



PHOTO: BORDER CROSSERS

# 'Our Ideal School'

IN THE UNITED STATES, **NOT ALL SCHOOLS ARE CREATED EQUAL.** BUT SOME STUDENTS HAVE PAINTED A PICTURE OF AN EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT IS FAIR.



CREDIT: GROUNDSWELL COMMUNITY MURAL PROJECT; LEAD ARTIST: JUAN VILLANUEVA

Students in New York City participating in the Border Crossers after-school program studied the issue of unequal funding for schools. They painted this mural and described their artwork:

**The first theme is:** What is an ideal school? We talked a lot about this in Border Crossers this year. Our idea of a perfect school would be a school that is not very crowded and that has good teachers. Also, a school that has enough materials. One more thing the ideal school has is every race with different colors representing different races. In our mural, the ideal school is in the middle and the unideal schools are in the corners.

**The second theme** in the mural is tracking. By saying tracking, we are trying to say not to make groups that separate people. And that when immigrants come to America, the tests should be fair to them. We drew pictures of what we would want a fair school to look like.

**The third theme is** school funding inequity. We wanted to show that every school should have the same amount of money. We also thought that people with less money shouldn't pay a higher percent of taxes for school than people with more money.

**In our mural,** the size of the people in suits symbolizes how much money is going into each school. The number of windows in the schools symbolizes the population of each school.



PHOTO: BORDER CROSSERS

## Q&A

### The Campaign for Fiscal Equity

Since 1993 the Campaign for Fiscal Equity has been working to ensure that students in New York City and throughout the state have enough resources and the opportunity for a good basic education. Stacy Feldman is director of communications with CFE.

#### Do you think that schools that don't have enough money will ever have enough money?

Absolutely! The state of New York is under a court order to provide New York City schools at least \$4.7 billion. As a matter of law, that money must be delivered to schools, and CFE is confident that it's going to happen in 2007.

#### How will that happen? What is CFE doing?

First, we're working very hard to get the highest court in New York state to issue a powerful order that would force the governor and the legislature to add those dollars. The order is expected in 2007. Second, New York state will soon have a new governor. It may be Eliot Spitzer, who has said that he would solve the lawsuit. Third, CFE has already drafted a bill that would meet the court order, and it's sitting in Albany right now. We are going to be working hard this year to make sure it gets passed.

#### Is too little money for education a problem in other states too?

Yes. What's going on in New York can be seen in school districts in almost every state. Across the nation, you'll see the same unfair distribution of resources that deprives poor and minority children of the dollars they need to succeed.

#### Is anyone doing anything about that?

Thankfully, there are groups similar to CFE all over the country that are standing up for children and filing lawsuits against their state governments. In fact, lawsuits have been brought in 29 states, and plaintiffs\* have prevailed in over three-quarters of them.

#### What can kids do to help?

Children are often the best advocates for their schools. I urge you to let lawmakers know that you want and deserve your CFE dollars. You can do so by logging onto [www.ourkidscantwait.org](http://www.ourkidscantwait.org) and sending letters to elected officials through the site. There are also opportunities to get involved directly with CFE. E-mail [sfeldman@cfequality.org](mailto:sfeldman@cfequality.org) to find out more.

\*PLAINTIFF: A person or group that raises a complaint in court.

### UNEQUAL FUNDING

Difference in spending per student in poor school districts compared to the richest districts. California and Massachusetts give more to poor schools; other states give less.

**+\$8**

California

**-\$295**

Florida

**-\$2,280**

New York

**-\$101**

Colorado

**+\$1,164**

Massachusetts

**-\$716**

Pennsylvania

2003 FIGURES; SOURCE: THE EDUCATION TRUST

## GROUP GOES TO COURT TO SEEK MORE MONEY FOR SCHOOLS

By KAZEMBE BALAGUN

We all know that public school is free, but ever think about who pays for stuff like teachers, books and desks? Most money comes from the state through taxes grown-ups pay.

On average, around the country we spend about \$900 less per student each year in the school districts with

more poor and minority students than we do in schools with more wealthy and white students.

New York City has 1.1 million students, making it the largest school district in the country. Yet, it receives less money per student compared to other cities in New York State.

In 1993 the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (fiscal means money, and equi-

ty means fairness) launched a lawsuit against the state of New York demanding more money for schools. In 2004, the Supreme Court of New York ordered the state to give New York City public schools an additional \$11.3 billion.

Governor George Pataki decided to appeal the bill to prevent it from taking effect. Why? Pataki says that

the additional money will make the state go broke. However, according to the CFE, the state already has \$4 billion more than it needs to give to public education. The CFE says the additional money can be used to lower class sizes, create new libraries, buy computers and create a safe and healthy learning environment.

On October 10, lawyers for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and the State of New York will present their oral arguments to the New York State Court of Appeals in Albany. While the legal battle continues, people like us can stay informed and contact our state representatives to let them know what we think about funding for our schools.