COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATOR
KRISTIN PHILLIPS-HILL
CO-CHAIR

REPRESENTATIVE
MIKE STURLA
CO-CHAIR

BASIC EDUCATION FUNDING COMMISSION

HEARING AGENDA
November 16, 2023 – 10AM
North Office Building, Hearing Room #1
Harrisburg, PA

10:00 a.m. Call to Order and Opening Remarks
- Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill, 28th Senatorial District
- Rep. Mike Sturla, 96th Legislative District

10:10 a.m. Panel of Brick-and-Mortar Charter Schools:
- Ryan Schumm, Executive Officer, Charter Choices
- Debi Durso, Member of Philadelphia Charters for Excellence Policy Committee and CEO/Principal of Green Woods Charter School
- Dr. Tina Chekan, CEO, Propel Charter Schools (Zoom)

10:30 a.m. Questions & Answers

10:50 a.m. Panel of Cyber Charter Schools:
- Jane Swan, CEO, Reach Cyber Charter School
- Dr. Richard Jensen, CEO, Agora Cyber Charter School
- Mark Allen, CEO, Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School (PALCS)

11:10 a.m. Questions & Answers

11:30 a.m. Panel Three:
- Dr. Adam Oldham, LPC, NCSC, High School Counselor, Pennsylvania Coalition of Student Services Associations
- Christi Buker, CAE, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Library Association
- Angela Marks, Founder, Reading Allowed
- Susan DeJarnatt, Professor of Law, Temple University Beasley School of Law (Zoom)

11:50 a.m. Questions & Answers

12:10 p.m. Closing Remarks and Adjournment

Basic Education Funding Commission hearing on November 16, 2023

Testimony of Ryan Schumm, Co-Founder of Charter Choices

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify before the commission. My name is Ryan Schumm. I hold a degree in Education, began my career teaching middle school math and science, and have dedicated the past 20 years to supporting public charter schools, with 17 of those years here in Pennsylvania as the Co-Founder of Charter Choices. Charter Choices provides accounting and back office support to over 50 charter schools in Pennsylvania with the goal of enabling school leaders and board members to focus on the care and education of the students under their local control.

I'll begin by referencing several pieces of testimony that were provided in this room one month ago. At the September 13th BEFC hearing, two of the attorneys who represented the Petitioners in the school funding lawsuit testified about many items with direct relevance to charter school funding. I will share three highlights from Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg's testimony:

From section 1.C "The funding system is failing. The court explained why: Because the funding system has created "manifest deficiencies" in the resources all agreed were essential".

Next, from his testimony during the Q&A at 1:49 minutes into the recording, which is available on the BEFC's website: "when you have an underfunded district school, you pretty much have an underfunded charter school" and "those kids (charter school kids) have the same needs and charter schools need to staff up too".

Lastly, from Urevick-Ackelsberg's written testimony section 1.D: "The systems failures are particularly placed upon the shoulders of low-income children and children of color".

Stepping away from the attorney's testimony for a moment, I'd like to take a look at who charter school students are relative to race and low income status. Sourced from Public Schools Percent of Low Income Reports from the October 1 PIMS snapshot for the 2022-2023 school year, which is available on PDE's website, the percent of enrollments from Low-Income families across all 500 school districts was 47.6%. In sharp contrast, the percent of charter school enrollments from low-income families was 65.6%. Sourced from the same October 1 PIMS snapshot, across all 500 school districts in Pennsylvania, 64.6% of students enrolled were white, with 35.4% being non-white. Across all charter schools in Pennsylvania in the same October 1 snapshot, we find that 31.8% of charter school students are white with 68.2% being non-white.

Immediately after Mr. Urevick-Ackelsberg's testimony, Maura McInerney, also an attorney who represented the Petitioners, offered the following from the court's opinion:

"[T]he Court rejected a two-tiered school funding system of the haves and have-nots. Instead, the Court expressly held that our school funding system must ensure that every student receives a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically, which requires that all students have access to a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education. The Court not only

defined the quality of education mandated by our Constitution but declared public education in our state to be a fundamental right, one guaranteed to every child regardless of wealth, race, or zip code."

I suspect that had charter school students been represented in this lawsuit, that the declaration by the court would have been that public education in our state is a fundamental right regardless of wealth, race, zip code, and *which type of public school a student attends*.

The Court clearly rejected a two tiered funding system, and I think it is imperative that the state's response to the lawsuit must not create or exaggerate a two tiered funding system that punishes students and families who attend public charter schools. All charter schools are public schools, and it seems clear that all students deserve equitable funding regardless of what type of public school they attend. I suggest that it is critical that the legislature ensures that changes to education funding in Pennsylvania do not further the inequities in funding that charter school students currently experience. Addressing equity and adequacy issues for public districts must be done in a way that addresses the same issues for public charters and the students whom they serve.

Currently, charter schools are primarily funded by the per pupil tuition that is billed to the student's district of residence. The tuition rates for charter school students is calculated with PDE's 363 form. The calculation provides an expense based pass through of funds, capturing a districts total expenditures less deductions, yielding a per pupil amount for both regular and special education students. Three of the primary challenges with the 363 funding method are that deductible expenses can be subjective and debatable, there is no mechanism to audit or quality control the district calculations, and there is no timeline for districts to complete the 363 calculations. As of PDE's November posting of 363 calculations on their website, 242 of the 500 school districts had completed and submitted their 363 calculation to PDE, leaving 51% of district charter school tuition rates being unknown 5 months into the fiscal year.

I suggest that addressing isolated elements of the charter funding formula would damage charter school students and lead to greater inequity. The responsible approach to addressing the charter funding model would be a holistic approach, with a study of all elements of funding sources and adequacy. At a conceptual level, I believe that funding charters based on a formula that considers the sending district's revenues would be more transparent than the expense model, and it would provide a greater chance at achieving equity and adequacy for charter school students. If adequacy targets were established for districts, they should flow to the charter school students through a revenue based funding model.

There are several inequitable funding mechanisms in Pennsylvania that negatively impact charter school students, two of which should be addressed by PDE and the legislature with urgency. Both are a result of grant funding procedures that exclude charter schools and the students that they serve. In Pennsylvania, allotments for the federal IDEA grant (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) for charter schools are calculated on the number of special education students enrolled at the charter school on the previous school year's December 1 student headcount. Charter schools in their first year of operation are denied federal IDEA funds because their prior year December 1 headcount was zero, due to the fact that they were not in operation during the prior year. There must be a way to include IDEA funding for charter school students who attend a charter in its first year of operation. I suspect that the barriers that have prevented a solution to this problem for the past 25 years are not a lack of creative problem solvers in Harrisburg, but rather the lack of willingness to solve this problem. The good news with IDEA funding is that charter school special education students become eligible to participate in this federal grant program in the years subsequent to the charter schools first year of operation. This is not the reality

with the state grant program, Ready to Learn. The Ready to Learn state block grant funding is renewed each year by the state, but it only includes charter schools that were in operation during the 2014-2015 school year. Charter school students who attend a school that opened after the 2014-2015 school year are perpetually denied funding for this state block grant. This seems blatantly inequitable.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and thank you for the many hours and miles that you have dedicated to the work of the BEFC.

https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Enrollment/Pages/PublicSchEnrReports.aspx

https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Charter%20Schools/Pages/Charter-School-Funding.aspx

https://www.pahouse.com/files/Documents/2023-09-15_115055__Philadelphia91423.pdf

https://www.basiceducationfundingcommission.com/Meetings/

Testimony to the Basic Education Funding Commission
November 16, 2023
Debi Durso, CEO/Principal, Green Woods Charter School
Policy Committee Member, Philadelphia Charters for Excellence

Good morning Chair Phillips-Hill, Chair Sturla, and other distinguished members of the Basic Education Funding Commission.

My name is Debi Durso and I am the CEO and Principal of Green Woods Charter School. I am here today representing the 80 member schools of Philadelphia Charters for Excellence (or PCE). I would like to thank you for including the Philadelphia brick and mortar charter community in this hearing on the future of public school funding.

I have spent 25 years as an educator and school leader in Philadelphia, with almost all of my time spent working in schools serving predominantly low-income and minority students, including many with special needs. I've taught in Philadelphia district and public charter schools, founded and led the successful turnaround of a failing district K-8 school into a thriving public charter school, and served as a regional superintendent for the Mastery Charter Schools network where we focused on K-12 schools in both Philadelphia and Camden, NJ serving some of the highest need student populations in both states. I now operate a single-site K-8 STEM-focused charter school, where our students have performed above the state average in reading and math in each of the last 8 years. I firmly believe that every child, regardless of the zip code where they live, has a right to a high quality public education, and I have dedicated my professional life to this effort.

I am also a mother of four school aged children who have attended traditional public, private, catholic, and public charter schools - so I bring the perspective of both a committed educator and a parent who makes choices about the school that's right for each of my children. It is from this depth of professional and personal experience that I am humbly speaking on behalf of PCE's 62,000 children to share ways that this Commission can create better learning opportunities for our students by creating more equitable funding for public schools in Pennsylvania.

Founded in 2011, Philadelphia Charters for Excellence (PCE), is a non-profit membership organization that works to connect, convene, and collectively advocate for the needs of 62,000 students and families attending 80 of Philadelphia's brick-and-mortar public charter schools. Our members represent:

- 96% of Philadelphia's public brick-and-mortar charter sector;
- 60% of all students enrolled in a brick and mortar charter school statewide (there are 104,00 students in brick-and-mortar statewide); and 38% of all public charter school students statewide (there are 161,669 students statewide across cyber and brick and mortar schools).

We are dedicated to ensuring that every Philadelphia student has the access and opportunity to attend a high quality public school of their choice - be it a district managed or public charter school.

When looking at the 62,000 students our members serve, if Philadelphia Charters for Excellence member public schools were considered an LEA or single school district, we would be the second-largest school district in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We believe our students and the voices of their families need to be clearly considered when discussing education funding equity.

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak to you today about the views and priorities our members, their educators, and students and families have shared on this important topic, and will focus on three (3) key priorities:

1. **Acknowledging and Addressing Funding Inequity for Charters: Philadelphia's brick and mortar public charter school students are bearing a greater burden in the current inequitable distribution of funding cited in the Commonwealth Court case**. While inadequately funded school districts have been the focus of this commission thus far, charter students in low income districts are arguably the least equitably funded students in the state, because they are doubly penalized both by being a part of underfunded district, and by the loss of the money held back by districts that does not follow students into their public school of choice. We believe it would make a significant impact for the public school children we serve in charter schools if Philadelphia schools were funded in an equitable manner with other schools across the state AND we received an equal share of that funding to educate students within our home district. We ask that this commission recognize the double inequity that is happening in the way public charter school funding is allocated to our schools.

2. **Accelerating the Implementation of the Fair Funding Formula**: **We can create more funding fairness for high-need students by putting more money through an equitable funding formula.** We know this needs to be done thoughtfully and over time, and we believe using the currently approved fair funding formula that takes student poverty and learning needs into account is the fairest way to distribute dollars to serve students statewide. This remedy would significantly benefit learning outcomes for our student population in Philadelphia's public charter schools.

3. **Actively Involving the Charter Sector in Negotiations and Decisions on Funding that Impact Public Charter Schools: Philadelphia public charter schools need a more active and sustained seat at the table to determine what remedies, policies, and timelines will best meet the needs of schools, students, and staff in this diverse ecosystem beyond moving more money through the formula.** There have been many remedies proposed over the course of these hearings that would impact public charter school students, but until today, there have been

essentially no direct charter school voices represented in the discussion. Thank you for including us today. We believe we can find common ground on what fixes are needed beyond a fair, basic funding formula, but we need to start there and include our schools in a comprehensive discussion.

Acknowledge and Address Funding Inequity for Public Charter Schools

In light of the Commonwealth Court decision on school funding, we can now agree that the way basic education funding is currently distributed in Pennsylvania disadvantages lower-wealth districts like Philadelphia and must be addressed to create fair allocation of resources to every child.

This ruling was a welcomed development for our members, who hope this will spur movement to create more equitable funding for schools and students statewide. We share many of the sentiments previously touched upon by leaders from the School District of Philadelphia, and other Pennsylvania districts serving a high number of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch or students with special needs. However, it is not lost on our members that if low-wealth public school districts are underfunded through the current formula, the way dollars currently flow to public charter schools from their host districts across the state creates *additional funding inequities for charter school students*. We would argue that brick and mortar charter school students in low-income school districts are receiving the least equitable funding share of any schools in the state of Pennsylvania.

Charter funding is currently allocated in an expense-based system, where actual non-federal spending on students in a district in one year dictates the per pupil allocations to charters in the following year. When a low-wealth district like Philadelphia receives what the Commonwealth Court determined is already an inequitable amount of funding to educate their students, the host district then passes on a fractional share of these funds to public charter schools as their relative per pupil for the year.

There are many myths and misconceptions about how public charter schools are funded in Pennsylvania. But there are a few facts most people can agree on:

1. Charter School funding flows from the host District where their students reside using an expense-based formula.

2. The funding calculation is based on - and is a percentage of - the District's per-pupil funding from the prior year *with some exceptions:*
    a. Specifically - The calculation of the tuition reimbursements are done through the PDE-363 form, which are required to be submitted to the PA Department of Education each year by school districts. The per-pupil calculation for regular education and special education students is done by taking each district's budgeted total expenditures from the previous fiscal year, minus the allowed deductions, divided by the Average Daily Membership of the school district. Allowable deductions have been growing over time as a way for host districts to reduce payments to public charter schools.

3. Charter schools receive a certain percentage less per-pupil than what district schools have to educate the same children.
    a. While there is disagreement over the average reduction in funding from districts to charters, this gap statewide has been identified as high as 30% less than district schools or as low as 12% in any given district and year.

The primary point to understand from this background on public charter school funding is that funding for charter school students and those of their district peers are inextricably linked; with charter students generally receiving between 70 - 88% of the funds that flow to their district peers.

There has been and will be much debate about the proper percentage of per pupil funding that should follow a student from the district where they reside. We believe that all dollars intended to serve students should follow those students into the public district or public charter school they attend to ensure they get the best education possible. If the Commonwealth Court decision found that low-wealth districts like ours are already receiving inadequate funding to meet the needs of the students they serve, this inequity is magnified by even fewer resources following students into public charter schools through the reduced per pupil allocations currently allowed under the law through manipulation of the PDE form 363 (see Appendix I).

The Court has ruled it is unfair for students from high-wealth districts to receive more funding than students in low-wealth districts. In Philadelphia, we have several examples of geographically adjacent public districts where the per pupil funding is $10,000 or more per student per year beyond what Philadelphia receives for students who attend schools just a few blocks away inside the city limits. The fair funding case confirms this is unjust and must be remedied. We would take this further to argue that it is equally - if not more unfair - that two students living next door to each other inside Philadelphia can walk out their doors to schools within blocks of each other in the same city - one traditional district and one public charter school - and experience a 12 - 30% disparity in the funding for their public education.

Charter schools are public schools and families choosing these public options for their children should not have fewer tax dollars allocated to their child's education than other public schools within the same district boundaries. All public school students - in both district and charter schools - should receive a fair share of funding that takes into account their needs and the amount of money that is required to adequately educate them. The governance model of the school should not be a factor in the funding for each student.

Accelerate the Implementation of the Fair Funding Formula

Putting more money through the fair funding formula first implemented in Pennsylvania in FY 2016 would benefit Philadelphia Charter School students almost universally. Despite some misconceptions about charter schools nationally or statewide - the schools represented by Philadelphia Charters for Excellence serve one of the highest need, most diverse, and lowest-income student populations in the state (see Figure 1):

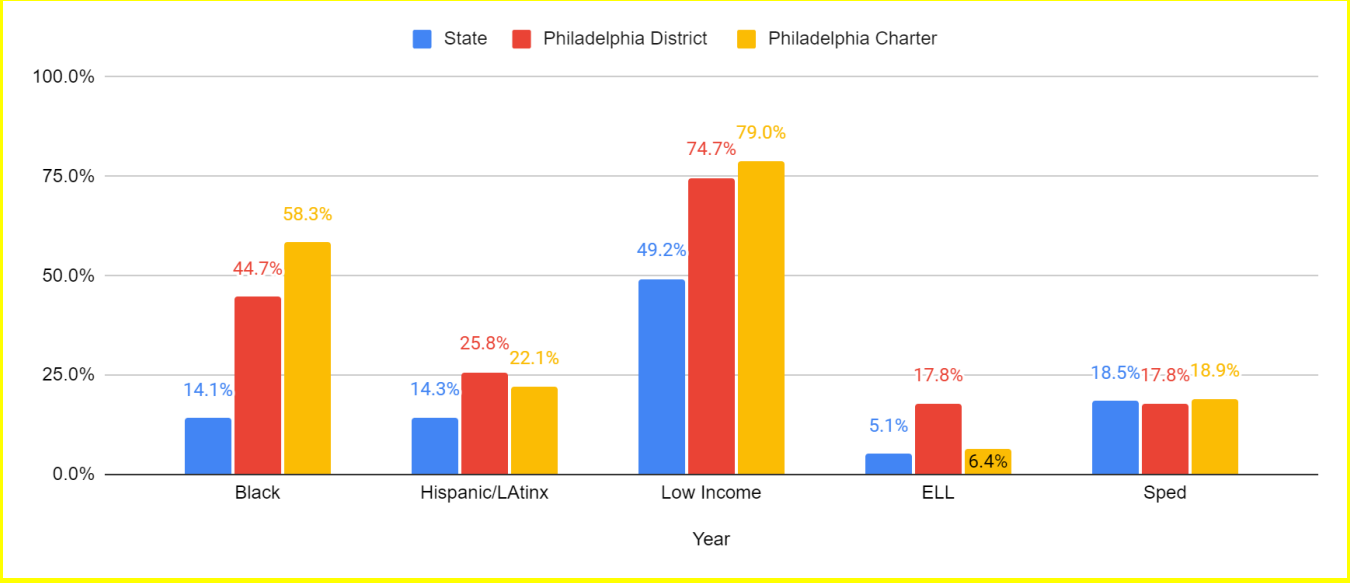
- 79% of our member schools' students qualify for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)

- 80% of our students are Black or Hispanic

With both of these demographics, public charter schools in Philadelphia are serving a larger share of low-income, historically disadvantaged minority students than our host district. In addition:

- 19% of our students qualify for special education services - which is on-par with the State and local District, and
- 6.5% qualify for ELL services

Figure 1 - Enrollment Demographics: Pennsylvania Public Schools, Philadelphia School District Public Schools, Philadelphia Public Charter Schools



	Black	Hispanic	Low Income	ELL	Sped
State	14.1%	14.3%	49.2%	5.1%	18.5%
Philadelphia District	44.7%	25.8%	74.7%	17.8%	17.8%
Philadelphia Charter	58.3%	22.1%	79.0%	6.4%	18.9%

While our member schools have shown innovative ways to do more with less over time, the students our schools serve are exactly who would benefit significantly from increased application of the fair funding formula and increases in basic education funding overall.

To inform this more comprehensive conversation about school funding, we are sharing further anecdotes from our members about some of the most acute cost-pressures they are currently feeling. Specifically, we see a number of areas where more funding is needed to support our student populations:

- **Recruiting and Retaining Talent** - From teachers to food service workers, staff is costing more money to recruit, employ and retain statewide, and particularly in areas of the state with a higher cost of living like Philadelphia and fierce talent competition from neighboring states.
    - In hard to staff subjects like math and science, in some cases there is no pipeline of active personnel to recruit and schools are increasingly hiring staff on emergency teaching certificates or leaving staff roles vacant.
    - Schools report raising salaries 15-20% for educators and still having problems fully staffing buildings based on shortages of education personnel statewide.
    - In Philadelphia, public charter schools have joined with district talent leaders, university teacher training programs, and non-profits supporting teachers to work together to seek grant funding and grow programs to attract and train talent. We ask that as the state considers funding opportunities for educator pipelines, that public charter schools be included in these opportunities.

- **Transportation and Safety** - While Districts are mandated to provide transportation, these funds are held by the local district and they are required to provide these services to our students. Our local LEA's challenges in providing this service for our students can negatively impact public charter school families.
    - Many members share that transportation services being provided by the local District are not adequate (e.g., bus routes not assigned to drivers, dropping students before schools are open for students or up to an hour after the instructional day has begun; limiting yellow bus service for middle grades students where public transportation routes impose a safety risk to and from school, etc.) impacting students' ability to actively attend school each day or on time.
    - Schools are being forced to supplement transportation costs or provide their own student transportation to provide safe passage for students to get them to school on time each day with no reimbursement for these services.

- **Modernizing and Maintaining Buildings** - Charter schools do not receive funding for facilities as the local District is allowed to exclude facilities funding from the dollars that flow to public charter schools.
    - Therefore, while charter schools have used our flexibility to get creative in how we invest in and maintain our facilities, many of our schools are struggling with deferred maintenance and increasing costs associated with maintaining our buildings with no facility funding following children into the public schools they attend.

- **Re-engaging and Supporting Students** - With attendance down across school sectors post -COVID, charter schools are putting even more resources into supporting students.
    - Schools are seeing increased numbers of students with Social/Emotional/Special Education needs applying to and enrolling in public charter schools.
    - While one-time ESSER dollars have provided a temporary stop-gap to fund these resources for students, these dollars disappear in the coming year and public charter

schools will have issues similar to public districts with maintaining needed support services without additional permanent funding. .

With more money flowing through the funding formula Philadelphia charter schools could invest not only in the areas cited above, but in other very concrete and tangible ways to benefit students who need support, and accelerate student learning.

Actively Involve the Charter Sector in Negotiations and Decisions on Funding Impacting Public Charter Schools

Philadelphia brick and mortar charters need an active seat at the table in both basic education funding discussions and discussions of how the actual charter funding formula should work in the charter school law. The 104,000 public brick and mortar charter school students statewide, including the 62,000 PCE schools serve, have families choosing this type of public school option for their children and deserve a voice in designing solutions that work.

While we have many policy recommendations related to school funding, one of the first and most consistent things we hear from our members is simply that with such a large and diverse membership and increasing demand from local families for public school options, our Philadelphia coalition of charter schools needs to have a more active and sustained role throughout state funding discussions now and into the future.

In reviewing testimony from previous hearings, there are a number of remedies that have been recommended by school district or public school board officials regarding complex charter funding issues such as special education, facilities, charter school reimbursement funding to districts, allowable exemptions from district funding, and moving from an expense to a revenue based funding model. While members in our coalition will have different points of view about which funding modifications may or may not benefit their schools and students, what we all agree on is the fiscal pressures on inequitably funded public schools have been laid bare in this case.

As a result, we believe we need this Commission to both move toward fairly funding public schools as quickly and efficiently as possible AND we need a separate comprehensive discussion on the matter of equitable public charter school funding under the charter school law. We are willing and able to be actively engaged in both conversations, and believe that a comprehensive approach to school funding, rather than piecemeal suggestions that do not take the full picture of funding into account for each student, are necessary.

In closing, we stand ready to work with the Commission to find funding solutions that are fair for all Pennsylvania students. At Philadelphia Charters for Excellence, we believe we can get there by taking the following actions:

1. **Create more equitable funding for all public school students by putting a greater percentage of education funding through the current fair funding formula.** We believe a

timeline needs to be in place, especially for districts relying on hold harmless; however, we believe using an agreed upon formula that takes student poverty and needs into account is the fairest way to distribute dollars and would significantly benefit high-need student populations like ours.

2. **Provide Philadelphia Charter Schools - through our umbrella organization PCE - with a more active and sustained seat at the funding table** to determine what remedies, policies, and timelines will best meet the needs of schools, students, and staff in this diverse ecosystem beyond moving more money through the formula.

3. **Further engage Philadelphia Charters for Excellence and others on this panel to study and make recommendations on any effort at comprehensive charter school funding reform.** We have faith in this Commission's ability to determine the best way to more fairly fund all schools across Pennsylvania. However, we would caution against considering cutting specific types of funding to charter schools in isolation from others as potential solutions to increasing funding to school districts . Robbing Peter to pay Paul would only create further inequity in funding to an entire class of public school students enrolled in charter schools. We believe a comprehensive approach to charter school funding is needed and public charter school leaders must be an equal voice in the conversation to ensure equity for the public school children we serve.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of Philadelphia Charters for Excellence today. We are willing and able to support the work of this Commission now and in the future in the service of Pennsylvania's children, and I look forward to your questions.

Appendix I: How Pennsylvania's Public Charter Schools are Funded Using the PDE Form 363

In considering equitable public school funding, it is important to understand how the funding formula for public charter schools work and how a Pennsylvania Department of Education form has been used as a strategy over time to decrease the amount of funding local school districts pass through to public charter schools in the form of per pupil dollars.

The Basics

1. Unlike school districts, public charter schools lack the power to levy taxes to supplement the federal and state revenue they are allocated.
2. Funding for public charter schools is addressed in Section 1725-A of the Pennsylvania Public School Code. Public charter schools receive the bulk of their funding through tuition reimbursements:
    a. The calculation of the tuition reimbursements is done through the PDE-363 form which is required to be submitted to the PA Department of Education each year by school districts.
        i. The per-pupil calculation for regular education and special education students is done by taking each district's budgeted total expenditures from the previous fiscal year, minus the allowed deductions, divided by the Average DailyMembership of the school district.
    b. Based on the current funding mechanism, public charter schools have no control over their annual revenue.

The Issues Impacting Charter School Funding

1. Currently, school district revenues are approximately 20% higher than public charter schools because the law allows for 7 deductions to be made on the PDE-363 form but over time PDE has increased the number of deductions to 24.
    a. Deductions were meant to ensure that charter schools were not receiving funding from school districts to pay for services they don't provide (like transportation, which districts are mandated to provide to charter students) and to prevent "double-dipping" (a scenario where a charter would get funding from a district for revenue they receive directly).
    b. The 7 deductions allowed for in the law are: (1) budgeted expenditures of the district of residence for nonpublic school programs; (2) adult education programs; (3) community/junior college programs; (4) student transportation services; (5) special education programs; (6) facilities acquisition, construction and improvement services; and (7) other financing uses, including debt service and fund transfers as provided in the Manual of Accounting and Related Financial Procedures for Pennsylvania School Systems.
    c. One of the additional deductions that PDE has allowed beyond those in the law

are federal funds.

2. The accounting and budgeting practices of each school district has a direct impact on the amount of funding a charter student receives through their tuition reimbursement rate.
    a. For example, with the significant infusion of federal funds to school districts as part of the COVID relief effort, public charter schools are seeing a significant drop in their per pupil tuition reimbursement rates. This is a result of school districts supplanting their state and local funding with the additional federal funding they have received over the past 3 years so they would not have to calculate those dollars in their charter reimbursement rate.
3. Some school districts exploit the current funding system for public charter schools with accounting loopholes that decrease the rightful amount of funding that should be going to students in charters. a. The "other financing uses" deduction allowed for in the law was intended to exclude debt service payments from the charter tuition reimbursement rate calculation.
    a. However, PDE has expanded the "other financing uses" deduction to include other expenditures such as "suspense account (5800)" and "budgetary reserve (5900)". These accounts are loopholes used by districts to remove eligible expenses from the reimbursement rate calculation and withhold a charter's rightful funding.In the 2022 fiscal year, approximately $270 million was designated as "budgetary reserves (5900)" by school districts.
    b. As previously outlined, public charter school funding is based on a per-pupil calculation and that calculation (cited in Section 2501(20) of the Public School Code) is based on "General Fund" expenditures.
        i. Due to the current wording of the law, districts have the ability to move eligible expenses out of the General Fund and into other funds to avoid calculating those expenditures into the charter tuition reimbursement rate.
        ii. One of the seven deductions in the Public School Code is "facilities acquisition, construction and improvement" and the issue with this deduction is that public charter schools do not receive any direct funding to assist with the cost of owning a facility.
            1. While the PlanCon reimbursement program has been dormant for several years now; it is important to note that this state program – which reimburses districts for construction costs – is not open to public brick-and-mortar charter schools.
        iii. The PDE-363 form has 2 deductions for "prekindergarten" expenses. While the school district's expenses are removed from the tuition reimbursement rate calculation, the students that are in the district's prekindergarten program are not removed from the denominator (aka the Average Daily Membership) in the formula - - leading to yet another decrease in the district's per-pupil charter tuition reimbursement rate.

Testimony to the Basic Education Funding Commission

November 16, 2023

Dr. Tina Chekan, CEO and Superintendent of Propel Schools

To the Chairs — Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill and Rep. Mike Sturla — and the other distinguished members of the Basic Education Funding Commission, my name is Dr. Tina Chekan, and I am the CEO and Superintendent of Propel Schools. On behalf of Propel, the largest network of public charter schools in western Pennsylvania serving nearly 4,000 students and their families, I would like to thank each of you for giving Propel and the public charter school sector an opportunity to participate in this important conversation.

In 2003, Propel opened the doors of its first school. I was there as a kindergarten teacher. We were in the basement of a former hospital in Homestead, which is just southeast of Pittsburgh. We barely had furniture that first day, but what we did have was a group of educators who bravely answered the call of local families who felt that a different public school option was needed to prepare their children to be successful in their adult lives. Let me say that another way: Families wanted Propel to open its first school in their community because their assigned public schools were not a good fit for their children. Most of these families did not have the financial resources to move to a different neighborhood where the district schools produced better outcomes or to send their children to a private school.

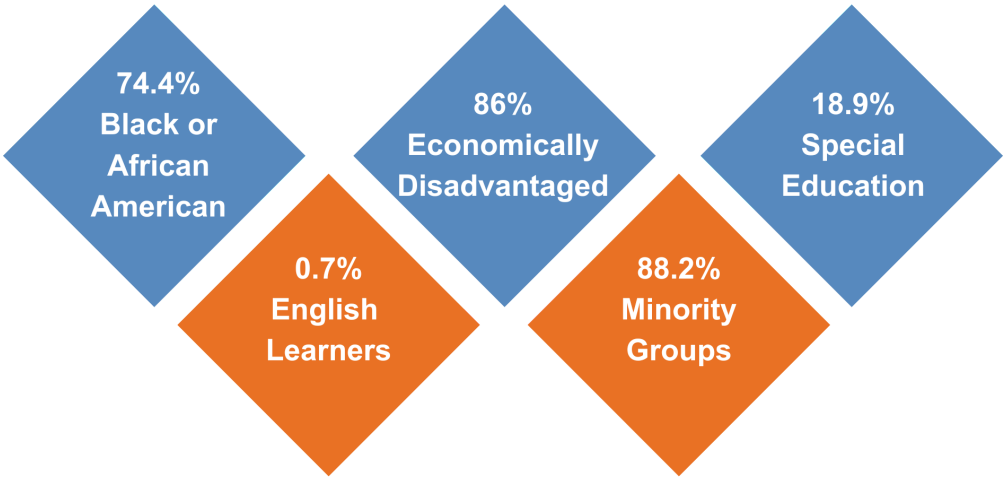
Back then, our enrollment process involved holding a public drawing of names. It was as if families had won the lottery when their names were called. Our lottery process now occurs through a software program that randomly selects applications that are received during our open enrollment period. We only collect very basic information before this random selection process takes place. There is no way to "cherry pick" nor would we want to. Propel exists to offer a high-quality education to the students and families we serve, not the students we select. Demand for our schools continues to remain high, often exceeding our capacity at many grade levels. Right now, there are more than 200 applications on our waitlist. Families must reapply for the following school year if there is no space available. Countless parents have told us that our individualized approach to learning and the success that other families have realized in their own children is why they choose Propel.

About Propel Schools and the Students We Serve

Over the years, our partnerships with families and local communities have fueled the growth of Propel from having just one school, to today operating 13 schools in 10 communities in Allegheny County: Homestead, McKeesport, Turtle Creek, Kennedy Township, Robinson Township, Braddock Hills, Pitcairn, and Hazelwood and Northside in the City of Pittsburgh. Like many urban areas across the Commonwealth, these communities have experienced population declines as businesses and people have left the region. Families that choose Propel tend to live in communities that are characterized by high poverty rates, a lack of investment in community centers and low-performing school districts.

Public brick-and-mortar charter schools are authorized by their local school district, which approves a charter application and decides on a charter's renewal every five years. Propel's 13 schools are authorized by six school districts: Pittsburgh School District, Gateway School District, McKeesport Area School District, Montour School District, Steel Valley School District, and Woodland Hills School District.

In total, Propel educates nearly 4,000 students in grades K-12 from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. Nearly 19 percent of our students have special education needs (which is 3 percent higher than the statewide average), 86 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch and 88 percent of our students are from minority groups. Whether they are coming to us in kindergarten or transfering from another school, many of the students who come to Propel require specialized support to be brought up to grade level learning. I encourage you to reference "Table 1 - Propel Student Snapshot", included at the end of this testimony, for additional demographic information on the students we serve.



While we have remained humble in our operations, Propel works hard to offer the highest quality education to our students through our STEAM-based curriculum, so that every single student is college- or career-ready. We know that reading is the foundation of all learning, which is why Propel has made a significant investment to ensure that **all** of our students are reading at or above grade level by the time they complete second grade. Based on the science of reading, our literacy initiative is realizing truly amazing results and is building upon the expectation of excellence in our classrooms.

Propel Success: Doing More With Less

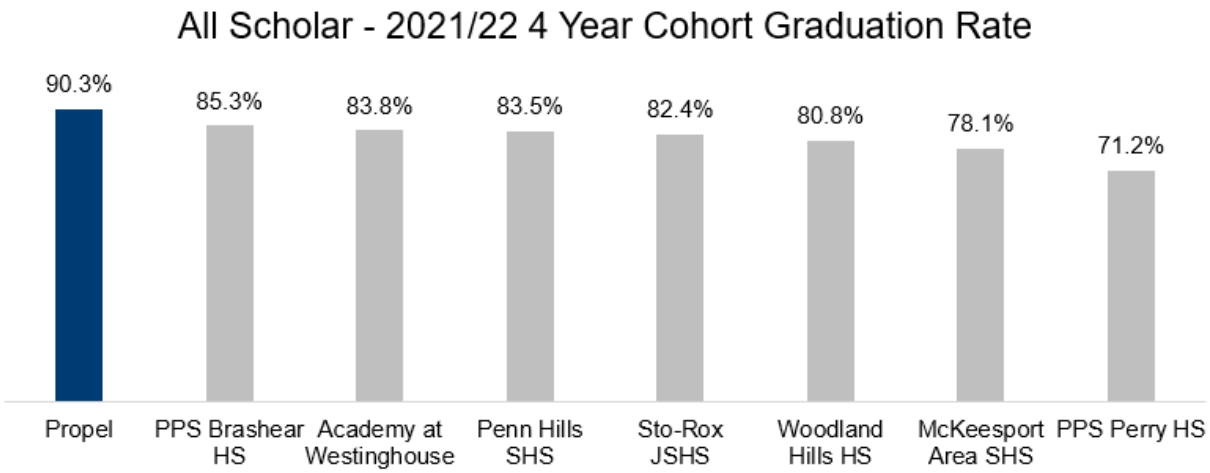
The driving forces behind Propel's success is our student-centered focus and our relentless pursuit of excellence. Propel educators redefine school so that our students can defy expectations. Our blueprint begins with high expectations for students — because we firmly believe that every student is capable of learning and growing.

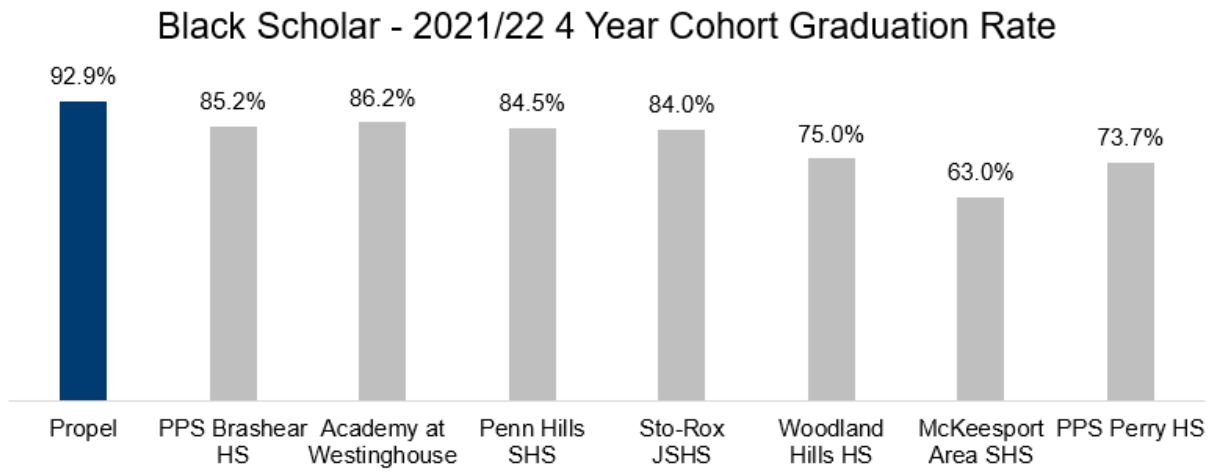
Every day, thousands of students from across Allegheny County walk through the doors of a Propel School that may not be in the neighborhood in which they reside. Our school building teams ensure that our students always find a well-maintained and welcoming space that is conducive to the learning

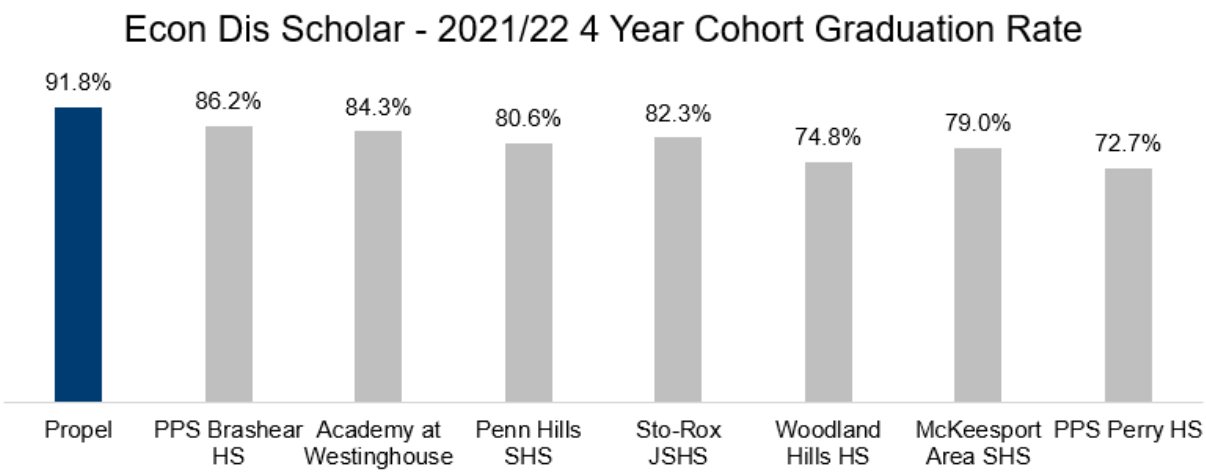
process. Our schools have grown into unique communities of learning where the answer to the question "Where are you from?" is always, "Propel!"

Propel students tend to perform better than their peers in their assigned public schools. I encourage you to review "Table 2: Building Level Scores for Propel Schools and Top Neighborhood Schools Where 75% of Students Reside", included at the end of this testimony for additional details. When we look at 4-year cohort graduation rates for Propel students compared to the district-run high schools in our area, we are producing better outcomes for all our students and we are particularly proud of our work to ensure historically marginalized students (Black students and economically disadvantaged students) are succeeding in our schools. If we compare Propel's graduation rates with the rest of the state, we are outpacing the statewide average by 3 percent.

4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates for Propel Schools and Top Neighborhood Schools Where 75% of 9-12 Grade Students Reside



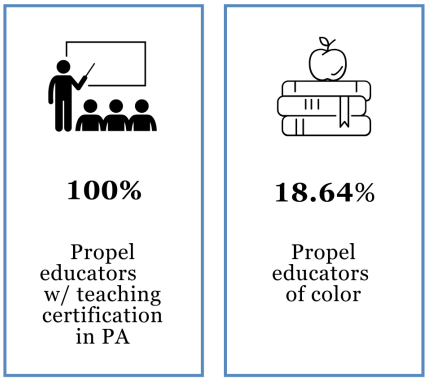




Arts integration is highly valued at Propel. Involvement with the fine and performing arts creates well-rounded, well-prepared learners. While you'll see the arts embedded in our classrooms, we also offer an innovative, in-house performing arts academy. After students are fully enrolled in a Propel school, those in middle and high school can participate in the Propel Performing Arts Academy. Program participants exhibit improved school attendance and increases in academic achievement. Experiences with the fine or performing arts boost critical thinking and enhance teamwork, improve collaboration, and problem-solving. Students gain essential skills that employers find valuable in our 21st-century economy.

Our students succeed because Propel educators believe in their students and in Propel's mission. Propel's focus is on recruiting and retaining highly talented educators who are committed to bringing out the best in their students. While public charter schools are allowed, by law, to have non-certified teachers in the classroom, 100 percent of Propel's educators are certified to teach in Pennsylvania. Although our educator retention dipped during the pandemic we are making a strong recovery but we struggle with the same staffing challenges as school districts. We know that not only do we need to increase the number of quality educators working in Pennsylvania, we also need to encourage diversity in our teacher workforce. At Propel, it is important that our scholars see themselves in the educators and staff who work in our schools and we are proud that our percentage of educators of color, which is 18.64 percent, is well above the average in the Pittsburgh region.

QUALIFIED, CARING EDUCATORS



When I think of equity in education, I cannot overemphasize the importance of having the best and most qualified teachers for the students who need them most. The General Assembly and the Governor can play a major role in promoting equity in public schools by providing incentives for educators to teach in high-poverty schools.

On top of Propel's education offerings, we add layers of support that will set the stage for successful learning. Students experiencing hunger are not prepared to learn. We support these students by offering cost-free breakfast and lunch at school. Students who are experiencing challenges in mental or emotional wellness are not ready to learn. We support these students through our "Partners In Wellness" programming that is tailored to each student's unique needs. Students who are not in school – or consistently late to school – are also not ready to learn. We support these students and their families by removing roadblocks to regular, on-time school attendance, such as transportation complications or access to clean school uniform pieces if a family's laundry routine is unexpectedly interrupted. Students headed into the next phase of their educational career may feel daunted by the processes and preparation for post-secondary learning. Our College and Career Counselors demystify access routes to college or career-training pathways. Intentionality, empathy and action are weaved into Propel's foundation.

Our Wellness Center at Propel Northside offers wellness services to students, staff, Propel families and the larger neighborhood, making it a community hub. Twice-monthly access to fresh fruits and vegetables, freshly baked bread from a well-established local company, and personal care items and clothing for the whole family is available at the Free Store. In order to provide these necessities to our students and the community without taking funding away from our educational programs, Propel has worked hard to cultivate a group of amazing local businesses and community organizations to support the Wellness Center:

BlaackOut Project
Consumer Fresh Produce
Charles Street Citizens Council
Children's Museum of Pittsburgh
City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police Zone 1
Dental Smiles
Extreme Hip Hop Step
Fineview/Perry Hilltop Citizens Council
Girls on the Run
Global Links
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
Gwen's Girls
Healthcorps
Higher Ground
Homeless Children's Education Fund
Northside Chamber of Commerce
Neighborhood Resilience Project
Northside Common Ministries
One Northside
Project Destiny and Thrive 18
SLB Radio
Strong Women Strong Girls
The Legacy Church
Pittsburgh Science Workshop
United Way
UPMC Work Partners
UPMC/Mon Yough – Child/Adolescent and Adult Services
Urban Impact
Vision to Learn (eye exams and glasses)
Urban Strategies
Wesley Family Services
When She Thrives

Families intentionally choose Propel as their partner in education. Families know what they want for their children and why they want it. For families to retain their right to choose the best education for their child, appropriate and equitable funding is a necessity. Families who intentionally partner with public charter schools should not be marginalized or penalized. Their children should not be expected to settle for less funding than their counterparts who opt to attend district-run public schools. By intentionally choosing Propel, families place their trust in us. This motivates us and compels us to be equity advocates for our families – because they deserve no less from us.

At Propel, we put the student at the center of every decision that we make. The same thing needs to happen here. The work of the Basic Education Funding Commission needs to be about students and putting them first.

Charter School Funding: 25+ Years of Funding Inequities

Public charter schools provide students with a high-quality education and are proud pillars in their communities, all while receiving 15-30 percent less funding than their public school counterparts — school districts. On average, the students who attend a Propel charter school receive 25 percent less funding than their peers who attend a district-run school. This Commission has been tasked with addressing the Court's determination that how Pennsylvania funds its 500 school districts is inequitable, but **the inequities exist at a more granular level between students who attend district-run public schools and charter-run public schools**.

How Public Charter Schools Are Funded in Pennsylvania

In 1997, public charter schools were established in Pennsylvania and how they are funded is addressed in Section 1725-A of the Pennsylvania Public School Code, which has not been substantially changed since. The primary distinction between funding for public school districts and public charter schools is that public charters have no control over their annual revenues. School districts, through their elected school boards, have the legal authority to levy local property taxes (with the exception of the Philadelphia School District) to generate additional revenue for special projects, emergency funding needs or to offset structural deficits.

A common misconception about public charter schools is that they set their own tuition reimbursement rates and local school districts have no say over how much is sent to charter schools each month. It's actually the exact opposite — the accounting and budgeting practices of each school district has a direct impact on the amount of funding a charter student receives through their tuition reimbursement rate. Unlike school districts, which receive their funding through federal, state and local (property taxes) sources, public charter schools receive the bulk of their funding through tuition reimbursements from each student's home school district. The calculation of the tuition reimbursements is done through the PDE-363 form, which is required to be submitted to the PA Department of Education (PDE) each year by school districts. The per-pupil calculation for regular education and special education students is done by taking each district's budgeted total expenditures from the previous fiscal year, minus the allowed deductions, divided by the Average Daily Membership of the school district.

It is important to note that charter tuition reimbursements are not a "cost" to school districts, as some would have you believe. Charter school students are included in their home district's total student count, which is used to allocate state funding, and the school districts act as pass-through entities to provide state funding to a student's chosen charter school. And just as charter students have a right to their allotment of state funding, they also deserve their share of local funding (aka property taxes) just like students educated by the school district in that community.

The deductions that are allowed to be made to the per-pupil tuition reimbursement rates were included in the law to assist school districts with the "stranded costs" associated with students leaving their schools to attend a charter school. These deductions were also meant to ensure public charter schools didn't receive funding for programs and services they don't provide, or receive double the money from certain allocations that the charter received directly. The law allows for seven of these deductions, which include: (1) budgeted expenditures of the district of residence for nonpublic school programs; (2) adult education programs; (3) community/junior college programs; (4) student transportation services; (5) special education programs; (6) facilities acquisition, construction and improvement services; and (7) other financing uses, including debt service and fund transfers as provided in the Manual of Accounting and Related Financial Procedures for Pennsylvania School Systems.

The public charter school sector has never argued that certain deductions are reasonable and necessary to ensure funding equity for students educated by districts and charters. However, over time, **abuses of power and financial manipulations have led to students in public charter schools receiving far less than what is rightfully theirs by law.**

Exploitation of the Charter Funding System

Over the past 25 years, some school districts (not all) have found ways to exploit the current funding system for public charter schools – with the help of PDE – by utilizing accounting loopholes that decrease the rightful amount of funding that should be going to students in charter schools.

While the Charter School Law allows for seven deductions to the per-pupil tuition reimbursement rate, as mentioned previously, over time the PDE has expanded the number of deductions a school district can make to its charter reimbursement rate to 24.

- Example #1 - The "other financing uses" deduction allowed for in the law was intended to exclude debt service payments from the charter tuition reimbursement rate calculation. However, PDE has expanded the "other financing uses" deduction to include other expenditures such as "suspense account (5800)" and "budgetary reserve (5900)". These accounts are loopholes used by some districts to remove eligible expenses from the tuition reimbursement rate calculation and withhold a charter student's rightful funding. In the 2022 fiscal year, approximately $270 million was designated as "budgetary reserves (5900)" by school districts.
- Example #2 - The PDE-363 form has 2 deductions for "prekindergarten" expenses. While the school district's expenses for prekindergarten are removed from the tuition reimbursement rate calculation, the students that are in the district's prekindergarten program are not removed from the denominator (aka the Average Daily Membership) in the formula — leading to yet another decrease in the district's per-pupil charter tuition reimbursement rate.

In addition to the inflated deductions that can be made to the tuition reimbursement rate, some school districts move money into different accounts to withhold funding from students in charter schools that were allocated for their education. As previously outlined, public charter school funding is based on a per-pupil calculation and that calculation (cited in Section 2501(20) of the Public School Code) is based on "General Fund" expenditures. Due to the current wording of the law, districts have the ability to move eligible expenses out of the General Fund and into other funds to avoid calculating those expenditures into the charter tuition reimbursement rate.

Unfortunately, the manipulation of how charter tuition reimbursement rates are calculated is not the only way the current funding system for public charter schools is exploited by some school districts for their own gain. Pennsylvania's Charter School Law requires that school districts that have students enrolled in a charter school, process the tuition reimbursements to "the charter school in twelve (12) equal monthly payments, by the fifth day of each month, within the operating school year". Despite this clear mandate, many school districts choose to break the law by refusing to make any reimbursement payments to charter schools. To receive the tuition reimbursement their students are legally owed by a district that fails to remit payment, the charter school must dedicate staff hours to navigate a burdensome and lengthy process created by PDE and go through this process each month, even if the district has never paid or indicated they won't pay. **Currently, of the 30 districts that Propel sends tuition reimbursement invoices to, 11 school districts refuse to make their state-mandated tuition payments and we must rely on PDE redirecting that funding each month.** School districts do not have to beg or jump through hoops to get the funding owed to their students, charter schools should not have to fight to get what their students rightfully deserve.

Charter Students Are Public School Students

As the leader of a network of 13 public charter schools, I am an active and vocal advocate for choice and equity. It is an unfortunate necessity that I (and other charter school leaders) must continually battle those who do not believe that families are capable of choosing the right educational fit for their children. I firmly and unabashedly believe in and stand with the students we educate, the professionals we employ and the communities we serve. I will continue to champion the case for equity — to ensure that our families receive the resources and respect they deserve. I have come before the Basic Education Funding Commission this morning to advocate for public charter school students, especially the 4,000 Propel students that I have the honor to serve. Please do not allow these students and families to be forgotten as you work to create equity in education funding.

There are some who may argue that Judge Jubelirer did not address public charter schools or charter students in her ruling, and that this Commission should only be focused on equitable funding for public school districts. I respectfully disagree and counter that Judge Jubelirer was very clear that her ruling was about equitable STUDENT funding, not the funding of school buildings or institutions.

Combined, public charter schools educate 160,000+ students in Pennsylvania — more than any other school district in the Commonwealth by 41,800 students. As I outlined previously, charter students are already receiving between 15-30 percent less funding than their peers in school districts but they are also victims of inequitable funding and systemic underfunding. In Allegheny County, where Propel operates

its 13 public schools, 10 school districts are among the 100 poorest districts in the state (aka "Level-Up Districts") according to Level Up PA.

Level Up Districts in Allegheny County	Percentage of Propel Students from Each District
Clairton City SD	2.65%
Duquesne City SD	4.39%
East Allegheny SD	2.88%
Mckeesport Area SD	7.65%
South Allegheny SD	0.60%
Steel Valley SD	3.71%
Sto-Rox SD	11.21%
West Mifflin Area SD	1.83%
Wilkinsburg Borough SD	4.28%
Woodland Hills SD	16.29%

Not only are many Propel students coming from historically underfunded school districts, they are coming from economically distressed communities, and neighborhoods ravaged by drug use and violence. **Yet these students are continually made to feel less-than by a public education system that punishes them, first, for their zip code and, again, for their choice in public school.** We must do better for Pennsylvania students and, based on Judge Jubelirer's ruling, that includes students in public charter schools: "...the Court concludes it requires that every student receive a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically, which requires that all students have access to a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education."

Recommendations for the Commission

The Commission has been presented with hundreds of pages of written testimony and approximately 30 hours of verbal testimony over the past three months on the financial issues impacting Pennsylvania's 500 school districts and ideas on how to address those issues. I hope the Commission will consider the following recommendations as it works to redefine what "equitable funding" means and how that definition extends to every public school student in this Commonwealth, including charter students.

Policy Changes That Can Be Made to Cut Costs for Charters and District Schools

- Standardize the new charter school application process — Currently, Pennsylvania's Charter School Law allows each brick-and-mortar charter school authorizer (aka the 500 school districts

in the state) to create their own application for the establishment of a new charter school. This has led to inconsistent standards for the establishment of new charters across the Commonwealth, and significant personnel costs on both the district- and charter-side as they struggle to establish standards and meet those standards.

    - Recommendation — I ask you to support an amendment to the Charter School Law that includes a mandatory standard application and detailed process for the establishment of new brick-and-mortar charter schools. The application process should be thorough but not burdensome on either party, include mechanisms that ensure timely decisions are made and allow for community voices to be heard.

- Standardize the charter renewal process — Currently, Pennsylvania's public charter schools must go through a renewal process every five years and get the approval of their authorizer to continue operating. The law allows each brick-and-mortar charter school authorizer (aka the 500 school districts in the state) to establish their own renewal application and renewal standards. This lack of standardization has led to inconsistent quality standards, allegations of bias in how renewals are awarded, and excessive taxpayer dollars being spent on legal fees by both districts and charters to litigate renewal decisions.
    - Recommendation — I urge the Commission to support an amendment to the Charter School Law that includes a mandatory charter renewal application, a detailed process for the renewal of brick-and-mortar charter schools and a specific set of standards/qualifications to warrant the renewal or nonrenewal of a charter. To avoid duplicative work, the standard renewal application should be mirrored off of the standardized annual reports that every charter must complete, and submit to PDE and their authorizer. Standardizing this process and the qualifications for a renewal will also decrease the number of cases coming before the Charter Appeal Board (CAB), which will result in a cost-savings for PDE and the Department of State whose staff support the work of the CAB.
- Move to a 5-year initial charter terms and 10-year charter renewals — Currently, a new charter school may be approved by their authorizer for an initial period of three to five years and renewals are granted in five-year terms. It is extremely difficult to show any meaningful growth or achievement data for a brand new school after only three years, especially when state standardized testing data is often released seven months after exams are taken. When it comes to renewals, the current process is extremely burdensome on the charter school and often requires months of work by staff who are dedicated solely on meeting the moving targets set by charter authorizers.
    - Recommendation — In order to reduce the financial burden on charter school authorizers (aka school districts) and charter schools, the Commission should support an amendment to the Charter School Law that provides for a 5-year charter term for newly established charter schools and 10-year terms for charter renewals. Not only will this result in a cost-savings to school districts and charter schools, it will also decrease the number of cases coming before the CAB which will result in an additional cost-savings to the state.
- Ensure the Charter Appeal Board (CAB) is operating efficiently and effectively — The CAB was established in the Charter School Law to provide charter school applicants and charter school operators an avenue to appeal decisions made by their authorizer. Unfortunately, the law provides little guidance on how procedures and processes are set by the CAB, and the standards the law

does set around timelines are often disregarded by the CAB with no consequence. The lack of guardrails on the CAB have resulted in unnecessarily long waits for decisions, the outsourcing of duties to hearing officers with no background in K-12 education, CAB appointees serving many years past their term's expiration, the ability for a Governor to "fire" every appointee and halt operations (as Governor Wolf did in April 2021), and conflicts of interest when the legal advisors for CAB are also General Counsel for the Governor (whose appointee chairs the Board). All of these issues with the CAB have led to the unnecessary spending of taxpayer dollars on legal fees by both school districts and charter schools.

    - Recommendation — I ask the BEFC to call for an amendment to the Charter School Law that provides greater flexibility in who can be appointed to the CAB and deadlines should be put in place for the nomination and appointment of CAB members. The law should require that the CAB contract with an outside law firm to provide unbiased advice to CAB members and that hearing officers must not be state employees under the Governor's jurisdiction to ensure fairness. Finally, the law should prescribe timelines for how cases are to be processed through the CAB and what recourse a charter or district may have if the CAB fails to adhere to those timelines. These changes will result in cost-savings for school districts, charter school applicants and operators, and PDE.

- Mandate relief from duplicative and unnecessary provisions in the law — Public charter schools are required to adhere to all the same accountability and transparency standards as school districts, and the same mandates required by the state and federal government. On top of these mandates, every public charter school must prepare detailed annual reports for PDE and their authorizer, and undergo an onerous renewal process every five years. Some of these mandates are outdated and duplicative, which require schools to allocate staff time or hire additional staff to comply with these requirements.
    - Recommendation — I urge you to support the current proposals moving through the General Assembly to provide mandate relief for public schools and ask that, as you consider these proposals, you ensure that public charter schools can also benefit from these mandate relief efforts. I also recommend that the Commission supports efforts to relieve charter schools of duplicative reporting mandates by requiring authorizers to use existing charter annual reports in charter renewal evaluations.

Policy Changes That Can Be Made to Cut Costs for Public Charter Schools

- Close loopholes in the law that prevent the approval of Multiple Charter School Organization (MCSO) — In 2017, a provision was added to the Charter School Law that allows for the consolidation of two or more public charter schools into an MCSO. The goal of this provision was to put more money back into the classroom by consolidating the management and oversight of multiple charter schools under one administrative team and one board of trustees. Not only would this provision cut the administrative costs for charter schools, it would make it easier for schools to benefit from shared services and future cost-saving measures. Unfortunately, the wording of certain provisions in the law have allowed PDE (who has the sole power to grant an MCSO) to deny every MCSO application that has come before them and deny charters from maximizing their resources to benefit students.
    - Recommendation — I urge this Commission to support an amendment to the law that requires PDE to approve MCSO applications that come before them, to ensure public

charter schools can benefit from the same shared services and cost-saving strategies as school districts. I also urge Governor Shapiro to direct PDE to reconsider the denied MCSO applications that have come before them and base their decisions on what is best for charter students.

- Require that IUs serve public charter schools in the same way they serve school districts — I detailed previously the difference in how school districts and public charter schools are funded and the inequities that exist in the current funding structure that cause charter students to receive significantly less funding. To compound these financial inequities, public charter schools do not have the same access to the support, technical assistance, collaboration, shared services and cost-saving initiatives provided to school districts by the 29 intermediate units operating across the Commonwealth. In some regions of the state, the local IU will offer services and support to public charter schools but at a higher cost than what is charged to the local school districts. In Philadelphia, where the IU is the school district, there are no supports or services offered to public charter schools. Not only are public charter schools denied access to cost-saving services by the IUs, our students are being robbed of state and federal funding that is allocated by PDE to IUs to provide targeted support for charter students.
    - Recommendation — In reviewing the testimony previously presented to the Commission and the comments made by Commission members, it is clear that cost-savings is going to be a crucial part of the BEFC's recommendations. We already have an amazing structure in place, through the 29 IUs, to support public schools in sharing resources and cutting costs to ensure we are maximizing the taxpayer dollars we have been given. I ask this Commission to support an amendment to the law that requires every IU to treat public charter schools in the same manner as school districts and provide access to all of their services.

Reforming the way charter tuition reimbursement rates are calculated to ensure charter students receive their "fair share" of funding

- Require PDE to update the PDE-363 form — As I reference previously, public charter schools are primarily funded through tuition reimbursements made by the home school district for their students who attend a public charter school. These tuition reimbursement rates are calculated for each district using a form created by PDE, called the PDE-363 form. Pennsylvania's Charter School Law allows school districts to make seven deductions to the per-pupil charter tuition reimbursement rate but, over the years, PDE has expanded this to 24 deductions. The drastic expansion of these deductions is not only a violation of the law but has resulted in charter students receiving 15-30 percent less funding than their peers in district schools.
    - Recommendation — I urge the Commission to call on PDE to update the PDE-363 form to include only the seven deductions provided for in the Charter School Law and include detailed instructions in the form as to what specific expenditures can and cannot be factored into each deduction category by school districts. Furthermore, the Commission should recommend and support legislation that clarifies and prescribes what expenditures can be deducted from a school district's per-pupil charter tuition reimbursement rate. By making this change, students in public charter schools will receive all of the state and local funding that, by law, is rightfully theirs.

- Shift from an expenditure-based tuition reimbursement rate to a revenue-based tuition reimbursement rate — Currently, charter school tuition reimbursement rates are based on each district's total expenditures from the previous fiscal year — so the tuition rates for the 2023-24 school year are based on what each district spent to educate their students in the 2022-23 school year. As I explained previously, there are several flaws and loopholes in the current funding system that have led to significant inequities in funding for students in district schools vs. charter schools.
    - Recommendation — To ensure charter students are getting their fair share of the public education funding provided to them, the Commission should call for a shift in how public charter schools are funded from an expenditure-based tuition rate to a revenue-based tuition rate. A revenue-based model offers many benefits: 1) It is a more stable funding model, unlike expenditures that can fluctuate dramatically from year to year; 2) It is a more predictable funding model that will help charter schools budget earlier in the year; and 3) It is a simpler and more transparent funding model that eliminates the opportunity for school districts to hide expenditures in budgetary categories that get deducted from the tuition reimbursement rate calculations.

Additional funding for school districts and charter schools

- Both school districts and brick-and-mortar charter schools need facilities funding — I agree with previous testifiers that there is a significant need for additional funding to address school facilities. We cannot expect our students to achieve at the highest levels in environments that are unsafe or unsuitable for learning. Just as representatives from school districts have presented to this Commission that they need additional funding for facility repairs, expansions and new buildings, so do brick-and-mortar charter schools. Due to budgetary constraints, the high cost of starting a charter school and the inability to raise revenue, many public charter schools operate out of nontraditional school spaces and often do not own their buildings. This does not mean that brick-and-mortar charter schools do not need facilities funding.
    - Recommendation — I ask that the Commission ensure that any recommendation around targeted funding for school facilities include brick-and-mortar charter schools. Additionally, while the PlanCon reimbursement program has been dormant for several years now, it is important to note that this state program — which reimburses districts for construction costs — is not open to public brick-and-mortar charter schools. If this Commission seeks to restart the PlanCon program, I ask that you recommend the inclusion of brick-and-mortar charter schools as eligible participants.
- Both school districts and public charter schools need support to attract and retain educators and school staff — You have heard from school districts that staffing shortages are a significant problem across the Commonwealth and, unfortunately, public charter schools are also suffering from a lack of qualified educators and support staff. It is especially difficult to hire and retain quality staff in schools that serve high-needs students. At Propel, we have engaged with statewide groups, like Teach Plus, to work collaboratively to support the growth and diversity of the educator workforce but we need additional resources.
    - Recommendation — I urge the Commission to recommend additional funding earmarked for "Grow Your Own" programs in public schools, stipends/salaries for student teachers, incentives for school staff to become certified teachers, initiatives that attract and support

diverse teacher candidates in post-secondary institutions and opening more non-traditional pathways to becoming a teacher. Again, as you consider a proposal to support the need to get more teachers in Pennsylvania classrooms, I ask that you ensure that public charter schools are not excluded.

- Ensuring students are safely getting to and from school requires additional funding — Currently, the state allocates transportation funding to every school district and districts are required to provide public charter school students with equal access to transportation as their district peers. This means public charter schools must rely on each home district to transport their students to and from school, in the same manner in which they provide transportation to their own students. Rising transportation costs and a lack of bus drivers, have resulted in unstable and unsafe transportation options for both district and charter students. For example, recently the Pittsburgh School District decided that they would no longer be transporting their 6th-12th grade students via school bus due to cost restraints. Instead, each student would receive public transportation passes. The Wilkinsburg School District determined that they would provide bus passes to all students, even those as young as 5 years old. Without any say in the matter, Propel students living in Wilkinsburg were no longer going to be safely transported to and from school via bus. With our students' safety on the line, Propel decided to contract with a transportation company to provide bus services to our students but we received none of the transportation funding allocated to the Wilkinsburg School District for the transportation of our students.
    - Recommendation — As the Commission works to redefine "equitable funding" for public education, I ask that you take transportation into account and propose a system that ensures every student receives their share of the transportation funding allocated by the state. Additionally, I ask you to consider earmarking the funding for transportation to ensure school districts use that money for the purposes in which the General Assembly intended and provide public charter schools an option to receive their portion of transportation funding directly.
- Reinstating the Charter Reimbursement line-item in the State Budget — There is an inherent tension between school districts and public charter schools, which the Commission has heard in several testimonies from school district representatives. This tension has mainly centered around funding and has been increasing since the Charter Reimbursement line-item was removed from the State Budget in 2011. The friction between districts and public charters have led to some school districts refusing to make charter tuition reimbursement payments, school districts acting punitively during the charter renewal process and the vilification of families that choose charter schools.
    - Recommendation — I support the recommendations of my fellow testifiers that the Commission propose the reinstatement of the Charter Reimbursement line-item in the State Budget. I believe these additional funding will improve relationships between school districts and public charter schools, which will provide opportunities for collaborations, shared services and cost-saving endeavors for both parties.

Two Final Notes…

Hold Harmless

I have listened to the testimony given by previous testifiers who represent school districts and I echo their call for predictability and stability in education funding. Eliminating the hold harmless provision, that is currently factored into a school district's basic education funding allocation, all at once would cause financial chaos for many public school districts and public charter schools who serve students in those districts. I encourage this Commission to not only work towards creating equity for students who have been chronically underfunded but also ensure other students are not harmed in the process. Propel serves students from 30 school districts across Allegheny County and the tuition reimbursement rates for each of those school districts will be impacted by the decision to keep the hold harmless provision in place or not. Based on data from the House Democratic Caucus, 26 of the school districts in Allegheny County would be harmed by the elimination of hold harmless and 17 school districts would benefit from the elimination of hold harmless. Here's a look at just the six school districts that authorize Propel's 13 schools and how they would be impacted if the hold harmless provision was eliminated.

Propel's Authorizing School Districts	**Impact of Eliminating Hold Harmless**	**% Change in 2018/19 BEF If All Money Went Through Formula**	**Percentage of Propel Students From Each District**
Gateway School District	Would benefit from the elimination of hold harmless	14% Increase	2.57%
McKeesport Area School District	Would be harmed by the elimination of hold harmless	8% Decrease	7.65%
Montour School District	Would benefit from the elimination of hold harmless	9% Increase	0.31%
Pittsburgh School District	Would be harmed by the elimination of hold harmless	47% Decrease	33.47%
Steel Valley School District	Would be harmed by the elimination of hold harmless	24% Decrease	3.71%
Woodland Hills School District	Would benefit from the elimination of hold harmless	39% Increase	16.29%

I understand that population shifts over time may warrant the elimination of hold harmless but I ask you to consider how this will impact brick-and-mortar charter schools. While school districts may have seen a loss in student populations over the years (like the Pittsburgh SD) demand for brick-and-mortar public charter schools in these areas continue to be consistently high and our student populations have not decreased.

Charter Funding Reform

It is clear that the way we fund public charter schools in Pennsylvania is not ideal for either the charter sector or school districts, and the fight over funding is distracting from our goal of educating students. That being said, I believe this topic is too complex to address haphazardly or without a thorough study into the nuances of the current funding structure, and the needs of both brick-and-mortar and cyber charters. I would urge this Commission to recommend that the General Assembly create a commission, like the BEFC, to study charter school funding in a comprehensive and unbiased manner. Propel would be happy to assist in that endeavor and continue the conversation around charter funding reform. Cutting funding for public charter school students, who already receive less than their peers in district schools, flies in the face of this Commission's work to achieve funding equity in public education.

Again, thank you to the Commission for giving me an opportunity to come before you and represent the students and families that are served by Propel. We stand ready to assist this Commission in the future, if needed, and would welcome the opportunity to continue discussions around comprehensive charter reform.

Table 1

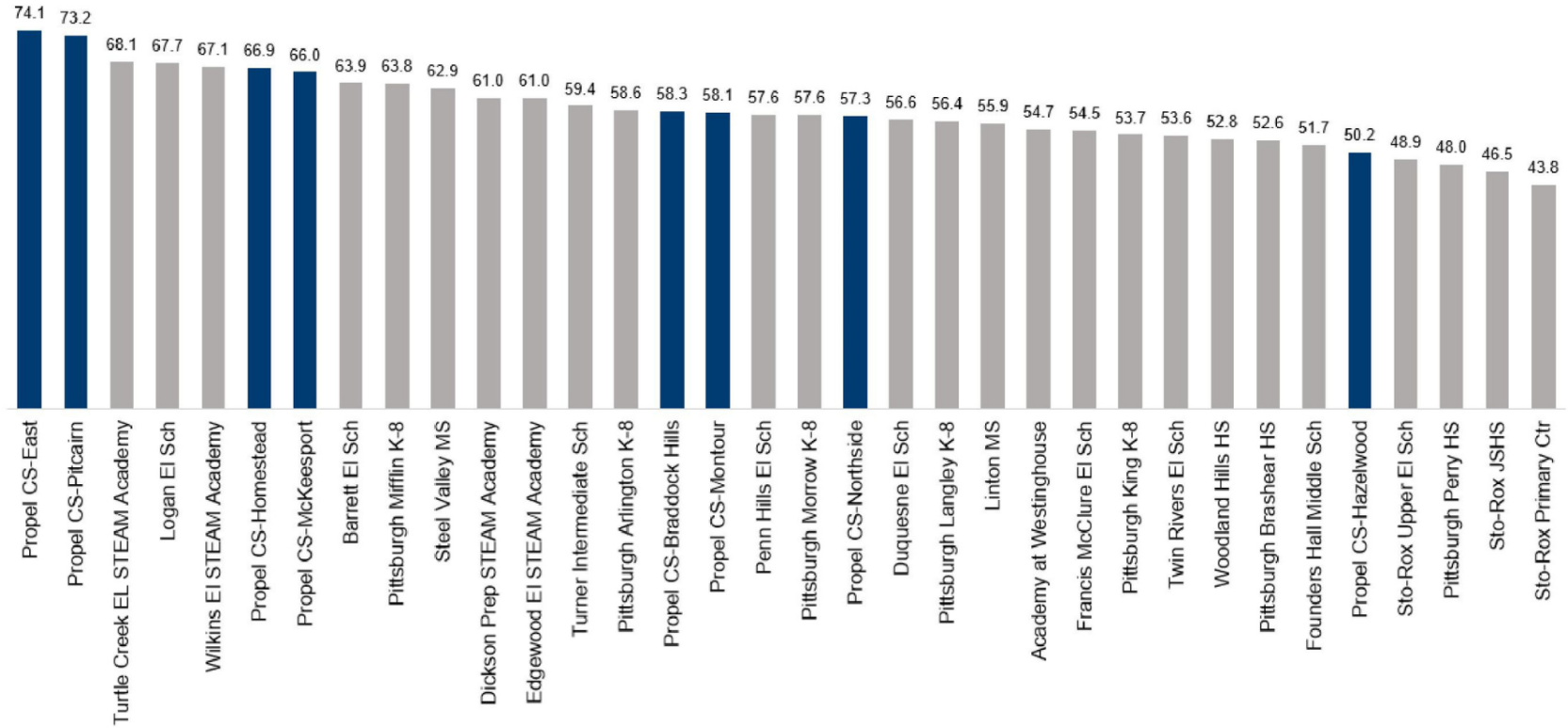
PROPEL STUDENT SNAPSHOT

Data by School - Please note that PDE considers each Propel LEA a school. The data below is based on Propel-identified schools.

LEA	Propel CS-Braddock Hills			Propel CS-East	Propel CS-Hazelwood	Propel CS-Homestead		Propel CS-McKeesport	Propel CS-Montour			Propel CS-Northside	Propel CS-Pitcairn
2023/24 Data by School	Braddock Hills ES	Braddock Hills MS	Braddock Hills HS	East	Hazelwood	Homestead	Andrew Street HS	McKeesport	Montour ES	Montour MS	Montour HS	Northside	Pitcairn
Total Enrollment	315	152	260	335	226	345	190	315	374	202	223	358	210
Race/Ethnicity Counts													
Black/African American (not Hispanic)	263	130	199	225	204	282	153	245	209	106	134	311	147
White/Caucasian (not Hispanic)	12	9	22	65	4	12	14	29	85	59	53	14	32
Multi-Racial (not Hispanic)	29	10	23	35	13	35	16	29	63	31	30	22	23
Hispanic (any race)	5	2	10	8	5	11	4	8	15	5	3	8	7
Asian (not Hispanic)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	0
American Indian/Alaskan Native	5	1	4	2	0	3	2	0	2	0	3	2	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (not Hispanic)	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Race/Ethnicity Percents of LEA Total													
Black/African American (not Hispanic)	83.5%	85.5%	76.5%	67.2%	90.3%	81.7%	80.5%	77.8%	55.9%	52.5%	60.1%	86.9%	70.0%
White/Caucasian (not Hispanic)	3.8%	5.9%	8.5%	19.4%	1.8%	3.5%	7.4%	9.2%	22.7%	29.2%	23.8%	3.9%	15.2%
Multi-Racial (not Hispanic)	9.2%	6.6%	8.9%	10.5%	5.8%	10.1%	8.4%	9.2%	16.8%	15.4%	13.5%	6.2%	11.0%
Hispanic (any race)	1.6%	1.3%	3.9%	2.4%	2.2%	3.2%	2.1%	2.5%	4.0%	2.5%	1.4%	2.2%	3.3%
Asian (not Hispanic)	0.3%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.6%	0.7%	1.5%	0.6%	0.0%	0.9%	1.1%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	1.4%	0.6%	0.5%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (not Hispanic)	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
Economically Disadvantaged Counts													
Economically Disadvantaged	289	136	211	262	213	315	154	268	329	162	161	326	188
Not Economically Disadvantaged	26	16	49	73	13	30	36	47	45	40	62	32	22
Economically Disadvantaged Percents of LEA Total													
Economically Disadvantaged	91.8%	89.5%	81.2%	78.2%	94.3%	91.3%	81.1%	85.1%	88.0%	80.2%	72.2%	91.1%	89.5%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	8.3%	10.5%	18.9%	21.8%	5.8%	8.7%	19.0%	14.9%	12.0%	19.8%	27.8%	8.9%	10.5%
Gender Counts													
Female	156	79	134	194	133	167	104	177	207	102	108	171	110
Male	159	73	126	141	93	178	86	138	167	100	115	187	100
Gender Percents of LEA Total													
Female	49.5%	52.0%	51.5%	57.9%	58.9%	48.4%	54.7%	56.2%	55.4%	50.5%	48.4%	47.8%	52.4%
Male	50.5%	48.0%	48.5%	42.1%	41.2%	51.6%	45.3%	43.8%	44.7%	49.5%	51.6%	52.2%	47.6%
English Learner Percents of LEA Total													
Is EL	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%	1.1%	1.0%	0.4%	1.4%	0.0%
Not EL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	99.1%	100.0%	100.0%	96.8%	98.9%	99.0%	99.6%	98.6%	100.0%
Data Sources	Oct 1 Enrollment Data - PDE PIMS Reports - Student Snapshot Template 10/26/23												

Table 2

2022-23 ACT 13 BUILDING LEVEL SCORES FOR PROPEL SCHOOLS AND TOP NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS WHERE 75% OF STUDENTS RESIDE



Reach Cyber Charter School

Testimony provided to the Basic Education Funding Commission

November 16, 2023

Good afternoon,

My name is Jane Swan, and I am the CEO of the Reach Cyber Charter School. I would like to thank the members of the Basic Education Funding Commission for inviting me to present information to you today.

In August 2016, Reach opened our doors with 16 staff members and 463 students with a mission to improve academic growth and cultivate curiosity through integrated STEM opportunities, K-12 personal instruction, and career exploration. Due to the popularity of public cyber charter schools and parent demand for robust, comprehensive virtual education, today Reach is educating 6,500 students across the Commonwealth and has over 800 staff members to serve our students.

Reach serves a diverse array of students from every corner of the Commonwealth, from gifted students who seek an accelerated track, to competitive athletes and performers, pregnant and parenting students, students with disabilities or compromised immunities, military families who need to relocate often, and others who seek an individualized approach to education and a flexible schedule.

Cyber charter schools are schools of choice in Pennsylvania whose demand has continued to increase dramatically over the past few years. Parents choose to leave a district because the district does not meet their child's needs or has failed their child either academically or from a relationship standpoint. Over 70,000 families have chosen cyber charter schools in the Commonwealth for those reasons.

The plaintiffs in the recent Commonwealth Court case argued that Pennsylvania's school system violates the constitution's equal protection clause, saying the kids in low-wealth districts are not being educated on a level playing field with those in wealthier districts. Cyber Charter Schools are uniquely able to level the playing field, providing all students with access to high quality resources, certified teachers, and opportunities for engagement regardless of their parents' income. They provide the ultimate scenario where all students are offered the same meaningful opportunities regardless of if the student lives in poverty or affluence.

Cyber education is a different form of delivering learning that the established educational institutions do not yet understand. The delivery model is different, and so are the costs associated, but that does not mean that the costs are less than with traditional models. The average cost to educate a student at Reach student is $15,178.00.

There are many unique cost considerations of Public Cyber Charter Schools, and I have included a list of some of these in my written testimony. Some of the significant cost considerations include -

Furthermore, cyber charter schools are a great value and save money! Under the current funding mechanism, for every student that attends a cyber charter school, school districts have additional money to support the students that remain within their brick-and-mortar building. On average, cyber charter schools receive just 75% of the per-pupil allotment for each student. School districts keep the remaining 25% that they can use for payments on debt, adult education programs, pre-K programs, transportation costs, and building and ground maintenance.

In addition, cyber charter schools are subject to the same mandates and requirements as traditional public schools. Cyber charter schools are required to comply with all local, state, and federal financial accounting, reporting, and auditing requirements, provide both regular and special education services including supports to parents and families as necessary to help each child achieve their academic goals, and comply with all state testing mandates and ensure equal access to safe, physical environments for students to attend and complete PSSA and Keystone exams.

In closing, I want to thank the Commission again for holding a hearing on this important topic and for providing Reach with an opportunity to present information. Public funding is essential for cyber charter schools to give Pennsylvania families the right to choose the education that is best for their students. I would be happy to take any questions you have.

Unique cost considerations of Public Cyber Charter Schools

- Building and facility leasing for administrative offices, including registrars, pupil health, special education, enrollment services, technology support, and teacher office space.

- Technology equipment for students, staff and administration including distribution. and reclamation.

- Shipping curriculum and educational support materials to and from students.

- Research, development, and implementation of innovative teaching design including all materials and resources.

- 24/7 Technical Support statewide.

- Learning Management and Student Information Systems.

- Enrollment Services statewide.
- Internet reimbursement allocation for in home services.
- Travel expenses for teachers and staff to fulfill State testing mandates, field trips, graduation, and other student and family support activities.
- Facility rental to comply with all State testing mandates.
- Family Supports and Services statewide.
- Contracting with various related services providers to meet individual student goals.
- Individual in home therapies including all travel related expenses.
- Coordination with various social services agencies statewide to provide in home support for students and families.
- Travel expenses required to maintain and enforce daily attendance mandates including truancy related court appearances.

Testimony of Richard Jensen, Ed.D., CEO, Agora Cyber Charter School and
Mark Allen, CEO, Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School

For the Basic Education Funding Commission

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

November 16, 2023

Co-Chair Phillips-Hill, Co-Chair Sturla, Members of the Basic Education Funding Commission, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the important role public cyber charter schools play in the Commonwealth.

Established in 2005, Agora Cyber Charter School is an online public school for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Agora's rigorous curriculum is taught by Pennsylvania certified teachers trained to provide virtual instruction in real time and are focused on providing all students with the educational resources and skills needed to become successful lifelong learners. Once enrolled with Agora, each student receives a computer, printer, and all resource materials needed to be successful. An extensive variety of extracurricular online and in-person activities guarantees an enriching assortment of social opportunities providing the student with a well-rounded educational experience.

Founded in 2004, The Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School (PALCS) provides an academically challenging curriculum designed to embrace different types of learners in grades K-12. The school combines core educational content with a custom-built technology platform that integrates multiple educational technology resources. PALCS helps prepare students to be informed, responsible citizens with a global mentality who will succeed through mentoring leadership.

Together, our two schools enroll nearly 8,000 students, and we employ approximately 1,000 public school teachers and support staff. There is no cost to the families who choose Agora or PALCS for their students. Tuition is paid by taxpayers – just like all other public schools. While both of our public cyber charter schools provide a unique educational experience, we share several important attributes:

- For nearly two decades, we have been successfully delivering a fully comprehensive and research-based education using proven virtual platforms.

- We rely on curriculum specifically designed to meet key accessibility standards, and we provide computers, tablets, and other resources so that students can readily access the technology they need.

- We have extensive protocols to ensure student participation.

- Our teachers receive consistent, specialized training to effectively teach and engage students in an online classroom environment.

- We provide a necessary option for families who need an alternative to their traditional district schools.

This last bullet point is worth repeating. Simply put, a virtual classroom is sometimes a better fit for students. Every school year, we provide life-saving educational opportunities for thousands of children who have difficult health circumstances or special needs, who were bullied in their old schools, who live in rural settings without access to the courses they desire, who want to escape struggling urban schools, or who simply have the necessary support system at home to learn virtually.

Nothing tells the public cyber charter school story better than specific examples about the tremendous impact we are having on children and their families:

- A parent of a child with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) – determined by her school district – was greatly concerned with the anxiety her daughter faced and how she saw her daughter shutting down and continually struggle in school. Someone recommended Agora, and she was willing to give the school a try. Almost immediately, she saw her daughter begin to thrive and become successful in her academics. Her daughter is even starting to see growth in socialization and interaction with others in her classes. She will tell you that Agora is the public-school option where her child belongs and when she can really excel.

- About two years into a student's schooling at Agora, he suffered from a seizure that led to a fall, causing a head injury requiring several days in the hospital. Medications to control the seizures caused complications and additional hospitalizations. He needed therapy to learn to walk properly and had far more than his fair share of medical appointments. Through it all, Agora made accommodations to work around his challenges and schedule. The Agora team even consulted with doctors to make sure everything done in school was supporting his recovery and well-being. During a time when the family was frightened for their child's health and future, the Agora team provided guidance and confidence.

- "For the past 13 years, Paige, a PALCS student, has dedicated a significant portion of her time to becoming a successful competitive gymnast. She currently trains six days per week (30+ hours) at Parkettes National Gymnastics Training Center in Allentown. She has competed throughout the United States and in Canada as an all-around gymnast (vault, balance beam, uneven bars, and floor exercise) and has won numerous medals in state, regional, and national competitions. Last season, she qualified as an Elite level gymnast, which is a tremendous accomplishment - less than 1% of competitive gymnasts become Elite gymnasts. It is from the Elite ranks that members of the US National team and US Olympic team are selected. In November 2022, Paige signed her National Letter of Intent to accept a full athletic scholarship to Iowa State

University. Iowa State is a Division I school in the Big 12 conference. This is on top of completing her high school academic career in three years with a GPA well above 4.0."

- Another PALCS student, Stefan, was able to pursue flight training while a student at the school. He entered college with his private pilot's license. In addition, the AP coursework he completed in high school allowed him to enter college with one semester completed. He is graduating with a degree in leadership and organizational Management, with a concentration in aviation. He has been a flight instructor at Brandywine Regional Airport since last fall.

We'd also like to note that student diversity, equity, and inclusion have long been top priorities for Agora, PALCS and public cyber charter schools. Several public cyber charter schools have percentages of traditionally under-served student populations that are significantly higher than the state average, such as students of color and economically disadvantaged students. As a group, public cyber charter schools also have significantly higher rates of economically disadvantaged students and students with IEPs – many of which were established prior to the student enrolling in a public cyber charter school, and all of which require school district approval.

These are all reasons to ensure continued access to a strong and well-funded system of public cyber charter schools. It also underscores why comparing students in public cyber charter schools with their peers in traditional classrooms is not an apples-to-apples comparison.

Our virtual classrooms provide the best opportunity for many students to succeed, and no matter what the circumstance, we educate these students for a fraction of the cost when looking at overall education spending in the Commonwealth. We also do it while being subject to the highest level of accountability that includes extensive reporting requirements, audits, and charter renewal processes.

In rough numbers, Agora and PALCS – like all public cyber charter schools – receive about 75 percent of what bricks-and-mortar public schools receive to educate the very same students. This is a challenge because we not only have most of the same costs as school districts – teacher salaries, staff pension and insurance costs, attendance and other central office costs, etc., but we also have expenses not typically born by districts. These include funding for staff positions like family coaches/mentors that are unique to public cyber charter schools, significant technology infrastructure, online curriculum costs, and major costs related to securing statewide testing sites.

This means that school districts keep a significant portion—25% on average—of the funding allocated for the students who leave their schools to enter public cyber charters even though these students are no longer being educated in a traditional district classroom. We emphasize this because these are funds school districts can use to help offset fixed costs such as facility maintenance, utilities, etc.

Further, the Pennsylvania Department of Education gives school districts significant discretion to determine exactly how much funding it will forward for a student who enrolls in one of our schools. We should note that the deductions currently allowed on the funding form for school districts go well beyond what the charter school law intended.

In sum, the portion of funding that follows students who enroll in public cyber charter schools generally represents less than two percent of a school district's overall budget. In many cases, even with this insignificant expenditure, school districts are still able to maintain very healthy surpluses.

We commend the Commission for its work to bolster education funding in the Commonwealth, and we understand there are many challenges that need to be addressed. That said, we ask that you to resist efforts to prioritize any one public school option over another. More specifically, we strongly oppose efforts to create a flat reimbursement rate for public cyber charter schools that fails to realistically account for the actual cost of running our schools.

Every public school – whether it is bricks and mortar or cyber – is unique for any number of reasons. However, all schools have one very important challenge in common. Schools cannot be all things for all students. That's why we are asking the Commission to pursue only those funding recommendations that allow for a robust system of public cyber charter schools. Agora, PALCS, and other public cyber charter schools are a public-school option that tens of thousands of families have determined to the best educational fit for their children. And, the decisions of these families have no negative impact to their home district's bottom line.

In closing, Agora and PALCS believe that if all public-school voices work together—rather than as adversaries—we can ensure that every child has equal, affordable access to the type of education that is best for their individual need. We see countless examples every day that prove this very real and important point. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony to the Commission.

PENNSYLVANIA COALITION OF STUDENT SERVICES ASSOCIATIONS

THE UNANIMOUS CALL FOR STUDENT SERVICES FUNDING

Testimony Before the Basic Education Funding Commission (BEFC)
November 16, 2023

My name is Dr. Adam Oldham, and I am here today as a full-time high school counselor, as the chair of government relations for the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association (PSCA), and as a representative of the newly formed **Pennsylvania Coalition of Student Services Associations**.

This coalition represents every student services association in Pennsylvania:

- Pennsylvania School Counselors Association (PSCA)
- Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania (ASPP)
- Pennsylvania Association of School Social Work Professionals (PASSWP)
- Pennsylvania Association of School Nurses and Practitioners (PASNAP)
- PSEA Department of Pupil Services (PSEA-DPS)
- Pennsylvania Association of Pupil Services Administrators (PAPSA)
- Pennsylvania Association of Student Assistance Professionals (PASAP)

Today, I am here to deliver a unified message from the 10,000+ school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and home and school visitors, and school nurses currently working across the Commonwealth - **Pennsylvania must provide specific and guaranteed funding for student services professionals and programs.**

It is the law in Pennsylvania that "each school entity shall prepare a written plan for the implementation of a **comprehensive and integrated K-12 program of student services** based on the needs of its students."[1]

While there are many needs that students experience, let me state plainly the harrowing reality we face, from the mouths of our own students on the Pennsylvania Youth Survey[2]:

- Almost 70% of Pennsylvania students report moderate or high levels of depression.
- One in four students report feeling like a failure.
- One in five students report seriously considering suicide.

Recognizing that students may experience barriers that limit their ability to fully engage with learning and their school experience, student services professionals are employed to address student developmental needs throughout their enrollment in school. Developmental services include **[school] counseling, psychological services, health services, home and school visitor services and social work services** that support students in addressing their academic, behavioral, health, personal and social development needs.[3]

While school entities are required to deliver comprehensive and integrated student services, **no specific funding stream exists to support these operations.**

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[1] 22 Pa. Code Chapter 12.41.a
[2] PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (2019). 2019 PA Youth Survey (PAYS) Statewide Report Highlights
[3] 22 Pa. Code Chapter 12.41.b(1)

Complicating this matter further, Pennsylvania also has **intentionally unclear role definitions of the different student services professions**, which is the direct result of state action in the mid-2000s, when previous regulations around student services, then called pupil services, were substantially changed. I'd like to quote directly from the regulatory paperwork[4] that explains the state's perspective at that time on this change:

> *The State Board [of Education] believes that Chapter 7 [Pupil Personnel Services] as it currently exists is too detailed and prescriptive for today's educational environment. The regulations…**limit flexibility provided to school districts and other educational entities in the planning, implementation and administration of cost effective, comprehensive student services programs.***
>
> *By consolidating the regulations…schools would be provided additional flexibility to deliver a comprehensive program of student services to their students. **Depending upon implementation on the local level, this might lead to improving the scope and quality of services provided to students while also providing cost savings.***

"This **might** lead to improving the scope and quality of services provided, while also providing cost savings."

What does the scope and quality of services provided look like in 2023?

In some schools, school counselors are performing the work of a school social worker, school psychologists are performing the role of a school counselor, and in far too many schools, **student services professionals are performing the role of the "other duties as assigned utility player."** We cover classes when there aren't any building substitutes. We monitor hallways and cafeterias. We are split We are tasked with administering state PSSAs and Keystone exams. All at the expense of time working with our students.

We have schools like the Wilkes-Barre SD, where the student to school counselor ratio can be as high as 900 students, or the SD of Philadelphia, where budget restraints limit each school of up to 799 students to a single school counselor, who also serves as the school attendance officer and is responsible for truancy intervention[5].

Role ambiguity among student services professions has led to **vastly different expectations of service** from one school district to another, and a lack of school district accountability to deliver these services has resulted in inequities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

As far as cost savings go, **student services are often on the table in discussions about cost savings and cuts,** and are often cut first when school districts are faced with budgetary constraints[6]**.** These are the cost savings we've experienced in the years since regulatory change.

While it is true that it saves a school district money when they aren't required to employ school counselors, school psychologists, or school social workers, in light of the intense and pervasive student needs we are experiencing today, **are these really the kind of cost savings we can continue to justify?**

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[4] 35 Pa.B. 6510

[5] Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania (2023). Memorandum Opinion. *William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education et al.* *https://pubintlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/02.07.23-Memorandum-Opinion-Filed-pubintlaw.pdf*

[6] PSEA (2022). Brief for the petitioners as amicus curaie https://pubintlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/22.07.01-PSEA-Amicus-Curiae-Brief_refiled-and-redacted_pubintlaw.pdf

When a 12-year-old in West Philadelphia dies after an apparent asthma attack because her school did not have a full-time school nurse on duty,[7] **are we satisfied with cost savings?**

When approximately 40,000 Pennsylvania students experience homelessness each year[8], and yet the majority of Pennsylvania school districts do not employ a school social worker, **are we satisfied with cost savings?**

When a struggling 5th grade student named Phillip was unable to find a school counselor at the end of the day because that counselor was dealing with an influx of students, and so Phillip tragically went home and ended his life[9], **are we satisfied with cost savings?**

Our students deserve to go to school where student services professionals are available and accessible, because the stakes truly can be life and death.

The call for more student services professionals **has been loud and clear for many years**.

In 2017, the Pennsylvania Department of Education stated in their state plan for the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act[10]:

> *School counselors are a critical part of Pennsylvania's vision to help all students translate their interests and aspirations into tangible college and career plans and choices.* ***However, many school counselors are stretched thin, juggling several responsibilities and significant caseloads, and are often isolated in their work.***

In 2018, the Pennsylvania School Safety Task Force[11], formed in the aftermath of the Parkland school shooting, which engaged with almost 1,000 Pennsylvanians in the creation of their final report, said*:*

> ***Every Task Force meeting included requests from multiple participants to increase the number of both physical and mental health professionals in schools. Task Force participants specifically requested additional nurses, social workers, psychologists, and school counselors in schools to help meet students' needs."***

In 2022, a special report from then Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro's office[12] said:

> *Understanding there is an acute need to improve students' mental health, and that schools are one of the best places to provide support before mental health problems escalate,* ***the Office of Attorney General has called for increasing the number of mental health counselors in schools*** *every year since the Safe2Say Something program launched in 2019.*

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[7] NBC Philadelphia (2013). Lack of school nurse led to daughter's asthma death. https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/lack-of-school-nurse-led-to-daughters-asthma-death-father/1974173/

[8] PA Department of Education. https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/Reports.aspx

[9] Philadelphia Tribute (2019). Legislators introduce 'Phillip's law,' named for 11 year old who took his own life. https://www.phillytrib.com/news/local_news/legislators-introduce-phillips-law-named-for-11-year-old-who-took-his-own-life/article_2d321c4e-7b17-5c88-beb6-88764f9bc3af.html

[10] PA Department of Education (2017). Every Student Succeeds Act, PA Consolidated State Plan. https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/ESSA/Pennsylvania%20Consolidated%20State%20Plan.pdf

[11] PA Office of the Auditor General (2018). PA School Safety Task Force Report. https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/resources/Pages/School-Safety-Task-Force-Report.aspx

[12] PA Office of the Attorney General (2022). Special report on student mental health. https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/OAG_Special_Report_on_Student_Mental_Health.pdf

Earlier this year in 2023, our now Governor Josh Shapiro, in his budget address, told us again why this call matters, and cited Pennsylvania students when he did it[13]:

> *Since we launched the [Safe2Say Something] program five years ago, we've received over 100,000 tips – but most of the tips weren't about violence.* ***75 percent are from kids reaching out with mental health issues for themselves and their friends.***
>
> *I've been to their schools.* ***I've asked these students what they need – and they're very clear. Students want someone who can help them.***

Finally, also earlier this year in 2023, the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania found the existing system of school funding unconstitutional, and stated the call as clear as crystal[14]:

> *The Court heard extensive credible testimony from educational professionals and experts as to* ***how other professional staff… such as [school] counselors, social workers, nurses, [and] psychologists… help students succeed. There was evidence that low income students often require more support, so an adequate number of counselors [and other student services professionals] is needed to meet those needs.***
>
> *While it is true that there was testimony that several of the districts have* ***some*** *of these personnel, there was also testimony that it was* ***the bare minimum required by law, of an insufficient quantity to actually meet student needs****.*

"Bare minimum and insufficient" can no longer be an acceptable standard for our students.

So Pennsylvania requires student services in our schools, student needs are higher than ever before, and there have been repeated calls by the public and multiple state agencies calling for more student services professionals.

In addition to recognizing the great needs our students are experiencing, we also know from research that student services professionals **make a substantial contribution** to student success and the school environment. For example:

> School districts with lower school-counselor-to-student ratios produce **higher graduation rates, higher college entrance and persistence rates, lower chronic absenteeism rates and fewer suspensions**[15].
>
> One cost-benefit analysis found that school nursing services prevented an estimated **$20 million** in medical care costs, **$28.1 million** in parents' productivity loss, and **$129.1 million** in teachers' productivity loss.[16]

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[13] Governor Shapiro's Budget Address (2023). https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-shapiros-2023-budget-address-as-prepared/

[14] Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania (2023). Memorandum Opinion. *William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education et al.*

[15] American School Counselor Association (2019). *Measuring the impact of school counselor ratios on student outcomes*.

[16] Wang, L.Y., Vernon-Smiley, M., Gapinski, M.A., Desisto, M., Maughan, E., & Sheetz, A. (2013). Cost-Benefit Study of School Nursing Services. *JAMA Pediatrics, 168*(7), 642–648. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.544

> School psychologists **help schools successfully improve academic achievement, promote positive behavior and mental health, support diverse learners, create safe and positive school climates, strengthen family-school partnerships, and improve school-wide assessment and accountability**.[17]

Why then, in light of all of this, do our schools still lack enough student services professionals?

Two words for far too many years have kept Pennsylvania from delivering the supports we know promote student success - **unfunded mandate.**

The Commonwealth Court has shown that student services professionals are **a key metric of the equity of opportunity**, and unsurprisingly, schools with adequate funding are more likely to have appropriate student services staffing than schools with inadequate funding.

Considering the Commonwealth Court ruled that the existing system of funding inequity is both unconstitutional and deprives students of access to opportunity and the equal protection of law, **student services are a mandate that must be funded.**

Then Attorney General Shapiro in 2022 echoed this sentiment in an amicus curiae brief his office filed in support of the petitioners in the school funding lawsuit[18]:

> *The evidence shows that certain districts **are unable to hire an adequate number of schools counselors and social workers** to meet the needs of their students. **No one can seriously dispute that…access to counselors and mental health resources…are necessary elements of a thorough and efficient education**. Yet the evidence demonstrated that Petitioners and other public school districts **lack the resources to provide these necessary elements**.*

We unanimously agree – **student services are necessary elements of a thorough and efficient education**, and many school districts lack the resources to provide them**.**

One strategy of funding to increase the number of student services professionals in our schools is the use of year-to-year grant funding, and examples of this include uses of the School Safety and Security Funds via the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)[19], or the ESSER/ARP funds[20] that were provided during the pandemic.

To help school districts identify uses for state safety and security grants, the PCCD School Safety and Security Committee produced a set of Behavioral Health and School Climate criteria[21] to establish a "baseline" for what safe, secure learning environments look like. The best practices identified in these criteria for behavioral health include appropriate ratios for school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers.

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[17] National Association of School Psychologists (2021). *School psychologists: Improving student and school outcomes* [Research summary].

[18] PA Office of the Attorney General (2022). Brief for the petitioners as amicus curaie. https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2022-05-17-William-Penn-v.-PDE-Shapiro-Amicus-Brief.pdf

[19] https://www.pccd.pa.gov/schoolsafety/Pages/School-Safety-and-Security-Grants-Program.aspx

[20] https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/CARESAct/Pages/default.aspx

[21] PCCD (2021). Baseline criteria – PCCD school safety and security committee. Behavioral health and school climate. https://www.pccd.pa.gov/schoolsafety/Documents/Assessment%20Criteria/Behavioral%20Health%20Baseline%20Criteria.pdf

In May 2023, this committee updated their baseline criteria, **which removed these ratios for student services professionals from both the Level I and Level II baseline**[22]. What were the baseline criteria that were removed?

- School entity has at least one full-time school counselor for each level (elementary, middle, high)
- School entity has at least one full-time school nurse
- School entity has at least one full-time school psychologist
- School entity has at least one full-time school social worker

While I find it unbelievable that we as a Commonwealth, in the face of such pervasive student needs, cannot commit ourselves to such minimum expectations for the availability and access to student services, I understand why this committee had to remove these criteria from their description of baseline. **The PCCD School Safety and Security Committee monitors and facilitates the distribution of year-to-year grants, not the Basic Education Funding allocation.**

And yet, when PCCD surveyed schools across Pennsylvania as part of Act 55 in 2022, the number one resource identified **by a WIDE margin** to improve mental health in our schools **was additional funding to hire staff[23].**

Grant funds are not a sustainable source of funding for student services professionals.

This is explained clearly in the opinion of the Commonwealth Court's decision[24]:

> *Some districts also took advantage of the ESSER funds to fill some of their staffing gaps. For instance, Otto-Eldred SD hired a social worker and two behavior specialists using ESSER funds. William Penn SD was able to afford to put a counselor in each of its schools with ESSER funds.* ***However, the ratio of students to counselors at William Penn SD will still be between 320:1 to 350:1. Its ratio of students to psychologists is even higher – 830:1. Until ESSER funds became available, the ratio of students to social workers at William Penn SD was 2,500:1.***
>
> ***Any effect of the hiring may also be short-lived.*** *Dr. Becoats testified he is not sure William Penn SD will be able to maintain some of the staff it hired with ESSER funds once those funds expire in a few years. Districts across the state faced a similar situation in 2011 when an influx of federal stimulus expired, causing the state to cut BEF funding.*
>
> ***Perhaps cognizant that history could repeat itself, the Department [of Education] and President Pro Tempore admonished districts to avoid using ESSER funds for recurring costs.***
>
> *Notwithstanding, some districts still* ***felt they had no choice*** *if they were to meet the immediate needs of their students, especially in the wake of the COVID pandemic.*

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[22] PCCD (2023). Crosswalk of Revised vs. Original Behavioral Health Baseline Criteria https://www.pccd.pa.gov/schoolsafety/Documents/CROSSWALK%20-%20Revised%20vs%20Original%20SSSC%20Behavioral%20Health%20Baseline%20Criteria%20Standards.pdf

[23] PCCD (2022). FY22-23 school mental health survey results. https://www.pccd.pa.gov/schoolsafety/Documents/School%20Mental%20Health%20Survey%20Aggregate%20Data%20and%20Findings%20(September%202022).pdf

[24] Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania (2023). Memorandum Opinion. *William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education et al.*

As an alternative to hiring certified student services professionals, many districts utilize grant funding to contract with community-based providers of student services, such as school-based counseling or social work services. Chapter 12 says explicitly that "school entities **may supplement, but may not supplant**, student services through school based, school linked, or coordinated services provided by locally available social and human services agencies."[25]

As well, Chapter 12 explicitly states that "persons delivering student services **shall be specifically licensed or certified as required by statute or regulation.**"[26] This is not always the case with contracted services, which suffer from higher turnover than certified student services professionals, **who are both highly qualified to provide services to students, and are a source of consistency year-to-year for students, families, and school communities.**

Consider the examples of Greater Johnstown SD, William Penn SD, and Panther Valley SD as referenced in the Commonwealth Court's decision[27]:

> *Greater Johnstown SD **cannot afford to hire any licensed social workers**. It used grant dollars obtained through its Communities and Schools Program **to bring in six non-licensed staff** for its three buildings instead.*
>
> *While Ms. Harbert was superintendent [of the William Penn SD], the district employed two social workers. They supported students in 11 school buildings, making the ratio of students to social workers 2,500:1. Using **one-time ESSER dollars, William Penn entered into a short-term contract with a mental health counseling service to provide support to its students, but those supports will only be accessible for the next two years.***
>
> *Through a grant organized with a local hospital, St. Luke's, Panther Valley SD offers support services of a social worker once per week to the neediest students in the district. **Panther Valley does not employ any truancy officers or other staff dedicated to addressing attendance.***

I would like to cite one final story from the Commonwealth Court's decision regarding Panther Valley SD, and their use of community-based funding[28]:

> *With the help of additional funds from St. Luke's and a local business, Ametek Corporation, Panther Valley is now offering the support of a family development specialist for the 2021-22 school year. This new role, which is in place at the elementary school, was created to bolster the social and communication skills of the younger students transitioning from online schooling during COVID to in person, live classroom learning.*
>
> *Although this program was very successful, Superintendent McAndrew said **it would be cut because the local business was sold and could not help fund the position in the future, meaning this specialist, who had built a rapport with and earned the trust of the students, will be one more person leaving those students.***

[25] 22 Pa. Code Chapter 12.16
[26] 22 Pa. Code Chapter 12.41.e
[27] Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania (2023). Memorandum Opinion. *William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education et al.*
[28] Ibid.

Creative, innovation-focused funding, even when school districts are able to do it (which not every community can), is not the same thing as consistent, certified student services professionals. **"One more person leaving" cannot be an acceptable standard for our students.**

In closing, every Pennsylvania school is required to design and implement a comprehensive and integrated plan of student services, but the state stops short of fully defining or funding these services.

Mental health distress is at an all-time high for our students, and yet student services professionals are often the first items cut when the budget gets tight.

Despite the years-long call by schools, families, professional organizations, and even the state itself for more student services professionals in our schools, there are fewer school counselors working in our schools today than there were in 2010[29]. Two of the petitioner school districts in the funding lawsuit had principals also serving as school psychologists[30]. And despite the state's own guidance to avoid using one-time grant funding to hire more staff, limited grants have been the only solution yet offered to school districts.

"Bare minimum, insufficient, and unfunded" are words that this Commission must remedy through a fair and equitable funding formula.

Until Pennsylvania makes these words a piece of ancient history, we will continue to rob our students of a true and honest opportunity to pursue their American Dream, and we rob ourselves of the great benefits we all receive when our children reach their maximum potential as healthy, productive adults.

What we as the collective body of student services associations are here to say today is this - **student services ARE basic education in Pennsylvania. It's time we start funding them that way.**

[29] PSCA (2023). PA School Counselor Staffing Report.
https://www.paschoolcounselor.org/_files/ugd/102df7_c7b278a29d5243768d6c312a346f9f16.pdf
[30] Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania (2023). Memorandum Opinion. *William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education et al.*

PENNSYLVANIA COALITION OF STUDENT SERVICES ASSOCIATIONS

To the co-chairs of the Basic Education Funding Commission, Representative Mike Sturla and Senator Kristin Phillips-Hill, and to all members of the Commission:

Pennsylvania stands to deliver one of the most impactful decisions to affect our children in the history of the Commonwealth – establishing an adequate funding structure that provides all children a thorough and efficient system of public education.

Consistently for years, student services professionals – school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers – have been recognized as an invaluable component to student health, wellness, and success. At the same time, consistently for years, the need for appropriate staffing of these roles has been highlighted through community feedback, from state government reports and statements of state officials, and most recently through the decision of the Commonwealth Court:

> *While it is true that there was testimony that several of the districts have some of these personnel, there was also testimony that it was **the bare minimum required by law, of an insufficient quantity to actually meet student needs**, or was **funded through outside sources or one-time ESSER funds**, which districts have been cautioned against using for such purposes. (William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education, 2023)*

While student needs have always demanded adequate student services staffing, these needs have never been greater in the aftermath of a global pandemic which disrupted the lives of our students, their families, and the communities in which they live in ways we will feel the effects from for years to come.

Unfortunately, because not all schools have appropriate staffing ratios for student services professionals, students have been shortchanged of the services that are known to effectively support student success – success that is clear and measurable in school districts with adequate staffing and resources.

We, as a coalition of the professional student services associations in Pennsylvania, call on the Basic Education Funding Commission **to ensure that funding for student services professionals** is included in the outcome of the Commission's work.

Funding for student services must be delivered in such a way that school districts feel comfortable hiring student services staff, as districts hesitate to use one-time grant funding for recurring staffing expenses. While community partnerships can also be valuable sources of support for students, not all schools and communities have access to such partnerships. Inadequate staffing levels also lead to increased levels of professional burnout and can cause professionals to leave the profession or change to a different type of practice, further exacerbating service delivery issues and highlighting the need to adequately staff our schools to preserve the investment Pennsylvania makes in student services.

Furthermore, to address student mental health needs, the Commonwealth must invest in efforts to attract and retain student service practitioners. Pennsylvania took an important step a little more than a year ago with the creation of the PA HELPS grant program, but that alone is not enough to repair the pipeline of student service professionals. We must collectively think about the students currently in high school, engage their interest in these professions now, and possibly incentivize their future service in schools given the vast need that exists.

Using Pennsylvania's existing data on school staffing and school enrollment, it is possible to identify the schools that need additional funding for student services professionals. It is not a question of whether student services staffing is inequitable, or of where the inequity is taking place. The question before the Commission is how much longer we will wait to do something about it.

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PENNSYLVANIA COALITION OF STUDENT SERVICES ASSOCIATIONS

COALITION MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS CONTACT INFORMATION

All student services associations, representing over 10,000 student services professionals working in Pennsylvania have joined together to deliver a unified message to the Basic Education Funding Commission - through a joint letter and testimony delivered on 11/16/23.

Pennsylvania must provide specific and guaranteed funding for student services professionals and programs. Student services **are** basic education in Pennsylvania, and any improvement to the school funding formula must ensure all students get adequate and equitable access to student services!

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The Behavioral Health and Wellness of Students

National Association of School Nurses

Position Statement

NASN POSITION

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that student behavioral health and wellness must be prioritized for students to successfully access and engage in educational opportunities. It is imperative that school systems respond to, and address, student behavioral health and wellness to ameliorate disparities related to the social determinants of health (Combe, 2019). School nurses are often the initial access point to identify concerns, determine interventions, and link families to school and/or community resources.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Behavioral health is defined by the promotion of mental health, resilience and wellbeing; treatment of disorders; and support of individuals and families who experience these disorders. Families and community partners are crucial in the effort to address these unmet needs (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2019).

COVID-19 has highlighted the need for enhanced monitoring of children's mental health during public health crises (Leeb et al., 2020). The length of loneliness and social isolation imposed by disease mitigation measures can predict later mental health problems for up to nine years post-event (Loades et al., 2020). A population health perspective examines multiple determinants of health outcomes such as access to healthcare, public health interventions, social and physical environment, genetics, and individual behavior (Kindig & Stoddart, 2003). Applying a population health perspective will be critical to determine the actual effects of the pandemic in the absence or presence of other known risk factors that impact mental health (Boden et al., 2021).

A myriad of family, community, and environmental factors that often begin in childhood affect mental health, wellness, and access to care (Kaushik et al., 2016). Age, poverty, living in a rural area, a shortage of providers, an increased distance to services, and lack of transportation are frequently identified as causes of inadequate treatment for behavioral health concerns including anxiety, depression, and behavior problems (Ghandour et al., 2019). These problems are prevalent among US children with significant disparities in treatment. In the US, 13% to 20% of children, especially ages 12-17, have a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder. Behavioral/conduct problems affect more than twice the number of boys as girls ages 6 – 11. Overall, children who are in poor health have a higher prevalence of each of these disorders (Ghandour et al., 2019). The school nurse is in a unique position to identify and assist students in obtaining appropriate referral and access to community resources.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as well as other childhood traumatic experiences. ACES are known to have negative and prolonged effects on children's mental health (Larson et al., 2017). Multiple studies show a risk of mental health disorders and academic failure when children are exposed to trauma. Students at poverty level and from minority racial/ ethnic groups have amplified exposure to trauma, yet these same students have reduced access to mental health services (Larson et al., 2017). Twenty-two percent of children living below the federal poverty level have a mental, behavioral, and/or developmental disorder (CDC, 2020a).

According to the CDC, "mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, causing distress and problems getting through the day" (2020a). The percentage of children diagnosed with mental health disorders has increased, with 49.5% of adolescents having some form of mental health disorder and 22% experiencing severe impairment (National Institute of Mental

Health [NIMH], 2020). The CDC reports that ADHD, behavior problems, anxiety, and depression are the most commonly diagnosed childhood disorders.

- 9.4% of children aged 2-17 years have received an ADHD diagnosis.
- 7.4% of children aged 3-17 years have a diagnosed behavior problem.
- 7.1% of children aged 3-17 years have diagnosed anxiety.
- 3.2% of children aged 3-17 years have diagnosed depression (CDC, 2020a).

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth age 10-24 (Curtain & Heron, 2019). Data obtained from United States students in grades 9-12 from the CDC 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) reveals:

- 37% of adolescents persistently felt sad or hopeless to a point where they did not engage in normal activities,
- 18.8% of students reported having seriously considered suicide, and
- 8.9% reported having attempted suicide (CDC, 2020b).

School nurses are frequently the first to identify and address behavioral health concerns and connect students and families with systems of support. Hoagwood et al (2018) determined programs that include children, families and the community have a greater influence on positive health outcomes, especially when dealing with those from lower socioeconomic status. Positive child experiences (PCE) can offset the effects of ACES (Bethel et al., 2019). School nurse referral options to support student needs include comprehensive school mental health systems as well as primary care providers, mental health specialists, telemedicine, and school-based health centers (National Center for School Mental Health, 2019; CDC, 2018).

The Framework for 21st Century School Nursing Practice™ (NASN, 2016) is aligned with the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model (CDC, 2014). School nurses apply these practice components to address social, mental, and physical health concerns at the individual student and population level. Given the early onset of emotional, mental health and substance use disorders and their subsequent costs, investments in prevention and early intervention programs are necessary (Starkey, 2019). Proactive school nursing practice encompasses the principles of community and public health nursing. School nurse services address access to care, cultural competency, health education, health equity, outreach, risk reduction, social determinants of health, and surveillance (NASN, 2020).

Student behavioral and mental wellness is essential for students to be healthy, safe, and ready to learn. The incidence of behavioral health concerns is on the rise and negatively impacts educational achievement (Rosvall, 2020). The school nurse is the bridge between health and education in the school setting, promoting positive behavioral health and using assessment skills to identify children at risk for behavioral health needs. School nurses, in collaboration with the interdisciplinary education team, provide critical links to prevention, early identification, intervention, and referral for behavioral/mental health concerns (Ramirez, 2018).

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"To optimize student health, safety and learning, it is the position of the National Association of School Nurses that a professional registered school nurse is present in every school all day, every day."

All position statements from the National Association of School Nurses will automatically expire five years after publication unless reaffirmed, revised, or retired at or before that time.

Equitable Reimbursement for School Nursing Services

Position Statement

NASN POSITION

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) believes school nursing services that are reimbursed in other healthcare environments should also be reimbursed in the school setting. The registered professional school nurse (hereinafter referred to as the school nurse) bridges education and healthcare and delivers quality, cost-effective healthcare in the school setting that is vital to supporting student learning and academic achievement (Maughan et al., 2018). Ensuring sufficient funding so that all children have access to necessary healthcare services provided by a school nurse is a matter of equity (Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2022a).

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

When there is a school nurse present in school, all students have access to healthcare without the need for an appointment, referral, fees, insurance, or transportation (Gratz et al., 2020). However, over half of public school students in the U.S. do not have access to a school nurse all day, every day (Willgerodt et al., 2018). Funding school nursing positions is not always a priority in educational budgets. However, the types of public health services provided by school nurses have demonstrated significant positive returns on investment (McCullough, 2018; Minnesota Management and Budget, 2017). “Spending on school nurses ought to be viewed as an investment, not a cost … Supporting local school nurses is a sound investment not just for students and schools, but for the entire community” (Maughan, 2018, paras 17-18). Beyond a financial justification, evidence supports meeting the societal values of doing what is best for children, with benefits that are often realized over the lifetime of a child (McCullough, 2018).

For school-age youth, schools are an appropriate, safe, and least restrictive setting where school nurses can provide medically necessary care that will “improve health or lessen the impact of a condition, prevent a condition, or restore health” (National Academy for State Health Policy, 2021, para 4). However, both public and private insurer reimbursements for school nursing services are typically not commensurate with reimbursement for nursing services provided in other settings such as hospitals, clinics, and home care. For all students to have access to sustainable, quality school nursing services, sufficient funding for school nursing services should be supported by reimbursement through public and private insurers at levels equivalent to nursing services in other healthcare settings. The setting for the provision of needed healthcare should not determine payment or rates for a reimbursable service.

The Future of Nursing 2020-2030 specifically calls attention to the reality that school nurses are “inadequately supported by current funding mechanisms” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2021, p. 176). In order for all students to have equitable access to quality school nursing services, there must be sufficient funding to cover the cost of providing full-time school nursing services (Weeks et al., 2021). “School and public health nurses play a vital role in advancing health equity. Adequate funding for these nurses is essential” (NASEM, 2021, p.10). The American Academy of Nursing asserts that “all students must have daily access to a full-time school nurse who is part of a comprehensive health-care and education system and is supported financially by health and education dollars” (Maughan et al., 2018, para 1).

Decision-makers and stakeholders from education, health, and governmental sectors need to collaborate to create and sustain “adequate and equitable funding models at the federal, state, and local levels” (National Healthy Schools Collaborative, 2022, para 4). Efforts to achieve equitable standards of care for all school-age youth require sustainable and flexible payment mechanism reforms that support school nursing (NASEM, 2021). “Adequate funding would enable these nurses to expand their reach and help improve population health and health equity” (NASEM, 2021, pp. 176-177).

With over half of children in the U.S. enrolled in Medicaid and/or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for children in families that do not qualify for Medicaid and cannot afford private insurance, these public programs provide health insurance for a significant number of school-age youth. Medicaid reimburses certain aspects of school health services for enrolled children when a qualified provider provides a service approved by Medicaid guidelines (Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2022b). Complicating matters, each state has different methods for applying Medicaid coverage for school nursing services. In some states, regulations are misaligned, precluding these states from taking advantage of expanded Medicaid coverage to reimburse school nursing and other health services (Mays & O'Rourke, 2022; Weeks et al., 2021; Hoke & McGowen, 2019).

Economic fluctuations and multiple priorities create competition for limited financial resources in school district budgets. Sustainable payment systems to sufficiently support school nursing services are necessary to equitably help all youth address health barriers to learning, to be able to meet their full educational potential. Insurance reimbursement for school nursing services comparable to other nursing settings can provide additional funding to support and strengthen the provision of essential, quality school nursing care for all children.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2023

School Nurse Staffing and Funding in Northeastern Pennsylvania

The Center for SCHOOL HEALTH Innovation & Quality

MOSES TAYLOR FOUNDATION
Advancing Our Legacy of Health

The School Nurse Staffing and Funding in Northeastern Pennsylvania study was conducted by The Center for School Health Innovation & Quality (CSHIQ) with funding from Moses Taylor Foundation.

About
Moses Taylor Foundation

Moses Taylor Foundation is a private foundation dedicated to building healthy communities and providing opportunities for people in Northeastern Pennsylvania to lead healthier lives. The Foundation was endowed in 2012 with the net proceeds from the Moses Taylor Health Care System sale to Community Health Systems of Franklin, Tennessee. Since its formation, the Foundation has grown to support approximately $4 million in annual grantmaking in Bradford, Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Wayne, and Wyoming counties.

The Foundation's mission, vision, and values reflect a commitment to advancing the legacy of health started when Moses Taylor Hospital opened in 1892 in Scranton, Pennsylvania, to treat injured miners and railroaders who were unable to access healthcare at other hospitals in the community. A few years later, the hospital also began treating workers' families and eventually expanded to serve the broader community, as well. The Foundation remains committed to championing the evolving health needs of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

MISSION

The mission of Moses Taylor Foundation is to improve the health of people in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

VISION

Moses Taylor Foundation is a catalyst in continuing the philanthropic legacy of Moses Taylor by providing opportunities for people in Northeastern Pennsylvania, especially the most vulnerable, to lead healthy lives.

CORE VALUES

We embrace these values for ourselves and for the communities that we serve:

- Honor our history by operating with compassion, respect, and dignity
- Ethics, integrity, and trust
- Stewardship, transparency, and accountability
- Courage, open-mindedness, and diversity
- Informed decision-making and fairness

About
The Center for School Health Innovation & Quality

The purpose of The Center for School Health Innovation & Quality is to reinvent school health and school nursing practice to better serve all students, with a special focus on students from underserved groups facing inequities. The initial goals of The Center are to:

- Reimagine data-driven school health
- Innovate and research
- Promote leadership

The Center is housed in the Public Health National Center for Innovations, which is part of the Public Health Accreditation Board, a nonprofit organization established in 2007.

Erin D. Maughan, PhD, MS, RN, PHNA-BC, FNASN, FAAN, Executive Director at The Center for School Health Innovation & Quality, and **Beth E. Jameson**, PhD, RN, FNASN, CNL, Co-Founder and Advisor at The Center for School Health Innovation & Quality, were the lead researchers of this report.

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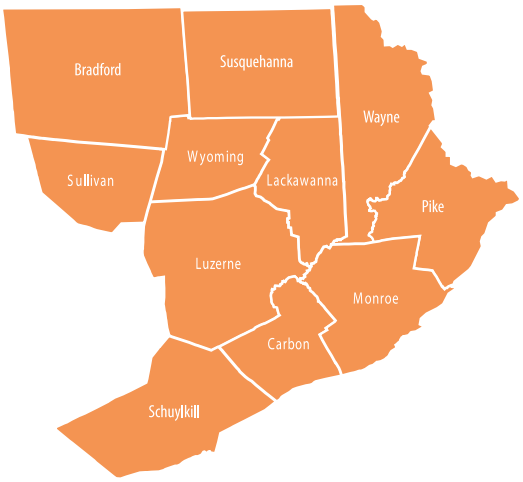
Introduction

OVERVIEW



School nurses play a critical role in helping students be safe and ready to learn in school. The COVID-19 pandemic helped many schools better understand the importance of school nursing. At the same time, the extended hours and stress caused by COVID-19 impacted the complexity of the school nursing position. Coupled with an aging workforce, across the country many school nurses are retiring or leaving school nursing. Other nurses have expressed concern about not having adequate support or substitutes. This project investigated current staffing concerns, including adequate staff, the impact of COVID-19, availability of substitute school nurses, and the future pipeline of school nursing. The project also examined how school nursing is funded, and provides recommendations for innovative, new solutions to address and strengthen the future of school nursing in Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) and beyond.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data gathering for this study included both collection and review of existing information as well as original research. Existing information included staffing and school nursing activity data from Pennsylvania's School Health Annual Reimbursement Request System (SHARRS), an environmental scan of related articles, and review of school nurse listervs. Original research focused primarily on an online survey completed by 2,392 school nurses (based both regionally in NEPA and nationwide for comparison) in May 2022 regarding models of staffing, number of substitute school nurses, retention/recruitment of school nurses, and funding. In addition, more than 100 school nurses shared ideas, many of which had not been tested, and were either interviewed on a one-on-one basis or invited to a town hall to discuss further. Two meetings with Pennsylvania school nurse educators held during the fall of 2022 helped provide information about the current pipeline of school nurses in Pennsylvania. Finally, a think tank of six health finance experts from across the country provided insight into innovative funding models for school nurses.

School Nurse Staffing

A Note About School Nursing Licensure

When discussing school nurse staffing, it is important to understand the varying licenses and certificates a school nurse can hold, and the scopes of practice that apply to each. The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) recommends that school nurses be baccalaureate-prepared Registered Nurses (RNs). Although the recommendation is an RN, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) are also employed in the schools. RNs have a broader scope of practice than LPNs. Whereas LPNs provide basic student care and monitor students' health, RNs have training to perform more complex treatments, work with other healthcare providers, and develop a plan of care for the student (American Nurses Association, n.d.).

A Certified School Nurse (CSN) is a designation specific to Pennsylvania. CSNs are Registered Nurses who have completed a four-year Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, as well as additional graduate school credits from an accredited program in Pennsylvania that is specific to school nursing. Only a CSN can carry a caseload of students in Pennsylvania. However, many schools in Pennsylvania employ supplementary help for the CSN in the form of other RNs or Licensed Practical Nurses.

Staffing Decision-Making and Models

Experts maintain that school nurse staffing for safe care must account for acuity, social needs of students, community/school infrastructure, and characteristics of the nursing staff (Jameson et al., 2022; Jameson et al., 2018). However, a uniform standard or process to determine school nurse staffing levels and workload does not exist at the state or federal level.

In NEPA and throughout Pennsylvania, individual districts make school nurse staffing decisions. The top three decision-makers are:

- District administrators (65%)
- School nurse leaders (21%)
- Others (14%)

In other states, principals were more involved in the decision-making.

School Nurse Staffing

School Nurse Staffing Decision-Makers

	All PA *n* = 967 *n* (%)	NEPA *n* = 132 *n* (%)	Other States *n* = 1425 *n* (%)	Total Sample *n* = 2392 *n* (%)
District administrator	645 (66.7)	86 (65.2)	760 (53.3)	1405 (58.7)
Principal	126 (13.0)	15 (11.4)	299 (21.0)	425 (17.8)
School nurse leader (not a nurse)	113 (11.7)	15 (11.4)	105 (7.4)	218 (9.1)
School nurse leader (nurse)	241 (24.9)	27 (20.5)	455 (31.9)	696 (29.1)
School nurse	90 (9.3)	12 (9.1)	220 (15.4)	310 (13.0)
Other	136 (14.1)	19 (14.4)	175 (12.3)	311 (13.0)

Note: Percentages may sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

One thing to note is that in instances where a non-nurse leader was the decision-maker on staffing, only 35.2% of respondents in NEPA indicated a school nurse was asked for input, similar to other states where only 37.7% reported school nurses being asked for input.

Once the decision-makers were identified, the researchers explored what factors were used by those decision-makers when determining how many school nurses to employ.

The top factors determining staffing ratios in NEPA and Pennsylvania were:

- CSN to school building ratio
- CSN to student ratio

Under Pennsylvania law, at least one CSN is required for every 1,500 students, so it makes sense that within the Commonwealth, the number of students would be a major deciding factor. Using the number of schools or number of students was also commonly cited in other states (32%). However, these ratios do not account for varying levels of health needs and social complexities within the specific school population. Some survey participants reported that they included some of these other factors when determining staffing, yet, when asked how, there were not well-defined measures nor were formulas used.

School Nurse Staffing

In addition to CSNs, districts in NEPA and across the Commonwealth employ supplemental nurses and staff, such as RNs (who are not CSNs), LPNs, and Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (usually administrative assistants). Nationwide, many districts indicate that when a trained aid or LPN is able to address first aid and routine medications, the RN is able to address more complex treatments, perform diagnostic screenings, administer medications, educate patients on how to manage their health after treatment, and assist students in addressing social needs that impact health (like lack of a medical home or food insecurity). The RN can also help with social factors (food insecurity, lack of access to care, and homelessness) that impact students' health. When an RN works alone, the focus tends to be on immediate and acute needs, leaving minimal time to address the more complex issues better suited to an RN's scope of practice.

National workforce data indicate that 70% of schools that have a school nurse employ an RN alone, and 14% utilize a model of an RN and LPN working together (Willgerodt et al, 2018). Our School Nurse Survey confirmed a CSN working alone in a school was the common model, although 36.4% worked with another RN (non-certified) to assist with various tasks.

Certified School Nurse Partners
Pennsylvania Only

	All PA *n* = 967 *n* (%)	NEPA *n* = 132 *n* (%)
RNs to assist the Certified School Nurse	408 (42.2)	48 (36.4)
Licensed Practical Nurses to assist the Certified School Nurse	437 (45.2)	68 (51.5)
Nurse extenders (aides) to assist nurses	27 (2.8)	5 (3.8)
Partnership with health department to provide school nurse positions or other staffing	6 (0.6)	0 (0.0)
Partnership with healthcare system/hospital to provide school nurse positions or other staffing	15 (1.6)	0 (0.0)
Partnership with local agencies to provide nursing for specific student	151 (15.6)	16 (12.1)
Partnership with local agencies to provide general nursing care (NOT care for a specific student)	107 (11.1)	7 (5.3)
Other	60 (6.2)	10 (7.6)
None of these	176 (18.2)	30 (22.7)

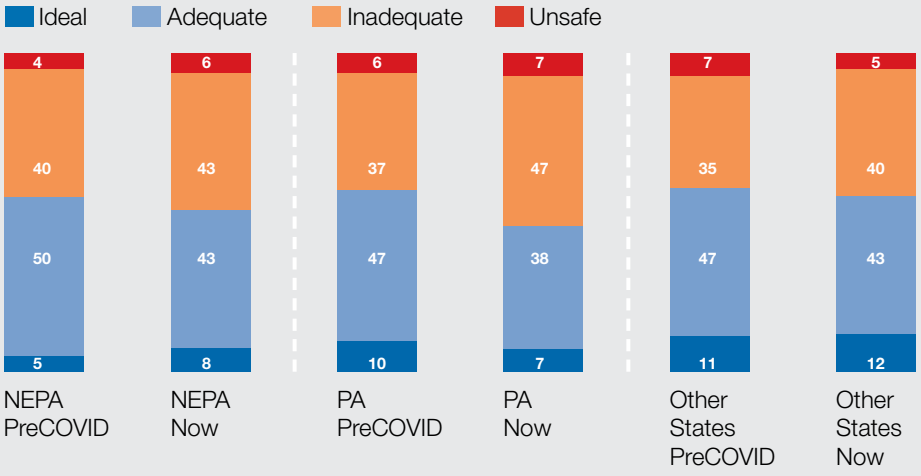
Note: Percentages may sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

School Nurse Staffing

Adequacy of Staffing

While, as mentioned above, Pennsylvania is one of only 12 states that have policies addressing recommended or required school nurse staffing ratios, the question as to whether this ratio (one CSN per 1,500 students) and school nurse staffing in general, is adequate to meet needs, is a different story. The survey for this study asked about "adequate" staffing before COVID and currently. Before COVID, a little less than half of participants felt there was adequate staffing. After COVID, more districts felt there was inadequate staffing, although not to the level of a statistical difference.

Percentage Adequate Staffing (Pre/Post COVID)



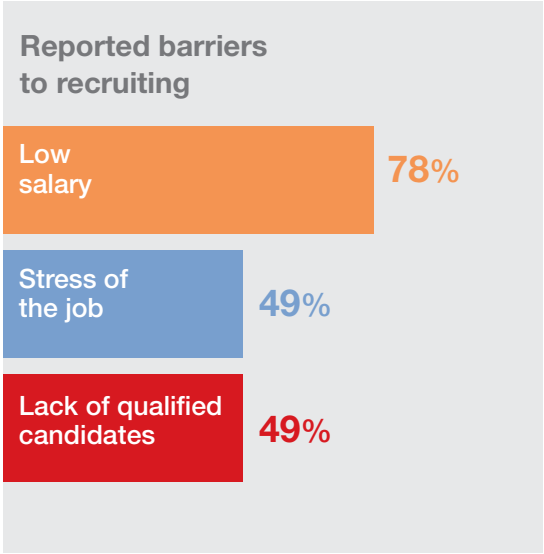
More work is needed to standardize what adequate staffing means in order to better identify the potential nursing shortage and develop a plan to address it. Much of the data collected by SHARRS could be used to help identify needs and appropriate staffing if the data were more accessible. For example, a significant limitation to this study's results is that data were only accessible at the county level, although each district enters it separately. In addition, the supplemental school health staff numbers were only available by region through SHARRS, so we could not include that data in the analysis.

School Nurse Staffing

School Nurse Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention are important factors to consider when looking at school nurse staffing. One-third of survey participants in NEPA reported them as challenges for their district, and they were also identified as issues by statewide and national respondents.

Reported barriers to recruiting school nurses include low salary (78%), stress of the job (49%), and lack of qualified candidates (49%). Several nurse managers indicated salaries are not competitive, especially for newer graduates who have student loans to pay back. One school nurse manager found that close to half of nurses given offers declined the job due to low salary.



Multiple responses allowed.

Another challenge frequently noted by school nurses is their contract and benefits with the school district. In Pennsylvania, the school teachers are unionized. Depending upon the structure of the union in each school district, school nurses are not always hired through the union on a teacher contract, which impacts their benefits and ability for promotion and professional development. In other instances, school nurses may be hired on the teacher union contract, but they are considered “entry-level” employees. This means that school nurses with years

School Nurse Staffing

of experience in nursing, but no experience working in a school district, are paid the same as newly graduated teachers just beginning their careers. This beginning-level pay scale for nurses with experience may lead some to not consider school nursing as an option.

Looking further upstream, focus groups were held with school nurse educators in the Certified School Nurse programs across the Commonwealth to learn how these programs view the current adequacy of the pipeline of school nurses. Interestingly, the educators have not suffered from a lack of students. Many programs consistently admit small numbers (3-15 students). The larger programs have even had an increase in emergency certifications due to turnover.

Beyond certification and recruitment, retention is the next step to consider in monitoring the school nurse workforce. Nursing is a stressful profession due to the need to make urgent life-altering decisions, working long hours, workload imbalances, and staffing shortages. In a pre-pandemic study, Jameson and Bowen (2020) found that approximately 30% of school nurses were moderately to severely burned out. In a nationwide 2022 survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), almost half (45%) of school nurses reported symptoms of at least one adverse mental health condition in the two weeks prior to completing the survey.

Even more concerning were the themes that arose from participants who shared regarding the consequence of burnout. Some spoke about feeling tired or exhausted all the time, while others indicated the stress and anxiety were impacting their home/family life to the point some retired early, are contemplating retirement, or are looking for a new job.

School Nurse Staffing

Substitutes

One final piece of the school nurse staffing puzzle is access to substitutes. The survey indicated that 89% of school nurses in NEPA (90% in Pennsylvania) stated they did not have adequate school nurse substitutes. Several districts indicated they were required to use a staffing agency to find substitutes, who were often not oriented in school nursing and not reliable. These substitutes could cover administering some medications and medical procedures, but were not trained in other tasks such as screenings and care coordination. A school setting and hospital/clinical setting are very different. In hospitals there are more resources, such as other nurses and medical providers and additional equipment to monitor situations. In schools, the nurse often works alone, relying on their assessment skills, with minimal technological monitoring. Substitute nurses have expressed to school nurses in Pennsylvania they do not feel like they give safe care because they do not have the proper training and are not familiar with the setting. School nurses also spoke to challenges of substitutes not having access to the electronic health records (EHRs) until later in the day when the informational technologists can come set up their account. School electronic records are also very different from hospital EHRs, which may make them difficult to navigate.

When survey participants were asked to describe the biggest barriers, overwhelmingly the response was low pay. Participants indicated the pay rate for substitute nurses was less than what RNs would make working in a hospital or at an agency.

The reported consequences for not having adequate school nurse substitutes varies. Often (53%) school staff are pulled from other buildings to cover a nurse who is out when a substitute cannot be found. In nearly one-fifth (19%) of the cases, nothing happens, and a school is left without coverage. Many school nurses indicate they just do not take days off, even when they aren't feeling well, because they know it would leave their school without a nurse.

School Nurse Staffing

Staffing Innovations

In addition to examining the current state of school nurse staffing, another goal of this study was to identify innovative solutions and models being used to address the current challenges in this area. Although there is a significant lack of data and research across school health, below are some ideas that were identified as having potential.

School Nurses Employed External to the School District

In some places across the country, school nurses are not employed directly by school districts. In these cases, they are most commonly employees of either a healthcare system or public health department. Both models were identified as having advantages and disadvantages. Advantages were related to access to increased resources from the employers. In the case of healthcare systems, there is access to the expertise of other medical professional colleagues, relevant professional development opportunities, a built-in pool of substitute nurses, and robust EHR systems (Becker & Maughan, 2017). For health department employed school nurses, there are greater resources in terms of health promotion, prevention, data, and immunizations (Becker & Maughan, 2017). Challenges that sometimes occur with these models include the potential for school nurses to be seen as "outsiders" either by the school or at their place of employment. They may, therefore, need to be more intentional about gaining access and trust. The employer can also influence the focus of the school nurses; for example, an observation of school nurses employed by healthcare systems is that they focus more on chronic conditions and acute issues of individual students, and not as much on the school nurses' role in health promotion and population-based care (Becker & Maughan, 2017). Local laws, policies, and culture are contributing factors to the success of both these models. It should be noted that even if school nurses are employed through other agencies, sometimes funding is pooled with education dollars and sometimes it is not.

School Nurse Staffing

Another potential staffing model innovation that was found during the course of this study is employing school nurses as an extension of a school-based health center (SBHC). Many schools across the country, including Pennsylvania, have SBHCs and school nurses. However, the common model is for the two to have two different employers. School nurses are most often employed through education. SBHCs are often funded through healthcare systems or community organizations. Many SBHCs are also Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), which is a reimbursement designation that allows them to be reimbursed at higher rates from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) because FQHCs provide primary care and are seen as a safety-net provider in areas of greatest need (Healthcare.gov, n.d.). The SBHCs and school nurses sometimes work well together as a team, and sometimes work in silos. If the two were employed by the same employer, there may be increased communication and a more coordinated delivery model.

Increasing Benefits

One study of nurses (not school nurses) indicated pay alone did not alleviate the challenge of obtaining adequate nurses (Shields, 2004). Since budgets are also stretched thin in education and beyond the control of some school nurse leaders, other strategies related to benefits may be a possible solution (unpublished discussion at Virginia Nurses Association meeting, Oct 2022). Such options may include job sharing, telehealth (working from home), tuition reimbursement, and professional development opportunities. Several school districts in Pennsylvania offer tuition reimbursement per their union contract.

In Phoenixville Area School District in Pennsylvania, they have begun working to promote their own school nurses by offering to pay for supplemental nurses to obtain their certification and working with education programs to allow practicum hours to be completed in their district. The

School Nurse Staffing

idea has been well received. However, the timing of openings has not always worked in favor of the district and the nurses may leave to neighboring districts who have openings for a CSN. In rural areas, loan forgiveness may be an option. Presently, a loan forgiveness program exists for individuals working in "eligible facilities" in areas experiencing a nursing shortage (designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area). There may be potential in this program if eligibility guidelines could be expanded to include school nursing (Benefits.gov, 2023).

Workload Analysis

Other support professionals in school districts are also currently experiencing shortages, such as speech-language specialists, school psychologists, bus drivers, and even substitute teachers (Schneider, 2022). One solution tried by school-based speech-language pathologists that may translate well to school nurses was to develop a model for workload analysis to establish need and improve retainment (Woltmann & Camron, 2009). The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, in conjunction with researchers, identified four key factors of speech-language pathologist workload: direct services to youth; indirect services to support individualized education plans; indirect services to support student placement; and compliance with federal, state, and local mandates. Several districts used this analysis and created a model of a 3:1 ratio, meaning they ensure their staff are able to spend one week on indirect services for every three weeks of direct services provided. Participating employees reported increased job satisfaction.

New School Nurse Residency Programs

New nurse residency programs have proven to be successful for retention in healthcare systems, and some school districts have tried replicating this model (Cadmus & Roberts, 2022). Nurse residency programs are longer orientation and guided mentoring programs designed to support new graduate nurses as they transition to competent professionals. In Arizona, COVID-19 funding was used to

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create a program to recruit and retain 60 newly licensed school nurses. This transition program includes advanced training and mentorship to support the school nurses to also receive their national certification in school nursing (Arizona Foundation for the Future of Nursing, n.d.). This program is still in progress, with no data yet available as to its success.

Hiring "Float" Nurses

Float or per diem school nurses have been successfully utilized for assistance with screenings, field trips, and as substitutes. This works well in larger districts that have the budget to hire extra coverage. Smaller districts wondered if they could utilize shared float nurses through their Intermediate Unit (IU) for a similar model. Some IUs already provide occupational and physical therapists in this way, so it seems feasible.

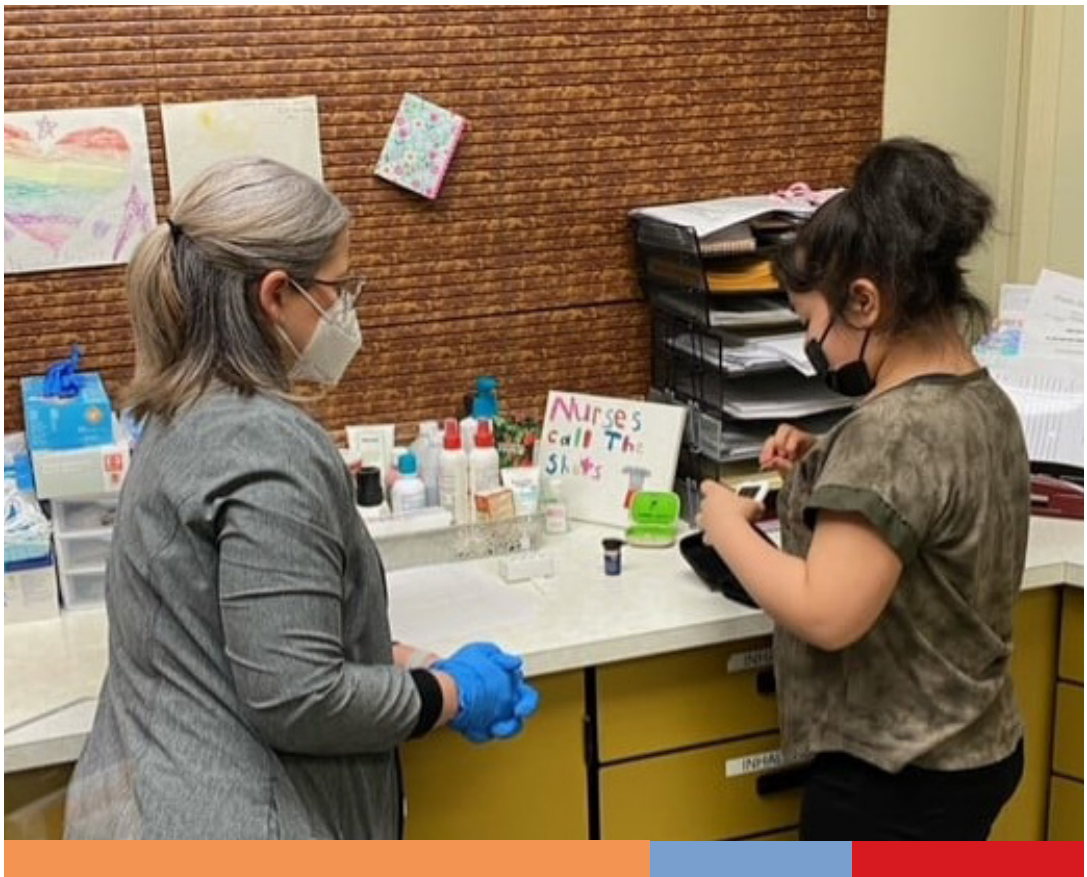
Maximize Use of Retired School Nurses

Retired school nurses know the system and appreciate the flexibility of being a substitute. Districts throughout the country spoke to having a nurse who retired continue working as a substitute. It should be noted that several school nurses in Pennsylvania indicated this was not allowed. Further investigation revealed that due to union rules, once a person is retired from the district, they can only work a certain number of hours or be in jeopardy of losing benefits. This option warrants further investigation and awareness to ensure that the knowledge and skills of retired school nurses can benefit students as much as possible. It should be noted that the state of Virginia has similar stipulations regarding retired employees. Due to the current shortage of teachers and specialized support staff, in 2023 the Virginia State Legislature passed House Bill 1630, which eased some of the requirements around retirement benefits. A similar initiative could be done in Pennsylvania.

School Nurse Staffing

Substitute Orientation

Several districts highlighted the importance of creating an orientation and training for substitute school nurses (Galemore, 2011; Park, 2020; Vollinger et al, 2011). Districts found that often substitutes did not return because school nursing is so different from other types of nursing (Park, 2020). Providing training and allowing them to get to know the other nurses and schools helped substitutes feel comfortable and be more willing to substitute. Having an orientation may also address some of the barriers cited by nurses wanting to be substitutes, such as cumbersome paperwork, fingerprinting, and long timelines for hire. Several districts in Pennsylvania have been able to provide a short orientation and have the nurses shadow school nurses in the district. Parkway School District in Missouri developed and implemented a more extensive orientation and training that has proved helpful in retaining substitutes (Park, 2020). Other districts have developed manuals that substitutes can use as references while they are working.



School Nurse Funding

The second half of this study focused on detailing the current sources of funding for school nursing, as well as potential innovations and alternative models that could be tested to increase capacity.

Current Funding Sources

Currently, there is no standard funding model for school nurses in NEPA, Pennsylvania, or other states. It is left to the local community and district to decide. District funds and Medicaid reimbursement are common mechanisms used.

Numerous attempts to speak to the Medicaid office for this report were unsuccessful (in fairness, they have been stretched thin with COVID-related impacts), so unfortunately, it is unclear exactly how many schools curently submit for Medicaid reimbursement in Pennsylvania. During the school nurse focus group, several of the nurses in Pennsylvania indicated that although they used to bill for Medicaid, due to the complexity, amount of paperwork required, and low reimbursement rates, they or their districts determined it was not a good use of their time. They also indicated that most of their EHR systems were not able to run the reports needed for Medicaid reimbursement, making the process even more cumbersome.

Beyond Medicaid and district funds, a unique funding source in Pennsylvania is the SHARRS. SHARRS is a data tracking system, as well as a reimbursement tool. The purpose of SHARRS is:

1) To provide a mechanism for school entities to document the provision of, and receive reimbursement for, health services.
2) To obtain information about Pennsylvania's school health programs, including student health status, dental and medical health service utilization, and selected nursing activity (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Division of School Health, 2016).

School Nurse Funding

Pennsylvania school districts are required to participate in SHARRS, yet only half the survey participants in Pennsylvania (45.7%) and NEPA (48.5%) indicated SHARRS funded school nursing, and very few knew what percentage of their funding was from SHARRS - some indicated all; others said the majority. The lack of clarity may be because many districts pool SHARRS funding with the district's general fund.

It should be noted that the current SHARRS reimbursement rate appears to have not changed since 1991. We could not find any new documentation since then, and school nurses who have worked more than 20 years confirm that no changes in reimbursement have occurred. Inflation alone would indicate the rates from 1991 are not appropriate in 2023.

Sources of School Nurse Funding in Your District, Pennsylvania Only

	All PA n = 967 n (%)		NEPA n = 132 n (%)	
Pennsylvania Department of Health (SHARRS)	442	(45.7)	64	(48.5)
Local school district funds	360	(37.2)	48	(36.4)
Medical Access Billing	144	(14.9)	15	(11.4)
Other	23	(2.4)	1	(0.8)
I don't know	468	(48.4)	62	(47.0)

Multiple responses allowed.

From the data obtained, school nursing services in Pennsylvania are funded similarly to other school nursing services across the country, with the exception of the SHARRS funding, which is a unique contributor and major funder for many school districts. Nationally and in NEPA, it is a consistent struggle to fund school nursing services, especially to the level needed.

The majority (70%) of participants from other states indicated that school nurses were funded through local school district funds. Other sources of funding included state department of education (15.7%), Medicaid reimbursement (12.6%), and state or local health departments (2.2-2.4%). Close to one-fifth of participants did not know how their position was funded.

School Nurse Funding

These funding sources are consistent with data from NASN's workforce study (Willgerodt et al, 2018). Recently, federal funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other agencies has been passed down through states to address the pandemic, as well as mental health crises. Grants related to mental health have also supported school nurse funding. However, these are soft funding solutions, which end when the grant or program ends.

Funding Innovation

Although funding for adequate school nurses is a known challenge, minimal discussion exists related to innovative models, and little could be found in the literature on the subject. Due to the lack of diverse ideas and the urgent need for different funding models, we convened a six-member think tank group of health finance experts. Below is a mix of ideas discussed within the think tank, as well as a few models that were identified through the environmental scan and survey.

Taxes

Several locations have created specific taxes that are designated to help school health services. For example, in Seattle, Washington, the Family & Education Levy funds much of the school health services (school nurses and school-based health centers). The city manager works with the district to determine where and how the funds are spent.

Sara O'Toole, director of nursing and medical services in Pinellas County Schools (Florida), worked with her county commissioners and the local Department of Health to have a portion of property taxes specifically fund school nursing (personal communication, July 2022). Several years before approaching the county, she collected data in her districts and developed a plan that projected the cost needed for adequate school nurse coverage

School Nurse Funding

for each school. She then worked with a team and approached a county commissioner who they believed would help champion the cause. The earmarked tax was successfully passed due to the work of the team. A lesson learned was that the tax was based on current need at the time (approximately five years ago), and the funding has remained flat despite local property values and district salaries rising. No provision was included in the tax for this growth and so they would need to ask for a tax increase to continue funding the same nursing coverage.

Finally, in some states, such as Wyoming and North Dakota, mineral or oil funds are used to support county health. This idea was discussed with the Pennsylvania School Nurse focus group. It was noted that approximately 10 to 15 years ago in Monroe County, Pennsylvania, there was a suggestion of adding a daily fee to hotel rooms that could then be applied to the school tax. It was not initiated by the school district, but rather by a local representative. It never progressed to a vote due to opposition from the local vacation bureau (K. Verbel, personal communication, February 9, 2022).

Legislated Funding to Regions of the State

Several states help fund school nurses through a variety of legislative allocations. A sustainable example of this model is the School Nurse Corp in Washington state. The model began in 1999. The state is divided into nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs). Funding (overseen by the State Department of Education) goes

School Nurse Funding

to the ESDs to assist and provide the services that rural and small school districts cannot finance on their own. Each ESD has an administrator to assist with programing and data collection. The state funding supports regional administrators, local school nurses, and other resources needed. The program has been very successful. However, until last year, there had not been a raise in the funds allocated to support this program, even though the number and complexity of students has been rising steadily over the years. A similar organizational model exists in Oregon where 19 ESDs serve 197 public school districts in 36 counties. The ESDs receive money from general education funds, some of which are earmarked for the ESD component districts. The services offered—and the structure supporting those services—vary by ESD. Some ESDs fund and employ school nurses to work in one or more districts. Other districts are responsible for directly hiring their own school nursing services. The Pennsylvania IU structure is similar to the ESDs in Washington and Oregon, although not as well funded or consistent statewide.

Population Pooled Funding

Another possible funding source for school nurses is based on ideas of how Massachusetts developed the universal health program. Companies submitted funds that were combined with tax dollars into an uncompensated care pool (UCP) that covered the cost of hospital bills for those unable to pay (Knox, 2006). School nurse advocates wonder if a similar model of pooled funding from insurance companies or even businesses in the area could be used to help support school nurses who are on the frontline of prevention.

School Nurse Funding

Medicaid

As previously mentioned, Medicaid reimbursement is a current funding source for some schools, but others found the process of obtaining reimbursement too cumbersome for the amount of money received. However, there is currently potential for these challenges to be addressed. In August 2022, CMS released additional guidance related to school-based Medicaid services and indicated even more guidance would come soon that would streamline paperwork and simplify the process of obtaining reimbursement. This additional guidance is expected in summer 2023 (as of this report it has not been released). CMS also created a technical assistance center to help schools and has indicated $50 million will be given to states/districts to assist with school-based Medicaid billing (V. Wachino, speaker Healthy Schools Campaign Webinar, February 9, 2023). Much of this increased discussion centered around clarification of the Free Care Rule, which allowed schools to bill for additional services they previously could not bill for if the services were offered to all children. Now schools can bill for those services offered to children covered by Medicaid.

An additional thought concerning Medicaid is looking at whether billing administration could be consolidated through partnerships between districts. This is currently done in Texas, where some of the larger districts assist smaller, rural districts in submitting their Medicaid claims. In Pennsylvania, this could possibly be consolidated through IUs.

Conclusion

School nurses are on the front lines of meeting the health needs of children. Over the past several decades, their work has evolved significantly and goes far beyond bandaging playground scrapes. School nurses are key to helping students manage chronic diseases, connecting families to crucial resources, screening children for health concerns, and much more. In fact, for many students, the school nurse may be the only health provider they see regularly. Wang et al. (2014) established in a cost-benefit analysis that school nurses prevented an estimated $20 million in medical care costs, $28.1 million in parents' productivity loss, and $129.1 million in teachers' productivity loss. However, as is clear from this report, the staffing and funding for this crucial resource to both healthcare and education is firmly entrenched in outdated models. While this report can serve as a starting point, further innovation and research is sorely needed to ensure that the structural supports for school nurses catch up to the significant challenges and changes that the profession has experienced.

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School nurses from Northeastern Pennsylvania gathered for a professional development session in 2023.

The School Nurse Staffing and Funding in Northeastern Pennsylvania study was conducted by
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Pennsylvania School Counselor Staffing Report

Volume III

SY 2021-2022

A REVIEW OF PENNSYLVANIA'S
STUDENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELOR RATIOS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION

The mission of the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association is to expand the image and influence of professional school counselors, to promote professional and ethical practice, and to advocate for equity and access for all students.

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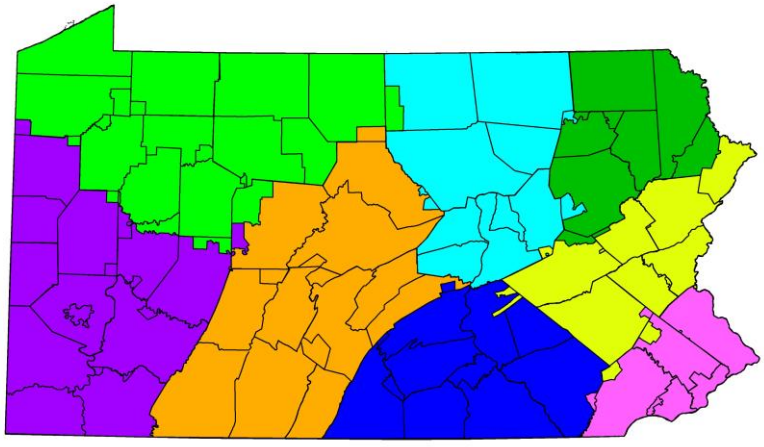

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What is This Report For?

This report is designed **to educate and empower school counselors** across Pennsylvania as they advocate for the investment in school counseling positions and programs in our K-12 education system.

This report is designed **to inform and spark interest with our legislative partners and elected officials** who set education policy, establish appropriations and funding, and who have the capacity to instill the value of school counselors and school counseling programs into law.

This report will serve as an **annual reference point** for the numbers and ratios of school counselors employed in Pennsylvania.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ARE AT A CRISIS POINT

The challenges today's generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. **And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating.**

-Dr. Vivek H. Murthy
Surgeon General of the United States
Protecting Youth Mental Health, The US Surgeon General's Advisory (2021)

The vast majority of K-12 students have suffered significant learning losses of half a year or greater. **Substantial numbers of students have continued falling further behind normal levels of learning for their age and grade.** Students with disabilities have suffered disproportionate academic impact.

-Center for Reinventing Public Education
The State of the American Student: A Guide to Pandemic Recovery and Reinvention (2022)

As we saw in the 10 years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, **mental health among students overall continues to worsen**, with more than 40% of high school students feeling so sad or hopeless that they could not engage in their regular activities for at least two weeks during the previous year—a possible indication of the experience of depressive symptoms. We also saw significant increases in the percentage of youth who seriously considered suicide, made a suicide plan, and attempted suicide.

-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2023)

Almost 70% of Pennsylvania students reported moderate or high levels of depression. One in four students report feeling like a failure. **One in five students report seriously considering suicide.**

-*Pennsylvania Youth Survey* (2021)

Every Task Force meeting included requests from multiple participants to **increase the number of both physical and mental health professionals in schools**. Task Force participants specifically requested additional nurses, social workers, psychologists, **school counselors**, and other support staff in schools to help meet students' needs.

PA School Safety Task Force Report (2018)
PA Office of Auditor General

School counselors are a critical part of Pennsylvania's vision to help all students translate their interests and aspirations into tangible college and career plans and choices.

However, **many school counselors are stretched thin, juggling several responsibilities and significant case loads, and are often isolated in their work**.

State Consolidated Plan, Every Student Succeeds Act (2019)
PA Department of Education

Understanding there is an acute need to improve students' mental health, and schools are one of the best places to provide support before mental health problems escalate, the Office of Attorney General has called for **increasing the number of mental health counselors** in schools every year since the Safe2Say Something program launched in 2019.

Special Report on Student Mental Health (2022)
PA Office of Attorney General

The Court heard extensive credible testimony from educational professionals and experts as to how other professional staff…such as guidance counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists, and other support staff…help students succeed. There was evidence that low-income students often require more support, **so an adequate number of counselors is needed to meet those needs.**

While it is true that there was testimony that several of the districts have some of these personnel, **there was also testimony that it was the bare minimum required by law**, of an **insufficient quantity to actually meet student needs**.

William Penn SD et al. v PA Department of Education (2023)
Judge Renee Cohn Jubelirer
PA Commonwealth Court

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION

CALL TO ACTION

School Counselors for All Students

Defined Scope of Practice

Reasonable
Student to School Counselor Ratios

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Level

A Certified School Counselor
for Every Building

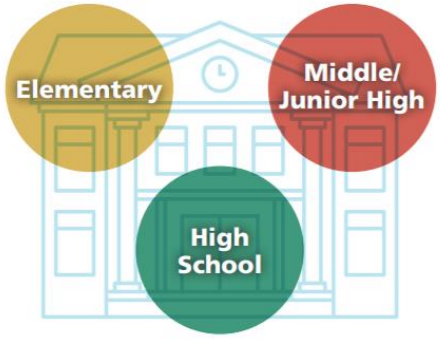
Who are School Counselors?

(The Role of the School Counselor, American School Counselor Association)

School counselors are certified educators who improve student success for all students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR QUALIFICATIONS

- **Hold, at minimum, a master's degree in school counseling**
- **Meet the state certification/licensure standards**
- **Fulfill continuing education requirements**
- **Uphold ASCA ethical and professional standards**



Also employed in district supervisory positions; and school counselor education positions

LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

School counselors work to maximize student success, promoting access and equity for all students. As vital members of the school leadership team, school counselors create a school culture of success for all.

- **School counselors help all students:**
  - apply academic achievement strategies
  - manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills
  - plan for postsecondary options (higher education, military, work force)
- **Appropriate duties include providing:**
  - individual student academic planning and goal setting
  - school counseling classroom lessons based on student success standards
  - short-term counseling to students
  - referrals for long-term support
  - collaboration with families/teachers/ administrators/ community for student success
  - advocacy for students at individual education plan meetings and other student-focused meetings
  - data analysis to identify student issues, needs and challenges
  - acting as a systems change agent to improve equity and access, achievement and opportunities for all students

Direct Services with Students

Direct services are in-person interactions between school counselors and students and include the following:

- Instruction
- Appraisal and Advisement
- Counseling

Indirect Services for Students

Indirect services are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors' interactions with others including:

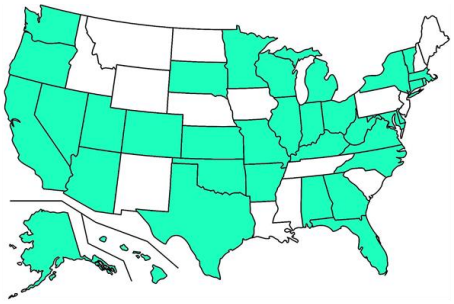
- Consultation
- Collaboration
- Referrals

School Counselors in American Schools

School counseling services in schools are commonplace across the United States.

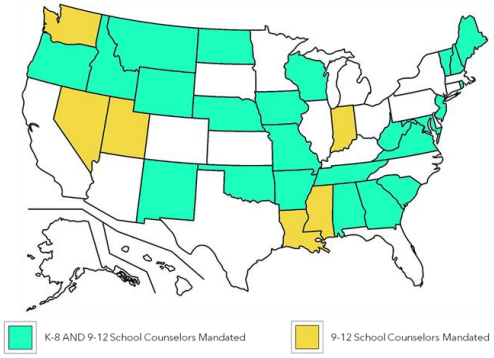
The two primary ways states incorporate school counseling services into schools are (1) requiring districts to develop comprehensive school counseling programs and (2) mandating school counselor positions in school buildings.

Pennsylvania is the ONLY state that does not require comprehensive school counseling programs or mandated school counseling positions in schools.



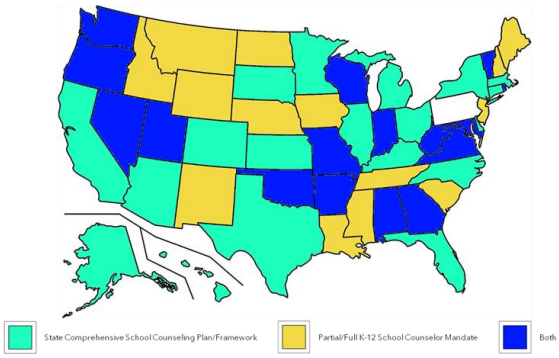
Comprehensive school counseling programs required in public school districts

35 states



School counselors required in public school districts

30 states



49 states

*American School Counselor Association (ASCA). *State Requirements and Programs.*

SCHOOL COUNSELING IN PENNSYLVANIA

CERTIFIED EDUCATORS

EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST (22 Pa. Code 49.1)

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR (CSPG #76)

EXISTING PLAN FRAMEWORK

K-12 STUDENT SERVICES PLAN (22 Pa. Code 12)

K-12 GUIDANCE PLAN (22 Pa. Code 339)

As described in the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Certification and Staffing Policies and Guidelines, school counselors are responsible for the development of a comprehensive school counseling program, and collaborate with others to meet student needs in three areas – academic development, career development, and personal-social development.

According to the PA Code, school counseling is considered a developmental "student service" that, along with other student services, should support students throughout their enrollment in school K-12. No definitions exist for school counselors or school counseling programs in the PA Code.

Vocational guidance is to be delivered to all students according to the PA Code, but the PA Code does not specify who is responsible for delivering this comprehensive, sequential program of guidance services.

The existing framework in Pennsylvania is too broad and vague to guarantee students are receiving school counseling services.

STUDENT SERVICES
HOW PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOLS RESPOND TO STUDENT NEEDS

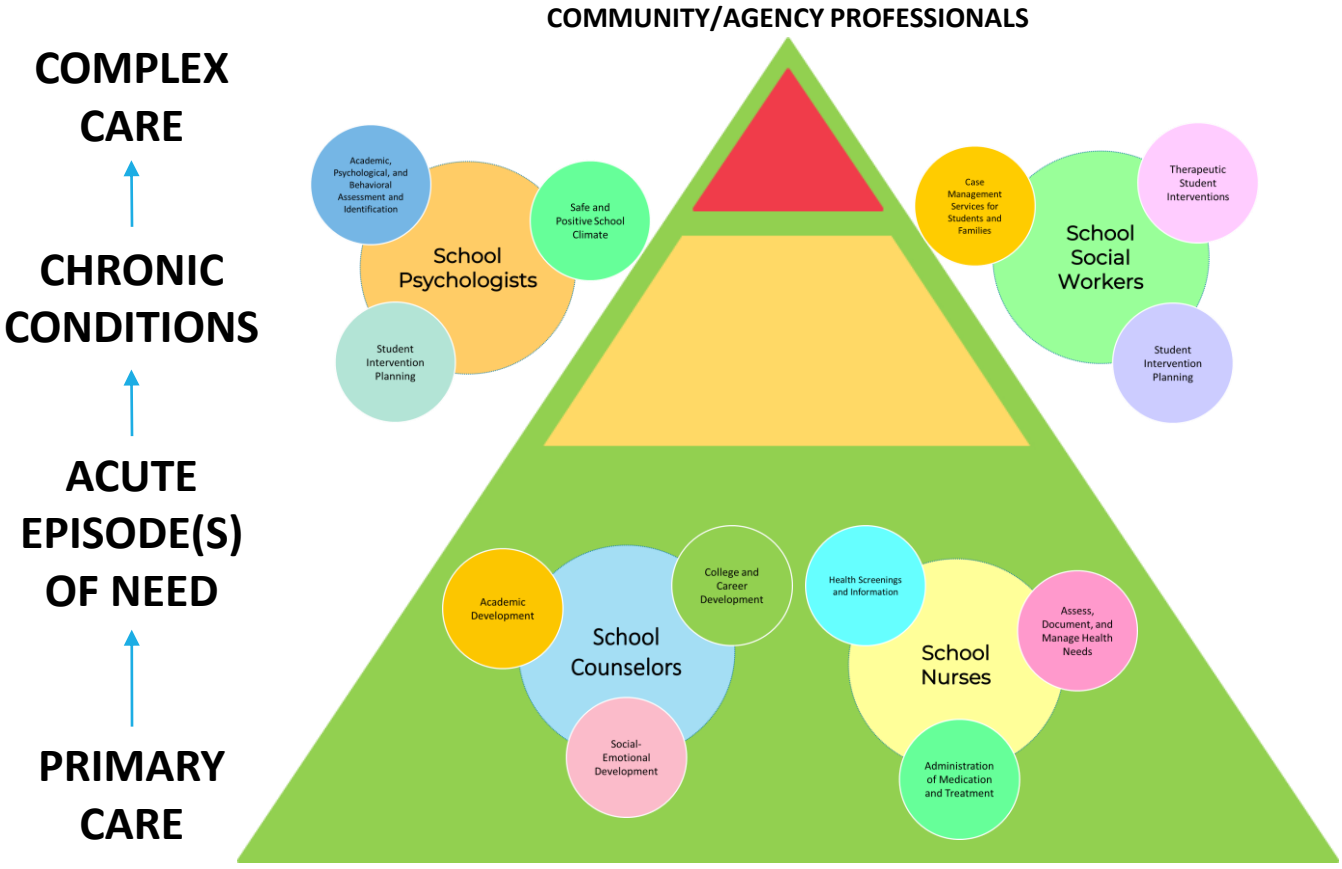
The most efficient way to deliver comprehensive mental health support to students is through school counseling services that operate in line with best practices, and with staffing that supports appropriate student to school counselor ratios.

Both in terms of the existing workforce and scope of practice, school counselors represent the largest group of student services professionals in Pennsylvania, and they work with **all** students on their caseload, not only students who are identified as needing support or intervention.

School counselors work together with other student services professionals to support the developmental needs of students. School counselors deliver proactive and preventative services to students to address their developmental needs, and they are also available for students when responsive or crisis needs arise (i.e. primary care). School counselors collaborate with/refer students and families to other student services professionals, such as school psychologists or school social workers, when the need for targeted or intensive interventions and programming (i.e. complex care) arise.

Student services professionals also partner with community and agency-based services for students when needs extend beyond what a school is able to provide.

While all student services professionals contribute to the health and wellness of students in our schools, understanding the unique expertise and scope of practice can help schools utilize these professionals as efficiently and effectively as possible.

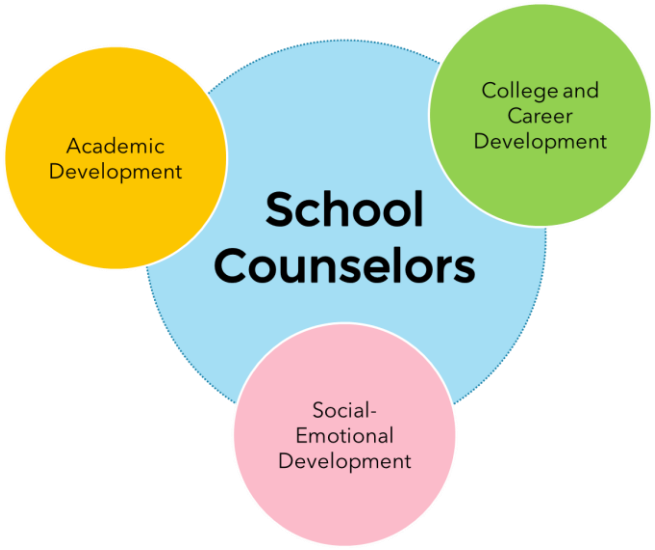


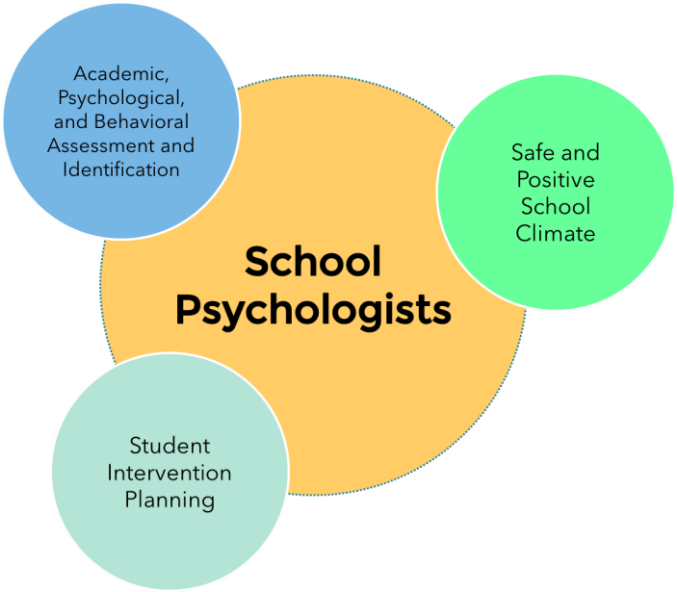
Comparing Student Services Professionals

Schools in Pennsylvania have historically utilized three different types of student services professionals to support student mental health and success. School counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers each function in similar and yet distinct roles dealing with student mental health, academic achievement, and human development. The differences are primarily in scope of reach – school counselors service all students, while school psychologists and school social workers service students identified as in need of or potentially in need of higher levels of intervention.

Deliver comprehensive school counseling services that address and support all students' developmental needs and growth.

- Standards-Aligned Classroom Instruction
- Individual Student Planning
- Responsive Services
    - Individual and Group Counseling
    - Crisis Response
- Referral Services



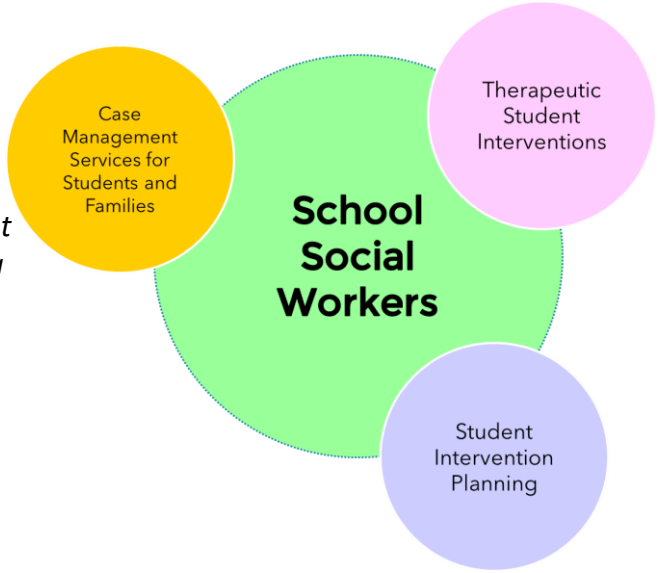


Evaluate and assess student concerns with individual academic achievement and behavioral health.

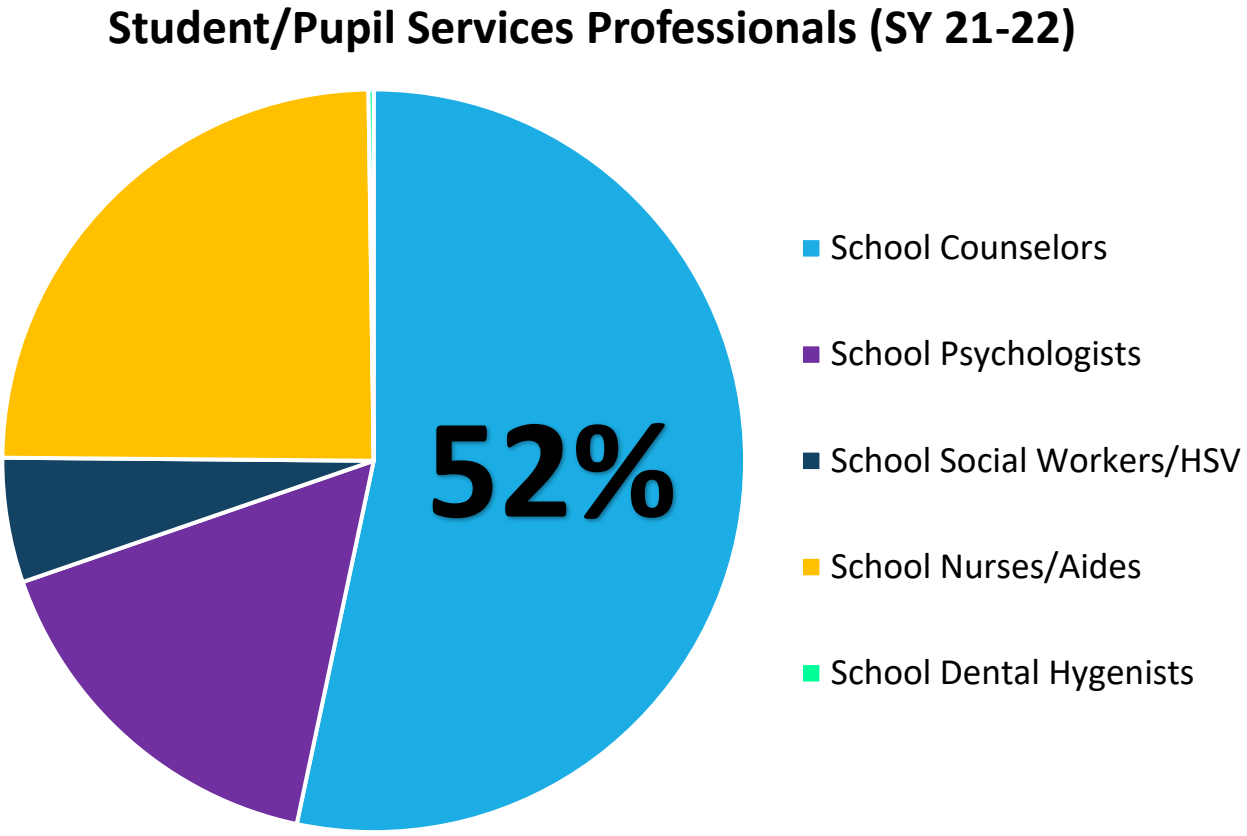
- Assessments and Identification
- Individualized Education Planning (IEPs)
- Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention
- School-Wide Positive Behavior Support

Support students and families in need of basic resources, direct interventions, and case management services, providing a bridge between the school and a student's home/family environment.

- Case Management
- Coordination of Care
- Direct Therapeutic Services and Interventions for Students Demonstrating High Levels of Need



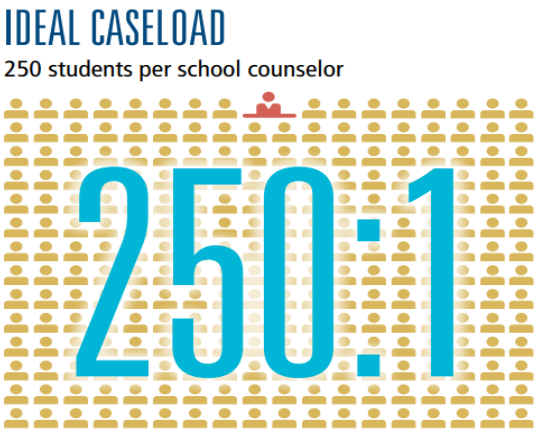
Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce



Totaling 52%,
school counselors are the **largest group of all Student/Pupil Services professionals** across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Why Student to School Counselor Ratios Matter

AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION



The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a student to school counselor ratio of 250:1

Research demonstrates that lower student-to-school-counselor ratios are associated with higher student achievement measures, better graduation rates, and lower disciplinary incidents (Lapan et al., 2012; Goodman-Scott et al., 2018; Parzych et al., 2019)

Nationally, school counselor ratios are significantly higher, with the most recent comparison estimating a national average ratio of 408:1 (ASCA, 2022)

ASCA reports that Pennsylvania's ratio for the 2021-2022 school year was 343:1 (ASCA, 2022)

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce

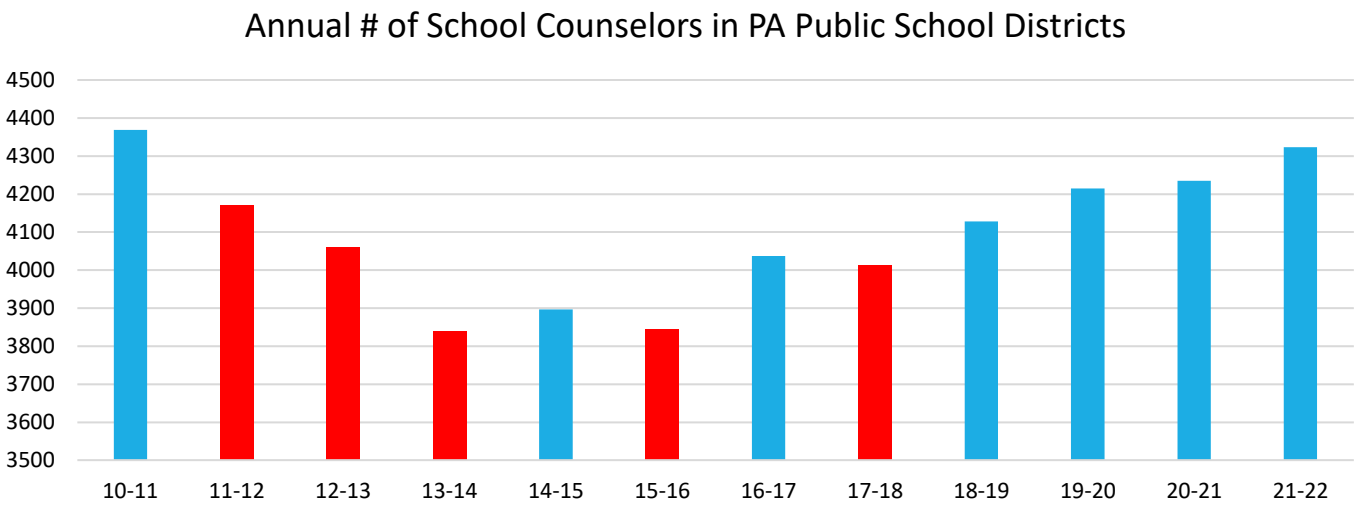
LEA Type / Description	# of School Counselors*		
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
School District	4225	4235	4323
Charter School	339	347	394
Intermediate Unit	153	151	151
Career and Technical Center	108	104	108
State Juvenile Correction Institution	4	4	4
Total	4829	4841	4980

Each year, the PA Department of Education releases the Professional Personnel ID Report listing out every public educator, and each assignment they had during the previous school year. Because each educator can have multiple assignments, the number of school counselors was determined by tabulating the listed Full-Time Equivalency (FTE) together for each individual educator.

In the majority of cases, each school counselor had a total assignment value of 1, though each individual school counselor may have been assigned to multiple buildings within an LEA. There were 95 school counselors that had less than 1 full position listed, and therefore it may appear, for example, that there are more school counselors practicing in public school districts than are actually in physical buildings.

*The numbers appearing throughout this report are focused on school counselor staffing in the 499 public “School Districts” throughout the Commonwealth.

Historic Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Workforce



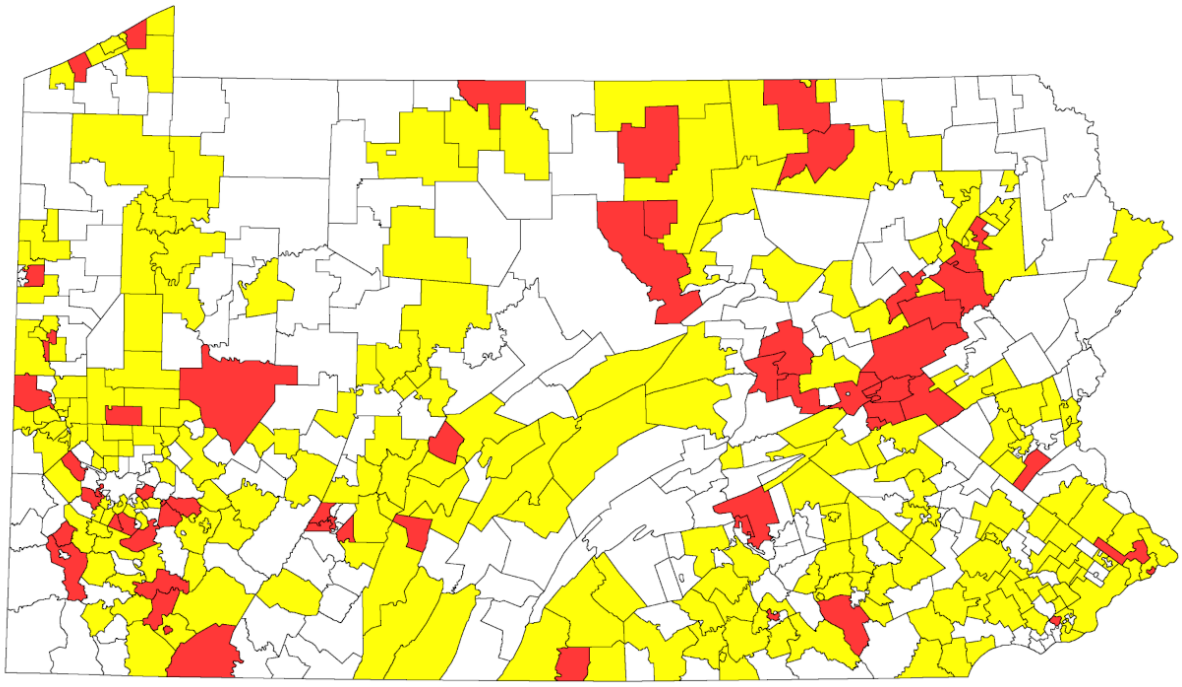
11 Year School Counselor Staffing Review	# of School Counselors*		
	Elementary	*Secondary*	*Total*
SY 2010-2011	1,660	2,709	4,369
SY 2021-2022	1,793	2,530	4,323
Change in School Counselor Staffing	**+133**	**-179**	**-46**

There are fewer school counselors working in Pennsylvania Public School Districts today than there were in 2010.

*Annual PDE Professional Personnel Individual Staffing Reports (2010-2022)

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

A Statewide Snapshot



1:353

Median Student to School Counselor Ratio
in PA Public School District Buildings

50% of PA Public School Districts
have average building ratios of **1:350 or higher**

1 in 10 PA Public School Districts
have average building ratios of **1:500 or higher**

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Ratios by Building

School Counselor Ratios	# of Public School Buildings
No School Counselor Listed	**192**
550 or Higher	**334**
450 to 550	**340**
350 to 450	**593**
250 to 350	**758**
250 or Less	**461**
Total	**2,677**

Less than 20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings meet the nationally recommended 250 students to 1 school counselor ratio.

20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings have ratios of 550 students to 1 school counselor, or have no school counselor at all.

Elementary school buildings (various grade configurations including K-6) are most likely to have higher student to school counselor ratios than any other building type.

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Ratios by Grade Configuration

School Counselor Ratios	# of Public School Buildings by Grade Configuration						
	Total	**K-6**	**K-8**	**6-8**	**9-12**	**5-12**	**K-12**
No School Counselor Listed	192	135	14	15	15	6	6
550 or Higher	334	262	30	28	12	1	1
450 to 550	340	269	17	26	21	7	0
350 to 450	593	375	32	105	49	32	0
250 to 350	758	288	34	180	187	67	2
250 or Less	461	136	26	99	152	46	2
Total	2,677	1,465	153	453	436	159	11

Less than 20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings meet the nationally recommended 250 students to 1 school counselor ratio.

20% of Pennsylvania public school buildings have ratios of 550 students to 1 school counselor, or have no school counselor at all.

Elementary school buildings (various grade configurations including K-6) are most likely to have higher student to school counselor ratios than any other building type.

Overview of Pennsylvania School Counselor Ratios by Grade Configuration

Building Level Configuration	# of Buildings	Average Ratio	Median Ratio	No SC Listed
Elementary (K-6)	1,464	1 : 444	1 : 412	135
Middle (6-8)	453	1 : 337	1 : 312	15
High (9-12)	436	1 : 297	1 : 271	15
Total	2,353	-	-	165

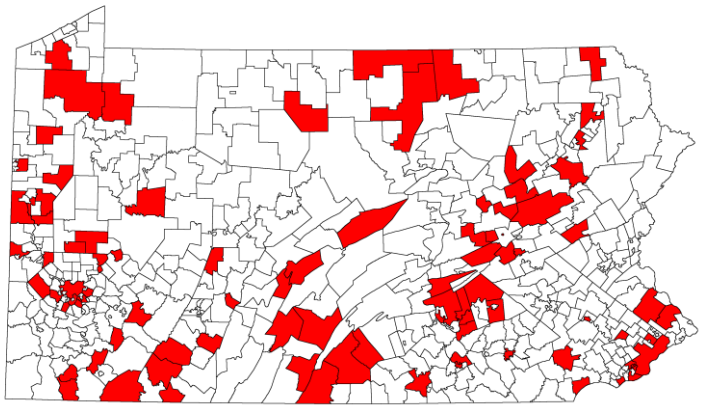
88% of Pennsylvania's school buildings are configured by standard grade level (Elementary, Middle, High). Note that elementary school buildings may be primary schools (K-2), intermediate schools (3-5), elementary schools (K-5 or K-6), or another variation of the K-6 grade band.

Building Level Configuration	# of Buildings	Average Ratio	Median Ratio	No SC Listed
ELE + MS (K-8)	153	1 : 479	1 : 362	14
MS + HS (5-12, 6-12, 7-12)	160	1 : 299	1 : 288	6
ELE + MS +HS (K-12)*	11	-	-	11
Total	324	-	-	31

12% of Pennsylvania's school buildings are configured with multiple levels within one building (for example, Junior/Senior High Schools, "Elementary" and "Secondary"). School counselors working in these buildings may then be responsible for students ranging from 5 years old up to 18 years old, which increases demand on their ability to address all levels of student development efficiently.

*Most of these K-12 "buildings" are special programs within school districts, such as cyber academies

School Counselor Ratios: A Snapshot of Inequity



Districts with Buildings
with No School Counselors Assigned

School Counselor Ratios	# of Public School Buildings	
	Total	Title I
No School Counselor Listed	**192**	**76%**
550 or Higher	**334**	**74%**
450 to 550	**340**	**68%**
350 to 450	**593**	**60%**
250 to 350	**758**	**45%**
250 or Less	**461**	**46%**

School buildings serving communities with higher levels of need have fewer school counselors available for those students.

School Counselor Ratios: A Snapshot of Inequity

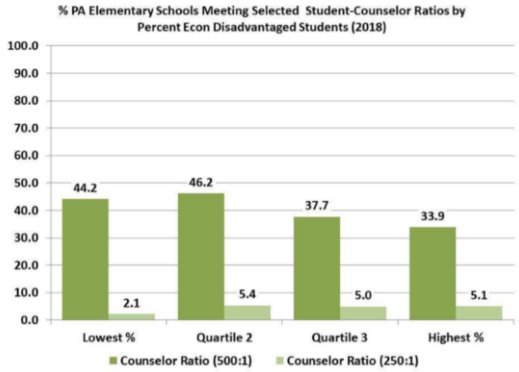
Total Public-School Buildings	No School Counselors Assigned	At Least a Fraction of a School Counselor Assigned	All Buildings Combined
Number of Buildings	192	2,485	2,677
% Title I	76%	56%	57%
Average % of Student Enrollment (not White)	45%	32%	33%
Average % of Student Enrollment Economically Disadvantaged	56%	45%	46%

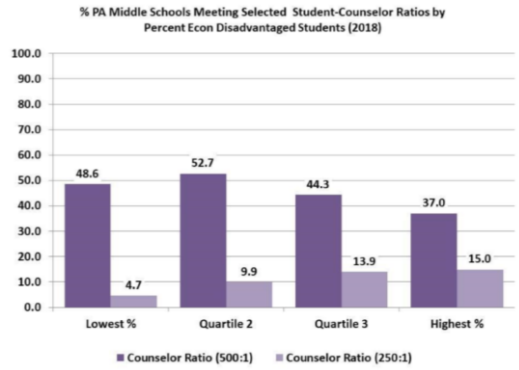
In comparison to schools with even a fraction of a school counselor assigned…

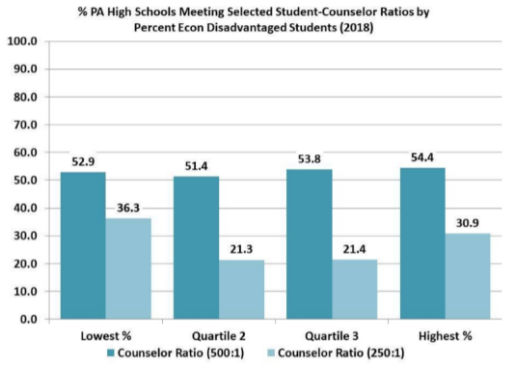
…school buildings without any school counselors assigned are:

- more likely to be a Title I school
- serve students from minority backgrounds
- serve students who come from economically disadvantaged homes

School Counselor Ratios: A Snapshot of Inequity







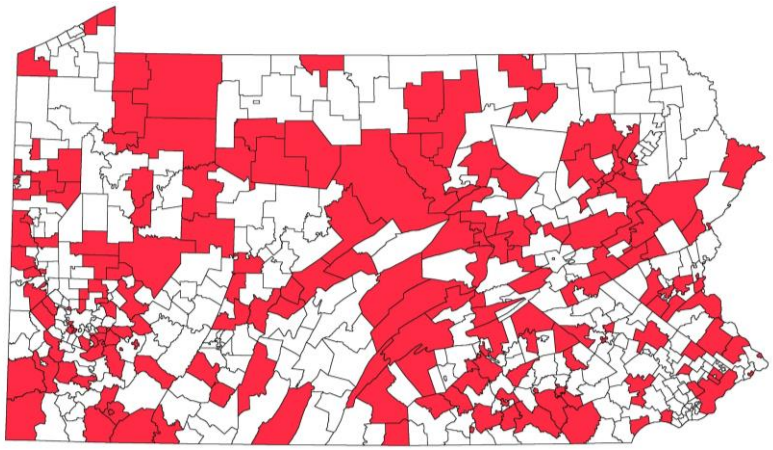
Research from Dr. Edward Fuller, Associate Professor and the Director for the Penn State Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis (PCEEPA) shows that schools serving student populations with higher levels of poverty are likely to have higher student to school counselor ratios.

Total Public-School Buildings	Title I Schools	Non-Title I Schools	All Buildings Combined
Number of Buildings	1,537	1,140	2,677
Average Ratio	1 : 422	1 : 356	1 : 393
Median Ratio	1 : 386	1 : 313	1 : 353
Average % of Student Enrollment Non-White	42%	21%	33%
Average % of Student Enrollment English Language Learner	5.6%	1.9%	4.1%

School counselors in Title I school buildings have significantly higher caseloads than school counselors in non-Title I school buildings, and these caseloads involve a higher proportion of students from diverse backgrounds.

Our most vulnerable students are the most likely students to not have access to school counselors.

School Counselors and Split Building Assignments



45%

225 school districts (45%) have buildings served by school counselors who are assigned to multiple buildings, impacting over a **quarter of a million students**, mostly **elementary school children**.

In practice, this means a school counselor might be assigned to two elementary schools, and only be physically present in each two or three days a week. This puts increased demand on the school counselor to be able to establish relationships not only with multiple groups of students, but multiple sets of staff, administration, parents, and communities.

In some cases, a school counselor may be called from one building to go to another in the event of a crisis, or a crisis may be handled by another school employee who may not have the same qualifications and training as a school counselor. The analogy of a fire sprinkler system demonstrates the risk in this – you want the sprinklers to be available and working every day, not just on days when there is a fire!

School Counselor Positions Needed for 250:1 Recommended Ratio

	19-20	20-21	21-22
School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	**6,229**	**6,028**	**6,029**
School Counselors Assigned to Buildings	**4,195**	**4,207**	**4,296**
Total School Counselors Needed	**2,034**	**1,821**	**1,732**

Pennsylvania students
only have 70% of the school counselor positions needed
to meet staffing recommendations.

56%
of public school buildings need at least 0.5+ additional SC positions to achieve ASCA recommended ratio.

The majority of these buildings are elementary schools, which serve our youngest students.

Building Need Categories	# of Additional SC Needed
Buildings Needing at Least 0.5 – 0.99 Additional SC	**759**
Buildings Needing at Least 1.0-1.99 Additional SC	**607**
Buildings Needing at Least 2.0-2.99 Additional SC	**110**
Buildings Needing at Least 3.0+ Additional SC	**26**
Total Buildings	**1,502**

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

Recommended Staffing Price Point

$130 MILLION

Number of School Buildings	**2,677**
Number of Students	**1,507,186**
School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	**6,029**
School Counselors Assigned to Buildings (SY 20-21)	**4,296**
Total School Counselors Needed	**1,732**
Median PA School Counselor Salary (SY 20-21)	**$74,950**

It would take approximately **$130 million** to hire the total school counseling positions needed in PA, which is **less than 1% of the total state appropriations for education** for the 21-22 school year.

This investment would impact each district differently based on their specific staffing needs and salary schedules as determined by local CBAs.

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

Recommended Staffing Price Point

$300

Number of School Buildings (SD LEA)	**2,677**
Number of Students (SD LEA)	**1,507,186**
Total School Counselors Needed for 250:1 Ratio	**6,029**
Median PA School Counselor Salary (SY 21-22)	**$74,950**
Total Annual Investment of Ideal School Counselor Staffing	**$452 million**
Total Investment Per Student	**$300**

If Pennsylvania committed to funding the complete school counselor staffing needs for an ideal student to school counselor ratio of 250 to 1, **it would be a $300 investment per child per year.**

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

Recommended Staffing Price Point

$86 MORE

	CURRENT	IDEAL
Number of School Buildings (SD LEA)	**2,677**	**2,677**
Number of Students (SD LEA)	**1,507,186**	**1,507,186**
Total School Counselors	**4,296**	**6,029**
Median PA School Counselor Salary (SY 21-22)	**$74,950**	**$74,950**
Total Annual Investment School Counselor Staffing	**$322 million**	**$452 million**
Total Investment Per Student	**$214**	**$300**

If Pennsylvania committed to funding the complete school counselor staffing needs for an ideal student to school counselor ratio of 250 to 1, **it would require $86 more per child per year.**

Defined Use of School Counselor Time

The ASCA National Model, which outlines best practices for school counselors and school counseling programs, recommends that **80% of a school counselor's time be spent in direct services to students**.

While school counselors are willing team players in the overall functioning of a school system, these non-school counseling duties interrupt and detract from the professional service that they provide to students and families.

Pennsylvania does **not** currently have a defined scope of practice for school counselors. Unlike classroom teachers, who are hired to perform defined classroom duties, school counselors are often used as utility players in a school building – covering classes when teachers are absent and no subs are available, coordinating standardized testing, filling in on duty rotations, or serving as data and records clerks. They sometimes function as pseudo-administrators, tracking student attendance and administering discipline.

Providing a scope of practice would **help school counselors advocate for appropriate roles and responsibilities in their buildings** so that students and families get the services school counselors are uniquely qualified to provide.

Defined Use of School Counselor Time

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

The PA School Safety Task Force (2018) identified several key areas that require a multidisciplinary approach to prevention, intervention, and response – social isolation and bullying, comprehensive social and emotional education throughout a student's K-12 education, and insufficient staffing levels for both physical and mental health services.

School counselors are trained to **address student social and emotional development, as well as mental health assessment and response**.

SCHOOL SAFETY TASK FORCE REPORT

Top 5 PA Safe2Say Something Report Types (2019)
Bullying/Cyber Bullying
Cutting/Self-Harm
Suicide/Suicidal Ideation
Depression/Anxiety
Drug Use

Safe2Say Something is an anonymous reporting service for students to report unsafe or concerning activities in schools, implemented in 2019 by the PA Attorney General's Office.

Students have primarily used this service to report concerns about their mental health.

FUTURE READY PA INDEX

"School counselors are a critical part of Pennsylvania's vision to help all students translate their interests and aspirations into tangible college and career plans and choices.

However, **many school counselors are stretched thin, juggling several responsibilities and significant case loads, and are often isolated in their work**."

-Pennsylvania State Consolidated Plan, Every Student Succeeds Act, 2019 (p.96)

STUDENT CAREER READINESS

School counselors are also a primary vehicle for **college and career advisement and planning**.

As these domains of student learning are now a part of the Future Ready PA Index, which is a public dashboard of school quality and performance, the need for school counselors to be able to focus their work has never been greater.

The School Counseling Services Act

HB 662

Over the last several years, Pennsylvania students have faced perhaps the greatest disruption ever to impact our school systems and communities. COVID-19 not only closed our school buildings in the spring of 2020, but impacted how students received instruction, how and when they were able to see their friends, the employment of their families and neighbors, and the safety and stability of what school is supposed to be as they grow and develop.

While many of our students have demonstrated resilience and perseverance through these unprecedented challenges, many others are struggling to cope with the increased strain on their mental, social, and emotional health.

- Throughout the pandemic, mental health problems have accounted for a growing proportion of children's visits to hospital emergency rooms throughout the pandemic (CDC, 2020)
- Mental and behavioral health concerns have been and continue to be the top referral categories through Pennsylvania's anonymous student reporting app Safe2Say Something (PA Department of the Attorney General, 2019; 2020)
- The rates of teenage suicide have been on the rise for the past decade (CDC, 2020), and in the last administration of the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), depressive symptoms were reported by students as one of the main risk factors they face, along with low attachment to their communities, and a low commitment to their schools – all factors that have steadily increased across all grade levels since 2015 (PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 2019).

Across the United States, school counseling services are generally guaranteed to students through one of two state practices – requiring school districts to outline comprehensive school counseling programs, or requiring a certain number or student to school counselor ratio in school buildings. Some states do both of these things.

Pennsylvania is the only state in America that does neither of these things.

The School Counseling Services Act

HB 662

As the only state yet to act on school counseling services for our students, there is no better or more timely reform than guaranteeing all Pennsylvania students have access to clearly defined, comprehensive school counseling programs.

School counselors in Pennsylvania are often confronted with the reality that their role is not well understood by school leaders and the general population. They must not only provide services to students, but must simultaneously educate and advocate in their schools and communities about their roles and areas of expertise. This means that not all school counselors are able to work effectively and efficiently with their students, and the types of services provided can look vastly different from one school district to another all across Pennsylvania.

While school counselors have provided responsive services for students in crisis for many years, the need for proactive, preventative, and educational programming specific to mental health and social-emotional learning has been magnified by the disruptions and their aftermath brought to our schools by COVID-19.

The School Counseling Services Act will provide clarity for students and families as to the services they can expect to receive from their school counselors, to school districts who are seeking to support their students effectively through a global pandemic, and to taxpayers who can see their money fund efficient student support services that align with best practices, no matter their zip code or socioeconomic status.

School counselors dedicate their time to service delivery for students, which is defined and understood by students, parents, and other staff.

Every district has a written, comprehensive school counseling program, delivered by certified school counselors.

House Bill 662 was introduced in the PA House of Representatives in March 2023.

It was previously introduced as House Bill 1825 in 2021.

The School Counseling Services Act

HB 662 Introduction Memo

"Increasing Student Success with More School Counselor Support"

School counselors fill a tremendous role in students' lives, often wearing multiple "hats" as they work to ensure that students have the tools and resources to be successful in school and beyond. Despite the importance of the job they do, Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation that does not require standardized school counseling services in all schools.

Our legislation would create the School Counseling Services Act, which would require that schools develop a robust and comprehensive school counseling plan. The plan would ensure that academic, career planning, and social and emotional learning concerns are addressed, would include a multilevel school data review to determine student needs, and would align with guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

In addition to requiring a comprehensive school counseling plan, our bill would spell out the way in which counselors spend their time, requiring that they spend at least 80% of their working time engaged in direct and indirect services to students on days that students were in school. These services could involve academic advising, career planning, social and emotional skill building, intervening with students at risk of dropping out, orienting new and transferring students, and contributing to decision-making teams and programs that directly impact students and families. Administrative responsibilities could take up no more than 20% of their time.

Recognizing that the success of our students dependent upon the collective efforts of all school personnel, we hope that you will join us in strengthening school counseling services in the Commonwealth.

-Representatives Dan Miller and Mandy Steele (March 2023)

CALL TO ACTION SUMMARY

Define the Scope of Practice (80% Direct, 20% Indirect)

- Pass the School Counseling Services Act (HB 662)
- School counselors often serve as test administrators, serve in duty roles, and perform "utility player" roles as needed in their buildings, as opposed to delivering school counseling services and content through a guaranteed and viable program
- Student social, emotional, and mental health are a priority and school counselors are uniquely trained to address these domains

Reasonable Student to School Counselor Ratios

- 1 in 10 school districts have ratios of 1:500 or higher
- 50% of PA school districts have average ratios of 1:350 or higher
- For $300 per student each year, which is only $86 more than is currently being spent, every student in PA could have access to a school counselor

A Certified School Counselor for Every Level

- Of the 192 school buildings with no school counselor, ~80% of these are elementary schools, and 76% are Title I schools

A Certified School Counselor for Every Building

- 45% of PA school districts have buildings served by school counselors who are assigned to multiple buildings
- Over a quarter million students have a school counselor who is assigned to multiple buildings
- In most cases, these are elementary school children
- Title 1 school buildings and buildings serving minority populations are less likely to have a school counselor and if they do, the ratios are higher

Methodology Used to Determine PA SC Ratios

PDE PA Professional Personnel ID Report (2021-2022)

- Filtered by Elementary and Secondary School Counselor assignment description
- Filtered by Public School District
- # of School Counselors Assigned Per Building calculated by adding the full-time equivalency (FTE) of each school counselor assigned to each building ([FTE*0.01] *1)

Future Ready PA Data Files (2021-2022)

- Building Enrollment
- “Ideal” staffing calculated by dividing each building’s enrollment by 250, in line with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommended ratio
- District and Building demographic information
- Title I designation

Needed Difference calculated by subtracting each building’s summed FTE # of School Counselors Assigned from the “Ideal” staffing

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PA Department of Education, State Consolidated Plan, Every Student Succeeds Act (2019)

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PA Safe2Say Something Annual Report (2019)

Dr. Edward J. Fuller, Associate Professor of Education at Penn State University, Director of the Penn State Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis (PCEEPA), and Associate Director of Policy for the University Council for Educational Administration

For questions about the data laid out in this report,
please contact Adam Oldham at aoldham@paschoolcounselor.org

EXISTING PENNSYLVANIA FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES

Pennsylvania is the ONLY state that does not have either a state plan for comprehensive school counseling services or mandated school counseling positions in schools. Despite this, there are existing systems that broadly define school counseling professionals and some of the services they provide to students and schools. In the absence of explicit definition and scope of practice, the way Pennsylvania schools utilize certified school counselors can look quite different from one place to another, even within the same school district.

EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST (22 Pa. Code 49.1)

CERTIFICATION

Professional certified personnel whose primary responsibility is to render professional service other than classroom teaching, such as dental hygienist, home and school visitor, instructional technology specialist, social restoration specialist, nutrition service specialist, **elementary counselor, secondary counselor**, school nurse and school psychologist.

A. The educational specialist understands the central concepts, structures and delivery styles of the professional area in which the educational specialist practices and can foster learning experiences for all students.

B. The educational specialist understands how all children learn and develop, and can contribute to the provision of learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, career and personal development.

C. The educational specialist understands how students differ in their ability and approaches to learning and creates opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

D. The educational specialist understands and uses a variety of professional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills.

E. The educational specialist uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning and self-motivation.

F. The educational specialist uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques supported by appropriate technology to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in and out of the classroom.

G. The educational specialist plans professional services based upon knowledge of professional field, students, the community and curriculum goals.

H. The educational specialist understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner.

I. The educational specialist thinks systematically about practice, learns from experience, seeks the advice of others, draws upon educational research and scholarship and actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

J. The educational specialist contributes to school effectiveness by collaborating with other educators and parents, by using community resources, and by working as an advocate for change to improve opportunities for student learning.

CERTIFICATION AND STAFFING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

CERTIFICATION

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR (PK-12) (CSPG 76)

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, in accordance with 22 Pa. Code § 49.13(b)(10), developed the Certification and Staffing Policies and Guidelines (CSPG) to provide guidance involving compliance with state laws governing certification and staffing practices in school entities within the Commonwealth. The CSPGs also provide clarification to educators regarding (1) the issuance of professional certificates, (2) the grade level and content scope of certificate subject areas and (3) the appropriate certificate for staffing professional positions in public schools. In the CSPGs, you will find valuable information related to certificate eligibility as well as the proper staffing practices that will help achieve educational excellence in the schools of the Commonwealth.

An educator holding a valid Pennsylvania certificate for Elementary and Secondary School Counselor is responsible for **the development of a comprehensive school counseling program**.

The certified School Counselor collaborates with others **to meet student needs in three areas**:

ACADEMIC	CAREER-PLANNING	PERSONAL-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
• Interprets cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests • Participates in special education individualized education programs (IEP's) • Assists in the educational placement (transition) of departing students	• Works with career program planning, organization, implementation, administration, and evaluation • Coordinates student work-release programs in which students meet specific academic and work experience requirements	• Conducts classroom guidance activities • Provides individual and group counseling related to academic or personal social development including peer mediation and bullying • Provides intervention and prevention

STUDENT SERVICES PLAN (22 Pa. Code Chapter 12.41)

PLANNING

Each school entity shall prepare a **written plan for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated K-12 program of the student services** based on the needs of its students. Though the variety of student services offered will differ from school to school depending upon its size and the needs of its students, the following categories of services shall be provided by each school entity in planning its student services:

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

Address student developmental needs throughout their enrollment in school. Developmental services **include guidance counseling**, psychological services, health services, home and school visitor services and social work services that support students in addressing their academic, behavioral, health, personal and social development issues.

DIAGNOSTIC, INTERVENTION, AND REFERRAL SERVICES

Address students who are experiencing problems attaining educational achievement appropriate to their learning potential. Student services staff use diagnostic services to identify barriers that limit a student's success in school. Intervention services actively engage student services staff in activities planned to reduce or eliminate specific barriers to student success. Student services staff may arrange for referrals to other school-based or school-linked professionals or may refer parents and guardians to appropriate community-based services for assistance.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION SERVICES

Consultation services are used by student services staff, in partnership with parents or guardians, to obtain assistance to address barriers and issues that are outside the scope of the student services professional. Consultation and coordination services may be used to assist in the diagnosis, intervention or referral of students who face barriers to success. Coordination services connect school resources with other available resources to assist students in meeting their educational objectives.

STUDENT SERVICES MUST:

- Be an **integral part of the instructional program at all levels** of the school system.
- Provide information to students and parents or guardians about **educational opportunities** of the school's instructional program and how to access these opportunities.
- **Provide career information and assessments** so that students and parents or guardians might become aware of the world of work and of a variety of career options available to individual students.
- Provide **basic health services** outlined in Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P.S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) for students and information to parents or guardians about the health needs of their children.
- Persons delivering student services shall be **specifically licensed or certified** as required by statute or regulation.
- The Department of Education will **provide guidelines and technical assistance** to local education agencies in planning student services.

DEFINITIONS (22 Pa. Code 12.16)

Student services—Services designed by a school entity to support the instructional program and to help students attain their educational and career goals.

(i) Services **may include school guidance counseling**, health services (under Article XIV of the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § § 14-1401—14-1423) and 28 Pa. Code Chapter 23 (relating to school health)), psychological services, social work and home and school visitor services.

(ii) School entities **may supplement, but may not supplant**, these services through school-based, school-linked, or coordinated services provided by locally available social and human services agencies.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (22 Pa. Code 12.42)

The Commonwealth's student assistance program is designed to assist school personnel to identify issues, including alcohol, drugs and others, which pose a barrier to a student's learning and school success. Student assistance is not a treatment program; rather, it is a systematic process using effective and accountable professional techniques to mobilize school resources to remove the barriers to learning, and, where the problem is beyond the scope of the school, to assist the parent and the student with information so they may access services within the community. The student assistance team members do not diagnose, treat or refer for treatment; but they may refer for an assessment for treatment.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE (22 Pa. Code Chapter 339.31)

PLANNING

There shall be a written plan on file, approved by the local board of school directors, for the development and implementation of a **comprehensive, sequential program of guidance services** for kindergarten through 12th grade. The plan must include procedures to provide for guidance services to AVTSs.

1. Assistance to students in selecting vocational curricula that meet their needs and address their interests.

   School entity counseling services must ensure that counselors do not direct or urge any student to enroll in a particular career or program, or measure or predict a student's prospects for success in any career or program based upon the student's race, color, national origin, sex or disabilities. School entities cannot counsel students with disabilities toward more restrictive career objectives than students without disabilities and with similar abilities and interests.

2. Assistance for all vocational students in making educational career plans including high school academic and technical preparation and postsecondary education and training, and adjustments through the use of individual and group counseling and appropriate student assessment procedures.

3. Provision of occupational and educational information needed for realistic career planning in an organized, systematic fashion for students, parents and teachers.

4. Maintenance of cumulative records and the use, exchange and release of student information in accordance with § § 12.31 and 12.32 (relating to general requirements; and elements of the plan).

5. Adequate orientation procedures for vocationally oriented pupils.

6. Support of a placement service that is developmental and makes provisions for the transition from school to the world of work.

7. Formal and informal consultation with teachers, administrators and other school staff.

8. A school-initiated system of parental involvement.

9. Liaison activities with community agencies.

10. Assistance in the conduct of follow-up studies to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum.

School Counselors for All Students

Pennsylvania is the **only state in America** that does not presently require defined school counseling programs or school counselors in our schools. In the absence of explicit definition and scope of practice, the way Pennsylvania schools utilize certified school counselors can look quite different from one place to another, even within the same school district.

While there are almost 5,000 school counselors currently working in Pennsylvania, too many students, schools, and communities do not have reasonable access to a school counselor. While many schools need more school counselors, there are also schools who are not utilizing existing school counselors appropriately, resulting in less effective and efficient services.

To meet the needs of Pennsylvania's students, policymakers need to take action to guarantee our students get access to school counseling services that align with best practices, that school counselors can work with students appropriately in the scope of their expertise, and that enough school counselors work in our schools to support the needs of all students.

DEFINE THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE — SERVICES

PASS THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES ACT (HB 662)	CLEAR EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE
	DEFINED USE OF TIME
	MAXIMIZING EXISTING RESOURCES
	ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROGRAM SUPPORT

INCREASE STUDENT ACCESS TO SCHOOL COUNSELORS — STAFFING

REASONABLE STUDENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELOR RATIOS	CERTIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELORS AT EVERY LEVEL	CERTIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELORS AT EVERY BUILDING

WHICH EXPANDS EQUITY AND ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY AND SUPPORT

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION

PSEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMS (PSEA Resolution E-37)

The Association believes that comprehensive school counseling programs, designed and delivered by certified school counselors, contribute to the optimal development of all students, addressing their academic, career, and social/emotional needs throughout their K-12 educational experience.

The Association believes that school counselors should dedicate at least 80% of their time to direct student services in order for students to receive the most efficient and effective benefits from these services.

PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES (PSEA Resolution C-32)

The Association supports a comprehensive mandated program of pupil personnel services under the supervision and administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Education with ratios of not more than 1:250 for certified school counselors.

GET MORE SCHOOL COUNSELORS INTO OUR SCHOOLS (PSEA Legislative Priority)

There is no doubt that the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted students. Now more than ever before, students are struggling with anxiety and depression. And they need help to cope.

At the same time, public schools don't have enough school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other mental health professionals to meet our students' needs.

PSEA has made it a priority to find ways to pay these important professionals and attract more of them to public education so that our students get the services and supports they need.

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION

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A Chapter of the American Library Association

November 16, 2023

Good morning members of the Basic Education Funding Commission and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Christi Buker, and I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Library Association. Founded in 1901, we are a non-profit, charitable organization with a current membership of more than 1200 representing public libraries, academic and university libraries, school libraries, special libraries and the staff and trustees of these libraries.

I know that you already received testimony from Dr. Laura Ward a past president of the PA School Librarians Association. We agree that there is significant value and importance to having a certified school librarian in each school, and a well-resourced school library. We support and believe in the great work of school librarians. Since you've already heard about school libraries, my testimony today is focused on how Pennsylvania's public libraries already positively impact education and have the potential to be a larger part of the solution to the equitable and quality educational needs of our residents, particularly our youth.

In Pennsylvania, we have 467 state-aided public libraries with an additional 175 branches and 20 bookmobiles for a total of 662 library outlets. The Office of Commonwealth Libraries within the PA Department of Education collects data annually to verify a public library's eligibility to receive state aid. From the 2022 annual report data, there are almost 5,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in public libraries. Roughly 60% of these are part-time workers which means there are well over 8000 library workers in PA. Approximately 85% of our public libraries are IRS registered 501(c)(3) non-profit, charitable organizations. More than 100 of these libraries operate with less than $100,000 each year, and some as small as $30,000. While not ideal, our libraries operate very leanly. Yet, these lean public libraries are powerful in contributing to the literacy and education of all ages.

For the discussion of basic education, I'd like to highlight that libraries provide extensive focus on early learners from birth to kindergarten, after-school programs and resources for school-aged children, summer reading and learning programs that have multiple benefits, support for teachers and homeschoolers, and career development tools. While the Commonwealth is still working to provide broadband and technology resources across the state, public libraries provide internet access, computers and in many cases Wi-Fi hot spots to check out.

From birth to kindergarten, libraries provide a range of story times that show enthusiasm, joy of reading and exploring, group social interactions, and model practices for parents and caregivers to support these early learners. Activities and resources for early learners range from books, special audio books, computer resources and special software for preschoolers, games and small manipulatives that teach essential motor skills to prepare them for kindergarten. Libraries designated as Family Place Libraries (www.familyplacelibraries.org) also provide essential connection as community centers for developing not just the child, but the parent-child relationship and development and support of parenting skills through connections to community resources. Whether a child is able to attend a formal pre-school program or not, the library is a great place to encourage and equip early learners.

School age learners often find the library as an after-school destination. With caring, trained, and helpful staff, the library has materials and programs for a variety of interests. From STEM programs, learning coding, comic book clubs, or reading to a friendly canine, libraries offer so many ways to explore and learn. Many libraries provide access to online

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resources such as Tutor.com which provides online one on one tutoring, and options in other languages. Of course, libraries are also a frequent meeting place for local, in-person tutors and their students.

Summer reading and learning programs provide excitement and encouragement for engaging young brains and reducing the "summer slide" or loss of skills when they aren't in formal educational settings. While programs vary across the commonwealth, summer reading programs are a major activity at the library to support essential reading skills and education. These also provide no or low-cost activities in safe spaces. In 2022, more than 91,000 programs were offered for ages birth through 11, and another 14,000 were offered to ages 12 through 18. While some libraries are not able to offer programs due to a lack of funding or space, simply averaging the total number of programs across 662 library results would be an average of 158 programs over one year.

Secondary level students have access to more robust research and learning tools. Whether accessing the automotive repair source, or taking free online skill development and certification classes, libraries offer career exploration and development resources. PowerLibrary.org offers free eResource cards to all Pennsylvania residents and includes access to learning languages through Transparent Languages or Duolingo.

Perhaps the greatest benefits of public libraries are summarized in saying that they are welcoming places of voluntary inquiry and learning, for all ages, and open days, nights, and weekends. Families with members of all ages, and regardless of resource and educational levels, can use a public library.

The Basic Education Funding Commission has a difficult task to find better ways to fund and distribute educational resources. Not all public libraries in Pennsylvania are able to provide some of these K-12 educational programs and resources due to a lack of funding. One recommendation we would like to offer is that public libraries, with expanded funding for staff, be utilized through their existing infrastructure, programs and activities to support and deepen the education of our young people.

Yes, public libraries already positively contribute to education and literacy in Pennsylvania, and if properly funded and leveraged, can do more.

To quote our PA Forward® initiative tagline from 2011, "Literacy is POWER, Libraries provide the fuel, for you, for your community, for Pennsylvania."

Sincerely,

Christi Buker, CAE
Executive Director

Written testimony of Angela Marks, Founder and Executive Director of Reading Allowed before the Pennsylvania Basic Education Funding Commission
Thursday, November 16, 2023, Harrisburg, PA

Chairman Sturla, Chairwoman Phillips-Hill, and members of the Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Angela Marks, and I'm the Founder and Executive Director of Reading Allowed, a nonprofit organization that provides structured literacy instruction regardless of financial circumstances across the Philadelphia area.

I served as a Reading Specialist in a middle school in an underserved neighborhood of Southwest Philadelphia and then worked in a private elementary school before founding Reading Allowed in September 2019. I'm also the parent of three adults who attended schools in a well-funded district in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

I founded Reading Allowed as a way to address the shocking inequity in access to high quality reading instruction across Philadelphia because I have seen professionally and personally the inequity of resources available to our students and how this affects their outcomes.

Reading Allowed serves more than 325 students across the Philadelphia area but we should not have to exist. We are a small band-aid on a large wound that I believe is cured by equitable funding. We work with students aged from five to adult. These are individuals who have been identified or have identified themselves as having fallen behind in their reading skills. We provide high-dosage structured literacy tutoring that is delivered by certified and experienced instructors. These students are being or have been failed by their underfunded system and are the least likely to have adequate access to additional support without direct school or district action.

Reading Allowed should not have to exist. An equitable and well-funded system would provide the most up-to-date reading instruction to all students, identify students at risk of reading failure, and provide support and interventions for these students before a gap develops. It would train professionals in practices best suited to accelerating the progress of readers who have fallen behind and provide individualized instruction for these below-grade level readers. This is achievable and is being achieved by districts that are well-funded.

My focus is on reading so I will speak today mostly from that lens.

85% of juveniles who interact with the juvenile court system are low literate and it's called the school-to-prison pipeline for a reason. There is no more stark example than that of Tyreek. Tyreek was a student at my underserved school in Southwest Philadelphia. He had been kicked out of a few schools before coming to us, his living situation was precarious and his mother and siblings had all spent time in jail. Tyreek's reading level was well below grade level. Tyreek was adopted by an educator and then attended a school in a well-funded district where he had access to interventions and resources that he had not previously had access to. Tyreek is an adult now.

He lives independently, has a productive and fulfilling job and is a charming soul. Had Tyreek not had the good fortune of receiving access to the right resources in high school, I have no doubt that he would have ended up in jail.

More than 75% of the students who came to our underserved middle school in 5th grade were reading significantly below grade level. I was the only Reading Specialist, and classroom teachers were new to the profession and were inadequately trained to teach reading and address reading challenges. It was an insurmountable and desperately sad situation, and the stories of our students as they left us were very often not happy ones. I then worked in an independent school and saw student after student, including many struggling readers, blossom and move on to bright futures because they had had access to the resources they needed.

An Equitable Education System will have Equitable Resources and Opportunities,

I recently sat with a group of 8th graders served by Reading Allowed at a school in West Philadelphia. All four of these students are reading at a 2nd or 3rd grade reading level, and it will likely take a few years of intensive, specialized instruction to get these students up to grade level. These 8th graders are bright, resourceful, funny, engaging, and have so much potential and so many dreams but they are already frustrated and despondent. They reminded me so much of my own children at that age. My own children, with access to all the resources for success at school, are living fulfilling, productive lives and yet, as I sat with the group of 8th graders this week, I worried desperately for their futures and by extension for all our futures.

School districts in the wealthiest quintile spend $6,200 more per pupil than the poorest school districts after adjusting for student need. Research for Action found that “Pennsylvania’s gaps in access to educational opportunity rank among the five worst nationwide in terms of both race and poverty.” These gaps were found across three indices: access to quality educators, access to advanced coursework, and access to positive school climate.

Let me bring this back to what I know best: reading.

In 2022, just 31% of 8th graders across Pennsylvania scored at the proficient level or above on the NAEP reading assessment. [1] Black students had an average score that was 26 points lower than that for White students, Hispanic students had an average score that was 24 points lower than that for White students, and students who were eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) had an average score that was 26 points lower than that for students who were not eligible. Additional analysis presented in the school funding trial made clear that these

[1] https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023010PA8.pdf

achievement gaps cannot be explained away by poverty or other out-of-school factors; low-income students do better academically in well-funded schools than they do in underfunded schools. In fact, we know that 95% of students can learn to read proficiently, regardless of their background, when given access to high-quality structured literacy instruction.[2]

I believe that the stark difference in experiences between my group of 8th grade students and my own children clearly reflects the outcomes we can expect from underfunded schools compared to well-funded schools.

My 8th grade students did not attend well funded pre-K that prepared them for Kindergarten. My own children did have that advantage and started Kindergarten meeting benchmark expectations.

My 8th grade students in an underserved district in Philadelphia were not screened in the early grades to identify potential struggles with reading. My own children were screened.

My 8th grade students did not receive early intervention to close a then-small gap in their reading skills. A large gap was allowed to develop.
My children did receive intervention in the early grades and were caught before they had a chance to fail.

My 8th graders did not have access to a Reading Specialist after 2nd grade to address their needs. The Reading Specialist they had access to until 2nd grade was the only one in the building serving many, many more students than she could reasonably expect to support.
My own children had access to a Reading Specialist who was responsible for a reasonable number of students.

We know that teacher quality is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement. [3] My group of 8th graders spent their elementary years in overcrowded classrooms with underpaid, exhausted teachers who had very limited experience and who were not receiving sufficient professional development. Very often they had multiple teachers and substitutes over the course of a school year.
My own children had a smaller class size and were taught by well-paid, seasoned teachers who had been at the same school for years and who regularly engaged in professional development opportunities.

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[2] https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2020/moats
[3] https://www.educationnext.org/in-schools-teacher-quality-matters-most-coleman/

Written testimony of Angela Marks, Founder and Executive Director of Reading Allowed before the Pennsylvania Basic Education Funding Commission
Thursday, November 16, 2023, Harrisburg, PA

My group of 8th graders were taught using an outdated curriculum that was not aligned with the most up-to-date methods of reading instruction.
My own children were.

My group of 8th graders sat in overcrowded, depressing, run down classrooms that were cold in the winter and stifling in the warmer months.
My own children sat in modern, well-ventilated, bright and engaging classrooms.

Reading Allowed was founded to address the inequity in access to high-quality structured literacy instruction in Philadelphia. At the doctor's office, patients are screened for certain conditions and if your primary care doctor suspects you have a particular condition, they will very often send you to a specialist. The same applies to reading. Children in well-funded school districts receive instruction from well-trained teachers using an up-to-date curriculum. They are screened and are sent to a highly trained reading specialist for intervention if there is an indication that they are at risk of reading failure. This is done in Kindergarten and students are caught before they have a chance to fail. Older students who are reading below grade level receive intervention from well-trained specialists. Students in underfunded schools are taught by less experienced teachers who are using an outdated curriculum, they are not screened, don't receive extra support from a highly trained specialist and are left to fall further and further behind. It's the Matthew effect: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Once these students are older and are reading way below grade level, there are no supports in place to close that gap.

The Basic Education Funding Commission can rectify these inequities:

The commission must set adequacy targets which will set goals for funding levels for each district based on the spending levels of high-performing districts, adjusted based on measures of each district's student needs.

How can we move forward effectively if we don't know what we're aiming for? Let's set goals for each district based on the needs of the students and what we already know about successful well-funded school districts. Dr. Kelly's recently updated analysis, based on the General Assembly's own methodology and updated to include critical factors including special education and mandated costs, should serve as a starting point.

In addition, the commission must include resources for pre-K, special education, facilities, and transportation in its plan. Judge Jubelirer made clear in her ruling that low-wealth districts are shortchanged in all of these areas, and that they are each important factors in an adequate and equitable education.

Written testimony of Angela Marks, Founder and Executive Director of Reading Allowed before the Pennsylvania Basic Education Funding Commission
Thursday, November 16, 2023, Harrisburg, PA

If all adults in our country were able to move up to the equivalent of a 6th grade reading level, the national benefit economically would be $2.2 trillion annually. On day 1 on the first day of Kindergarten, many of our students are already well behind their peers from well-funded districts with options for Pre-K. We are playing catch-up before they're even out of the gate. We cannot separate K-12 funding from Pre-K funding. It just makes sense to invest in a robust, high-quality pre-K experience and get our students ready for Kindergarten. Prevention is much less costly, in all senses of the word, than intervention. Students who enter kindergarten with preferably two, but at least one year of high-quality Pre-K, have a more robust vocabulary, the foundational building block of literacy, and letter recognition skills which gives them a leg-up in learning to sound out words and begin to see how letters form words, compared to their peers without access to high-quality Pre-K programs.

We don't have days to waste. Each day that a student is not receiving an education funded equitably is a day closer to that student entering and not leaving the school-to-prison pipeline. It's that simple. The future does not look bright for my 8th graders and so many others like them. We need to be thoughtful and meticulous but we need to act with a desperate sense of urgency.

In order to ensure that 95% of students become proficient or better readers, our highest-need districts must have adequate funding:

- to provide training and continuing professional development to teachers in training and practicing teachers in the most up-to-date methods of reading instruction
- to adequately compensate teachers so that districts can hire and retain the best educators
- to provide the emotional and mental health supports that students need to enable them to successfully engage with their education
- to open more classrooms so that class sizes are ones that are manageable
- to invest in curricula that are aligned with the most up-to-date research
- to adequately screen our Kindergartners to identify those at risk of reading failure. Prevention is much, much cheaper than a cure
- to train and hire personnel to identify and provide additional supports for those at risk of reading failure

- to train individuals in methods of literacy instruction best suited to closing the gap for below-level readers as quickly as possible

- to provide high-dosage tutoring[4] delivered by appropriately trained personnel to close the gap for older students as quickly as possible.

- to provide access to pre-K so that our students are well prepared for Kindergarten.

- to ensure that our students needing special education services are identified, assessed and receive appropriate individualized reading instruction

- to invest in facilities that promote engaged learning and that send the message to our students that we value them. This means modern, bright, spacious, well-ventilated facilities that support teachers in doing the best job possible

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your commitment to Pennsylvania's children.

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[4] https://edresearchforaction.com/research-briefs/accelerating-student-learning-with-high-dosage-tutoring/

Testimony to the Basic Education Funding Commission
Susan L. DeJarnatt
Professor of Law, Temple University Beasley School of Law[1]

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I am a law professor at Temple University where I've focused my research and writing on public education issues for the past twenty years. I am also a long time public school parent; my children attended Philadelphia's public schools from 1989 through 2013. My scholarship focuses on the governance of charter schools, the importance of oversight over the sector, and the financial impact of charter schools on the overall system of education. I know you have now heard hours of testimony about nearly every aspect of school funding in the Commonwealth. I will try to avoid repetition and keep my focus on the specific role of charter schools in the current funding system.

Charter schools are an important part of the Commonwealth's system of education. But they are not an efficient part of that system because of the way they are now funded. If the legislature solves the education equity challenges found in the *William Penn* case with no changes to the charter elements of the funding system, charters will be the outsized beneficiaries of the new state investments at the expense of the traditional schools.

Charters are not the silver bullet to solve Pennsylvania's funding problems. The fundamental problem is lack of money. Charters are concentrated in low wealth underfunded school districts, and they suffer from that underfunding just as the traditional schools do. Judge Jubilier found that charters in underfunded school districts do not outperform the traditional schools and in some cases have worse academic outcomes for minority and low income students. The opinion emphasized that both charters and traditional schools suffer from inadequate funding and that economically-disadvantaged students in charter schools perform worse than those in traditional public schools.[2] The unconstitutional underfunding of schools leads to failure across both sectors. The solution is equitable funding as required by the Constitution, and employment of adequacy targets to meet the needs of all schools.

Charters and traditional schools are in this together because charter funding depends on funding of district schools. It is important to first understand how charter tuition is calculated. Charters receive tuition from school districts through a calculation based on the per pupil funding of the charter's authorizing district. The calculation deducts certain elements, including federal funding, transportation costs because the districts remain responsible for transportation under Pennsylvania law, and non-K-12 expenses like preschool and adult education. The calculation is based on the district's prior year expenses, so it runs a year behind. Thus, major cuts to or increases in district funding will affect the charter tuition in the next year. Because charter funding is based on district funding, the necessary increases to districts will also result in increased funding to charters.

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[1] Affiliation provided for identification only. I do not speak for Temple or the law school. I serve on the Board of Directors of the Education Law Center, the Editorial Board of the National Education Policy Center, and am the Co-Chair of the New Jersey-Philadelphia Chapter of the Scholars Strategy Network.

[2] *William Penn S.D. v. Pennsylvania Dept. of Ed.*,
294 A. 3d 597 at 779, 930 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2023).

Charter schools cost money. Running multiple school systems duplicates administrative expenses and facilities costs. Districts must also incur expenses related to processing applications for new charter schools and for oversight of existing ones. Districts also incur ongoing stranded costs because there is no one to one correlation between a student leaving a school district and that district being able to reduce costs. Charters typically draw students from across the entire district which means that any given district school may have fewer students but often not in numbers or distributions that allow the school to reduce staff. The district still must heat and maintain the building, employ administrators, keep an adequate teaching staff, and otherwise meet the needs of the remaining students. School districts need to plan and budget for charter growth. Uncontrolled charter growth impedes the district's ability to plan and make efficient use of funds to meet the needs of all the district's students, charter and traditional. As Charles Zogby noted when he was the financial administrator for Erie's school district, "curbing future charter school enrollment growth is the District's single biggest lever to positively impact its future budgets and better ensure its fiscal solvency going forward."

This Commission must consider ways to increase spending on public education but there are also several important steps the Commission can take to reduce expenditures that are not going towards education. Updates to the funding formula for charters also will enable significant savings that will help the legislature meet the funding needs required by the constitution. The Commission would be remiss not to consider the flaws in charter funding and to correct them.

First, the cyber charter funding formula is irrational. A flat tuition for all cyber students would rationalize the expense of cyber charters and would save funds. This reform is clearly warranted as the cyber charters have built up a surplus of over a quarter of a billion dollars through the current system. Cyber tuition should be based on the actual costs to educate the students, not on the happenstance of where the students live.

Second, the Commission should update the calculation for special education funding for charter students, as recommended by the 2015 Basic Education Funding Commission. The Charter School Law as currently written provides more generous special education funds to charter schools than it does to traditional public schools and it does not require charters to spend special education funds on special education. State funding for special education must be increased for low wealth districts and some of the funds to make that possible can come from creating consistent special education formulas for charters and traditional public schools. Now is the time to fix this disparity because charters will get a big influx of money with the general increased funding which will ease their transition to a fair system, instead of one where they rely on special education funding to cover non-special education costs.

Charters are a significant part of the Commonwealth's system of public education. There are 162 bricks and mortar charters and 14 cyber charters in Pennsylvania. Although charter proponents frequently argue that more charters are needed because of demand, there is no reliable data on charter waiting lists. A review of Philadelphia's robust charter system shows that many charters are under enrolled now, calling in to question the waiting list claims. There were nearly 7,000 empty

charter seats based on the October 2022 enrollment.[3] I am advised by the Charter School Office that the number of empty seats as of October 2023 has increased to 7634. Cyber charters do not have enrollment caps and the 14 existing schools provide ample opportunities for any family who prefers on-line learning. Given the critical need for updating of the Charter School Law and the need for careful consideration of how charters can best fit into the thorough and efficient system of public education, a moratorium on charter expansion should be put in place until that updating occurs.

Refining the funding formula to account for the true cost of charter school education will help the Commonwealth to meet its constitutional obligation to ensure that "every student receive a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically," and will enable charter and traditional schools to more effectively provide all of their students with "access to a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education."[4]

[3] This data is derived from the enrollment figures in the ACE reports on the Philadelphia School District website. Each report sets out the actual enrollment at the school along with the enrollment allowed by the school's charter.

[4] *William Penn S.D. v. Pennsylvania Dept. of Ed.,*
294 A. 3d 597 at 962 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2023).

THE PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER
Action. Access. Progress.

EDUCATION LAW CENTER

MEMORANDUM

To: Basic Education Funding Commission
From: Public Interest Law Center and Education Law Center
Date: November 15, 2023
Subject: Submission for Official Record of November 16, 2023 Hearing

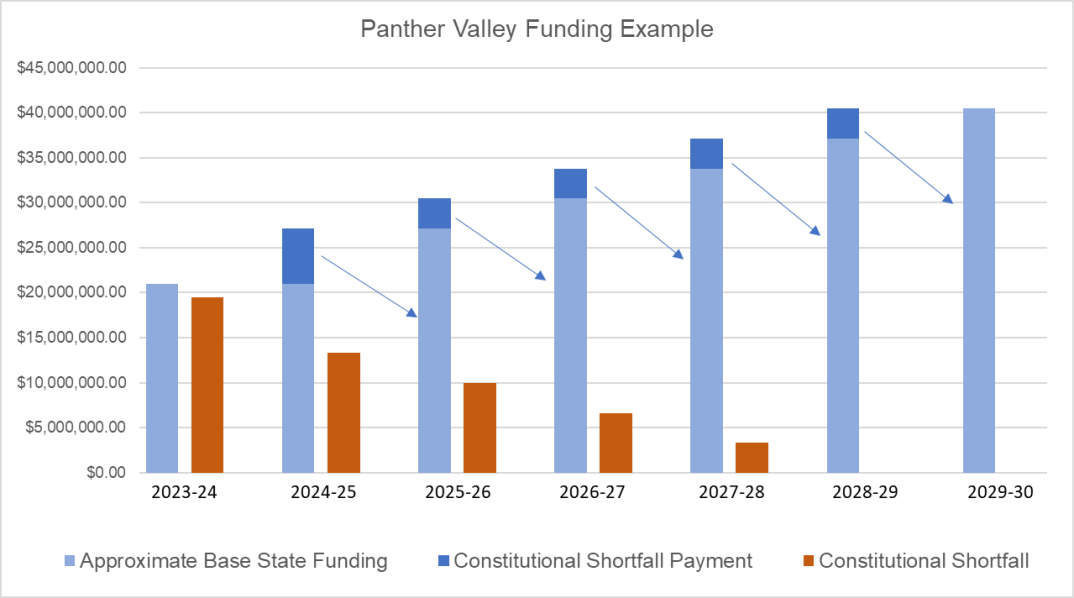
The Commonwealth must meet "the challenge of delivering a system of public education that the Pennsylvania Constitution requires – one that provides for every student to receive a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically, which requires that all students have access to a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education."[1] That means "provid[ing] **all** students in **every** district throughout Pennsylvania, not just Petitioners, with an adequately funded education."[2] The Basic Education Funding Commission therefore must carry out the most foundational task: set and develop a plan to meet a **constitutional funding target** sufficient to ensure each child can receive the public education that the Constitution requires.

A constitutional funding target can be determined using a variation of a successful schools model, a benchmark used in many other school funding cases. Developing such a system can be accomplished within the existing framework of Pennsylvania's school funding system, using previously established basic and special education weights to distribute additional "constitutional shortfall funds" and directing those funds to the most underfunded districts on a predictable schedule, and then incorporating those funds into a district's annual base. Such a plan will improve district stability and eliminate year after year infighting regarding hold harmless.

This proposal has two main elements:

- **Existing funding**. Every year the General Assembly will allocate basic and special education, pension, and transportation funding the same way they always do, increased by inflation. No changes to existing formulas are necessary.
- **Constitutional shortfall funding**. An additional $6.26 billion "constitutional shortfall fund" will be distributed over the course of five years, in a payment schedule enacted into law, proportional to each district's constitutional shortfall. An initial $2 billion appropriation shall be made in year one. Each year's funding will be added to a district's base the following year, to ensure permanence and stability.

[1] *William Penn Sch. Dist. v. Pennsylvania Dep't of Educ.*, 294 A.3d 537, 886 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2023).
[2] *Id.* at 871.



Requirements and methodology

To implement an adequate, equitable, predictable system of school funding that is constitutionally compliant, the General Assembly must do the following:

1. Determine how much funding is needed to provide each child a constitutionally adequate, comprehensive, contemporary, effective education;
2. Determine how much funding is missing from each district;
3. Determine the state/local share of that gap for each school district in such a way that a constitutionally compliant system is achievable for all districts, including those communities with limited tax capacity;
4. Allocate new state funds to the inadequately funded districts in a stable, predictable manner;
5. Ensure funding gaps do not grow or re-emerge;
6. Create a framework to guide the constitutional shortfall funding that ensures accountability and flexibility; and,
7. Provide adequate funding for Pre-K and facilities.

The steps to accomplish this goal:

1) Determine how much funding is needed to provide each child a constitutionally adequate, comprehensive, contemporary, effective education

a) Develop a constitutional funding target for each school district, based upon a constitutional base cost and each district's relative needs, and enact those calculations into the Pennsylvania School Code.

b) The constitutional base cost is the median per-pupil cost for successful Pennsylvania school districts, relative to that district's needs. Specifically, it shall be based upon the current expenditures of the median successful Pennsylvania school district, relative to that district's 1) average daily membership, 2) the

weights from the Basic Education Formula, and 3) the weights from the Special Education Funding Commission (collectively "Student Weights").[3]

i) In order to provide a more accurate count of the students educated by a district that are living in poverty, the Student Weights regarding poverty must be calculated through a combination of a district's low-income student count (to determine the proportion of a student body that is low-income) and the American Community Survey (to determine the share of that identified student body that is in poverty versus acute poverty), rather than the American Community Survey (ACS) alone.[4] When combined with ACS, PDE's low-income student count, which is used for federal reporting, is a more accurate measure of student poverty.

c) Based upon the above calculations, the constitutional base cost for all students is $14,152.93.

d) Each district's constitutional target is the constitutional base cost multiplied by that district's Student Weights.

e) After five years, a base cost may be re-calculated using the median cost of those school districts meeting updated 2033 interim targets for proficiency and high school graduation, as identified in the Commonwealth's current consolidated state plan pursuant to the Every Student Succeeds Act.

2) Determine how much funding is missing from each district

a) Each district's constitutional shortfall consists of their constitutional target minus their most recent calculated current expenditures. For 2024-25, this aggregate shortfall for all districts equals approximately $6.26 billion.

3) Determine the state/local share of that gap for each school district in such a way that a constitutionally compliant system is achievable for all districts, including those communities with limited tax capacity

a) The Commonwealth can assume responsibility for the entire constitutional shortfall of $6.26 billion. This amount is equivalent to about 20% of all K-12 current expenditures, and would mean the Commonwealth contributes about 46% of K-12 funding.[5]

b) To the extent the Commonwealth desires to determine a state and local share, that calculation must consider reasonable local funding capacity. The state share

[3] The Student Weights regarding special education shall be derived from the relative student costs of the Special Education Funding Commission in order to provide a more accurate estimate of the costs of educating children with disabilities. Those weights were—perhaps inadvertently—not enacted into the School Code. Failure to include them will increase shortfalls by hundreds of millions of dollars.

[4] This calculation more accurately reflects the status of students who are educated in district schools, and is particularly important to districts such as Shade-Central SD, Uniontown Area SD, Wilson Area SD, New Brighton Area SD, the School District of Lancaster, Wilkes-Barre Area SD, Southeast Delco SD, Bristol Township SD, Norristown Area SD, Interboro SD, Conemaugh Valley SD, and others.

[5] K-12 funding is measured by state, local, and federal revenues to school districts in the most recent annual financial reports.

of the constitutional shortfall can be determined based on the assumption that each district is capable of contributing at a tax effort of at least the 25th percentile of school districts as defined by the Local Effort Rate calculated pursuant to the 2023-24 student weighted distribution of Section 2502.53 of the School Code. In present dollars, this will lower the state share of the constitutional shortfall from $6.26 to $6.1 billion, and the number of districts with a state shortfall from 412 to 400.

c) In the alternative, the state share can be determined based on the assumption that each district is locally capable of contributing at a tax effort of at least the median of school districts as defined by the Local Effort Rate calculated pursuant to the 2023-24 student weighted distribution of section 2502.53 of the School Code. In present dollars, this process will lower the state share of the constitutional targets from $6.26 to $5.58 billion, and the districts with a state shortfall from 412 to 383. Close consideration will need to be given to whether such a standard places a constitutionally compliant education out of reach for too many communities.

4) Allocate new state funds to the inadequately funded districts in a stable, predictable manner

a) In order to account for inflation and allow school districts to plan, the Commonwealth will enact a five-year distribution schedule for the constitutional shortfall funding, such that the state share of shortfalls are closed in five years.

b) The first year's payment shall be $2 billion, distributed proportional to the state shortfall of each district. The remaining shortfall (the total state shortfall minus $2 billion) shall be evenly apportioned across year two through year five, multiplied by inflation.

c) To promote the long-term stability of the system, the state shall add each year's constitutional shortfall funding to a district's annual base of BEF Funding.

d) As constitutional shortfall funding is added to the system over five years, the state shall also annually fold in portions of the current student weighted distribution to a district's annual base of funding, to further promote stability and predictability. As each district is brought into constitutional compliance, existing hold harmless disputes will become of minimal importance.

5) Ensure funding gaps do not grow or re-emerge

a) To ensure funding gaps do not grow, and that every district receives the necessary funding, the Commonwealth shall fund annual formula-based increases at least at inflation levels using the existing funding formulas for basic education, special education, pensions, career and technical education, transportation, and other major funding streams. Any increase for a district above inflation may lower that district's shortfall in the following year.

6) Create a framework to guide the constitutional shortfall funding that ensures accountability and flexibility

a) In order to ensure accountability and flexibility for the significant infusion of state resources, the Commonwealth may direct a portion of the shortfall funding not to exceed 50% to proven uses that will boost student outcomes, including those

strategies referenced in 24 P.S. § 25-2599 (which include, among other things, reduced class sizes, pre-K, full day kindergarten, tutoring, extended school day and school year, and curricula to align with structured reading and other proven teaching strategies and methods); those defined as demonstrating Tier I and Tier II evidence of success in Pennsylvania's Evidence Resource Center; other strategies and uses that may be defined pursuant to state statute or regulation; and, elements that the Court identified as the components of a constitutionally compliant system.

b) The General Assembly may also, at its discretion, create new programs or allocate additional funding for specific priorities including mental health, educator recruitment and retention, student safety, new CTE specialties, or other priorities.

7) Provide adequate funding for Pre-K and facilities.

a) The state must ensure that all children in need can access Pre-K. Accordingly, the state shall appropriate sufficient funds – to school districts or to other providers – to proportionally fund Pre-K shortfalls over a five-year period, as identified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

b) The state must ensure that all school districts have sufficient funds to provide all students with safe, appropriate facilities. That funding is not covered by this estimate.

#PANeedsTeachers

Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium

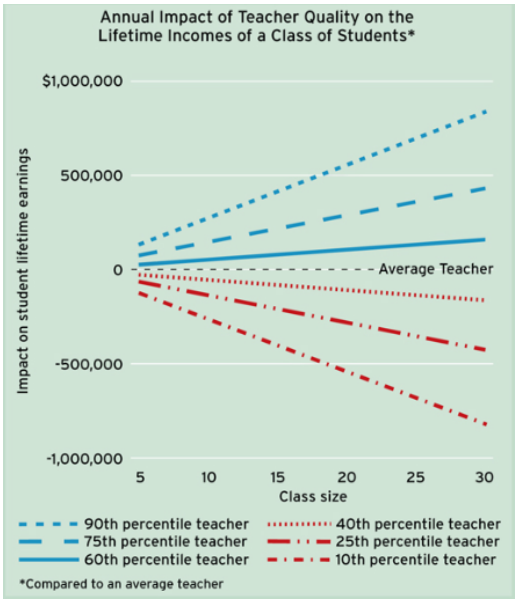
Senator Kristin Phillips-Hill and Representative Mike Sturla
Co-Chairs of the Basic Education Funding Commission
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

November 2023

Chair Phillips-Hill, Chair Sturla, and Members of the Basic Education Funding Commission:

We jointly submit this testimony on behalf of the #PANeedsTeachers campaign and the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium. #PANeedsTeachers is a statewide coalition, made up of over 100 individuals and organizations, dedicated to addressing Pennsylvania's teacher shortage crisis. The Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium is a grassroots organization made up of over 550 individuals from 265 organizations working to increase the number of teachers of color and culturally relevant educators in Pennsylvania.

As you conclude your series of public hearings considering ways to reform our public education funding system to meet constitutional muster and turn to developing a final report and remedy to the school funding lawsuit, we urge you to attend to one critical element in your solution: rebuilding a strong and diverse educator pipeline and workforce. Research tells us that there will be no improvements in educational outcomes without investments in a highly-qualified, well-prepared, and diverse teacher workforce. And on the other hand, the impact of any other investments in our public education system will be limited if there is not a plan – along with dedicated resources – to reverse the devastating decline in our teacher pipeline and address Pennsylvania's worsening teacher shortage crisis.



Graphic Source: Hanushek, E. (2011). Valuing Teachers: How Much is a Good Teacher Worth?

The Importance of High-Quality and Diverse Teachers

Research is clear that a highly qualified, adequately staffed, and diverse teacher workforce is essential for any thriving educational system, workforce, and economy. Teacher quality is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement,[1] and it has also been linked to longer-term outcomes including graduation rates, college attendance rates, and future earnings.[2] The highest-performing educational systems internationally recruit teacher candidates from amongst their top-performing secondary and postsecondary students,[3] and their teachers have deep subject-matter expertise.[4] The benefits of a diverse teacher workforce are also well-documented: teachers of color improve outcomes particularly for students of color, but also for all students in general.[5]

[1] Goldhaber, D. (2018). In Schools, Teacher Quality Matters Most.
[2] Opper, I. (2019). Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement.
[3] National Center on Education and the Economy. (2016). Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World - Recruiting and Selecting Excellent Teachers.
[4] National Center on Education and the Economy. (2016). Not So Elementary: Primary School Teacher Quality in Top-Performing Systems.
[5] Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color.

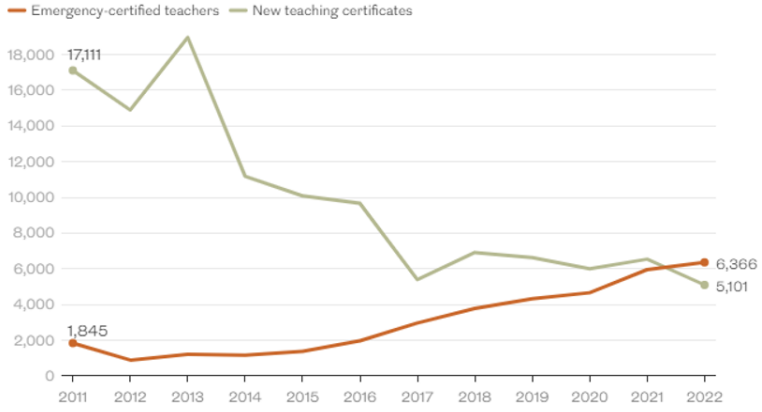
Conversely, both teacher shortages and teacher turnover have been linked to lower student achievement and poorer school climate, with particularly large effects on more vulnerable students.[6] Teacher turnover is also expensive and wasteful, costing districts tens of thousands of dollars per teacher.[7] Finally, insufficiently prepared and ineffective teachers lower student achievement,[8] leave the classroom at higher rates,[9] and contribute to lower perceptions of the profession that drive a vicious cycle of shortages.

The Scope of Teacher Shortages in Pennsylvania

While Pennsylvania does not collect detailed data on teacher supply and demand, there are numerous data points as well as a great deal of anecdotal evidence demonstrating that districts across the commonwealth are facing dramatic and unprecedented challenges in recruiting and retaining highly qualified and diverse teachers. The Pennsylvania Department of Education reports the number of subject areas experiencing shortages to the U.S. Department of Education: since 2013, this number has risen from three to 15.[10] Other proxy measures point to a rapidly declining supply of new teachers: the Department also reports fewer applicants per position across every subject area, and for the first time in 2020-21, there were more teachers on emergency permits than teachers obtaining traditional certification in Pennsylvania.[11]

These trends are largely traceable to a long-term decline in teachers pursuing certification in Pennsylvania; since 2011, the number of teachers certified annually in Pennsylvania has plummeted by 70% from over 17,000 per year to just over 5,000 per year in 2022.[12] While teacher preparation program enrollment has declined nationally, Pennsylvania's decline of over two-thirds in ten years is twice as steep as the national average, which has declined by one-third over the past decade.[13]

Emergency Teachers Surpass New Teacher Certificates



Graphic Source: *Philadelphia Inquirer* (see footnote 12)

At the same time as the number of new teachers entering the pipeline has dried up, new leaks have sprung up elsewhere in the pipeline. A recent analysis found that teacher attrition reached a record high of 7.7% in 2023.[14]

As a result of these combined factors, districts across Pennsylvania are competing to hire from a shrinking supply of highly qualified educators, with media outlets across the commonwealth describing schools opening with vacancies, superintendents and principals covering classes, and districts beseeching parents and other community members to serve as substitutes and bus drivers.

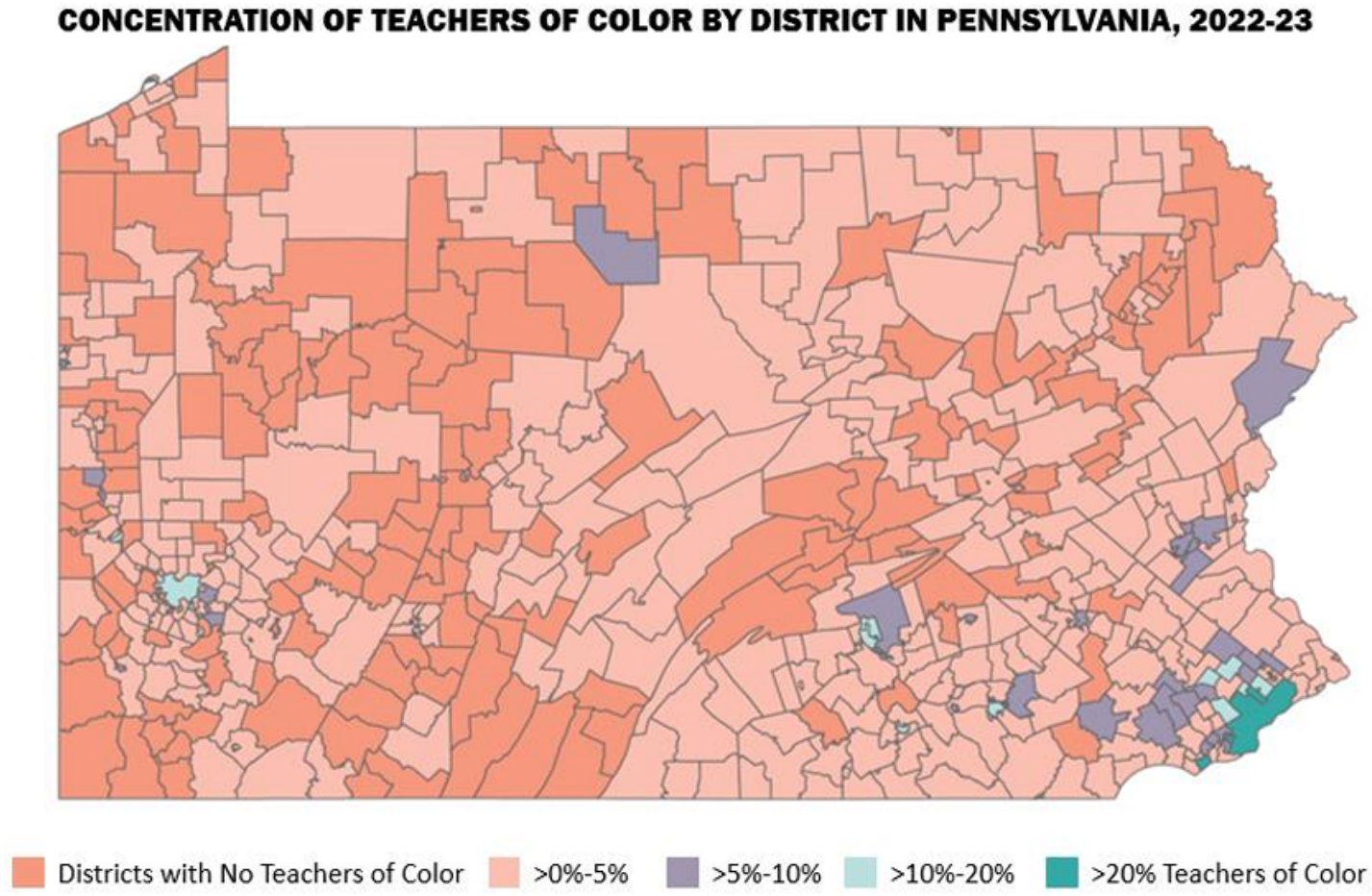
Although educator shortages are being felt throughout the commonwealth, they are not felt equally across districts. Data suggest that rural schools and schools with high proportions of students of color and students living in poverty, which are also likely to be the most underfunded and least able to offer competitive salaries, have the greatest challenges recruiting teachers. Charter schools and schools with high proportions of students of color and students living in poverty also struggle the most to retain teachers. As a result, students of color and

[6] Learning Policy Institute. (2018). U.S. Teacher Shortages—Causes and Impacts.
[7] Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It.
[8] Hanushek, E. (2011). Valuing Teachers: How Much is a Good Teacher Worth?
[9] Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It.
[10] Fuller, E. (2022). Pennsylvania Teacher Staffing Challenges.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Graham, K. (2023). Pa. issued the lowest number ever of new teaching certificates as educator shortage worsens.
[13] Will, M. (2022). Fewer People Are Getting Teacher Degrees. Prep Programs Sound the Alarm.
[14] Graham, K. (2023). Teachers are leaving Pa. schools at the highest rate on record, a new analysis shows.

students living in poverty are much more likely to be taught by novice or underqualified teachers and to learn in schools affected by high teacher turnover than their white and wealthier peers.[15]

Similarly, educator shortages are most pronounced in certain subject areas and for certain demographic groups. The state department of education reports the greatest shortages in special education, English language instruction, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects.[16]

Meanwhile, Pennsylvania has a particularly acute shortage of educators of color, with only 6.6% of the educator workforce identifying as persons of color, compared to 38.1% of the student population.[17] In 2022-23, 46% of all Pennsylvania schools and 31% of all Pennsylvania districts employed zero teachers of color.[18]



Graphic Source: Research for Action (see footnote 17).

As you have heard in testimony from Research for Action, Teach Plus, and the Pennsylvania State Education Association, among others, there is also a great deal of intersection between the issues of state underfunding and educator staffing. While all districts in Pennsylvania are increasingly feeling the effects of a nationwide decline in interest in teaching and a diminishing educator pipeline, it's underfunded districts that are bearing the brunt of this crisis. Without adequate resources, underfunded districts can't keep up with wealthier districts in recruitment and retention of qualified educators in an increasingly constrained labor market. Specifically, research has revealed that the lowest-wealth and most inadequately funded districts in Pennsylvania:

- **Employ less-qualified teachers than adequately funded districts.** The most underfunded districts employ the highest percentages of novice teachers, out-of-field teachers, and emergency certified

[15] Fuller, E. (2022). Pennsylvania Teacher Staffing Challenges.
[16] Pennsylvania Department of Education (2021). Pennsylvania ARP ESSER State Plan.
[17] Lapp, D. et al. (2023). Research for Action. Research to Inform Educator Diversity Initiatives in Pennsylvania.
[18] Ibid.

teachers. For example, compared to adequately funded districts, middle school students in districts with a "very high" per-student shortfall of at least $3,467 are nearly twice as likely to be taught by a novice teacher (three or fewer years of experience), 40% more likely to be taught by an out-of-field teacher, and nearly nine times more likely to be taught by an emergency certified teacher (see Figures 1-3 in Appendix).

- **Have higher rates of teacher attrition than high-wealth districts.** The teacher attrition rate for the lowest-wealth quintile of districts is nearly 50% higher than that of the wealthiest quintile (see Figure 4 in Appendix).
- **Have fewer classroom teachers per student than adequately funded districts.** In adequately funded districts, the average number of teachers per 1,000 students is 76.1, compared to an average of 64.8 students in districts with a "very high" per-student shortfall of $3,467 or higher (see Figure 5 in Appendix).
- **Have lower average teacher salaries than high-wealth districts.** The average teacher salary in adequately funded districts is $83,400, 24% higher than the average teacher salary of $67,021 in districts with a "very high" per-student shortfall of $3,467 or higher (see Figure 6 in Appendix).
- **Have fewer support staff per student than adequately funded districts.** Adequately funded districts have more support staff per 1,000 students, on average, compared to inadequately funded districts. In particular, districts with "very high" per-student shortfalls have 23% fewer guidance counselors, 57% fewer librarians, and 8% fewer psychologists and social workers (see Figure 7 in Appendix).

Educators across the commonwealth have described the impact of these educator shortages and the ripple effects they cause for students, teachers, and schools:

- Larger class sizes and less time for individualized student support as classes are merged temporarily or permanently
- Increased workloads, stress levels, and burnout rates among current teachers due to lost prep periods and increased responsibilities covering for vacancies, leading to higher absence and resignation rates
- Principals and district leaders covering classes when teachers are not available, reducing their ability to support school improvement efforts and other priorities
- Loss of learning and positive, stable relationships for students
- Inability to comply with individualized education plans for students with disabilities and other legal requirements due to insufficient staff.

In the school funding lawsuit, many of these same impacts of insufficient staffing were discussed by the plaintiff school districts. However, the current educator shortage presents a challenge for this commission as you grapple with how to reform our public education funding system in light of the Commonwealth Court's decision: any infusion of new state resources to inadequately funded districts will only increase demand for qualified educators at a time when supply is at record lows. Without simultaneous, targeted investments to grow the educator pipeline, the districts most in need of qualified teachers will still be unable to hire them because qualified teachers cannot be created overnight or from thin air. Even with additional resources, districts will be forced to resort to hiring emergency-certified teachers with insufficient training, reduced effectiveness, and lower retention rates. **Consequently, any increases in state funding to districts to ensure adequacy and equity must be paired with significant state investments in our educator pipeline and workforce in order to fully realize the benefits of a constitutional state education funding system.**

Addressing Pennsylvania's Educator Shortage with Systemic Solutions

The shortage of highly qualified teachers and diverse teachers in Pennsylvania can be traced to four systemic root causes, which are explored in detail in the report *#PANeedsTeachers: Addressing Pennsylvania's Teacher Shortage Crisis Through Systemic Solutions*:[19]

- The financial value proposition for becoming a teacher in Pennsylvania continues to worsen as the cost

[19] Boyce, L. & Morton, A. (2023). #PANeedsTeachers: Addressing Pennsylvania's Teacher Shortage Crisis Through Systemic Solutions.

of college and other expenses to enter the profession rise and teacher compensation remains low.
- Interest in teaching and the status of the profession continue to decline, particularly among younger generations, making recruitment into the profession more and more difficult.
- Many new teachers in Pennsylvania do not receive preparation and induction experiences that build their subject matter expertise, give them sufficient on-the-job clinical experience, and provide support from highly effective mentor teachers, making these teachers less likely to succeed and persist.
- Many Pennsylvania teachers experience stressful and isolating workplace conditions, without opportunities for career progression or input into school-wide decision-making.

Based on these challenges, the #PANeedsTeachers report recommended **six policy principles** to guide the creation of solutions to teacher shortages in Pennsylvania:

1. **In order to make teaching more attractive as a career, the job of the teacher must fundamentally change.** To make teaching more attractive, schools must be organized in a manner more consistent with the characteristics of professional work environments, such as law firms and hospitals, which foster high levels of collaboration, value professionals' expertise, provide competitive compensation, and offer opportunities for advancement based on competence.

2. **Teacher shortages cannot be solved in the long term by lowering the bar to become a teacher.** Although eliminating requirements to become a teacher may seem like an attractive and low-cost short-term solution to addressing shortages, in the long term this will make the profession less attractive to high-performing students and perpetuate the undesirable pay and working conditions that currently plague the profession. While *unnecessary* barriers to entry that are *not* predictive of teacher quality or success–particularly those that lead to racial disparities–should be eliminated, rigor and quality must remain goals for Pennsylvania's educator preparation programs and schools.

3. **Any policy solutions that involve investment of additional public funds should improve both the quality *and* quantity of the educator workforce.** Public funds should be used not only to subsidize the costs of recruiting and retaining more educators, but also to incentivize needed structural changes that will address systemic root causes to teacher shortages, resulting in more qualified, better prepared, and more diverse teachers entering and staying in the system.

4. **Policy solutions should function primarily as incentives rather than requirements in order to reduce compliance mentality.** Institutions such as educator preparation programs and local education agencies (LEAs) should be encouraged to make needed structural changes through the use of incentives, such as competitive grant funds, rather than forced to make changes through across-the-board mandates. This will reduce compliance mentality in favor of an opportunity mentality, encourage innovation among the willing, and allow for proof points that build buy-in across the system.

5. **Policy solutions should be systemic and address root causes.** Policy solutions should address root causes of teacher shortages rather than the symptoms. Ideally, policy solutions should be designed to simultaneously impact multiple root cause problems given the interconnectedness of our educational system. However, policy recommendations may be introduced separately, provided they contribute to and do not diminish a larger, long-term systemic solution.[20]

6. **Policy solutions should drive both excellence and equity.** While all communities in Pennsylvania are impacted by teacher shortages, certain communities–particularly urban and rural communities, low-wealth and low-income communities, and communities of color–suffer disproportionately. Ideal

[20] Reducing the standards to become a teacher is a prime example of a policy that addresses a symptom rather than the cause of the problem. While this might lead to a very short-term increase in teacher applicants, it fails to address what drove the supply down in the first place and will, ultimately, lead to even fewer qualified teacher applicants in the future.

policy solutions will not only increase the supply of high-quality and diverse teachers across the board but also identify ways to accelerate the supply of such teachers to high-need districts and schools.

Finally, the #PANeedsTeachers report identified five strategies for state-level policy action:

1. **Incentivize high-quality teacher preparation, characterized by rigorous coursework and intentionally designed clinical experiences developed in partnership with local education agencies.** Pennsylvania should invest funds to incentivize close collaboration between educator preparation programs and local education agencies to redesign pre-service teachers' preparation experiences in a way that ensures teachers are prepared to meet LEAs' staffing needs and succeed in the classroom from day one. Specifically, to qualify for funding, these partnerships must demonstrate intentional shifts that will ensure teacher candidates:
    - Are diverse and reflective of the communities they serve;
    - Are prepared to teach high-need subjects and/or in high-need schools;
    - Are able to obtain their degrees free of cost in exchange for a commitment to teaching in the partner LEA for at least four years;
    - Develop deep subject-area and pedagogical content knowledge through rigorous, cohesive coursework that aligns with the LEA's curricular approach;
    - Participate in a year-long clinical residency under the mentorship of an effective, trained mentor teacher, with additional aligned mentoring during induction;[21]

    Preference could be given to high-need districts, educator preparation programs with a track record of success, partnerships with strong working agreements and plans for collaboration, and programs that commit to pursue registering their program as an apprenticeship to unlock other sustainable funding sources.

2. **Invest in teacher retention through well-defined career ladders.** Pennsylvania should incentivize LEAs to develop innovative staffing models that incorporate teacher leadership development, career ladders, and a more flexible approach to scheduling and staffing to allow for increased collaboration and professionalization. To qualify for additional funding, which could be used for teacher leader compensation and training as well as technical assistance and capacity building, LEAs would have to create teacher leadership roles such as lead teacher and mentor teacher, clearly defined within a career ladder or leadership capacity development system, that allow teacher leaders to take on progressively more responsibility for impacting student achievement and leading the learning of their colleagues based on demonstrated competence. These adjustments would likely involve changes to salary schedules, master schedules, staffing structures, collective bargaining agreements, and other district policies and practices. Priority would be given to high-poverty LEAs facing the greatest staffing challenges, and this strategy should be connected to the previously discussed strategy to target the same LEAs building new pipelines of highly qualified teachers.[22]

3. **Expand pathways into teaching for youth and paraprofessionals.** Pennsylvania should continue to expand youth pathways into teaching–both through the new high school career-and-technical education (CTE) teaching pathway as well as through dual enrollment opportunities. In addition to providing funding to further expand these pathways, the state should provide support and incentives to LEAs and educator preparation programs to ensure program quality, public awareness of these pathways, clear articulation agreements to allow for transfer of credits, and expansion of these opportunities to students in every district in Pennsylvania.[23]

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[21] For our working definition of residency, see Pathways Alliance. (2022). Towards a National Definition of Teacher Residencies.

[22] Strategies 1 & 2 are inextricably linked and designed to work in tandem, recognizing that better-prepared teacher candidates will nonetheless be dissatisfied and unlikely to remain in schools that do not treat them like professionals. Therefore, incentives such as loan forgiveness, scholarships, teacher-focused allotment funding, or other forms of funding should be used to simultaneously incentivize the structural changes described in strategies 1 and 2.

[23] Because working with younger students can often spark interest in teaching, these youth pathway programs should be designed to encourage formal and informal opportunities for these kinds of interactions, in addition to coursework.

4. **Improve the financial value proposition for becoming a teacher.** Pennsylvania should explore multiple avenues and funding sources, including the teacher apprenticeship model and service scholarship programs, to move toward the goal of making it free to become a teacher in Pennsylvania. Efforts should also be made to eliminate other financial barriers by encouraging or funding stipends for teacher candidates during clinical experiences, subsidizing the costs of certification exams, and investing in loan forgiveness for teachers, especially in high-need subjects and schools. Finally, teacher pay must become more competitive with other fields that require a bachelor's degree, both through increased and equitable state funding of education to support local pay increases as well as through targeted financial incentives for teachers in high-need subjects and schools.

5. **Improve data collection to allow for targeted investments in the teacher pipeline.** There are many gaps in Pennsylvania's current data collection efforts that make it difficult to identify and anticipate teacher shortages, measure the effectiveness of different programs and initiatives, and understand root causes of teacher dissatisfaction. With improved data collection and visualization systems, we can better understand and address root causes of teacher shortages, identify and address pain points, identify and learn from bright spots, target resources where they're most needed and to programs best equipped to prepare high-quality teachers, and incentivize behaviors that will support recruitment and retention. Specifically, Pennsylvania should begin collecting data on demand for teachers (as measured by vacancy numbers and rates), begin tracking teacher candidates longitudinally from their educator preparation programs into the workforce, establish a statewide teacher working conditions survey and teacher exit survey, and create publicly accessible dashboards for many other existing measures of teacher supply, demand, retention, and satisfaction, as well as educator preparation program success.

A Roadmap for an Educator Pipeline & Workforce Investment

As the Basic Education Funding Commission and General Assembly consider reforms to our state education funding system that could total in the billions of dollars per year, a more modest investment of $300-500 million per year into educator pipeline and workforce initiatives would go a long way toward increasing the supply and diversity of the educator workforce to meet the needs of Pennsylvania's schools and students. While the exact details of a proposal would be the product of engagement with policymakers and stakeholders, the following types of investments should be considered:

- **A state-funded teacher scholarship, apprenticeship, and/or grow-your-own grant program** - The state would subsidize the costs of teacher preparation and certification for teacher candidates in exchange for at least four years of teaching in a high-need subject or hard-to-staff school (if the commitment is not fulfilled, the grant will revert to a loan); teacher preparation programs would be incentivized to coordinate closely with local education agencies to design programs that met their needs.
    - Estimated cost: $40-160 million (1,000-2,000 recipients at $40,000-$80,000 per teacher candidate over four years)
- **Student teaching stipends** - Paid student teaching for teacher candidates in high-need subjects and hard-to-staff schools.
    - Estimated cost: $20-40 million (2,000-4,000 recipients at $10,000 per teacher candidate)
- **State-funded teacher residencies** - The state would support career changers that hold bachelor's degrees to engage in one-year paid residency programs in partnership with local education agencies while earning teaching certificates and master's degrees in high-need subjects.
    - Estimated cost: $30-100 million (1,000-2,000 teacher residents at $30,000-$50,000 per resident, with LEAs also contributing toward the cost of stipends for residents)
- **Loan forgiveness -** State-funded student loan forgiveness for teachers in high-need subjects and hard-to-staff schools in exchange for additional years of service in these subjects/schools.
    - Estimated cost: $40-60 million (4,000-6,000 teachers at $10,000 per teacher per year)
- **Targeted salary supplements** - State-funded, targeted stipends/ salary supplements for teachers in high-need subjects and hard-to-staff schools
    - Estimated cost: $40-80 million

- **Career ladder incentive program -** Competitive grant program to districts, with preference for hard-to-staff districts, to support the development of career ladders and innovative staffing models
    - Estimated cost: $40-60 million
- **Improved state-level capacity to support educator workforce strategy** - Additional funding to the Pennsylvania Department of Education to support improved data collection, data dashboards and contracted research analysis, a targeted educator recruitment campaign and teacher hub in partnership with Teach.org, dedicated staff focused on addressing educator shortages and providing technical assistance to local education agencies and educator preparation programs, and administration of new educator workforce initiatives and grant programs.
    - Estimated cost: $5-15 million

Conclusion

Addressing Pennsylvania's teacher shortage crisis will not be easy. It will require broad public support, political will, investment of public resources, and a willingness to disrupt "the way things have always been done." But the stakes couldn't be higher: our children's futures, our commonwealth's economy, and our shared prosperity and security are on the line. With vision, leadership, and courage, Pennsylvania can not only respond proactively to this growing crisis but seize an opportunity to become an innovative leader by reimagining the teaching profession to recruit and retain the highest-performing teacher workforce in the world.

The 2024-25 state budget presents an opportunity to boldly invest in the educator pipeline and workforce in concert with historic and constitutionally required investments in the overall state education funding system. Without intentional and targeted efforts to expand, strengthen, and diversify the educator workforce, attempts to reform the funding system will be hampered by the unavailability of qualified educators to staff underfunded districts as they receive unprecedented funding increases. But *with* strategic investments in the educator pipeline and workforce, Pennsylvania can realize the student achievement gains we hope for as our commonwealth moves toward a more adequately and equitably funded public education system.

#PANeedsTeachers and the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium stand ready to partner with policymakers to develop and enact innovative solutions to our teacher shortage crisis. Our children can't wait: together, we can address the root causes of teacher shortages in our commonwealth and build the excellent and diverse teacher workforce that every Pennsylvania student deserves.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Elementary School Teacher Qualifications by Funding Adequacy[24]

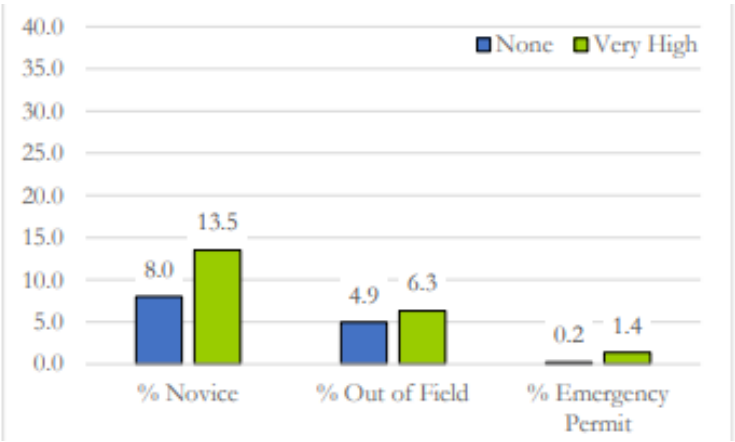


Figure 2: Middle School Teacher Qualifications by Funding Adequacy[25]

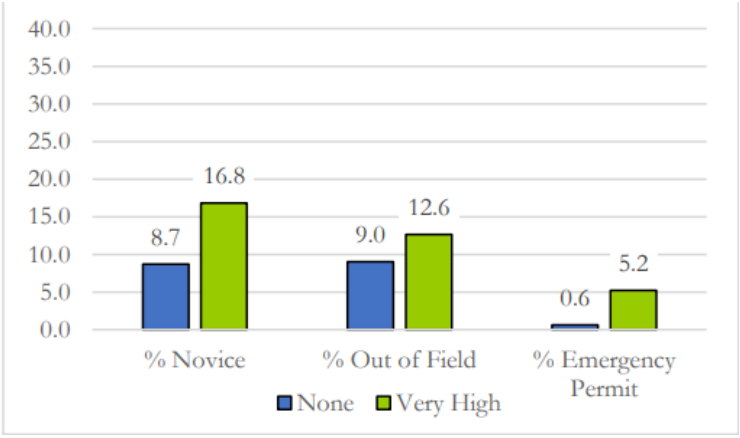
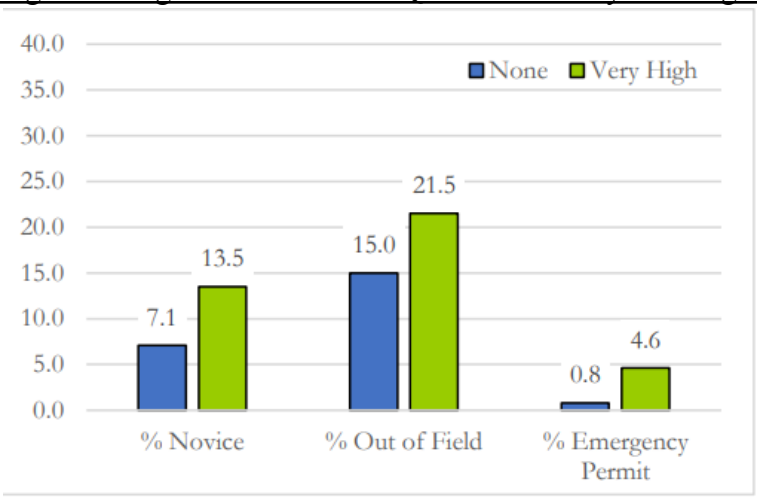


Figure 3: High School Teacher Qualifications by Funding Adequacy[26]



[24] Analysis by Ed Fuller, data from Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Inequitable Distribution of Teacher Quality in Pennsylvania.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

Figure 4: Teacher Attrition by District Wealth (2022 to 2023)[27]

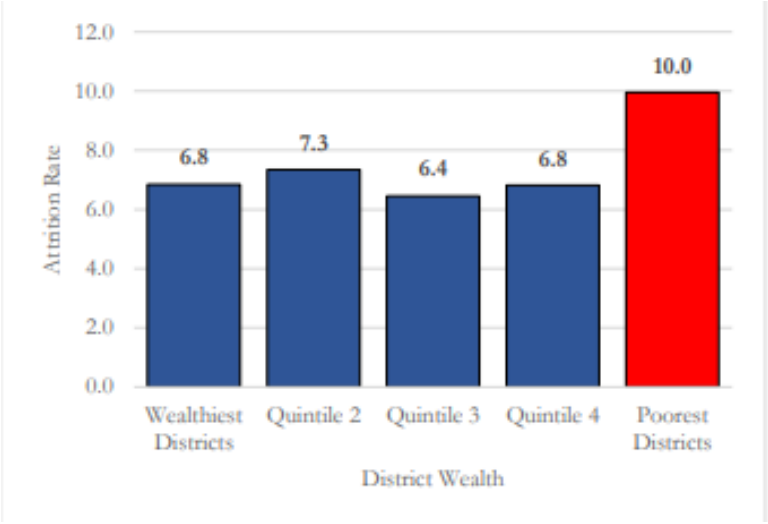


Figure 5: Teachers Per 1,000 Students in Districts by Funding Adequacy Category, 2019-20[28]

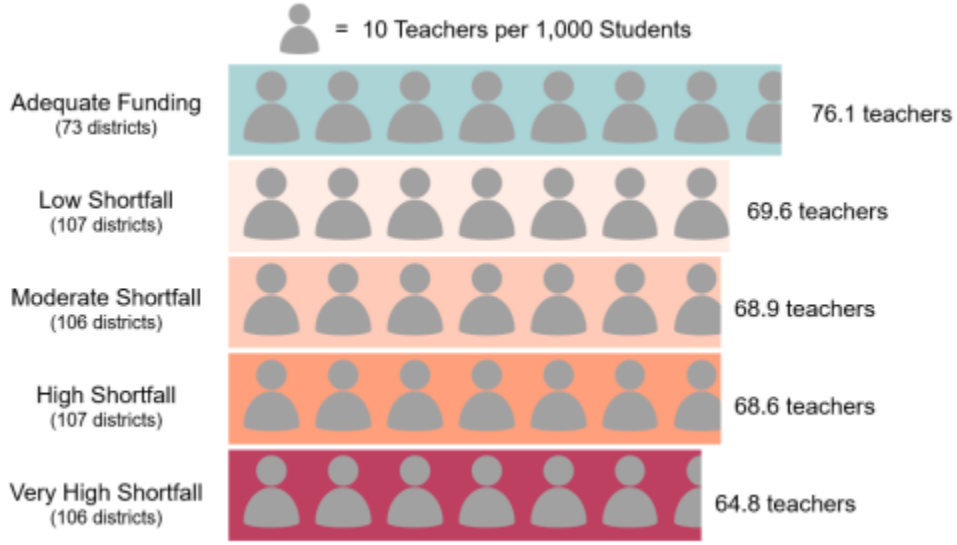
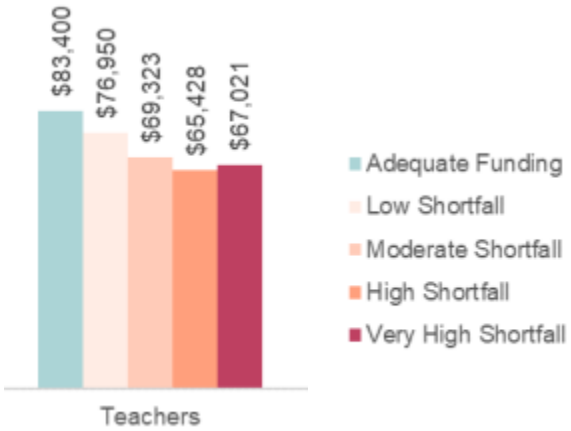


Figure 6: Average Teacher Salaries by District Funding Adequacy Per Pupil, 2019-20[29]



[27] Analysis by Ed Fuller, data from Pennsylvania Department of Education. Exacerbating the Shortage of Teachers: Rising Teacher Attrition in Pennsylvania from 2014 to 2023.
[28] Analysis by David Lapp and Anna Shaw-Amoah, data from Pennsylvania Department of Education. Pennsylvania School Funding and School Staffing Disparities.
[29] Ibid.

Figure 7: Professional Support Staff per 1,000 Students in Districts by Funding Adequacy Category, 2019-20[30]

Type of Professional Support Staff	Number of Professional Support Staff per 1,000 Students With Percent Difference from Level in Adequate Funding Districts				
	Adequate Funding (73 districts)	Low Shortfall (107 districts)	Moderate Shortfall (106 districts)	High Shortfall (107 districts)	Very High Shortfall (106 districts)
All Professional Support Staff	**9.9**	**8.6** **-13%**	**8.1** **-18%**	**7.5** **-24%**	**9.7** **-2%**
Guidance Counselors	3.1	2.8 -10%	2.7 -13%	2.6 -16%	2.4 -23%
Library Sciences	1.4	1.1 -21%	1.1 -21%	1.0 -29%	0.6 -57%
School Nurses	1.4	1.1 -21%	1.2 -14%	1.1 -21%	1.4 0%
Psychologists, Social Workers, Home/ School Visitors	1.2	1.1 -8%	1.0 -17%	0.9 -25%	1.1 -8%
Support Supervisors, Coordinators, Specialists	0.9	0.8 -11%	0.7 -22%	0.7 -22%	0.4 -56%
Physical/Occupational Therapists, Dental Hygienists	0.1	0.1 0%	0.1 0%	0.1 0%	0.1 0%
Unspecified Professional Student Support Staff	1.8	1.6 -11%	1.4 -22%	1.1 -39%	3.7 +106%

Note: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

[30] Ibid.

Support Equity First
Kelly@LewisStrategic.com

DATE: November 13, 2023

TO: Rep. Mike Sturla & Sen. Kristin Phillips Hill, Co-Chairs of the 2023 Basic Education Funding Commission

FROM: Kelly Lewis, Esquire

RE: Written Testimony for Basic Education Funding Commission

Members of the 2023 Basic Education Funding Commission, thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in support of full funding through the 2016 Basic Education Funding Formula law.

I am a former member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from the 189th legislative district that represented Monroe and Pike Counties. I've stayed an active advocate for fair school funding.

In 2016, after the adoption of the Basic Education Funding Formula law, a group of us formed Support Equity First, www.supportequityfirst.org, to encourage the Governor and General Assembly to enact state budgets that would fully fund the enacted Basic Education funding formula law.

- We supported implementing the recommendations of the Basic Education Funding Commission Report issued on June 18, 2015.
- We supported state budgets that would proportionally only fund the 180 school districts that were not receiving their baseline amounts under the 2016 Basic Education Funding law, until all 500 districts were receiving their baseline amounts.
- We supported a state budget that would identify the 320 school districts benefiting from hold harmless, and either freeze their Basic Education funding amount, or only give those districts cost-of-living adjustments, until all 500 school districts were receiving their baseline amounts.
- We urged the General Assembly to form a K-12 Cost Savings Commission to immediately implement cost-savings measures long-used by other states. We were and remain highly confident that there are billions of dollars of savings to be achieved.
- In 2001, Senator Jim Rhoades and I worked together to implement caps on School District General Fund balances in the FY 2001-2002 state budget. These caps are still in place. To get around the caps, most school districts transferred excess reserves into Special Revenue Funds and Construction Funds. We urged and continue to urge the Governor and General Assembly to implement reasonable caps to prevent excess reserves held by school districts.

In June 2015, the bi-partisan Basic Education Funding Commission unanimously issued its Commission Report with 6 recommendations.

1. School Consolidation. Because the school funding issue was/is so difficult to fix, school consolidation and incentives for school consolidation were considered good strategies to fix Pennsylvania's school funding crisis. School consolidations are still a good strategy to fix funding inequities. School consolidation can occur without closing high schools or terminating the high school sports teams or other favored programs.

2. The elimination of the hold harmless provision in Basic Education funding. Interestingly, the Report states "The Commission recognizes eliminating the hold harmless clause would have a significant negative impact." The Report further states "eliminating the hold-harmless clause… would result in 320 school districts receiving approximately $1 Billion less in basic education funding than the previous year." While discussing the impacts to these 320 districts potentially receiving less, surprisingly the Report fails to describe the significant negative impacts experienced by the other 180 districts, that in many cases were far below their "baseline amounts" in Basic Education funding for decades! For the last 8 years, the "Hold Harmless Coalition" has successfully thwarted any attempt to fix Basic Education funding fairness. Now, 8-years later, the school districts not receiving their baseline amount under the 2016 Basic Education funding formula law remain impacted, some severely!
    1. Over the past 8-years we've supported legislation referenced in the 2016 Commission Report to use proportional funding to the schools not receiving their baseline amounts from the Basic Education Funding formula law to get all 500 districts to their baseline amounts.
    2. Instead, all state budgets since the adoption of the 2016 Basic Education Funding law have funded all 500 school districts, so nothing has essentially changed. The 320 school districts benefiting from hold harmless still benefit, and most of the 180 districts not receiving their baseline amounts still don't get their baseline funding amount.
    3. We have opposed the implementation of the Level Up supplement for the following reasons:
        1. The Level Up supplement is contrary to Pennsylvania law and contradicts the adopted 2016 Basic Education funding formula law.
        2. We fear the Level Up supplement will erase the 8-years of underfunding to the 180 districts not receiving their baseline amounts. In other words, by walking away from the 2016 Basic Education Funding formula law, 320 school districts that received 8-years of overfunding, and 180 school districts that were underfunded for 8-years, and all of the accumulated amounts will be forgotten. These are real figures, with real impacts. In 2022, we calculated the accumulated underfunding figure to be $7.2 Billion dollars. Simply put, 320 school districts received an additional $7.2 Billion in Basic Education funding even though the Commission Report clearly indicated they were benefiting from hold harmless and receiving more baseline Basic Education funding.
        3. We believe the Basic Education funding formula law is one that must be followed. We don't believe the General Assembly can simply decide not to fully fund it. We don't believe the General Assembly can ignore the Basic Education Funding formula law and continue to use hold harmless to overfund 320 school districts and underfund 180 school districts. We don't believe the General Assembly can pass supplements like Level Up that are contrary to the Basic Education funding formula law.
        4. The Level Up supplement purposely ignores many school districts that remain underfunded under the Basic Education funding formula law, some in excess of $10 million dollars per year. Left uncorrected, these "gap" school districts may never receive fair funding even though the 2016 Basic Education funding formula law clearly indicated they were underfunded and not receiving their baseline amount.
        5. We hope the 2023 Basic Education Funding Commission will recognize the $7.2 Billion in underfunding that occurred over the past 8-years, recommend a Fund be established that recognizes this amount, and recommends a funding mechanism that works to pay it back proportionally to the 180 underfunded districts over a short number of years.

Four additional recommendations were made by the 2015 Commission.

3. School Crossing Guard Reimbursement. Presently the state subsidizes bus transportation for suburban and rural districts but doesn't subsidize the expenses for walking students, to wit: crossing guards. The Report recommends balancing this funding.

4. Homeless and Foster Care students present additional funding impacts. The Report recommends homeless and foster care students be studied and possibly incorporated into school funding formula laws.
5. Trauma. The Report recommends student trauma be studied and possibly incorporated into school funding formula laws.
6. Transiency. The Report recommends student transiency be studied and possibly incorporated into school funding formula laws.

We absolutely supported and applauded the adoption of the 2016 Basic Education funding formula law. But by not providing special allocations to the school districts that are not receiving their baseline amounts, a very bad situation is now 8 years worse.

We are concerned 2023 political expediency will tweak the 2016 Basic Education Funding formula law, resulting in dozens of school districts that were underfunded according to the 2016 Basic Education funding formula law getting blocked from receiving fair funding for the past 8 years, and going forward.

We are concerned the accumulated underfunding, over $7.2 Billion for the past 8 years, will be ignored and forgotten.

We hope the 2023 Basic Education Funding Commission will recognize the $7.2 Billion in underfunding that occurred over the past 8-years, recommend a Fund be established that recognizes this amount, and recommends a funding mechanism that works to pay it back proportionally to the 180 underfunded districts over a short of number of years.

Going forward, we don't believe the 2016 Basic Education Funding formula needs to be greatly adjusted, if at all.

Going forward, any adopted Basic Education Funding formula law should be fully funded, and if it is considered too draconian to immediately reduce funding to the "320" hold harmless districts, at a minimum the hold harmless districts should have their Basic Education amounts frozen or only receive a cost-of-living adjustment, until all 500 school districts receive their baseline amounts.

Thank you.
Kelly Lewis, Esquire
Former House member, 189th Legislative District

Support Equity First
Shelly@supportequityfirst.org

DATE: November 13, 2023

TO: Rep. Mike Sturla & Sen. Kristin Phillips Hill, Co-Chairs of the 2023 Basic Education Funding Commission

FROM: Shelly Echeverria, Managing Director, Support Equity first

RE: Written Testimony for Basic Education Funding Commission

Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in support of full funding through the Basic Education Funding Formula laws.

In 2016 a group formed Support Equity First, www.supportequityfirst.org to encourage the Governor and General Assembly to enact state budgets that would fully fund the Basic Education funding formula laws. In 2018 I joined the effort.

- We supported implementing the recommendations of the Basic Education Funding Commission Report issued on June 18, 2015.
- We supported state budgets that would proportionally only fund the 180 school districts that were not receiving their baseline amounts under the 2016 Basic Education Funding law, until all 500 districts were receiving their baseline amounts.
- We supported state budget that would identify the 320 school districts benefiting from hold harmless, and either freeze their Basic Education funding amount, or only give them cost-of-living adjustments, until all 500 school districts were receiving their baseline amounts.
- We urged the General Assembly to form a K-12 Cost Savings Commission to immediately implement cost-savings measures long-used by other states. We were and remain highly confident, there are billions of dollars of savings to be achieved.
- In 2001, Senator Jim Rhoades and Representative Kelly Lewis worked together to implement caps on School District General Fund balances in the FY 2001-2002 state budget. These caps are still in place. To get around the caps, most school districts transferred excess reserves into Special Revenue Funds and Construction Funds. We urged and continue to urge the Governor and General Assembly to implement reasonable caps to prevent excess reserves held by school districts.

In June 2015, the bi-partisan Basic Education Funding Commission unanimously issued its Commission Report, with 6 recommendations.

1. School Consolidation. Because the school funding issue was/is so difficult to fix, school consolidation and incentives for school consolidation were considered good strategies to fix Pennsylvania's school funding crisis. School consolidations are still a good strategy to fix funding inequities. School consolidation can occur without closing high schools or terminating the high school sports teams or other favored programs.

2. The elimination of the hold harmless provision in Basic Education funding. Interestingly, the Report states, "The Commission recognizes eliminating the hold harmless clause would have a significant negative impact." The Report further states, "eliminating the hold-harmless clause… would result in 320 school districts receiving approximately $1 Billion less in basis education funding than the previous year." While discussing the impacts to these 320 "over" funded districts receiving less, surprisingly the Report fails to describe the significant negative impacts experienced by the other 180 districts, that in many cases have been receiving far below their baseline amounts in Basic Education funding for decades! Now, 8-years later, the school districts not receiving their baseline amount under the 2016 Basic Education funding formula law remain impacted, some severely!
    a. Over the past 8-years we've supported legislation referenced in the 2016 Commission Report to use proportional funding to the schools not receiving their baseline amounts from the Basic Education Funding formula law to get all 500 districts to their baseline amounts.
    b. Instead, all state budgets since the adoption of the 2016 Basic Education Funding law have funded all 500 school districts, so nothing has really changed. The 320 school districts benefiting from hold harmless still benefit, and the 180 district not receiving their baseline amounts still don't.
    c. We have opposed the implementation of the Level Up supplement for the following reasons:
        i. The Level Up supplement is contrary to Pennsylvania law and contradicts the adopted 2016 Basic Education funding formula law.
        ii. We fear the Level Up supplement will erase the 8-years of underfunding to the 180 districts not receiving their baseline amounts. In other words, by walking away from the 2016 Basic Education Funding formula law, 320 school districts that received 8-years of overfunding, and 180 school districts that were underfunded for 8-years, and all of the accumulated amounts will be forgotten, even though they are real figures, with real impacts. In 2022, we calculated the accumulated underfunding figure to be $7.2 Billion dollars. Simply put, 320 school districts received an additional $7.2 Billion in Basic Education funding even though the Commission Report clearly indicated they were benefiting from hold harmless and receiving more baseline Basic Education funding, then the Basic Education formula law dictated.
        iii. We believe the Basic Education funding formula law is a law that must be followed. We don't believe the General Assembly can simply decide not to fully fund it. We don't believe the General Assembly can ignore the Basic Education Funding formula law and continue to use hold harmless to overfund 320 school districts and underfund 180 school districts. We don't believe the General Assembly can pass supplements like Level Up that are contrary to the Basic Education funding formula law.
        iv. The Level Up supplement purposely ignores many school districts that remain underfunded under the Basic Education funding formula law, some in excess of $10 million dollars per year. Left uncorrected, these "gap" school districts may not ever receive fair funding even though the 2016 Basic Education funding formula law clearly indicated they were underfunded and not receiving their baseline amount.
        v. We hope the 2023 Basic Education Funding Commission will recognize the $7.2 Billion in underfunding over the past 8-years and establish a Fund that recognizes this amount and establishes a funding mechanism that works to pay it back proportionally to the 180 underfunded districts over a short of number of years.

Four (4) additional recommendations were made.

3. School Crossing Guard Reimbursement . Presently the state subsidizes bus transportation for suburban and rural districts but doesn't subsidize the expenses for walking students, to wit: crossing guards. The Report recommends balancing this funding.
4. Homeless and Foster Care students present additional funding impacts. The Report recommends homeless and foster care students be studied and possibly incorporated into school funding formula laws.
5. Trauma . The Report recommends student trauma be studied and possibly incorporated into school funding formula laws
6. Transiency. The Report recommends student transiency be studied and possibly incorporated into school funding formula laws.

We absolutely supported and applauded the adoption of the 2016 Basic Education funding formula laws. But by not providing special allocations to the school districts that are not receiving their baseline amounts, a very bad situation is now 8 years worse.

We are concerned 2023 political expediency will tweak the 2016 Basic Education Funding formula, resulting in dozens of school districts that were underfunded according to the 2016 Basic Education funding formula law getting blocked from receiving fair funding for the past 8 years, and going forward.

We are concerned the accumulated underfunding, over $7.2 Billion for the past 8 years, will be ignored and forgotten.

We hope the 2023 Basic Education Funding Commission will recognize the $7.2 Billion in underfunding over the past 8-years and establish a Fund that recognizes this amount and establishes a funding mechanism that works to pay it back proportionally to the 180 underfunded districts over a short of number of years.

Going forward, we don't believe the 2016 Basic Education Funding formula needs to be greatly adjusted, if at all.

Going forward, any adopted Basic Education Funding formula law should be fully funded, and if it is considered too draconian to immediately reduce funding to the 320 hold harmless districts, at a minimum the hold harmless districts should have their Basic Education amounts frozen or only receive a cost-of-living adjustment, until all 500 school districts receive their baseline amounts.

Thank you.
Shelly Echeverria
Managing Director, Equity First

11/16/23 Written Testimony by Dave Mendell
President of Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education

To the Members of the Basic Education Funding Commission:

PAGE, the Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, is a non-profit organization that works on the behalf of the more than 60,000 children in Pennsylvania that are identified as gifted learners. Currently, Gifted Education in Pennsylvania is an unfunded mandate. Chapter 16 of the PA School Code dictates how schools and districts are required to support gifted learners but the state education budget allocates no money to support these students. With little support and little oversight, many districts, especially in more impoverished areas, are likely to provide minimal, if any, support for these students.

Sadly, many people incorrectly assume that gifted students will be "just fine" because the stereotype suggests they are excellent students who love school. The reality is that gifted students NEED specialized education to keep them engaged in learning and to help them reach their potential, just as students with learning disabilities do.

As the Basic Education Funding Commission takes into consideration the needs of all students and Districts across the State of Pennsylvania, we ask that the funding needs for gifted learners is taken into consideration.

Allocating $73 million as a line-item for Gifted Education in the State Education budget will greatly improve the educational services that Gifted students require. Funding at this level could help improve equity by funding teaching positions and providing greater levels of administrative support and oversight to ensure that Pennsylvania's gifted students receive the educational support that they need to grow and thrive.

Thank you for your consideration.

Pennsylvania Policy Center

1926 Green Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101 • http://www.pennpolicy.org

November 14, 2023

State Representative Mike Sturla
Co-Chair of Basic Education Funding Commission
106 Irvis Office Building

Dear Co-Chair Sturla:

Please submit into the 11/16/23 hearing record my two research briefs I wrote on issues that have come up in the Basic Education Funding Commissions hearings.

The first, called Shuffling The Deck Won't Solve The Pennsylvania School Funding Crisis, shows that the data about the high level of overall school funding in Pennsylvania does mask the lack of state funding which leads to Pennsylvania our having some of the most inequitably funded schools in the country. For both substantive and practical reasons, we cannot solve this problem without substantial new funding.

The second, called Education Funding and School Achievement, reviews that large and growing body of research showing states that have added substantial funding to previously underfunded schools have seen significant improvements in student achievement and later life success. One noticeable research finding is that I cite a recent piece by Eric A. Hanushek, who testified on behalf of the defendants in the lawsuit, registering his recognition of this recent evidence.

Thank you,

Marc

Marc Stier
Executive Director

Shuffling The Deck Won't Solve The Pennsylvania School Funding Crisis

1926 Green Street Harrisburg, PA 17102 www.pennpolicy.org

October 30, 2023 By Marc Stier

Judge Renée Cohen Jubelirer's February 2023 school funding lawsuit decision called on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to develop a new funding system to fulfill the state's constitutional obligation of a thorough and efficient system of public education.

Since the decision, opponents of investing more to attain education equity in Harrisburg—egged on by the Commonwealth Foundation—have tried, once again, to change the subject.

First, they claimed that the decision should lead us to embrace vouchers and "school choice," even though the decision, like the Pennsylvania Constitution itself, requires a system of "public education." It never mentions vouchers, and it is clear that no voucher proposals under consideration could meet the constitutional mandate.

Lately, those who are dubious about new education funding have been focused on comparing Pennsylvania's education spending to that of other states. They point out that Pennsylvania's spending per student ranks somewhere in the top 15 or so of all states (with some variation from one year to another and depending on how one counts spending and students) and that per-student funding in Pennsylvania much higher than that in other developed countries.

However, this focus on total spending misses the point again in multiple ways.

First, comparing Pennsylvania to all 50 states, with their widely divergent costs of living and education costs, is bound to overstate how much our state spends on education. If we compare Pennsylvania to the 10 other New England and Mid-Atlantic states, we find that Pennsylvania's spending per student of $20,188 per year is below the average of $21,738. And as a share of personal income, Pennsylvania's education spending of 3.88% is below that of the average for these 11 states, 4.1%.[1]

Second, comparing education funding in Pennsylvania and other states to education funding in other countries doesn't take into account the impact of economic inequality on equal opportunity in the United States. A recent Pew Study summarized the situation: "the U.S. has one of the most unequal income distributions in the developed world, according to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development— even after taxes and social-welfare policies are taken into account."[2] If Pennsylvania and others states are to have any chance of keeping the promise of equal opportunity that has long been thought to be the hallmark of the United States, we must invest more in education funding for schools that serve children those with low incomes. Yet we do the opposite in most states and especially in Pennsylvania.

Third, and most importantly, to focus on total K-12 education spending in Pennsylvania misses the key point of Judge Jubelirer's decision: our state and local education spending is extraordinarily

1. Calculations by Pennsylvania Policy Center based on US Census Bureau summary tables from 2021 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data.

[2] Drew Desilver, Global Inequality: "How the U.S. Compares," *Pew Research Center*, December 19, 2013. There is no evidence that inequality has decline in the United States in the last ten years.

unequal. Study after study, both national and local, has shown that students educated in school districts with a high share of Black and Hispanic students or a high level of families living in poverty receive far less than students in school districts with low poverty levels and a low share of Black and Hispanic students.[3]

Moreover, those studies all understate the problem because, as educational research shows—and decisions by the General Assembly in the past recognize—it takes more resources to provide an adequate education to children living in poverty or who speak English as a second language.[4]

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3. There are many studies that focus both on Pennsylvania data and cross-state comparisons showing that education inequity is greater in Pennsylvania than in most other states.

One is Research for Action's Educational Opportunity Dashboard. It shows that Pennsylvania ranks lowest of all states for the gap between students of color and white students on its average opportunity score. The state also ranks 50th out of 50 states for the gap between Hispanic and white students on the average opportunity score. It ranks 49th out of 50 states on the same measure for the gap between students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and those not eligible for it.

The Education Trust's December 2022 report on funding gaps in K-12 education, Equal Is Not Good Enough, reports similar results. It compares spending between school districts with the highest and lowest share of Black students, English-language learners, and students with low incomes. Pennsylvania ranks 43rd out of 50 states with regard to the funding gap by share of low-income students, 45th with regard to funding gaps by share of English-language learners, and 40th from the bottom with regard to funding gaps by share of low-income students.

The School Finances Indicators Database (SFID), produced by Rutgers University Graduate School of Education's Albert Shanker Institute, measures education funding equity in a different way—it compares revenues per student for typical school districts where 0%, 10%, 20%, and 30% of it families living in poverty. School spending data is adjusted in this survey for differences in district [size], the cost of hiring teachers and other personnel, and other factors that affect the cost of education. With this data we can measure equity in school funding by comparing funding for school districts at 30% and 0% poverty levels. By that measure, Pennsylvania is again among the states with the most unequal funding, ranking 46th out of the 49 states for which complete data is available. See Bruce D. Baker, Matthew Di Carlo, Ajay Srikanth, and Mark A Weber, *School Finance Indicators Database: State Indicators Database 2023 (5th Release).* Washington, DC: Albert Shanker Institute, 2022.

Another report by Matthew M. Chingos and Kristin Blagg, The Urban Institute's report School Funding: Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share?, Urban Institute, May 2017, provides data on school expenditures from 2013 to 2014. The study compares the "average funding for poor and non-poor kids" using district-level data adjusted for differences in salaries of college graduates. It found that Pennsylvania ranked 41st out of the 49 states for which there is complete data.

The impact of school funding inequality on school staffing is the subject of a recent report by David Lapp and Anna Shaw-Amoah, Pennsylvania School Funding and School Staffing Disparities, *Research for Action*, May 2023. They find that, "despite serving the most students with high-cost needs, Pennsylvania's inadequately funded school districts would need to hire more than **11,000 additional teachers, 1,000 administrators, and 1,600 professional support staff** and to **spend an additional $2.6 billion in salaries** alone just to provide what students receive in Pennsylvania's adequately funded districts. We conclude that without reversing these staffing disparities, which are rooted in funding disparities, Pennsylvania policymakers are unlikely to reverse disparities in student achievement."

Finally, the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center did a series of studies that focus on measuring funding inequity using Professor Matthew Kelly's updated estimates of the funding needed to provide an adequate education in each of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts. We have replicated this study a number of times, taking into account changes in school funding. (We will be updating this study in the near future.) We consistently find large gaps in adequacy between school districts with a larger share of Black, Hispanic, and low-income students and school districts with a smaller share of each. The most recent report in the series is: Marc Stier, Alternative Approaches to Making a Down Payment on Education Equity, Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, March 22, 2023.

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The drastic inequity in school funding in Pennsylvania denies a large share of our children the equal opportunity to get a good education and secure all its benefits. It also undermines the economy by denying the state the full benefit of the talents and abilities of our kids.

Democrats and Republicans in the General Assembly and on the Basic Education Funding Commission recognize the fundamental problem of inequity and they are tasked with developing a plan to adequately and equitably fund our schools. But some legislators are now suggesting that we can solve the problem by reallocating state funds from school districts that are better funded to those that are less well funded.

Shifting funding around without adding more state funding—shuffling the school funding deck— is, however, not what our Constitution requires and is also politically and practically impossible.

The Pennsylvania Constitution does not require that our schools be as good as schools in the average state. It does not require them to be a little above average. It requires that our schools provide every child with a "comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education."

Unfortunately, this standard is not met by most schools in Pennsylvania or, for that matter, most other states in the country. Indeed, we know that, on average, student achievement in the average school in the United States falls behind that of many other countries[5] and that this undermines economic growth in our country as a whole.[6]

We also know that, after an increase from a low level in the 1990s, school funding nationwide has stagnated or declined a bit since the Great Recession of 2008.[7] There is some evidence of a recent upturn, but there is no reason to be complacent about our nation's and our state's commitments to providing an adequate education to all.

Pointing to national averages thus does not tell us how much funding Pennsylvania schools need. Our goal should——and is required by our Constitution to be—higher than simply attaining the mediocre level of education spending and education outcomes found in states across the nation. A far better approach—the one that was adopted by the PA Costing-Out Study that Professor Matthew Kelly has now updated—is to look at what our best, highest-achieving schools spend. By using them as a model, and adjusting spending levels for various kinds of students, we can estimate how much each school district should spend per student to bring students up to a high level of achievement. By that standard, a bit more than 80% of schools in Pennsylvania are underfunded.[8] Some only need a bit more money. But many need more, especially those in low-income communities or that serve a large share of Black and Hispanic students.

So shifting money from well-funded to poorly funded school districts won't meet the constitutional standard. It is also politically and practically impossible.

It is practically impossible for the same reason that school funding is so unequal—Pennsylvania's state share of K-12 education spending is among the lowest in the country. As a result, the school

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5. Drew DeSilver, U.S. student's academic achievement still lags that of their peers in many other countries, Pew Research Center, February 15, 2017.

6. The evidence about the impact of K-12 education on economic growth can be found in Marc Stier, "The Contribution of K-12 Education to Economic Growth and Democracy," Pennsylvania Policy Center, November 8, 2023

7. Matthew Chingos and Kristin Blagg, How Has Education Funding Changed Over Time?, Urban Institute, August 2017.

8. Testimony of Professor Matthew Kelly to the Basic Education Funding Commission, September 12, 2023.

districts that are well-funded are those that raise a great deal of local money for schools because they are wealthy, are willing to tax themselves at higher rates than the state average, or both. Because the inequity in school funding is largely a result of local decisions, the state can't take money from one district to another except by radically reducing state funding for well-funded districts (and even then, this approach is limited because the best-funded districts don't get that much from the state).

And, of course, the state cannot shift a great deal of money from some school districts to others without creating a storm of political opposition. Any plan to resolve the unconstitutional funding of our schools must be, among other things, politically feasible.

So, raising the state share of K-12 funding is critical to ensuring that underfunded districts get the additional dollars they need and to doing so in a way that will build broad political support in the General Assembly. (It's also necessary to hold property tax increases down.) That means that a sound plan to fix our unconstitutional system of K-12 school funding will necessarily require a substantial increase in state funding.

That is the task the Basic Education Funding Commission and the General Assembly must undertake. Meeting that challenge will mean that we finally provide Pennsylvania kids with a best-in-the-nation K-12 education. That's what they—and we, given the enormous impact of better education on our economy—deserve.

Education Funding and School Achievement

1926 Green Street Harrisburg, PA 17102 www.pennpolicy.org

November 2, 2023 By Marc Stier

Introduction

The Basic Education Funding Commission is tasked with developing a plan to meet the Commonwealth Court order to repair Pennsylvania's unconstitutional system of funding K-12 education. The Court found that Pennsylvania's schools are inequitably funded because school districts rely heavily on local sources of revenue and school districts vary widely in their capacity to raise revenues at reasonable levels of taxation. The Court found that, as a result, Pennsylvania does not give all students access to the comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education required by Article II, sections 14 and 32 of the Pennsylvania Constitution.

The Court's decision was based on the conclusion—which followed a review of the extensive evidence put before it—that levels of school funding matter to the quality of education children receive.

While this conclusion should be the start of the Commission's deliberations as it works toward producing a plan to meet the Constitution's requirements, it may help the Commission and others who seek to influence or assess the Commission's work to review the evidence that supports the Court's claim that school funding makes a difference to successful schools whether they are measured by student achievement in school or later-life well-being. So this policy brief gives a summary of the relevant evidence found in what is now an enormous body of academic research.[1]

The Upshot

That body of research now firmly supports the conclusion that school funding matters; and it matters a great deal. In the vast majority of well-designed studies, additional school funding has been shown to lead to students staying in school longer and graduating high school at higher rates; getting better standardized test results; having higher incomes as adults; and even being more likely to marry and stay married. And that is especially true for students who are living in poverty or are Black: additional funding for their schools can partly overcome the barriers created by poverty or racial discrimination.

Moreover, the evidence for this conclusion comes from enacting exactly the kind of public policy that is called for by the decision in the school funding lawsuit and is being considered by the Basic Education Funding Commission: adding new state funds to previously underfunded districts and, in doing so reducing economic, racial, and ethnic inequity in school funding.

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1. The intellectual framework for this piece, and many of the sources, owes a great deal to two blog posts by C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson, and Claudia Persico, "Boosting Education Attainment and Adult Earnings," *Education Next*, Fall 2015, https://www.educationnext.org/boosting-education-attainment-adult-earnings-school-spending/; "Money Does Matter After All," *Education Next*, July 17, 2015, https://www.educationnext.org/money-matter/; and to the overview of the subject by Bruce Baker, *Does Money Matter in Education, second edition*, Albert Shanker Institute, 2016, https://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/does-money-matter-education-second-edition.

The evidence is now so compelling that Eric Hanushek—who for years was one of the leading academic figures questioning the contribution of school funding to student success and who testified for the defendants in the Pennsylvania school funding lawsuit—recently published a paper that recognizes the preponderance of recent evidence now shows that school funding does make an important difference.[2]

Hanushek does continue to insist—rightly, in the view of those who have long believed in the importance of school funding—that how money is spent makes an important difference as well. It has long been clear to everyone in this field that money can be wasted in our schools. As we see below, the research on how best to improve school performance is not definitive. There is some support in the literature for recruiting and training better teachers, reducing class sizes, providing more student supports, and other approaches.

But one thing is clear: without new funding there is no way to adopt any of them.

Perhaps the best way to survey the evidence is to look at the history of research on the subject over the last sixty years. That history shows how new research methods and new evidence have initially challenged and then reversed the academic consensus that school funding does not have a dramatic impact on academic achievement and later-life success.

The Coleman Report and After

Those of us old enough to remember the release of the famous Coleman Report Study in 1966 can recall the shock of reading a large, statistical analysis that called into question the impact of school funding on student achievement as measured by standardized testing.[3] The Coleman Study used data from a cross-section of students in 1965 to examine the relationships between school spending, family background, and test scores. The report summarized its finding by saying "it is known that socioeconomic factors bear a strong relation to academic achievement. When these factors are statistically controlled, however, it appears that differences between schools account for only a small fraction of differences in pupil achievement"[4]

While the Coleman Study was disheartening to many who believed that effective education could overcome economic inequality and poverty to create some degree of equality of opportunity, others said that we should not be surprised that schooling could not make up for the impact of sometimes deep poverty in which too many of our children are raised.

Further Studies

That skepticism was reinforced by a series of studies that, using a similar methodology, came to roughly the same conclusions. A series of overviews of these studies by Eric A. Hanushek pointed

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2. Danielle V. Handel and Eric A. Hanushek, "US School Finance: Resources and Outcomes," Working Paper 30769, National Bureau of Economic Research, February 2023, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Handel%2BHanushek%202023%20NBER%20w30769_1.pdf.

3. James S. Coleman et. al. *Equality of educational opportunity.* U.S. Department of Health, Education an Welfare, 1966.

4. Ibid. pp. 21-22.

to the same result.[5] Then it was further reinforced by the gross results of the significant increase in school spending between 1970 and the present, which did not lead to large increases in test scores or other measures of academic achievement.[6]

Questions About the Coleman–Hanushek Approach

In recent years, however, both kinds of evidence have been challenged on both substantive and methodological grounds.

Scholars have noticed, first, that the claim that nationwide increases in school spending did not lead to higher academic achievement ignores other changes in our society and schools that might have led to lower academic achievement. As C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker Johnson, and Claudia Persico point out, "…these spending increases occurred against the backdrop of countervailing influences, such as the rise in single-parent families, more highly concentrated poverty, deterioration of neighborhood conditions for low-income families, the exodus of the middle class to the suburbs, mass incarceration, the crack epidemic, changes in migration patterns, and others."[7] In addition, during this same period schools across the nation were moving, often under court order or state mandate, to expand services to students with severe disabilities. That led to higher K-12 spending but not to spending designed to improve academic achievement on the part of all students. Drop-out rates of students who did less well in school also declined. All these factors were likely—and in some cases could be shown—to lead to worse education results. So, it's quite possible that the new school spending in the 1980s and 1990s was important in stopping a decline in school achievement that would have occurred without it. Jackson, Johnson, and Persico give a telling analogy: cigarette smoking among women declined by 30% between 1960 and 2000, yet their rate of lung cancer death did not decline and, on some reports, increased during this period. That evidence is not, however, thought to weaken the claim that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer, which was well supported by other evidence. Rather, researchers concluded that other factors led to an increase in lung cancer deaths.

Second, the results of the Coleman Report and other similar studies have been challenged because they could not easily prise apart the impact of different levels of school funding as opposed to the socioeconomic status of parents on school achievement. The major source of school funding in the United States is property taxes. School districts with high property values, which allows them to raise revenues for schools, are typically those in which residents' incomes are also higher. Test scores tend to be higher in these districts. But it is impossible to say how much these high test scores can be accounted for by the high socio-economic status of students as opposed to the high spending levels of the schools they attend. The design of the statistical analysis in the Coleman Study and others, did not and could not provide any clear evidence to conclude that socio-economic status was more

5. These studies are reviewed in a number of pieces by Eric A. Hanushek. The most widely cited is The Failure of Input-Based Schooling Policies, *The Economic Journal*, 113, (February 2003), F64-F98, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%202003%20EJ%20113%28485%29.pdf.

6. This argument is due to Eric A. Hanushek in "The Failure of Input-Based Schooling Policies." He summarizes it in the paper "Money Matters After All?," *Education Next*, Volume 23, No. 4, Fall 2023, https://www.educationnext.org/money-matters-after-all/.

7. C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson, and Claudia Persico, Money Does Matter After all, Education Next, July 17, 2015, citing NCES, Digest of Education Statistics, 2012, https://www.educationnext.org/money-matter/.

important than well-funded, good schools. But that was the conclusion reached at the time by most who read it.[8]

Third, despite the methodological problems with the earlier arguments pointing to the lack of impact of school spending on academic achievement or later-life success, recent work that re-analyzes the earlier research has found more evidence for the impact of school funding than previously thought. For example, more recent studies show that during the period of increased school funding NAEP scores have increased for Black children and low-income urban children;[9,10] that high school graduation rates went up for Black and Hispanic students;[11] and that the rates of low-income students enrolling in post-secondary education went up as well.[12]

And fourth, a major reassessment of the series of studies Hanushek analyzed, conducted by Larry Hedges, Richard D. Laine, and Bob Greenwald, called into question the conclusion that school funding did contribute to educational success. Hedges et. al. noted that even the simpler method of aggregating different studies on the relationships between school funding and education outcomes used by Hanushek—essentially counting how many surveys show such a relationship and how many do not—casts doubt on his conclusions. They point out that if school funding had no relationship to school success, then in drawing samples for the studies, by chance, half of them would likely show a positive relationship and half would show a negative relationship, and only 5% of the results would be statistically significant. But 70% of the studies in Hanushek's sample show that per-pupil expenditures are positively correlated with better education outcomes and the percentage of those that are statistically significant were "2.3 to 7 times" that which would be expected due to chance."

Using more advanced methods of aggregating individual studies, Hedges et. al. found that per-pupil expenditures and many of the things that additional funding allows—more experienced and educated teachers, higher teacher salaries, lower student / teacher ratios—are positively correlated with student achievement at a statistically significant level. Their analysis of the strength of the relationships suggests that "an increase of PPE [per-pupil expenditure] by $500 (approximately 10% of the national average [at the time of the study]) would be associated with a 0.7 standard deviation increase in

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8. Why did they come to this conclusion? That's an interesting question of intellectual history about which I can only speculate. The main reason, I suspect, is that social scientists trained in the fifties and sixties, like today, were inclined to look to "deeper" structural issues like poverty than to policy issues like education funding as an explanation for outcomes. And then the nature of statistical methods encouraged the conclusion that socio-economic status, not education funding, was the prime source of variation in test scores. When we test the hypothesis that an "independent variable" education funding matters and use socio-economic status as a "control variable," we wind up showing that your independent variable is not that important. But if the two variables change places, the data would suggest the opposite conclusion.

9. Richard Rothstein, "Fact-challenged policy," *Economic Policy Institute*, March 8, 2011, https://www.epi.org/publication/fact-challenged_policy/.

10. Alan B. Krueger, Reassessing the view that American Schools are Broken, *Economic Policy Review*, 1998, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1023716#:~:text=Abstract,may%20actually%20be%20reasonably%20effective.

11. C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson, and Claudia Persico, Money Does Matter After all, Education Next, July 17, 2015, citing NCES, Digest of Education Statistics, 2012, https://www.educationnext.org/money-matter/.

12. Sandy Baum, Sandy, Jennifer Ma, and Kathleen Payea, "Education Pays 2013: The Benefits of Higher Education to Individuals and Society," The College Board, 2013, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf.

student outcome. By the standards of education treatment interventions, this would be considered an exceptionally large effect."[13]

A New Direction in Research: The Impact of School-Finance Reforms

The Jackson–Johnson–Persico Paper

Research on the impact of school funding (and other factors) on student success, whether in school or in later life, took a new direction with the work of C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson, and Claudia Persico (hereafter JJP).[14] Seeking to overcome the methodological flaws of the Coleman Study (and other similar works), JJP recognized it was possible to take advantage of court-mandated school-finance reforms (SFRs) to estimate the impact of increases on school funding on education outcomes. While Coleman-like studies get mired down by the strong relationship between school funding levels and the socio-economic status of parents, additional school funding that comes about because of court order are not connected to previous levels of spending or parents' socioeconomic success. Thus, the quasi-experiment created by SFRs makes it possible to estimate the effect of additional school funding provided by the state on student achievement and later-life success.

In other words, JJP and those who have done similar studies are, in effect, evaluating the very policy that Pennsylvania advocates of school finance reform have called for: adding state funds to school districts that have historically been underfunded.

Another important feature of JJP's work is that their initial study measured the success of additional school funding not by looking at test scores but at later-life success. They were able to do this by drawing on an extensive data set that periodically surveyed a nationally representative sample of families and children from 1968 to 2011.

JJP's results are striking. They find that increasing per-student spending by 10 % in all twelve school-age years

- increases the probability of high school graduation by 7 percentage points for all students, by roughly 10 percentage points for children from poor families, and 2.5 percentage points for children from non-poor families.
- boosts adult hourly wages by 13% for children from poor families but has a negligible effect on children from non-poor families.

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13. The impact of some changes in one variable on another is expressed in terms of standard deviation when using standardized regression coefficients. Standardized coefficients make it possible to compare the impact of different factors that are measured in ways that are not easily comparable, e.g., per-pupil expenditure and teacher experience.

Hedges et. al. find that per-pupil expenditure and teacher experience are positively and strongly related to student outcomes. But teacher salary, teacher education, teacher / pupil ratio, facilities, and other factors show a "mixed pattern of median regression coefficients, sometimes being positive and sometimes being negative." They conclude, "This pattern of results is consistent with the idea that resources matter but allocation of resources to a specific area (such as reducing class size or improving facilities) may not be helpful in all situations. That is, local circumstances may determine which resource inputs are most effective, and local authorities utilize discretion in wisely allocating global resources to the areas most in need.

14. C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson, and Claudia Persico, The effects of school spending on education and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms. The Quarterly Journal of Economics vol. 131, no. 1, pp. 157-158. Also available as National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 20847.

- increases later-life family income by 17.1% for children from poor families, while not having much impact on children from non-poor families.[15]
- increases the likelihood of being married and never divorced by 10 percentage points among children from low-income families.
- reduces the annual incidence of adult poverty among those who grew up low-income by 6.1 percentage points.

JJP recognize, as do all who study these issues, that just adding school funding does not make schools more effective by itself. As they point out, creating lavish faculty lounges is not likely to improve education. They found, however, that "when a district increases per-pupil school spending by $100 due to reforms, spending on instruction increases by about $70, spending on support services increases by roughly $40 and spending on capital increases by about $10, while there are reductions in other kinds of school spending, on average. While instructional spending makes up about 60 percent and support services make up about 30 percent of all total school spending, the two categories account for about 70 percent and 40 percent of the marginal increase, respectively." As a result, a 10% increase in school spending leads to "about 1.4 more school days, a 4% increase in base teacher salaries and a 5.7% decrease in student-teacher ratios."

State Studies

JJP's striking paper stimulated additional research focused on the impact of court-ordered school reforms which, by and large, has supported their conclusions.

Joydeep Roy's study of the impact of Michigan's Proposal A, which increased state funding to the lowest spending schools, found that not only did the adoption of the plan equalize school spending but it also brought about significant gains in student achievement.[16] For every $1,000 increase in spending per student, Roy finds that the percentage of students scoring at or above the satisfactory level in reading went up between 3 and 6 points for reading and 6 and 8 points for mathematics. Leslie Papke and Joshua Hyman reported similar results in two other studies of the Michigan initiative.[17]

John Deke's study of school funding reform in Kansas also found that school funding changes designed to equalize per-student expenditure had a significant impact on students. His research

15. As JJP point out, higher family income can be a product of individuals having higher incomes, being more likely to be married, or marrying individuals who also have higher incomes (perhaps because they benefited from the same court-ordered education spending).

16. Joydeep Roy, "Impact of School Finance Reform on Resource Equalization and Academic Performance: Evidence from Michigan," *Education Finance and Policy*, (2011) Vol. 6 No. 2, 137-167, https://direct.mit.edu/edfp/article/6/2/137/10136/Impact-of-School-Finance-Reform-on-Resource.

17. Leslie Papke, "The effects of spending on test pass rates: Evidence from Michigan," *Journal of Public Economics*, 89 (5-6): 821-839, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272704000908. Joshua Hyman, "Does Money Matter in the Long Run? Effects of School Spending on Educational Attainment," *American Economic Journal*, (2017) Vol. 9 No. 4, 256-80, https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20150249.

suggests that a 20% increase in general fund spending on education increased the probability that students would go on to college by approximately 5%.[18]

Three studies of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA), which aimed to distribute more education dollars to schools that had been underfunded, reached similar conclusions. Jonathan Guryan concluded that a $1,000 increase in per-student spending is associated with an increase in math, reading, science and social studies test scores by about half a standard deviation. (No impact was found for eighth-grade scores although Guryan suspects that the fourth-graders spent "a larger fraction of their education in well-funded schools.")

Thomas Downes, Jeffrey Zabel, and Dana Ansel show in "Incomplete Grade: Massachusetts Education Reform at 15," that after considering other factors that might affect them, post-MERA test scores in lower-spending districts were relatively higher compared to higher-spending districts than they were before the new funding. They write, "…by 2006, these (low-spending) districts exhibited increases in performance relative to that of the middle- and high-spending districts of 0.7 to 1.4 standard deviations. These are all very large impacts in an economic sense."

A more recent study by Phuong Nguyem-Hoang and John Yinger reaches the same conclusion: "the substantial increase in Chapter 70 [MERA] aid over the years and changes in its distribution have paid off. If state education aid had remained unchanged since 1993, the mean student performance of all district deciles would have been substantially worse (at least 4.6 percentage points less) than the case of actual Chapter 70 aid in 2006.[19]

Vermont is another state where school finance reforms had a positive effect on student achievement. Thomas Downes shows that Act 60, which was passed in response to a state supreme court decision, led to a convergence in per-student funding among the school districts of Vermont. And the link was weakened property wealth and both education spending and student performance in school districts.[20] Downes also finds some evidence that student performance has become more equitable since the enactment of Act 60.

A New Meta-Analysis

There are many other studies of state specific or multi-state school reforms that aim to increase and equalize school funding. However, the most impressive evidence we have that additional state

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18. John Deke, "A study of the impact of public school spending on postsecondary educational attainment using statewide school district refinancing in Kansas," *Economics of Education Review*, (2003) Vol. 22, 275-284, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775702000250.

19. Phuong Nguyem-Hoang and John Yinger, "Education finance reform, local behavior and student performance in Massachusetts," *Journal of Education Finance* (2014) Vol. 39 no. 4, https://login.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/login?qurl=https://go.gale.com%2fps%2fi.do%3fp%3dAONE%26u%3ddrexel_main%26id%3dGALE%257CA367966216%26v%3d2.1%26it%3dr%26aty%3dip.

20. Thomas Downes, "School Finance Reform and School Quality: Lessons from Vermont" in John Yinger, ed. *Helping Children Left Behind: State Aid and the Pursuit of Educational Equity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), https://login.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/login?qurl=https://web.s.ebscohost.com%2fehost%2febookviewer%2febook%2fZTAwMHhuYV9fMTIyNTYzX19BTg2%3fsid%3d73d14e33-4c47-4c9d-b7d9-f0716fafdd06%40redis%26vid%3d0%26format%3dEB%26lpid%3dlp_283%26rid%3d0. An earlier version can be found here.

funding has a strong and positive impact on student achievement and later-life success comes from a new attempt to aggregate a wide range of studies—including the state studies I've mentioned here—in a meta-analysis conducted by C. Kirabo Jackson and Claire L. Mackevicius that uses the most advanced statistical techniques.[21]

This major research project aggregate data from 34 different studies. Its conclusions provide striking evidence that by providing new funding to schools, states can make a huge difference in student outcomes regarding test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance. More specifically, the reports finds that a $1,000 per-student increase in spending sustained over four years

- increases test scores by .03 standard deviations.
- increases the high school graduation rate by 2 percentage points.
- increases the rate of going to college by 2.8 percentage points.

The study also makes three other findings that are important for Pennsylvania.

- There is no difference in the impact of new funding based on geography. New school funding has roughly the same impact in urban and rural communities.
- The impact of a $1,000 per-student spending increase is greater for low-income students than for non-low-income students. The increase in the rate of high school graduation and college attendance due to new funding is three times greater for low-income students than for those with higher incomes. Applying the policy to the average district would lead to an increase in college attendance above 2 percentage points 90% of the time but only 30% of the time for higher-income students. It would increase the rate of college going by 5 percentage points in one-fifth of all cases for low-income students but "almost never" for higher-income students.
- There is little evidence of diminishing returns when new funding is added to schools that are already highly funded. One reason for this may be that high-spending states are also states with higher labor costs. Because education is such a labor-intensive field, high-wage states need to spend more to keep well-trained, experienced, and effective teachers.

How We Spend Money Is Important

While the evidence that new funding contributes to education achievement and later-life success is compelling, it is important to note that this evidence does not show that just any education spending is beneficial. How schools spend money is always important.

It would take us too far afield to survey the evidence about what kind of school spending contributes to effective schooling and then to education achievement and later-life success. But I want to mention

21. C. Kirabo Jackson and Claire L. Mackevicius, "What Impacts Can We Expect from School Spending Policy? Evidence form Evaluations in the U.S.," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* (forthcoming), https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20220279. Quotes are from a draft from January 11, 2023.

three broad conclusions from the literature on the impact of new funding streams from state school reform programs.[22]

First, new funding is generally not frittered away. The evidence we have is that new school funding is not going to frills but rather to core educational expenses. As noted above, the seminal JJPA paper pointed out that new funding goes to core educational expenses at higher rates than school funding in general.

Second, the kinds of spending that seem to result in better educational outcomes are exactly what one would intuitively think they are. Education is labor intensive. All the important work of education is done by teachers in the classroom and in their one-on-one interaction with students. It is thus best done by well-trained, experienced, and effective teachers. So, the most effective way to improve education is to recruit and retain better teachers. In a market economy like our own, the only real way to do that is by paying teachers more. There is substantial evidence that teacher pay has not kept pace with pay in other fields,[23] and this is especially true with regard to teachers who have been in the profession longer.[24] There is also evidence that teachers in districts with higher salaries are less likely to leave the field[25] as well as some evidence that structuring pay scales to better reward teachers with three or more years of experience is a more effective way of raising teacher effectiveness than raising starting salaries.[26]

There have been experiments that tie teacher pay or bonuses to measurable student outcomes. But, to date, the evidence has not shown these policies to be as or more effective than general pay policies that lead to recruiting and retaining qualified and effective teachers.[27] But it is too soon to conclude that such experiments have failed or that additional experiments are unwarranted.

There is also evidence that points to reducing class size, especially in earlier grades, as a way to improve education quality, although the evidence is mixed. One analysis of data from the Tennessee STAR program suggests that small classes lead to greater student success. Students who attend smaller classes go to college at a rate 2.7 percentage points higher in general for students in large

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22. For a more detailed analysis of this question, which has shaped the next two few paragraphs, see Bruce Baker, *Does Money Matter in Education, second edition*, Albert Shanker Institute**,** 2016, https://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/does-money-matter-education-second-edition.

23. Sylvia Allegretto, Sean P. Corcoran, and Larry Mishel, *The Teaching Penalty: Teacher Pay Losing Ground*, Economic Policy Institute, 2008, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://files.epi.org/page/-/old/books/teaching_penalty/teaching-penalty-full-text.pdf.

24. Richard J. Murnane and Randall J. Olsen, "The Effects of Salaries and Opportunity Costs on Length of Stay in Teaching Evidence from Michigan," *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, (1989) Vol. 71, no. 2., 347-352, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1926983.

25. Jan Ondrich, Emily Pas, and John Yinger, "The Determinants of Teacher Attrition in Upstate New York," Public Finance Review, Vol 36. No. 1 (2008), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1091142106294716.

26. Matthew D. Hendricks, *Public Schools are Hemorrhaging Talented Teachers: Can Higher Salaries Function as a Tourniquet?*, March 24, 2015, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2564703.

27. Aaron J. Sojourner, Elton Mykerezi, and Kristine L. West, "Teacher Pay Reform and Productivity Panel Data Evidence from Adoptions of Q-Com in Minnesota," *Journal of Human Resources***,** Vol 49. No. 4 (2014), 945-981, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24735638.

classes. The benefit twice that much for Black students and is 7.3 percentage points for students enrolled in "the poorest third of schools."[28]

There is also substantial evidence that pre-K programs have a dramatic impact on school and later-life success. Studies have shown that children who attend pre-K programs score higher on academic tests and that these benefits are greater for those whose families have lower incomes.[29] The effects of pre-K education have also been shown to be long lasting: long term studies have shown that those who receive pre-K education have higher IQs at age five, have higher high school graduation rates, are more likely to own a home, and have higher incomes at age 40.[30]

Third, one reason that research examining the effect of different kinds of changes in school inputs—teacher pay and various ways to deliver it, class size, pre-K and the like—is not yet definitive may be that these different kinds of improvements work very effectively in some circumstances, and with some students, but not as well in others. Much more research needs to be done before it will be possible to give every school district or school definitive guidance about how best to spend their money. So, at present, the best approach may be to increase school funding and allow local school district board members and superintendents, with the advice of their faculty members, to make these decisions while tracking the results of those decisions and holding them accountable for success and failure.

Conclusion

We may not know exactly what kinds of investments make for better educational outcomes. But we do know that additional state funding directed at historically underfunded districts can make a big difference. It can lift test scores. It can raise high school graduation rates. It can raise the proportion of students who go on to college or to other post-secondary training. It can lead to reduced poverty and higher incomes for adults. And it can even affect the likelihood that adults marry and stay married.

And all these results are more likely for students who come from low-income or poverty-stricken backgrounds and for students of color.

Pennsylvania is a late-comer to court-ordered school finance reform—although we did experience an upsurge in school funding under the Rendell administration that was cut short by the Great Recession of 2008. As a late-comer, Pennsylvania can benefit from the experiences of other states. ***And that experience show us that additional school funding is a powerful tool for improving education, especially in historically underfunded schools.*** While adequate and equitable school funding can't entirely make up for the impact of economic inequality and racial barriers, it can help Pennsylvania realize the long-delayed promise of creating true equality of opportunity in our state— that is, making

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28. Susan Dynarski, Joshua M. Hyman, and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, *Experimental Evidence on the Effect of Childhood Investments on Postsecondary Attainment and Degree Completion*, National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2011, revised July 2013, https://www.nber.org/papers/w17533.

29. G. Henry, B. Ponder, D. Rickman, A. Mashburn, L. Henderson, and C. Gordon, "An Evaluation of the Implementation of Georgia's Pre-K Program: Report of the Findings from the Georgia Early Childhood Study," Atlanta: Georgia State University, Applied Research Center, 2004, https://search.issuelab.org/resource/an-evaluation-of-the-implementation-of-georgia-s-pre-k-program-report-of-the-findings-from-the-georgia-early-childhood-study-2002-03.html; and William Gormley, Jr., Deborah Phillips, and Ted Gayer, "Preschool Programs Can Boost School Readiness," *Science* 320, June 27, 2008, 1723-24, https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1156019.

30. L. J. Schweinhart et al., *Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40*, Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press. © 2005 by High/Scope® Educational Research Foundation, https://researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/7622.

it possible for every young person in our state to take advantage of their talents and abilities to create a better life for themselves and, in doing so, contribute to the economic well-being of all of us.

PENN STATE
CENTER FOR EDUCATION EVALUATION & POLICY ANALYSIS

Research Brief 2023 – 14:

Consequences of the Inequitable School Finance System in Pennsylvania

Ed Fuller, PhD

Introduction

The recent ruling in the Pennsylvania school finance court case makes abundantly clear that the current process of funding schools in the Commonwealth is unconstitutional. This is an incredibly important decision given that there is now a consensus among researchers that money matters— especially for academically struggling students, children in families facing economic difficulties, and children of color.

Why does money matter? There are many reasons why additional money can improve student outcomes. One of the primary mechanisms is access to well-qualified teachers and access to support personnel such as counselors and librarians that affect student outcomes.

In this brief, I examine student access to well-qualified teachers, school counselors, school librarians, and the dollar amount of expenditures on teacher salaries in schools within the lowest funded districts and schools within the highest funded districts in the Commonwealth. In this study, determination of funding level is based on the adequacy of the funding necessary to achieve certain levels of student outcomes. Thus, the lowest funded districts are those with the most inadequate levels of funding based on their needs and the highest funded districts are those with the most adequate funding based on their needs.

I find that, ***in comparison to schools in the highest funded districts, schools in the lowest funded districts have less access to well-qualified teachers, counselors, and librarians as well as and spend significantly less on teacher salaries per pupil, per classroom, and per school.*** In short, the Commonwealth's current system of funding provides fewer human and fiscal resources to the children who need access to human and fiscal resources the most. These children tend to be disproportionately children of color and children in poverty. To improve overall outcomes for all children in the Commonwealth, we must adopt a more equitable and adequate school funding system.

Schools Included in the Analysis

Only schools included in the Pennsylvania Future Ready PA Index system were included in the analysis. Schools were divided into elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. In general, schools including kindergarten through 5th grade were identified as elementary schools, schools that included grades 6 through 8 were identified as middle schools, and schools that included grades 9 through 12 were identified as high schools. Some schools have grade levels that span two different levels. In such cases, a school was placed in the higher of the two levels. So, for example, a school that serves children in kindergarten through 8th grade would be identified as a middle school.

School Funding Groups

For this analysis, I rely on the estimates of the cost of education in 2022 by Dr. Matthew Gardner Kelly, Assistant Professor at Penn State in the College of Education.

Specifically, I used Dr. Kelly's estimates of current expenditures on education per weighted average daily membership that includes special education funding and district specific poverty rates. In short, this is current expenditures per weighted student where the weights per student are based on student need. The weighted student component is important because this component adjusts expenditures based on the differential costs associated with students at different school levels and with different characteristics of students and districts.

Thus, this measure is an estimate of the current expenditures relative to student need. I use CE/WS to denote this in the remainder of this study.

This measure was the basis for Dr. Kelly's identification of model schools and the funding adequacy estimates. Thus, not surprisingly, the CE/WS is highly correlated with Dr. Kelly's funding adequacy estimates. In fact, the difference in the outcomes of my analyses in this study are nearly identical between using current expenditures or the adequacy estimates.

I ranked all 496 districts with data in descending order based on their cost of education. Thus, the district with the greatest CE/WS was ranked first and the district with the lowest CE/WS was ranked last. I placed districts into five quintiles with the first quintile being the 20% of districts with the highest CE/WS. The last quintile included the 20% of districts with the lowest CE/WS. The number of districts in each quintile and the break points in funding adequacy for each quintile are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Districts and Break Points for Quintiles of District Funding Adequacy

Quintile of Adequacy	Number of Districts	Lowest in Quintile	Highest in Quintile
Quintile 1	99	$13,966	$22,687
Quintile 2	99	$12,883	$13,959
Quintile 3	99	$11,798	$12,882
Quintile 4	99	$10,852	$11,782
Quintile 5	100	$6,901	$10,849

In addition, the average CE/WS for districts was $12,551 with a minimum of $6,901 and a maximum of $22,687 and a standard deviation of $2,161.

I used these quintiles in all analyses in this study. Because of space limitations, I present the results for the top and bottom quintiles only. For the teacher salary study, I also divided districts by labor market. More details on the methods of the teacher salary analysis are in the appendix.

Access to Well-Qualified Teachers

Currently the Pennsylvania Department of Education reports three different measures of teacher qualifications. These three measures include:

- Percentage of novice teachers (teachers with three or fewer years of experience),
- Percentage of teachers assigned out-of-field (teaching a subject or grade for which they are not fully certified, and
- Percentage of teachers teaching a subject area or grade level for which they are not fully certified and are teaching on an emergency permit.

Research has shown that well-qualified teachers are more effective than their less-qualified peers. In general, teachers with greater than three years of experience, teachers with a certification for the subject area to which they are assigned, and teachers who are certified to be a teacher are more effective than teachers with three or fewer years of experience, teachers assigned to teach out of their area of expertise, and teachers who are not certified.

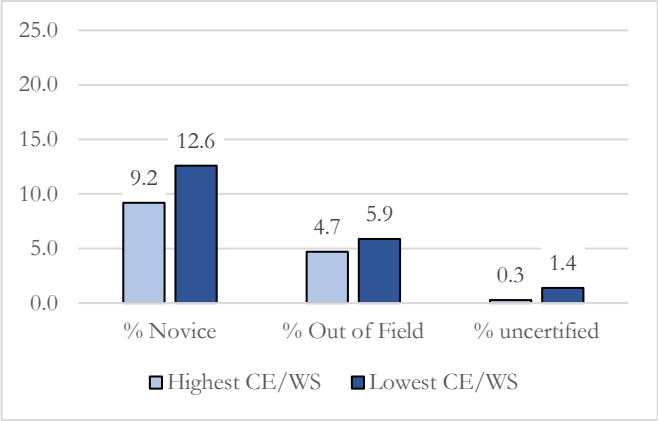
There is a strong research consensus about the relationship between experience and student outcomes—especially over the first five to ten years of a teacher's employment. The research is more mixed regarding teachers assigned out-of-field and teachers without certification. There is fairly strong evidence that teachers with greater subject matter knowledge tend to have greater student achievement. This is especially true in mathematics and science but not a consistent finding in other subject areas. There has been difficulty in identifying the effect of out-of-field teaching and teaching without a certification because of two issues: data limitations on teacher assignments and their certifications and relatively few teachers assigned to teach without any preparation or certification in subject areas with student test scores.

Below, I examine the percentage of each of these measures at the three school levels (elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools) for schools in districts with the least funding and schools in districts with the most funding. funding groups. For space purposes, I only present the data for schools in districts with the highest CE/WS levels and schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS.

Elementary Schools

As shown in Figure 1, schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS had a greater percentage of novice teachers, teachers assigned out-of-field, and teachers without certification than schools in districts with the greatest CE/WS. While the differences were not substantial, the impact of differential access to well-qualified teachers accumulates over time. Indeed, the difference in access is magnified as students encounter multiple teachers who are not well-qualified as they progress through the system. Some research suggests that even one ineffective teacher can have a negative impact on a child's academic trajectory and having two ineffective teachers can have a lasting and profound impact on their academic achievement.

Figure 1: Teacher Qualifications in Elementary Schools by Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)

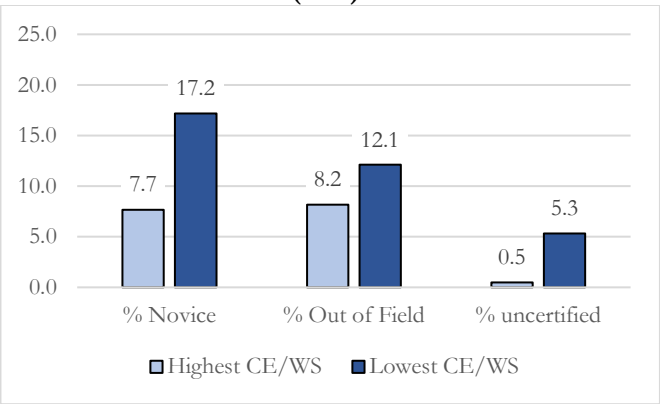


Middle Schools

As shown in Figure 2, schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS had far greater percentages of novice teachers, teachers assigned out-of-field, and teachers without certification. Specifically, the percentage of novice teachers in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS was more than twice the percentage in schools in districts with the highest CE/WS while the percentage of teachers assigned out-of-field in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS was 50% greater in schools than in schools in districts with the CE/WS

levels. The greatest disparity was for the percentage of uncertified teachers—schools with the lowest CE/WS had a percentage that was 10 times the percentage in schools with the highest CE/WS.

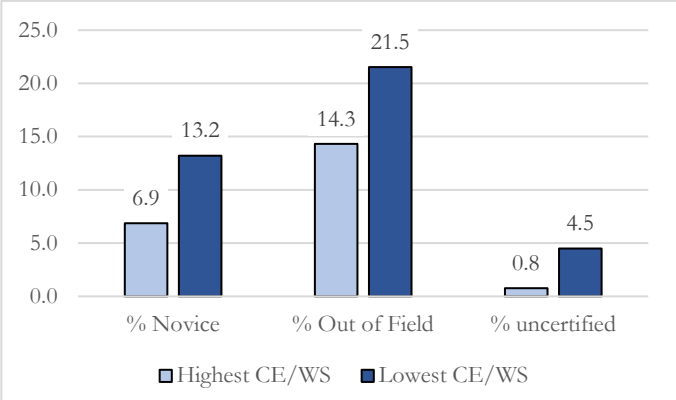
Table 2: Teacher Qualifications in Middle Schools by District Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)



High Schools

As shown in **Figure 3**, schools in districts with the CE/WS levels had greater percentages of novice teachers, teachers assigned out-of-field, and teachers without certification. Schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS had twice the percentage of novice teachers, 50% more teachers assigned out-of-field, and six times the percentage of uncertified teachers than schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. Strikingly, more than one out of every five teachers in schools with the lowest CE/WS were assigned out-of-field. Thus, on average, every student in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS is taught by at least one teacher assigned out-of-field each year.

Table 3: Teacher Qualifications in High Schools by District Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)



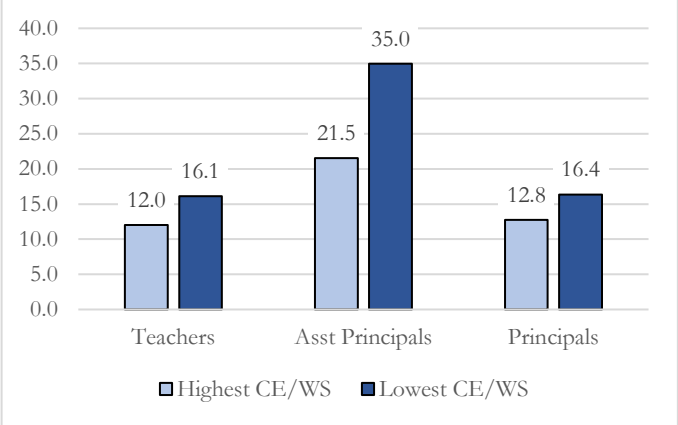
Teacher and Leader Turnover

In this section, I examine the annual turnover for teachers, assistant principals, and principals. Teacher turnover is important to investigate because research has shown that ***high teacher turnover has a negative impact effect on a variety of student outcomes***, including achievement. Because teacher turnover varies by school level, I analyze teacher turnover separately for each of the three school levels.

I also include the turnover of assistant principals and principals. Although there is no research on the effects of assistant principal turnover, research has shown that principal turnover has negative effects on teacher stability, school climate, and student outcomes.

As shown in **Figure 4**, turnover for all three types of educators was greater in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS than in schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. For schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS, 16.1% of teachers left the school and almost 13% of principals left the school. In contrast, only about 12% of teachers and principals left schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. In addition, greater than 1 out of every 3 assistant principals left schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS compared to only about 1 out of every 5 assistant principals in schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. This constant churn of teachers and leaders has a negative effect on student outcomes.

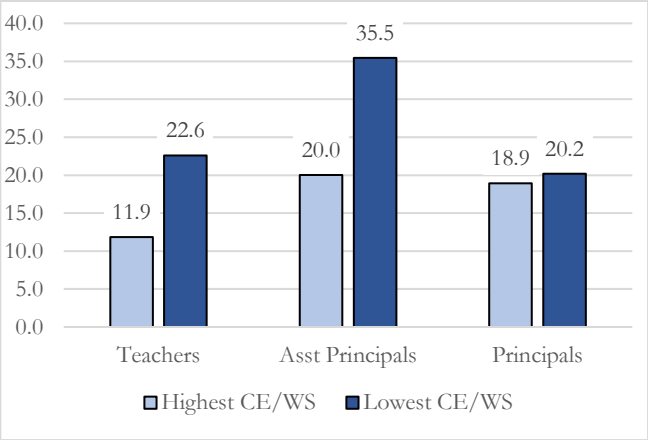
Figure 4: Annual Elementary School Educator Turnover for Schools in Districts with the Lowest and Highest Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022-23)



As shown in **Figure 5**, middle school teacher turnover is also substantially greater for schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS than schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. On average, the annual teacher turnover for schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS was 22.6%--more than 10 percentage points greater than for schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

While there was only a small difference in the turnover rate for principals between schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS and schools in districts with the highest CE/WS, greater than 1 out of every 3 assistant principals left schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS compared to only about 1 out of every 5 assistant principals in schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. This constant churn of teachers and leaders has a negative effect on student outcomes.

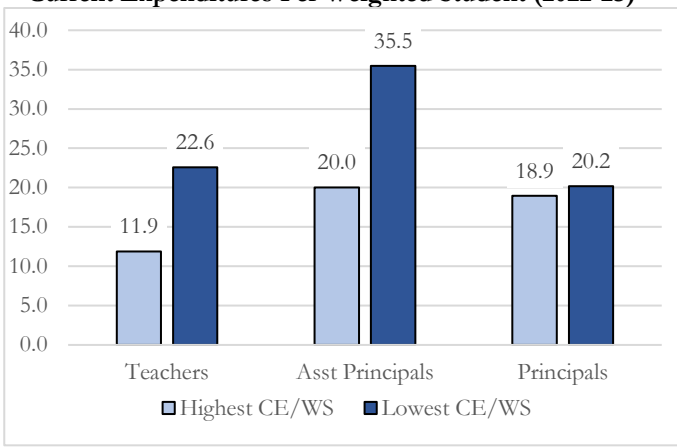
Figure 5: Annual Middle School Educator Turnover for Schools in Districts with the Lowest and Highest Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022-23)



As shown in **Figure 6**, high school teacher turnover was also substantially greater for schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS compared to schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. The annual teacher turnover for schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS was about 6 percentage points greater than for schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

There were also substantial differences in principal and assistant principal turnover. The turnover rate for principals in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS was about 25% which was 7 percentage points greater than the 17.9% turnover rate in schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. Finally, about 1 out of every 3 assistant principals left schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS compared to only about 1 out of every 5 assistant principals in schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

Figure 6: Annual High School Educator Turnover for Schools in Districts with the Lowest and Highest Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022-23)



Access to Support Personnel

In this section, I examine student access to counselors, librarians, and nurses. In each section, I present the comparisons between schools with the highest funding levels and lowest funding levels at the three school levels.

Access to Counselors

Recent research concludes ***counselors play a critical role in the educational experiences of students, providing resources that improve student*** mental health, academic achievement, student attendance, student behavior at school, and post-secondary readiness.

A recent study of counselors in Massachusetts found that counselors have a causal effect on both academic achievement and enrollment in post-secondary institution and this effect is similar in strength to that of teachers.

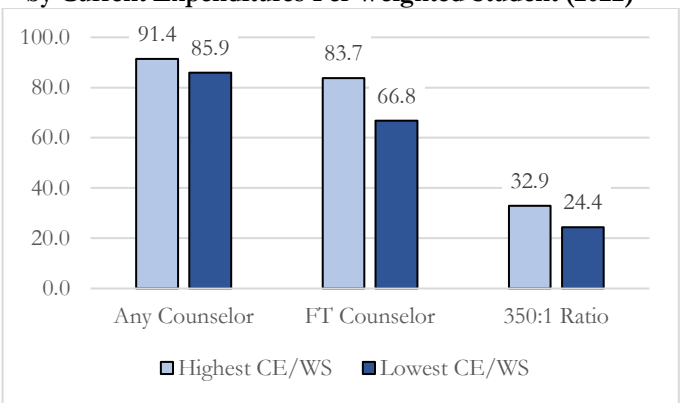
Counselors are particularly important in helping students living in poverty and first-generation college applicants navigate the complicated college admissions and financial aid process. For all these outcomes, **counselors have an even more profound influence for students living in poverty and minoritized students.**

Further, research shows that having a smaller student-counselor ratio increases the positive influence that counselors have on students. The recommended student- counselor ratio is 250 students for every one counselor. Very few schools in Pennsylvania meet this standard. Thus, in the analyses below, I examine the percentage of schools that provide a 350 student to one counselor ratio. I present an analysis for each school level below.

Elementary Schools

As shown in **Figure 7**, a greater percentage of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS than schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS employed any counselor, a full-time counselor, and met a 350 student to 1 counselor ratio. The difference in access to a full-time counselor was substantial—17 percentage points. Almost 1 out of every 3 schools in districts with the highest CE/WS met a 350 student to 1 counselor ratio while only 1 out of 4 schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS did so.

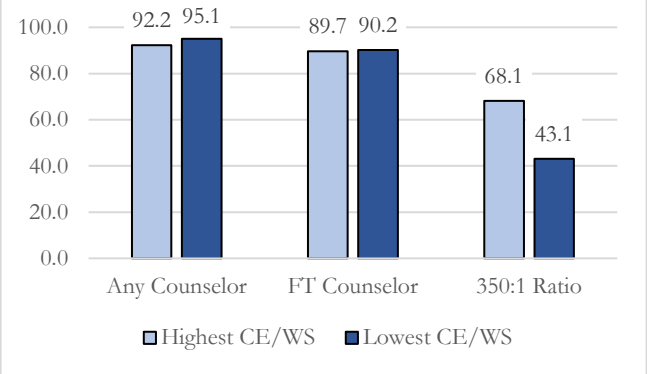
Figure 7: Percentage of Elementary Schools Employing Any Counselor, Full-Time Counselor, and Meeting a 350 Student to 1 Counselor Ratio by Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)



Middle Schools

As shown in **Figure 8**, there were only small differences between the two sets of schools with respect to employing any counselor or a full-time counselor. However, a substantially greater percentage of schools with the highest CE/WS than schools with the lowest CE/WS met a 350 student to 1 counselor ratio. In fact, the difference between the two sets of schools was about 25 percentage points in favor of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

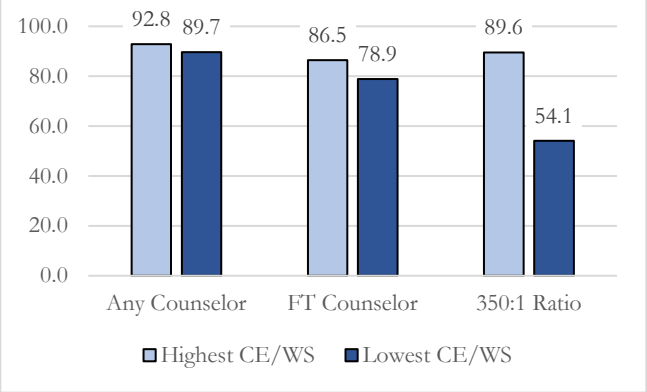
Figure 8: Percentage of Middle Schools Employing Any Counselor, Full-Time Counselor, and Meeting a 350 Student to 1 Counselor Ratio by Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)



High Schools

As shown in **Figure 9**, a greater percentage of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS employed any counselor, employed a full-time counselor, and met a 350 student.to 1 counselor ratio. The difference for the student-counselor ratio was substantial—about 36 percentage points. About 9 out of 10 high schools with the highest CE/WS provided a 350 student to one counselor ratio while only about 1 out of every 2 schools with the lowest CE/WS did so.

Figure 9: Percentage of High Schools Employing Any Counselor, Full-Time Counselor, and Meeting a 350 Student to 1 Counselor Ratio by Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)



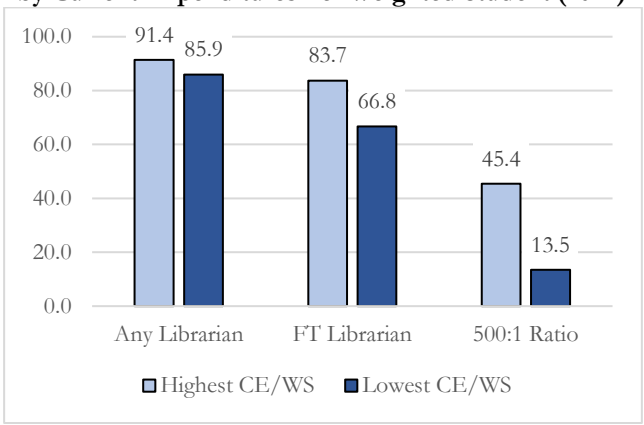
Access to Librarians

While there is not research consensus about the relationship between access to librarians and student achievement, research does suggest a positive relationship such that students who have access to a school library staffed by a qualified librarian tend to have greater achievement as well as achievement growth, even after controlling for other factors. This finding is strongest for students living in poverty since they tend to have less access to books at home and increasingly have less access to books through public libraries. Finally, access to libraries and librarians has also been found to be positively associated with children engaging in literature, developing hobbies, and developing social skills.

Elementary Schools

As shown in **Figure 10**, a substantially greater percentage of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS employed any librarian, a full-time librarian, and met a 500 student to 1 librarian ratio. For access to any librarian, the difference was about 37 percentage points while the difference for access to a full-time librarian was about 40 percentage points. About 3 out of every 5 schools with the highest CE/WS employed a full-time librarian while only 1 out of 5 schools with the lowest CE/WS did so. Finally, a substantially greater percentage of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS met a 500 student to 1 librarian ratio than schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS. Specifically, 45% of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS met the 350 students to 1 librarian while less than 14% of schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS did so.

Figure 10: Percentage of Elementary Schools Employing Any Librarian, Full-Time Librarian, and Meeting a 500 Student to 1 Librarian Ratio by Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)

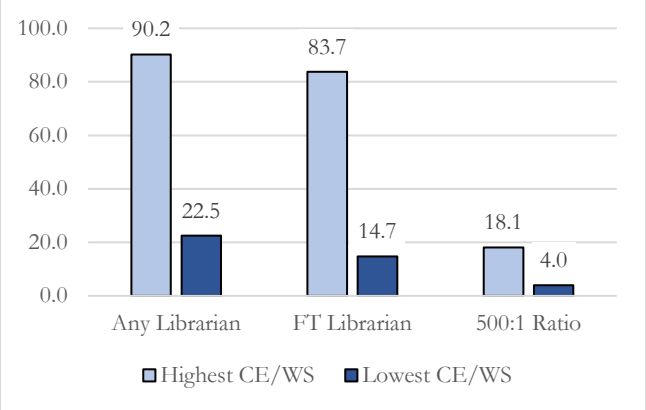


Middle Schools

As shown in **Figure 11**, there were massive differences in access to a librarian between the two sets of schools at the middle school level. While about 9 out of 10 schools in districts with the highest CE/WS employed a librarian, only slightly more than 2 out of 10 schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS did so. More than 8 out of 10 schools in districts with the highest

CE/WS employed a full-time librarian while only slightly more than 1 out of 10 schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS did so. Finally, about 18% of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS had a 500 student to 1 librarian ratio while only about 4% of schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS did so.

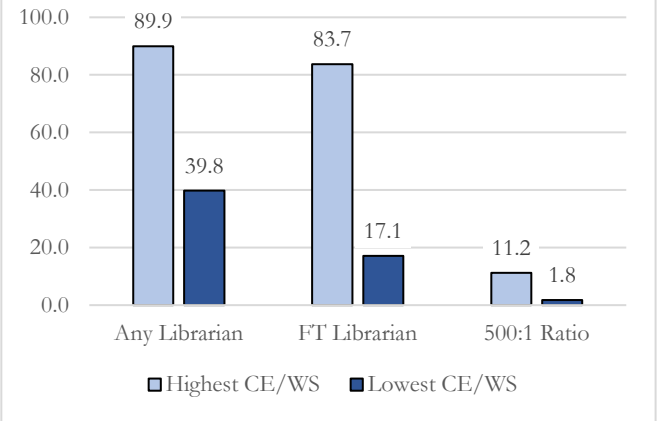
Figure 11: Percentage of Middle Schools Employing Any Librarian, Full-Time Librarian, and Meeting a 500 Student to 1 Librarian Ratio by Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)



High Schools

As shown in **Figure 12**, there were also very substantial differences at the high school level. About 9 out of 10 schools in districts with the highest CE/WS employed a librarian compared to only about 4 out of every 10 schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS. While about 6 out of 10 schools in districts with the highest CE/WS employed a full-time librarian compared to less than 2 out of 10 schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS. Finally, 11.2% of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS had a 500 student to 1 librarian ratio. While this was extremely low, the percentage for these schools was more than six times greater than the percentage of schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS. which was almost five times greater than the 2.5% of schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS.

Figure 12: Percentage of High Schools Employing Any Librarian, Full-Time Librarian, and Meeting a 500 Student to 1 Librarian Ratio by Current Expenditures Per Weighted Student (2022)



Expenditures on Teacher Salaries

Another consequence of the disparity in funding between schools with the highest- and lowest- CE/WS is expenditures on teacher salaries. Differences in expenditures on salaries can partially explain differences in the qualifications and retention of teachers between schools that have been reviewed above. In the analyses below, I document the disparities in teacher salaries per pupil, per classroom, and per school.

Because salaries differ by school level and labor market, I need to ensure I am making an "apples-to-apples" comparison. This could be done through statistical techniques that are difficult to explain and understand. Another method is to restrict comparisons to the same school level and labor market.

By restricting the analyses within the same labor market, I ensure that districts have access to the same supply of teachers and that the same amount of dollars buys the same amount of goods—including employees. In this study, I used the core based statistical areas (CBSAs) provided by the US Census Bureau. Inclusion in a labor market was based on data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics.

Only seven of the 10 labor markets in Pennsylvania included enough schools in both the highest- and lowest-funded districts. These seven labor markets were: Allentown-Bethlehem, Harrisburg-Carlisle, Lancaster, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Reading, and York-Hanover.

Below, I present the results for teacher salaries per pupil for each school level and labor market. I then present data on salaries per classroom and salaries per school.

Teacher Salaries Per Pupil

In this section, I document the per pupil expenditures on teacher salaries by school level and labor market.

As shown in **Figure 13**, schools in the districts with the highest CE/WS had substantially greater per pupil teacher salaries than schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS for all three school levels.

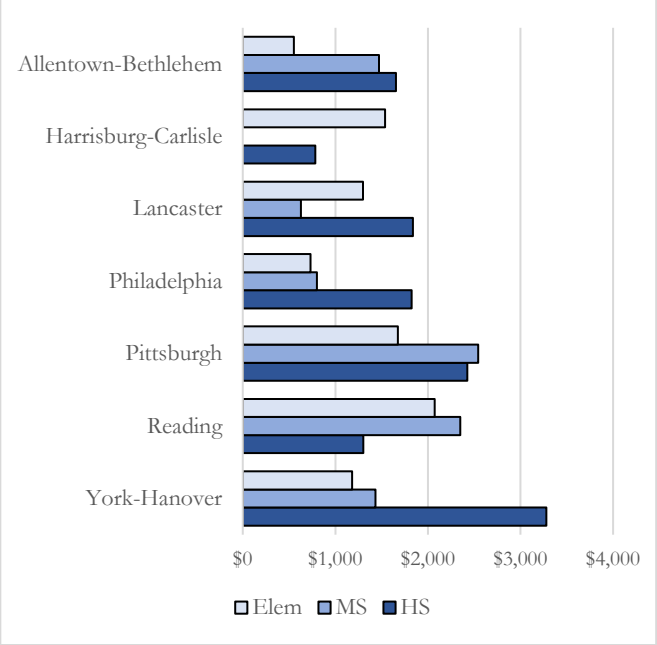
At the elementary school level, the average difference in per pupil expenditures on teacher salaries was $1,292 in favor of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. ***In other words, schools in districts with the highest CE/WS spent $1,292 more on teacher salaries per student than schools in districts with the lowest*** **CE/WS.** The smallest difference was about $700 per pupil in the Allentown-Bethlehem labor market. The largest difference was about $2,000 per pupil for the Reading labor market.

At the middle school level, the average difference in per pupil expenditures on teacher salaries between schools in districts with the lowest- and highest- CE/WS was $1,318. The smallest difference was $628 for the

Lancaster labor market while the greatest difference was $2,542 for the Pittsburgh labor market. The difference in the Reading labor market was also greater than $2,000 per pupil.

For high schools, the average difference across all labor markets was $1,837. The smallest difference was $784 for the Harrisburg-Carlisle labor market while the greatest difference was $3,280 for the York-Hanover labor market. Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS

Figure 13: Per Pupil Difference in Teacher Salaries Between Schools in the Highest- and Lowest- Funded Districts by Labor Market and School Level (2022)



Teacher Salaries Per Classroom

In this analysis, I compare expenditures on teacher salaries ***per classroom*** between schools in districts with the lowest- and highest- CE/WS within the seven labor markets. Again, the analysis is disaggregated by school level. For comparison purposes, I assume an elementary classroom has 20 students, a middle school classroom has 25 students, and a high school classroom has 30 students. The number of students in a classroom, of course, varies by school and even within schools. However, this approach creates an easy to understand "apples-to-apples" comparison.

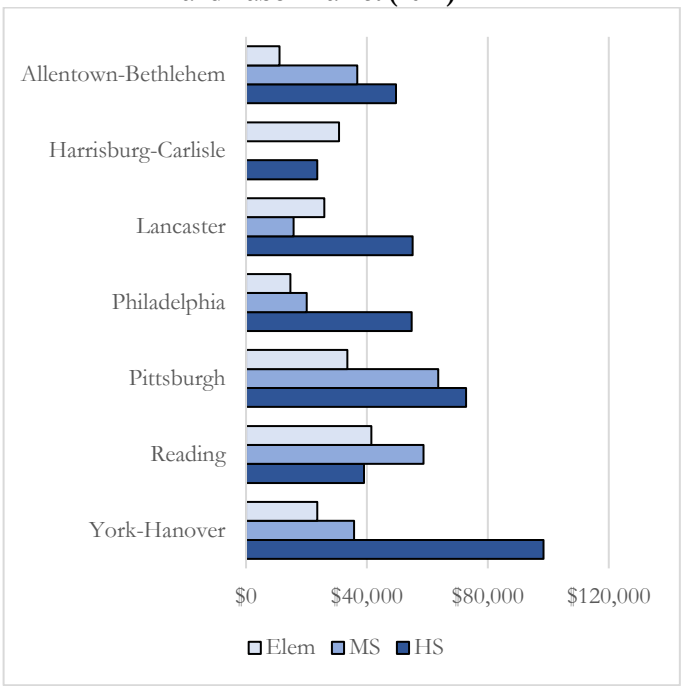
As shown in **Figure 14**, the average difference at the elementary school level was nearly $29,000. The average difference at the middle school level was almost $33,000 while the average difference at the high school level was slightly greater than $56,000. These are all substantial differences in expenditures when considering these differences are *per classroom*. ***In sum, schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS spent substantially less on teacher salaries per classroom than schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.***

At the elementary school level, the smallest difference was $14,645 for the Philadelphia labor market and the greatest difference was $41,438 for Reading. Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS

At the middle school level, the smallest difference was $15,701 for the Lancaster labor market. The greatest difference was $58,734 for the Reading labor market. Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS

Finally, at the high school level, the smallest difference was $223,533 for the Harrisburg-Carlisle labor market. The greatest difference was for the York-Hanover district at nearly $100,000 per classroom. Again, differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS

Figure 14: Classroom-Level Differences in Teacher Salaries Between Schools in the Highest- and Lowest- Funded Districts by School Level and Labor Market (2022)



Teacher Salaries Per School

In this analysis, I compare expenditures on teacher salaries **per school** between schools in districts with the highest- and lowest- CE/WS by school level within the seven labor markets. For comparison purposes, I assume an elementary school enrolls 500 students, a middle school enrolls 750 students, and a high school enrolls 1,000 students. This approach creates an easy to understand "apples-to-apples" comparison.

As shown in **Figure 15**, there were substantial differences in the school-level expenditures between schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS and schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. For elementary schools, the average difference was about $646,000 in favor of schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. For middle- and high-

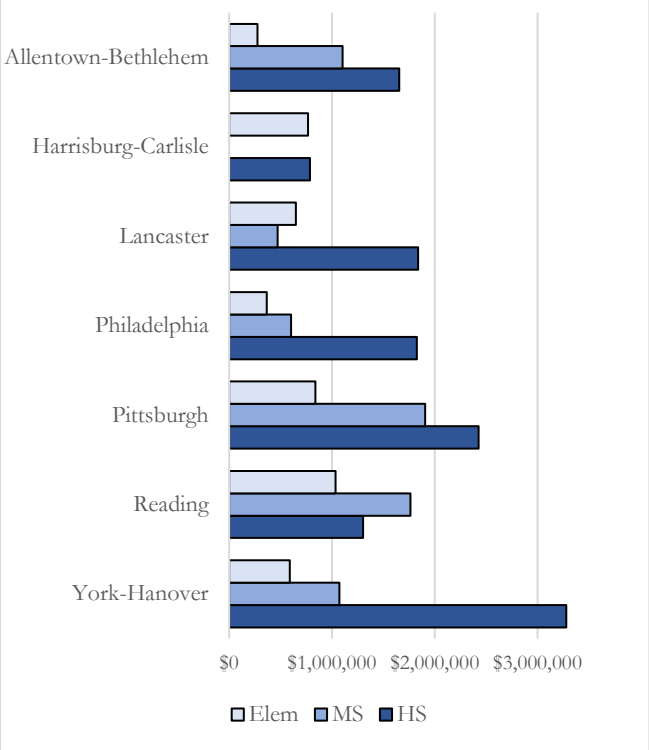
schools, schools in districts with the highest CE/WS had expenditures on teacher salaries that were about $988,000 and $1,870,000 greater than schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS, respectively. ***Thus, the differences in expenditures on teacher salaries between schools I districts with the highest CE/WS and schools I districts with the lowest CE/WS are extremely large and these differences stem primarily from the Commonwealth's inequitable school finance system.***

For elementary schools, the smallest difference was about $276,000 in the Allentown-Bethlehem labor market. The greatest difference was more than $1,000,000 for the Reading labor market. Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

For middle schools, the smallest difference was about $471,000 for the Lancaster labor market. The greatest difference was $1,900,000 for the Pittsburgh labor market. Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

Finally, at the high school level, the smallest difference was about $784,000 for the Harrisburg-Carlisle labor market. The greatest difference was nearly $3,300,000 for the York-Hanover labor market. Again, differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

Figure 15: School-Level Differences in Teacher Salaries Between Schools in the Highest- and Lowest- Funded Districts by School Level and Labor Market (2022)



Student Characteristics

In this section, I review the characteristics of students enrolled in schools in the lowest funded districts and the highest funded districts across the Commonwealth.

Elementary Schools

As shown in Table 2, there were substantial differences in the student characteristics between the two sets of schools. As compared to schools in in districts with the highest Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS, schools in districts with the lowest Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS had at least twice the percentages of Black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and English Language Learner students. Alternatively, schools in the districts with the highest Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS had 1.5 times the percentage of white students as schools in districts with the lowest Both differences favored schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

Table 2: Elementary School Student Characteristics for Schools in the Lowest Funded Districts and Highest Funded Districts (2022)

Student Characteristic	Highest-Funded	Lowest-Funded	HF - LF
Black	8.9	20.7	-11.8
Hispanic	6.5	22.1	-15.6
White	71.3	46.9	24.4
Multi Race	5.8	6.6	-0.9
Asian	7.3	3.4	3.9
Econ Disadv	29.1	67.6	-38.5
Special Educ	14.9	16.4	-1.5
ELL	3.7	8.5	-4.8

Middle Schools

Table 3 shows that differences between middle schools in districts with the lowest- and highest- CE/WS were even greater than at the elementary school level. Specifically, the percentages of Black and Hispanic students in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS were three times greater than in schools in districts with the highest CE/WS. For ELL students, the difference was four times greater for schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS. Schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS also had more than double the percentage of economically disadvantaged students than schools in districts with the highest CE/WS.

Table 3: Middle School Student Characteristics for Schools in the Lowest Funded Districts and Highest Funded Districts (2022)

Student Characteristic	Highest-Funded	Lowest-Funded	HF - LF
Black	12.8	39.0	-26.2
Hispanic	6.6	22.6	-15.9
White	68.3	29.3	39.0
Multi Race	5.4	4.9	0.5
Asian	6.7	4.0	2.7
Econ Disadv	33.3	73.6	-40.3
Special Educ	19.5	20.2	-0.7
ELL	2.3	9.9	-7.6

High Schools

Table 3 shows similar trends in student characteristics as at the elementary- and middle- school levels. Specifically, as compared to schools districts with the highest CE/WS, schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS had at least twice the percentages of Black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and English Language Learner students. In fact, the differences were near three times greater for Black and Hispanic students and more than four times greater for ELL students.

Table 4: High School Student Characteristics for Schools in the Lowest Funded Districts and Highest Funded Districts (2022)

Student Characteristic	Highest-Funded	Lowest-Funded	HF - LF
Black	10.5	30.7	-20.2
Hispanic	5.7	16.1	-10.3
White	75.1	45.6	29.5
Multi Race	3.8	4.2	-0.4
Asian	4.6	3.2	1.5
Econ Disadv	33.0	62.8	-29.9
Special Educ	19.8	20.3	-0.4
ELL	1.4	6.0	-4.6

Conclusions

As a Commonwealth that cares deeply about our children, we should place our greatest investments in schools that serve the children who most need our help. Yet, as this brief shows, ***we have created a system that provides far fewer fiscal and human resources to students enrolled in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS as compared to their peers in the districts with the highest CE/WS.*** Specifically, students in schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS are more likely to be taught by a novice teacher, a teacher assigned out-of-field, and an uncertified teacher. They are also more likely to be in schools that experience greater teacher-, assistant principal-, and principal- turnover. Finally, schools in districts with the lowest CE/WS spend substantially less money than schools in districts with the highest **CE/WS** on teacher salaries per pupil, per classroom, and per school. ***In short, our current system of education—especially funding--creates greater obstacles to success for children enrolled in schools in our most underfunded districts. In fact, our system provides more resources and support for children who are already more advantaged in many ways.***

Recommendations

We must find a way to create an equitable funding system that ensures all districts can compete on a level playing field for effective educators. At the same time, we must also increase the supply of educators—especially educators of colors. Adopting a more equitable and adequate funding system without addressing the teacher pipeline will not completely solve the issues faced by communities that have suffered decades of neglect.

To ensure each and every school in the Commonwealth can provide adequate access to human resources, policymakers should consider the following policies that would increase the number of educators available for hire while not diminishing the quality of the educator workforce.

1) Increase teacher salaries.

Teacher pay has remained stagnant or even declined in Pennsylvania. Given the high and increasing cost of higher education, inflation, rising housing costs, increasing student loan debt, as well as other factors, there is little to no economic incentive for a person entering college to choose teaching as a career. In fact, I have estimated that at least 35% of Pennsylvania novice teachers who are single parents with children do not earn a livable wage.

2) Fund a teacher scholarship, apprenticeship, or loan forgiveness program,

To entice more individuals to choose education as a career, policymakers should reduce the cost of obtaining a degree and certification. This could be through a teacher scholarship program that pays the tuition of individuals who are enrolled in a teacher preparation program. A similar approach would be no interest loans for individuals enrolling in teacher preparation programs. For those teaching for a specified number of years, a portion or the entirety of the loan could be forgiven.

3) Financially Support Grow Your Own Program

The Commonwealth should provide financial and other support for Grow Your Own programs. There should be much more support for schools like the proposed Middle College High School in Philadelphia that will enroll students interested in pursuing a career in the education field.

4) Targeted Salary Adjustments

The shortage is most acute for specific subject areas and "hard-to-staff" schools. Policymakers should provide additional salary adjustments to entice individuals to enter into and remain teaching in specific subject areas that are designated as experiencing an acute shortage. Policymakers should also provide additional salary adjustments for properly certified teachers to choose employment in a school designated as "hard-to-staff" and to remain in the school for a specific number of years.

5) Student Teaching Stipends

Because of the high cost of higher education in Pennsylvania, many students must work while enrolled in college. During student teaching, a student works full-time learning to become a teacher.

This often includes work at night grading papers and preparing lesson plans. Many students also need to work which detracts severely from their student teaching experience. Given that the student teaching experience is the most beneficial experience prior to teaching, the need to work while also completing student teaching dramatically lessens the ability of future teachers to be fully prepared to enter teaching. This may lead students to either decide not to become a teacher or to leave teaching early in their career. Providing financial support to students enrolled in student teaching will increase the quality of the preparation of the teacher as well as increase the odds the person chooses to become a teacher and remains in the teaching profession.

6) **Establish and Support a Teacher Career Ladder**

While experienced teachers may obtain a Teacher Leader certificate, there is no systemic system of teacher leaders in Pennsylvania. Some teachers become disenchanted with teaching because there is no opportunity to earn substantially more money or take on leadership roles without choosing to enter administration. Teacher leader positions can provide an alternative to leaving the teaching profession to enter a non-instructional role. Moreover, teacher leaders can help mentor and support beginning teachers or ineffective teachers, thus improving teacher effectiveness, student learning, and teacher retention. In short, fiscal support for this measure may have a positive return on investment.

7) **Establish and Support Teacher Residencies**

A substantial number of teachers—especially teachers of color—enter teaching without full certification. These individuals are expected to teach full-time while they are attending classes to obtain certification. The attrition rate for such individuals is extraordinarily high. Keeping these teachers in the teaching profession would substantially increase the shortage of teachers and especially the shortage of teachers of color.

8) **Examine Entry and Exit Requirements of Teacher Preparation Programs**

The Commonwealth should convene a committee of experts to examine all the entry and exit requirements for teacher preparation and entry into the field. For example, the current statute expects students to earn and maintain a 3.0 GPA despite a lack of research supporting this requirement. The goal would be to remove barriers to entry into teaching without compromising on the quality of teachers entering the workforce.

9) **Improve the capacity of the state to support a comprehensive educator workforce strategy**

We currently lack sufficient information to fully understand the shortage of educators, the distribution of the shortage, or the causes of the shortage. The Commonwealth needs to invest in the Pennsylvania Department of Education and other agencies to collect far more information and make that information easily available to policymakers and the public.

Appendix: Data and Methods

CBSAs and Labor Markets

According to the Office of Management and Budget, "The general concept of a core based statistical area (CBSA) is that of an area containing a large population nucleus, or urban area, and adjacent communities that have a high degree of integration with that nucleus." CBSA is often used in education research to identify a labor market for educators with the goal of making an apples-to-apples comparison of fiscal matters—especially salaries—within the same labor market.

Teacher Salary Analysis

After schools were identified for the analysis, I used the PDE educator employment file to select all teachers employed in those schools.

The file includes the name of the teacher, a unique identifying number for each teacher, the full-time equivalent for each teacher and each of their assignments, the school's name and numeric identifier for each teacher and each assignment, and the annual salary for each teacher and assignment.

A full-time equivalent (FTE) is the percentage of the day a teacher is assigned to teach a particular subject in a particular school.

After selecting only teachers employed in the schools in the analysis, I aggregated the data by person and school. Most importantly, this step results in an FTE total for each person and for each of the schools in which the person worked. This is an important step because I need to identify the FTE and salary for each school in which a person works.

For most of the teachers, each teacher was assigned to one school and had an FTE of 1.0 (meaning the person was employed full-time as a teacher in the schools). In these cases, the salary of the teacher was simply the salary provided by the district. This was true even for the temporary substitute teachers with salaries lower than the minimum teacher salary.

Teachers who had an FTE total of less than 1.0 presented a problem. Take, for example, Teacher A and Teacher B. Suppose both teachers have an FTE of 0.5 and Teacher A has a salary of $30,000 and the salary of Teacher B is $50,000. Are the salaries correct? They might be correct, but they also might be incorrect.

Determining whether the salaries of teachers with FTEs lower than 1.0 requires additional information. For example, knowing the years of experience of the teacher, their 2023 FTE and salary, and the average salary for full-time teachers in the school in which the teacher works would all be useful in determining if a salary was correct. I was able to calculate and connect all of this data and used it to identify salaries that

were correct and to modify salaries that were incorrect. For example, consider Teacher A and teacher B again with the information shown in Table A1.

Table 1A: Example of Teacher Salary Decisions

Teacher	A	B
Exper 22	14	8
FTE 22	0.5	0.5
Salary 22	30,000	50,000
FTE 23	1.0	0.5
Salary 23	61,750	51,000
Sch Avg	57,500	55,500

From this information, it would be reasonable to conclude that the salary of $30,000 was correct for Teacher A, but that the salary of $50,000 was incorrect for Teacher B. In fact, the available information suggests the salary for Teacher B should be 0.5 x $50,000 = $25,000. Thus, I used the available information to identify a salary that appeared to be most accurate.

List of Districts in Teacher Salary Analysis

Allentown-Bethlehem	
Highest Funding Quintile	Lowest Funding Quintile
Nazareth Area SD	Panther Valley SD
Saucon Valley SD	Allentown City SD
Jim Thorpe Area SD	
Northwestern Lehigh SD	
Salisbury Township SD	
Southern Lehigh SD	

Harrisburg-Carlisle	
Highest Funding Quintile	Lowest Funding Quintile
Camp Hill SD	Harrisburg City SD
Halifax Area SD	Steelton-Highspire SD
	Susquehanna Township SD

Lancaster	
Highest Funding Quintile	Lowest Funding Quintile
Eastern Lancaster County SD	Penn Manor SD
Pequea Valley SD	

Reading	
Highest Funding Quintile	Lowest Funding Quintile
Brandywine Heights Area SD	Reading SD
Conrad Weiser Area SD	Antietam SD
Kutztown Area SD	Muhlenberg SD
Oley Valley SD	
Tulpehocken Area SD	

York-Hanover	
Highest Funding Quintile	Lowest Funding Quintile
South Eastern SD	Hanover Public SD
	York City SD

Pittsburgh	
Highest Funding Quintile	Lowest Funding Quintile
Avella Area SD	Albert Gallatin Area SD
Peters Township SD	Brownsville Area SD
Pittsburgh SD	Connellsville Area SD
Allegheny Valley SD	Uniontown Area SD
Avonworth SD	Charleroi SD
Pine-Richland SD	Ringgold SD
Bethel Park SD	Baldwin-Whitehall SD
Carlynton SD	McKeesport Area SD
Chartiers Valley SD	Sto-Rox SD
Cornell SD	Belle Vernon Area SD
Fox Chapel Area SD	Jeannette City SD
Hampton Township SD	New Kensington-Arnold
Keystone Oaks SD	Norwin SD
Montour SD	Southmoreland SD
Mt Lebanon SD	Aliquippa SD
North Allegheny SD	Ambridge Area SD
Quaker Valley SD	Big Beaver Falls Area SD
Riverview SD	Freedom Area SD
Shaler Area SD	New Brighton Area SD
Steel Valley SD	
Upper Saint Clair SD	
West Allegheny SD	
Seneca Valley SD	
South Side Area SD	

Philadelphia	
Highest Funding Quintile	Lowest Funding Quintile
Centennial SD	Norristown Area SD
Central Bucks SD	Chester-Upland SD
Council Rock SD	Southeast Delco SD
New Hope-Solebury SD	Upper Darby SD
Palisades SD	William Penn SD
Pennsbury SD	Philadelphia City SD
Abington SD	
Cheltenham SD	
Colonial SD	
Hatboro-Horsham SD	
Jenkintown SD	
Lower Merion SD	
Lower Moreland Twnship SD	
Methacton SD	
North Penn SD	
Perkiomen Valley SD	
Souderton Area SD	
Springfield Township SD	
Spring-Ford Area SD	
Upper Dublin SD	
Upper Merion Area SD	
Wissahickon SD	
Great Valley SD	
Octorara Area SD	
Owen J Roberts SD	
Phoenixville Area SD	
Tredyffrin-Easttown SD	
Unionville-Chadds Ford SD	
Chichester SD	
Garnet Valley SD	
Marple Newtown SD	
Radnor Township SD	
Rose Tree Media SD	
Wallingford-Swarthmore SD	