



NEFA

National Education Finance Academy

The 11th Annual Conference of the National Education Finance Academy will be held April 5-9, 2021 at the Embassy Suites Tampa Convention Center in Tampa, Florida. We invite scholars, students, policymakers, and practitioners in the fields of P-12 education finance, higher education finance, economics of education, education law, and educational policy to join us in Tampa to engage in discussions about research, policy, and practice.

Conference Theme

The National Education Finance Association returns to Tampa, site of the first annual conference, as we embark on the second decade of our organization. We begin our second decade during an unprecedented time - our country is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and facing racial and political unrest. Equity has taken center stage as practitioners and policymakers contemplate finding balance between protecting the public health and providing an adequate system of public education. Because the pandemic has disproportionately impacted black and brown communities and people living in poverty, longstanding inequities have been magnified.

The economic hardships wrought by the pandemic have resulted in tremendous budget shortfalls across the fifty states. As recently as September 3, 2020, the National Conference on State Legislatures (NCSL) reports projected budget shortfalls in 37 of the 50 states. These shortfalls will impact funding for P-20 education which has yet to recover from cuts incurred during the great recession of 2008. Equity and the provision of an adequate education for all persons is the predominant issue facing practitioners and policymakers thus thrusting our discipline to the front of conversations surrounding education. Rather than return to pre-pandemic notions of equity, we suggest that what is needed is a ***complete reimagining of the system of education finance*** and a ***reconceptualization of what an equitable system of education means***. We call upon our membership to inform this high purpose of defining an equitable system of education by conducting and disseminating research around the theme ***In Pursuit of Equity***.

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Equity in Education

The concepts of equity, equality, adequacy, efficiency, and opportunity and the role of education in ensuring these rights to the citizenry have been part of the national political discourse since the founding of the republic. According to Jefferson, only an educated citizenry could know the truth and thus be free. He believed that education was the vehicle to ensure the survival of the republic and that the foundation of equality was a ‘moral sense’ which enabled individuals to understand right and wrong. Jefferson wrote, “the most certain, and the most legitimate engine of government’ is the provision of a basic education.” Later, Horace Mann, described the struggle of defining the purpose of education as well as the proper role of the state in supporting a system of education. Mann argued for the development of common schools that were built upon “our highest ideas of perfection itself” (p. 10). He noted that the failure to educate all children properly would have a devastating, and long-lasting effect upon society.

The system of higher education in the United States, which was largely regional, linked to the church and grounded in the European tradition during the colonial and post-revolutionary period, saw tremendous growth following the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862 leading to growth in the study of areas of strategic emphasis such as agriculture, mechanical, and military sciences while expanding programs in the liberal arts. Throughout subsequent eras, such as the gilded age (1870-1910) wherein graduate education was expanded and the AAU was created and the golden age (1945-1970) wherein federal funding for research was expanded to meet strategic goals of the federal government and junior colleges were expanded to increase access and transfer opportunities for undergraduate students, the role of higher education in sustaining the republic and in creating economic opportunity continued to evolve. At the close of the twentieth century, equity took center stage in the development of the system of higher education as the demographic profile of institutions changed with increased

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enrollment of women and students of color. Issues of equity and access are more pronounced in the higher education policy realm as resources are becoming more scarce and postsecondary education is more closely tied to economic well-being.

Measuring Equity

The quest to measure equity is foundational to the study of education finance. The study of finance equity has been iterative and has expanded to include terms such as equity, adequacy, sufficiency, efficiency, and equality of educational opportunity. Typically, an examination of the equity of a finance system has included inputs, outputs, or processes. The concepts of horizontal and vertical equity were described in the seminal work of Berne and Steifel (1984) who defined horizontal equity as equal treatment of equals and vertical equity as the differential treatment of individuals based on justifiable differences, such as socio-economic status or exceptionalities. The definition of vertical equity has later been expanded to denote adequacy (King, Swanson, & Sweetland., 2005; Ladd, 2008). Scholars have attempted to calculate the equity of finance systems using measures of dispersion such as the range, restricted range, federal range ratio, coefficient of variance, McLoone Index, and Versteegen Index. Attempts have been made to discern the alignment of resources with educational outcomes. Knoepfel and Della Sala (2013) introduced an equity ratio that combined finance and performance to discern the degree to which finance systems have been aligned by measures of student achievement. They asked, what is the equity of performance given equitable resources and created the equity ratio by dividing the coefficient of variance of student performance by the coefficient of variance of the finance model. Later, Houck and Knoepfel (2018) expanded upon this work to include an examination of weighted pupil expenditures in an attempt to draw conclusions as to the appropriateness of the weightings to improve equity.

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Lenses on Equity

Notions of equity, adequacy, opportunity and efficiency are codified in state constitutions thus allowing for a **judicial interpretation** lens on equity. Scholars have examined the language of education clauses and categorized states according to the duty to provide a system of education. These classifications range from weak clauses that simply establish a school system to clauses mandating a thorough and efficient school system. Furthermore, clauses contain language regarding the purpose and/or benefit of a quality education and that proclaim education to be a paramount duty or mandating other specific duties. Thro (1998) chronicled the three waves of school finance by focusing on the forum in which these challenges have taken place as well as the changed focus from resource equity to resource adequacy.

In most instances, school finance-related courts and advocates have based their arguments for equality of educational opportunity on notions of equity and adequacy. Gutmann (2007) examined equity through the lens of **equality of educational opportunity**. Equal educational opportunity may be interpreted as maximization, equalization, and meritocracy. Maximization interpretations find that the state should devote and distribute as many resources as necessary to schooling “in such a way as to maximize the life chances of all its future citizens.” (p. 236) On the other hand, equalization interpretations posit that the state should distribute resources in order to position all students, regardless of backgrounds and disadvantages, to achieve their educational goals. Lastly, meritocracy interpretations require the state to distribute resources to students that are proportional to their demonstrated abilities and willingness to learn.

Card and Kruger (1992) examined equity using an **economic lens** by studying the relationship between per pupil expenditures and college going rates and lifetime earnings. Their research found that there was a strong positive correlation between per pupil expenditures and both college going rates and

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lifetime earnings thus introducing postsecondary attendance as a variable used to study equity. Additionally, Chetty, Hendren, Kline, and Saez (2013) studied intergenerational income mobility. The authors calculated expected economic outcomes between children from high income and low income families and found significant correlations between intergenerational mobility and income inequality, economic and racial residential segregation, measures of school quality, social capital indices, and family structure. Interestingly, these same variables have been found to be correlated with lower achievement in schools.

In education finance cases, the terms equity, adequacy, and efficiency have been used interchangeably in education finance litigation thus allowing for the study of equity through an *efficiency lens*.

Economists define efficiency as the maximization of outputs given a certain set of inputs and offer two definitions of efficiency: technical efficiency and allocative efficiency. Technical efficiency refers to the maximization of outcomes given minimizing inputs while allocative efficiency is the maximization of outcomes given the optimal use of inputs (Ray, 2004).

Lastly, examinations of degree completion allow for an examination of equity through an *access lens*. As the population of the United States becomes increasingly more diverse, the demographics of the student body must reflect the diversity of our society if institutions of higher education are to achieve their mission of promoting democracy and social mobility. Zumeta, Breneman, Callan & Finney (2015) advocated for leadership and policies that reduced barriers to higher education that are based on race or ethnicity.

The Future of Equity

Despite tremendous reform efforts in state and federal accountability policy and a continued focus on equity in the literature, little has changed in the way that we fund P-12 education in the United States (Verstegen & Knoepfel, 2012). Nearly all state funding formulae include a foundation; the adjustments

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to the foundation that have been implemented to address equity have been weighted pupil expenditures. In higher education, states have implemented Performance Based Funding or Outcomes Based funding formulae at the state level, but the emerging literature reveals that these policy initiatives have done little to impact the decision making of individual institutions.

Equity remains elusive in the provision of education across the P-20 system. The 2020 Quality Counts School Finance Edition gave the nation a grade of C; 22 states were graded C- or D. A report published by the Education Law Center in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University noted that disparity in educational equity is driven by school finance formulae that fail to distribute adequate resources in support of education, especially in schools serving a disproportionate number of black and brown children and children experiencing poverty. Inadequate resources impact access to high-quality curriculum, classrooms, technology, and highly skilled teachers which traps children in a cycle of generational poverty and underemployment. An 'equity agenda,' which includes changed systems of state education funding, is needed to resolve inequitable opportunities and outcomes.

The Education Trust reports on inequitable educational outcomes in higher education. Arguing that a well-educated population and workforce will grow the economy and strengthen our democracy, the authors noted that the United States lags behind other developed countries in degree completion largely because of a failure to serve Black and Latinx students. According to their report, 47.1% of White Americans have completed an Associate's, Bachelor's or graduate degree as compared to 30.8% of Black Americans and 22.6% of Latinx Americans. These data are particularly alarming given the economic and social benefits associated with a college degree. The Education Trust has advocated for policies and practices, to include changes to funding for higher education, that reduce inequities in order to advance the public interest that all Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, are able to pursue and complete a college degree.

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The following questions are offered to stimulate thinking about the 2021 NEFA Conference and theme. Proposals addressing related themes and topics are also welcomed.

1. What is the impact of state budget shortfalls on state funding for K-12 schools and how do these projected shortfalls impact equity and adequacy?
2. Equity has been studied, measured, and interpreted through many different lenses: judicial, equality of educational opportunity, economic, efficiency, and access. What is the next horizon for education finance equity?
3. What collective action can be taken by scholars, practitioners, or policy makers to change resource allocation models at the school level to reduce inequities that have resulted from the pandemic and the economic downturn?
4. What is the impact of state budget shortfalls on funding models for higher education? How do reductions in state aid impact access to higher education and how are different populations impacted by these decisions?
5. How has the pandemic impacted budgets at the school level for institutions of higher education and what impact has that had on program offerings, student affairs, athletics, and extracurricular activities? Is there a difference in these impacts in public and private institutions or based on university mission?
6. How do P-20 educational funding policies impact economic growth? What improvements are suggested given studies showing limited social mobility, especially in the American South?
7. What are the current trends in school finance litigation? Will the pandemic result in a new 'suspect class' of plaintiffs?

Participants are invited to submit proposals for the following session types:

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Paper

A paper submission is an individual paper with one or more authors. These sessions are intended for reporting research results or analyzing issues of policy and practice related to educational finance. The proposal summary should include a statement of purpose, theoretical framework, findings, and conclusions. For research reports, also describe data sources and methods.

Symposia

A symposium provides an opportunity to examine specific research issues, problems, or topics from a variety of perspectives. Symposia may present alternative solutions, interpretations, or contrasting points of view on a specified subject or in relation to a common theme. Symposia may also use a panel discussion format targeted at a clearly delineated research issue or idea. Symposia may be quite interactive where a large portion of the session may be devoted to activities such as discussion among the presenters and discussants, questions and discussion among all those present at the session, or small-group interaction.

Roundtable Sessions

These sessions are intended to stimulate informal, lively discussions around topics of interest in the field of education finance. The roundtable session format allows maximum interaction with the presenters by eliminating the formal presentation format. Papers accepted for a roundtable session will be grouped by the program chair into tables with three to five papers per table clustered around shared interests. Each roundtable will have a designated chair who is knowledgeable about the research area to facilitate interaction and participation. The proposal should include an overview of the presentation, the concept/ideas to be discussed, context as discussed in the literature, structure of participant interaction, outline of questions to be addressed, and implication for the profession.

Workshops

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A workshop provides an opportunity to exchange information or work on a common problem, project, or shared interest. Presentations are brief, allowing adequate time for reflective discussion and interaction. The workshop format is designed for sessions that provide information relevant to the research on education finance and are specifically geared toward practitioners (e.g., obtaining research funding, translating policy in to practice, building school and district budgets to promote equity, building higher education budgets that promote access, or other areas of interest to our participants).

Workshop submissions are expected to include a chair.

Proposals

The deadline to submit proposals for the 11th Annual Conference of the National Education Finance Academy is **January 15, 2021**. Proposals will be submitted electronically on our new website:

<https://www.viethconsulting.com/members/proposals/propselect.php?orgcode=NEFA&prid=919845>. All proposals will be reviewed using blind review by members of the Conference Planning Committee. All presenting authors of accepted papers and all participants in accepted sessions (including session facilitators) are required to register for and attend the Annual Conference and to be present at the scheduled sessions. Submission is a commitment to attend the conference in Tampa. Participants will be notified of acceptance by **February 15, 2021**.

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