

Who We Are

Education Voters of PA is a non-profit, non-partisan, statewide education policy and advocacy organization focused on building and mobilizing the public will to ensure that support for quality public education and an opportunity to learn for all children is a top priority for key decision makers.

We are a project of the Keystone Research Center.

www.educationvoterspa.org



EDUCATION VOTERS
of Pennsylvania

A statewide problem demands a statewide movement



20 governing body members

16 endorsing members

**Statewide education
associations, education,
child advocacy and civic
organizations**

- **Research**
- **Communications**
- **Mobilization**
- **Government Relations**



EDUCATION VOTERS
of Pennsylvania

Research--Reports

EDUCATION LAW CENTER



Shortchanging Children with Disabilities: State Underfunding of Special Education in Pennsylvania

October 2018

The trajectory of a person's life is profoundly shaped by what happens in school. For students with disabilities, the stakes could not be higher, as these children are more likely to face unemployment and underemployment later in life,¹ leading to homelessness or institutional placement.² Prior to the adoption of federal and state civil rights laws, these students were literally shut out of school. Today, we recognize that students with disabilities need and are legally entitled to a free and appropriate public education ("FAPE") in the least restrictive environment.³

Providing a FAPE to children with disabilities involves providing specialized instruction tailored to meet their unique needs, integration in the regular classroom with supplemental supports and services, and providing an education calculated to achieve grade advancement and true progress in light of their potential.⁴ Under the law, needed educational services must be provided through a combination of federal, state, and local funding, without additional cost to parents or students.

Providing a FAPE means meeting the needs of a child like Tammy, a 12-year old student with multiple physical and neurological disabilities in an underfunded school district. Tammy was unable to attend school for four months because her district could not hire the nurse she needed. She is now far behind her peers because her communication and social skills regressed while she languished at home, receiving only a few hours of education each week.

Five years ago, in response to advocacy by the Education Law Center, parents, and other partners statewide, Pennsylvania's General Assembly convened a [Special Education Funding Commission](#) and held [hearings](#) across the state to examine how to improve funding to better serve students with disabilities. "State support for special education in public schools is important for helping students to achieve academically and fulfill their individual potential," the Commission's December 2013 [Report](#) observed. Despite this important purpose, the Funding Commission Report went on to say that the state's existing funding system "is often seen as not fairly and adequately serving the current needs in Pennsylvania for students with disabilities and their schools."⁵

In response, the General Assembly adopted a new special education formula that distributes funding in excess of 2013-14 levels based on the number of eligible students, the severity of their disability, and the cost of services. But does the current system enable Pennsylvania school districts to fairly and adequately serve the current needs of students with disabilities? Does state funding provide what is required to ensure that these students receive a FAPE as required by law? Those questions are the subjects of this report.

Despite Modest Progress in Recent Years, State Special Education Funding Remains Inadequate

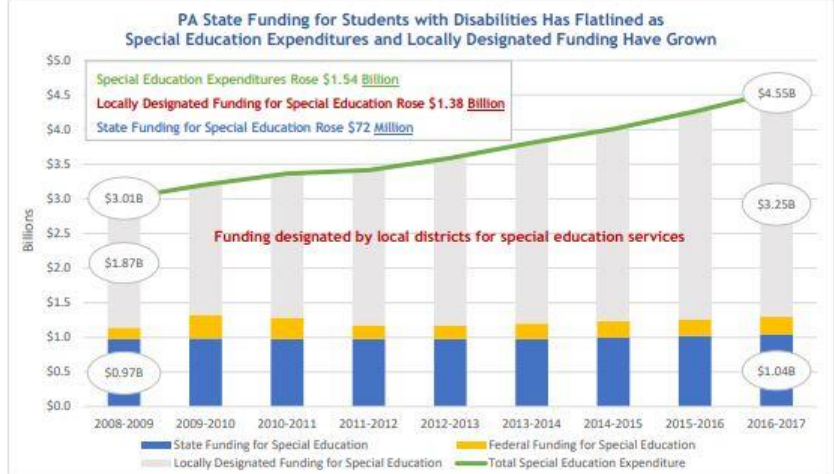
Recent state increases in special education have been a welcome shift from the years of stagnation that preceded the Commission's Report. From 2014 to 2018, the state increased special education funding by \$90 million, a notable change from the preceding four-year period where state funding for special education instead fell by \$6.1 million. The General Assembly itself acknowledged this previous lack of investment in special education, noting in the 2013 Funding Commission Report that "since 2008-09, Pennsylvania has not increased special education funding."⁶

Despite this upward trend, the rate of state investment has failed to keep pace with local needs. Statewide, special education costs have been rising at a rate averaging nearly \$200 million per year, with the most recent years reflecting even larger increases.⁷ From 2008 to 2016, the most recent year for which both revenue and expenditure data are available, state investment in special education increased by \$72 million. Yet during that time, *district special education costs increased by \$1.54 billion, from \$3 billion to \$4.5*

Shortchanging Students with Disabilities: State Underfunding of Special Education in PA | 2018

billion.⁸ Local districts had to allocate funds to cover 90% of those increased costs, the equivalent of \$1.38 billion, in district budgets. In other words, local districts designated close to \$20 to special education for every additional \$1 contributed by the state. This creates significant revenue challenges for local communities that must be met through general education sources, such as local taxes and state basic education funding. For example, in Wilkes-Barre Area School District, the cost of special education services increased by \$11 million from 2008 to 2016. The state's special education funding increase of only \$641,000 required the district to designate \$10.3 million in other education funding to meet increased costs.

Since 2008, local districts designated close to \$20 to special education for every additional \$1 contributed by the state.



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Annual Financial Reports. Online at <https://bit.ly/2P7d3hG>

Even with such significant local funding increases, most districts still lack sufficient resources to ensure that students with disabilities receive the services and supports they are legally entitled to receive. A 2009 report found that 391 school districts had inadequate funding for special education, resulting in an annual funding gap of \$380 million, or \$1,947 per pupil on average.⁹ Given minimal state investments and local challenges meeting increased fiscal pressures,¹⁰ problems of underfunding and inadequate special education services have undoubtedly grown since then.

Pennsylvania's Declining State Share of Special Education Revenues Deepens Funding Inequities

Because state contributions have so significantly lagged behind local expenditures, the allocation of funding between state and locally designated sources has become increasingly inequitable. In 2008-09, the state provided nearly one-third of total special education funding; by 2016-17, the state share had declined to less than one-quarter. Over that same time, the share designated by local districts increased from 62% to 72%.¹¹ Many districts faced even more dramatic changes in state and local allocations. More than 83% of districts, 417 in total, have seen their share of special education expenditure increase since 2008, and 53 districts have seen

Research—Fact Sheets

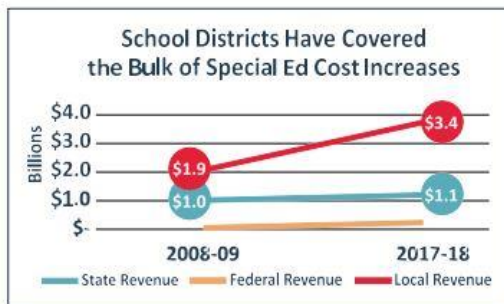


Bermudian Springs School District

A STAGGERING STORY OF STATE NEGLECT:

School districts need help with the rising costs of special education

Pennsylvania's financial support for special education has failed to keep pace with local needs. Between 2008 and 2018, Pennsylvania increased state special education funding by \$95 million. Yet during that time, total special education costs to local school districts increased 18 times faster than state aid – by a whopping \$1.7 billion.



In the Bermudian Springs School District, from 2008 to 2018, expenses for special education increased by \$1,597,827.

State special education funding covered \$92,032 of the increase, while taxpayers in the Bermudian Springs School District were left to come up with \$1,223,722.*

When the state does not pay its share of special education funding, local school districts face difficult choices, including raising property taxes to meet funding gaps, spreading limited resources across a range of programs, and reducing needed services and supports for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities need and are legally entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. The state has both a moral and a legal obligation to better educate and support children with disabilities. We cannot afford to have the state continue to ignore its obligation to meet the resource needs of these students.

Please contact your state senator and representative to let them know you support more state funding for public schools, including for special education.

PASCHOOLSWORK.ORG



FACEBOOK.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK



TWITTER.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK



*School districts also receive a small amount of federal funding to support students with disabilities. Any discrepancy between the change in expenditures and the combined change in state and local funding is due to a change in federal funding for the district.

Research--Fact Sheets



Reading School District Factsheet

Pennsylvania is not paying its fair share for public schools. It ranks 44th in the country in state share of education costs. Pennsylvania also has the widest gap in the U.S. between the highest and lowest spending school districts.

What does this mean for the Reading School District?

18%

Share of school funding provided by local taxpayers to Reading.

4

The number of times Reading has raised property taxes in the last 10 years.

226

Reading rank in terms of local tax effort out of 500 school districts (#1 being highest).

\$160M

The increase in state funding for Reading if it were fully funded by the state.

Contact these elected officials

to let them know you support more funding for your schools and sensible property tax relief:

Senator

Sen. Judy Schwank (D)

Representatives

Rep. Mark Rozzi (D)

Rep. Manuel Guzman (D)

How much is spent to educate district students?

\$12,618

Current spending per student in Reading.

490

Reading rank in current spending out of 500 school districts (#1 being highest).

PASCHOOLSWORK.ORG



FACEBOOK.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK



TWITTER.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK



Reading School District Factsheet

Here is what has changed for the district since 2011 when the state dramatically reduced education funding.

**+\$20,294,369
(15%)**

Increase in instructional costs for the district

**+\$295,097
(0%)**

Change in state funding to cover instructional costs

**+58%
+\$18,683,392**

Change in Expenditures for Special Education

**+28%
+\$2,622,604**

Change in State Revenue Dedicated to Special Education

**+460%
+\$9,226,640**

Change in Payments to Charter Schools

**Number of
students
18,871**

**Performance -
Students on
Grade Level**

Reading:
3rd
29%

Math:
7th
9%

Child Poverty Rate

School
District
44%

Statewide
17%

To view sources of this information please visit
www.paschoolswork.org/data

PASCHOOLSWORK.ORG



FACEBOOK.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK



TWITTER.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK



Communications-Press Conferences

May 6, 2021

Lancaster/York

Pittsburgh

Lehigh Valley


Northeastern PA

North-Central PA

Philadelphia Area



Mobilization-Webinars






SAVE THE DATE!

**Join PA SCHOOLS WORK
for a Lunch & Learn Webinar**

PA's School Counselor Shortage:
New Report Quantifies A Problem That Is
More Important Than Ever

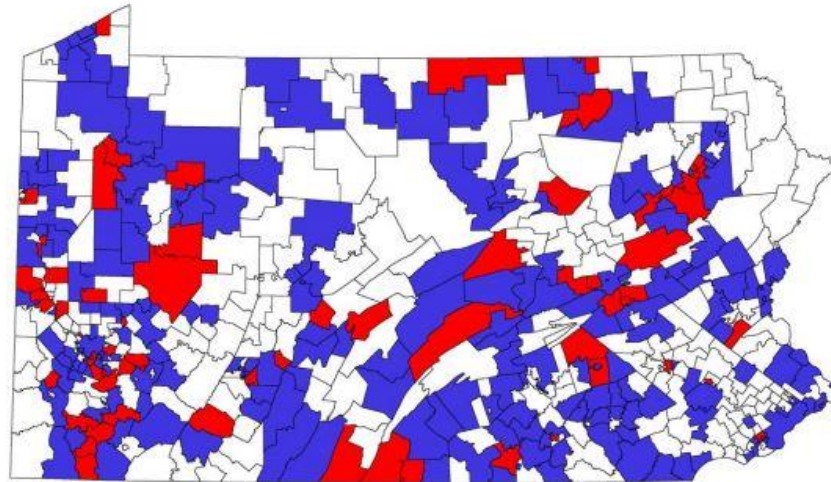
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31ST
12:00pm-12:30pm

PASCHOOLSWORK.ORG 	FACEBOOK.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK 	TWITTER.COM/PASCHOOLSWORK 
--	---	---

EMILIA PEIFFER, PSCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ADAM OLDHAM, PSCA GOVERNMENT RELATIONS



Mobilization-Webinars



1:377

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

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

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



LEVEL UP 100 THE 100 DISTRICTS

The **100 identified districts** include rural, suburban, and urban districts in every region. While this list includes **20% of Pennsylvania's school districts**, those districts serve:

65% of Pennsylvania's Black students

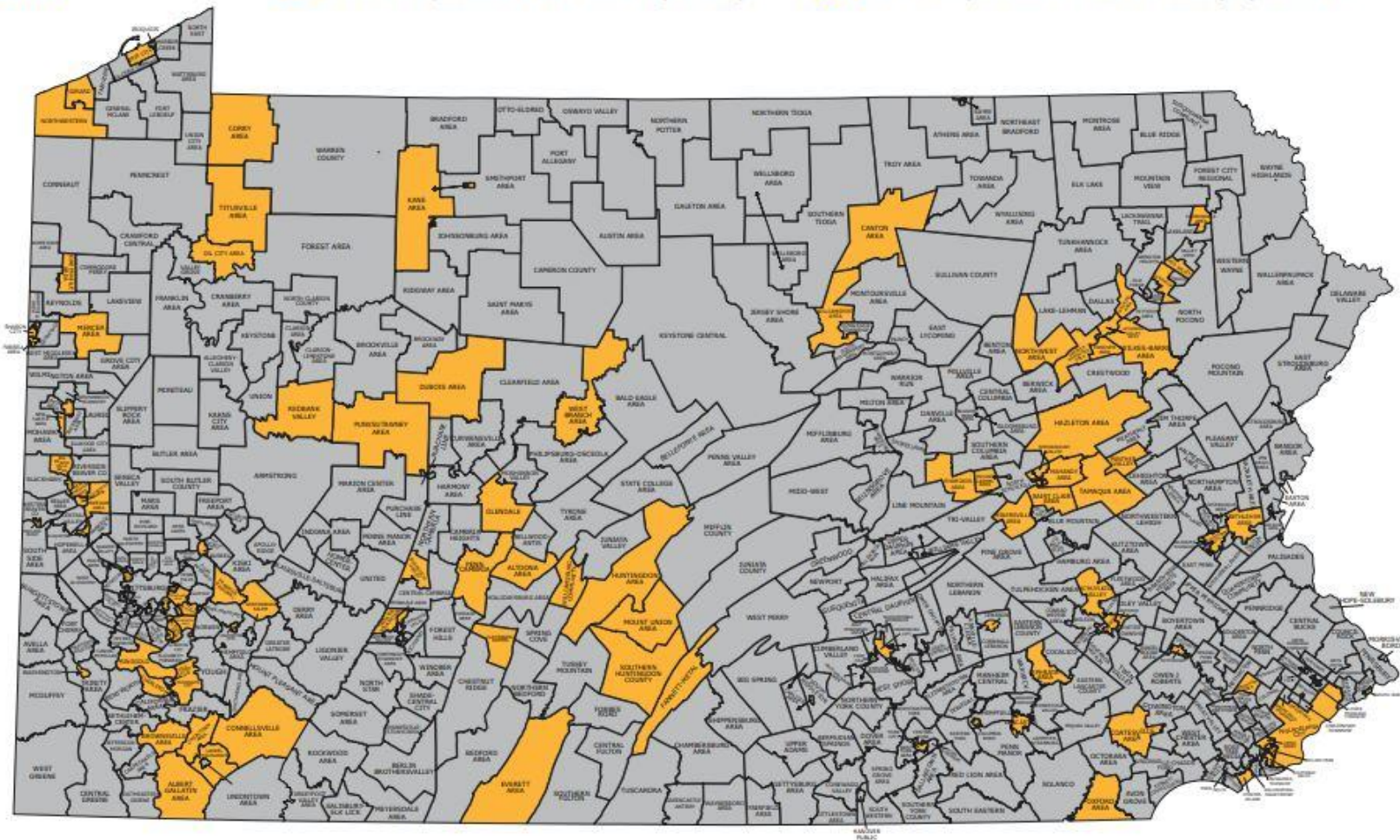
58% of Pennsylvania's Latinx students

58% of Pennsylvania's students in poverty

64% of Pennsylvania's English learners

35% of Pennsylvania's students with disabilities

32% of Pennsylvania's total student population



[ABOUT](#)[RESOURCES](#)[NEWS](#)[LEVEL UP 100](#)[PARTNERS](#)[JOIN US](#)[TAKE ACTION](#)

04-15-2021

Level Up Coalition Launches Effort to Increase Funding for 100 Severely Underfunded PA School Districts

PA Rep. Schlossberg Introduces HB 1167 to Aid PA's Most Under-Resourced Schools

HARRISBURG (April 15, 2021) – Level Up, a coalition of more than a dozen education advocacy organizations from across the commonwealth, launched a campaign today to increase state funding for the 100 most underfunded school districts in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania ranks 44th in the nation for state share of funding for K-12 education and has some of the nation's widest gaps between wealthy and poor school districts. [READ MORE](#)

LATEST PRESS

'Moral scandal': Gov. Wolf proposal, lawsuit aim to cut Pennsylvania school funding gap *trib live* April 17, 2021 [READ MORE](#)

Lawmaker's 'Level Up' bill takes aim at Pa.'s education inequity in Lehigh Valley, elsewhere *Lehigh Valley Live* Apr 17, 2021 [READ MORE](#)

Level Up Coalition Launches Effort to Increase Funding for 100 Severely Underfunded PA School Districts *My ChseCo* April 16, 2021 [READ MORE](#)

Rep. Schlossberg calls for more money for schools, admits getting it could be tough *69 News WFMZ-TV* Apr 16, 2021 [READ MORE](#)

Representative Schlossberg looks for more money for poorer schools *WFMZ-TV* Apr 16, 2021 [READ MORE](#)

Distressed schools across Pa. join together to push for \$100 million relief *WTF* APRIL 16, 2021 [READ MORE](#)

Equity Collaborative





EDUCATION VOTERS
of Pennsylvania



[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [ISSUES & REPORTS](#) [EDUCATION FUNDING](#) [ADVOCATES](#) [RESOURCES](#) [NEWS](#) [DONATE](#)

\$2.2 billion in federal aid headed to PA's public schools

Jan 20, 2021

On Friday, the Wolf administration announced that Pennsylvania's \$2.2 billion share of federal ESSER II (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) emergency funding

How does your school district measure up? Don't miss this new tool and report

Jan 14, 2021

If you want to learn about how state funding issues impact your own school district, you are in for a treat with the Tools for Education Advocates Webinar

Help us support and defend public education

Dec 29, 2020

What a year of challenges 2020 has been! We have struggled with the severe disruptions of COVID-19, witnessed nationwide protests against systemic racism, and faced profound economic, ideological, and political turmoil.