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## *Snapshots of Schools Across North Carolina: Are They Adequate and Equal?*

- In Robeson County, at Rowland Norment Elementary School, the facilities are in desperate need of repair. "This school is infested with termites, has corroded exposed pipes, cracked walls, and peeling paint. The school has poor lighting and poor acoustics. The library has tables with broken legs and numerous books that are outdated and in poor condition." At St. Paul's High School, the science classes need "microscopes, Bunsen burners, electronic balances, multimeters, models, charts, and other basic science supplies. Some safety equipment, such as the eye wash, does not work, while other safety items, such as goggles and gloves, are simply not available."<sup>1</sup>
- In Halifax County, at Inborden Elementary School, signs are posted throughout the school warning of asbestos. But that is not the only problem. "Textbooks are frequently in short supply. In addition to shortages, students must often make do with worn out and outdated textbooks. Other supplementary materials that are recommended to accompany state textbooks are frequently unavailable, or must be shared with other classes. Classrooms often do not have resources such as dictionaries."<sup>2</sup>
- In Vance County, "there are no elementary school programs in second languages, drama, creative movement education, choral music or instrumental music—all of which are basic elements in North Carolina's Standard Course of Study." Furthermore, "[t]he school system has experienced considerable difficulties attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers."<sup>3</sup>
- In Hoke County, increasing enrollment presents a variety of problems. "With no locally paid teachers we have an inordinate number of combination grade classes (There are not enough teachers to provide for self-contained grade levels.) and frequently exceed class size maximums."<sup>4</sup>
- In Cumberland County, "[f]ew, if any, schools have adequate technology in the area of computers. Indeed, many of these schools lack much more basic equipment, such as overhead projectors. . . . The children of Cumberland County do not have anything approaching the educational opportunities available to children in wealthier North Carolina school districts."<sup>5</sup>

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Affidavit filed with the plaintiffs' amended complaint in Halifax County Superior Court on Sept. 26, 1994, by Purnell Swett, Superintendent of the Robeson County School System.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, by Willie J. Gilchrist, Superintendent of the Halifax County School System.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, by A. Craig Phillips, Superintendent of the Vance County School System.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, by William C. Harrison, Superintendent of the Hoke County School System.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, by John R. Griffin, Jr., Superintendent of the Cumberland County School System.

wide funding differences between rich and poor school districts. North Carolina had the 15th highest gap in funding between wealthy and poor districts, according to the GAO, even though the state ranked 19th in its efforts to equalize funding.<sup>2</sup> For example, in 1994–95, Hyde County spent \$7,460 per-pupil—almost double the amount (\$3,809) that Onslow County spent. (See Table 2 on pp. 48–55.)

### The Right to Education

**I**n two landmark legal efforts in the early 1970s, parents challenged the funding of school systems near Pasadena, Calif., and San Antonio, Texas. In *Serrano v. Priest*,<sup>3</sup> the California Supreme Court ruled that the reliance on local property taxes to fund the California school system violated the federal