

November 30, 2011

Districts Pay Less in Poor Schools, Report Says

By **SAM DILLON**

Education experts have long argued that a basic inequity in American schooling is that students in poor neighborhoods are frequently taught by low-paid rookie teachers who move on as they gain experience and rise up the salary scale.

Until now, however, researchers lacked nationwide data to prove it. That changed Wednesday when the Department of Education released a 78-page report.

Its conclusion: Tens of thousands of schools serving low-income students are being shortchanged because districts spend fewer state and local dollars on teacher salaries in those schools than on salaries in schools serving higher-income students.

“Low-income students need extra support and resources to succeed, but in far too many places, policies for assigning teachers and allocating resources are perpetuating the problem rather than solving it,” Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in a conference call.

The report, *Comparability of State and Local Expenditures Among Schools Within Districts*, is based on data collected from 84,000 public schools in districts that had to report salary expenditures to receive emergency federal money under the 2009 economic stimulus law, which channeled \$100 billion to public education.

The inequities documented in the report began to accumulate within a few years of the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the main federal law on public schools, which channels money to educate poor children. To prevent them from simply substituting the federal antipoverty dollars for local funds, districts had to show that they were spending at least as much state and local education money in the poor schools getting federal money as they were spending in their more affluent schools.

But a loophole allowed school systems to report educator salaries to Washington using a districtwide pay schedule, thus masking large salary gaps between the higher-paid veteran staffs in middle-class schools and the young teachers earning entry-level pay in poor parts of the district.

A few researchers have documented the problem with statewide data in Florida and some other

states, said Cynthia Brown, a vice president at the [Center for American Progress](#), a liberal research group. “But I’m excited because this is the first time that data documenting the problem has ever been collected on a nationwide basis,” she said. “Many of us have known for a long time that in some individual districts the high-poverty schools weren’t getting their fair share of state and local funds.”

Federal officials estimated that although the inequities were widespread, alleviating them would not be costly.

“Providing low-income schools with comparable spending would cost as little as 1 percent of the average district’s total spending,” but the extra resources “would make a big impact by adding between 4 percent and 15 percent to the budget” of schools serving poor students, the department said in a [statement](#).