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A Disproportionality Analysis of South Carolina School Finance Policy Priorities in High Proportion LatinX Districts During COVID-19

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IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program

The José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program was established by IDRA to honor the memory of IDRA founder, Dr. José Angel Cárdenas. The goal of the program is to engage the nation's most promising researchers in investigating school finance solutions that secure equity and excellence for all public school students. The José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program focuses on and funds school finance research that builds cross-disciplinary and inter-sector perspectives on equity.



Dr. Cárdenas was actively involved in the school finance reform efforts since the early days of the *Rodríguez vs. San Antonio ISD* litigation when he was superintendent of Edgewood ISD. Following the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court reversal of the *Rodríguez* decision that found the Texas system of school finance unconstitutional, he resigned from Edgewood ISD to establish IDRA to advocate for school finance reform and improved educational opportunities for all children. He led decades-long efforts to achieve school finance equity and was instrumental in the *Edgewood* court cases. His research, articles and books provided a blueprint for those interested in bringing about future reform in schools and other social institutions.

In the foreword of Dr. Cárdenas' book, *Texas School Finance Reform: An IDRA Perspective*, Dr. James A. Kelly stated: "He worked hard, he played hard. And in doing so, never lost sight of his goal. Because, for José, school finance reform was never really an end in itself. It remained a means to a larger end: to improve teaching and learning for all children; in particular, to improve the life chances of the poor and dispossessed."

2022 IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellow – David Martínez, Ph.D.



Dr. David Martínez is a tenure track assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policies at the College of Education of the University of South Carolina. He is a critical school finance policy scholar connecting policy knowledge and praxis through multi-method inquiry. Dr. Martínez seeks to understand how school finance policy impacts funding availability and spending in low-income, ethnically and linguistically diverse, minoritized communities. Dr. Martínez holds a doctorate in educational policy and evaluation, economics of education and school finance from Arizona State University.

IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program – 2022 Advisory Committee

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Abstract

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted many disparities in the public school system across the United States. In South Carolina, these disparities juxtaposed against a history of school finance insufficiency continually under scrutiny. For over two decades, the state was enmeshed in a school funding lawsuit, *Abbeville v. South Carolina* (2017). The lawsuit itself culminated in few resolutions for the plaintiff districts. Following the pandemic, South Carolina districts continue to struggle with lack of funding and are confronted with few solutions to address the historical school funding challenges. This study attempts to expound on the history of school finance disparity in South Carolina focusing discretely on those districts serving a high percentage of LatinX students.

Methods: This multi-method design incorporates longitudinal district-level funding analysis to guide in-depth interviews with a broad, statewide, stratified sample of education leaders. The quantitative strand begins with a horizontal disproportionality analysis (*i.e.*, descriptive analysis of relative uniformity) to inform a fixed effects estimation model that examines the relationship of specific revenue and expenditure categories as a function of LatinX proportion. The quantitative strand helped to inform the qualitative strand that incorporated semi-structured interviews with five educational leaders.

Implications: This study expounds on three distinct implications. First, South Carolina must fully fund its education system including the needs of LatinX students and emergent bilingual students. Second, South Carolina must try to understand school districts' acute needs and allow for communication from direct district leaders and personnel. Finally, South Carolina must provide greater ethnic and cultural support for its LatinX community.

Keywords: school finance, education equity, education policy, LatinX students, education research

Introduction

In November 2018, South Carolina's Post and Courier published an exposé, *Minimally Adequate*, detailing the historical stratification of educational opportunities against race/ethnicity and wealth, prominently on display in South Carolina's *Corridor of Shame* – the name given by state lawmakers to school districts located along interstate I-95. The deficit ideology that shames the community maintains educational disparity through a *minimally adequate* funding standard, reified by South Carolina's General Assembly and state Supreme Court.

These disparities are now exacerbated after widespread school closures and community isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Policy powerbrokers were once again forced to confront educational inequities as they designed solutions to address new challenges due to COVID-19 and consider which communities were invisible in the policy process. In South Carolina, school districts serving higher proportions of LatinX students epitomize this intersection. They are at greater risk due to bias that criminalizes or treats the LatinX community with indifference (Rodríguez, 2018; Rodríguez, et al., 2020; Winders & Smith, 2012).

The LatinX community of South Carolina is woven into the fabric of the state, established as part of the enslavement of peoples across the globe in the mid-1500s. The modern history of the LatinX community in South Carolina is more closely attributed to movements in labor needs and immigration, which include agriculture and textiles (Mohl, 2003; Monreal & McCorkle, 2020; Rodríguez, 2018). South Carolina, a *nuevo LatinX sur* or new LatinX south, destination has a history of inequity grounded in Black-white segregation constricting access to state resources (Beck & Stevenson, 2016; Rodríguez, 2018). This ontology extends into the LatinX community through policy discourse that oppresses immigrants, largely of LatinX origin, and normalizes over-policing (Rodríguez & Monreal, 2017).

The policy environment impedes education opportunities for LatinX students, as the discourse of deservingness dehumanizes new residents, an erasure of the value within the emerging LatinX community (Monreal & McCorkle, 2020; Rodríguez, 2018).

South Carolina must recognize LatinX students are embedded in education, increasing in scale from 1% in 1999, to 10% in 2019. Furthermore, the emergent bilingual, largely LatinX, student population has increased from 0.46% in 1999, to 6% in 2019. To educate these students, South Carolina must confront policy that hinders LatinX academic success and who it relies on for policy recommendations.

Education leaders can provide nuanced insight into how previous resource disparities and the compounding inequities of COVID-19 influence community education (Koyama, 2011; Spillane, et al., 2002). Education leaders are aware of learning challenges created by socioeconomic inequality, lack of opportunity, immigration, migration, documentation status, language proficiency, separation from country of origin, and collective trauma experienced by LatinX students (Carrillo, 2016; Guerrero, 2017; Knoepfel, 2007; Kozol, 1991; Kochhar, et al., 2005; Martínez & Spikes, 2020; Odem & Browne, 2014; Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001; Winders, 2011).

One of the difficulties embedded in the policy process, however, is a disconnect between how policy is created and the value placed on local knowledge (Delaney, 2002; Placier, et al., 2000). Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand educational inequities through the knowledge of local leaders.

Education leaders are a valuable resource necessary to inform education policy post-COVID-19. We used a multi-method design incorporating longitudinal district-level funding analysis to guide in-depth interviews with a broad, statewide, stratified sample of education leaders (*e.g.*, principals, superintendents) in South Carolina. We focused on school districts that are at or above the mean of LatinX student proportion for the state, approximately 6%. We did so because research indicates state funding cuts decrease education fiscal availability in minoritized communities, which puts students in those districts at greater risk of underachievement (Baker, 2014; Knight, 2017).

This project focuses attention on pre- and post-COVID-19 resource disparity through direct contact to leaders with intimate knowledge of how the pandemic disrupted education in LatinX communities. This project's fundamental purpose is to understand if high-proportion LatinX districts had the necessary resources to provide a salient program of instruction to their LatinX students.

This project is unique in that it supports LatinX communities specifically and helps to unpack if leaders were able to substantially mitigate potential instruction loss due to resource availability including technology access.

Finally, this project guides policy implications for improvement from first-hand information, including future resource availability in times of health, social and economic triage. Through different forms of communication broadly to the community of South Carolina and acutely to the South Carolina state legislature, this project allows for full dissemination of policy implications and recommendations.

School Funding Disparity in South Carolina Relevant Literature

Abbeville County School District et al. v. State of South Carolina (Abbeville II), 410 S.C. 619, 767 S.E.2d (2017) ended in a 3-2 decision that released lawmakers from Supreme Court oversight. The court's decision to vacate plaintiffs' judgments nullified its earlier court-ordered funding improvement. The decisive ruling in *Abbeville* is one among a litany of historically unresolved school finance cases examined through state constitutionality with attempts to mitigate continued school funding disparity (Dumas & Anyon, 2006; Hinojosa, 2016; Howard, et al., 2017).

Abbeville underscores the influence political powerbrokers have over the South Carolina courts, which establish school finance legal precedent (Tran et al, 2022). Essential to the significance of *Abbeville* is its ability to reify the educational insufficiency the state displayed in the decades leading up to the outset of the case and the changing epistemology of the courts over time to adhere to the political norms of the S.C. General Assembly (Tran et al, 2022).

Internally, the concluding remarks of *Abbeville* add credibility to this notion through Hon. Chief Justice Donald Wayne Beatty's objection of the court's inability to create an inclusive system of education challenging colleague's complicity with the state (*Abbeville*, 2017). In his dissent, Chief Justice Beatty acknowledged the state's need to further explore a systematic school funding resolution but questioned its capacity to self-initiate policy change leading toward education opportunity for all children by concluding, "Unfortunately, our Court has lost the will to do even the minimal amount necessary to avoid becoming complicit actors in the deprivation of a minimally adequate education to South Carolina's children" (p. 4).

The South Carolina Supreme Court was reluctant to make assertive changes to the South Carolina Public Education system, instead relying on the S.C. General Assembly to make the necessary changes required by the case. The S.C. General Assembly chose to operate schools in a manner that relied on educational policy that favored neoliberal ideology (Tran et al, 2022).

Neoliberalism dominates the conservative educational policy discourse. Since the 1980s, neoliberal ideologies have positioned accountability practices as leading to improved outcomes (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Tran et al, 2022). South Carolina followed this trend and adopted data and testing standards that placed the responsibility for improvement of the public education system on educators (Tran et al, 2022). The state also decreased the educational agency of the curriculum and specific content areas, largely dictating what students should learn and how (Werts, et al., 2013). Locally, many leaders acknowledged this pressure continued during the pandemic despite federal moratoria on accountability standards.

South Carolina's reliance on accountability policies defines the educational growth of students through statistical growth and successful adherence to state mandates (Werts, et al., 2013). School funding is necessary to improve in these areas, but South Carolina is unwilling to provide the necessary resources in order to achieve the educational metrics it requires of schools (Baker, et al., 2016; Tran et al, 2022; Truitt, 2009).

Critically connected to this accountability are those districts serving higher percentages of students in poverty and serving diverse student populations unfairly scrutinized in the educational landscape of the state. In 2021, the continued educational malfeasance of the South Carolina legislature was fully displayed in the funding disparity of the state and challenges associated with COVID-19. Education advocate stakeholders who have endured this treatment, however, have the potential to inform policy recommendations but have fewer opportunities to do so. This project seeks to remedy the devaluation of these leaders in the policy construction pipeline. Financial sustainability and offer reparative justice to the LatinX community.

Research Questions

The following research questions ground this study:

1. What education resource inequities existed prior to COVID-19?
2. Has COVID-19 exacerbated historical resource disparities and how?
3. What solutions could South Carolina incorporate to ameliorate resource disparity?

By starting this project immediately, we sought to develop a set of actionable policy recommendations to address educational disparities exacerbated by COVID-19 for the 2023-24 legislative session. In this manner, we help reimagine education opportunity for LatinX students in the *nuevo LatinX sur*. Furthermore, we hope this initial study provides a foundation for future longitudinal and generalizable research beyond South Carolina and provides tools to amplify local education leaders in the policy process.

Conceptual Framework

To confront education resource disparity as a result of minoritizing policy in South Carolina, we used an intersectional practice theory (*i.e.*, site ontology), and critical race theory lens. Schatzki (2005) states that political and policy practices are organized into inter-connected spatial-temporal actions. These actions are grounded in heuristics, material objects and geography (*i.e.*, site) that inform the cultural, economic, social and political ideologies intrinsic/extrinsic to the site (Green, 2009; Grootenboer, et al., 2014; Schatzki, 2005; Schatzki, et al., 2001).

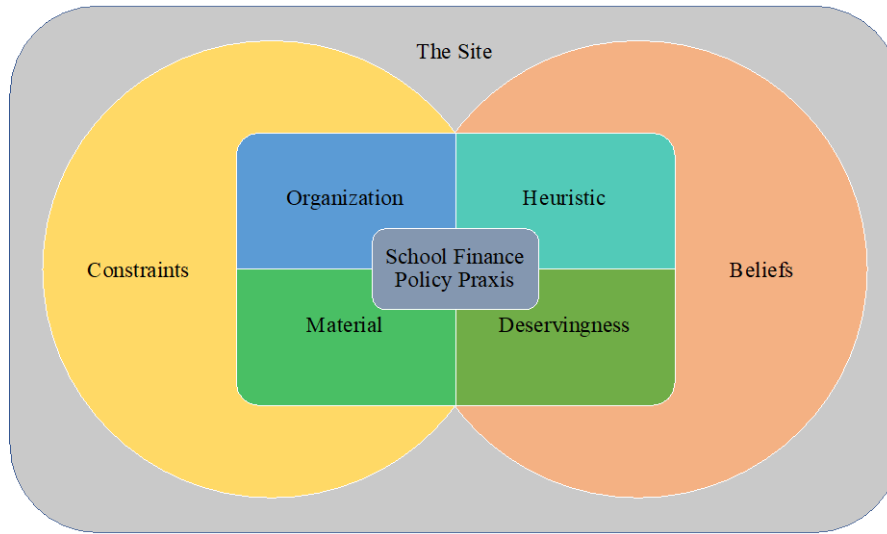
Participants engaged in praxis agree on an action that can mediate a particular challenge (*i.e.*, cohesion) and, in our pandemic reality, an action that is best suited to address historical disparity and the confluence of COVID-19. Furthermore, engaging in praxis constrains participants through its realization and restrains discourse (*e.g.*, advocacy, counter-narratives) that challenges the dominant group (Grootenboer, et al., 2014; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Schatzki, 2002; Schatzki, 2003; Schatzki, 2005).

South Carolina as a *nuevo LatinX sur* site has oppressed the LatinX community through policy informed by its historical site ontology, which favors slavery and white supremacy as preferred practices. Furthermore, state legislation has the potential to resolve education funding inequity, but legislative action has maintained disparity as the preferred status quo (Driscoll, et al., 2014; Rodríguez, 2018). This status quo is now intensified due to COVID-19, and minoritized communities are positioned to once again feel the pressure of fiscal austerity as with the Great Recession (Baker, 2014; Knight, 2017).

Thus, the use of critical race theory helps problematize the policy praxis of the state and the ideologies valued in the policy process as a function of institutional racism and white supremacy that is normative informs South Carolina's temporal actions (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Exhibit 1 displays the interdependent spatial-temporal phenomena grounding policy praxis. In the center, school finance policy praxis is informed by organization and material arrangements, that operate as constraints. Simultaneously, deservingness and heuristics work to create a belief structure about the community.

Exhibit 1: Theoretical Interdependent Relationship of School Finance Policy Praxis



Finally, and recalling cohesion, if practice is informed by – and informs subsequent – history as South Carolina works to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on schooling, it will continue to assert racial dominance through policies that work to increase education inequity in communities of color, and specifically LatinX communities (Dumas, 2015; Gillborn, 2005; Gordon, 2015; Montoya, et al., 2016; Stovall, 2006).

Through our framework, we argue oppression of the LatinX community and communities of advocacy are embedded in South Carolina’s site ontology, thus it is challenging to develop state-level policies that support communities of color. The manifestation of oppressive practices ascends through school finance policies that devalue local advocates for fear of disrupting South Carolina’s hegemony (Crenshaw, 2002; Crenshaw, 2019; Mitchell, 2013; Tate, 1997).

Employing this theoretical position, we contend understanding school finance policy praxis in South Carolina, and which stakeholders are valued in that process, requires advocates to understand the belief structures that inform school finance policy praxis in South Carolina and its history.

Research Design

Quantitative Strand

Data

For this analysis, we combine district-level datasets from multiple sources. South Carolina makes available a district-level dataset that includes unique administrative data for school district and school-level characteristics with unique identifiers that can be linked to other datasets. South Carolina is an ideal state to engage in this research due to its historical connection as a main port of slavery in what is now the United States, which structured a power base that through history has favored wealthy white communities in policy discourse. It also exhibits a high degree of geographic rurality, which uniquely perpetuates school finance disproportionality that favors wealth-driven communities with local industry, commerce and property of higher value. We combine South Carolina district-level data with data from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which provides information on poverty, district urbanicity and the local cost of labor (Martínez & Spikes, 2020).

The entire data set spans 2008 through 2018. We merged, compiled, cleaned, coded and analyzed the data using Excel v16.52 and Stata v17.0.104. We checked the data for outliers and tested the sensitivity of results when imposing restrictions at the 1.5 percentile and the 98.5 percentile. Of the 72,640 individual cells of data, after imposing restrictions, 258 total cells (0.36%) of fiscal data across the sample were deleted due to extreme deviation from the mean.

The analytic sample includes only traditional local education agencies (LEA) in South Carolina. Independent, private and charter LEAs were excluded in this analysis and are not captured in the main database for this specific analysis, as they are often small sample LEAs, structurally incongruous, and would not be comparable with the traditional LEAs. This analysis acutely omits Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, Governor's School for Science and Mathematics, South Carolina Public Charter School District, Deaf and Blind School, John De La Howe, Dept of Juvenile Justice, Dept of Correction NO4, Charter Institute at Erskine, Felton Lab School of South Carolina H24, South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, Will Lou Gray Opportunity.

Analytic Strategy

This study employs a horizontal disproportionality analysis panel (*i.e.*, descriptive analysis of relative uniformity) to inform the fixed effects estimation model that examines the relationship of specific revenue and expenditure categories as a function of LatinX proportion. Traditionally, school finance research examines the differences in resource allocation across a state or district and the impact of various inputs, such as property tax revenue generation, on resource allocations (Baker & Green, 2009; Berne & Stiefel, 1994; Clotfelter, et al., 2005; Ginsburg, et al., 1981; Houck, 2010).

In addition, school finance researchers investigate the relationship between property tax revenue generation, socio-demography (*e.g.*, race, class, socio-economic status) and school resource variation (Berne & Stiefel, 1994; DeAngelis, et al., 2005; Duncombe & Yinger, 2006). Ultimately researchers attempt to correlate student learning with varying types of school resources, revenue generated or expenditure per pupil (Carr, et al., 2007; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2008), and variation in

teaching battery (e.g., salary, sorting, experience, credentialing) (Owens & Maiden, 1999; Rubenstein, et al., 2006) to search for the combination of school-level resources that can close the persistent achievement gap that exists in the United States.

School finance research has employed descriptive and disproportionality analyses to determine differences in resource allocation across districts and how these resource differences affect achievement (Baker & Green, 2009; Berne & Stiefel, 1994; Clotfelter, et al., 2005; Ginsburg, et al., 1981). In this paper, we use the following measures of disproportionality, commonly used in descriptive analyses of school finance:

1. The Coefficient of Variation $Cv = \sigma/\mu$, is a distribution's standard deviation (σ) divided by its mean (μ) (Betts, et al., 2000; DeAngelis, et al., 2005; Odden & Picus, 2020). A coefficient of variation much like a McLoone index varies from 0 to 1 with 0 indicating perfect equality.
2. The Gini ratio measures the extent to which a distribution differs from perfect equality. This ratio is best understood with the use of the Lorenz curve, which measures the proportion of income or wealth held by each proportion of the population. The Gini coefficient is equal to twice the area enclosed between the Lorenz curve and the equality diagonal. If there is perfect equality, the Gini ratio is equal to zero, and the Lorenz curve is equal to the equality diagonal (Berne & Stiefel, 1984; Burke, 1999).
3. The Theil Index of Economic Inequality measures income inequality distance where the higher the index coefficient, the more inequality that measure contains (Theil, 1967). Prototypically the equation for Theil takes the following form:

$$I_{\text{Theil}}(F) := \int \frac{x}{\mu(F)} \log\left(\frac{x}{\mu(F)}\right) dF(x)$$

We then explored the relationship between state and local per-student funding and the proportion of LatinX students in a district. We focused on state and local revenues, omitting federal funds, because (a) state school finance systems are evaluated by how they distribute state and local funds (Odden & Picus, 2020); (b) federal funds are primarily designed to supplement an already equal or progressive funding scheme; and (c) these revenue variables include capital (i.e., facilities) funding, which is omitted from current expenditure data (and not reliable with total expenditure data). While NCES tracks capital and facilities spending, districts may incur large expenses in one year for investments lasting multiple years. Total expenditures are therefore not a useful measure of available resources each year.

We used a fixed-effects model to estimate the relationship between revenue and expenditures and share of LatinX students. One of the challenges with estimating fiscal capacity over time is district-level changes over time. A fixed-effects model helps to account for these changes by removing all unobserved time-invariant characteristic differences between districts while allowing for time-varying characteristics common to all districts. This is consistent with school finance research estimating district resources longitudinally (i.e., Clapp, et al., 2008; Dhar & Ross, 2012; Häkkinen, et al., 2003; Weber, 2018).

We fit the following model to answer Question 1:

$$\text{Fiscal Capacity } PP_{ij} = \beta_{0ij} + \beta_1 \text{Latin}X_{ij} + \beta_2 X_{ij} + \gamma_i + \delta_j + \mu_{ij}$$

where:

Fiscal Capacity PP_{ij} = revenue or expenditure variable per pupil for district i in year j

$\beta_1 \text{Latin}X_{ij}$ = percentage of LatinX students in district i of year j

X_{ij} = vector of controls for district i in year j

γ_i = district fixed effects

δ_j = year fixed effects

μ_{ij} = error term

District fixed effects allow us to examine changes in fiscal capacity per pupil, within districts, over time. Year fixed effects remove any confounding factors specific to a given year but common across all districts in the state. The error term captures within district fiscal capacity per-pupil changes unrelated to randomness in fiscal capacity, a specific year, or time-varying observable district characteristics. Standard errors will be clustered at the district level.

Qualitative Strand

Data. To understand the resource disparities that existed before COVID-19 and how the pandemic has exacerbated these resource disparities we conducted interviews with chief executive leaders in school districts with above the mean of LatinX student proportions for the state, approximately 6%. We used semi-structured interviews with five leaders ($n=5$), interviewing each participant twice leading to 10 total interviews. This study initially used a convenience sampling approach contacting partners that have previously worked with the researcher. We used snowball or network sampling to identify additional participants who met the parameters of the study (Patton, 2001). This purposive sample strategy is appropriate for this study due to the nuances of the sub-topic and sub-population (*i.e.*, school finance and adjudication, LatinX). Finally, LatinX student scale in South Carolina is minimal compared to other race/ethnicity categories. However, this study is at the forefront of preparation for continued LatinX student increases across the state.

Methodological approach. To answer Questions 2 and 3, we conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that allows for extraction of themes, analysis and interpretation of the messages presented through education leaders (Clarke, 2009; Saldaña, 2015; Reid, et al., 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). As a methodological technique, IPA helps researchers capture a phenomenon from the perspective of the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Participants are embedded in the understanding of the phenomena under study.

In this study, we tried to understand previous disparity and how the pandemic exacerbated this disparity. IPA favors both emic (internal) and etic (external) positions (Clarke, 2009). The approach is emic-centered, which makes sense of the data through local experts that inform thematic codes. Verbatim quotes help ground analyses and interpretations and highlight the epistemology of education leaders. Multilevel comparative open coding helps minimize interpretation bias by incorporating input from respondents in the sample.

Analysis. We conducted interviews via Zoom and recorded them. The transcripts were then cleaned and transcripts were corrected for accuracy with the recording, and additional details were added as needed. The transcripts were uploaded to *NVivo 1.7.1* and line-by-line coded to fully engage with the data (Saldaña, 2015). The first cycle of coding used concept coding, which “assigns meso or macro levels of meaning to data” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 119). This is often done with a single word and is an appropriate tool for phenomenological studies (Saldaña, 2015). Following the first cycle of coding, a second cycle coding allowed for the concept codes to be distilled further into three broader themes, presented in the findings to follow.

Concurrent Mixed-Methods Analysis

To understand the phenomena from multiple angles, we relied on a mixed concurrent design. In a concurrent mixed-methods analysis, both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the analysis are associated to provide context for both (Leech et al., 2010). We drew on this type of mixed-methods design for its ability to provide triangulation of multiple forms of data and to provide a base of support for complementary data (Creswell et al., 2003).

When triangulated, multiple forms of data enable the researcher to converge findings through multiple methods to improve knowledge of a phenomena and provide a narrative of the phenomenon that is more accurate than the single method design interpretation. In this study, evidence provided by the quantitative and qualitative data help to broaden understanding of school finance allocations for areas of South Carolina that educate a higher proportion of LatinX students and how the policy process impacts chief executive decision-making.

Findings

Quantitative Strand

The quantitative strand of this study presents some interesting findings about both the disparity that exists between districts in revenue allocation and how this disparity targets high LatinX school districts and districts in poverty. Exhibit 2 presents descriptive analysis of the data. The exhibit shows that South Carolina presents itself statistically as a predominantly Black (44%) and White (47%) educational state. LatinX students make up 5.3% of the total student population, and at most in any school district across the entire sample approximately 37%.

The state exhibits a high degree of poverty. The free and reduced-priced lunch program participant data shows the mean is 68%, while the school district poverty index statistic shows the mean of poverty reaching 75% with a max of 99%.

Concurrently, South Carolina’s median income is \$24,567. This is \$38,888 less than the report 2008 median income of the United States, \$63,455, and \$43,601 less than the 2018 median income of \$68,168. The exhibit below provides salient information regarding the fiscal state of school districts in South Carolina.

The exhibit shows the mean total revenue per pupil from 2008 to 2018 was \$11,609. This total revenue is comprised primarily of the local share of revenue per pupil, \$4,322, and state share of revenue per pupil, \$5,778. The federal share is \$1,463, which represents approximately 13%. The exhibit also reports salient expenditure information, while revenue is the amount of money available to school districts, expenditures are the amount spent. Total expenditure per pupil was \$9,836.

Maintenance and operations (M&O) expenditures are those funds designated for administration, instruction, instruction support and operations. The mean M&O expenditure level was approximately \$968 with a maximum across our sample of \$2,189. Instructional expenditures are those funds directly related to classroom instruction. The mean of instructional expenditures was approximately \$5,424.

Exhibit 2: Descriptive Statistics Variables of Interest 2008 to 2018

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max
District Demographic Variables					
% Black	908	44.0%	(25.1)	0	97.3%
% White	908	47.1%	(23.2)	0	86.8%
% LatinX	908	5.3%	(5.0)	0	36.7%
% Asian	908	0.9%	(0.9)	0	5.6%
% Indigenous	908	0.4%	(0.7)	0	5.9%

% HI/PI	908	0.1%	(0.1)	0	0.6%
% Two or more	908	1.9%	(1.7)	0	6.9%
% Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	908	67.8%	(19.0)	0	100.0%
% Emergent Bilingual	908	3.78%	(4.0)	0	26.8%
Community Demographic Variables					
% District Poverty Index	908	74.5%	(14.5)	21.1%	98.5%
Median Income	738	\$24,567	(1405.96)	\$23,293	\$27,366
Per-Pupil School Finance Variables					
Total Revenue Per Pupil	878	\$11,609	(2003.88)	\$8,187	\$17,723
Total Local Revenue Per Pupil	878	\$4,322	(1561.74)	\$1,816	\$9,547
Total State Revenue Per Pupil	878	\$5,778	(872.67)	\$3,953	\$8,548
Total Federal Revenue Per Pupil	879	\$1,463	(626.21)	\$495	\$3,665
Total Stat-Loc. Revenue Per Pupil	878	\$10,131	(1806.13)	\$6,753	\$15,689
Total State Formula Aid Adjustment Per Pupil	904	\$1,306	(297.82)	0	\$2,468
M&O Expenditure Per Pupil	908	\$968	(254.15)	0	\$2,189
Instructional Expenditure Per pupil	908	\$5,424	(844.07)	0	\$8,582
Total Expenditure Per Pupil	904	\$9,836	(1758.19)	\$5,085	\$26,289
Note. Information for student demographic information, total state formula aid adjustment per pupil, maintenance and operations expenditures per pupil, and instructional expenditures per pupil, are obtained from NCES. Poverty index data is obtained from the Department of South Carolina state education agency.					

In 1977, South Carolina passed the *Education Funding Act* and instituted an equalization formula for South Carolina public schools. The EFA calculates its allocations using a product of district base student cost (BSC), supplemented through weighted pupil units (WPU) (*i.e.*, multipliers on the BSC) that enables the state to consider the needs of students with disabilities and the index of taxing ability (ITA):

$$\text{State Aid} = (\text{DWPU} \times \text{BSC}) - (\text{SWPU} \times \text{BSC} \times \text{Index} \times 0.3)$$

1. DWPU = District Weighted Pupil Units
2. SWPU = Statewide Weighted Pupil Units
3. BSC = Base Student Cost
4. ITA = School District Index of Taxpaying Ability

By applying multiplier weights in critical areas (S.C. Code § 59-20-40(1)(c)), the equalization formula accounts for any additional cost of educating a student.

For many years, South Carolina adjusted the BSC to account for increases in cost due to inflation. The S.C. General Assembly ceased this practice after the Great Recession (*i.e.*, 2007-2009). It now sets the BSC at an arbitrary yearly amount.

For many years, South Carolina has not fully funded the BSC. Exhibit 3 shows the severity of cuts and the extent of the shortfall. Yearly enrollment was calculated using a sum of total enrollment for only those districts in our sample (n=908) for each year, excluding adult education, to conservatively estimate the BSC shortfall.

Enrollment data were obtained through the NCES. The exhibit reveals the most severe cuts occurred in 2011 with a total shortfall of \$790,726,950 in BSC funding. In fact, in every year of our analysis from 2009 to 2018, South Carolina shows a shortfall of funding between what is estimated as necessary to fund education across the state and what is provided to districts.

Furthermore, according to data provided by the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (2021), before 2008, the last year the BSC was considered fully funded was 1998. In 2019-20, the projected state gap in BSC funding was \$606 per student, with a difference between BSC budgeted \$3,095 and BSC actual of \$2,489.

In this analysis, 2008 to 2018 mean total state formula aid was \$1,306 per pupil (from Exhibit 2), well below the estimated 2008 level of \$2,476 and 2018 level of \$2,984 (South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, 2021).

Exhibit 3: Base Student Cost Shortfall 2008 to 2018					
Year	Estimated BSC (Budgeted)	Final BSC (Actual)	Difference (Budgeted-Actual)	Enrollment	Shortfall
2008	\$2,476	\$2,476	\$0	710685	\$0
2009	\$2,578	\$2,184	-\$394	714290	-\$281,430,260
2010	\$2,687	\$1,756	-\$931	715590	-\$666,214,290
2011	\$2,720	\$1,615	-\$1,105	714742	-\$789,789,910
2012	\$2,790	\$1,880	-\$910	715744	-\$651,327,040
2013	\$2,790	\$2,012	-\$778	721600	-\$561,404,800
2014	\$2,771	\$2,100	-\$671	729386	-\$489,418,006
2015	\$2,742	\$2,101	-\$641	737401	-\$472,674,041
2016	\$2,801	\$2,197	-\$604	743320	-\$448,965,280
2017	\$2,993	\$2,350	-\$643	747868	-\$480,879,124
2018	\$2,984	\$2,425	-\$559	750032	-\$419,267,888

Note. BSC data was obtained through the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office *EFA Factor Computation*: https://rfa.sc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/EFA22_7-24-20.pdf

Exhibit 4 shows the variation represented by the CV, for total revenue per pupil of 17%. The local revenue per-pupil variation is quite large at 36%. This is expected as this is representative of community wealth. Research shows those states with large gaps in community wealth will also show gaps in local per-pupil revenue allocations. There is also a relatively large variation when examining federal revenue per pupil of 43%.

The Gini and Theil coefficients show that these variations hold. However, the variation is represented much more conservatively. Exhibit 4 shows there is gross variation in the per-pupil expenditures between districts. Acutely the M&O expenditure per-pupil variation, represented by the CV, is 26%, and the instructional expenditure per-pupil variation is 16%. These relationships hold for the other dispersion indicators, although again, they are much more conservative in their estimated variation.

Finally, Exhibit 4 shows there is variation in total state formula aid adjustment per pupil, CV of 23%. All three dispersion indicators help to isolate inequity for the respective variables. Odden & Picus (2020) set cutoffs for inequity with the standard for the CV is less than or equal to 10% and the Gini ratio is less than or equal to 5%. Clearly, South Carolina exhibits gross dispersion across the major fiscal capacity variables and thus exhibits some degree of inequity. There are limitations to these measures of inequity that ultimately mask variation in fiscal capacity due to perceived need, thus we continue with a landscape descriptive analysis of need-based categories specifically focusing on poverty.

Exhibit 4: Coefficient of Variation, Gini Ratio, and Theil Index, for South Carolina School Districts, 2008 to 2018			
Measure	CV	Gini	Theil
Total Revenue Per Pupil	17.26	0.10	0.01
Total Local Revenue Per Pupil	36.14	0.20	0.06
Total State Revenue Per Pupil	15.10	0.08	0.01
Total Federal Revenue Per Pupil	42.79	0.23	0.08
Total State and Local Revenue Per Pupil	17.83	0.10	0.02
Total State Formula Aid Adjustment Per Pupil	22.81	0.12	0.03
M&O Expenditures Per Pupil	26.26	0.14	0.04
Instructional Expenditures Per Pupil	15.56	0.08	0.01
Note. Fiscal data for this dispersion analysis were obtained from NCES.			

Exhibit 5 displays the mean of each fiscal capacity variable per pupil from 2008 to 2018. Connecting to the literature review, Exhibit 5 shows the differences between those districts with greater than 50% poverty and those with less than 50% poverty. There are gaps between high and low poverty schools for all fiscal capacity variables, except federal funding (*i.e.*, \$836) specifically tied to Title I funds and poverty designation within a district and state formula aid (*i.e.*, \$73).

The largest difference in Exhibit 5 is in the combined state and local revenue per-pupil category. Those districts with greater than 50% of students in poverty receive approximately \$1,810 less than those districts with less than 50% poverty. This is a function of local revenue per-pupil poverty disparity. Districts with greater than 50% poverty receive approximately \$1,780 less in local per-pupil funding. This is not surprising and is part of the history of funding disproportionality. Furthermore, for instructional expenditures per pupil those school districts with greater than 50% of students in poverty receive approximately \$367 less per pupil.

Exhibit 5: Descriptive Statistics of School Finance Variables Per Pupil by Poverty Designation 2008 to 2018

Measure	Less than 50% Poverty	Greater than 50% Poverty	Difference
Total Revenue Per Pupil	\$12,457	\$11,564	-\$893
Total Local Revenue Per Pupil	\$6,012	\$4,233	-\$1,779
Total State Revenue Per Pupil	\$5,837	\$5,775	-\$62
Total Federal Revenue Per Pupil	\$659	\$1,495	\$836
Total State and Local Revenue Per Pupil	\$11,850	\$10,040	-\$1,810
Total State Formula Aid Adjustment Per Pupil	\$1,236	\$1,309	\$73
M&O Expenditures Per Pupil	\$987	\$967	-\$20
Instructional Expenditures Per Pupil	\$5,773	\$5,406	-\$367

Note. Fiscal data for this dispersion analysis were obtained from NCES.

Exhibit 6 shows the results of the regression analyses, which correlate school district funding with the proportion of LatinX students. The first two columns show the variation of state revenue per pupil for high-LatinX and otherwise similar low-LatinX districts based on post-estimation predicted values for districts with 10%, 30% and 90% students identified as LatinX.

Our analysis indicates that, as the share of LatinX students in a district increases, so do the gaps in fiscal capacity, discretely gaps in state revenue per pupil. For instance, in 2018, school districts with 10% LatinX students received \$1,192 more in state revenue than districts with 30% LatinX students. Concurrently, as shown in the right-hand side of Exhibit 6, school districts with 90% LatinX students received \$4,768 less than those districts with 10% LatinX students.

Exhibit 6: Estimated State Revenue Per-Pupil Funding Gap Between High and Low-Percentage of LatinX Students within a School District, 2008 to 2018

	State Revenue Per Pupil			State Revenue Per Pupil		
	10% LatinX	30% LatinX	Difference	10% LatinX	90% LatinX	Difference
2008	\$5,235.86	\$4,074.70	-\$1,161.17	\$5,235.86	\$591.20	-\$4,644.66
2009	\$4,969.80	\$3,989.74	-\$980.05	\$4,969.80	\$1,049.58	-\$3,920.22
2010	\$4,714.04	\$3,936.59	-\$777.46	\$4,714.04	\$1,604.22	-\$3,109.83
2011	\$4,675.36	\$4,162.87	-\$512.49	\$4,675.36	\$2,625.40	-\$2,049.96
2012	\$4,878.45	\$3,978.32	-\$900.13	\$4,878.45	\$1,277.95	-\$3,600.50
2013	\$5,204.37	\$4,511.09	-\$693.28	\$5,204.37	\$2,431.24	-\$2,773.13

2014	\$5,226.25	\$4,300.19	-\$926.07	\$5,226.25	\$1,522.00	-\$3,704.26
2015	\$5,468.03	\$4,509.18	-\$958.85	\$5,468.03	\$1,632.64	-\$3,835.39
2016	\$5,652.10	\$4,649.55	-\$1,002.55	\$5,652.10	\$1,641.90	-\$4,010.20
2017	\$6,113.31	\$5,254.62	-\$858.69	\$6,113.31	\$2,678.55	-\$3,434.76
2018	\$6,345.76	\$5,153.81	-\$1,191.95	\$6,345.76	\$1,577.97	-\$4,767.79

Note. Estimates are based on predicted values from regression-adjusted averages for districts with 10% and 90% Black student enrollment, weighting by total student enrollment.

In Exhibit 7, we estimated state revenue per pupil as a function of LatinX school district scale weighted by district enrollment size. We used this method because larger districts contribute more to the estimated relationships. We show the relationship of state revenue per pupil and district LatinX enrollment visually showing the characteristic gap in funding that exists year to year. We isolated state revenue per pupil to understand how districts with higher proportions of LatinX students ultimately intersect with state sources of funding to sufficiently address the learning needs of students.

Exhibit 7: State Revenue Per-Pupil High and Low LatinX Districts

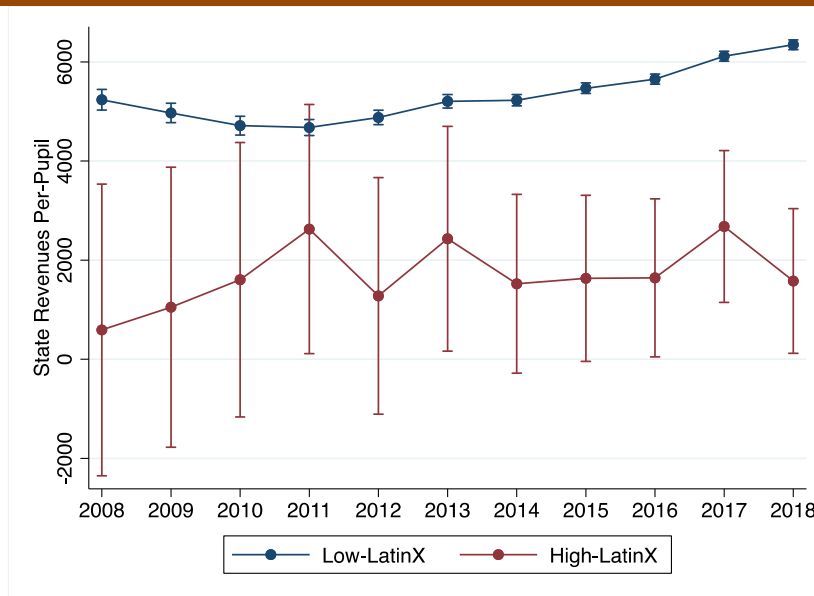


Exhibit 8 shows the relationships of state funding and the share of emergent bilingual (English learner) students in a school district. Once again, there is a characteristic gap between high-emergent bilingual and similarly low-emergent bilingual district enrollment. One of the inherent challenges within the LatinX community is the context of language and how language can become a barrier for learning if students are not provided the appropriate services.

Exhibit 8: State Revenue Per Pupil High and Low Emergent Bilingual Learner Districts

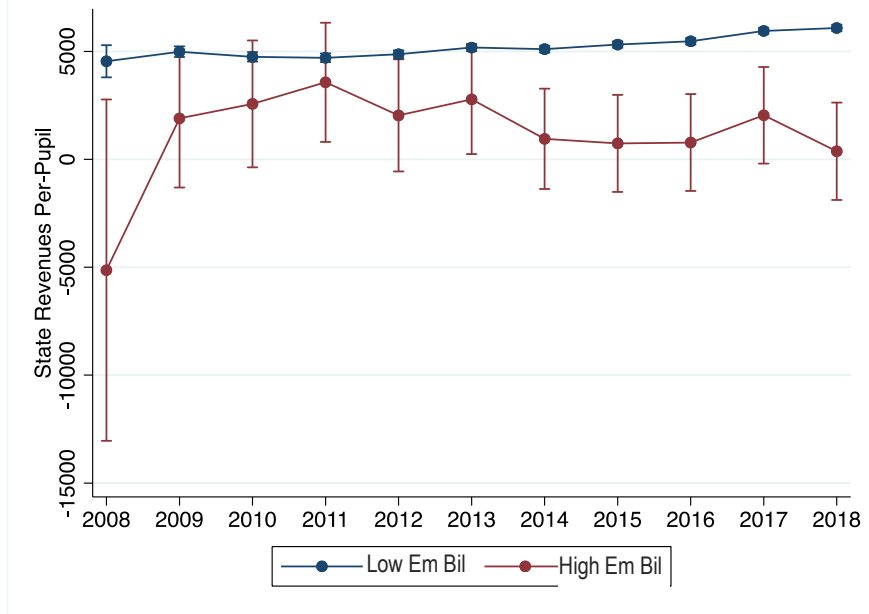
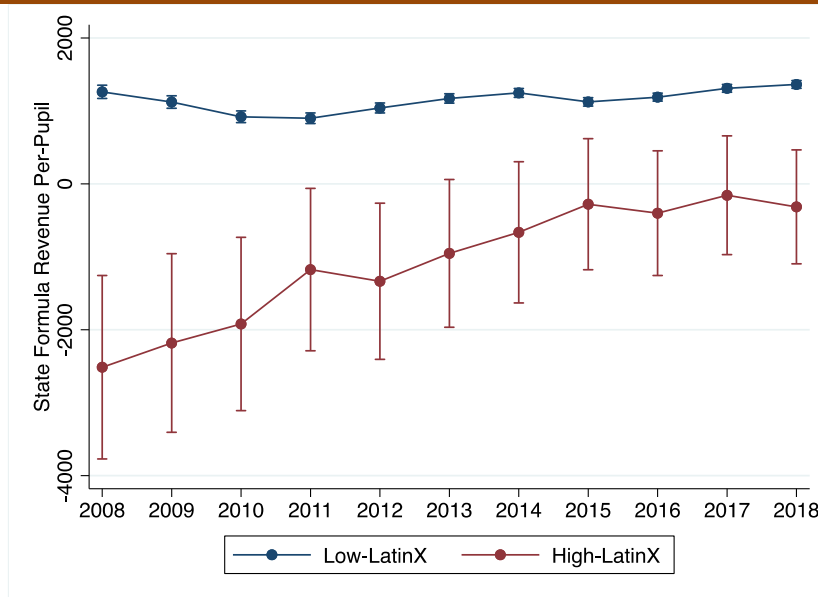


Exhibit 8 shows that state-level funding may not be accounting for emergent bilingual proportion, and thus districts with more emergent bilingual students may be at a distinct disadvantage when funding crucial services for emergent bilingual students.

Finally, Exhibit 9 shows the relationship between state formula aid revenue per pupil and high-LatinX versus similarly low-LatinX districts. Again, there is a correspondent gap between high and low LatinX districts, with low LatinX districts receiving greater amounts of formula aid than low LatinX enrollment districts, 10% and 90% respectively for Exhibits 7, 8 and 9.

Exhibit 9: State Formula Aid Revenue Per Pupil High and Low LatinX Districts



The results of the descriptive analysis of fiscal capacity and funding in South Carolina provides additional nuance to the school finance debate across the state. Ultimately, this study targeted state-level appropriations for educating LatinX students specifically and, while an argument can be made that the local share of funding may compensate for lack of state funding, we should give pause to discuss how the state share of funding, or lack thereof, puts districts doing more than their part at risk.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which was not included in our analysis due to data limitations and the lag of publicly available sources, invariably affected fiscal capacity for districts. During economic downturns, low-wealth school districts serving higher proportions of racially and ethnically diverse students exhibit decreases in local tax levies that support local education and are disproportionately impacted by state austerity measures (Jackson, et al., 2021; Knight, 2017; Shores & Steinberg, 2019).

The state-level funding disproportionality tends to create greater challenges for school districts serving higher proportions of racially and ethnically diverse students because those districts are unable to supplement state losses through local tax levies (Shores & Steinberg, 2019). Furthermore, South Carolina has yet to fully recover from post-recessionary austerity measures. Then the COVID-19 pandemic created a scenario where already-strained school districts had to contend with decreases in revenue but maintain the same level of service. Thus, to further explore how the S.C. General Assembly interacts with the daily operation of schools during the pandemic, we interviewed district leaders as discussed below.

Qualitative Strand

The quantitative analysis shows that South Carolina’s state investment in its districts that serve a greater proportion of LatinX students – and by proxy LatinX students’ writ large – may not counteract the education needs present. Furthermore, currently, little is known about how the COVID-19 pandemic

exacerbated the educational needs of LatinX students and those school districts serving the highest proportion of LatinX students.

For this reason, it was imperative to understand from district leadership what role the legislature played in mediating the disparities presented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this qualitative analysis, we intend to further highlight three broad themes related to district-level disparity during the pandemic.

District-Level Need

In interviews, school district leaders expressed there was a lack of resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. One district leader (BB) stated:

“We realized that some of our students come to school for those essentials. That was probably the most consistent part of their day, caring adults, it’s a controlled environment. And I mean, not security, controlled environment, I mean, heating and cooling controlled environment. So, it was a comfortable, nice, good 72 to 74 degrees, consistent all day, two meals. You have breakfast, and you’ll have a lunch. And you’ll have opportunity to socialize.”

Acutely, district leaders stated that South Carolina may not have sufficiently allocated state resources but relied on federal sources during the pandemic. BB once again:

“The supplemental funds were there to provide some of the resources or provide some of the services that we needed. But that was not a state initiative. It was not a state initiative. And there was some concerns about the South Carolina school districts taking the federal government money because of the strings that are attached. I don’t know about those strings. But that money came from the federal government, so not from the state of South Carolina.”

BB identifies the state as not only insufficiently addressing district need internally, but possibly impeding intervention to support schools. District leaders also identified specific areas of need in technological infrastructure due to virtual instruction. MM a district leader states:

“Being in a rural area, we didn’t have Internet. It was not everywhere. So that means one of the primary ways that we are going to try to provide instructional services is through different forms of Internet services or it’s transported that way. So, we have to figure out how are we going to develop or get the material to the students who don’t have that access. How are we going to stay up to date with them?”

Entire school districts began a virtual program of instruction. With that came a plethora of complications. District leaders were required then to provide triage technology infrastructure so that students received some program of instruction. BB describes:

“We were assigning lessons virtually. And so, we turned our Wi-Fi on and turned it up as high as we could. So, when you’re sitting in the parking lot or at the picnic benches, you would have connectivity to our Wi-Fi system.”

Students required technology resources, and many times school districts were providing this resource themselves, using federal funds, with a great deal of state-level oversight. A district leader (HP) states that

there was a pipeline of communication with the S.C. General Assembly on how districts could use funds including the following.

“What was allowable, what wasn’t allowed, because you wanted to be in compliance. With that, you know, you wanted to ensure for example, you could use these funds for technology and the purchase of technology. If you were trying to outfit a great deal of grade levels of schools with Wi-Fi capability, enhancing the Wi-Fi capabilities, or providing students with mobile devices to be able to operate from home, we wanted to make sure we were in compliance.”

These school district leaders highlight the salient realities of needing to educate students while contending with a state that, as our quantitative analysis shows, is at best indifferent. Beyond addressing areas of need then, leaders must contend with a legislature that may not broadly understand the need present or sufficiently communicate with school district leaders.

Communication with State Officials

School district-level officers require a reciprocal level of communication with state-level leaders to ensure student need is addressed. If this communication is unidirectional, or if state leaders never inquire beyond cursory oversight and accountability standards, then there may be a disconnect between how state leaders understand the everyday challenges of a district. This was a challenge during the pandemic. BB states:

“Any discussions that I’ve had as it relates to policy, education policy, has been initiated by me or my staff. So that’s from school safety. That’s to academic achievement, curriculum and instruction. That is student well-being and support funding allocations, that the full gamut, you know, that’s been initiated by on behalf of myself or members of administration.”

BB expresses that state leaders are not engaging in the reciprocal communication that may be required between school district-level officers and state leaders. This may also help with the crucial oversight and accountability the state often requires. MM states:

“It would be helpful if there was a reliable source from the state department that could say any district can do these set of things, and just having presentations and knowledge of who to contact if you run into different issues. I think that would be helpful for us. I’m sure some districts don’t experience that. And I guess big districts have the money to hire people to do that. But in a smaller district, we really don’t.”

MM expresses the reality of how disconnected communication is for some school districts. For this district leader, the connection to state leaders is crucial to navigating the accountability process and the rural disconnect to state leaders who may disregard the added difficulties of existing in rural spaces. HP expresses the lack of reciprocal communication as a type of hegemony stating the following.

“There’s always this fear that you’re some sort of way going to just undo a structure that has been in place that has allowed a segment of the population, primarily white conservative folk, maybe to continue to thrive, and you’re trying to, you’re going to take something away from me.”

This dynamic that exists between white communities and other communities permeates the south and in

South Carolina as a port of slavery has permeated the culture. However, district leaders do express wanting to participate in multiple forms of communication for the sake of the students. SR states the following about legislators:

“They need to come to the meetings [board meetings], I’ll sit down, have lunch, and have a conversation. I think we learned so much from each other. And what people need when we asked them, what do you need? They don’t ask us what we need, right? They go in and make votes based off what they think.”

State legislators are voting unidirectionally based on their assumptions, SR instigates this point and BB substantiates this point stating:

“We’re not even going to listen to what they have to say, about education, we know better than you. Because you just teach. And so, we know better than you, because you’re just a high-ranking teacher, but you’re not really a CEO.”

With this final point, BB makes clear the distinction between the actual job of a school district leader and the respect the S.C. General Assembly pays to its leaders may not have been present during the pandemic.

Furthermore, all the leaders expressed this break in communication and break in acknowledgment that schools are complicated spaces that require everyone in positions of power to be in communication. The General Assembly may fear though that paying respect to these leaders and listening or providing pipelines of communication may somehow upend the status quo. The final section below engages how district leaders do upend this status quo and points toward community-driven efforts and solidarity to overcome.

Community and Coalition

Throughout the entire interview process, there was a sense that school district leaders recognize schools are a community effort. If state legislators do not ask leaders what they need and there is no dynamic mechanism to report out, district leaders often find ways to come together as a community. This extends to the LatinX community and how leaders are thinking about the schools as sites of cohesion. BB states:

“Partnering with some of the churches in the area, to see to recruit, really, we’re recruiting individuals, and they are bilingual or multilingual, and then we can hire them in a position and then compensate them for that unique skill that they have, we can get them certified.”

This is one community-driven effort to provide translation services for the bilingual families of this district. This is important because:

“Many of those families [LatinX families], they do not feel like they are a part of the school’s community. Because when they go, they see zero representation, and very few people that are able to communicate with them in their native tongue. And so, they don’t feel a part [of]. And when they don’t feel a part, you don’t get that full level of engagement.”

BB finds it necessary to constantly engage with LatinX families through multiple means that may be outside of the schools, so they do not feel as if they are treated with indifference and then disconnect.

What BB wants is to have families connect with the district and feel included. SR states:

“We know that parent involvement equals success for students. So, the more parents are involved, that’s what they are. So, we need to find ways to make sure that we’re engaging them. Getting people like [district employee name redacted] involved, who is well known in the Latino community, right. So, continue to build that relationship and partnership with people like her [district employee name redacted] to make sure parents feel safe and welcome when it comes our school.”

As a priority, these leaders are making efforts to address the needs of the LatinX community in some way. Those efforts though are difficult. MM states:

“The fact that we are not funded at a level that we are able to provide as much support for those families, meaning, that we have enough ELL [emergent bilingual learner] teachers that are here, specific programs and assistance.”

This is concerning because, once again, MM identifies a lack of resources to address their need and specifically the need of LatinX students. To overcome though, MM implemented district-grown initiatives but believes there needs to be greater efforts that are structural. MM states:

“We need diverse people in our leadership. They are in a position to help influence what we do through our entire system... We need Latino teachers and administrators. If there was a way we could help address this teacher shortage, and education shortage, by helping [to] take this population of people that’s growing within our district and create programs to make it accessible for those kids to become teachers and administrators. We’ve got to create [a pipeline program], because here is a possible population that’s growing that we could. If we could tap into that, it would really be helping two ways. One it would be putting more of those families in leadership positions within the established community structure, and it would help everybody coming because they’ve got people that understand at a level that I can’t because it’s not my lived experience. No matter how hard I try I’m never going to be able to meet the need like somebody who comes through that same path and can talk to that parent in their native language and make them feel, you know, [comfortable].”

MM helps us to understand how engrained the sense of community is and how school district leaders view the power of the community as actively able to participate in mediating the structural challenges of the district if they are supported themselves. MM also helps to situate the educator need, against a population of individuals he views as having the capacity to mediate this need, if provided pipelines of access. With this, portion of dialogue, MM captures the essence of this study, structurally the LatinX community of South Carolina may be unsupported, despite the many ways it currently supports the state and despite the ways it could support the state if provided sufficient opportunities. In our current understanding of state dynamics, however, the LatinX community is not viewed as fundamentally a part of the state or as fundamentally deserving of those opportunities by indifferent state leaders.

Discussion

Our data and analysis show that South Carolina has a history of school finance disparity. Political

powerbrokers in South Carolina have neglected to address the historical school finance disparity across the state. South Carolina, and the state level normative ideological constraints, obstruct equity forgoing liberation. In the place of liberation and equity, South Carolina purposefully demeans its historically minoritized communities and proposes oppressive policies that persecute our community, and in this study, mediates funding for LatinX students and school districts that serve these students. The oppressive policy approach is represented in the legacy of inequitable school finance and recent legislation by the S.C. General Assembly that limits freedom and democracy.

Anti-Critical Race Theory Legislation

In the 124th session of 2021-22, the S.C. General Assembly proposed several widespread pieces of legislation aimed at reducing the discourse about the state's history of enslavement and persecution and discretely prohibits teaching critical race theory (CRT). These bills include HB 4325, HB 4343, HB 4605, and SB 534. In the body of these bills, South Carolina makes no attempt to navigate the nuances of its own history, or CRT.

For instance, HB 4325 (2021) would have prevented instruction in any public school that “directs or otherwise compels students to personally affirm, adopt or adhere to the tenets of critical race theory.” The narrative of HB 4325 did not attempt to expound on the nuances of CRT, and instead mis-categorized the tenets of CRT. HB 4325 did not address any of the secondary knowledge bases of CRT (*i.e.*, LatCrit, DesiCrit) and in no way delineated how CRT was developed or why it is used (see Bell, 2004; Crenshaw, 1988; Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Harris, 1995; Matsuda, 1995).

A similar bill, HB 4343, focused on content and instruction, criminalizing professional development and training grounded in liberatory knowledge, justice, equity, and emancipation. In this bill, South Carolina would have proposed strict curricula oversight and forced educators to submit curriculum to the state. Similarly, SB 534 proposed strict guidance for how educators in South Carolina teach U.S. History. This included diminishing the history of Indigenous genocide, Slavery-Reconstruction-Jim Crow, and the period of colonization. Finally, HB 4605 would have placed school districts at risk of loss of resources, threatening the funding for schools if they did not comply with the curriculum mandates and strict accountability practices.

While not passed into law, this set of bills represents a steep turn toward continued educational persecution, prioritizing the whims of a legislature that for so long has disregarded educational justice for minoritized communities. South Carolina prides itself on stewarding the freedom of its residents, juxtaposed against the undeniable degradation of educational agency that these bills present. South Carolina may need to re-evaluate who exactly they feel is, or should be, free. Ultimately, constraining educators to narrow versions of history do nothing to protect the South Carolinas children. Instead, in the fray, many of our students will inevitably languish in schools that lack resources, and soon if South Carolina has its way, lack necessary spaces of educational liberty. South Carolina argues that it is protecting children from indoctrination, however, it does little to protect our community from the indoctrination of a state complacent to hide its own history, and insufficiently fund schools.

Thus, if we accept these bills as part of the history of persecution of people of color, then a greater question arises in line with this study, what vested interest does South Carolina have in supporting LatinX students, LatinX communities, or those leaders that support gente via an educational pipeline? In our estimation, there is no evidence to support that South Carolina has a vested interest or factually invested

beyond the cursory allocation.

Key Findings Summary

Both the quantitative and qualitative strands of this study were integral in presenting a holistic perspective about South Carolina, its school funding, and the complications presented during COVID-19. This research addressed three research questions. The first was, What education resource inequities existed prior to COVID-19? Discretely, our analysis shows that for many years, South Carolina has underfunded the basic student cost (BSC) with noteworthy gaps in funding districts serving a high percentage of LatinX students, emergent bilingual students, and students in poverty.

- School districts with greater than 50% of students in poverty receive approximately \$1,810 less than those districts with less than 50% poverty.
- School districts with 90% LatinX students received \$4,768 less than those districts with 10% LatinX students.
- State-level funding may not be accounting for school district proportions of emergent bilingual students.

Regarding the second research question, Has COVID-19 exacerbated historical resource disparities and how? Our qualitative analysis shows that school district leaders reported a lack of resources during the pandemic. Already-strained school districts had to contend with decreases in revenue but maintain the same level of service. School district leaders need reciprocal communication with state leaders to ensure student needs are addressed. School district leaders recognize schools are a community effort. If state legislators do not ask leaders what they need, and there is no dynamic mechanism to report granular needs, school district leaders find ways to come together as a community. This extends to the LatinX community and how leaders are thinking about the schools as sites of cohesion.

From the perspective of our data analysis, we know that South Carolina exhibits a gross amount of revenue disproportionality and, specifically, revenue inequity for those districts who serve the largest proportion of LatinX students in the state. From the perspective of our partner interviews, we now better understand that South Carolinas' education leaders feel a sense of isolation and have done their best as educators and community members to mediate the obstacles presented by COVID-19.

Ultimately, the purpose of this project was to focus on pre- and post-COVID-19 resource disparity through direct contact to leaders with intimate knowledge of how the pandemic disrupted education in LatinX communities. It is important to understand if high-proportion LatinX districts have the necessary resources to provide a salient program of instruction to their LatinX students because South Carolinas' LatinX community is of historical and practical significance to the state. This includes helping to develop the future of South Carolinas' economic stability and also the state's democratic participation.

Finally, it is important to understand how to move forward. In the Policy Implications section we address our third research question, What solutions could South Carolina incorporate to ameliorate resource disparity?, which attempts to provide salient guidance for resolving the disparity that exists in South Carolina.

Policy Implications

South Carolina's current educational trajectory of increased school privatization and increased policy dysconsciousness may be creating greater harms to LatinX students, both isolating the population and diminishing the education opportunities that are available. While the S.C. General Assembly has placed a great deal of effort vilifying CRT through HB 4325, HB 4343, HB 4605, and SB 534, it has done little to reconcile the school finance need across the state. This is especially true of targeted need this research study shows is necessary for school districts serving higher proportions of LatinX students. To make steps toward resolution, we offer the following policy responses.

First, South Carolina must fully fund its education system, including to serve LatinX students and emergent bilingual students. Our analysis shows the current year-to-year BSC shortfall has now reached \$790,726,950. This shortfall is difficult to overcome in a system that has changed so quickly over the last 10 years. To that end, South Carolina must find a way to increase the state share of funding for public schools overall and to provide targeted funding for educating LatinX students and their communities. While the local share of school revenue possibly counterbalances the availability of funding, the state must make an effort to meet the full need associated with educating LatinX students. This includes increasing the proposed emergent bilingual state funding multiplier of 0.15 in 2022-23 (H630 Part 1B).

Increasing state funding would help to fully support services for South Carolina's diverse students, bolstering academic material, and human resource capital writ large. Targeting funds, however, could potentially support LatinX students through the academic pipeline and help them thrive in a holistic manner. Increases in school funding help to mitigate inequity throughout an entire state system, help to increase student achievement, and play a role in the long-term benefits of schooling (Jackson, et al., 2016; Lafortune, et al., 2018).

Targeting, this type of funding for LatinX and emergent bilingual students would markedly improve the services available for these students including creating inclusive learning environments where students could invest themselves in academic and culturally-relevant pedagogy, could potentially increase teacher diversity in public schools providing students an academic resource that mirrors their own potential self-perceptions of academic success, and can help support innovative programs fostered in community assets that lead to higher education, and a stable workforce.

Second, South Carolina must try to understand school districts' acute needs and allow for communication from direct district leaders and personnel. This is different than the top-heavy policy style that currently dominates the policy landscape of the state. The findings of this research suggest there are few opportunities for district leaders to communicate their needs, and few if any instances where the S.C. General Assembly opens itself up for substantial influence from those leaders with front-line knowledge. State policymakers want to have a hand in everyday curricular decisions yet are not doing the necessary landscape information gathering from school district experts who could steer policy decisions with the potential to make change. Thus, formally widening the lines would alleviate discourse dominance, while simultaneously providing crucial information to fund districts – and by proxy schools – in a manner that helps support all students.

Finally, South Carolina must provide greater ethnic and cultural support for its LatinX community. This includes funding directed toward this growing population and toward educating these students. Furthermore, South Carolina must evaluate its institutional structures and question if the current political structure supports a global perspective diversity and to a large extent includes all voices in state-level policy discourse. The diversity of South Carolina's school-age population will continue to increase, and South Carolina must be willing to recognize and provide a platform of political support and respect for the experiences of people from all backgrounds. Concurrently, South Carolina must mediate the ways in which policy negatively impacts the LatinX community and revisit those policies that decrease potential.

Conclusion

State-level policy powerbrokers have largely disregarded the LatinX community in South Carolina and education leaders with practical educational insight. This scholarship has three goals: first to highlight the insights and nuance of educational leaders; second, to highlight the school finance disparity that exists across the state; and third, to support the LatinX community in South Carolina as one that is consistently targeted for police violence but practically ignored in the policy process.

By expanding insights into community-centered care from the perspective of education leaders, we may be able to inform policy praxis and support LatinX students across the state. The results of this quantitative analysis show that South Carolina has a long way to go before it addresses the school finance need. Furthermore, the results of the qualitative interviews show that district leaders not only feel unsupported but also have had to contend with disparities that go beyond data, language and labor market. Finally, South Carolina has not fundamentally changed its school funding program in decades and has opted for slight modifications to address its school finance disparity. These measures are insufficient and, to move forward, it may be necessary for all communities to work in coalition to ameliorate school funding challenges. The state of South Carolina, however, must be willing to listen to its school district leaders and upend the hegemony it is accustomed to.

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