school finance decisions are being made in state and district offices, highlighting new data sources and findings from new research. We welcome questions from audience members. Please submit your questions by emailing events@brookings.edu or tweeting at [BrookingsGov](https://twitter.com/BrookingsGov) using the hashtag [school finance](https://twitter.com/schoolfinance).

So let me introduce the three panels. First, we have Marguerite Roza, a research professor and director of the Edunomics lab at Georgetown University, a research center focused on exploring and modeling education finance policy and practice. Dr. Roza's research traces the effects of fiscal policies at the federal, state and district levels for their implications on resources at the school and classroom, classroom levels. She leads the McCourt School of Public Policy Certificate in Education Finance and has published widely on state and school district finance policy, financial equity, pensions, compensation and other related topics.

Next, Richard Bowman is the chief information and strategy officer at Albuquerque Public Schools in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In his, in this role, he develops district strategies to improve educational outcomes for all students and collaboratively implements educational technologies. Dr. Bowman has worked in education for more than two decades, with prior experience as a high school science teacher, as a Strategic Data Project fellow from the Harvard Graduate School of Education,

and through earning his Ph.D. in education policy analysis at the Pardee RAND grant graduate school.

And finally, Michael Hansen holds the Herman and George R. Brown chair in government studies and is a senior fellow in the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. Dr. Hansen is a labor economist who focuses on a wide array of education policy issues with special, specialization in the public teacher workforce. We, so let's, let's start by going to Mike from the Brown Center to, to tell us a little bit about the report you just released to coincide with this webinar. And then we'll, then we'll go to the other panelists for their opening statements. Over to you, Mike.

Michael Hansen [00:03:28] Yes, thank you, Sarah. I'm glad to be here. And yes, we just released a new Brown Center report on school finance. We're really very excited about it. One of the great things about this report, we have sort of two separate analyses that are done in it. And these analyses are really possible because we have new data on, on schools, that this is school level data that was mandated, you know, mandated for collection through Esser. And this new data really allows us to do, to do new analyzes of school finance that we hadn't really been able to do in the past, or at least not on such a broad scale across the country. And so let me sort of very briefly describe the, some of the high level findings from these two chapters.

First, we looked at district level financial allocations across the country. And what we found overall is that if you're looking within districts, we find very slightly progressive spending patterns. So, so more money is going to schools serving more, you know, higher shares of disadvantaged students. So this is, but, but the, we do note that the, that the differences in spending are about 2 to 3 percentage points on average across these districts. So this is, you know, on net, it's good news. You know, we don't have high levels of regressivity. But we also question whether it is enough.

And also, we did some additional analyses, and we look at associations between different types of school districts and their generosity for disadvantaged students. And we think, we find things like urbanicity, politics, school enrollment, enrollment, size of the districts and economic segregation, these are all significant factors. But really the ones that are like the most important and predicting generosity for at the district level, those are tend to be really the city measures and the enrollment measures and economic segregation. So politics sort of falls out as being all that critical.

And next, we have an analysis where we, we question whether teacher sorting is related to financial inequalities. We know from, from studies many studies over, over about two decades that

experienced teachers, more credentialed teachers, they tend to be in more affluent settings. And as a result, we expect sort of as a, as a mechanical result of that, we expect lower levels of teacher spending in, in schools that have, that are more that sort of more high need students, excuse me. And we do find that to be the case.

And in our study, states, we focus specifically on six states where we can really try to home in on classroom-level spending. And we do find that teacher spending is slightly progressive across all these states. And so it's a bit of a counterintuitive result where we have both lower access to experienced teachers and at the same time, we see slightly regressive, excuse me, slightly progressive teacher spending. And the way that we reconcile is that is that we also find increased teacher spending, excuse me, increased teacher staffing that is also happening simultaneously in those, in those districts. And so they're much more likely to have teacher, higher FTE ratios for teachers. They're also much more likely to have higher FTEs for instructional support staff like teachers aid or other support, supporting staff. So I'm happy to go into those details further, but those just provide just a high-level overview of what we found.

Sarah Reber [00:07:09] That's great. So now let's turn to Marguerite. Your Edunomics Group has played a big role in securing and providing access to these new school level data that that are used in this study. Can you share with us some of the major insights in this coming out of this new data source and what you've been able to learn about, what you and other researchers have been able to learn about school finance from these new data.

Marguerite Roza [00:07:36] Yes. So first of all, it's kind of a great time at ed finance because the world is shifting and for decades, mostly ed finance studies focused on whether state policies distributed resources equitably across districts or whether districts as a whole could get good value for the money. And that is, that like, I feel like we're at a sea change right now, and most of it is because we now have a new piece of the puzzle, and that is data on school-by-school expenditures. So we can now really for the, for the first time in history, look under the district hood and say when the money gets to the district, what happens to it? Does it go disproportionately to wealthier schools, disproportionately to poverty schools or somewhere in between, or is it more messy or does it depend on the district?

So I feel like what is happening right now is the door is opening to a whole new field in education finance, which is about what happens on the spending side of the equation when the

money gets to the district. So I'm really excited about these new studies that the, that the Brown Center at Brookings has done. And I hope there will be a whole lot more, we're starting to see more studies emerge that are starting to fill in that picture of the puzzle on what, what's going on when the money reaches the district. And that's where the, the spending decisions are made. That's where in public education the decisions are made about spending, it happens at the district level. Some of the money comes with strings attached, but it's really district leaders together with their board, also embedded in their labor contract decisions, how the money flows out across the different schools and in districts.

And so I think the shift is happening right now. We're witnessing it now for the first time. We have a lot of questions and we're starting to get some of those answers. And one of the answers is that districts do play a really important role. What Mike just shared were some of the averages, but some districts are regressive, some districts are progressive, and many are sort of in between, kind of on the margins. So there's a lot of story that is embedded in each of these districts. And I, you know, I think in some ways that's elevating the role of the district is putting a spotlight there that we hadn't seen before.

So one of the things he said, I just want to reiterate this, is that in general, it turns out that these larger districts that have lots of schools are, do have junior lower paid teachers at their higher poverty schools, and they're offsetting that lower spending with giving them more teachers. Right. So they have more staff. You have lower experienced, lower paid staff, but you have more of them. And I think a question for our audience is that, is that a fair and legitimate trade? Is it okay to say you have lower experienced staff, many of whom will be lower quality?

Right. If you, if you have a school with a revolving door of teachers, it means there are, you've gone into the, deeper into the labor pool to hire them and there's much higher turnover every year, is that a sufficient trade that then you get more teachers, or is this an equity issue we should solve, which is that often our lower income students are taught by potentially more junior, lower paid, lower quality staff. Is that the bigger thing that matters? So I'm looking forward to getting into the discussion, but excited to be having this discussion right now with all the new emerging data, school by school financial data.

Sarah Reber [00:11:38] Great. Thanks for that. So let's bring Richard into this conversation. From your perspective, working on a large school district, how does the district decide how to spend the money and how easy is it to change how dollars are being spent?

Richard Bowman [00:11:51] Great. So thank you so much, Sarah. And I just wanted to say I also appreciate the research being done by Michael and the data that Marguerite has helped put together. You know, the first time having this comprehensive national set within district expenditures is it's very, very notable. As looking inside of the district, I will say that, yes, the decision, the spending decisions are made at the district level, but within the district there are a number of internal stakeholders. It's not monolithic at all and it's kind of best viewed as a kind of this competing set of priorities between the community and then the board and the principals and the parents and the teachers. And so what you end up with just kind of in general is a type of funding, funding structures and patterns that are very difficult for the districts to change. And there are a number of these explicit and implicit constraints that show up that, that really kind of help to lock in the spending patterns that already exist.

With that said, though, the role of increased data and technology and access to data within districts has also driven a bit of a trend towards adoption of so-called weighted student funding formulas within district where, where students, where schools are given more money per student based upon their, the characteristics of the students, which is one of the things that can help explicitly address some of this regressivity, progressivity situation. It's very difficult to do a weighted student funding formula if you don't have data on your students readily available whenever you're thinking about budgets. And so the fact that that data is now more easily available very much enables districts to move there if they, if they so choose.

One of the other touches that they both, Michael, Marguerite, mentioned that districts in the lower income, the schools that serve lower income students tend to have more FTE but maybe less experienced teachers is, the thing to think about there is perhaps this is a case of where these schools are being asked to serve more of the nonacademic needs of those children and are kind of putting the, putting more, more people there to try to address that. And so it's just an interesting question, I don't know that the data explicitly addresses it, but that is one of the concerns that I would have as a district. So with that, I'm very much excited about this conversation and would like to hand it back over to you Sarah.

Sarah Reber [00:14:58] Great. Thank you so much. So first, before we go into the main panel, I want to just remind everybody out there in YouTube land that you can submit questions by emailing events at Brookings dot EDU or tweeting at Brookings gov using the hashtag school finance. So we hope to get some questions. We'll have some time for that at the end. So I want to get into this finding from the study that all of you mentioned, that there seems to be a quality for quantity tradeoff occurring between the more and less economically advantaged schools where you often see this progressive allocation of funding, where the disadvantaged schools are spending more, but they do have less, less, experienced teachers and maybe more staffing.

So maybe first we can start with Mike, and you can tell us a little bit more about this, this finding and how whether you think whether you think it's problematic or is this a fair tradeoff? And then maybe go to, to Richard to talk about whether you see this happening and, and more about what you think about the tradeoff. And then, Marguerite, if you want to add anything, that would be great, so Mike.

Michael Hansen [00:16:09] Sure, thanks Sarah. The short answer is yes. These teacher allocations that we see across schools, this is a problematic allocation. This is something that we've known about for as, as I mentioned, it's something we've known about for decades. Some of the earlier studies were done around 2002 to 2003. And so this is something that has, has received some level of of, you know, research and attention for a long time. And during the Race to the Top era, we did have some, there were some efforts to try and promote more equitable access to quality teachers. Many, many states still do have those policies on the books, even though, even though we now are under Esser. But but these these are still important policies to maintain.

So there is good news, which I think I think is very good news, that even though we do have this adverse sorting that's happening, that there is some a little bit of compensation that appears to be happening to counter that. So which, you know, quite frankly, from my perspective, I wasn't walking into the study expecting to find exactly that. And so that is good. You know, it's good that there is some recognition that there is some or at least, you know, presumably there's some recognition that there is a, a need there and that we can fill that need by providing additional staff. And so maybe that staff helps to lower class sizes, maybe that staff helps to just provide, you know, so if a teacher, you know, teacher's aide, so maybe they help to grade grade papers, maybe it's paraprofessionals to

provide, you know, some, some breakout classes or some breakout instruction and those kinds of things. I think, I think it's good news.

The question, though, is whether this is enough. And I think from from my perspective, it's, it's not enough. You know, what we're talking about, like the differences here is in terms of FTEs is around half, you know a quarter to a half of an FTE for, for a difference you know for going to from a, a school, a school that was serving say 40% FRPL students so this is high needs students up to an additional 20%, they're getting up like an additional half an FTE of teacher. So yes, it makes a difference. It doesn't make a huge difference. It's not like we're dropping class sizes from, you know, 24 kids down to 18 kids, you know, so like there is some, some slight difference on the margin. And I would argue that if we think that the staffing is a way to compensate, it's probably not doing enough to compensate for low access to quality teachers.

I do think it is important to just note that we're looking at teacher experience as our indicator of teacher quality here. That's the only thing that we have in our data. Teacher quality, excuse me, teacher experience is a, is correlated with teacher quality, but it's, you know, only fairly weakly correlated. So by no means is this like a definitive answer. I think really we should, we really do need to be paying attention more to different access to quality teaching itself and, you know, looking at things like value added measures, also looking at things like instructional rubrics and evaluation ratings. I think all of these are useful metrics to help us know where our best teachers are and how we can guarantee student access to them. So I think I think, yes, this is modestly good news, but I do think it's not enough. And I think we do need to really keep pressing on what we can be doing to ensure more equitable access for, for disadvantage students everywhere.

Richard Bowman [00:19:56] Oh. So I guess I'll just weigh in. And I was thinking we would get into a panel where we'd have some really heated discussion, but I find myself unable to disagree with Michael on this one. It's not enough. One of the things that we, that we see is schools in those high-needs areas have an enormous amount of need, particularly in the cities where you've kind of discovered this greater amount of progressivity. It's, it's not simply, it's not simply the academic need that we're talking about. There is an enormous amount of the social emotional need, the additional adverse childhood experiences, counselors, nursing, medical needs that have not been addressed, taken care of. And what I'm, what we've experienced is that the community in those areas are looking

to the schools to, to be the organization that kind of raises the, raises the child and not just academically.

And so while there might be some level of, of compensation going on with respect to the numbers of FTE, the need is just, the need is just so much greater that, that more needs to be done. I will touch back a little bit on, on the finding, which was that this is, much this finding is more apparent in the cities. And I would just, just also go back to the research on, on long term and intergenerational concentrated poverty and the impacts that that has on students' childhoods and their, their learning.

So with that said, you know, yes, as a district, we do try to send additional staff. It's not enough. And if your district or your labor union has not managed to negotiate some level of, if the administration has not negotiated some level of control over teacher placement— which is a very difficult thing to try to negotiate— teachers pick their living patterns and will move in ways that contribute, that contribute to this sort of inequality. So with that I'll pass it over to Marguerite, if you'd like to say anything.

Marguerite Roza [00:22:26] So much to say. I think that we have this notion in our minds that a teacher is a teacher is a teacher, and, and that that is we know it's not true, parents know it's not true, you know, the data show it's not true. But it is true that that the higher poverty schools are sort of last in line for the teachers when it comes to this. And you mentioned, Richard mentioned, the labor union agreements. Most districts have a, you know, a pay scale that rewards longevity, maybe master's degrees, very little else. Certainly does not reward teaching at a higher poverty school with more pay.

And so and actually changing that we know changes the choices that teachers make about where to teach. Denver had increased pay if you taught at a higher poverty school and it worked, it was luring more teachers to, to want to teach in these schools and they had a greater applicant pool to choose from. And then the union went on strike over that, and other things and the district eliminated that additional pay bump, or most of it for teaching in a higher poverty school. Denver stood out as a rare example of that. Most districts are not going there with those kinds of things, even though there is some, some good support for it. So, you know, yes, they, Richard mentioned there that there's a lot of forces at the local level that are keeping things in place. And we're going to have to kind of push through those if we want to address the uneven access to teachers that some of our higher poverty schools have.

The other thing I want to say is that every district's data tell a different story. So some districts are seeing different patterns where they're spending a whole lot more on their tiny, little itty-bitsy schools, right, or under enrolled schools that no one wants to go to. Or some are spending a whole lot more on the magnet school. Some of them have legacy programs, really fancy jazz music program in a single school, and there's a lot more money there. So I guess one thing I would say is each district has to kind of open the books and take a look at it and see whether it wants to address some of these patterns. And if so, that would happen during the budgeting process. And until now, districts have not been incorporating these school-by-school spending data into their budgeting process.

That means the budgeting process that's happening right now for the next school year. Like November, December, January, February, it would mean taking a look at these districts and saying, or these data across the schools and saying, do we want to do something different? Then when we go into labor negotiations, do we want to negotiate a higher pay for teaching in a higher poverty school? Because if we're not going to address the things head on, they're likely a chance they're getting worse with all this Esser money. Right. Because the Esser money might be giving out money to hire new people. Teachers might be leaving their high poverty schools to fill the roles in their more wealthy schools, leaving more openings and more hiring of junior teachers in our schools that need that capacity the most. So no time like the present.

Sarah Reber [00:25:47] Great. I'm going to come back to Esser in a minute. But before we do that, it sort of come up this question of, well, these, these sort of on average, the high need schools, the high poverty schools are, do seem to be getting a bit more funding, but maybe it's not enough more funding. So there was, there was sort of a question from the audience, from John Enderlin from the Arlington Foundation for, for Families and Youth, I hope I said your name right. And he asks, the report discusses differential funding as a means to reduce the opportunity gap. Any guidance on the magnitude of the differential funds required.

So that, that was related to a question that I had about how much more do students in disadvantaged settings need and how, how can we go about figuring that out as a first stage and then of course moving more in that direction as a first stage? So let me let me start with you, Richard, and then maybe to Mike and Marguerite.

Richard Bowman [00:26:47] I love this question. So thank you, Sarah, and thank you. So how much do they need? So I just got this question so I don't really have a number for you, but I

would say until the opportunity gap is erased. I think we need to meet students where they are and we need to, we need to meet them where they are, and we need to provide them resources sufficient to accommodate their needs, academic and otherwise, either within the school or with community partners, and to be able to, to be able to help the kids learn.

So we know, you know, students don't learn as well if they're worried about their safety or their health. We know that our teachers are typically taught how to teach with the proper pedagogy using the curriculum. Teachers aren't necessarily taught how to address all the other needs of the children. And so whether it's some combination of additional, additional staff or different types of staff, different types of credentialing, different types of training, additional time and support, all of that is what's necessary. And I'll just say it, it is quite expensive to, it would be quite expensive to undo the impacts of income inequality and access to education.

Michael Hansen [00:28:27] I'll hop in here very quickly and just offer that in many of the states that, or excuse me, in our analysis, we saw differentials within districts on the order of 2 to 3% two to three percentage points in terms of additional spending for disadvantaged students. 2 to 3% of this spending, it comes, you know, I mean, depending on exactly how much your district is already spending as a base, that, of course, varies. But this is, you know, typically on the magnitude of a few hundred dollars, a few hundred dollars a year. And so it's not a terribly large amount of money. And, and as Richard just indicated, given the diversity of needs, particularly for high need communities, it's probably not going to be enough to cover the additional services that we, that we'd hoped that they could provide.

Also, just as another benchmark, Title I dollars that are, that go to, that go to schools that serve high shares of students in poverty, those amount to a little over \$1,000 per eligible student. Of course, Title I isn't given, given out at the student level, they're directed to schools. But, but that gives you a rough benchmark of, you know, we should be spending an additional \$1,000 or so. And many of these just, many of the, many of the districts that are in the analysis are not, are not spending magnitudes that, that large. Right. So as I mentioned, a few hundred dollars for the most part. So I think, I think, yes, we could be spending more, and we probably should be, you know, doubling or tripling the amount of differential that we currently have, at least.

Marguerite Roza [00:30:22] I think I'll just jump in and say, just do the reminder that money isn't also the guarantee. Right? We have schools around the country that are spending 30, \$40,000 a

kid on their high poverty students, and some of them are really quite low performing. And we have some that are, you know, spending on the low end, sometimes 10, 11, \$12,000 a student and have outsized impacts on their kids are really kind of delivering for us a more modest amount of money. And that is not to say money doesn't matter, but it is absolutely no guarantee and that we know.

So for, for one, we have to up our expectations for the money that we spend. We have to dig into these data inside districts. We have to engage the principals and the, and the teachers and parents in these communities and say, as we put an incremental dollar in, we do need to see an incremental impact on students. We've done a lot of research sometimes on principals who are teaching or are leading schools that are do have a sufficient amount of resources. And by sufficient, I mean double, sometimes even triple some of their peer schools have and still are lagging on the outcomes, and for one, they don't know that. So we haven't shared the financial data with them and they're not completely clear that that was the expectation that we get better outcomes both on reading and math and those things and attendance for their students there. And this is, in a way I'm sympathetic with principals. We're throwing a lot at them, right? You need to improve their social emotional health, you need to, you know, do all sorts of things.

And, you know, as Richard mentioned, there's a lot of demands coming on schools right now. It's not very clear what the mission is for, for many people. But with the additional resources that we bring, we also do need to bring those additional expectations, particularly for the high poverty school students. One thing not in Mike's analysis is what happens, I mean, most high poverty kids go to school with less poverty kids, right. They're mixed together in schools. Sometimes it's 60% poverty, sometimes it's 40% poverty, sometimes it's 90% poverty.

But sort of whether, whether or not the additional spending at the school is delivering the value, particularly for the high poverty students in that school, or do we create a lot of AP classes and activities and our high poverty kids aren't even participating in them, so there's still a lot of work to do to know. But I don't think there's a magic dollar number that provides any guarantee of the outcomes.

Sarah Reber [00:33:11] Thanks. I was going to go to Esser.

Marguerite Roza [00:33:13] Yeah. Can I just say that NERD's data are open and publicly available. So they're called NERDs data, National Ed Resource Database on school spending. They're on the Edunomics website at Georgetown, they are available state by state for anybody who wants to analyze them for all 50 states. So please help us do the research.

Sarah Reber [00:33:37] Thank you. Thanks for that. Yeah. So I was going to go to Esser, which I'll do in a second, but I want to, I want to follow up on what, what Marguerite was talking about. So just to think more about, you know, with these new data and this discussion, whether we should be focused on where and how the money flows or other kinds of issues. So, Mike, I know you've done work arguing, I think, convincingly for the benefits of a diverse educator workforce. And there's been this longstanding discussion about the importance of teachers in general and some of the barriers, many of which I think are not about funding to getting the most effective teachers in the neediest schools.

Recently, there has been, I don't know if folks have watched, heard the Sold a Story podcast, which has brought attention to the widespread use of discredited reading curricula, which, you know, is bad for everyone, but higher income parents and I speak from experience here, often can compensate for these things. And so this, these kinds of issues become critical equity issues. So and there's a lot of issues like this. And so I guess on the, the general question is how do we balance the focus on the money and where the money flows and sort of addressing these other issues? How do they connect?

And so maybe, Mike, we'll start with you, if, if you want to speak to the teacher diversity question, what, what could we be doing to, to improve on that front or other aspects? And then, Richard, maybe you could speak and then Marguerite, if you had any anything more to add over what what you have you've just mentioned on this. That would be great.

Michael Hansen [00:35:06] Thanks. This is a great question. First, I do want to reiterate what Marguerite just said and specifically in response to your question, Sarah. What can we be doing about teachers? And the first is that just doing a little bit more with money is not enough. And we do need to have a robust set of policies in place to help promote and ensure a, a robust pipeline that is feeding the teacher workforce. Because we have, you know, we're constantly churning through teachers and we are constantly having retirees, we're having people who, who have done a great job in the classroom, and they want to do something else. And so we need to replace them.

And so, you know, it's sort of a beast that needs a lot of feeding. And we need to make sure that we have pipelines in place to really help train quality teachers and get them into the classroom. On that point now, especially about teacher diversity, we do know that racially diverse teachers really do impact student outcomes in important ways. The, the great news about educator diversity is that in

general, they do tend to be concentrated. They are already relatively concentrated in high need, in high need settings. And so schools that serve high shares of Black or Latino kids, you know, tend to have a teacher workforce that is, you know, much more representative of the students they serve than your typical, your typical school will be on average.

Now but that, but however, there's a hitch. That doesn't mean that all, that all schools that are serving Black or Latino kids have a representative workforce. And we really need to be doing I, I, my coauthors and I, we recently published a book, and we argue that we should be doing a lot more to conceptualize and think about how we can use teacher race as an element of teacher quality. And we argue that there's a, there's a really good empirical foundation for this, too. We know that matching, matching when a student of color sees a teacher who looks like them in the front of the classroom, we see a lot of important student outcomes go up. So this is test scores, this is high school graduation. This is likelihood of going to college. This is also, also things like your likelihood of being selected for gifted and talented, your reductions in absences, reductions in, you know, suspensions from the classroom, those kinds of things.

And so there's a lot of different positive outcomes that are associated with, with long term, with long term benefits to these kids. And we do need to do more to bring diverse teachers into the workforce. And one thing that we do that, that we should be doing, and this is I just sort of say this as a final point, is that we could be, you know, tapping into pools of talent that we already have in schools. And so these are, these are often called grow your own programs, or at least excuse me, grow your own programs, often tap into paraprofessionals or teacher's aides who are already working in schools.

But maybe they just don't have, they haven't finished their bachelor's degree, they haven't quite done all the requirements in order to become a full-fledged teacher. And so many of these programs are trying to identify and work with paraprofessionals in these settings, they tend to be they, they also tend to be more representative of the students that they're working with. And this is a source of diverse, of racially diverse teachers into the workforce. This is something that we should be doing more of. There are various programs across the country, but we need to sort of be multiplying those by ten to really feed the, the needs for racial diversity that we have in the workforce.

Richard Bowman [00:38:55] So thank you for that. And I, I did just want to go back and touch on, you know, when the question is how much do we need to kind of right all of the wrongs that exist,

it's hard to kind of say, you know, there is a need there. But with that said, it's as money is insufficient to, to handle it. That is absolutely right. We have to make sure we are not wasting money as well. And I think that there is one risk that can happen where the outliers that are sort of beating the odds rather than being an inspiration become a cudgel to and to all of the other schools who have to who have significant needs that they simply don't have enough.

And I would say, you know, touching on the teacher quality, this is a huge, huge, huge issue. We've had teacher shortages for years, every single year. And it's always, you know, in the high-needs areas, the math, the science areas where students who have, students in colleges who have those type of skills have many other opportunities kind of thrown at them. And I don't know that, you know, the traditional more one size fits all salary scales really helps us as far as targeting the areas of most need and bringing those in there. And that might be something to look at, but one of the things that this conversation has, is bringing up to me, it's the role of governance and how, if you're speaking of this or this at the federal level, it's a different conversation than speaking of it at the state level, because the states have a substantial role to play in education. And there are those who would argue that the feds have very little role to play and maybe they should, should not play the role that they are playing.

But I will push one more thing onto there, which is the role of local governance as well. So while I might have my own beliefs about equity and whether particular programs, you know, jazz or science or magnet schools, I might have my own ideas about whether those are valued and valuable, other individuals in the community and the community as a whole and communities across the state can make different decisions. And so to what extent, and I just, it's I do believe that having a community voice is very valuable when determining the type of educational services that a school district is providing and just don't want to lose that particular lens.

Finally, the grow your own programs. I think they're awesome and amazing and we should have them. And they're a great source of, they're a great source of that additional diversity. You can simultaneously have the most diverse students and you can teach them to help, to help others. And that's one of the most rewarding things.

Marguerite Roza [00:42:23] So I saw in that pre-submitted questions that Ramona had asked about property taxes and, can we, you know, how do we move away from those? And I just want to point out that property taxes affect allocations across districts, but they have nothing to do with

inequities within districts. And most states chip in a lot of money on top of property taxes. And so you see the state playing the role of trying to level that out. The Urban Institute has some great data visualization state by state that you can look up to see. But I think we've seen a good amount of progress over the last few decades on across district inequities, not enough and not in every state, but some, some progress there. And but within districts, I think we're still looking at this, and Saul at KSU is asking, what does this look like over time? And honestly, since the data are new, we really actually don't know.

I can tell you that we pulled data from different districts individually and watched them over time. One thing that does seem to be, the districts we've watched look like they're getting more progressive. Then again, we've hammered them with data, so they might be responding to that, the fact that they've had data out longer. And Nubia in New Jersey asked, what are some of the common mistakes that you see, rookie mistakes— I love that question— from districts and budgeting and they're, one of them especially related to this is not factoring in the school-by-school effects.

So if you go out and do a 6% pay raise, you just gave more money to your advantaged schools because they have more senior teachers and a percentage raise brings more money to them. So you just made it worse. So you really want to, you really want to line it up. What are the school-by-school effects of what you're doing?

And the second one is not asking what does this investment do for the kids we're trying to serve? And if you can't answer that, like what specific outcomes we're expecting to see, we would count that as a rookie mistake. We dig into that a lot with our certificate in ed finance. So if you're looking for some skill building in that area, consider that program.

Sarah Reber [00:44:42] Okay, great. So I think we'll, we'll shift to some, to taking some questions from the audience. Marguerite's already gotten us started on that a little bit. So. So Julie Whitman of the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana, she she writes, an unprecedented amount of federal funding has flowed to schools under the various COVID relief bills, and much of it is still unspent. What should policymakers be thinking about to ensure that school districts have the capacity to use these funds that are available to them? What needs to be in place to get from new funding to better outcomes?

So in general, can we, let's talk a little bit about what's going on with Esser, the COVID funds, we've seen some reporting that districts are struggling to spend the money. Is that your impression?

And, and what more could be done to try to ensure that these, these funds are spent well. So maybe we can start with Marguerite and then Richard and, and then Mike.

Marguerite Roza [00:45:46] So I first, first and foremost, there's some new data on the pace of spending. So districts were behind on their spending at the end of last school year. On a national average, most states have really upped the pace of spending on Esser, and now are spending all told altogether something like \$5 billion a month, which at that pace will spend down all the Esser. I don't think getting any more, that there's any case to be made, that there's going to be money left over at the end. What we're seeing now is starting the school year really a high rate of spend. So first and foremost on that.

Second, I just want to be clear that not everybody agrees on what Esser is for. You know, there wasn't a clear, it's for this. And so people are saying, well, they ought to spend it well, well, toward what? Some of them are saying, I'm doing a good job of updating my facility and other ones are saying I'm doing a good job of bringing up all my weight, my employee groups up on comparable pay to our neighboring districts. And some might be saying we're trying to diversify the workforce or offer more activities. For me, getting kids back on track academically and reengaged in school would be a priority. But I say that's for me, and there isn't broad agreement on that.

So for, for those of you who are worried about how the money is spent, I would say dive in and talk with people about what is, what are we trying to accomplish with this money? Let's try to get on the same page and then let's measure if we're making progress. So if you say, I want to get kids reengaged in school and handle their social and emotional health, well, then let's see if attendance is coming back up and if it's working on some of those things, because there's still a lot of time for midcourse corrections and we should make them if we're not seeing progress on our outcomes.

Michael Hansen [00:47:44] So reaching back to the— thank you for that, Marguerite— how can policymakers help districts spend money? I think the districts are going to figure that one out fairly, fairly expeditiously. I don't know a single district that really wants to turn around and hand money back. I think the bigger question is, is what Marguerite's touching on, which is how to spend that money well. There were districts that, you know, districts that try. So the challenge is any strategy that relied fairly heavily on finding new people or even paying people substantially more is going to be very, it's very difficult to pull off because the labor shortage, it's hard to find people who want to work extra, additional or more in this, in this time.

So we have seen, at least in my district, we have seen that, that we're having to shift our spending towards things that we can actually, that we can, can spend on. One of the, a couple of the highlights, so technology. Training. Out-of-School time, tutoring slash wraparound services, Mr. Marcus Ransom asked a question about community schools. So having community schools, having partners and funding that is also areas, so these are all areas that we've been looking at and I don't know, we, you know, the challenge with education is that you can't go back in time and do a random controlled trial on whether your decision was the right decision. And you can just look at the your best efforts and try to make the best decision that you can at the time with the data and information that you have.

Marguerite Roza [00:49:48] Can I just respond that I think that's not enough. I mean, I think we need to be month by month looking for signs of progress. And if it's through attendance, if it's with the, districts have access to a lot of data. I mean, we now, we now have tools of tracking math and reading and things like that. I don't think we, we need to wait to next year to see if it's it, I guess my urge, I have some urgency and I would impress on that on districts try try to, try to look now as you go. I mean, are the kids showing up for tutoring? Do we see that they're making it through the content? Do we, you know, let's go back and measure these things a little bit more along the way, I think.

Sarah Reber [00:50:27] Mike, I'm gonna skip you on this question and go and put another question to you from, from, from Moira Linehan, Missouri, from the office of U.S. Senator Jack Reed. And she asks, could you discuss the relationship between the condition of school facilities on school finance and educational equity?

Michael Hansen [00:50:46] Yeah, thanks. It's a great question. A couple of things to note is that, first off, we do know that schools that serve higher shares of disadvantaged students, they tend to have lower school facility quality. And so this, this is, this was, there was a lengthy GAO report that was put out a couple of years back that identifies, that documents the various ways that this happens during the during the pandemic, there was a lot of schools that did upgrade HVAC systems, which was a very high area of need. But presumably we still have, there was a lot of outstanding issues, not just HVAC, but, but there are many places that still do have needs in school facilities. So, so yes, there is an equity issue around the quality of school building, quality of school facilities that does need to, need to be addressed.

But I will say this, that there are, this study from Jackson and a coauthor whose the last names who I don't recall at the moment, they were looking at the, the impact of, of how school facility, of how money matters in education. And they looked at money spent on school facilities separately from money not spent on school facilities. And in general, yes, money does matter. It matters a lot more if it's not spent on school facilities. And so that's not to say that school facilities are irrelevant. We know that they are, especially in in places where, you know, there are safety issues that are at play, you know, you know, making sure that we have good, you know, a good source of water, you know, that buildings are comfortably, climate controlled, etc. But, but in general, you know, spending more money for a nicer basketball stadium or basketball court may not necessarily have a high impact. But, but these, but it does, it does matter. Even, even there are places where it does matter still there. Yeah.

Sarah Reber [00:52:48] Oh, go ahead, Richard.

Richard Bowman [00:52:49] Yeah, if I could just jump in on that one thing. Yeah. So I loved how you said it's not that dollars spent on school facilities don't matter, it's just that dollars spent elsewhere might matter more. And I'd say that it, you know, until you have, until you have the building becoming the problem for the education, like maybe there's this return to school facilities that that is, you know, very much nonlinear, where if most of it's all fine, you can have just education working. But once you have leaks and drips and smells and other types of issues, like maybe it's not so much that the kids can't continue to learn expeditiously.

Sarah Reber [00:53:34] I'll just take the liberty of adding a quick point on this, that I think we have a lot of evidence now that that heat affects learning adversely. And we have a lot of schools in places where all of the commercial buildings have central air conditioning and only the administrative offices in the schools have air conditioning and the school year, the school buildings are being used all, all year round. And I think and then with the pandemic, we've really learned that the, you know, having, having good air quality in the schools is important, important to prevent the spread of disease. I think that in places where the HVAC is out of line with what would be in a regular building, that could be a good investment. But Marguerite, do you want to add anything on the facilities point?

Marguerite Roza [00:54:25] No. I'll pass on that one.

Sarah Reber [00:54:28] Okay. Let me go to a question from Crystal Olmedo from the San Diego Center for Children. And what she asked is, how can we find a balance between filling gaps

that have become more transparent during our struggles with COVID and continue to meet the needs of students and educators who may be disadvantaged? And Marguerite, you want to start?

Marguerite Roza [00:54:46] Yeah, I saw Crystal's question. And so it's just sort of saying they seem like two maybe competing goals, address equity or really take care of the deep needs. And I would say, first of all, sort of related to some of the questions we got from others like Loretta, like how do we go and resolve these inequities? And Aaliyah saying, should we use the federal money to address the inequities? And for all of those questions, I, I think I would say, first of all, let's try not to seek to see them as distinct, separate priorities. So if you have a school that you're spending less on and you want to go level them up with some sort of funding, also ensure that that, those additional dollars are delivering the remedy that the kids need for the outcomes. So I would see them in parallel and you might see the kids who are furthest behind— you can't do everything on equity in one year— but you might look at where the kids are furthest behind and target your equity remedies to those places so you're, you're getting a twofer, I guess, on that sense.

And Aaliyah, you know, sure, target your federal money, but, you know, that money runs out. And and when that money runs out, if you're going back to an inequitable system before, that you had before, you really haven't done anything for the long haul. So you might think about investments that, you know, that can get kids back up to speed now so that at the end of Esser, they're, they're performing on grade level with their peers. I would really try to do, to solve those problems. We know that our highest needs kids fell the furthest behind during the pandemic. So if you think about inequity in an achievement agenda as is really targeting the groups that are furthest behind, I think you can get them, you know, to be one and the same.

And lastly, Laura, Loretta was asking, how do we resolve these inequities like bigger, broader challenge? I think a lot of people have hoped that these data would be one way to engage people on resolving them. I'm, I'm optimistic about that. I think the transparency, we're getting new tools out there that allow you know, if anybody wants to follow up with me afterwards, I can show you exactly where the tools are for your district to see how spending varies across your school, really fancy graphs that can do that. Bringing those to a board meeting, I think it helps. There's question about whether policy is a good lever, we have questions on comparability. Those have faced some pretty steep headwinds in terms of popular opinion, I'm not completely convinced we can get it done through federal fiat.

I think really, you know, seeing the progress that we're seeing districts make is optimistic. But I think the last piece is training. And most people will finish their, their training in education and not know much about these equities or how to resolve them. We, you know, Edunomics do the certificate program really targeted to districts to try to help them learn that. But we've got to, we've got to help prepare people to address these issues for the long haul. It's not a slow, it's not a quick remedy.

Sarah Reber [00:57:58] Okay. So we're actually just coming up on time, so I'm not going to be able to put that question to Richard and Mike, but in the time we have left, maybe 45 seconds each. Richard, then Mike, then Marguerite on some, some quick closing thoughts.

Richard Bowman [00:58:18] Yeah. So, so my closing thought with this one is that making changes in this regard, it's great to have the data. We've, my district has used the data from Edunomics lab and we've kind of sent some folks to training and it has helped our budgeting conversations. But what it takes is a lot of very hard work and focus and kind of a dedication to equity and pushing against the systems that are in place that are all kind of conspiring almost to keep things as they are. So you really have to focus on change management and kind of lead and leading that change and helping everyone in the leadership see and agree that we need to do something better, we need to do something different for our children that we serve.

Michael Hansen [00:59:15] And I just want to say thank you to everyone for participating. So the Brown Center, of course, we're, you know, put on, we did the research and we, you know, are hosting the event. But it's really great to have you. So thank you to everyone here, I just want to make sure that's clear. But and as for final thoughts, let me say that just to reiterate our points, that equity is really important. I do appreciate the value of this new data and how it's highlighting these inequities within districts.

This is is, is excellent point, though I also just feel that we do need to maintain a focus, especially on the teacher side— I'm a teacher guy— we want to maintain a focus on policies that are going to continue to strengthen the teacher workforce, that are going to continue to provide equitable access across districts, across schools, and even within schools so that students can have access to high quality teachers that can help them thrive and grow in the future.

Sarah Reber [01:00:17] Well, great. So that wraps up today's event. Thank you for joining us, panelists, and thanks to our audience members and those who sent in questions. Finally, we also want to acknowledge financial support from the Gates Foundation in enabling the Brown Center to

conduct this work and hold the seminar. And a final thank you to Catalina Navarro and Trevor Bryan for event support. Have a great day, everybody.