



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on April 27, 2011

Heritage Foundation: Racial Disparity In School Funding A Myth

A disparity in public education funding does not explain the racial achievement gap among students, a report from the Heritage Foundation found.

“The Myth of Racial Disparities in Public School Funding” may be the most politically incorrect document Heritage has ever published.

The abstract [of the study](#) explains the conclusions of Heritage analyst Dr. Jason Richwine:



Achievement disparities among racial and ethnic groups persist in the American education system. Asian and white students consistently perform better on standardized tests than Hispanic and black students. While many commentators blame the achievement gap on alleged disparities in school funding, this Heritage Foundation paper demonstrates that public education spending per pupil is broadly similar across racial and ethnic groups. To the extent that funding differences exist at all, they tend to slightly favor lower-performing groups, especially blacks. Since unequal funding for minority students is largely a myth, it cannot be a valid explanation for racial and ethnic differences in school achievement, and there is little evidence that increasing public spending will close the gaps.

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What the Study Shows

[Richwine demolishes](#) the conventional thinking on education; i.e., that “disparities” in funding are the reason blacks and Hispanics do not perform as well in school as whites and Asians.

Writes Richwine:



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A common hypothesis is that Hispanic and black students perform worse in school because less money is spent on them. In 1995, Columbia University's Linda Darling-Hammond claimed, "The resources devoted to the education of poor children and children of color in the U.S. continue to be significantly less than those devoted to other American children ... and it is these inequalities that create and sustain the 'bell curve' of differential achievement."

Part of the NAACP's official statement on education policy reads: "Quality public education for African American and Latino students is persistently threatened as a direct result of inequitable school funding."

Responding in 2001 to criticism that blacks and Hispanics perform poorly on the SAT, College Board President Gaston Caperton declared, "Tests are not the problem.... The problem we have is an unfair education system in America — an unequal education system."

In fact, [Richwine proves](#), an "unequal education system" is not the problem, and if the system is "unequal," its inequality favors blacks and Hispanics, not whites.

"Nationwide," [Richwine shows](#), "raw per-pupil spending is similar across racial and ethnic groups."

The small differences that do exist favor non-white students. After breaking down the data by region, the non-white funding advantage becomes more pronounced. In the Northeast, for example, blacks receive over \$2,000 more than whites in per-pupil funding per year. The region with the smallest differences is the South, where spending on black and Hispanic students is only slightly higher than on whites.

Adjusted for cost of living, the differences narrow. Asian and Hispanic students receive slightly less money than whites overall, while blacks receive slightly more. Regional differences persist after the adjustment, especially in the Northeast.

Close scrutiny of Richwine's figures reveal some numbers that would surprise anyone accustomed to reading the ceaseless complaint that minorities are shortchanged in education funding.

Nationally, per-pupil public education spending on whites is \$10,816. On blacks, it is \$11,387. Hispanics also get more money per capita than whites on a national level: \$10,951. Asians get the most money at \$11,535. In short, contrary to popular myth, white students get the short end of the stick when it comes to per capita spending across the country.

Regionally, the differences, [Richwine reports](#), are greatest in the Northeast, where per capita spending on black pupils far exceeds that of white students. Blacks pupils receive \$16,773 per capita versus \$14,521 for whites, a difference of \$2,252. At \$16,994, Hispanics get \$2,473 more than whites while Asians receive \$1,674 more, or \$16,195. Hispanics receive more money per capita than any other racial group in the Northeast.

These figures, unadjusted for cost of living, hold true across the country. In every region, white students are funded at a lower level than all other racial groups. When adjusted for cost of living, only in the South are black and white students equal in funding. Elsewhere, again, black students receive more spending per capita than whites. Hispanics and Asians receive either more money than whites when the figures are adjusted, or just a percentage point or two less.

Richwine's datasets came from the federal Department of Education.

[Richwine avers](#) that these data prove something the educationists won't want to hear: that tossing more money at education in the hope of raising test scores for black and Hispanic students is a mistake and



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won't accomplish anything. "It is a mistake to assume that funding increases for public schools can close the achievement gap," he writes. "Purchasing more educational resources is a popular idea, but rigorous studies on reduced class sizes, graduate degrees for teachers, and enhanced amenities in schools suggest little or no impact on student achievement."

Although it is often blamed for the racial achievement gap, unequal school funding is largely a myth. Per-pupil spending in the U.S. is broadly similar across racial and ethnic groups. If any one group enjoys an advantage in funding, it is black students, especially in the Northeastern states. Group differences in school achievement cannot be the result of an unequal commitment of resources to minority students, and simple increases in public school funding are not likely to close the gaps.

Richwine does not discuss what accounts for the persistent and seemingly ineradicable achievement gap between Asian and white students and black and Hispanic students.



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