



ONE MEMBER'S VOICE

Addressing the Racial Achievement Gap and Equity of School Funding

By Christopher D. Mano



My name is Christopher Mano, a Philadelphia native, and one of the over 100,000 educators in Pennsylvania. I am a secondary aspiring principal member of the Pennsylvania Principals Association and am currently completing my principal certification at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am slated to complete my

studies in spring 2024 and begin my career as an assistant principal.

Two important issues that concern me are the racial achievement gap and the school-to-prison pipeline. We need to raise awareness of implicit bias on the part of our faculty to help them be more cognizant of how their actions affect their students. These actions may be direct or indirect. Implicit bias affects all students, especially minoritized students, and this raises the incidence of referrals for disciplinary infractions. The presence of exclusionary discipline rather than restorative justice practices is a detriment to our students. Helping students understand their actions and repair the harm done is central to forging a better society.

All students can learn. I foster a progressive and growth mindset approach with a focus on equity. When students feel supported in the classroom environment, they are more likely to try their best and succeed. Further, when students feel alienated and are critical of themselves, it is more likely that they will fail. Negative labels are often affixed to students, such as "troublemaker." In many cases, students begin to internalize these labels and become discouraged. Losing confidence is the outcome, and test scores soon follow.

To combat this issue, educators and principals must focus on the strengths of their students and how to best support their growth. It is important to encourage, uplift and console rather than to detract from a student's education. Being critical of students and sending them to the office will only exacerbate the problems we see in today's legal system. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Why? It stems

from how we are disciplining students in our schools (Sawyer & Wagner, 2023).

The following issue was discussed in a recent letter I wrote to Governor Josh Shapiro. "One contributing factor to the achievement gap is a lack of resources for our schools. As an educator, this issue is of particular concern to me. A few months ago, I read a 2020-2021 report by the PA House Appropriations Committee that stated the commonwealth was considering operating within 2014-2015 school-base funding level limits (Brandon, 2020). Knowing that not all our children are being afforded the resources, education, or opportunities they require both for themselves and our state to flourish is disheartening and unacceptable. For instance, Philadelphia and other school districts are receiving between 70%-95% of the "fair share" of state funding (Brandon, 2020). Considering the case, William Penn School District v. Pennsylvania Department of Education (2018), property taxes are absolutely an unconstitutional method of allocating funding for our school districts. This precedent has been displayed in other states in cases such as Horton v. Meskill (1977)."

The fundamental purpose of my article is to present this pressing concern and devise a new and more equitable funding formula for our schools. It is my firm belief that the General Assembly should only consider "Option 2." Option 2 starts with Option 1 (select a base year of funding and distribute all funds above that amount through the Basic Education Funding Commission's recommended formula) but then prioritizes new funding are receiving less than their fair s addition, Option 2 recommends increase funding levels by \$100 districts across the state, which i the playing field for our students considered is to "redistribute" th wealthier school districts, though tion. Educational equity is a wort more in our children and their futures to leave a better world. ■

Brandon, S. (2020). *PA's Fair Funding Budget Briefing*. 1-13. <https://www.papolicy.org/reports/2020-2021-fair-funding-budget-briefing>
Barnaby Horton et al. V. Thomas J. Meskill. U.S. District Court of Connecticut. <https://www.uscourts.gov/record-and-documents/1977-1-13-1977-1-13-1977-1-13>
Sawyer, W., & Wagner, P. (2023). *Massachusetts School Funding and the Prison Pipeline*. www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/massachusetts-school-funding-and-the-prison-pipeline
William Penn SD et al. v. Pa. Dept. of Education. www.elc-pa.org/cases/william-penn-sd-et-al-v-pa-dept-of-education

(References on page 2)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Christopher D. Mano, M.A.Ed., is an educator from Philadelphia and author of two self-published books. He is an aspiring principal member of the PA Principals Association and is currently completing a post-master's principal certification at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. You may contact him at cmano0409@gmail.com.