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# Disparity in Schools Is Just One Symptom

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The question of whether education standards and funding should vary by state is ultimately about the growing economic disparities within the nation. On close examination, we find a political economy that reproduces the structural inequalities most responsible for educational failure, as well as tax structures and government funding priorities that protect the interests of the wealthy.

If our goal is to eliminate educational failure, we absolutely must create a system of federal funding to states determined by the actual needs of their people and effectively linked to ameliorating poverty, the only approach that has been shown, time and again, to improve academic achievement. In contrast, initiatives like the Common Core standards are market driven and thus more likely to echo existing inequalities than to eliminate them.

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National education standards like Common Core simply codify what all children should learn, with little attention paid to the unequal playing field of American society. Despite its liberal overtones, the Common Core initiative reproduces what the late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire called the banking model of education, debilitating because it narrows what constitutes legitimate knowledge, while excluding those who are outside of its boundaries. Such national policies create a smokescreen of homogeneity and educational equality, which do not create equality.

Although greater federal funding to states is necessary for a more just and democratic nation, federal funding tied to policies like Common Core standards is no panacea. They are yet another distraction from the larger structural problems responsible for economic and social disparities. While schools can make a difference, they can do so only in conjunction with federal, state and local funding policies and practices that disrupt structures of impoverishment – promoting wide-scale job creation, a living wage, adequate housing, access to health care and a variety of educational opportunities for all.