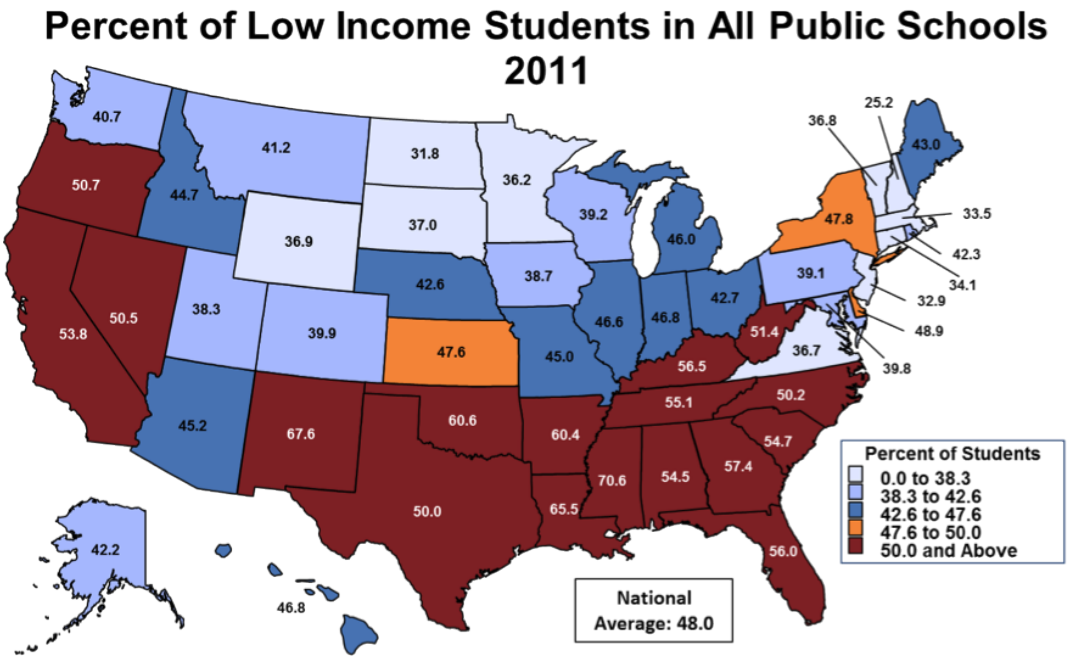
SOUTHERN EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Research Report Update

A New Majority

Low Income Students in the South and Nation

October 2013



Overview

A majority of public school children in 17 states, one-third of the 50 states across the nation, were low income students – eligible for free or reduced lunches – in the school year that ended in 2011. Thirteen of the 17 states were in the South, and the remaining four were in the West. Since 2005, half or more of the South's children in public schools have been from low income households.[1] During the last two school years, 2010 and 2011, for the first time in modern history, the West has had a majority of low income students attending P-12 public schools.

TABLE 1
States with a Majority of Low Income Students in Public Schools: 2011

State	Rate (Percent)
Mississippi	71
New Mexico	68
Louisiana	66
Oklahoma	61
Arkansas	60
Georgia	57
Kentucky	57
Florida	56
Tennessee	55
South Carolina	55
Alabama	55
California	54
West Virginia	51
Oregon	51
Nevada	51
North Carolina	50
Texas	50

As in past years, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Louisiana had the largest rates of low income students among the 50 states. Based on data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 71 percent of all students in Mississippi, 68 percent of New Mexico's students, and 66 percent of all Louisiana children attending public schools were from low income households. Oklahoma and Arkansas were the two other states where at least 60 percent of public school children were low income during the 2011 school year, the latest date for comparable data for all public school districts across the nation. All but two of the 15 states in the South had a majority of low income students enrolled in their public schools in 2011. Only Maryland (40 percent) and Virginia (37 percent), the northern-most states in the South, had rates below 50 percent [see Appendix 1 for ranking of all 50 states].

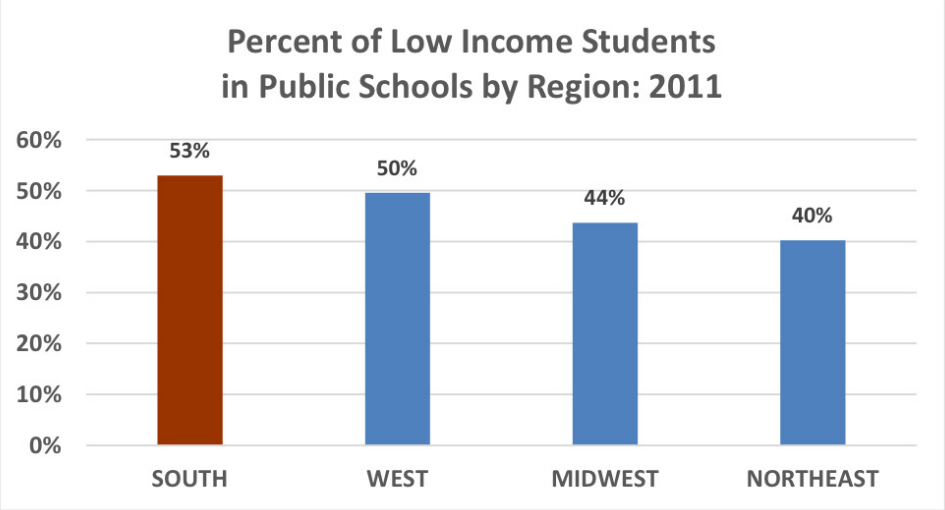
1 This update was developed and written by Steve Suitts, Vice President of the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) with the assistance of Nasheed Sabree, SEF Program Assistant, and Katherine Dunn, SEF Program Officer. It follows the SEF report, A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South's Public Schools (2007). Students are eligible for free or reduced meals at public schools if they live in households where the income is 185 percent or less of than the poverty threshold. In 2011, for example, a student in a household with a single parent with an annual income of less than $26,956 was eligible for a free or reduced lunch (FRL) at a public school.

Four states in the West – New Mexico, California, Oregon, and Nevada – had a majority of low income children in public schools, and, combined with a growing number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch in recent years across the region's other nine states, the West had a majority of public school children in 2011.

Regional Trends across the States: South Leads the Nation and Other Regions

The latest NCES data indicates that 48 percent of all public school children across the nation were eligible for free or reduced lunch in 2011. The rate of low income students in the South was 53 percent – the highest rate among the regions of the nation. For the first time in recent history, at least half of the public school students in the West were low income. In 2010 the rate was 51 percent. In 2011, it remained 50 percent of all public school children. The Midwest had the next highest rate, 44 percent, and the Northeast had a rate of 40 percent.

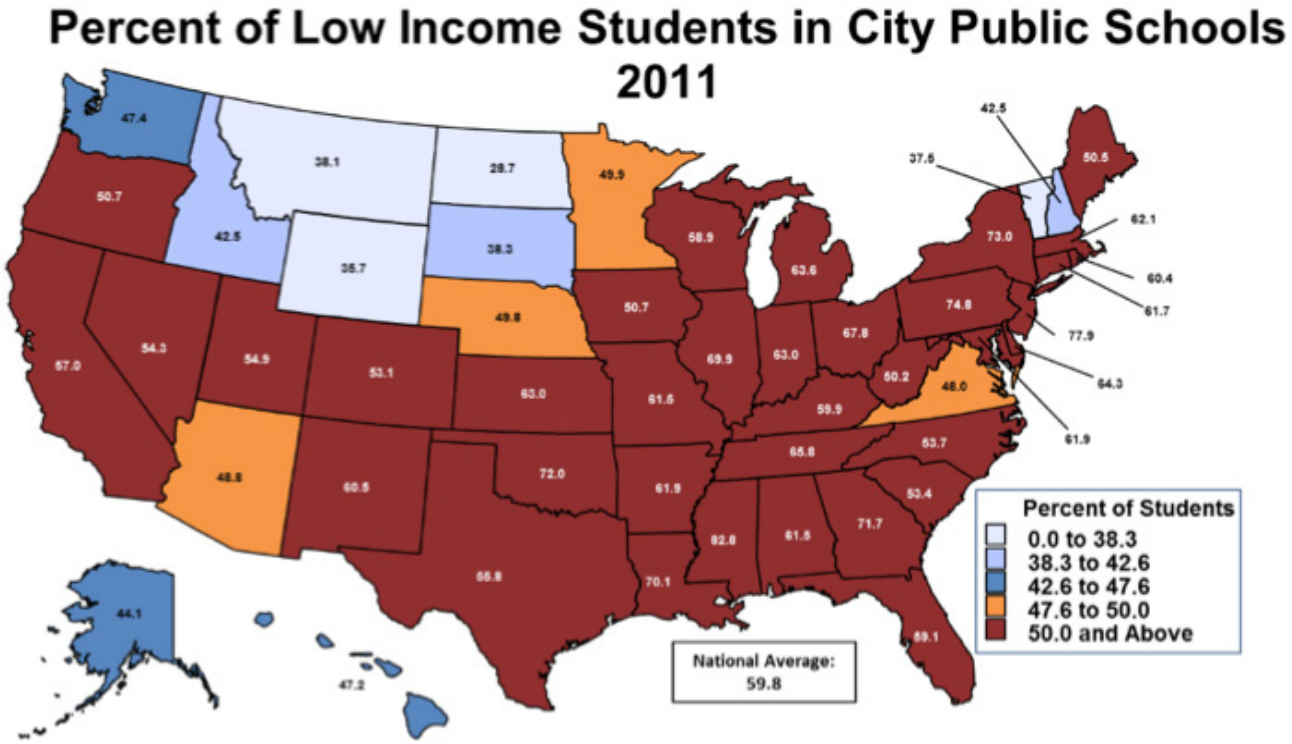
Across the entire southern sections of the United States – ranging from the west coast across the Southwest through the Deep South, only in Arizona (45 percent) were low income students less than half of all public school children. In 2011, more than two-thirds of African American and Hispanic students in the United States attended public schools where a majority of school children were low income (see Appendix 3), but white students also constitute a majority of low income public school children in a large number of schools and school districts, especially in the South. The common denominator of education in 2011 for the states mapped across the western and southern portion of the United States from Oregon to North Carolina, with an outcropping into Appalachia, was the presence of a majority of low income students in P-12 public schools.[2]



2 For an overview of factors creating the growth of low income students, see p. 10 of A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South's Public Schools. A closely related trend is found in the fact that the South is today the only US region with a majority of students of color in the public schools. See A New Diverse Majority: Students of Color in the South's Public Schools.

Patterns within the States: Cities and Towns Have Highest Rates

The nation's cities have the highest rates of low income students in public schools. Sixty percent of the public school children in America's cities were in low income households in 2011. In 38 of the 50 states, no less than half of all children attending public schools in cities – any urban place with more than 100,000 population – were low income (Appendix 2). While known for its rural poverty, Mississippi had the nation's highest rate for low income students in cities: 83 percent of all children in that state's cities were low income. New Jersey (78 percent), Pennsylvania (75 percent), and New York (73 percent) had the next highest rates for cities. Georgia, Louisiana, Illinois, and Oklahoma also had rates of low income students at or above 70 percent in their cities.



Fifty-two percent of all students attending public schools in America's towns (located outside urban and suburban areas) were eligible for free or reduced meals in 2011. Mississippi also had the nation's highest state rate for students in towns: 78 percent. Louisiana (72 percent) and New Mexico (70 percent) ranked next in line. South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, California, Oklahoma, and Arkansas followed – each with rates above 60 percent for students in towns (Appendix 2).

America's rural and suburban schools had lower rates of low income students. Forty-four percent of rural students and 40 percent of suburban students were eligible for free and reduced lunches in 2011. In New Mexico, 71 percent of the rural students lived in low income households. In seven other states – all Southern states – 55 percent or more of all rural students were low income.

Table 2
States Where Low Income Students Are 55 Percent or More Among Rural Public School Children
2011

State	Rural Low Income Students	Rate (Percent)
New Mexico	70,524	71
Mississippi	168,992	66
Louisiana	129,674	63
Oklahoma	142,195	61
Arkansas	123,727	60
Kentucky	167,327	58
Alabama	192,883	55
South Carolina	176,442	55

New Mexico also had the highest rate for low income children in suburban public schools: 72 percent.[3] In seven other states, at least half of all students in suburban schools were low income. Five are Southern states and two states are in the West. In 22 states (including Wyoming), two out of every five suburban students were in low income households. The lowest suburban rate for any state was in New Hampshire (17 percent), where only about 11,000 low income students attended public schools in suburban areas. Only four other states, Alaska, Iowa, Maine, and New York had a percentage of low income in suburban public schools below 25 percent.

Table 3
Low Income Students as a Majority of Suburban Public School Children: 2011

State	Suburban Low Income Students	Rate (Percent)
New Mexico	27,737	72
Louisiana	93,933	59
Mississippi	24,571	57
Nevada	78,154	56
Florida	734,329	56
Georgia	351,886	54
Arkansas	24,881	53
California	1,196,481	51

Patterns within Regions: Rates Higher in the South Except in Northeast Cities

In each of the nation's four regions, a majority of students attending public schools in the cities were eligible for free or reduced lunch last year. The Northeast had the highest rates for low income school children in cities: 71 percent. The next highest rate, 62 percent, was found in Midwestern cities. The South had the third highest percentage of low income students in the cities – 59 percent.

No region of the country in 2011 had a majority of low income students in suburban schools, although the

3 The suburban rate in Wyoming, 75 percent, was actually higher, but with only 1,133 suburban children in the state, its rate was not included in this ranking.

suburban rate in the South (47 percent) was the highest rate among the four regions. The suburban rate of low income students in the West was almost as high – 45 percent. The Northeast suburbs had the smallest rate – 28 percent.

In towns outside urban and suburban area, the South (60 percent) and the West (55 percent) had a majority of low income children attending public schools. The South also was the only region in the country where most rural public school children were in low income households. In the West, 44 percent of rural school children were low income. In the Northeast, the rate was only 29 percent.

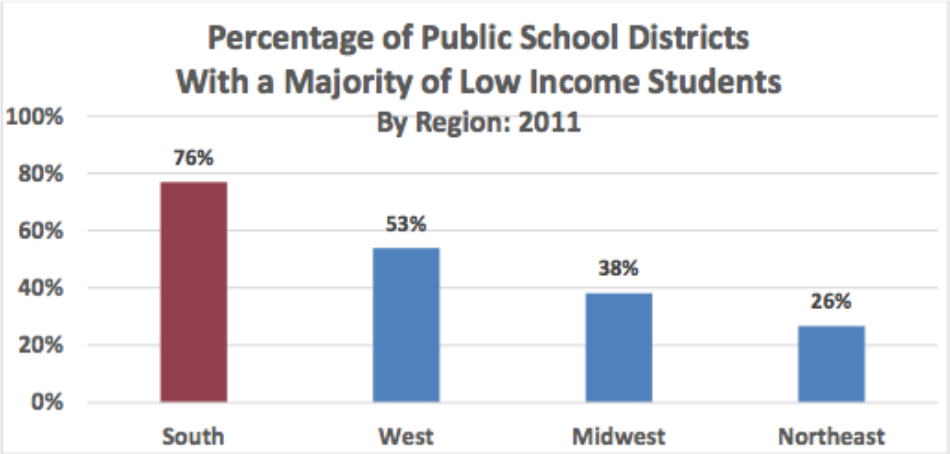
In suburbs, towns, and rural areas, the South had the highest rates of low income students enrolled in public schools among the nation's four regions. A majority of all students in all areas of the South, except suburban schools, were from low income families in 2011.

Table 4
Rates of Low Income Students in Public Schools by Area within Regions: 2010-11

Area	City Percent	Suburban Percent	Town Percent	Rural Percent
USA-50 States	60%	40%	52%	44%
SOUTH	59%	47%	60%	51%
NORTHEAST	71%	28%	39%	29%
WEST	54%	45%	55%	44%
MIDWEST	62%	35%	43%	36%

The prevalence of school districts with a majority low income enrollment was especially acute in the South, where more than three-fourths (76 percent) of all local school districts had a student population in which low income students were the majority.[4] In Mississippi and Louisiana, at least nine out of every ten school districts had a majority of low income students (see Appendix 4). In Oklahoma and Georgia, 87 percent and 84 percent of the states' school districts had a majority of low income students.

In Western states, low income students were a majority of all students in more than half the region's school districts. In New Mexico, virtually eight of ten school districts enrolled a majority of low income students. The districts in the Northeast had the smallest rate – only 26 percent.



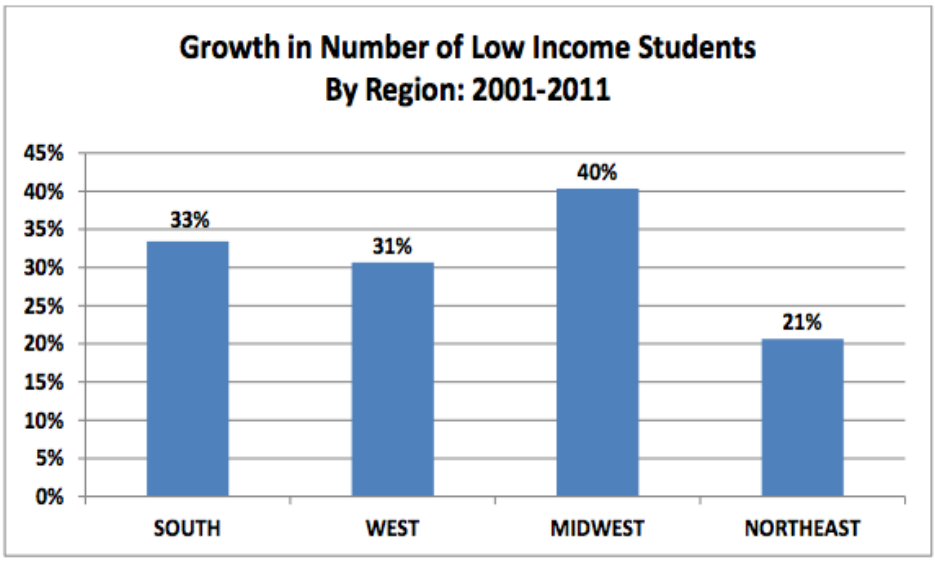
4 In addition, more than half of the South's school districts had a majority of school children eligible for free lunches – in household with incomes below 130 percent of poverty. School districts failing to report students eligible for free or reduce lunch (FRL) in 2011 were excluded from the calculations.

2001-2011 Trends: Large Growth of Low Income Students Over Decade

By all accounts, the 2008 recession reduced family incomes in the United States and added to growth in the number of low income students in public schools, especially in states where both the housing market and the local economy collapsed. But, there has been a steady increase in the number and percentage of low income students attending America's public schools for a much longer period of time.

Data from the US Department of Agriculture demonstrates consistent growth in the rates of low income students in most states and in each region of the country since at least 1989.[5] During the last ten years, according to NCES data, this pattern has continued annually. From 2001 through 2011, the numbers of low income students in the nation's public schools grew by 32 percent – an increase of more than 5.7 million children. As a result, low income students attending the nation's public schools moved from 38 percent of all students in 2001 to 48 percent in 2011.

During the same period, public schools in the Midwest experienced a 40 percent rate of growth in low income students, and in the South from 2001 to 2011 the number of low income public school children enlarged by almost one-third. The schools in the Northeast had the smallest rate of growth – 21 percent.

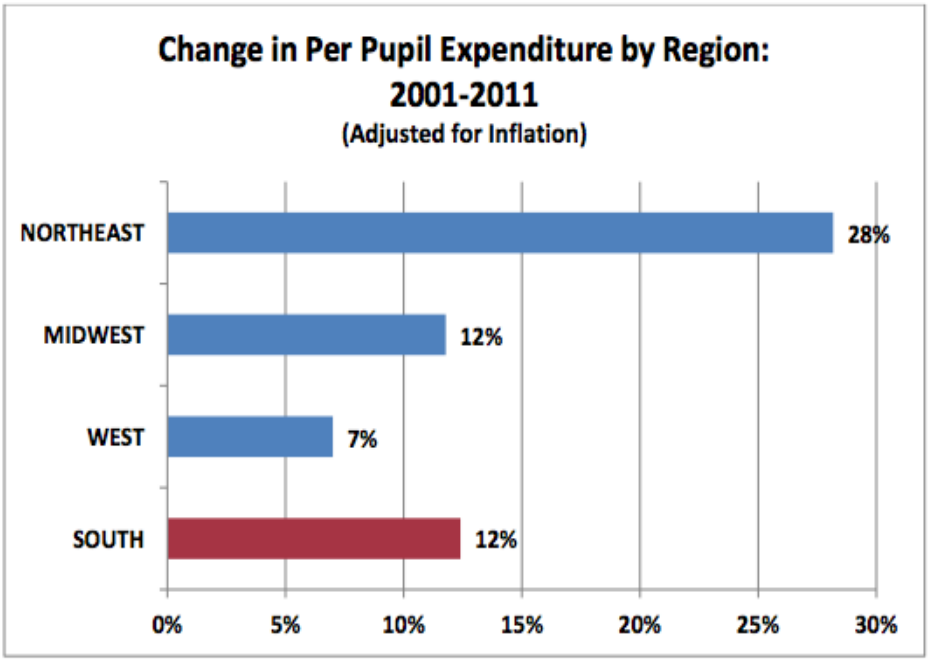


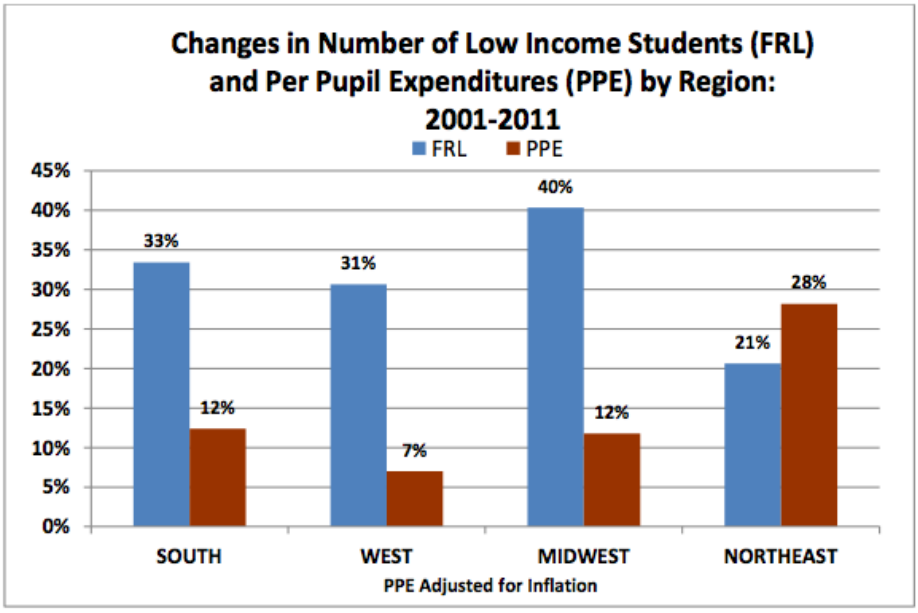
As a result of these trends, the South became the first region of the country in modern times to have a majority of low income students in its public schools in 2007, a year before the recent recession. Three years later, low income students became a new majority of the public school children in the West, and in 2011 the nation stood within only two percentage points of enrolling a majority of low income students in public schools across 50 states.

5 See pp. 6-9, A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South's Public Schools.

2001-2011 Trends: Smaller, Mismatched Growth in School Funding

During the last decade, as the number of low income students grew substantially in all regions, public school expenditures also increased, although at markedly slower rates. After adjustments for inflation, NCES data show that the nation's average per pupil expenditure for public education rose by 14 percent from 2001 to 2011. There were, however, considerable differences between and within the regions in rates of increase. The Northeast enlarged per pupil expenditures by 28 percent, twice the national average. The per pupil expenditure in the both the South and the Midwest were much smaller – only 12 percent, and the West had the smaller gains, half the national rate from 2001 to 2011.





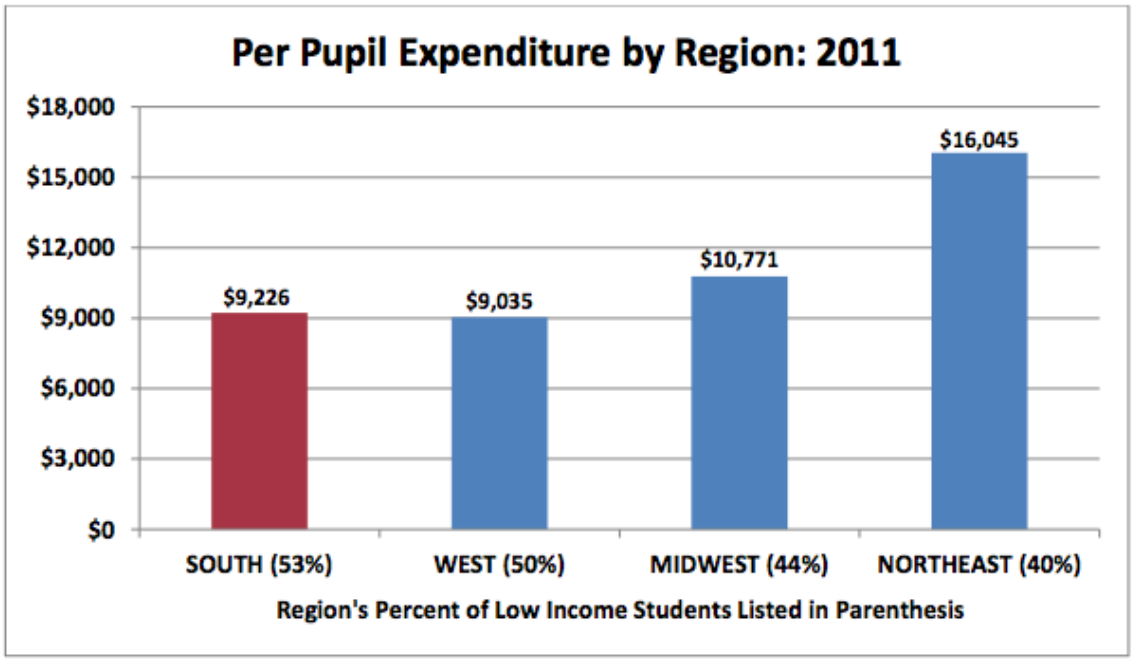
These regional rates do not always reflect patterns of the states in the region. For example, per pupil expenditures in Alaska increased by 43 percent – more than five times the rate for Western states as a group. Maryland's growth in per pupil expenditures was approximately three times larger than the South's rate of growth. Despite these outliers, regional rates generally reflected the trends of growth for most states of each region.

These growth rates in educational expenditures failed to match the region's rates of growth for the number of low income students. From 2001 to 2011, the region with the lowest growth in the number of low income students, the Northeast, had by far the largest growth in per pupil expenditures. It was the only region where the growth rate of school spending exceeded the rate of growth in low income students. In the other three regions, the opposite occurred: the growth rates in the number of low income students vastly exceeded the growth in per pupil expenditures.

The number of low income students in the West, for example, grew from 2001 to 2011 by 31 percent but per pupil expenditure for students in the West grew by only seven percent. Public schools in the Midwest had a growth of 40 percent in the number of low income students and an increase of 12 percent in per student spending. In the South,

public schools had a one-third increase in the number of low income students during a time when they had little more than a one-eighth increase in per pupil spending.

These trends in public schools since 2001 have contributed to a pattern that remains today: schools that have the largest proportion of low income students spend the least in support of students. In 2011, a majority of school children in both the South and the West were from low income families, and the public school children in the both the South and the West received the least educational resources: both less than $9,300 per pupil. In contrast, public schools in the Northeast, where 40 percent of all students are low income, spend $16,045 per pupil.[6]



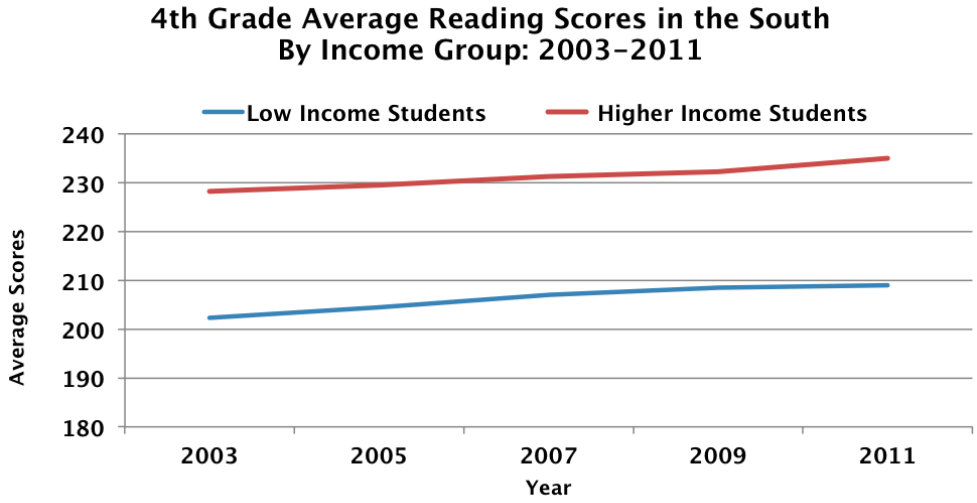
This mismatch is nothing new in public education and is found at the regional, state or local levels. As noted in prior SEF reports, low income students are much more likely to attend public schools that have significantly lower academic and student support and per pupil funding.[7] In this case, the pattern of inequitable, mismatched funding for student learning appears to have persisted at least since 2001 even as public schools in the regions experienced significant growth in the number of low income students.

6 Some analysts adjust per pupil expenditures among the states by regional differences in cost of living (COL). See www.edcounts.org. This adjustment tends to flatten somewhat regional differences by lowering spending amounts in more urban states and increasing rates in more rural states. But, even with COL adjustments, the basic regional trends and patterns remains the same.

7 See pp. 17-23 of No Time to Lose and pp. 16-20 in Worst of Times: Children in Extreme Poverty in the South and the Nation. Charts of regional NAEP data use Census South, which includes Delaware and the District of Columbia, not in SEF's 15-state South.

Trends 2003-2011: Persistent Gaps in Learning by Income

Low income students are more likely than students from wealthier families to have lower tests scores, fall behind in school, dropout, and fail to acquire a college degree.[8] These gaps in learning and achievement have not improved in recent years, while the numbers of low income students have escalated in the South and nation. Test scores for the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) – the most reliable, comparative test of academic performance across the states – suggest strongly that there has been little or no change in the wide differences in learning between students according to income from 2003 to 2011.



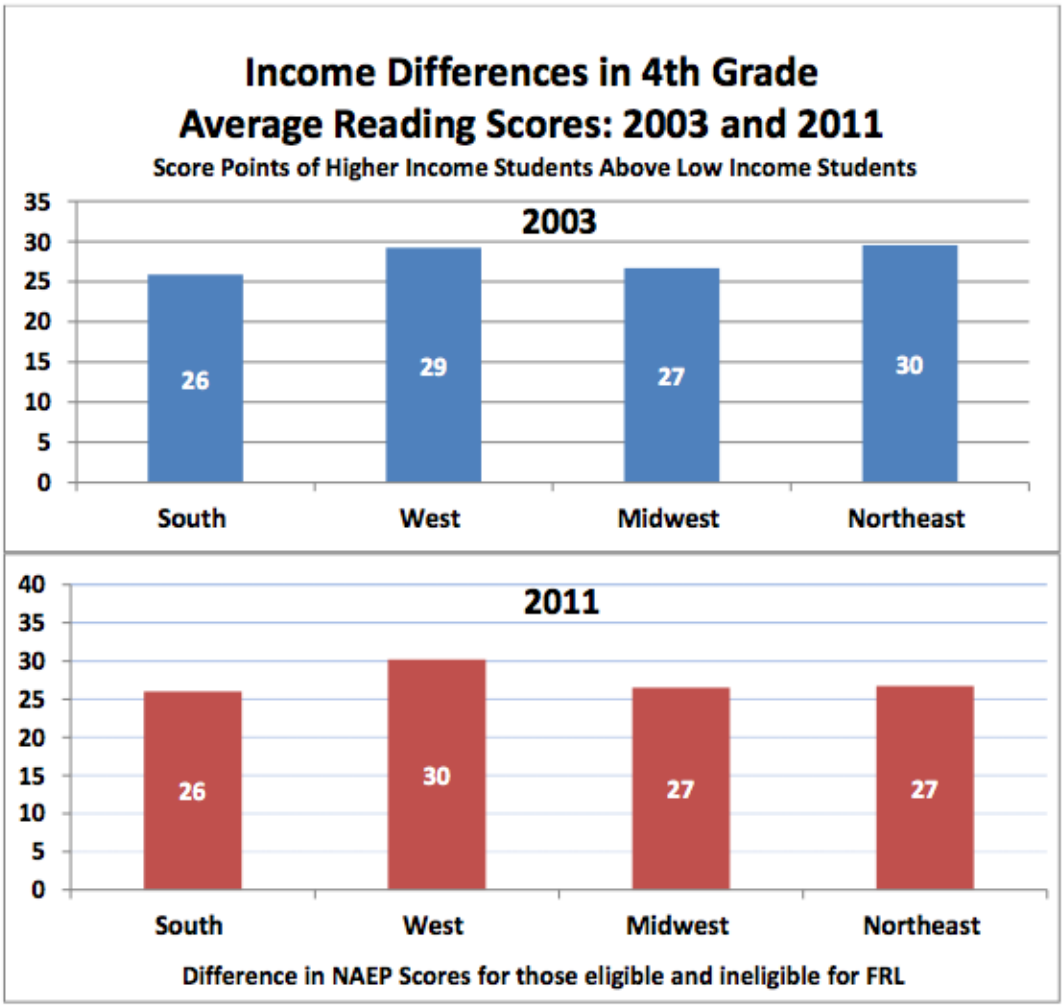
NAEP Scores for those eligible and ineligible for FRL

There have been some real gains in tests scores by low income students in the South since 2003, but those improvements have been matched largely by gains among higher income students. In other words, as low income students in the Southern states gained seven points on NAEP test scores for fourth grade reading from 2003 to 2011, so did students from higher income households. As a result, the learning gap of 26 score points that existed in 2003 between students in the South according to household income remained the same in 2011 for fourth grade reading scores. [9]

A similar pattern is evident among the regions of the nation. From 2003 through 2011, the learning gap by income in fourth grade reading remained wide and constant in the South and the Midwest. It narrowed somewhat in the Northeast, the only region where the growth in the number of low income students was smaller than growth in per pupil spending from 2001 to 2011. In the West, the gap by income slightly enlarged during this period. These huge learning gaps by income in fourth grade reading reflect regional patterns in other NAEP tests: regardless of subject or grade, gains in the test scores of low income students from 2003 to 2011 have generally been matched by similar gains of higher income students. Therefore, while there has been an upward trend in test scores for low income students, the learning gap for low income students has remained very wide and unyielding.

8 See pp. 11-12, A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South's Public Schools. Also see Table 1 and Table 4 in Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and Kewal Ramani, A. Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2009 (NCES 2012-006). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics (2011).

9 Generally, a similar gap persisted in reading and mathematics scores in NEAP tests administered for 4th and 8th grade students from 2003 to 2011.

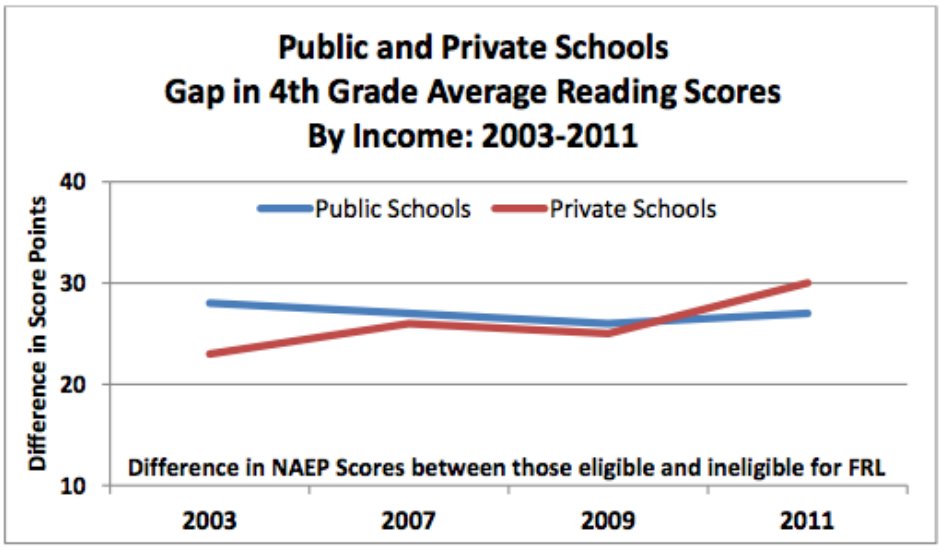


Trends in 2003-2011: Private Schools Have Similar Learning Gaps by Income

These trends reflect issues of educational achievement in the nation's public schools, which is where the vast majority of low income students in the United States receive their P-12 education. But, the learning gap is a national challenge for both public and private schools. The gap for low income students in private schools from 2003 to 2011 appears nearly as large as or larger than the gaps in public schools.

In 4th grade reading scores, for example, NAEP tests show that public and private schools have had comparable differences in scores according to student income since 2003. The gap has been huge –over 20 score points – in all years for both types of schools. The difference in scores was somewhat larger in public schools in 2003, but the public school income gap slightly narrowed in more recent years, and private schools evidenced a widening gap between low income students and wealthier students since 2003. As a result, from 2007 to 2009 there was relatively little difference between public and private schools in the average scores for low income students in fourth grade reading. By 2011, the learning gap by income was larger in private schools than public schools nationwide.

The actual scores for low income students in public and private schools – not simply the gap – have also narrowed. In 2009, for instance, low income students in private schools scored at an average of 210. Low



income students in public schools scored that year an average of 206. In 2011, low income students in the fourth grade of private schools scored an average of 208, while fourth grade students in public schools scored an average of 207 points. [10]

Public schools may possess a greater urgency in the need to address the learning gap by income because they have a much larger, growing percentage of low income students. At the same time, private schools as a sector have the same problem. The fundamental question these trends present is how – not really where – to close the learning gap for low income students.

Interpretation of Findings

The latest data shows that low income students comprise a near-majority of the nation's public school children (48 percent) and are half or more of all students in the South and the West. Low income students are concentrated in the nation's cities but are by no measure confined to only cities. Forty percent or more of all public school children in the nation's suburbs, towns, and rural areas are low income students.

Long-term trends strongly suggest that the nation has not adjusted its support for public schools to reflect the educational challenges that these developments bring. Since 2001, the number of low income students in public schools has grown roughly by one-third (32 percent) across the states. These are the students who need the most assistance. They generally are more likely to score lowest on school tests, fall behind in school, fail to graduate, and never receive a college degree. During this same period (2001-2011), the nation's per pupil expenditure (adjusted for inflation) in public schools increased by only 14 percent --- less than half the rate of growth in the numbers of low income students. The growth in the number of low income students far out-stripped the growth in per pupil spending in public schools during the last decade in every region of the country, except the Northeast.

During virtually the same period (2003-2011), the learning gap for low income students across the nation and in every region of the country, except the Northeast, remained stagnant. While there were real learning gains for both low income and higher income students during this time, the gap between the student groups in national test scores in 2011 was the same as in 2003, except in the Northeast where the learning gap closed by three points.

Given the current debate over school choice that has emerged during the last decade, it is also worthy of note that the learning gap for low income students has generally been as large or larger in private schools as in public schools across the nation.

These trends present a clear, concise picture of what has happened during the last decade and what will

10 This pattern of comparable differences between low income and higher income students for both public and private schools generally holds for NAEP subjects in both the 4th and 8th grade. In 8th grade reading, private school scores appear erratic during this period.

continue to happen in the next decade unless the patterns of the past are broken. There was no progress in closing the learning gap for the nation's low income students at a time when the growth in their numbers far outpaced the growth in per pupil spending in public schools. If these trends in student enrollment and school spending persist, there is no reason to expect that the learning gap will begin to close. And there is no reason to expect that moving low income children from public schools to private schools will make any difference in closing this gap.

The future consequences of these trends are likely to severely undercut the American promise of fairness and equity for children in low income households. That should be concern enough for policymakers in Washington and all fifty states. But, the consequences will go far beyond that. When the public school achievement of low income students constitutes the educational success or failure of a majority of all public school students, our entire nation's future educational capacity is at stake.

No longer can we consider the problems and needs of low income students simply a matter of fairness. These students are in two regions half or more of all public school children. They were in 2011 a near majority of the nation's public school children and are continuing to grow in numbers. Their success or failure in the public schools will determine the entire body of human capital and educational potential that the nation will possess in the future. Without improving the educational support that the nation provides its low income students – students with the largest needs and usually with the least support -- the trends of the last decade will be prologue for a nation not at risk, but a nation in decline.

Conclusion

Within the next few years, it is likely that low income students will become a majority of all public school children in the United States. With huge, stubbornly unchanging gaps in learning, schools in the South and across the nation face the real danger of becoming entrenched, inadequately funded educational systems that enlarge the division in America between haves and have-nots and endanger the entire nation's prospects.

There is no real evidence that any scheme or policy of transferring large numbers of low income students from public schools to private schools will have a positive impact on this problem. The trends of the last decade strongly suggest that little or nothing will change for the better if schools and communities continue to postpone addressing the primary question of education in America today: what does it take and what will be done to provide low income students with a good chance to succeed in public schools? It is a question of how, not where, to improve the education of a new majority of students.

Without fundamental improvements in how the South and the nation educate low income students, the trends that this report documents will ricochet across all aspects of American society for generations to come. As a wise American leader once reminded a troubled nation: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

Appendix I
State Rankings by Percentage of Low Income Students in Public Schools (2011)

State	Rate	State	Rate
Mississippi	71%	Missouri	45%
New Mexico	68%	Idaho	45%
Louisiana.	66%	Maine	43%
Oklahoma	60%	Rhode Island	43%
Arkansas	60%	Ohio	43%
Georgia	57%	Nebraska	43%
Kentucky	57%	Montana	41%
Florida	56%	Maryland	40%
Alabama	55%	Washington	40%
Tennessee	55%	Colorado	40%
South Carolina	55%	Pennsylvania	39%
California	54%	Wisconsin	39%
West Virginia	51%	Iowa	39%
Oregon	51%	Alaska	38%
Nevada	50%	Utah	38%
North Carolina	50%	Wyoming	37%
Texas	50%	South Dakota	37%
New York	48%	Vermont	37%
Delaware	48%	Virginia	37%
Kansas	48%	Minnesota	37%
Hawaii	47%	Connecticut	34%
Indiana	47%	Massachusetts	34%
Illinois	47%	New Jersey	33%
Michigan	46%	North Dakota	32%
Arizona	45%	New Hampshire	25%

Regional Rankings
Percentage of Low Income Students in Public Schools (2011)

Region	Rate
United States	48%
South	53%
West	50%
Midwest	44%
Northeast	40%

Appendix 2
Percentage of Low Income Students by Areas Inside State (2011)

Jurisdiction	City	Suburban	Town	Rural
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
US - 50 States	60	40	52	44
Alabama	62	47	55	55
Alaska	44	24	31	50
Arizona	49	33	55	43
Arkansas	62	53	62	60
California	57	51	64	47
Colorado	53	34	42	29
Connecticut	62	26	32	13
Delaware	64	48	48	43
Florida	59	56	64	51
Georgia	72	54	65	54
Hawaii	47	42	52	54
Idaho	43	39	49	47
Illinois	70	37	44	31
Indiana	63	39	48	37
Iowa	51	23	42	32
Kansas	63	31	54	38
Kentucky	60	46	58	58
Louisiana	70	59	72	63
Maine	51	23	45	45
Maryland	62	39	33	25
Massachusetts	62	27	36	18
Michigan	64	38	44	42
Minnesota	50	31	34	33
Mississippi	83	57	78	66
Missouri	62	35	47	44
Montana	38	43	39	45
Nebraska	50	33	46	36
Nevada	54	56	42	38
New Hampshire	43	17	33	22
New Jersey	78	30	43	19
New Mexico	61	72	71	71
New York	74	24	38	33
North Carolina	54	43	57	49
North Dakota	29	32	32	34
Ohio	68	35	45	35
Oklahoma	72	45	63	61
Oregon	51	45	57	49
Pennsylvania	75	28	38	32
Rhode Island	60	37	30	21
South Carolina	53	49	66	55
South Dakota	38	44	32	39
Tennessee	66	40	59	52
Texas	56	44	56	44
Utah	55	33	43	35
Vermont	38	27	42	36
Virginia	48	30	46	35
Washington	48	33	53	40
West Virginia	50	46	51	54
Wisconsin	59	27	34	35
Wyoming	36	75	35	39

National maps of this data available on SEF website: www.southerneducation.org.
Definitions of geographic units at NCES First Look – Common Core Data, 2010-11, pp. B-2 & B-3 Revised data version. 2a.

Appendix 3
Percent of Students by Race/Ethnicity/Heritage
Attending Public Schools Where Low Income Students
Are Half or More of All Students
2011

All Public Schools

White	30%
Black	72%
Hispanic	68%
Asian	35%
Pacific Islander	53%
American Indian/Alaska Native	65%
Two or more races	43%

Suburban Public Schools

White	18%
Black	60%
Hispanic	62%
Asian	25%
Pacific Islander	46%
American Indian/Alaska Native	41%
Two or more races	33%

City Public Schools

White	40%
Black	82%
Hispanic	76%
Asian	50%
Pacific Islander	65%
American Indian/Alaska Native	63%
Two or more races	56%

Appendix 4
Percentage of Public School Districts with a Majority of Low Income Students By Region and State: 2011

State/Region	Free Lunch	Free / Reduced Lunch	State/Region	Free Lunch	Free / Reduced Lunch
SOUTH	**56%**	**76%**	**MIDWEST**	**23%**	**38%**
Alabama	59%	76%	Illinois	20%	31%
Arkansas	55%	82%	Indiana	20%	37%
Florida	49%	75%	Iowa	3%	13%
Georgia	71%	84%	Kansas	15%	43%
Kentucky	59%	80%	Michigan	39%	54%
Louisiana	82%	90%	Minnesota	20%	33%
Maryland	16%	32%	Missouri	31%	57%
Mississippi	88%	95%	Nebraska	7%	27%
North Carolina	51%	75%	North Dakota	11%	17%
Oklahoma	66%	87%	Ohio	37%	46%
South Carolina	68%	78%	South Dakota	12%	19%
Tennessee	55%	81%	Wisconsin	9%	23%
Texas	47%	67%			
Virginia	27%	47%			
West Virginia	26%	70%			
WEST	**35%**	**53%**	**NORTHEAST**	**18%**	**26%**
Alaska	40%	50%	Connecticut	11%	16%
Arizona	44%	63%	Delaware	37%	39%
California	43%	57%	Maine	20%	42%
Colorado	21%	44%	Massachusetts	12%	18%
Hawaii	0%	0%	New Hampshire	2%	5%
Idaho	25%	56%	New Jersey	14%	19%
Montana	21%	35%	New York	26%	36%
Nevada	11%	22%	Pennsylvania	20%	29%
New Mexico	60%	79%	Rhode Island	30%	32%
Oregon	44%	69%	Vermont	9%	22%
Utah	10%	22%			
Washington	25%	45%			
Wyoming	4%	8%			

"Free Lunch" Column is the percentage of schools districts in the state or region in which a majority of the districts' students are eligible for a free lunch – children in households with an income below 130 percent of the poverty line.

State/Region	Free Lunch	Free / Reduced Lunch
50 States USA	**32%**	**47%**
South	**56%**	**76%**
Non-South	**25%**	**38%**

Founded in 1867 as the George Peabody Education Fund, the Southern Education Foundation's mission is to advance equity and excellence in education for low income students and students of color.

SEF uses research, advocacy, and collaboration to improve outcomes from early childhood to young adulthood.

Our core belief is that education is the vehicle by which all students get fair chances to develop their talents and contribute to the common good.

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