



Funding Crisis Restricting Black Students' Access to Public Schools of their Choice.

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Issue at hand

Historically, white schools in the suburban areas have more educational resources than black schools in the townships. The post-apartheid government legislated for the desegregation of all public schools in order to build a non-racial society. This would help black children gain access to schools with sufficient resources and promote equal educational opportunities. However, the post-apartheid government gave very little direction to schools or school districts about how to de-racialize white (and black) schools. For example, there was no strong rezoning policy to “force” the issue of black students’ access to white schools. In theory, under the law, parents could choose to send their children to any school, regardless of their race. In practice, white schools determined who gained access to their schools through self-created policies based on high tuition fees, exclusive language policies, and self-defined “catchment areas” from which students are chosen. Together, these strategies effectively exclude the black poor, even though small numbers of black middle class children have gained access to, mainly English-medium, white schools.

Financial Barriers to School Access

Despite the fact that education receives the largest budget from the national government, most township schools are still trapped in a financial crisis. Research has traced this financial crisis to poor financial management, inefficiency, corruption and bureaucracy in the distribution of school funding. The financial crisis leaves township schools operationally dysfunctional; hence most black parents who can afford to do so decided to transfer their children to better resourced schools in suburban areas.

However, transferring black children to wealthy schools doesn’t address the problem, because these schools often discriminate against them. Black parents are now faced with the new problem of wealthy schools imposing high tuition fees and other costs of participation, which are a barrier to access for most children from impoverished backgrounds.

Recommendations

To address these issues, the government is urged to

1. Re-examine the financial crisis in township schools, and;
2. Monitor the policies of wealthy public schools in the suburban areas to ensure that they don’t exclude students based on their parents’ inability to pay.
3. Committees should be established to trace the funds allocated to schools to check if they do actually reach those schools in timely manner. This potentially can reduce bureaucratic barriers but introduces another layer of committees.



4. Monitor the legality of the processes of awarding education contracts and transfer of funds from one project to another. These processes should be strictly for the purpose of improving education in poor schools. Monitoring them can eliminate mismanagement of funds.
5. The government should widely publicize the school fees exemption policy and other funding possibilities. Media publicity should be in *all* official languages of South Africa to ensure that this message reaches the whole population, especially the non-English speaking poor.
6. Pass legislation that will allow the government to financially penalize any public school found to be engaging in discriminatory practices. This would force the principals of public schools to explain to all prospective parents the financial support available to the parents of children in these schools.

Insert a picture of a township school