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Smart Spending Will Close Education Gap

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By [The Day](#)

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A new report by the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now - ConnCAN - shows that if it were just a matter of spending money the gap between student performance in urban centers and in the suburbs would be rapidly closing. Unfortunately, it's not.

"Connecticut spends more money on education than almost any other state in the country, and our teachers are among the highest paid in America. The gap in spending between our city and suburban districts is among the smallest in the country," states the new report, "School Finance in Connecticut," available on the organization's Web site: www.conncan.org.

ConnCAN, created in 2005, is dedicated to bridging the chasm in school performance, calling it among "the most urgent social and economic problems facing Connecticut." Its objective assessment shows money alone is not the solution.

Despite the fact that education funding is now "relatively equally distributed" Connecticut continues to have the nation's largest achievement gap between poor and non-poor students. For example, only 12 percent of Bridgeport 10th-graders read at grade level, compared to 87 percent of students 10 miles away in Westport, notes the report. This gap persists despite increased state funding for cities to equalize education spending.

Thanks to state aid, New Haven last year spent \$13,883 per pupil compared to \$13,576 per pupil in affluent Fairfield, but Fairfield students performed far better on standardized tests. Students in affluent communities, of course, have the many advantages money can buy. And cities face more challenges - the need for school breakfast programs, after-school tutoring, reading intervention efforts - that can quickly burn through the resources they receive.

Yet, given the largely successful effort to equalize funding, the persistent and in some case growing performance gap is troubling.

It would be wrong to conclude that spending is not part of the solution. If cities do not have the resources to pay for quality teachers, supplies and programs, there is no hope of ever providing equal educational opportunities for all. The solution, then, is to invest money more effectively and efficiently and to award programs that work.

One problem noted in the report is that state funding does not adequately support magnet and charter schools, despite the success the schools have shown in improving student scores by mixing urban and suburban students. Many of these schools have waiting lists, but lack the resources to expand. If funding sources followed children to these successful schools it would provide them the ability to grow. Instead these schools must fight for every dollar they get, while money flows automatically to underperforming schools.

There can be no protected classes if Connecticut is to solve this problem. Public schools must reward and better utilize quality teachers and replace poor performers. And fostering parental responsibility and involvement must be a goal at all schools.

In releasing its report, ConnCAN announced the hiring of Marguerite Roza, whose work with the Center on Reinventing Public Education has earned her the reputation as a leading researcher on school financing and its results. Her work will result in policy recommendations for Connecticut before the end of the year.

We eagerly await her recommendations. Closing the performance gap is a daunting challenge, but one this state cannot afford to give up on.

"Regional"