



Philadelphia Education Fund

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COMMUNITY LEARNING BRIEF

A Brief from the Philadelphia Education Fund

www.philaedfund.org

How Does School Funding Affect Your Student's Education?

This spring, Oprah Winfrey aired a show where suburban high school students and inner-city high school students traded places for a week. Both sets of students were shocked. Their new surroundings confirmed what many people already suspected—suburban schools often have more and better resources. But experiencing the educational opportunity gap first-hand was a real eye-opener for these students.

The Philadelphia Story

Here in the Philadelphia region, we see big differences in what schools provide for their students. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, in 2004-05, Philadelphia spent \$10,834 per student, much less than what was spent by area school districts (*see sidebar*). While Philadelphia students receive less funding, they cost *more* to educate. According to experts, education costs increase dramatically for students who live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, who have special needs, and for whom English is not their first language. Philadelphia has all of these—and other—added cost factors.

The Education Law Center of Pennsylvania estimates that the School District of Philadelphia needs at least \$1,815 more per student to adequately educate our children.

More funding means lower class size, enhanced core academic needs, electives and specialized programs for at-risk students. It also means more and better athletic, arts, music and other extracurricular activities. For a class of 30 students, a \$1,815 increase per pupil would mean an extra \$54,450 per classroom each year—that's a lot of books, supplies and computers. For a school with 1,000 students, that would mean an additional \$1.8 million every year. This would help narrow the educational opportunity gap between Philadelphia and suburban students in a very real way.

The majority of public school funding in Pennsylvania comes from local sources, primarily property taxes. So districts with higher property values can raise significantly more money than their less affluent neighbors, as much as \$10,000 more per child. However, the residents of less affluent communities often have a greater tax burden because their property tax rates are frequently higher.

Philadelphia By the Numbers

Total Expenditures Per Pupil (2004-2005)

Philadelphia	\$10,834
Top 10 area districts (average)	\$17,380
Difference	-\$6,546

Local School Districts' Spending Per Pupil

Bryn Athyn	\$25,011
Lower Merion	\$18,064
Jenkintown	\$16,080
New Hope-Solebury	\$16,592
Radnor	\$16,566
Philadelphia	\$10,834

State Per-Pupil Contribution (2003-2004)

Delaware	\$6,833
New Jersey	\$6,433
New York	\$6,130
Pennsylvania	\$3,923

Community learning briefs provide suggestions for improving students' academic performance. Sign up to receive future briefs at www.philaedfund.org.



The Philadelphia Education Fund is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education throughout the Philadelphia region. For 21 years, the Ed Fund has been working in partnership with school districts, universities, non-profits and businesses to initiate and implement innovative educational programs, improve teacher quality, engage the community in school reform and conduct research. The Ed Fund is one of the largest of 86 education funds affiliated with the Public Education Network. Visit www.philaedfund.org

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The Philadelphia Education Fund's Community Learning Briefs are designed to keep parents, families and communities central to the academic success of our young people.

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How is school funding determined in Pennsylvania?

In Pennsylvania, there is a huge gap in funding between the top 50 spending school districts and the remaining 451. There are two main reasons why districts are under-funded:

- 1) The state contribution toward the cost of public education is inadequate, and
- 2) The state's method of distributing funds to school districts (the funding formula) is arbitrary and inequitable.

Educators and advocates agree that the only way to make sure children in less affluent communities—urban and rural—have equitable and adequate funding is to reduce reliance on local property taxes and for the state to pay a bigger share. However, the trend in Pennsylvania has been the reverse. Since 1974, the state's share of the cost of education has decreased from 55% to 36%, placing an increasingly heavy burden on under-funded school districts. And compared to neighboring states, Pennsylvania contributes a much lower proportion and a much lower dollar amount (*see sidebar on reverse*).

The Funding Formula

The "funding formula" is another way of saying, "the method used to divvy up the pot of money the state spends on education." Not only is there not enough money in the "pot," but also the amount is divided in an arbitrary, unpredictable manner that does not always reflect realistic costs and needs. Each year, the Governor and Legislature negotiate the

funding formula to create the annual state budget. Changes in the formula can be based on the strength of individual politicians rather than on more objective factors such as the poverty level. In fact, the definition of "poverty" can change from year-to-year.

What Can We Do?

The Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia (PILCOP) recommends that Pennsylvania contribute 65% of the cost of public education statewide. Additionally, the funding formula should be revised so that districts and children most in need get adequate, equitable and predictable school funding.

Although the 2005-06 state budget includes important increases for public education, and the projected new gaming revenue could potentially have a big impact on school funding, we still have a long way to go to make sure Philadelphia and other low-income school districts throughout the state have sufficient resources to give our children the education they need and deserve.

The Solution

- Increase state contribution to 65% (*less reliance on property taxes*)
- Revise state funding formula
- Ensure adequate funding for all school districts
- Spark active citizen participation

To learn more about school funding contact
learningbrief@philaedfund.org
or any of the organizations listed below.

Good Schools Pennsylvania
(866) 720-4086
www.goodschoolspa.org

Education Law Center of PA
(215) 238-6970
www.elc-pa.org
PILCOP
(215) 6277100
www.pilcop.org

Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth
(215) 563-5848
www.pccy.org

Philadelphia ACORN
(215) 765-0042,
www.acorn.org

Edu. Policy Leadership Ctr.
(717) 260-9900
www.eplc.org