The Federal Government’s Role in Financing Education

At this point, some of you might be thinking: Even if every state provided every school district with adequate funding and a great education plan, the economic gaps among the states would still be enormous. If you thought about that, congratulations; you have put your finger on a systemic problem. For instance, students in New York or Connecticut typically receive far more education dollars than students in Mississippi or Arizona, regardless of the state’s revenue plan. Because of the Constitution, this is a problem the United States seems unable to correct.

If the Constitution had assigned education as a federal responsibility, we might expect to see the federal government close the economic gap between states. U.S. schools might be centrally financed and governed; or at the very least, the Supreme Court might rule funding inequities among states unconstitutional. But this is not the case. The Supreme Court has ruled that education is not a “fundamental right” under the U.S. Constitution and has left education to the states. Accordingly, the federal government’s role in the financing of education is relatively small. In fact, the federal government typically pays only 6 to 9 percent of the nation’s educational costs, a very small part of its overall budget. 31 (See Figure 9.5.)

However, the federal government still manages to influence schools. How does it do this? One way has been through categorical grants—funds directed at specific categories and targeted educational needs. Categorical grants have provided funding for preschool programs for poor children, library construction, acquisition of new technology, educational opportunities for veterans, the training of teachers and administrators, educational reform, lunches for low-income youth, and loans to college students. By targeting funds, federal aid, although limited, has had a significant impact in schools.

The federal government also funds schools through block grants, large sums of money given directly to the states with few strings attached. Block grants reduce the obligations, rules, and even competition associated with seeking federal dollars. You can see that each type of grant has strengths and weaknesses. Categorical grants give the federal government influence by identifying how federal money should be used. Block grants give the states the power to make those spending decisions.

The federal government also influences education through the courts. For example, the 1954 Supreme Court’s Brown decision desegregated the nation’s schools, a monumental

焦点问题

How does the federal government influence education?

RAP 3.1

Money Matters

POWERPOINT 9.7

Federal Budget and Education

POWERPOINTS 9.8

Public Opinion on Financing Education

图9.5

Federal budget and education. Within the federal budget, education expenditures remain quite small. This 2 percent includes elementary, secondary, vocational and higher education, as well as research and educational assistance.

来源：Office of Management and Budget, fiscal year 2013.
Investing in Teachers Pays Off

What is the financial impact of a good teacher on a student? A teacher in the top 15 percent of teachers can, in one year, add more than $20,000 to a student’s lifetime earnings. For a class of twenty, that’s $400,000 of additional earning. And that’s just one teacher. Closing the achievement gap of U.S. students on international assessments would have an enormous economic impact, increasing the annual growth rate of the United States by 1 percent of GDP. Over a lifetime, this achievement gain would increase U.S. economic output at least $112 trillion. (That’s trillion, not billion.)

SOURCE: Eric A. Hanushek, Education Next

Schools, Children, and Commercialism

This section is about the impact of businesses on children and schools, and we want to tell you up front that we are not neutral on this topic. Business dollars are shaping our children, and not in good ways. Along with other writers and educators, the authors of this text have deep reservations about what happens to children when they are targeted by commercial interests and when schools are used for marketing products. We believe that the goal of public education should be to open minds, not turn a profit, and children should be off limits for advertisers and business interests. So as you read this section, you should be aware of our values. But as always, we do present the arguments of those on the other side of this issue in a You Be the Judge feature in Chapter 5, where we explore for-profit schools. We invite you to read both sides of the argument and form your own opinion.

Commercializing Childhood

We have become a nation that places a lower priority on teaching its children how to thrive socially, intellectually, even spiritually, than it does on training them to consume. The long-term consequences of this development are ominous.

Just a few decades ago, the children’s advertising industry spent $100 million selling products to kids, mainly through television ads. By 2006, food companies alone spent $1.6 billion marketing carbonated beverages, fast-food restaurants, and breakfast cereals to children. Today, marketing is not just television ads. Computer games, cell phones, MP3 players, DVDs, and even school itself have become advertising hubs. Children are the target for 20 billion advertising dollars annually.

Why the surge in commercializing childhood? Politics, changing lifestyles, and electronic innovation all contribute to this problem. In the 1970s, corporate pressure moved Congress to prohibit the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) from banning television marketing to children under 8 years old. In the 1980s, children’s television was deregulated even further, and television programs focused on selling products directly to children. As single-parent and two-working-parent families increased, so did the number of children watching television. Today, almost half of 3-month-old babies regularly watch television, and 10 percent of children under 1 year of age have a television in their bedroom. The recent surge in personal electronic gadgets means that companies now target ads directly to children on iPods and other devices.
Advertisers influence children through product placement (in movies and computer games), brand licensing (a company’s brand name placed on other products), viral marketing (advertising done on pre-existing social networks), and guerrilla marketing (selling things in unconventional and unexpected places).

Today’s children spend a trillion consumer dollars annually. Their allowances, their paychecks, and the influence they exert on parents’ spending make them prime targets for advertisers. Marketing experts film children at play, study their behaviors, and analyze their tastes. Based on that research, sophisticated and effective sales pitches are created, and children are persuaded to buy products from fast food to cosmetics.

Here is one example of how this research shapes the buying habits of children: Advertisers have learned that younger children want to be like older children, so aspirational marketing was born. Advertisers intentionally market older products to younger children. Young girls are targeted for sexy adolescent clothes, although they lack the maturity to understand the strong social messages wearing such clothes sends. Abercrombie and Fitch sells thong underpants to 8-year-olds with slogans such as “wink wink” and “eye candy,” and girls under 5 go to “spas” such as Saks Fifth Avenue’s Club Libby Lu to get “makeovers.” Rather than developing their creativity and self-expression, young girls emulate the older girls they see in High School Musical and Hannah Montana. The result is that young girls become consumers of weight-reduction products, makeup, clothes, and dating.

For young boys, it is about emulating the physical strength and toughness of older boys, so rough competitions are valued. Young boys watch wrestling matches on television, play violent video games, and sometimes experiment with steroids. The Federal Trade Commission has criticized the entertainment industry for continuing to market R-rated movies, M-rated video games, and explicit-content recordings on television shows and websites with substantial teen audiences. For both genders, sex-role stereotyping is emphasized at the expense of authentic relationships. Creative play, innocence, and connecting with nature, all healthy childhood activities, are lost to commercialism.

Other industrialized nations do not let this happen. Television marketing to children is banned in Norway and Sweden, junk-food ads for the young are banned in Britain, and Greece never allows war toys to be advertised. America’s children are virtually defenseless in the face of sophisticated marketing, and they pay a price. Allen Kanner, a clinical child psychologist, finds that children now talk about making money and their friends’ clothes and designer labels, but “not the person’s human qualities.”

Commercialism promotes self-gratification: “It’s about me, and I want it now.” Happiness is achieved by acquiring things, and one can never have enough things. Such values have led to assaults, as students attacking each other to steal designer jackets or Nike shoes. Marketing to the young teaches all kinds of lessons, few if any of them good. When the marketing occurs at school, the costs are even greater.

**Brand Name Education: Should Schools Be Open for Business?**

To increase attendance, some schools are offering prizes, paid for by local businesses, just for showing up. For example, in Hartford, Connecticut, a 9-year-old won a raffle for students with perfect attendance and was given the choice of a new Saturn Ion or $10,000. (His parents
Chose the money.) At Oldham County High School in Kentucky, a high school senior was awarded a canary yellow Ford Mustang. Krispy Kreme doughnuts awards students in Palm Beach County, Florida, a free doughnut for every report card A. Describing his quest for additional school funds, one high school principal noted, "My approach is Leave No Dollar Behind."40

Schools also promote specific products by entering "exclusive agreements" so that no competitive products are sold on school grounds. About 75 percent of high schools have signed exclusive soft drink contracts. Coca-Cola promised Oakland, California, half a million dollars to support a community youth program in return for a ten-year agreement banning the sale of competing soft drinks on city property. Such exclusive contracts may turn out to be a very bad business deal if schools are sued for contributing to America’s obesity epidemic,41 while keeping vendors of healthy snacks and drinks from selling on school grounds.42

Branding schools does not stop with products; school districts now sell the naming rights of athletic facilities, school buildings, and offer companies the opportunity to put their corporate logos on textbooks. Sometimes the corporation pays the school for getting students and parents to buy their products. General Mills donates funds to schools according to the number of box tops turned in or other coupons showing proof of purchase. Channel One broadcasts commercials in school and on school time. Students admit they are more likely to remember the ads than the educational programs. If children grow up with Nike and McDonald’s in school, they are likely to stay with those companies as adult consumers. As one critic noted, if you teach business values early enough, children accept it as truth.43

Schools and teachers can be persuaded to echo the tactics of advertisers. Tom Farber, an advanced-calculus teacher in San Diego, decided that a good way to pay the cost of photocopying tests was to sell advertising space to local businesses and parents. He charges $10 for an ad on a quiz, $20 for an ad on a test, and $30 for an ad on the final exam. He raised $625 and explained, "When money is tight, you really have to be creative."44

These are overt examples of commercialism, but it is wise to remember that the influence of business can be far more subtle. Everyday school practices that seem so familiar also teach students corporate values such as neatness, conformity, and punctuality. As educator Linda Darling-Hammond has noted:

The short segmented tasks stressing speed and neatness that predominate in most schools, the emphasis on rules from the important to the trivial, and the obsession with bells, schedules, and time clocks are all dug deep into the ethos of late nineteenth-century America, when students were being prepared to work in factories on predetermined tasks that would not require them to figure out what to do.45

Commercial interests can overwhelm schools, but we are not helpless. When the Seminole County, Florida, school district was paid by McDonald’s to put student report cards in envelopes covered by McDonald’s advertising and offering free Happy Meals, almost 2,000 parents protested. The county was forced to stop the practice. Scholastic magazine promoted Bratz items at their book clubs and book fairs. (Bratz is the brand for provocative and sexualized dolls made under suspect labor conditions in China.) More than 5,000 e-mails persuaded Scholastic to stop the practice. Massachusetts and Vermont have introduced legislation to prohibit marketing in school, and citizens and organizations continue to lobby the federal government to regulate childhood commercialization in and beyond school.

Teachers can make an enormous difference as well. Teaching media literacy empowers children to understand and confront the market messages that manipulate them. Classrooms can be places where children discuss the underlying values implicit in consumerism and its impact on the planet and themselves. Rather than sitting by as young lives become focused on consuming, educators can help children connect with healthy alternatives, such as
exploring nature, developing creative talents, discovering the joys of community service, and forming authentic relationships. For those who want to learn more about confronting childhood commercialism, we recommend the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood as a helpful resource.

What the Future May Hold for School Finance

Today, we are in a period of shifting governmental responsibility for the financing of schools. Reformers are focusing less on financial inequity and more on educational inadequacy. What are some other trends in educational finance, issues that are likely to surface in the years ahead?

Accountability

The public wants to see academic progress for their tax dollars—in short, accountability. Schools are often ranked by their students’ standardized test scores, as the testing culture persists. Teachers find that student test scores can influence their pay and careers, while tenure itself has become more difficult to obtain, or retain.

Choice Programs and the Neighborhood School

The neighborhood school, long a mainstay of public education, is being challenged by school competition and the growth of charter schools. Many neighborhood schools are disappearing or being reconstituted. (See Chapter 5.)

Longer School Day and School Year

A number of charter schools have extended their school day and their school year as one tangible way to improve student performance. Some public schools are now following this trend, but it is difficult to determine what will happen when longer school days and years collide with shrinking educational budgets.  

The Economy’s Impact on School Budgets

When the economy takes a downturn, state and local budgets are cut, and education suffers. This means fewer teachers, larger class sizes, and the elimination of sports, extracurricular activities, art, and music. Few state and local governments maintain the financial reserves necessary to avoid such cutbacks. This may become a steady pressure in the years ahead.

The Rich–Poor School Divide Is Likely to Grow

While poor schools struggle, wealthier districts are developing creative strategies to ensure that their schools are not endangered by funding redistribution plans. Through Parent-Teacher Association donations, online fund-raisers, cooperative agreements with local business endowments, unequal local funding that gives more to schools that have more experienced teachers, and tax-sheltered private educational foundations, additional educational dollars find their way to schools in wealthier neighborhoods. Wealthy communities defend such practices as a way to prevent parents from fleeing “to private school if they don’t perceive the public education to be excellent.”