

United States Senate

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Statement by Senator Barack Obama

Growth and Disparity: A Decade of U. S. Public School Construction

Many factors contribute to the school achievement gap that separates children of low-income families, and students of color, from their peers. These gaps may not be due to the students themselves, but to the educational settings in which they are placed.

This report from the Building Educational Success Together (BEST) collaborative, led by 21st Century School Fund, demonstrates that large disparities exist in school construction funding. By tracking the money spent on building new schools or remodeling existing ones, BEST was able to show that low-income students received only about half the level of funding for their school buildings as their more affluent peers. This is important because the quality of a school facility has an impact on the educational experience of students, and on the resulting academic achievement.

This report further demonstrates that the money spent in the schools of low-income students is most often spent on addressing health or safety concerns. Affluent school communities are more likely to fund new science labs, access to technology, or space for new programs. For low-income students, the schools are made less decrepit; for wealthier students, they are made more enriching.

If we want all students to have the opportunity to be successful, we must address the disparities in the quality of school buildings. For all students to achieve, all must be provided adequate resources: effective teachers, inspiring school leaders, and enriching classroom environments. BEST has illustrated the disparities in provision of funds for school construction, and provided valuable policy suggestions that should receive serious attention.