Funding and Scholastic Equity: A Study and Comparison of Selected Timer City and Suburban Schools in the City of Long Beach

An anthropological field project incorporating statistical data, ethnographic research and personal interviews

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Introduction

Long Beach is the fifth largest city in California. It has a population of 487,100 and it spans across fifty-two square miles. Not only is Long Beach one of the largest cities in California, measured by its total population and land mass, but it is also one of the most diverse cities when measured by the vast number of nationalities it represents. It is no surprise that Long Beach’s public schools are as diverse as the city. In some ways, the public schools of Long Beach represent its present and future growth as a largely diversified city. In order to serve a group of students both economically and ethnically diverse, it is necessary for the Long Beach school district to promote and adhere to equitable funding for their public schools. In such a diverse environment, how is equitable school funding recognized and practiced? When assessing the quality of life issues in Long Beach, it is essential to take into consideration the state of its public school funding and exactly how that funding relates to the quality of education the students in Long Beach receive.

This is the question the authors of this paper have attempted to answer through an in depth analysis and research of the issue. This paper seeks to identify the various types of funding the Long Beach Unified School District receives and allots to their public elementary schools. The reason for choosing a sampling of elementary schools is to emphasize the importance of the primary education received at such schools which will in turn provide insight into the quality of education a child receives in subsequent years and ultimately will reflect their overall academic achievement. Taking a step further in the research to answer questions concerning how well equitable school funding is achieved with a larger sampling representative of Long Beach’s schools and large
population, it would be necessary to do extensive comparison of more than the four schools surveyed in this paper.

In order to analyze such an abstract topic, it is vital to understand that school funding is defined as the monies that local, state, and federal governments endow to a school district. From the school district, the money is then disbursed to the district's schools. These funds are distributed in accordance with an individual school's needs stemming from its geographic area, its students' socio-economic status, test scores, and the number of students in attendance. Therefore, a quality education might be measured by learning opportunities afforded to the students through funding based on how well the school's specific educational needs are met.

Because the city of Long Beach is so diverse in terms of socio-economics and ethnicity, it is imperative to examine and research the different services and resources available to all its citizens. In order to provide an accurate analysis of education in the city of Long Beach, it is essential to study and compare both inner city and suburban schools, while limiting this research to four schools, since four schools allows for a more focused approach to the issue, as Long Beach contains approximately 100 elementary schools. Consequently, this will assist us in determining what factors are critical to students' performance and eventually to their success.

**Origin of the District Plan**

Long Beach Unified School District was founded in 1885. Because of the growth of the Long Beach community, schools became necessary and thus there was a need for the formation of Long Beach Unified School District, its governing body and the board of trustees. The purpose of LBUSD, as stated in the Mission Statement,
is to insure the educational success of all students by having high expectations, a
commitment to excellence, and a comprehensive program, confirming the belief that all
students can learn and become responsible, productive members of a competitive society.
(lbusd.kl 2.ca.gov).

Contacts with Clients

In addition to a quantitative aspect of this research, qualitative fieldwork provides
a firsthand perspective of how funding is effectively handled from the district to the four
schools specified in this research. The schools selected for this research are named
schools "A" and "B" as being inner city schools, and schools "C" and "1)" as being
suburban schools. The majority of qualitative research used in this paper has derived
from contact with administration and personnel at the four schools.

The Program Facilitator at school "A" ensures that programs at the school are
sustained by the appropriate amount of funding. At school "B" the program facilitator
shares in the responsibilities that the Facilitator at school "A" has. School "C" contact
was made with both the Principal and the Secretary of the school. All Principals of the
schools are empowered with the decision making positions concerning funds distributed.
The Secretary meanwhile, sees that all administrative duties are accomplished, and
therefore was able to provide information regarding some of the basic characteristics of
the school. School "D", as with school "C", was contacted via the Principal.

In addition to visiting the four schools selected, contact was also made with Long
Beach Unified School District administration. Initial contact at the school district was
made with three School Board members, and all were interviewed. For the purpose of this
paper and the board members' confidentiality, the three board members will be titled
"Board Member 1", "Board Member 2", and "Board Member 3". And while these Board members were accessible in assisting with the qualitative research of this project, other LBUSD administration was not as willing to help further this research and disclose information. In an attempt to hear the voice of the teachers in Long Beach, an association representing teachers was contacted, specifically the Assistant Executive Director. The interview at the teacher's association was unsuccessful in representing the teachers' voices, so it was helpful to solicit information at teachers' supply stores where Long Beach teachers frequent.

A well rounded collection of qualitative data also includes the media's handling of the issue. To provide this aspect of the research, contact was made with a Long Beach newspaper journalist whose writings and columns deal with the topic of school funding in Long Beach.

**Financing**

Long Beach Unified School District functions with the support of federal, state, local, and donated or granted monies. Federal funds are called Title I funds. These funds are defined as:

…grants [that are] intended to help elementary and secondary schools establish and maintain programs that will improve the educational opportunities of educationally disadvantaged children who live in school attendance areas with high concentrations of children from low-income families. The funds are intended to provide instruction and instructional support for these disadvantaged children so they can master challenging curricula and meet State standards in core academic subjects (U.S Department of Education 2003: 6).

Title I funding is used in the United States to serve "2 million students with limited English proficiency, 1.2 million students with disabilities, and more than 100,000
children identified as homeless" (U.S. Department of Education). In order for a school to receive these funds, the school must exhibit that seventy-five percent or more of their students are qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The majority of Title I funds are used for instruction, supporting or hiring additional teachers and instructional aides, instructional materials, computers, and support for other instructional programs and resources. These funds are intended to equalize a school's resources in both high and low poverty schools by financially supporting districts with greater needs which may receive fewer funds from state and local governments.

State funding and categorical funds are distributed according to the students' attendance at the school, class size, and various other specific categories. An example of state funds,

The State Instructional Materials Fund Realignment Program (IMFRP) is the source of funding for textbooks. The Long Beach Unified School District allocation is based upon the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) reported in April of the previous fiscal year. The IMFRP allocation is approximately $25 per student. Governing guidelines for IMFRP funding require that a basic textbook be provided to every student in each of the core subject areas of Language Arts, Mathematics, History Social Science, and Science. These guidelines also prioritize the order in which the district must meet this mandate (Dominguez 2004: 1).

A school may also receive funds raised by the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or from donations made by parents. The PTA funds are most commonly used for the supplemental needs at a school, such as fieldtrips, reading progress incentives, graduation activities, etc. The PTA raises these funds by selling food products, I.D. bracelets, books, or having on campus carnivals for families to attend and donate money. Some schools have money donated directly to them by the parents of students in attendance. This
money can either be given directly to teachers to purchase supplies for the classroom or special projects; or it can be given to the PTA.

After establishing the criteria and uses of Federal, State, and Local funds a school in Long Beach Unified School District may receive, examining schools "A", "B", "C", and "D" in respect to how their funds are used has provided a means to determine equitable funding within the schools. School "A", an inner city school, attempts to reduce its class sizes by having a year round schedule. Kindergarten through third grade classrooms have an average of 20:1 student and teacher ratio. Fourth through fifth grade classes average of 30:1 student and teacher ratio. Students are provided with text books and related academic materials for core curriculum. The text books are adopted on a five to seven year cycle. They are selected in order to have one book per student, and additional class sets are also purchased. School "A" is staffed with a full-time nurse, a full-time librarian, a part-time media assistant, a full-time resource specialist, an instrumental teacher, a speech therapist, school psychologist, and a vocal teacher. There are also two community workers who speak Spanish and Khmer and who work with the school's students, parents, and faculty. This school has a student population of 1,223. Nineteen percent of the student population is African American, fifty-nine percent are Hispanic or Latino, ten percent are Asian, three percent are Pacific Islander, one percent Filipino and six percent White (Not Hispanic). The Program Facilitator at school "A" noted that the majority of these students are living in an impoverished neighborhood, many born addicted to drugs, or are first generation immigrants; and they are surrounded by gang violence in their homes and neighborhoods. Many of these students come to school hungry, and when hunger is combined with the various other adverse conditions a
child may be experiencing, he or she may struggle to perform adequately on a consistent basis.

Based on these factors, school "A" receives one million dollars, a majority of which is Federal Title I money. This is determined by the overwhelming number of students who receive free or reduced price lunch, and represent a low or high poverty level. In order for this school to receive significant State and Local funds in addition to these Title I funds, the school's Academic Performance Index scores would have to be above 800. In 2004, the API base score for school "A" was 735; therefore, school "A" did not qualify for State or Categorical funds. It is because school "A" s low test scores, that the Title I funds from the Federal government supplement what is lacking in State funds to the school. The Program Facilitator at this school also indicated that the school is striving to meet the immediate needs of the students. While they are provided one field trip a year as an enrichment activity, the Facilitator emphasized the crucial investment made towards the special academic needs and extra attention given to the large group of struggling students at the school. This is how school "A" spends their money. They do not provide a large number of enrichment programs, and thus focus on the students' mastering of the basic instructional skills. This school sets a large priority on the academic needs of its students, while sacrificing the possibility of extra enriching activities.

School "B", a traditional inner city elementary school, has a student population of 1,061 students. This school is staffed with forty-eight classroom teachers, a reading recovery teacher, four literacy coaches, two full-time intersession teachers, a computer technology specialist, a resource specialist, a speech and language specialist, a librarian, a
nurse two days a week, and a psychologist two days a week. However, this school has difficulty in retaining its teachers, as many of them leave after a short time of employment. Text books and other materials are adopted on a five to seven year cycle. The student population is composed of eighteen percent African-American, sixty-nine percent Hispanic or Latino, eleven percent Asian, and one percent White. The Program Facilitator at school "B" recognized that the students at this school have issues beyond academic struggles. They are from low socio economic communities, affected by gang violence, lack medical care, severe language challenges, and most compelling for this elementary school is the existing racial tension among the students. Based on the information gathered from school "A" and school "B", both inner city schools, it is apparent while school "A" receives one million dollars in funds and school "B" approximately $626,000, school "B" demonstrates an urgency and need for both funding and academic assistance that exceeds what their funds can supply.

School "B" receives 626,000 from federal Title I funds. For the required API base score of a minimum 800, school "B" in 2004 received 691 points, not meeting minimum score for eligibility of State awarded money. A huge portion of school "B"s funds go towards funding a technologically advanced educational program aimed to improve the academic advancement of its students. This program is a major expense, but the school finds it necessary to employ such a program in hopes that the students will improve test scores. With this necessary program and expense, school 'B" still finds itself in a financial crisis. The school has resorted to asking businesses and organizations in the community to donate money to help the school to provide bare necessities. A letter addressed to donor reads,
Public schools are in a financial crisis like we have never seen before in our school's history. Our students do not even have the basic school supplies that we have been able to provide in the past... We have therefore launched a new fundraising campaign... (Letter School "B" 2005: 1).

Some of the funds requested will go towards purchasing organization tools for students, paper, pencils, markers, and glue sticks.

School "C", a traditional California distinguished school and U.S. Blue Ribbon school of excellence is located in a suburb of Long Beach. The average class size between kindergarten through third grade is twenty students. And, fourth through fifth grade class size is an average of thirty students. The teachers at school "C" have extensive degrees that exceed the bachelor's or teaching credential. In fact, school "C" retains two Doctorate holding teachers, and sixteen teachers have Master's degrees. The staff includes a resource specialist teacher, an adaptive P.E. teacher, a speech therapy teacher, a computer teacher, a district psychologist, a librarian, a school nurse, a school community worker, and a bilingual instructional aid. The student population is made up of fifty-three percent White, twenty-four percent Hispanic or Latino, eleven percent African-American, eight percent Asian, and three percent Filipino. The student population is a total of 882 students. The office assistant at school "C" stated that students in attendance reside in high socio-economic status neighborhoods. There are no children being bussed in to school "C" from the inner city. There is a low population of English as second language students, less than one hundred have a second language barrier. School "C" provides three after school programs in addition to regular curriculum, an after school reading program, a state of the art IBM compatible computer lab, and extra tutoring in subjects. Based on the requirements to receive Title I funding,
school "C" does not qualify, but supplements what they lack in funds with an extremely supportive PTA. The school is doing well academically. And the principal stated that it seems like the school is being punished for doing well, as it does not receive a sufficient amount of State and Federal funds. There are not enough students at the school who receive free or reduced price lunch, thus school "C" must seek out funds from state allotted and PTA contributed funds. School "C"s API score of 834 qualifies the school for State Categorical funds, 54,000 dollars. In order to maintain its high quality educational environment, school "C" is complemented by a large PTA contribution and membership. The PTA at school "C" has a ninety to one hundred percent membership. According school's Accountability Report Card,

the PTA supports teachers and students with a variety of programs such as Art in the Schools, Meet the Masters, Read Aloud Daily, Reflections, and Science Enrichment. [The] PTA has also helped to fund useful items from playground equipment to computers (School "C" Accountability Report: 2005).

Another aspect of school "C" s excellence in performance derives from the partnership established by the school with local businesses. These businesses in turn support academic programs by donating services and goods. School "C" s students benefit from an exposure to both the businesses themselves and the inspiration they provide the students as mentors. Even though school "C" does not rely totally on Federal and State funds to provide an enriched academic environment to its children, it does find itself, much like the inner city school "B", requesting money from parents of fifth grade students. In a letter composed by the school's Endowment Committee it states,

until now, [school "C"] has been extremely fortunate in maintaining its superior staff, programs and offerings thus far, as a result of spending our budget wisely, which allowed us to carryover funds from year-to-year. The reduction of [school "C"s] budget for the 2005-06 school year means
cuts…
(Letter School "C": 2005).

This concludes that even a suburban school is affected by a greater issue, State budget cuts.

School "D" is a traditional school located in a suburban Long Beach neighborhood. The total enrollment of students is 814. The student population is comprised of thirteen percent African-American, fifty percent Hispanic or Latino, twenty-eight percent White, and seven percent Asian. It is important to this comparison of suburban and inner city schools to know that the majority of school "D" s students are bussed in from the inner city whose schools are too crowded to hold them. The classroom size for kindergarten through third grade is 20, and fourth and fifth grade classes have an average of thirty-three students. School "D"s faculty is comprised of a full-time counselor, an eighty percent nurse, a three-day librarian, a one-day media assistant, a district psychologist, and a speech therapist. The text books are adopted on a five to seven year cycle. They are selected in order to have one book per student, and additional class sets are also purchased. This school receives the majority of its funds from the Federal government's Title I program because it's bussed in students come from low socio-economic status. In total the school receives $407,000 Title I funds, State funds of 83,000 dollars, and English Learners funds (EIA) of 77,000 dollars. Much of school "D" s funding is used to support both academic and enrichment programs. These programs include a Meet the Master's Art program, computer lab and instruction, science lab, theater productions, instrumental instruction. With an API score of 730, school "D" qualifies only for federal funds, and therefore relies also on PTA funding.

Successes and Failures
After an examination of two inner city and two suburban Long Beach schools, it can be said that success and failures of the schools and district are measured by different factors depending on the school's needs. Factors such as the socio-economic status of students, school location, teacher retention and qualification, availability of Federal and State funds, API scores, PTA involvement, language accommodations, and the availability of enrichment activities and programs are monumental contributors to a school's measure of success and failure. The crux of a school's success in distribution of its allotted funds remains in the hands of the Principal. He or she has the ultimate authority in deciding how the money will be spent and how it will support the school's success while overcoming its failures. With this said, LBUSD really does not have much authority over how a school will spend its funds. Success in a school can be measured by how the school spends its money according to its specific needs. For example, success for inner-city school "B" is not achieved by implementing extensive enrichment programs when the students exemplify a dire need for supplemental tutoring in basic academic areas that challenge them. In contrast, success for suburban school "C" cannot be achieved through the funding of tutors for Spanish speaking-transitional students, but more so through enlightened and enriched programs that offer a challenge for an already proficient group of students.

Failure in LBUSD can be judged by the fact that are no apparent checks and balances when it comes to its school funding issues. While the school district recognizes where monies are spent in different schools, it does not determine the way the money is spent. This lack of accountability ripples into the schools by denying them liability that would prove effective when delegating funds for essential programs and enrichment.
Summary and Conclusion

By limiting this survey to only four schools, the authors do not imply that the schools examined are entirely representative of LBUSD's funding issues and quality education. There are certainly many limitations involved in the composition of the research and the collecting of resources and data. Part of this limitation comes from time constraints, lack of funds, and the overwhelming size and elements that are involved in funding and finding scholastic equity. The schools surveyed here were accessible by providing quality and first hand information. However, the LBUSD offices were hesitant to provide resources, data and assistance. As such, based on the compilation of sources acquired the authors find just cause in giving the Long Beach educational system a "C" because it is barely meeting the apparent needs of its students and schools.
Works Cited


Donation Letter School "C" 13 May 2005


Mission Statement Long Beach Unified School District www.lbusd.k12.ca.us 3 2005