The dollar debates: Comparing the implications of judicial versus political intervention for school finance reform

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Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:106777

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2016

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The Rhode Island Supreme Court chose to respect the state legislature’s primacy in determining allocations. As a result, the state undertook a years-long, scientifically guided process to develop an acclaimed formula that enjoys enduring support in both political branches. The resulting Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act of 2010 produced the Fair Funding Formula, a foundation amount allocation mechanism that accounts for district and student need.

New Jersey has been embroiled in litigation since 1973, a costly process that has produced mixed results. Robinson v. Cahill II and Abbott v. Burke I-XIII demonstrate the risks inherent to judicial intervention: sprawling remedies and usurpation of the legislative prerogative. Further, rulings favorable to disadvantaged students continually falter during implementation, when the political branches lack the resources to enact a sweeping judicial policy.