

# Opinion: In St. Louis, money plays a role in getting access to clean water

By Tony Messenger, Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.01.16

Word Count **685**



In this May 4, 2016, file photo, drinking fountains are marked "Do Not Drink Until Further Notice" at Flint Northwestern High School in Flint, Michigan. Photo: P Photo/Carolyn Kaster File

Students cannot use the drinking fountains in 30 St. Louis, Missouri, public schools. Water flows through lead pipes in the old school buildings, and comes out poisoned. Lead is a metal that causes many health problems. Last summer, thousands of children in another city, Flint, Michigan, were exposed to lead-poisoned drinking water. After that, leaders checked the water at the nearby St. Louis, Missouri schools. The results showed lead in the water there, too. Drinking fountains were shut off at some St. Louis schools. Some fountains there had much more lead than those in Flint.

Reed Elementary School is close by, in Ladue, Missouri. The town is very rich. There, the water is cold and clean. In fact, the schools got money from people to put name plates on drinking fountains at the schools. Thirsty students can see that they live in a place where clean water is for people who have money.

The water fountain is a symbol of differences in skin color. St. Louis is in the same area as Ferguson, Missouri where Michael Brown was killed by Ferguson police on August 9, 2014. He was 18 years old. Since then, people around the country have been talking about civil rights. In St. Louis, 8 out of 10 students are black. In Ladue, only 2 out of 10 students are black.

### **Wealthy Schools Getting More Money**

Ladue already plans to spend millions of dollars on schools there. The town figured out how to raise even more money. People could give money to name rooms and hallways after themselves. They could name buildings, football fields, and even water fountains.

The price for getting a school drinking fountain labeled with a person's name is \$3,000. For a whole stadium, the price tag is \$600,000.

Nearby, children have been sucking poisonous lead into their tiny bodies for a long time. In 1993, Missouri Judge Byron Kinder noticed. He said that the state did not give money to its schools equally.

It is hard to imagine anything worse than children who swallow lead in their drinking water. Meanwhile, children just blocks away get water fountains with names on them.

People are divided by their skin color and how much money they have. St. Louis is not the only place that this is happening. Last week, a company shared a list of the 50 most divided areas, where rich school districts are next to poor ones. St. Louis was on the list, and so were many districts from all over the country.

In 1968, a group asked leaders to make one school district in St. Louis instead of 24. Then, thirsty kids would all have the same water. It would not depend on what town they lived in.

The change did not happen. Leaders have made small changes in the money that schools get, but the differences remain. White parents with money are not affected by how well poor black children are doing in school, a problem that leads to unfair differences.

### **Poor Students Suffering From Lead Poisoning**

A few months ago, I watched two children play in their St. Louis home. Aaliyah and Rashaud Dinwiddie had just moved across the street. Their old apartment had lead paint. Health department testing found very high levels of lead in both children. Rashaud is 5 years old, and started public school this month in a city that continues to poison its children.

Two years ago, more than 3,000 children in St. Louis had lead levels high enough to cause health problems. Leaders thought that the lead problem was because of lead paint in houses. However, the water at the schools had never been tested.

St. Louis is an area divided by skin color and money in the most disgusting way. Children in rich parts of town have drinking fountains flowing with clean water. Children in the city's poorest neighborhoods have crime tape surrounding theirs.

*Tony Messenger, metro columnist at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, was a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist for a series of editorials on Ferguson. This article was adapted from two columns originally published in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.*

**Quiz**

- 1 Read the section "Wealthy Schools Getting More Money."  
Which paragraph shows how people tried in the past to fix the water problems?
- 2 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-3].  
Which sentence from this section BEST explains WHY schools in Ladue have clean water in the drinking fountains?
- (A) Lead is a metal that causes many health problems.
  - (B) Drinking fountains were shut off at some St. Louis schools.
  - (C) The town is very rich.
  - (D) In St. Louis, 8 out of 10 students are black.
- 3 What would be another good title for the section "Wealthy Schools Getting More Money"?
- (A) "An Unfair Divide"
  - (B) "Raising Money For Schools"
  - (C) "The Rich Get Richer"
  - (D) "Lead In The Water"
- 4 Which sentence from the article is MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) Lead is a metal that causes many health problems.
  - (B) Some fountains there had much more lead than those in Flint.
  - (C) People are divided by their skin color and how much money they have.
  - (D) Health department testing found very high levels of lead in both children.

## Answer Key

- 1 Read the section "Wealthy Schools Getting More Money."  
Which paragraph shows how people tried in the past to fix the water problems?
- Paragraph 8:**  
**In 1968, a group asked leaders to make one school district in St. Louis instead of 24. Then, thirsty kids would all have the same water. It would not depend on what town they lived in.**
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