



Highlights of [GAO-03-234](#), a report to the Ranking Minority member, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has focused national attention on the importance of ensuring each child's access to equal educational opportunity. The law seeks to improve the performance of schools and the academic achievement of students, including those who are economically disadvantaged. The Congress, among others, has been concerned about the education of economically disadvantaged students. This study focused on per-pupil spending, factors influencing spending, and other similarities and differences between selected high-poverty inner city schools and selected suburban schools in seven metropolitan areas: Boston, Chicago, Denver, Fort Worth, New York, Oakland, and St. Louis.

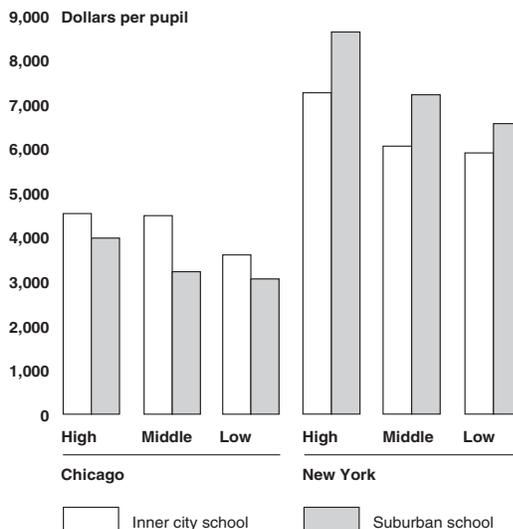
SCHOOL FINANCE

Per-Pupil Spending Differences between Selected Inner City and Suburban Schools Varied by Metropolitan Area

What GAO Found

Among the schools GAO reviewed, differences in per-pupil spending between inner city and suburban schools varied across metropolitan areas, with inner city schools spending more in some metropolitan areas and suburban schools spending more in other areas. The inner city schools that GAO examined generally spent more per pupil than suburban schools in Boston, Chicago, and St. Louis, while in Fort Worth and New York the suburban schools in GAO's study almost always spent more per pupil than the inner city schools. In Denver and Oakland, spending differences between the selected inner city and suburban schools were mixed. In general, higher per-pupil expenditures at any given school were explained primarily by higher staff salaries regardless of whether the school was an inner city or suburban school. Two other explanatory factors were student-teacher ratios and ratios of students to student support staff, such as guidance counselors, nurses, and librarians. Federal funds are generally targeted to low-income areas to compensate for additional challenges faced by schools in those areas. In some cases, the infusion of federal funds balanced differences in per-pupil expenditures between the selected inner city and suburban schools.

There is a broad consensus that poverty itself adversely affects academic achievement, and inner city students in the schools reviewed performed less well academically than students in the suburban schools. The disparity in achievement may also be related to several other differences identified in the characteristics of inner city and suburban schools. At the schools GAO visited, inner city schools generally had higher percentages of first-year teachers, higher enrollments, fewer library resources, and less in-school parental involvement—characteristics that some research has shown are related to school achievement.



Source: GAO's data analysis of school spending.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt/GAO-03-234

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marnie Shaul at (202) 512-7215 or shaulm@gao.gov