



Pennsylvania Public Education Facts

Pennsylvania continues to have one of the nation's most ineffective and unjust statewide funding systems for elementary and secondary education. As a result of insufficient state funding, public education in Pennsylvania is very dependent on local wealth, and Pennsylvania therefore has one of the most inequitable funding and educational resource systems in the country, where the quality of educational opportunity for children varies widely. Consider the following:

- The state share of school costs is far below the national average and ranks Pennsylvania near the bottom of the 50 states: In 2004-05, the state share of school costs funded by the state budget amounted to 35.8%. Nationally, the average is closer to 50 % paid by the state. (Source: *Pennsylvania Department of Education and May 2003 reports from the National Center for Education Statistics*).
- The amount of state appropriations on a per pupil basis also lags the national average: State government spending per student in Pennsylvania averages \$3,475, while the national average for annual state support for students is \$4,253 per student. According to NCES, Pennsylvania ranks 36 of the 50 states in support per student. (Source: *National Center for Education Statistics*).
- As a result of insufficient state funding, public education in Pennsylvania is more dependent on local taxes than in most states, and school district property taxes in Pennsylvania are therefore among the highest in the country.
- In national comparisons, Pennsylvania ranks 37th out of 50 for efforts to make sure education funds in the state are spent fairly across the Commonwealth. (Source: *Education Week, January 2006, based on 2002-03 school year data*).
- There is a \$10,259 gap between what the highest and lowest spending school districts in Pennsylvania spend per pupil on current expenditures. The highest spending district spent \$18,064 per student in 2004-2005; the lowest only \$6,991. This translates into a \$276,825 gap per classroom of 25 students. (Source: *Pennsylvania Department of Education*)
- Along with this disparity in educational resources, Pennsylvania also has a great disparity in local school taxes, ranging from 9.7 mills to 49.8 mills. Ironically, it is many of the poorest school districts that have the highest tax rates, yet still do not have adequate levels of funding to ensure a high quality education is available to all students. (Source: *Pennsylvania Department of Education*)
- Lawsuits aimed at funding equity or adequacy, have been filed in 45 states since the early 1970s. In 27 states, the courts have ruled that the states must change their funding formulas to ensure an equal opportunity to learn for every child. While two such lawsuits have been filed in Pennsylvania, our courts have refused to rule on the issue, declaring school funding a matter for the legislature to resolve. (Source: *Advocacy Center for Children's Educational Success with Standards, www.accessednetwork.org*).
- Pennsylvania, like most other states, has adopted statewide student-learning standards as part of the standards-based reform movement. However, Pennsylvania has never determined how it must align funding with the high standards that students are expected to meet. More than 30 other states have performed "costing-out studies" to obtain objective information on how to fund public education so that all students have a real opportunity to meet the learning standards. (Source: "Status of Education Cost Studies in the 50 States," June 24, 2004, *Advocacy Center for Children's Educational Success with Standards, www.accessnetwork.org*).

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How is Pennsylvania doing on other indicators?

- Of the 38 states that funded preschool in the 2004-05 academic year, Pennsylvania ranked 30th in access for 4-year-olds. This is an improvement over the previous year, where the state ranked 37th of 38. The improvement is due to the state Legislature's approval of the \$200 million Education Accountability Block Grant in 2004, which allowed districts to invest in prekindergarten programs, among other proven educational strategies. Pennsylvania's spending on preschool is below average, spending \$2,900 per child compared with \$3,500, ranking Pennsylvania in 25th place. The state's ranking is also low on quality standards – although the state board of education is in the midst of raising the bar. (Source: *National Institute for Early Education Research, 2005 State Preschool Yearbook*)
- As a result of the Accountability Block Grant program, today 51 percent of Pennsylvania children have access to full-day kindergarten, compared with just 34 percent in 2002-03. However, nationally, an average of 61 percent of children have access to full-day kindergarten. (Source: *Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children: The State of the Child 2006*)
- In national comparisons of student achievement, Pennsylvania has some of the largest achievement gaps between students above and below the poverty line, and between white, African-American and Latino students. (Source: *the National Assessment of Education Progress*).
- In 2005, nearly 50 percent of Pennsylvania's eleventh graders scored below proficient in math and 35 percent of eleventh grade students scored below proficient in reading on the state's standardized test. The figures are even more dire for minority students: In 2004, 82 percent of eleventh graders scored below proficient in math, and 72 percent scored below proficient in reading. (Source: *Pennsylvania Department of Education*).
- In 2005, the Pennsylvania Department of Education identified 574 schools as needing to make improvement in meeting the federal government's No Child Left Behind goals. (Source: *Pennsylvania Department of Education*)
- In 1964, the average high school dropout earned 64% of the average high school graduate. Today, high school graduates earn three times more than those who did not graduate, and college graduates earn six times more. Dropouts have higher rates of teen pregnancy, substance abuse and crime. 80% of those incarcerated are dropouts. (Source: *Pennsylvania Partnership for Children: The State of the Child 2006*).
- Data shows that there are schools with high percentages of low income and/or minority children that have closed the achievement gap among groups of students. Research shows that the very techniques used to help struggling learners also improves the teaching practice, learning environment and results for all children. (Source: *Pennsylvania department of Education, PAGE I initiative*).