

Southerners for Fair School Funding Advocacy Guide

Funding for Students from Low-Income Backgrounds

Why Funding Matters for Students From Low-Income Backgrounds

In 2021, the US Census reported that **6 of the 10 states with the highest percentage of young people ages 5-17 living in poverty are in the South**. Roughly **20% of young people ages 5-17 in the South live in poverty** as compared with roughly 16% nationwide. Recent research illuminates how money matters in schools, particularly for low-income students. Increasing school funding can lead to **higher achievement in low-income districts** and **increase low-income families' educational attainment and wages**.

Funding matters for students from low-income backgrounds because they have been shortchanged by systems for far too long. As do all supplemental services, these supports require additional funding above the average per-student amount. Southern states have an opportunity now to modernize how we educate our diversifying student populations by ensuring that schools have the resources necessary for success.

Why a Student-Weighted Formula Matters for Students From Low-Income Backgrounds

Student-weighted formulas improve equity, increase transparency, and maintain flexibility. **Forty-four states** provide additional funding for low-income students; however, that funding is often not enough and it may be provided as a program or grant that does not consider the needs of individual students. Students from low-income backgrounds are not a monolith, and their needs vary. Therefore, as part of funding formula reform, Southern states must provide additional funding for low-income students through differentiation to ensure all students' needs are met.

Model Funding Policies for Students From Low-Income Backgrounds

Serving students from low-income backgrounds presents confounding challenges and requires more resources to meet student needs. Therefore, students from low-income backgrounds should receive an additional weight to the base funding allocation. Additionally, **half of all students in the U.S. attend public schools where a majority of the population is low-income.** As a result, Southern states should account for high concentrations of low-income students in a district, recognizing these schools require more resources and staff to meet students' needs. These considerations recognize that lower-income students often benefit from wrap-around services and additional instructional interventions to close gaps and support their success.

Model Policies For Students From Low-Income Backgrounds Should Include:

- A generous weight for students from low-income backgrounds based on direct certification in addition to the base amount (e.g., provide 100% to 200% more, or two to three times as much funding for students from low-income families than for students from higher-income families).
- An additional, sliding-scale weight based on the concentration of students from low-income backgrounds in the district.

Model Funding Practices in Other States

Texas: See *Tex. Educ. Code Ann. § 48.104*. Texas provides increased funding for students from low-income households at five different weight levels ranging from .225 to 2.75. Texas uses multiple measures, including median household income and average educational attainment, to differentiate between levels.

Kansas: See *Kan. Stat. Ann. § 72-5132 and 5151*. Kansas provides a .484 weight for students from low-income backgrounds and a high-density weight that varies based on concentration.

[🔍 FIND YOUR STATE'S FUNDING POLICIES](#)

Key Questions To Ask Policymakers

- Is our state considering maintaining a weight for students from low-income backgrounds? Will it include additional funding for districts with high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds?
- What measures will our state use to identify students from low-income backgrounds in a new formula? How will they determine the appropriate weights for educating low-income students at the individual and district levels?
- Will our state allocate multiple weights for students who qualify as low-income and are also students with a disability, English learners, and other student groups?
- How will the formula account for higher mobility rates among low-income students and their families?

Additional Resources

How Do School Finance Systems Support Economically Disadvantaged Students?

Bellwether, 2023

50-State Comparison K-12 and Special Education Funding: Funding for Students from Low-income Backgrounds

Education Commission of the States, 2021

How States Allocate Funding for Students From Low-Income Backgrounds

Education Commission of the States, 2020

Investing Additional Resources in Schools Serving Low-Income Students

2020 Education Law Center

Common Sense & Fairness Funding Tool Builder

EdBuild, 2020

State Education Funding: The Poverty Equation

FutureEd, 2020

School Funding: Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share?

The Urban Institute, 2017