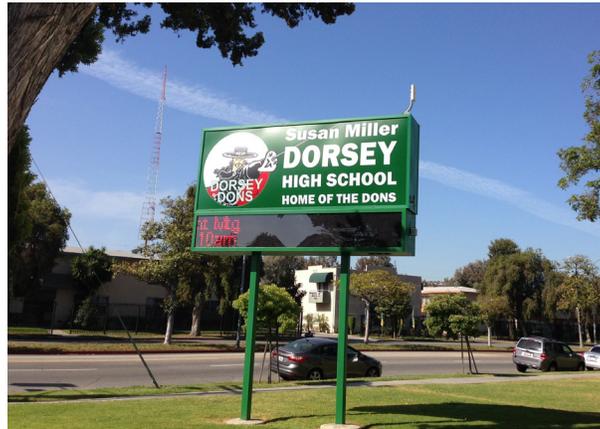




THE EDUCATION DEBT



The Promised Land.

That's how one teacher at Dorsey High School in Los Angeles describes schools where staff can make as many copies as they want—even color copies. And then, there are the class sizes. They can exceed 40 students at Dorsey.

“It's not fair to have to rush to class to get a seat,” student activist Saisha Smith says in *A Rose in L.A.*, a [short documentary](#) produced by Media Sutra.

In the documentary, students, families and staff call for additional funding for Dorsey. The video was released in conjunction with *Confronting the Education Debt*, a [report](#) by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS). Coined by National Education Policy Center Fellow [Gloria Ladson-Billings](#) in a [2006 address](#) she made as President of the American Educational Research Association, the term “education debt” describes the opportunities and resources held back from students of color over the decades.

Ladson-Billings' conception of this debt is not only financial but also historical, sociopolitical and moral. The AROS report zeroes in on the financial, putting a price tag to the federal portion of that debt, which they estimate to be \$580 billion, just for the period between 2005 and 2017—the length of a child's K-12 career. That is the additional amount of funding that would have been allocated if Congress had taken the following actions:

- Allotted 40 percent per Title I student, above and beyond what was provided by state and local funds. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which established the Title I funding stream, aimed to allot 40 percent above and beyond state and local funding for each Title I-eligible student.
- Allotted 40 percent of the needed funding per student with a disability. In 1975, when Congress passed the law now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act, it

pledged that the federal government would pay 40 percent of the cost of educating each student with a disability, as mandated by the law, with the remaining resources to be provided by states and school districts. That cost was assumed to be equivalent to twice the cost of educating a student without a disability.

The *Confronting the Education Debt* report tallied up the shortfalls in funding these two federal programs. The report also notes that:

- Only 11 states use state funding to offset the disparities between (a) wealthier districts that can raise sufficient funding for schools and (b) poorer districts that cannot, due to their lower tax base.
- In the 1940s and 1950s, the top marginal tax rate was over 90 percent. Today it is 37 percent.

In 2006, Ladson-Billings spoke in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. She expressed some hope that policymakers would begin addressing the education debt: “here, for the first time in a very long time, the nation—indeed the world—was confronted with the magnitude of poverty that exists in America.” Over the past dozen years, little has changed. The teachers at Dorsey High and elsewhere still await the Promised Land.

NEPC Resources on School Finance and Funding

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