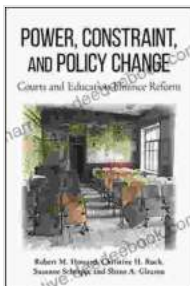


Courts and Education Finance Reform: SUNY in the Crucible of American Constitutionalism

The issue of education finance reform has been a contentious one in the United States for decades. At the heart of the debate is the question of whether the government has a constitutional obligation to provide equal access to quality education for all students. This question has been addressed by courts at all levels, from state supreme courts to the United States Supreme Court.



Power, Constraint, and Policy Change: Courts and Education Finance Reform (SUNY series in American Constitutionalism) by Robert M. Howard

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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One of the most important cases in the history of education finance reform is *Serrano v. Priest*, which was decided by the California Supreme Court in 1971. In *Serrano*, the plaintiffs argued that the California public school finance system violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The plaintiffs claimed that the system was unconstitutional because it resulted in significant disparities

in per-pupil spending between wealthy and poor school districts. The California Supreme Court agreed with the plaintiffs, holding that the system violated the Equal Protection Clause and ordered the state to implement a new system that would provide more equitable funding for all students.

The *Serrano* decision was a landmark victory for education finance reform advocates. However, it was not the end of the story. In 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District* that the Texas public school finance system did not violate the Equal Protection Clause. The Court held that education was not a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution and that the state had a legitimate interest in allocating educational resources in a way that it deemed appropriate.

The *Rodriguez* decision was a major setback for education finance reform advocates. However, it did not completely close the door on the possibility of using the courts to challenge inequitable school funding systems. In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe* that the Texas public school finance system could not be used to deny undocumented immigrant children access to public education. The Court held that the state's interest in educating undocumented immigrant children outweighed its interest in preserving its limited educational resources.

The *Plyler* decision was a significant victory for education finance reform advocates. It showed that the Court was willing to use the Equal Protection Clause to strike down school funding systems that discriminated against certain groups of students. In 1997, the Supreme Court ruled in *Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby* that the Texas public school finance system violated the Equal Protection Clause because it resulted in

significant disparities in per-pupil spending between wealthy and poor school districts. The Court held that the state had a constitutional obligation to provide all students with an adequate education.

The *Edgewood* decision was a major victory for education finance reform advocates. It showed that the Court was willing to use the Equal Protection Clause to require states to provide equitable funding for all students. In 2006, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bush v. Holmes* that the Washington public school finance system did not violate the Equal Protection Clause. The Court held that the state had a legitimate interest in allocating educational resources in a way that it deemed appropriate.

The *Bush v. Holmes* decision was a setback for education finance reform advocates. However, it did not completely close the door on the possibility of using the courts to challenge inequitable school funding systems. In 2014, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in *Abbott v. Burke* that the New Jersey public school finance system violated the New Jersey Constitution because it resulted in significant disparities in per-pupil spending between wealthy and poor school districts. The Court held that the state had a constitutional obligation to provide all students with an adequate education.

The *Abbott v. Burke* decision is a significant victory for education finance reform advocates. It shows that courts are still willing to use their power to strike down school funding systems that discriminate against certain groups of students. The decision is also a reminder that the fight for education finance reform is far from over.

The Case of SUNY

The State University of New York (SUNY) system is the largest public university system in the United States. It has 64 campuses and enrolls over 400,000 students. SUNY is a major economic driver for New York State, and it plays a vital role in educating the state's workforce.

However, SUNY has also been at the center of a long-running debate over education finance reform. In 1998, a group of students and faculty members filed a lawsuit against the SUNY system, alleging that it violated the Equal Protection Clause of the New York State Constitution. The plaintiffs argued that the system was unconstitutional because it resulted in significant disparities in per-pupil spending between wealthy and poor campuses.

The New York State Supreme Court agreed with the plaintiffs, holding that the SUNY system violated the Equal Protection Clause. The court ordered the state to implement a new system that would provide more equitable funding for all campuses. The state appealed the decision, and the case eventually made its way to the New York Court of Appeals, the state's highest court.

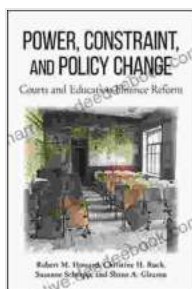
In 2006, the New York Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court's decision. The court held that the SUNY system violated the Equal Protection Clause and ordered the state to implement a new funding system. The state appealed the decision to the United States Supreme Court, but the Court declined to hear the case.

The *Students of the State University of New York v. State of New York* decision is a significant victory for education finance reform advocates. It shows that courts are willing to use their power to strike down higher

education funding systems that discriminate against certain groups of students. The decision is also a reminder that the fight for education finance reform is far from over.

The issue of education finance reform is a complex one with no easy answers. However, courts have played a significant role in shaping the landscape of education finance reform. Court decisions have struck down school funding systems that discriminated against certain groups of students and have ordered states to implement new systems that provide more equitable funding for all students.

The fight for education finance reform is far from over. However, the progress that has been made is due in large part to the efforts of courts. Courts have shown that they are willing to use their power to strike down unconstitutional school funding systems and to order states to implement new systems that provide more equitable funding for all students.



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