

# Education News & Notes

## No More Talking Around The School-Financing Issue

by Kurt Landgraf, President and  
CEO, Educational Testing Service  
(ETS)

(NAPSA)—Much of the public debate about school financing over the last year has focused on whether the No Child Left Behind Act is being adequately funded. It's an important question. But if our goal is fairness as well as adequacy in how we fund our public schools, then we need to get to the core of the funding issue. And that means doing away, once and for all, with the system's over-reliance on local property taxes.

For many states, that would require a sea change in public policy. Given the status quo, an overhaul is what's needed.

At the K-12 level, on average, states provide about half of the funds for public schools, with local districts contributing another 43 percent and the federal government making up the balance. Within a district, most of a community's contributions to the school budget are drawn from local property taxes.

As a rule, the wealthier the community, the higher the property values and the more money available for students, schools and school improvement. It's a self-propelling cycle driven by a regressive tax.

It's also a social flashpoint that's harming education and eroding confidence in public institutions. By tying school funding so closely to local wealth, we're pitting rich against middle class against poor; urban against suburban against rural; region against region; workers against the retired; neighbor against neighbor.

And taxpayer against government: Almost every state is strug-



gling with complaints over its school-financing system. These disputes typically end up in litigation in which states are accused of violating their own constitutional requirements to provide effective, high-quality educational opportunities for all of their students.

As a result, we have a patchwork of hopelessly complex public policies that few would defend as ideal, fair or even effective in providing access to a quality education for all students.

In the weeks and months ahead, ETS will be stepping up our efforts to drive this issue closer to center stage in the public policy arena. Some have cautioned us not to do so, arguing that school financing is either too complex to examine or too politically charged to confront. In fact, it's too important an issue not to confront.

At ETS, we're listening to educators, parents and policy-makers. We're learning from sound research. And we're leading the effort to achieve both informed public policy and informed educational practice.

ETS has a lot to say about listening, learning and leading. For more information, visit [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org).