Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of *The Future of Children* is to disseminate timely information about major issues related to children’s well-being, with special emphasis on providing objective analysis and evaluation, translating existing knowledge into effective programs and policies, and promoting constructive institutional change. In attempting to achieve these objectives, we are targeting a multidisciplinary audience of national leaders, including policymakers, practitioners, legislators, executives, and professionals in the public and private sectors. This publication is intended to complement, not duplicate, the kind of technical analysis found in academic journals and in the general coverage of children’s issues by the popular press and special interest groups.

This issue of the journal focuses on financing schools, a major civic endeavor which consumes one-third of all state and one-half of all local tax revenues. School boards have the primary responsibility for providing effective and efficient schools. However, the states are ultimately responsible for ensuring that schools are adequate, leading states to provide much of the school budget and to regulate schools in multiple and complex ways. The federal role in funding and regulation is relatively minor, with the exception of special education regulations.

This issue highlights several challenges common to most states. First, little is known about the link between school funding and student outcomes, making it extremely difficult to determine an appropriate level of funding for schools. Second, in many states the tax burden of supporting schools is poorly distributed. Often, low-wealth communities pay disproportionately high taxes without achieving higher per-pupil funding. Third, school buildings are increasingly overcrowded, run-down, and even unsafe. Finally, many states are creating new accountability mechanisms (such as fiscal incentives and sanctions) and linking school funding to parental choice (through such options as charter schools, private school vouchers, and contracts with private education agencies). These options have an intuitive and logical appeal, but their impact is not yet known.

The articles presented here summarize knowledge and experience in selected areas that we believe are relevant to improving public policies in the United States which have an impact on financing schools. We hope the information and analyses these articles contain will further the understanding of important issues and, thus, contribute to reasonable changes in policies which will benefit children.

We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding this issue of *The Future of Children*. Our intention is to encourage informed debate about financing schools. To this end we invite correspondence to the Editor. We would also appreciate your comments about the approach we have taken in presenting the focus topic and welcome your suggestions for future topics.

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Editor