

A Look at Public Education in Pennsylvania

Issue Overview

H O U R G L A S S



F O U N D A T I O N

Thaddeus Stevens: An early advocate for Pennsylvania's Public Schools

Thaddeus Stevens the legendary nineteenth century Congressman, who is most often remembered as an ardent abolitionist and one of the founding fathers of the Republican Party, is sometimes overlooked as perhaps the most important figure in the history of Pennsylvania's public school system. For while his fiery oratory challenged the souls of the nation on the issue of slavery, it was a speech that he made while a junior member of the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives that forever established a free, and what he believed would always be a quality public education system in Pennsylvania.

With the passage of the Free Public Schools Act of 1834, Pennsylvania became the first state in the nation (five years before Horace Mann and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) to adopt a statewide public school system. A year later, the Commonwealth was faced with a taxpayer's revolt sparked by those who did not wish to fund the new system. When the legislature began to buckle under the pressure, and with the Senate having already voted to repeal the Act, it was Stevens who single handedly led the fight to save the public education system in Pennsylvania. Rising to challenge his colleagues on the floor of the State House Stevens words were drenched with passion and determination:

“Sir, I trust that when we come to act on this question, we shall. . . so cast our votes. . .that the blessing of education shall be conferred on every son of Pennsylvania -- shall be carried home to the poorest child of the poorest inhabitants in the meanest hut of your mountains, so that even he may be prepared to act well his part in this land of free men, and lay on earth a broad and solid foundation for the enduring knowledge which goes on increasing through eternity.”

After listening to Stevens' eloquent and moving speech the members of the Senate who were in attendance returned to their chambers to overturn the repeal of the Act, which they had already passed, and the cries of those within the legislature who wanted to dismantle the system were forever silenced. Thaddeus Stevens had stood up to guarantee the right of every child in Pennsylvania to receive a quality public education, and for his actions the citizens of this Commonwealth should be forever grateful.

Let us now look at some of the issues and the events that have shaped public education in Pennsylvania and across the nation, as well as some of the challenges that have arisen in the 167 years since Steven's famed speech.

Why do we need our public schools to work?

- **Today, public schools educate more than 90% of all children in the U.S. and 85% of all children in Pennsylvania.** Schools across the U.S. vary widely in terms of the background and family income of the children they serve, the curriculum they teach, the ways they are governed, and their annual budgets.
- **Citizens have long recognized the vital role of public education in maintaining a democracy.** Public schools are where children from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds, as well as faiths learn to communicate, play and work with each other.
- **While alternative school programs may offer additional options to a small fraction of children, the vast majority will continue to attend public schools.** Unless Pennsylvania maintains a strong commitment to its public schools our economy and the general welfare of the Commonwealth will ultimately suffer.
- **Ensuring a high quality education to *all* children in public schools must be a top priority for our legislators, as well as the general citizenry.** Well-funded school districts within every community help to promote a stable society, generate economic growth and prepare the next generation for an increasingly complex, high-tech world.

Is there a crisis in public education funding in Pennsylvania today?

Let's look at some numbers:

- **The state's share of local educational expenditures has been declining for over 25 years.**

In the 1974-1975 school year, the Pennsylvania State government provided 55% of education expenses for public schools. In the 2000-2001 school year, the state provided only 35% of the expenses.

- **The highest spending district in Pennsylvania spends \$14,406 per student, per year, the lowest only \$5,302.**

In 1999, the top 100 school districts (20%) spent an average of \$10,150 per child; in 270 other districts (54%) each child has at least \$2,000 less. That's at least \$203,750 less spent for each classroom of 25 children every year in those districts.

- **In Education Week's (January, 2002) annual report on public education, Pennsylvania earned a D- for funding equity.**

A grade like that challenges the notion that we are providing "a thorough and efficient system of public education to meet the needs of the Commonwealth" according to the words of the Pennsylvania Constitution.

Pennsylvania and Public Education 1682 to 2002

1682 William Penn's Charter of Liberties, §12 (1682) commanded, "The governor and Provincial Council shall erect and order all publick schools." In his Laws Agreed Upon In England, Section 28 (1682), he provided that:

"All children . . . shall be taught some useful trade or skill, to the end that none may be idle, but the poor may work to live, and the rich, if they become poor, may not want."

1707 Penn's School Grant (1707) declared that:

"The prosperity and welfare of any people depends in a great measure upon the good education of youth and their early instruction in the principles of true religion and virtue."

Penn's School Grant commissioned a school, which had actually already opened in Philadelphia in 1698 -- the first public school in the United States:

"A public school . . . where poor children of both sexes may be taught and instructed in reading, writing, working, and other good and useful literature and maintained gratis, and the children and servants of the rich may be taught and instructed at reasonable rates."

1776 Pennsylvania's 1776 Constitution commanded that:

"A school or schools shall be established in each county by the legislature, for the convenient instruction of youth, with such salaries, to the masters paid by the public, as may enable them to instruct youth at low prices."

1790 Pennsylvania's 1790 Constitution and its 1838 Constitution commanded that:

"The legislature shall, as soon as conveniently may be, provide for the establishment of schools throughout the state, in such manner that the poor may be taught gratis."

1834 The Pennsylvania legislature passes the Free Public Schools Act to guarantee a quality education to every child in the Commonwealth.

1874 The 1874 Constitution commanded that:

"The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public schools, wherein all the children of this Commonwealth above the age of six years may be educated, and shall appropriate at least one million dollars each year for that purpose."

1968 In its current, modern form, 1968, the Pennsylvania Constitution commands that:

"The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth."

1971 The legislature enacted a new statewide personal income tax.

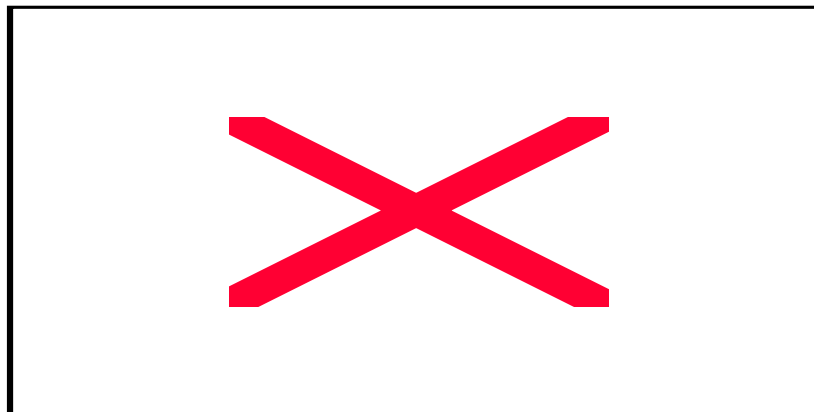
1974-75 The peak of the state basic instruction subsidy system. The Commonwealth provided basic subsidy of \$1.2 billion to reimburse expenditures of \$2.2 billion, reimbursing 55% of 1973-74 expenditures.

- 1975** Act 59 changed the calculation of the aid ratio so that 60% of state aid was based on a district market value and 40% was based on the personal income of the district's residents. This was enacted because the state could not provide increases sufficient to return to the 50% funding and the state was using the information gathered from the 1971 personal income tax law to overcome the deficit.
- 1982** The legislature stopped making yearly changes to the reimbursable amount and instead implemented a \$72 million dollar supplement called the "Equalized Supplement for Student Learning" (ESSL) that calculated funding disparities by reflecting local wealth and student population changes.
- 1983** Act 31 replaced the Basic Instruction Subsidy with the Equalized Subsidy for Basic Education (ESBE) and repealed the 50% subsidy requirement. The Factor for Educational Expense replaced the Actual Instruction Expense factor in the formula and was set each year by the legislature. The result of this legislation was that by the end of the 1980s, our funding system was inequitable for all public school children.
- 1991** The Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS) with 127 school districts filed a case in both the Commonwealth Court and in Federal District Court. The complaint described the disparities between districts with very few resources and those with great resources and charged that the current Pennsylvania system of funding public education is unconstitutional.
- 1998** The Pennsylvania Supreme Court halts the case in Commonwealth court by saying the issue is for the legislature to decide, not the courts.

Source: Good Schools Pennsylvania

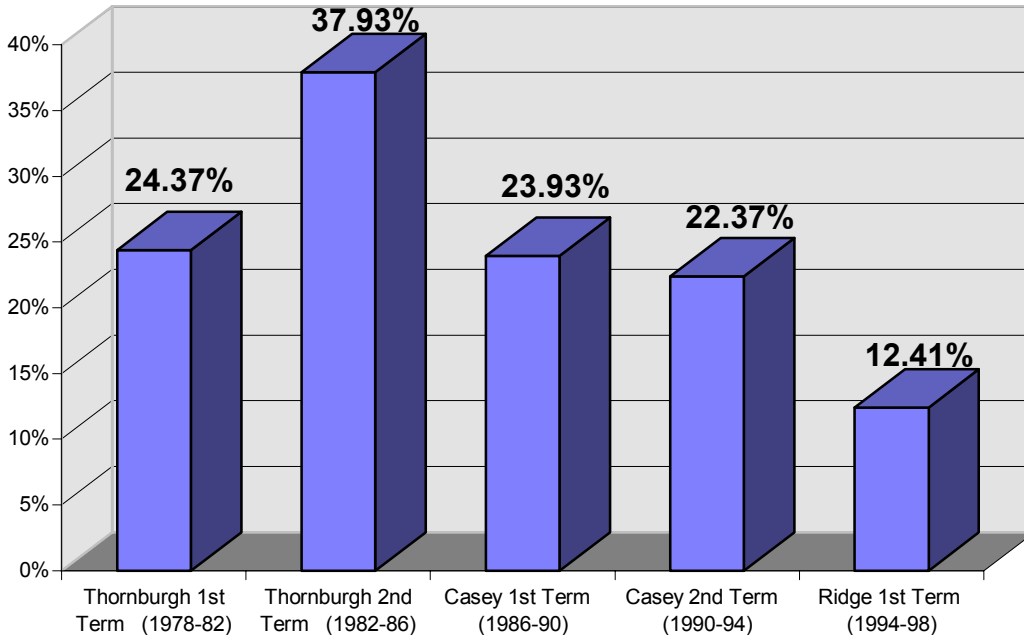
What is the state's role in funding Pennsylvania public schools?

- **The federal government plays a relatively small role in funding public education.** States and municipalities bear the primary responsibility for maintaining and strengthening their local public schools.
- **Pennsylvania once played a major role in funding its public schools,** contributing 55 percent, on average, of every local district's budget. But in recent years, the balance has tipped. Local districts now must pay a far greater share of school costs through property taxes. In many suburban districts, rapid growth and sprawling development have fueled spiraling school taxes.
- **Overall, Pennsylvania's education funding has fallen far below the level of what other states contribute to their schools.** Today, the state contributes only 35 percent of the average school district's budget, whereas the national average for state funding is almost 49 percent. **Pennsylvania now ranks 45th out of 50 states in how much we invest in local school budgets.**



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

State support for public school funding has been dropping



- Since 1986, combined education appropriations for basic education, special education and transportation have declined in Pennsylvania. In Governor Ridge's second term, increases for education funding fell below 5 percent, despite a 9.5 percent rise in public school enrollment during the 1990s
- While overall spending for public education has increased, those dollars buy less and less and have not kept pace with the rate of inflation over the same period.
- As Pennsylvania is sharing the same economic uncertainty that all states are facing, Gov. Mark Schweiker has proposed an \$8 billion education budget for 2002 **that would give each district a 1% increase in basic education funding, and a 1.5% increase in special education funding.**

Source: Governor's Executive Budgets, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania's public schools at a glance: 2000-01

Pennsylvania has 501 public school districts with 3,246 schools buildings, 15 comprehensive area vocational-technical schools (AVTS), 65 occupational schools, 65 charter schools, four consortium-operated alternative high schools, 12 juvenile correctional institutions and two state-owned schools. There are 2,474 private and nonpublic schools in the state.

	Total Enrollment	Percent of total	% change since 1991-92
ALL SCHOOLS			
Public	1,814,311	84.7	+7.2
Private and Nonpublic	327,153	15.3	-2.6
TOTAL	2,141,464	100.0	+5.6
ELEMENTARY			
Public	966,889	45.2	+2.2
Private and Nonpublic	242,453	11.3	-5.1
TOTAL	1,209,342	56.0	+5 0.6
SECONDARY			
Public	847,422	39.6	+13.5
Private and Nonpublic	84,700	3.9	+5.6
TOTAL	932,122	43.5	+12.8
RACE (Public Schools only)			
White	1,419,408	78.2	2.0+
Black	274,697	15.2	22.9+
Hispanic	81,641	4.5	67.7+
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2,240	0.1	46.8+
Asian/Pacific Islander	36,325	2.0	29.0+

The number and percentage of enrollments for all minority categories increased since 1991-92. Minorities now comprise 23.5% of elementary and 19.8% of secondary enrollments, compared to 18.6% and 16.9%, respectively, in 1991-92.

Most Pennsylvania school districts have fewer than 3,000 students

Pennsylvania is divided into 501 school districts, most of them very small. There are only seven school districts in the state with enrollments greater than 13,000. Philadelphia is the largest, with more than 210,000 students. Pittsburgh is second largest, with about 40,000. Over half of school districts in Pennsylvania have enrollments between 1,000 and 3000 students.

Public school enrollments grew throughout the past decade.

Projections through 2004-05 indicate that:

- Public **elementary** enrollments will continue to **decline**
- Public **secondary** enrollments will continue to **increase**
- **Private and parochial** enrollments **declined** after their peak year in 1994-95. Since 1993-94, non-public elementary enrollments declined every year, while secondary enrollments increased.

Other Vital Pennsylvania School Facts:

115,000 Public school teachers

1.8 million Pre-K-12 enrollments

\$15.1 billion Annual pre-K-12 expenditures (all revenue sources)

21.2% Minority students

18% Children in poverty

11.9% Students with disabilities

728,000 Children under the age of 5

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

Private and Parochial Schools

In Pennsylvania, public tax dollars cover the cost of transportation, health services and special education for private and parochial school students. While parochial school enrollment has declined statewide since in 1995, Pennsylvania has nearly one third more students enrolled in non-public schools than the national average. In 2000-01, almost 65 percent of all students in private and nonpublic schools were enrolled in Catholic schools. Students in Amish and Mennonite schools make up one quarter of all students enrolled in non-Catholic parochial schools. Private, secular schools account for less than 10 percent of non-public school students.

PRIVATE AND NONPUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND LEVEL 2000-01

AFFILIATION	# SCHOOLS	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	%
CATHOLIC			
Archdiocese of Philadelphia	274	111,176	
Diocese of Allentown	72	18,176	
Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown	33	5,929	
Diocese of Erie	51	13,175	
Diocese of Greensburg	29	5,642	
Diocese of Harrisburg	50	14,474	
Diocese of Pittsburgh	122	27,630	
Diocese of Scranton	60	14,786	
Independent	5	242	
RELIGIOUS TOTAL (CATHOLIC)	696	211,230	64.5%
NON-CATHOLIC			
Amish	426	12,094	
Mennonite	94	9,092	
Baptist	101	7,410	
Society of Friends	25	6,525	
Jewish	37	2,792	
Episcopal	16	2,106	
Assembly of God	19	1,789	
Lutheran	26	1,687	
Methodist	22	1,677	
Islamic	17	1,349	
Presbyterian	12	1,115	
Seventh-Day Adventist	23	1,036	
Pentecostal	10	356	
God's Missionary Church	2	222	
Brethren	6	215	
Church of God	6	203	
Other Religions	3	76	
Missionary Alliance	1	6	
Other Christian Denominations	327	34,523	
RELIGIOUS TOTAL (NON-CATHOLIC)	1,173	84,273	25.7%
TOTAL SECULAR (NON-PUBLIC)	605	31,650	9.6%
TOTAL NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS / ENROLLMENT	2,474	327,153	(15%)
TOTAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS / ENROLLMENT	3,246	1,814,311	(85%)

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

Home Schooling

Act 169 of 1988 authorized parents, guardians and legal custodians to teach their children at home. Since the passage of that act, the number of home education students has increased every year. The 1999-00 total of 23,313 was an increase of 1,854 students over the 1998-99 total of 21,459. This one-year growth rate of 8.6% was less than the 8.8% increase of the prior year.

Data was collected from all of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts for home education students aged 5 through 21. Austin Area was the only school district that reported no home education students in 1999-00.

The number of home education students increased in 55 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Lancaster County led the state with 2,297 students followed by Allegheny County with 1,395. The highest concentration of home education students was located in the south central and southeastern regions of the state. Statewide, the percentage of students educated at home represented 1.1% of the state's public, private and on public enrollments in 1999-00.

For the first time, data was collected to determine whether home education students were permitted to enter into curricular and extracurricular activities at their school district of residence. There were 222 school districts (44.3%) that allowed home education students to participate in curricular programs while 228 (45.5%) allowed them to participate in extracurricular activities.

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

What do Pennsylvania's public schools need to succeed?

In recent years, we have come to learn a lot about what makes schools work and what helps children succeed. In Pennsylvania and other states, high-achieving school districts have several factors in common. These districts:

- **Adopt high academic standards**
- **Measure school performance and hold themselves accountable**
- **Offer good early childhood programs and full-day kindergarten**
- **Reduce class size, particularly in the early grades**
- **Invest in teacher training**
- **Ensure access to up-to-date books, educational tools and computers**
- **Maintain safe, clean, modern facilities**
- **Use classroom approaches that build complex skills**
- **Significantly increase parent and community involvement**

But, educational experts say it's not enough to succeed with just one of these items alone. Successful school reform efforts require a combination of these strategies. Each helps to build a firm foundation for achievement.

Unfortunately, despite signs of progress across the state, for many poor urban and rural school districts in Pennsylvania, many of these approaches are simply out of reach. For these strategies to work, schools must invest not only ample time and effort—but also resources. Reducing class size, opening full-day kindergarten, expanding access to computers, purchasing proven academic support programs and training for teachers are all strategies that cost money.

Trying to succeed on an uneven playing field

- **Pennsylvania's approach to funding schools is based on the property tax.** This has created significant gaps between what wealthy and poor districts in Pennsylvania can provide to pupils.
- **Today in Pennsylvania's public schools, children in wealthy communities enjoy educational opportunities that are simply not available to children from poor urban and rural communities.**
Wealthy school districts in Pennsylvania have class sizes far smaller than poor districts on average, and can afford more educated and experienced teachers and access to more up-to-date books and computers.
- Schools in poorer districts must also devote a far greater portion of their resources to serving children with special needs, who come from households that cannot provide them with the same learning opportunities that children in wealthier districts are given.
- In addition, in 1992-93, the State mandated a freeze in the formula used to determine each school district's fair share of education funding. Since then, State funding has stopped keeping pace with the added burdens of school districts with skyrocketing growth and more children in poverty. Hundreds of cash-strapped urban and rural districts now divide their state education subsidy among far more students in need. As a result, nearly half of the State's 500 school districts have joined in legal challenges to the State's system of funding in recent years.

Taking the battle to the courts

In a 2001 report on the spending gap between high- and low-poverty school districts in the U.S., the National Education Trust in Washington, D.C. found that **only four states have education funding more unequal than Pennsylvania.**

- In the past decade, hundreds of school districts in Pennsylvania sued the state in an effort to obtain more adequate resources. They are not alone.
- Lawsuits aimed at funding equity or adequacy was filed in 40 states since the early 1980s.
- In 25 cases the courts have ruled that the states must change their funding formulas and funding calculations to ensure an equal opportunity to learn for every child.
- Pennsylvania is among a handful of states where the courts have found no compelling reason to change how it is funding schools.

Does money make a difference?

Does the spending gap widen the achievement gap? Here is how 8th grade students in a sampling of school districts in Southeastern Pennsylvania scored on the most recent PSSA statewide achievement tests in math. In almost every case, students in districts with higher per-pupil spending and better paid, more experienced teachers' outperformed students in districts with less to spend.

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

County	School districts by county: The first district in each box represents a low funded district, with the second being a high spending district.	Scaled Score Math	% Advanced Math	% Proficient Math	% Basic Math	% Below Basic Math
ADAMS	FAIRFIELD AREA SD	1290	13.4	31.9	26.9	27.7
	GETTYSBURG AREA SD	1360	23.3	36.7	23.3	16.6
BERKS	READING SD	1220	6.2	22.4	25.3	46.1
	WYOMISSING AREA SD	1460	37	39.6	15.6	7.8
DAUPHIN	HARRISBURG CITY SD	1130	1.8	12.0	18.3	68.0
	CENTRAL DAUPHIN SD	1340	21.2	34.9	23.3	20.5
LANCASTER	LANCASTER SD	1200	8.4	16.5	23.6	51.4
	MANHEIM TOWNSHIP SD	1420	33.2	38.6	15.6	12.5
LEBANON	LEBANON SD	1240	7.6	25.2	29.9	37.4
	CORNWALL-LEBANON SD	1350	23.5	34.6	22.4	19.5
YORK	YORK CITY SD	1180	2.3	21.6	23.5	52.6
	YORK SUBURBAN SD	1370	24.8	39.6	17.1	18.5

Here is PSSA 8th grade math results for students in some of the state's highest spending districts:

BUCKS	COUNCIL ROCK SD	1480	44.2	40.3	9.7	5.8
CHESTER	TREDYFFRIN-EASTTOWN SD	1500	49.2	34.8	10.8	5.2
DELAWARE	RADNOR TOWNSHIP SD	1500	49.2	34.3	11	5.5
MONTGOMERY	LOWER MERION SD	1440	36.2	39.4	15.1	9.4
STATE AVERAGE		1310	25	27	26	23

School districts in our region send fewer graduates to college

Central Pennsylvania schools are sending fewer graduates on to college compared with other districts in the state, and far fewer than the state’s highest performing and highest spending districts. This means that fewer of our young people are prepared to help build a thriving regional economy or meet the demands of today’s high-tech workplace.

- **On average, only 60% of Lancaster County high school graduates were college bound in 1999-2000, compared with the statewide average of 70%.**
- Higher spending, higher achieving school districts in the Philadelphia region send as many as 94% of graduates on to college.

County	% of College bound Graduates
ADAMS	62%
BERKS	65%
DAUPHIN	74%
LANCASTER	60%
LEBANON	60%
YORK	61%
PHILA. REGION	
BUCKS	78%
CHESTER	77%
DELAWARE	79%
MONTGOMERY	80%
STATE AVERAGE	70%

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education High School Graduate Report

Drop-out rates are higher in the region

Public schools in Berks, Dauphin, Lancaster and York Counties are among 13 counties in Pennsylvania with higher dropout rates than the state average of 2.6%. Adams and Lebanon counties also have higher dropout rates than 28 other counties. By contrast, school districts in higher spending; higher achieving districts have far fewer drops-outs. Students who drop out are less likely to become productive members of their communities, and are at far greater risk for teen pregnancy, crime and drug use.

County	Drop-out Rate
ADAMS	2.4%
BERKS	2.9%
DAUPHIN	3.0%
LANCASTER	2.9%
LEBANON	2.2%
YORK	2.9%
BUCKS	1.3%
CHESTER	1.5%
DELAWARE	1.8%
MONTGOMERY	1.4%
STATE AVERAGE	2.6%

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education 1999-00

More children from low-income families are living in our region

As the number of children from low-income families increases, school district resources much stretch farther to make up for the lack of books, computers, and other educational opportunities that children from wealthier homes enjoy. During the last decade, the number of low-income families attending public schools in our region has risen, in some cases dramatically, while in more affluent counties and statewide, the number has actually gone down.

PERCENT OF ENROLLMENTS OF CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

County	District/Educational Institution	1992-1993	2000-2001	% Change
ADAMS	FAIRFIELD AREA SD	11.4	14.1	2.7
	GETTYSBURG AREA SD	19.1	25.0	5.9
BERKS	READING SD	51.7	68.7	17.0
	WYOMISSING AREA SD	3.3	7.5	4.2
DAUPHIN	HARRISBURG CITY SD	64.1	79.5	15.4
	CENTRAL DAUPHIN SD	10.5	14.9	4.4
LANCASTER	LANCASTER SD	56.3	61.0	4.7
	MANHEIM TOWNSHIP SD	4.8	7.3	2.5
LEBANON	LEBANON SD	39.6	42.9	3.3
	CORNWALL-LEBANON SD	14.9	15.5	0.6
YORK	YORK CITY SD	59.4	72.4	13.0
	YORK SUBURBAN SD	4.7	7.9	3.2

In these wealthy suburban districts, the number of low-income families declined:

BUCKS	COUNCIL ROCK SD	1.7	1.4	-0.3
CHESTER	TREDYFFRIN-EASTTOWN SD	2.9	2.7	-0.2
DELAWARE	RADNOR TOWNSHIP SD	6.3	3.4	-2.9
MONTGOMERY	LOWER MERION SD	5.5	4.6	-0.9

Statewide, the number of low-income families has also declined slightly.

PA State Average		30.6	30.5	-0.1
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Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Report on Percent of Enrollment from Low-Income Families by Local Education Agency, 1993-2000

Experienced teachers make a huge difference

In the view of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "teacher expertise is the single most important factor in determining student achievement."

- Recent studies confirm that a trained, experienced and skillful teacher can make a difference, even in the face of deficits in student readiness or school resources. One Tennessee study found that students who had good teachers three years in a row scored significantly higher on state tests and made far greater gains in achievement than students with a series of ineffective teachers. In a study of 900 Texas school districts, teacher expertise accounted for a 40% variance in reading and math achievement in grades 1 –11. (*Paying for Education – New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters*, Ferguson, R. 1991)
- **The distribution of well-prepared teachers is an important indicator of equal educational opportunity for different groups of students.**
- As noted in the 1998 Quality Counts Report from Education Week, **"Teachers in high-poverty secondary schools, whether urban or rural, are the least prepared and the most likely to lack even a minor in the subjects they teach.** Such schools also tend to have a larger share of new, inexperienced teachers...and a tougher time hiring and filling teaching vacancies, especially in such sought-after fields as biology, mathematics, bilingual education, and special education."

Wealthier districts can afford more qualified and experienced teachers

Wealthier districts that spend more per student can offer teachers smaller class sizes, higher salaries, more training, newer facilities, and more modern equipment. It's small wonder that they also attract and retain a greater number of teachers with the highest levels of education and experience. As teacher shortages become a growing national concern, affluent districts have a key advantage in recruiting quality teachers that poorer rural and urban districts do not.

County	District/Educational Institution	Average teacher salary 2000-01	% of Teachers with Masters or higher	Average Years Experience	1998-99 Average spending per pupil
ADAMS	FAIRFIELD AREA SD	\$43,726	40%	14.5	\$5,783
	GETTYSBURG AREA SD	46,841	50%	17.6	8,168
BERKS	READING SD	45,866	22%	14.7	6,774
	WYOMISSING AREA SD	56,274	44%	14.9	9,404
DAUPHIN	HARRISBURG CITY SD	43,482	34%	14.9	7,704
	CENTRAL DAUPHIN SD	50,043	25%	16.8	9,856
LANCASTER	LANCASTER SD	49,674	42%	14.8	7,850
	MANHEIM TOWNSHIP SD	50,290	43%	15.1	7,903
LEBANON	LEBANON SD	48,576	39%	16.7	6,290
	CORNWALL-LEBANON SD	50,679	37%	16.4	7,903
YORK	YORK CITY SD	50,587	42%	12.8	7,067
	YORK SUBURBAN SD	55,198	41%	16.9	8,743

Teacher qualifications and experience are higher in districts that can spend more

BUCKS	COUNCIL ROCK SD	\$76,011	48%	16.6	\$9,674
CHESTER	TREDYFFRIN-EASTTOWN SD	62,647	67%	16.7	12,236
DELAWARE	RADNOR TOWNSHIP SD	66,451	71%	17.2	14,341
MONTGOMERY	LOWER MERION SD	68,961	63%	16.8	13,139
PA State Average		\$49,528		15.9	7,917

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

Filling the Opportunity Gap

One way to look at the opportunity your children have for a quality education is to look at the resources available to teach them compared to the resources available to teach children in the highest-performing public schools.

- **Wealthy districts spend an average of \$3,000 more per child** than do the poor districts, although tax rates in poorer districts are on average 40% higher.
- Another way of looking at this Opportunity Gap is to compare what school districts currently spend with the amount that should be available to reach the level of spending in the state's highest achieving districts.
- **In the median school district, such as the City of Lancaster, this Opportunity Gap would amount to more than \$46,000 for every classroom of 25 students.** This means that most school districts have a gap greater than \$46,000 - often \$50,000 to \$70,000 - between what they can afford under our current funding system and what they should be spending to equal the highest-performing schools.

What do Pennsylvanians think?

Pennsylvanians want their state to take greater measures to improve school performance and find a better solution to school funding. In a January 2002 survey of 1,012 adult Pennsylvanians prepared for the Pennsylvania Economy League by the Center for Opinion Research at Millersville University, respondents were asked what they thought should be “the primary job of the state government.”

- **Education a top priority.** The highest-ranking response was “Improve our education system and schools.”
- **School funding methods.** Pennsylvanians believe the state lags behind other states in its ability to retain young people, its economic growth rate, its state and local tax system, its method of school funding, and its ability to attract business.
- **School quality.** When asked what was the most important issue facing the state government, the following were the two leading responses:
47%: Improving the performance of public schools
42%: Attracting new businesses to the state
- **Taxes and school funding:** 30% said Pennsylvania's way of funding public schools is worse than elsewhere; only 9% said it's better. 35% said Pennsylvania's system of local and state taxes are worse than that found in other states; 10% said it's better.

Source: Issues PA, of the Pennsylvania Economy League

New Legislative efforts in Pennsylvania

In February 2001, the legislature formed a select committee to study school funding and propose improvements.

- In November, members of the committee unveiled a new proposal on paying for schools. The bill, whose lead sponsor is Republican Rep. Nicholas A. Micozzie, would raise the state's personal-income-tax rate from 2.8 percent to 4.6 percent, using the projected \$5 billion from that hike to boost the state's share of school funding to 64 percent. The so-called **Successful Schools Budget Proposal** combines mandatory cuts in local property taxes of at least 32 percent with substantially increased state subsidies to create the chance for all schools to have the resources they need to be as good as the best schools. The formula seeks to replicate spending in Pennsylvania's 33 best-performing districts.
- **In the State Senate** another measure, sponsored by Republican Sen. James Rhoades, bases its formula on the median amount that districts spend per student on instruction. The state would be required to provide 80 percent of that amount under his plan. The proposal would increase the income-tax rate to 4.8 percent, slightly more than in Mr. Micozzie's bill, and cut local property taxes by a statewide average of 66 percent.

If enacted, both of these proposals would actually increase the amount of funding provided by the state for every school district in the Commonwealth.

How have other states improved their school funding systems?

Michigan, Vermont, Texas, Kentucky and other states all provide important lessons for Pennsylvania, and we should draw on these in developing the solution for our state. Among the most popular is an increase in the state personal income tax, which would allow an average decrease in local property taxes by as much as two-thirds.

- **Michigan** – In 1993, Michigan took the extraordinary step of eliminating property taxes as a source of K-12 school funding as a way to force itself to come up with a better plan for improving school funding equity, implementing a number of school reform measures statewide and redefining the relationship between state and local government. Legislation was passed that raised income, sales and other taxes and substantially improved funding equity and the availability of funding for school reform efforts across the state.
- **Kentucky.** In 1990 the General Assembly passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act [KERA], less than a year after the Kentucky Supreme Court had used a rather typical school-funding-disparities lawsuit to declare the state's entire public school system "unconstitutional." The Court gave the legislature one year to craft a more fiscally and educationally equitable and proficient system. The reform plan that emerged from this process--known simply as "KERA" --has been described as "far reaching" and "path breaking" by education pundits around the nation and has pulled Kentucky up from the lowest levels of achievement in the decade since implementation began.

No matter which approach or combination of approaches Pennsylvania chooses, the important thing is that the Commonwealth must move to a system where the lion's share of education funding comes from the state.

What can I do to support public schools?

If you have an opinion on public schools and how they are currently funded, the most important thing that you can do is be engaged in the process. Talk with your friends and neighbors, attend community forums, contact your legislators and support those who you believe are doing the right thing when it comes to public education.

If you think that the way Pennsylvania funds its public schools is flawed know that you are not alone. In fact, you stand in pretty good company with some distinguished people who know a thing or two about the issue.

Every one of the 11 living former PA. Secretaries and Acting Secretaries of Education from both Republican and Democratic administrations have called our funding system flawed. Each of them has endorsed a set of principles to address these issues. They have joined together to urge the Governor and the legislature of the Commonwealth to adequately fund the state's public education system so that every child in Pennsylvania may receive a quality education *regardless of where they live*.

They have advocated that the State close the resource gap between wealthy and poor districts, replace its current reliance on property taxes as a funding system and increase its investment in school improvements that work. These include smaller class size, increasing teacher training and funding enrichment programs for students who have had years of inadequate opportunities.

Source: Pennsylvania School Reform Network

Learn more about Pennsylvania public schools

For more information on school reform, public education in America, and education in Pennsylvania, visit these sites:

National Center for Education Statistics - Common Core of Data (CCD)

A program of the U.S. Department, the CCD is a comprehensive, annual, national statistical database concerning all public elementary and secondary schools
<http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>

Education Week

www.edweek.org

Education Commission of the States (ECS)

An interstate compact created in 1965 to improve public education
www.ecs.org

Pennsylvania School Reform Network

www.psrn.org

Good Schools Pennsylvania

www.goodschoolspa.org

Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools

www.parss.org

Issues PA – an online publication of the Pennsylvania Economy League

<http://www.issuespa.net/issues/12>

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

www.nctaf.org

Pennsylvania Department of Education – K-12 School Statistics

<http://www.pde.psu.edu/esstats.html>

Reducing Class Size, What Do We Know? – March 1999

http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReducingClass/Class_size.html

US Census 2000

www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html

The Merrow Report: In Schools We Trust

www.pbs.org/merrow/tv/trust/index.html

A Nation at Risk: Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education created by President Ronald Reagan.

www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html

The United States Dept. of Education website.

www.ed.gov

Edison Project – Frequently Asked Questions

http://www.edisonproject.com/contact/con_f_aqs.ht