

Distributive Values

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Presentation to the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education, May 14, 2019

Based on:

Harry Brighouse, Helen Ladd, Susanna Loeb, and Adam Swift,
Educational Goods: Values, Evidence and Decision-Making (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

What do we want our schools to do?

- Standard answer in NC and the U.S.:

Raise student achievement

Typically as measured by scores on standardized tests

But that is far too narrow. Clearly we want schools to do more. But what? That is a matter of values.

What do we value and why?

We need some new language: Educational goods
(Childhood goods)

New Language: Educational goods

Def: The knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that enable an individual to flourish as an adult and to contribute to the flourishing of others.

Why “goods”?

Why “educational”?

Also: Childhood Goods.

Which knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions?

Those that promote the following capacities

- ✓ Economic productivity in the labor market
- ✓ Personal autonomy
- ✓ Democratic competence
- ✓ Healthy personal relationships
- ✓ Treating others with dignity and respect
- ✓ Personal fulfillment

Distributive principles

The need for clarity

The terms “equity” or “social justice” are too vague to be useful

Our preferred three principles

Adequacy – To what end?

Equality -- Equality of what?

Benefitting the less advantaged

Sometimes they work in the same direction. In other situations there are tradeoffs.

School Finance

Consider two levels of government.

The state – with funding responsibility for education.

The local level – districts (or schools)

Consider three funding decisions.

1. How much should the funding be differentiated among the local districts ?
2. How much autonomy/flexibility should the districts be given over their state funding?
3. Should the districts be permitted to supplement the state funds with local revenues?

Decision 1. Differentiated funding?

Should the state provide the same or different per pupil amounts to the various local districts?

Equality.

If goal is equal educational goods (think educational quality)
 Need to adjust for differences in costs across local districts
 And differences in student needs

Adequacy.

Also need to pay attention to whether there is enough funding

Benefitting the least advantaged.

Need to provide more funding to the poorest local districts

Decision 2. Local autonomy over budgets?

Should the state control how the local districts use the money or should the districts be free to use it at they wish?

Consider additional funding provided to adjust for student need (e.g. for disabled students or disadvantaged students)

Policy issues:

Purpose of the additional funding. School quality or for specific students ?

Alignment of goals between local and central policy makers.

Confidence of state policy makers in the ability of local policy makers to make wise decisions.

Decision 3: Power to supplement?

Should the local districts be allowed to supplement the money they get from the state with locally raised revenue?

May involve trade-offs among distributive values

Adequacy and equality

Equality vs. other goals such as responsiveness to parents' interest or to respect for local democratic process

Key messages

Good decision making in education (and in other policy areas) should be driven by values – what do we want to accomplish?

Evidence should inform those decisions but should not drive them.

The valued outcomes of schooling are much broader than test scores or success in the labor market - New terms: educational goods and childhood goods.

Clear thinking about specific distributive principles is more useful than reference to vague terms such as “equity” or “social justice”.