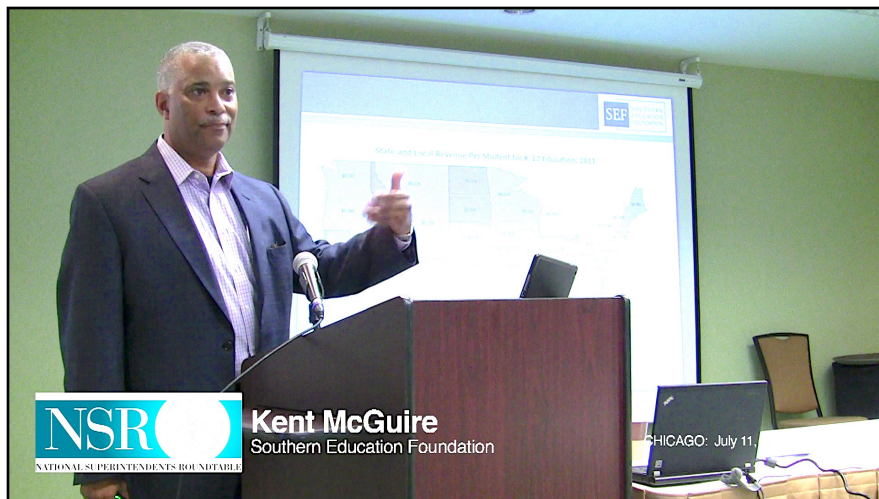


Roundtable News

The Human Misery of Childhood Poverty

Half of public school children eligible for reduced-price meals



Kent McGuire, President, Southern Education Foundation, describes SEF's ground-breaking 2012 report demonstrating that a "new majority" now attends American public schools—just about half of the students in American public schools are eligible for free- and reduced-price meals.

The current school reform movement focuses on an accountability model largely restricted to school policy and school practice. It ignores some unpleasant out-of-school realities: Half the children in American public schools are low income, one million are homeless, and the proportion of the population living in Census tracts of concentrated poverty has increased by 57% since the turn of the century. The plight and needs of these children were the focus of the Roundtable's July 2014 meeting in Chicago.

Poor children are located in communities long since abandoned in the scramble to maximize profits in a market economy. As the United States grew wealthier, these communities and their children were left behind

without a second glance. Some live in third-world conditions, many in shockingly substandard housing in blighted inner-city communities . . . in rural trailer parks . . . in the hollows of Appalachia . . . the barrios of large cities . . . in homeless shelters (if they are fortunate) . . . and in tents and automobiles (if they are not). More than one million children in the United States are documented to be homeless, with homelessness rates in some schools exceeding 80 percent.

These unfortunate families and their children are the forgotten Americans of public policy. While paying lip service to the importance of closing the educational achievement gap, the elite consensus that dominates education policy today has been complicit in

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Molly Hunter of the Education Law Center documents disparities in school funding

maintaining these inequities by pretending that poverty is just an excuse, that the market's assault on the dignity of these families is acceptable, and that fixing all this human misery is the responsibility of the schools.

This issue of Roundtable News examines these issues (*cont'd on p. 7*).

THE NEW MAJORITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS—LOW-INCOME CHILDREN

Kent McGuire, President of the Southern Education Foundation, provided Roundtable members with a powerful and insightful overview of poverty in the national political narrative and how this narrative affects schools.

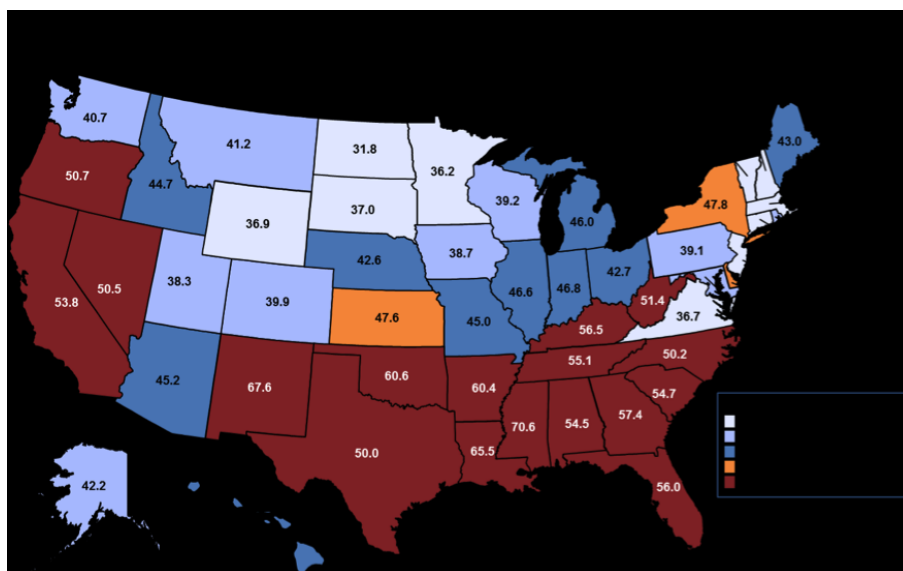
“It’s a hard movie to watch right now in the South,” McGuire commented, referring to the rising numbers of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, a widely-accepted marker of poverty. That number is fast approaching 50% of American public school children nationally. In the South, in many states, more than 60% of public school students qualify for free and reduced meals (*see figure*). As shocking as that statistic is, McGuire described extreme situations in parts of the American South where entire households live on just six dollars a day.

In some parts of the American South, entire households live on just \$6 a day.

Kent McGuire

Southern Education Foundation

What’s worse is that in these areas with high concentrations of extreme poverty, less money is spent on alleviating those conditions than is spent in more affluent areas.



Adding to these political and financial concerns, McGuire discussed the problems associated with bringing poverty back into political focus. There are a series of challenges that make it difficult to re-frame the issue: years and years of demonizing the poor alongside negative narratives surrounding education, an “either/or” discourse that dominates policy discussions, a bickering research community that gives the public the impression that no one knows what they are talking about (even if they do), and a distinct omission of educators’ voices.

McGuire called on Roundtable members to pay attention to the “new majority” in public schools – the nearly 50 percent of students nationally (and more than 60 percent in the South) who are low-income. He also emphasized that it is important to play a part in the movement to shatter the myth of educators as complacent about these issues. He remarked that policy-makers still believe that educators will do what they are told “even if we’ve been set up to fail” and that is it time to do away with this narrative. McGuire called for integrated systems and increased dialogue between different communities and sectors (such as the healthcare system, business, and schools) to refocus not on “what we are against but *what we are for*.” McGuire argued that change now is a “function of will, not a function of knowledge.” And, he observed, during his tenure with the Manpower Development and Research Corporation (now known as MDRC), “It was clear that just lifting people out of poverty had enormous effect on achievement in the schools, even if you did *nothing* in the schools.”

A DURABLE ARCHITECTURE OF SEGREGATION

Professor Paul A. Jargowsky, Director of Rutgers University's Center for Urban Research and Education (CURE), reviewed the geographic aspects of poverty by analyzing Census tracts of "high-poverty neighborhoods"—communities in which 40% or more of adults are poor. In his work, Jargowsky (right) was able to identify some persistent patterns of concentrated and intergenerational poverty. He shared some startling facts:

- The 384 metropolitan areas in the United States contain 84% of the U.S. population.
- Concentrated poverty doubled between 1970 and 1990, declined amid economic growth in the 1990s, and increased by 57% between 2000 and 2013 as the number of high-poverty Census tracts reached record levels.
- Between 2000 and the five-year period of 2008-2012, concentrated poverty increased for all ethnic groups, but remained most severe among people of color. About 7% of whites (of all ages) were living in areas of concentrated poverty in the latter period, compared to 16% of Hispanics and 24% of black Americans.
- Concentrated poverty by racial and ethnic groups is distributed in different ways. The highest concentration of poverty among black Americans is found in the Detroit area. Among Hispanics, the Philadelphia, area just edges Laredo, Texas as the site with the highest concentration of poverty.
- Concentrated poverty among whites tends to be highest in rural areas of Michigan, Ohio, New York, and Utah.
- In almost all metropolitan areas, a few communities bear the entire burden of concentrated poverty.

- Suburbs use exclusionary zoning to wall out the poor.

Jargowsky described patterns of gentrification and exclusionary zoning that have acted as a "feedback loop" exacerbating segregation in neighborhoods by race and income. Suburban growth, often subsidized, "cannibalizes" central cities and older suburbs, he said. This pattern leaves behind isolated communities, more and more frequently displaying the characteristics of concentrated poverty.

Why do so many communities isolated in this way exist, asked Jargowsky? "Because we build them!" We have constructed a "durable architecture of segregation" that creates concentrated poverty in certain areas. Rather than focusing on how to fix schools that are apparently "failing," Jargowsky insisted that the "metropolitan development paradigm" of unbridled suburban expansion must be examined since it has created the conditions in which extreme poverty has extended across generations.



FAIR FUNDING AND AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Molly Hunter, Director of the Education Law Center's Education Justice program, provided the Roundtable with a thorough explication of school funding by state. Hunter began by explaining that there are a few different ways to measure the quality of "fairness" in school funding. Hunter's Education Justice Program evaluates each state on four separate, inter-related fairness measures: *funding level* (ranked from highest to lowest); *funding distribution* (assessing whether funds distribution reflects poverty distributions); *effort* (spending relative to fiscal capacity); and *coverage* (essentially the ratio between public and private school attendance). Measuring fairness this way leads to a national fairness ranking system, where state funding levels are compared to other state funding levels.

First, there is the funding level itself, or the amount of money the state spends on its students. Hunter introduced the term "effort," which is defined as the amount of the state's GDP directed to K-12 education. Depending on the state, their level of "effort" will produce different spending levels, she noted. Once that lump sum is determined, (*cont'd p.5*)

EDUCATIONAL CORRELATES OF POVERTY

Elaine Weiss, National Coordinator for the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education, spoke passionately about the cumulative effects of poverty and segregation on educational outcomes. She brought members' attention to the myriad of inequities that are present, both in and out of the American education system today.



Disparities all day, every day

Weiss (left), began by stating, “children born to poor and minority mothers experience multiple disadvantages that are associated with long-term obstacles to educational success.” These disadvantages include early health problems (premature and low birth weight births due to mothers’ poor nutrition and inadequate prenatal care, etc), lack of early stimulation due to family’s lack of understanding of child development, and low-quality child care or no access to pre-kindergarten environments. Right away, it is clear that before a child even sets foot in a school, a large number of factors have been set into motion that might determine the success of that child in the future. In fact, the cumulative impact of these kinds of disparities are measurable: She quoted studies concluding that by the time low-income children reach kindergarten, they are already one-to-two years behind in school readiness. That kind of gap – one that pre-exists the child’s enrollment- cannot be attributed to the school, but must be seen as the product of other social inequalities at play. (*cont’d p. 5*).

MAPPING POVERTY IN ONE STATE

When Timothy Grieves (right), Chief Administrator of the Northwest Area Education Agency in Iowa, responded enthusiastically to the announcement that the July 2014 meeting would be a heavy-duty data introduction to poverty, he didn’t realize, he complained, that he would wind up on the program!

But once he described the data tool available from the Iowa School Finance Information Service (ISFIS), it too became grist for the mill, and Timothy became a major part of the program.

On the ISFIS website, it is possible for any member of the public to enter the “Factmap Program” and select “Demographics” and then “Free/Reduced” before hitting “play.”

https://isfis.net/Advanced_Mapping_Tool

An astonishing picture unfolds over time, county-by-county. A state that reported a free- and reduced-lunch proportion of 28% in 2001 was reporting a rate of 65% by 2014. Year-by-year more and more Iowa counties move from very light blue (less than 20% FRL rate) to dark blue (more than 40% FRL rate). Visually it appears that although relatively few counties in the Hawkeye State

were represented by dark blue in 2001, dark blue seemed to represent about half the counties by 2014.



HUNTER (CONT'D)

it is broken down into average per-pupil expenditures. Per-pupil expenditures vary wildly across the country, from the highest spending state (\$17,397 in Wyoming) to the lowest spending state (\$6,753 in Idaho). (to p. 4)



Fairness in funding can also be evaluated by how funding is distributed within a state. A state that spends more on its low-income students than it does on students in high-income households would be practicing a more “fair” funding model. For

example, the state of Minnesota spends 128% more on students from areas with 30% poverty than it does on students from areas with virtually no poverty. This earns Minnesota an “A” grade for funding fairness, which is also labeled a “progressive” spending state. In contrast, Nevada spends less on those students in high-poverty areas than it does on their more affluent peers (students in poverty are only funded at 69%), which earns it an “F” grade for funding fairness, and is labeled a “regressive” spending state. Hunter’s data suggest that it is to the state’s benefit to fund students more fairly. The state fairness index correlates pretty well with national assessment results.

WEISS (CONT'D)

Weiss cited research indicating that less than one third of factors that contribute to the achievement gaps can be tackled directly in schools. In this sense, achievement gaps might be manifested in schools, but opportunity gaps predominantly begin outside of schools.

She insisted that it is important for educational leaders to maintain perspective on this situation, and to focus on drivers of achievement gaps that are policy-malleable and can be implemented within schools. She identified four key drivers and urged educators to pay attention to them:

- early childhood education,
- children’s nutrition and health,

- after-school programs, and
- summer programs, both to provide nutrition to low-income children and tackle summer loss.

Below: Roundtable members Christine Mahoney, (East Granby, CT) Mike Gorman (Pemberton, NJ), and Greg Humphreys, Jr. (Shaker Heights, OH) energetically engage speakers.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

It's all well and good to explore what's happening at the national level. But the view of what's happening on the ground is often obscure from 10,000 feet. Tim Grieves of Iowa and Gregory Hutchings, Jr. (Shaker Heights, Ohio), brought the conversation back to earth by asking Roundtable members to reflect on what they had heard at this meeting. Grieves broke the meeting into small groups and asked each group to have a conversation about poverty in their own districts and contribute to a collaborative GoogleDoc as a platform for reflection. Hutchings asked his colleagues to focus on three questions: (1) What have I learned? (2) What do I think about what we've learned? (3) What am I going to do with this information when I return to my district? What came back reflected the complexity of the challenge of student poverty:

- The challenge of dealing with “summer loss” and how to support children’s learning during the summer vacation.
- The difficulty of addressing pockets of poverty in more affluent communities.
- Complex issues involved in gaining the trust of families about how to support their children’s learning.
- The differences between rural and urban poverty and how frequently national discussions of poverty proceed as though it were an urban phenomenon.

With regard to the challenges laid down by Grieves and Hutchings, while there was not a one-to-one convergence between the statement of problems and potential responses, Roundtable members came up with a rich and varied menu of positive educational and policy actions that could make a difference. The highlights of this discussion are outlined below:

How does poverty affect your students?	How can we shape responses?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unprepared for kindergarten. 2. Untended medical and dental needs. 3. PTSD & childhood trauma. 4. Lack of opportunities to play due to danger in streets. 5. Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, safety) often missing in children's lives. 6. Refugee children in our schools often in the U.S. while parents are in native countries. 7. Mobility of families means students bounce from school to school, often from district to district. 8. Irregular attendance for many low-income children. 9. The number of foster children and homeless children is a challenge in many districts. 10. Discipline problems. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Address early childhood needs. 2. Develop teacher empathy. 3. Create community partnerships to provide services. 4. Professional Development around poverty (poverty simulations). 5. Community service to sensitize students to challenges of poverty. 6. Teaching resiliency. 7. Connect students to mentors. 8. Tours of schools/communities for legislators and business leaders. 9. Field trips and enriched after-school activities that are not remedial. 10. Partnerships with higher education to expose teaching candidates to poverty and to attract native speakers into teaching. 11. Joint high school and college classes for college credit. 12. Reform school finance to provide additional funding, beyond equity, for students with greatest needs. Start with basic resources for all kids – books, pencils, etc. 13. Organize “backpack” programs to ensure children are not hungry at home. 14. Place most experienced teachers in most demanding schools and classes. 15. Provide collegial time for teachers to share best practice. 16. In terms of policy: extend school day and school year; make school the focal point of providing community services; provide simple vision screening for low-income students; work with boards, state, and national agencies to advance “whole child” agenda

THE SQUALID CONDITIONS IN WHICH MANY CHILDREN IN THE WEALTHIEST NATION IN THE WORLD LIVE

Low-income children are not living in gated communities or waterfront condominiums. A picture is worth 1,000 words. Whether in urban, rural, or suburban areas, many students find themselves living in communities characterized by sub-standard housing, “food deserts,” a shattered economic base, and few job opportunities for adults or recent graduates.



HERE AND THERE

New People

2014 was a banner year for new Roundtable members: Thomas Ahart, Des Moines, IA; Leslie Boozer, Fontana, CA; Gary Cohn, Everett, WA; David Fleishman, Newton, MA; Wendy Gudalewicz, Cupertino, CA; Debra Hamm, Columbia, SC; Frank Hewins, Franklin Pierce, WA; Luvenia Jackson, Clayton, GA; Samuel King, Norfolk, VA; Victoria Kniewel, Edgemont, NY; William McCoy, Red Bluff, CA; Nancy McGinley, Charleston, SC; Tim Mills, Bellevue, WA; Kenneth Mitchell, Blauvelt, NY; Daniel Moiao, King City, CA; Matthew Montgomery, Portage, OH; Pedro Rivera, Lancaster, PA; H.T. Sanchez, Tucson, AZ; Thomas Scarise, Madison, CT; George Steinhoff, Penn-Delco, PA; Michael Watenpugh, San Rafael, CA; Karen Woodward, Lexington, SC; and Louis Wool, Harrison, NY.

Welcome one and all!

The Best of NSR & Twitter, 2014

By 2014 it became clear that we needed to step up our game on social media. Websites and Facebook pages merely scratched the surface. The Roundtable entered the Age of Twitter. Some of our prominent “tweets” follow:

4 charts explaining US diversity explosion. <http://tinyurl.com/nr4eolt>

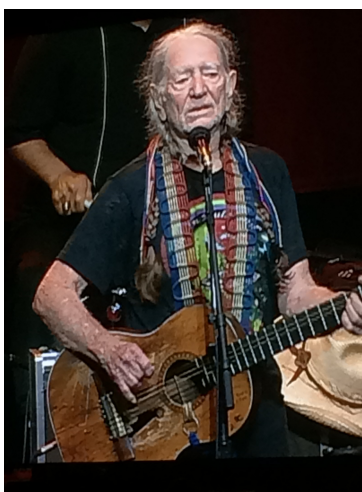
Thousands of schools need books and supplies: <http://tinyurl.com/l2g7wkc>

2 Years after Newtown, legislators more beholden to gun lobby than to kids: <http://tinyurl.com/qcvjsj20>

Market believer: After 20 years, clear charters don’t work in schools: <http://tinyurl.com/lt4u5nm>

Real wages for young Americans have collapsed: <http://tinyurl.com/m3dujad>

Willie Nelson Meets Roundtable
Roundtable takes in Chicago concert of country music legend.



Superintendent’s Fieldbook

The Superintendent’s Fieldbook, a best-seller for Corwin Press that was written and edited by four founding members of the Roundtable, was re-issued in a 2nd edition in 2013. Reflections from Roundtable members included in the volume make a significant contribution to the text, which is widely used in superintendent preparation programs. Available at Corwin Press: <http://www.corwin.com/books/Book237433>

Roundtable Steering Committee

Gloria Davis, Decatur, IL (Co-Chair)

Stephen Ladd (Elk Grove, CA (Co-Chair)

Marianne Bartley (Lebanon, PA)

Mark Freeman (Shaker Heights, OH)

James Harvey (Seattle, WA)

Morton Sherman (Alexandria, VA)

Bernard Taylor (East Baton Rouge, LA)

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Number and Percentage of US Children Under Age 18 Living in Poverty,, by Race/Ethnicity, 2012

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage poor	Number of Poor
Black	39%	3,874,000
White	13%	5,026,000
Hispanic	33%	5,762,000
Asian	13%	435,000
Pacific Islander	25%	31,000
Native American	36%	197,000
Two or more Races	22%	662,000
Total		15,987,000

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2013