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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing
Subcommittee on Progressive Policies for Working People
A People's Budget: Education

Monday, March 1, 2021, at 3 p.m.

Representative Elizabeth Fiedler, Chair
House Subcommittee on Progressive Policies
Representative Rick Krajewski

PANEL ONE: PRE-K EDUCATION

3 p.m. **Shalonda Spencer**, Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs, Trying Together

Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez, CEO of Children's Playhouse Early Learning Center

De'Wayne Drummond, President, Mantua Civic Association
Parent Engagement Specialist, Head Start at Philadelphia School District

PANEL TWO: K-12 EDUCATION

3:55 p.m. **David Mosenkis**, Statewide Education Justice Team Chair
POWER Interfaith

Angel Gober, Western PA Organizing Director
One Pennsylvania/Education Rights Network

Milka Uribe, Make the Road PA Member Leader
Parent of Reading Area HS Student, *Testimony provided in Spanish*

Chris Forbes-Nicotera, Teacher
Philadelphia Area School District

EMBARGOED UNTIL MARCH 8, 2021



READY TO SUCCEED
AN INITIATIVE OF EARLY LEARNING PA



Invest in Quality:

A Case for Paying Closer to
What High-Quality Pre-K Costs

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania understands the importance of investing in three- and four- year olds. In the last five years, Pennsylvania's spending on pre-k increased by \$145 million for state-funded, high-quality pre-k programs - Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP). As the Commonwealth continues to increase public dollars for early childhood education, it is imperative that investments go towards increasing rates for publicly-funded programs so we can pay providers closer to what high-quality pre-k costs.



As Pennsylvania strives to be a leader in early childhood education, we must consider the balance between continuing to serve more children and increasing quality. Pre-k teachers remain at the center of quality. Without addressing inflation costs and increased basic expenditures, publicly-funded programs cannot support the skilled teachers who are the foundation of high-quality early education, nor can they keep up with the materials and resources necessary for creating high-quality learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing problem of the underfunded early childhood

infrastructure. We understand the competing priorities and fiscal challenges brought on by the pandemic; however, early childhood is a critical piece to economic recovery. Pre-k will not only be essential to supporting the growth of our youngest learners who have missed out on months of learning opportunities, it will also serve as part of the infrastructure for getting families back to work. In order to begin paying closer to what high-quality pre-k costs, the Pre-K for PA campaign is recommending increasing the rates for Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program.

PENNSYLVANIA'S CURRENT PRE-K RATE

Since the pre-kindergarten investments Pennsylvania made in fiscal year 2015-16, approximately 14,835 more children received access to high-quality pre-k. There is also a need to focus on investments to go towards a rate increase per child in order to adjust for inflation. In 2015, the cost of a full time Pre-K Counts slot was \$8,500; according to the U.S. inflation rate this is equivalent to more than \$9,200 with an 8.8% inflation rate in 2020, however the Pre-K Counts rate for 2019-2020 was \$8,750.

In a Pre-K for PA partner report by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, *The Road to Success Includes High-Quality Pre-K*, state by state comparisons paint a picture of where the Commonwealth falls. Pennsylvania ranks 19 out of 28 in per capita investments of pre-k programs according to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).¹ If we want to keep pace and invest in the future, we need to increase our investments for high-quality, publicly-funded pre-k that focuses on access and quality.

Beyond adjusting for inflation rates and keeping pace for what other states spend on pre-k slots per capita, increasing the rate for pre-k slots supports quality. Across the early childhood field, state-funded pre-k programs have made the most headway toward addressing teacher compensation and qualifications.²



TEACHERS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF QUALITY

A skilled and stable teaching workforce maintains a high-quality early learning environment. While quality expects and demands the appropriate knowledge and credentials of professionals, the compensation for pre-k teachers remains significantly lower than their colleagues in K-12 settings.

There are 23 states that have established pre-k salary parity policies with K-12 teachers with the goal to raise the salary of a pre-k teacher with a similar level of education and qualifications as their K-12 counterparts.³ The NIEER data snapshot for lead teacher qualifications and pay parity considers the following aspects when comparing pay parity to K-3 teachers: starting salary, salary schedule, fringe benefits paid planning and/or professional development, and prorating to account for difference in the length of day.

Child Trends explored the effects of the pre-k salary parity policy in Alabama by speaking with teachers and center directors. Key takeaways included that salary parity increased interest in joining the early childhood education workforce and it may be helpful for retention of teachers in the field.⁴ States with higher pre-k compensation also tend to have better funded pre-k programs. Higher salaries for pre-k teachers are linked to higher spending per pupil. The ratio of pre-k to kindergarten spending per pupil is higher for salary parity states.⁵

Pre-k teachers receive pre-service training and professional development just like their K-12 counterparts so they are well-prepared in developmentally appropriate practice and instruction for the age group/developmental period that they teach. **Table A (page 4)** provides an overview of requirements for lead teachers and compares the education and training for Head Start, Pre-K Counts, and elementary school teachers in Pennsylvania. Educational effectiveness in early childhood education requires educators to have specialized knowledge in child development. This specialized content knowledge supports children in their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development that lay the foundation for all future learning competencies. Teachers need to be equipped not only to teach curriculum but also to understand how to instruct young children and develop relationships with them. Stable, consistent relationships are best for young children as they develop social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills.

Table A Lead Teacher: Education and Training Comparisons

Head Start	Pre-K Counts	PK-4
Education: Associate's, Bachelor's, or advanced degree in child development or ECE- or in a related field with coursework equivalent to a major relating to ECE and experience teaching preschool children	Education: Bachelor's degree and ECE certificate	Education: Bachelor's degree and ECE certificate
Complete a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year	Must complete a minimum of 24 post baccalaureate credits to convert from Instructional Level I to Level II within six years	Must complete a minimum of 24 post baccalaureate credits to convert from Instructional Level I to Level II within six years
	Participate in a PDE approved teacher induction program	Participate in PDE approved teacher induction program
	150 hours of Act 48 approved professional development every five years to maintain certification	150 hours of Act 48 approved professional development every five years to maintain certification

HIGH TEACHER TURNOVER THREATENS QUALITY

Due to the inadequate compensation the turnover rate is high for pre-k teachers in this critical work. Nationally, the annual turnover rate for early childhood educators is 30%, with low compensation cited as the top reason for leaving the field.⁶ High teacher turnover in early childhood programs undermines quality and is a financial burden on programs. High turnover of pre-k teachers can be detrimental to the quality of the environment and the development of young children, just as it would be for schools to lose and replace teachers in the middle of the year. Teacher turnover impacts the quality environment of the classroom and directly impacts the connection

with children and their families. When programs lose and replace teachers this can trigger stranger anxiety in pre-k students, which hinders the potential for growth in their early learning environment. The constant teacher turnover and struggle with retaining highly qualified professionals also has a detrimental impact on the program as it takes time to rehire a qualified professional and often causes staffing shifts. Often times certified pre-k teachers leave child care center-based classrooms for school districts or leave the education field altogether. **Table B** compares the statewide annual occupational wages for lead preschool teachers, kindergarten, and elementary school teachers.

Table B Statewide Annual Occupational Wages

	Entry Level	Average	Experienced
Preschool teacher	\$22,650	\$31,380	\$35,740
Kindergarten teacher	\$43,830	\$66,160	\$77,320
Elementary school teacher	\$48,540	\$69, 630	\$80,170

Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), 2019

Despite working a highly-skilled, challenging job with similar education, certification, and training requirements, pre-k teachers make significantly less than teachers instructing older grades in an elementary school. Many of the pre-k teachers have the same PK-4 Pennsylvania teacher certification as their colleagues. While funding streams differ, we need to move towards parity for teacher compensation across programs and addressing rates will help achieve that goal. The **Appendix (page 6)** in this report shows the breakdown of annual earnings for several counties throughout the Commonwealth.

BASIC EXPENDITURES CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY

While teachers are the center of quality and personnel accounts for the majority of costs at early learning programs, basic expenditures such as rent, utilities, classroom materials, and food also impact the quality of care and education provided. Well-equipped and resourced facilities enhance child development and program quality. The environment is one of the “structural dimensions of care” that influences the quality according to Shonkoff and Phillips *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*. The physical space sets the stage and creates the context for everything that happens. Facilities and classroom materials play an important role in developing the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. In addition to the typical operations costs, COVID-19 health protocol have presented a new set of costs for the PPE and sanitation materials to ensure the safety of children, staff, and families.



CONCLUSION

Improving quality through rate adjustments in both Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program ensures these programs can maintain high-quality early learning experiences for children and families. This rate increase should be consistent with the rate increase provided through the federal CARES Act funding of \$9 million. Pennsylvania should allocate \$9 million to specifically go toward a rate adjustment for both Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program and ensure these rate increases are directly passed through to providers in order to meet current needs.

- Support a \$7 million allocation to provide rate adjustments of Pre-K Counts current base rate from \$8,750 to \$9,025
- Support a \$2 million allocation to provide rate adjustments of Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program current average base rate from \$10,500 to \$10,805

APPENDIX

Annual Occupation Wages by County

*Note some county data was not available

County	Role	Annual Entry	Annual Average	Annual Expr'd
Adams County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,910	\$27,030	\$29,590
Adams County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adams County	Elementary School Teachers	\$45,270	\$60,880	\$68,690
Allegheny County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,090	\$35,950	\$42,380
Allegheny County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$53,710	\$77,960	\$90,090
Allegheny County	Elementary School Teachers	\$50,220	\$74,130	\$86,090
Berks County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,710	\$31,400	\$35,750
Berks County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$44,610	\$62,990	\$72,180
Berks County	Elementary School Teachers	\$46,910	\$66,050	\$75,610
Blair County	Preschool Teachers	\$18,600	\$25,150	\$28,420
Blair County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$35,360	\$50,560	\$58,170
Blair County	Elementary School Teachers	\$40,130	\$56,290	\$64,370
Bucks County	Preschool Teachers	\$20,330	\$26,400	\$29,440
Bucks County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$54,840	\$70,190	\$77,870
Bucks County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,740	\$78,770	\$92,280
Cambria County	Preschool Teachers	\$24,650	\$33,570	\$38,030
Cambria County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$49,340	\$59,990	\$65,320
Cambria County	Elementary School Teachers	\$43,300	\$59,330	\$67,350
Centre County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,400	\$35,210	\$42,110
Centre County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Centre County	Elementary School Teachers	\$36,220	\$53,500	\$62,140

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Chester County	Preschool Teachers	\$26,710	\$32,140	\$34,850
Chester County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Chester County	Elementary School Teachers	\$49,100	\$72,210	\$83,770
Clearfield County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,800	\$37,450	\$44,780
Clearfield County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Clearfield County	Elementary School Teachers	\$44,980	\$57,380	\$63,580
Columbia County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,710	\$30,540	\$34,450
Columbia County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Columbia County	Elementary School Teachers	\$39,040	\$61,460	\$72,670
Cumberland County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,080	\$28,940	\$30,880
Cumberland County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cumberland County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,340	\$61,690	\$66,870
Dauphin County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,040	\$29,990	\$32,460
Dauphin County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$38,560	\$56,870	\$66,020
Dauphin County	Elementary School Teachers	\$46,350	\$61,450	\$69,000
Delaware County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,950	\$31,020	\$35,060
Delaware County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$29,060	\$60,250	\$75,840
Delaware County	Elementary School Teachers	\$50,900	\$78,230	\$91,900
Erie County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,130	\$26,300	\$28,890
Erie County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$32,880	\$60,910	\$74,920
Erie County	Elementary School Teachers	\$42,580	\$61,240	\$70,580
Franklin County	Preschool Teachers	\$17,910	\$24,150	\$27,270
Franklin County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$54,700	\$58,910	\$61,020
Franklin County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,530	\$65,090	\$71,870

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Lackawanna County	Preschool Teachers	\$17,420	\$23,900	\$27,140
Lackawanna County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$52,760	\$63,940	\$69,530
Lackawanna County	Elementary School Teachers	\$43,240	\$59,140	\$67,090
Lancaster County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,360	\$31,340	\$34,320
Lancaster County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$31,130	\$46,730	\$54,530
Lancaster County	Elementary School Teachers	\$47,320	\$65,740	\$74,950
Lebanon County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,680	\$28,200	\$30,470
Lebanon County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lebanon County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,570	\$67,760	\$75,860
Lehigh County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,210	\$32,340	\$37,900
Lehigh County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$57,680	\$78,470	\$88,870
Lehigh County	Elementary School Teachers	\$57,690	\$77,380	\$87,220
Luzerne County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,260	\$25,030	\$26,910
Luzerne County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Luzerne County	Elementary School Teachers	\$44,910	\$61,790	\$70,230
Lycoming County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,870	\$29,070	\$32,660
Lycoming County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$58,790	\$66,880	\$70,920
Lycoming County	Elementary School Teachers	\$56,800	\$68,160	\$73,840
Mercer County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,720	\$27,860	\$30,930
Mercer County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mercer County	Elementary School Teachers	\$45,590	\$62,460	\$70,900
Monroe County	Preschool Teachers	\$20,460	\$28,480	\$32,490
Monroe County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Monroe County	Elementary School Teachers	\$49,760	\$73,900	\$85,970

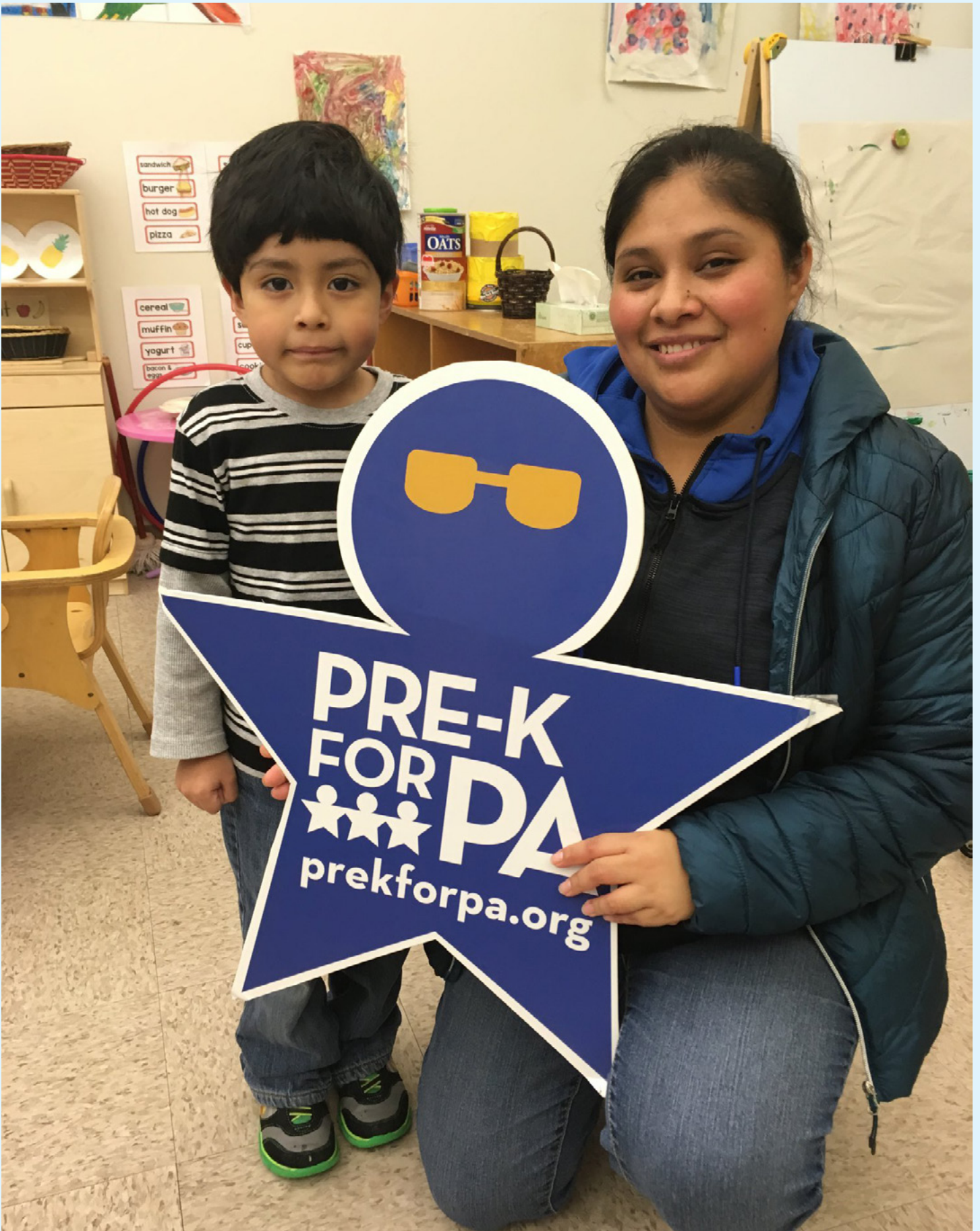
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Montgomery County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,100	\$30,260	\$32,840
Montgomery County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$46,140	\$75,600	\$90,320
Montgomery County	Elementary School Teachers	\$48,940	\$83,150	\$100,250
Northampton County	Preschool Teachers	\$17,240	\$22,760	\$25,520
Northampton County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$59,360	\$78,410	\$87,930
Northampton County	Elementary School Teachers	\$59,850	\$77,250	\$85,950
Philadelphia County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,170	\$33,460	\$38,610
Philadelphia County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$32,340	\$50,290	\$59,270
Philadelphia County	Elementary School Teachers	\$46,100	\$70,960	\$83,380
Schuylkill County	Preschool Teachers	\$29,890	\$40,640	\$46,020
Schuylkill County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Schuylkill County	Elementary School Teachers	\$37,470	\$56,190	\$65,550
Westmoreland County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,760	\$29,410	\$32,230
Westmoreland County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Westmoreland County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,110	\$68,710	\$77,510
York County	Preschool Teachers	\$24,000	\$29,090	\$31,630
York County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$50,570	\$75,000	\$87,220
York County	Elementary School Teachers	\$54,550	\$73,420	\$82,850

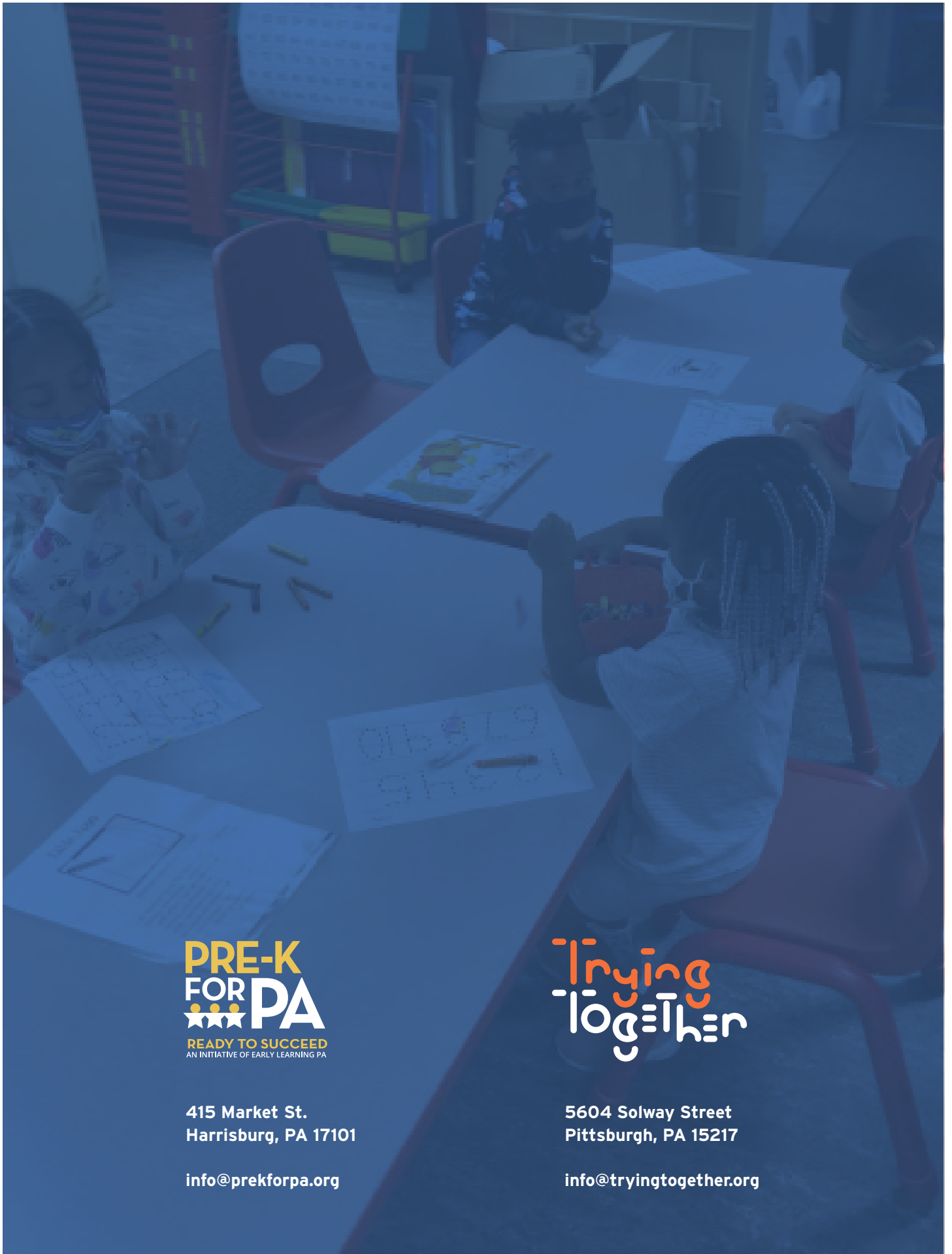
Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), 2019

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- ⁶ Porter, N. (2012). *High Turnover among Early Childhood Educators in the United States*. Washington State University. Retrieved from https://www.childresearch.net/projects/ecec/2012_04.html.



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March 1, 2021
A People's Education Budget
Testimony
Shalonda Spencer, Director, Public Policy & Government Affairs
Trying Together

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on Pre-Kindergarten and early care and education funding. My name is Shalonda Spencer and I am the Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs with Trying Together. Trying Together is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support high-quality care and education for young children by providing advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities for the needs and rights of children, their families, and the individuals who interact with them. While we are based in southwest Pennsylvania, our advocacy efforts on behalf of that mission are not only regional but state and federally focused as well.

From birth to age five, young children's brains make millions of neural connections every second – forming brain architecture for life. At no other time in a human's life will the brain develop at this remarkable speed or with such intricacy. This is the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend.

While parents will always be the most important influence during this time of a child's life, nearly 71 percent of Pennsylvania children under age six have all available parents in the labor force. For these children to be well cared for and educated while their parents are at work, state policymakers should be supporting evidence-based programs that strengthen our families and ensure access to high-quality early care and education in order to maximize the potential of the first five years.

Access to high-quality early learning education programs are essential to our youngest learners and because Pennsylvania respects a family's role as their child's first teacher we intentionally rely on a mixed delivery system of public and private programs to provide high-quality early childhood experiences which allow for family choice.

Current programs that support high-quality standards across the state include:

- Pre-K Counts (PKC), which is delivered by school districts, Head Start programs, certified child care centers/group homes participating in Keystone STARS with a STAR 3 or 4 rating, and private academic nursery schools.

Child Care programs serve nearly 50% of the Pre-K Counts classrooms. Child care is funded in part through the Child Care Assistance and Child Care Services lines items under the Department of Human Services.

- Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP), which expands federally funded Head Start services to Pennsylvania’s most economically disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-olds.
- Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTLBG) (includes Accountability Block Grant or ABG funds), which enables school districts to invest in the educational programs proven to help children’s academic achievement. Certain school districts can use this funding to establish, maintain or expand a quality pre-k program aligned with the state’s current academic standards and some have used ABG funds to support pre-k in the past.
- PHLpreK, which provides locally funded quality pre-k programs for 3- and 4-year-olds living in Philadelphia. The program is funded with some of the revenue generated by the Philadelphia Beverage Tax enacted in June 2016 and designed to create 6,500 locally funded, quality pre-k seats in Philadelphia over the subsequent five years.
- Licensed Nursery Schools, which are regulated and overseen by the Department of Education. Through this license the Department of Education regulates physical space, professional staff, equipment and curriculum.

There is an extensive body of research that shows the importance of investing in high-quality pre-k, including producing gains for disadvantaged children and

delivering better long-term outcomes for society. Since the 1960s this compendium has consistently demonstrated the academic and social benefits of high-quality early learning experiences. These documented benefits include a reduced need for special education, decreased need in remedial education services, decreased high school dropout rates and an increased likelihood of graduation and college enrollment. With limited time today I won't go into the research in detail but I have included a research reference and am happy to provide additional information to anyone interested following this hearing.

So how does Pennsylvania rank in terms of our commitment to funding pre-kindergarten programming? Despite annual increases over the last 10 years with \$120 million in increases in just the last 3 years, Pennsylvania is still behind other states regarding per capita investments in pre-k. **As of Fiscal Year 2019-20, the commonwealth served 25,318 at-risk children but is still leaving over 102,000 eligible pre-kindergarteners unserved.** And although our current appropriation is \$217, 284,000 we are ranked only 19th out of 28 states in per capita public support for high-quality pre-k with a per capita spend of \$966 per preschool age child. Other states are outpacing our commitment, putting the commonwealth at a serious disadvantage with neighboring states. New York, New Jersey, Maryland and West Virginia all spend between \$500 to \$3,000 **more per child.**

The Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program since its inception has enabled local Head Start programs to create new slots for children and extend the day for children already enrolled in the program. HSSAP served 6,497 children in FY 2019-20 and has grown by \$25 million in the past 3 years, with a state appropriation now standing at \$64 million. Head Start programs for 3- and 4-year-olds give economically challenged children and their families appropriate preparation for school, which fuels greater academic success. Head Start's holistic, comprehensive family support services strengthen parents, so they can help their children, prepare them for school success, and be more self-sufficient.

As a principal partner in both the Pre-K for PA and Start Strong PA campaigns, we recommend the following: **investment of an additional \$296.5 million in high-quality pre-kindergarten (pre-k) by making increased annual investments in the Pre-K Counts (PKC) and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) line items.** Along with this increased state investment, it is recommended that any new slots awarded should be based on each county's pro rata share of the statewide total of children under 300% of poverty who do not already have access to high-quality, publicly funded pre-k.

In addition, the rate increase provided through CARES Act funding (\$9 million dollars) during the pandemic should not be cut but maintained in this year's funding.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on the importance of funding for high-quality pre-kindergarten and early care and education programs today. I would be happy to do my best to answer any questions you may have and if anyone would like additional information on child care I can get that for you following this hearing.

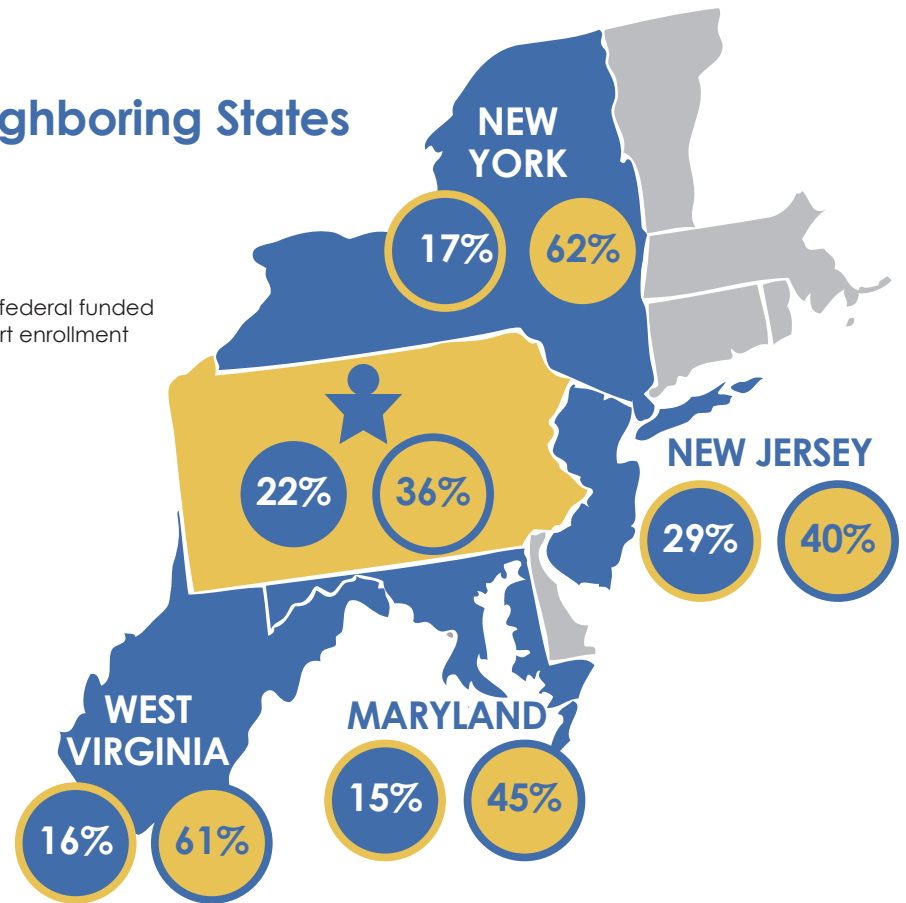
High-quality Pre-k in Neighboring States

3-year olds served*

4-year olds served*

* Includes federal funded Head Start enrollment

State	Amount spent per child
Maryland	\$1,005
New Jersey	\$3,421
New York	\$1,894
Pennsylvania	\$966
West Virginia	\$2,363



Beyond these neighboring states, there are additional states worth noting that have not only made a commitment to high-quality pre-k but have also made the financial investments to ensure high percentages of their preschool age children benefit:

OKLAHOMA'S state-funded pre-k program scored a nine on the NIEER quality rating scale. Using funds from this program and federal Head Start, Oklahoma provides pre-k to 86 percent of its 4-year-olds. Twenty percent of Oklahoma 3-year-olds are served with state pre-k and federal Head Start funds. Oklahoma spends \$4,264 per child.

SOUTH CAROLINA received a seven from NIEER and serves 17 percent of its 3-year-olds and 53 percent of its 4-year-olds using funding from their high-quality pre-k program and federal Head Start. South Carolina spends \$1,303 per child.

GEORGIA'S state pre-k program scored eight on the NIEER scale and, coupled with resources from federal Head Start, serves 65 percent of its 4-year-olds. Federal Head Start makes pre-k available to 9 percent of Georgia's 3-year-olds. Georgia spends \$2,851 per child.

ALABAMA received a NIEER rating of ten and serves 40 percent of its 4-year-olds and 11 percent of its 3-year-olds using state pre-k and state and federal Head Start funds. Alabama spends \$2,100 per child.

Making PA a Leader in Pre-K

The Pre-K for PA campaign is mindful of the fiscal challenges Pennsylvania faces, yet prioritizing investments in high-quality pre-k can be a means to alleviating those challenges. While increasing access to high-quality pre-k will require additional state and/or federal resources, the proven, long-term benefits of high-quality pre-k will ease other areas of state spending.



My name is Damaris Alvarado. I'm the Executive Director of Children's Playhouse. I have two locations in South Philadelphia: the Children's Playhouse Newbold, located at 1426 W. Passyunk Ave, a STAR 3 facility with a space capacity of 125 students, and The Children's Playhouse Whitman, located at 2501 S. Marshall St., a STAR 4 Center that has a licensed capacity of 158 students. Both locations offer Head Start, Pre-K Counts and PHLprek to 200 preschool students and 28 Infant-Toddler Contracted slots (ITCS) to infant toddlers from 6 weeks through 3 years of age. This means that Children's Playhouse was able to offer at least 6 hours daily FREE childcare to 228 to families in need, prior to the pandemic. I've sought out all these funding streams because our diverse South Philly community contains children and families with a range of incomes and home situations, and this allows me the flexibility to welcome them, regardless of their situation.

As you all know, COVID 19 has made a huge impact in all the childcare centers across Pennsylvania and in Philadelphia. Our facilities have faced shutdowns during the early months of the pandemic and throughout the last 12 months that has made us lose thousands of dollars in funding from our [families with a child care subsidy, who were not required to provide their usual weekly co-pay], private pay families, and PHLprek slots that are not filled. Prior to COVID-19, we served approximately 280 students and still had a waiting list. As of today, we are serving 205 students; this is a 27% of revenue drop that we have faced as our enrollments fluctuate. Our staffing turnover has been a huge challenge, even as we are faced with additional staff needs to ensure that we are meeting COVID-19 health and safety requirements.

An *adequate* budget would help the Children’s Playhouse hire additional staff to make sure that children remain in the same cohorts if a staff member is sick, quarantining, or just needs a personal day off for a mental health break. Additional funding will allow us to fairly compensate our staff, which are already underpaid, and limit the turnover that plagues our industry. Already, our degreed staff can earn more at Target or Walmart. An ***adequate*** budget for the childcare sector will include extra to purchase additional PPE so we can disinfect our schools with consistency, without wondering if we can afford this tomorrow, or taking from our already strained payroll funds.

An ***adequate*** state budget for the childcare sector will add additional state dollars that can be used for our essential childcare staff wages, enabling me to compensate my teaching team for the monies they have lost this year. That includes the Education and Retention Awards (ERA), a 17-year old program that provided an annual \$3,000 bonus for staff that have earned higher educational degrees and have not switched employers. This year the Administration replaced the ERAs with a \$600 payment to all child care staff. Surely we could find the funds for both, if we are committed to rewarding *all* those who have risked exposure and worked through the pandemic, as well as those who pursue higher education – which is strongly correlated with high quality and the best outcomes for our children.

Currently, 2 in 3 children enrolled in child care *do not* attend a program considered high quality, as state funding cuts to child care have flattened the early momentum of our state’s once cutting-edge quality improvement efforts. That means these children may not get the opportunity to be truly ready for kindergarten, they aren’t learning the important social skills and emotional self-regulation skills that will help

them thrive as children and as adults. And there's a price on that: it costs society when kids have to repeat a grade, need special education, get involved in crime, or can't support their families. Research shows that there's a huge return on the state's investment in high quality early education that saves expenses for schools, communities and the Commonwealth, but that benefit only comes with high quality care.

As I mentioned though, we're stuck. We're stuck in a vicious cycle where child care providers are stuck and can't invest in higher quality; half of our teachers are paid so poorly that they're eligible for public benefits, so they leave the field or switch employers for 10 cents an hour; and working-class and middle-income families can't afford the current cost of child care, let alone the true cost. Across the state, the average family with young children pays more for child care than they do for housing.

But a truly progressive budget – the kind that could lead to access to high quality for all families – wouldn't make child care affordable on the backs of the workforce. It would set parity in terms of salary and benefits between equally qualified child care teachers and public school Kindergarten teachers, and it would have enough public funds to subsidize ALL families to an affordable tuition payment.

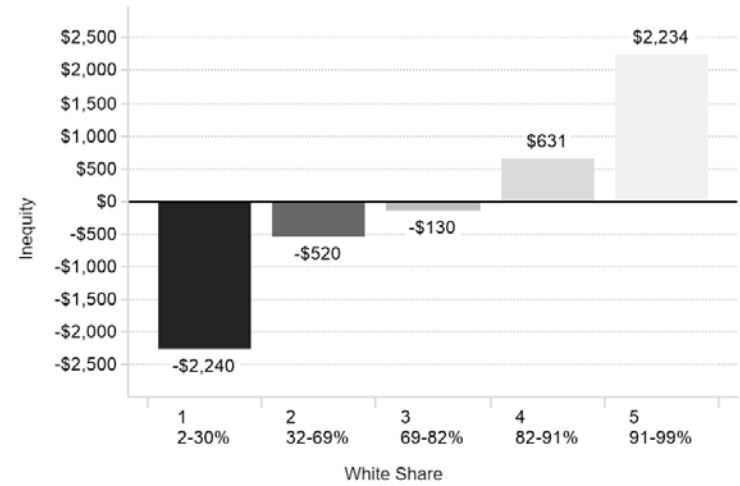
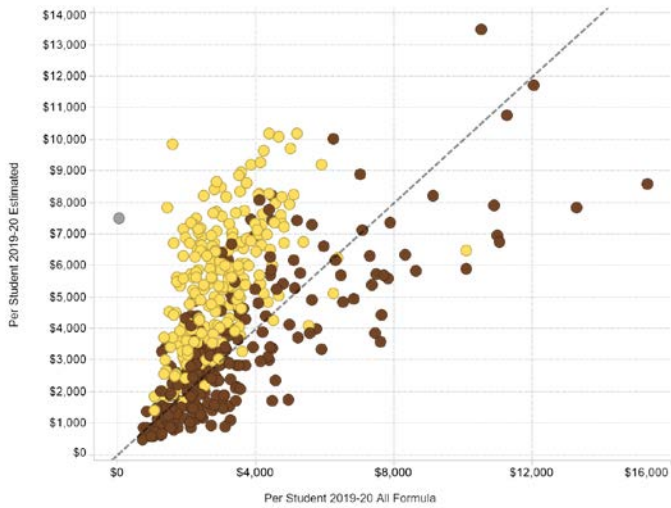
Good afternoon my name is De'Wayne Drummond. I am the president of the Mantua civic association out in West Philadelphia and I am the parent of De'Anna Drummond who attends Masterman Elementary school in Philadelphia.

The covid 19 pandemic has impacted my daughter's learning experience as well as other students when it comes down to their public education experiences. A couple of things that myself and other parents have notice was the lack of access when it comes down to educational resources such as safe school Facilities at is asbestos and lead free , the digital divide ,and parental engagement supports.

I know that parents are the children first teachers and this pandemic is new to all of us but this pandemic has cause a chain reaction involving students, teachers , and parents. We are all suffering because of the lack of financial education resources. I have had many conversations while helping at our community weekend food cupboard about the lack of knowledge in how to access technology from parents down to grandparents on the regular.

There are so many barriers we as guardians face. If a child can't login from home to attend school virtual. The Only options are to go to their neighbors house and prayer that they can gain internet access or sit in their public school parking lot. I have seen a lot of males become more engaged in their children education because of the pandemic had forced many individuals to lose their jobs.

Are children are our future and every child should have a fair and bright future. It would be fair and just if a state budget would be structured in progressive way that it would invest more funding, so our children can have sustainable and positive outcomes when it comes down to the public education.

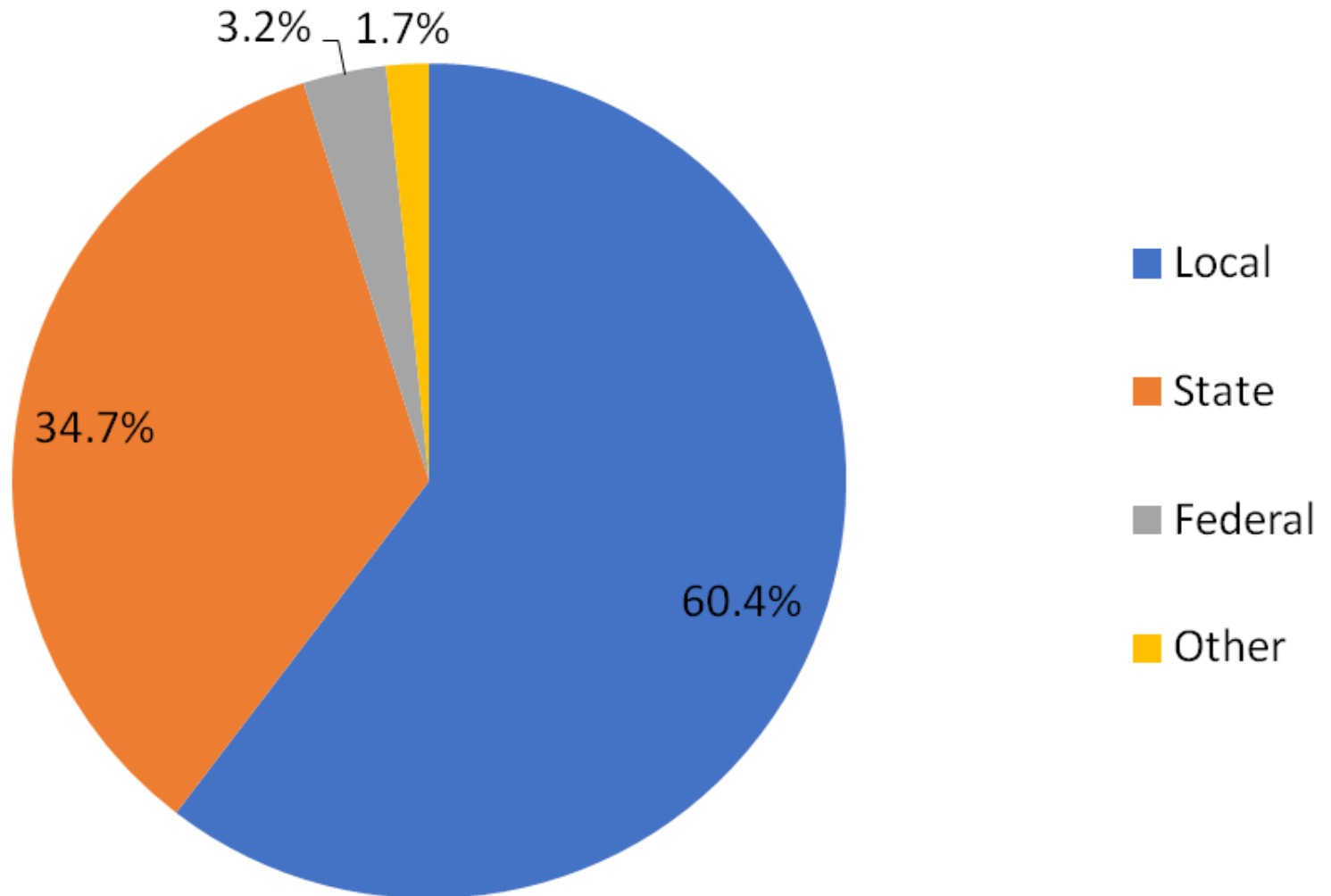


Racial Inequity in Pennsylvania Public School Funding

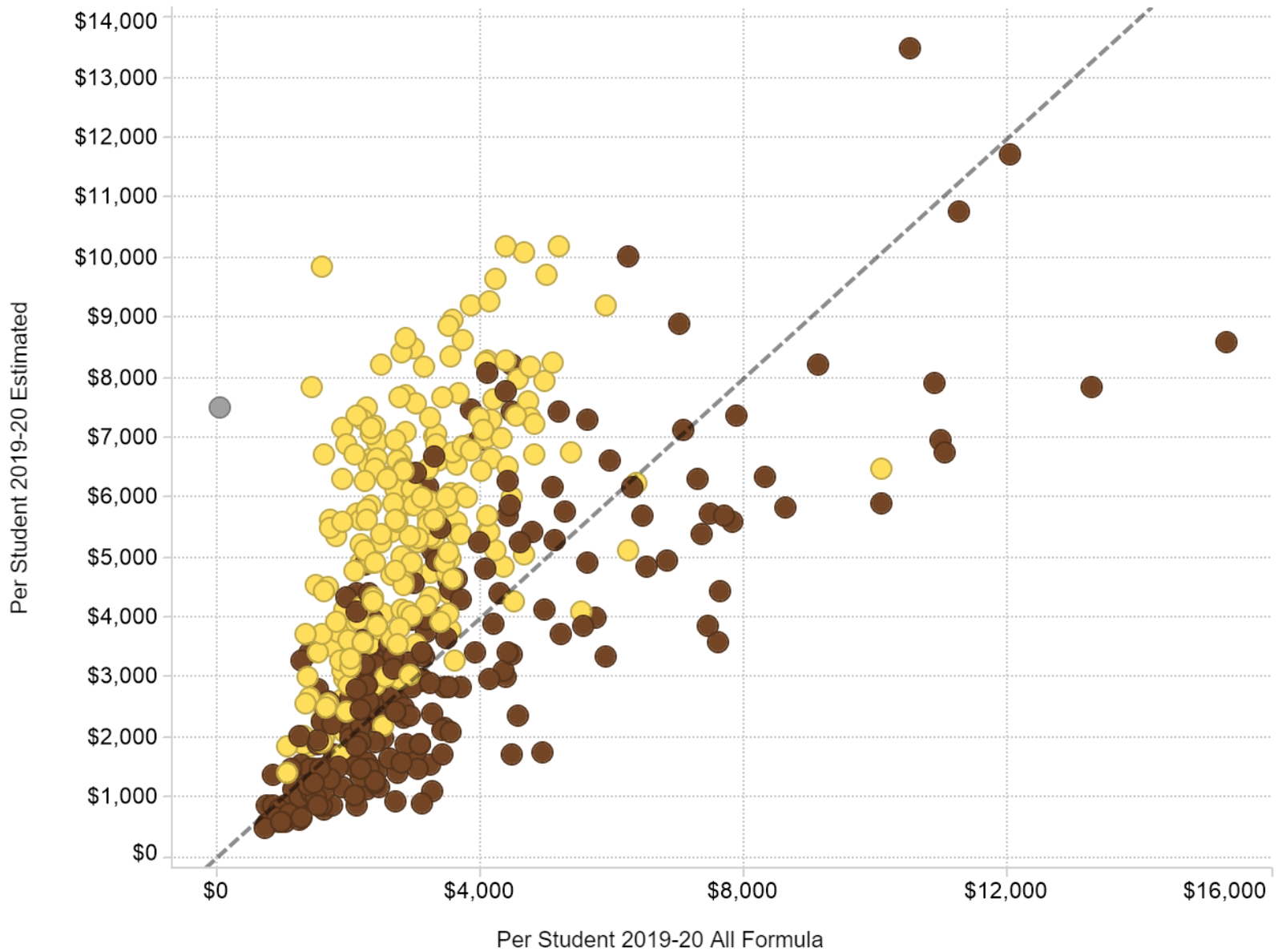
David Mosenkis
POWER Interfaith

March 1, 2021

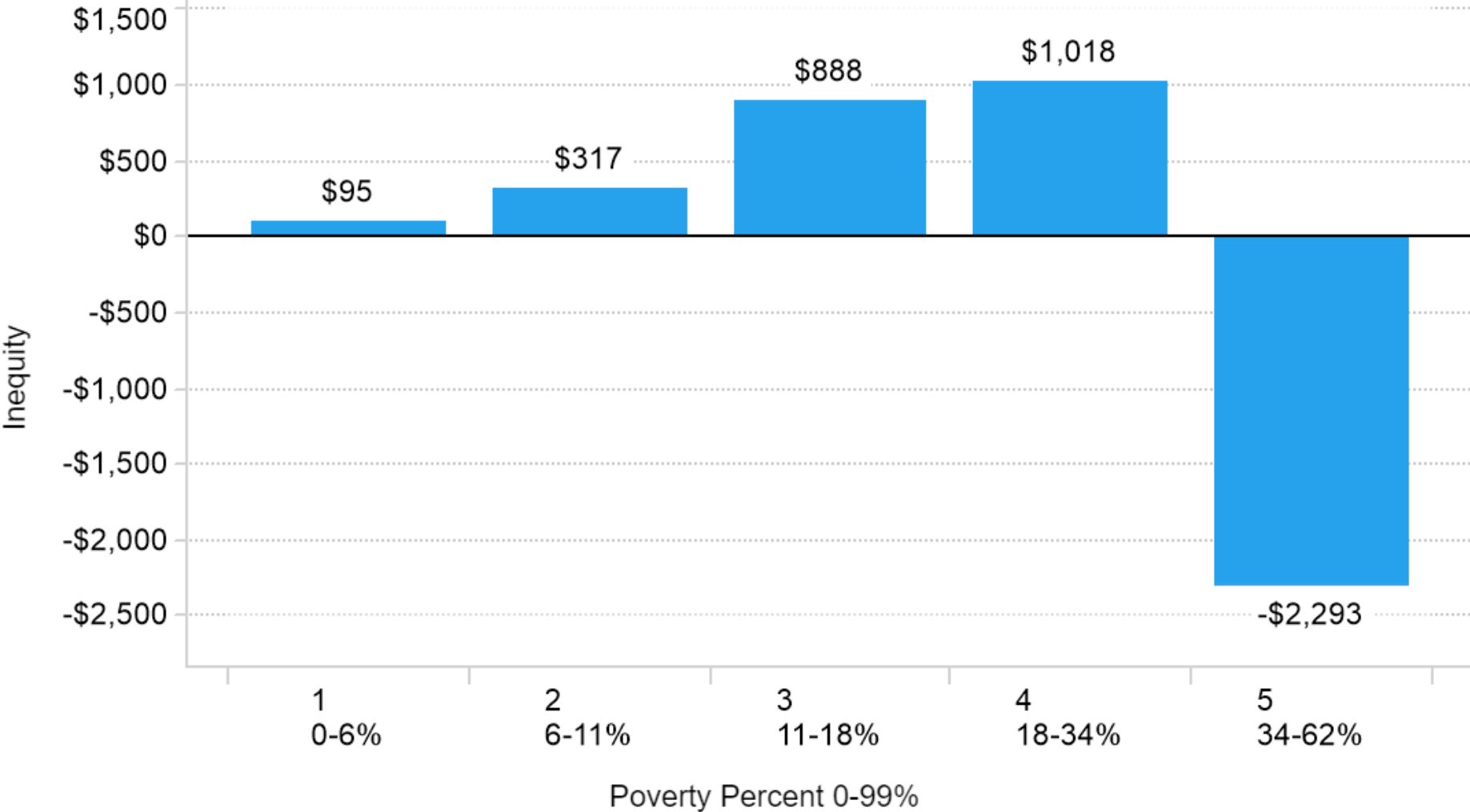
Sources of Pennsylvania Education Funds 2018-19



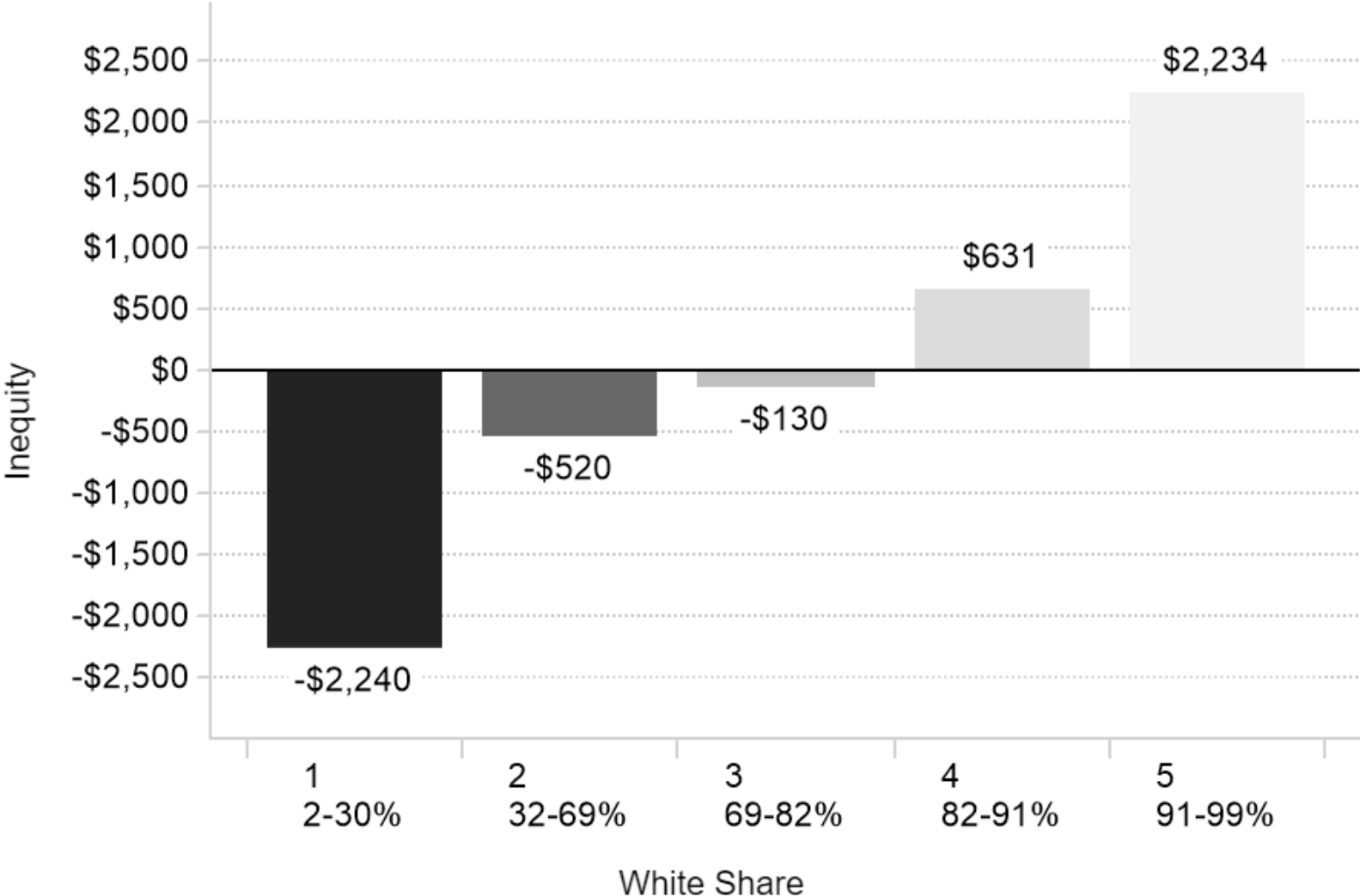
2019-20 – Fair Funding vs. Actual Funding



2019-20 Average Inequity per % Poverty Quintile

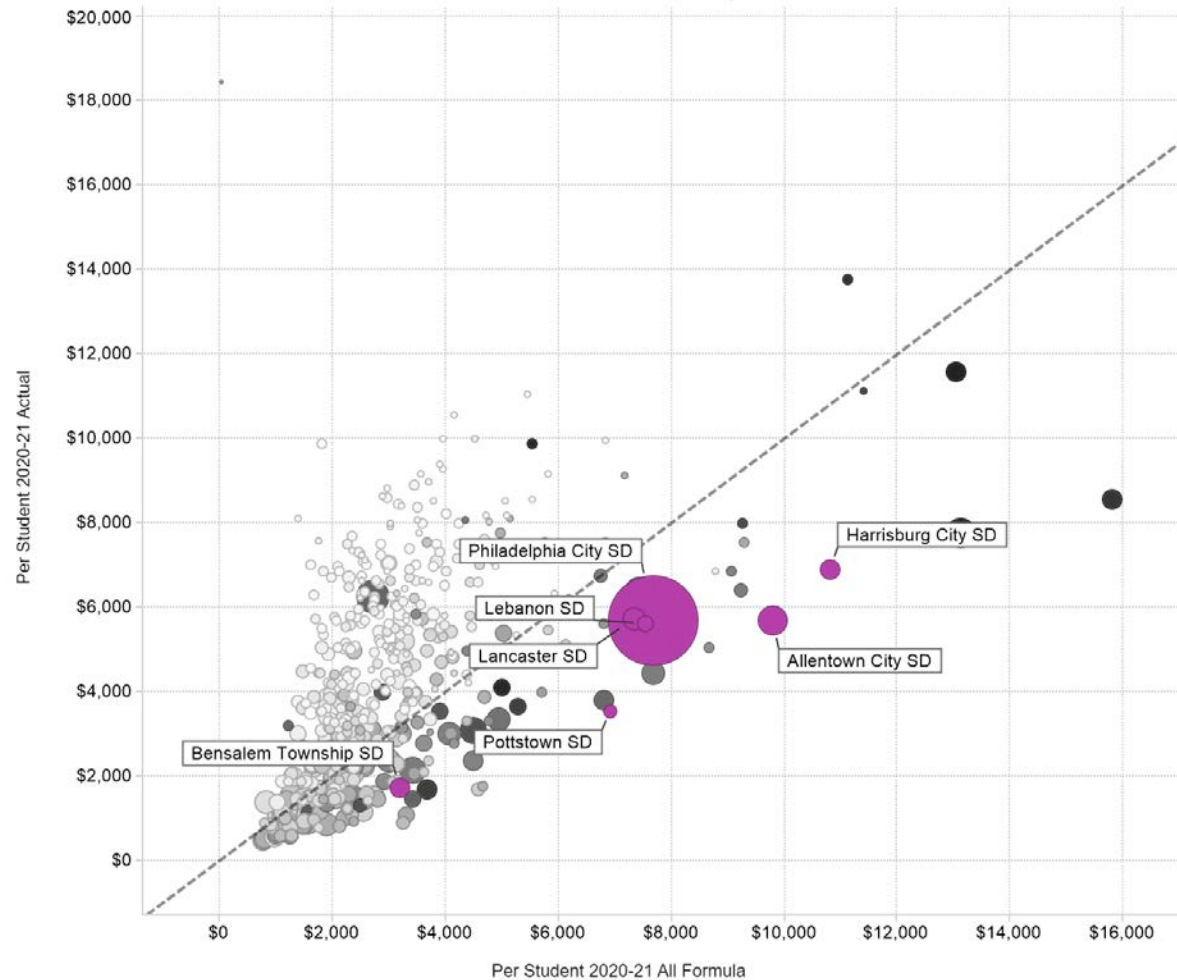


2019-20 Average Inequity per % White Quintile



Current Actual vs. Formula

Per Student 2020-21 Actual vs. Per Student 2020-21 All Formula, color by White Share

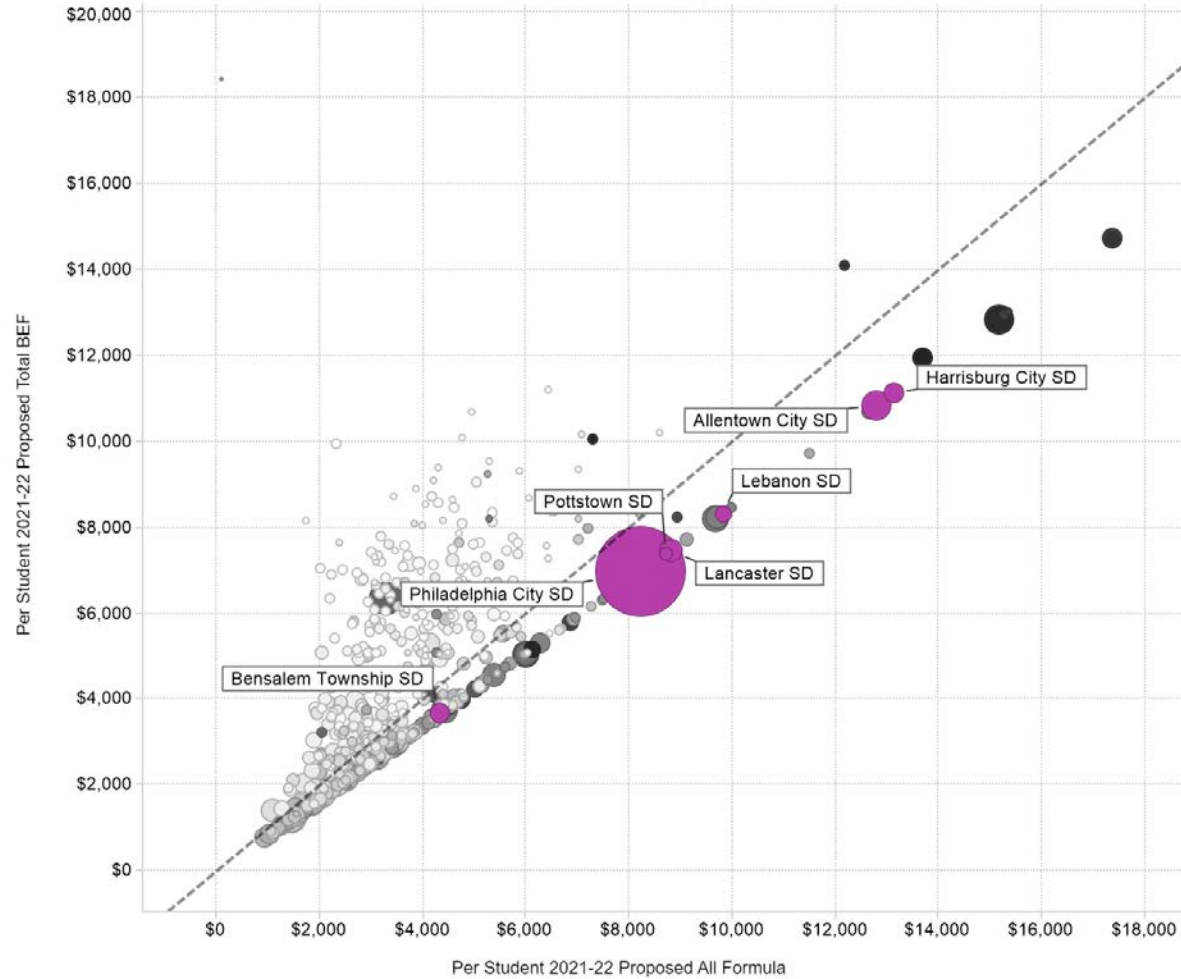


Diff, Per Student Diff per School District
(Column Names)

School District	Diff	Per Student Diff
York City SD	-\$59,011,242	-\$7,212
Reading SD	-\$99,201,575	-\$5,321
Allentown City SD	-\$86,725,573	-\$4,095
Harrisburg City SD	-\$30,578,136	-\$3,918
Columbia Borou...	-\$5,281,679	-\$3,607
Aliquippa SD	-\$4,349,291	-\$3,577
Pottstown SD	-\$11,573,685	-\$3,366
Scranton SD	-\$33,362,310	-\$3,231
Wilkes-Barre Are...	-\$23,630,005	-\$2,974
Hanover Public SD	-\$5,911,968	-\$2,883
Jim Thorpe Area ...	-\$6,430,891	-\$2,855
Greater Johnsto...	-\$8,550,345	-\$2,802
York Suburban SD	-\$7,544,545	-\$2,363
Conestoga Valley...	-\$9,459,045	-\$2,193
Shenandoah Vall...	-\$2,576,659	-\$2,184
East Stroudsbu...	-\$14,614,022	-\$2,083
Philadelphia City ...	-\$401,929,228	-\$1,974
Norristown Area ...	-\$15,934,048	-\$1,974
Muhlenberg SD	-\$7,767,065	-\$1,919
Forest Area SD	-\$840,798	-\$1,912
Lebanon SD	-\$10,301,733	-\$1,908
Sharon City SD	-\$3,538,990	-\$1,729
Sto-Rox SD	-\$3,029,551	-\$1,692
East Allegheny SD	-\$3,032,940	-\$1,675
Steelton-Highspir...	-\$2,599,694	-\$1,672
Southeast Delco ...	-\$7,711,830	-\$1,614
Lancaster SD	-\$17,402,662	-\$1,571
Hazleton Area SD	-\$18,487,673	-\$1,568
Loyalsock Towns...	-\$2,363,000	-\$1,484
Chester-Upland SD	-\$10,044,974	-\$1,441
Antietam SD	-\$1,669,459	-\$1,436
Bensalem Towns...	-\$11,200,021	-\$1,426

Wolf Plan vs. 100% Formula of Wolf \$

Per Student 2021-22 Proposed Total BEF vs. Per Student 2021-22 Proposed All Formula, color by White Share



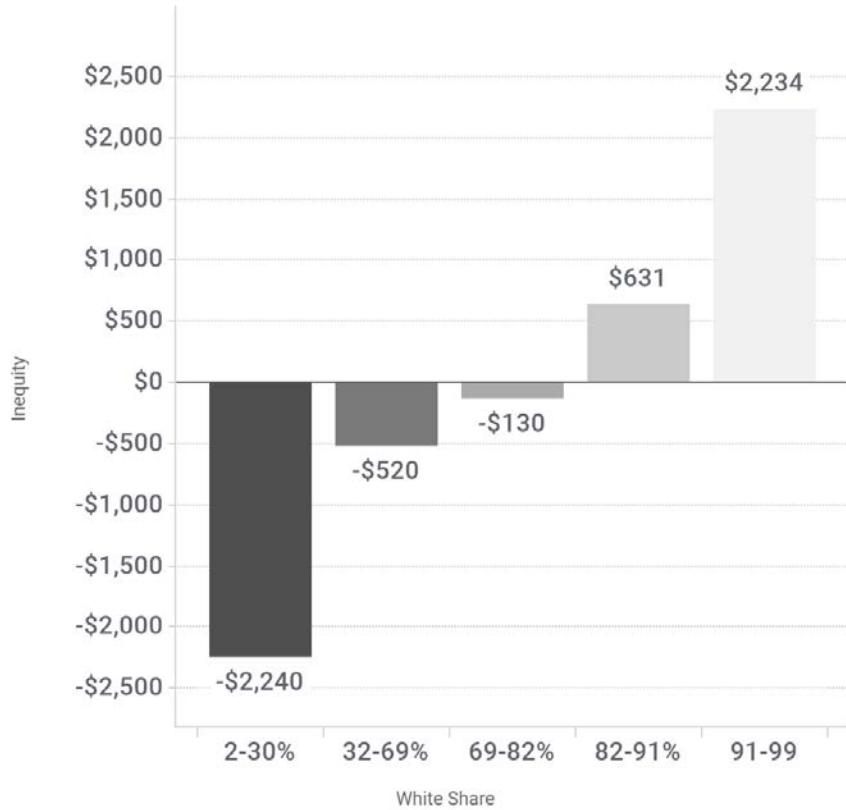
Diff, Per Student Diff per School District

(Column Names)

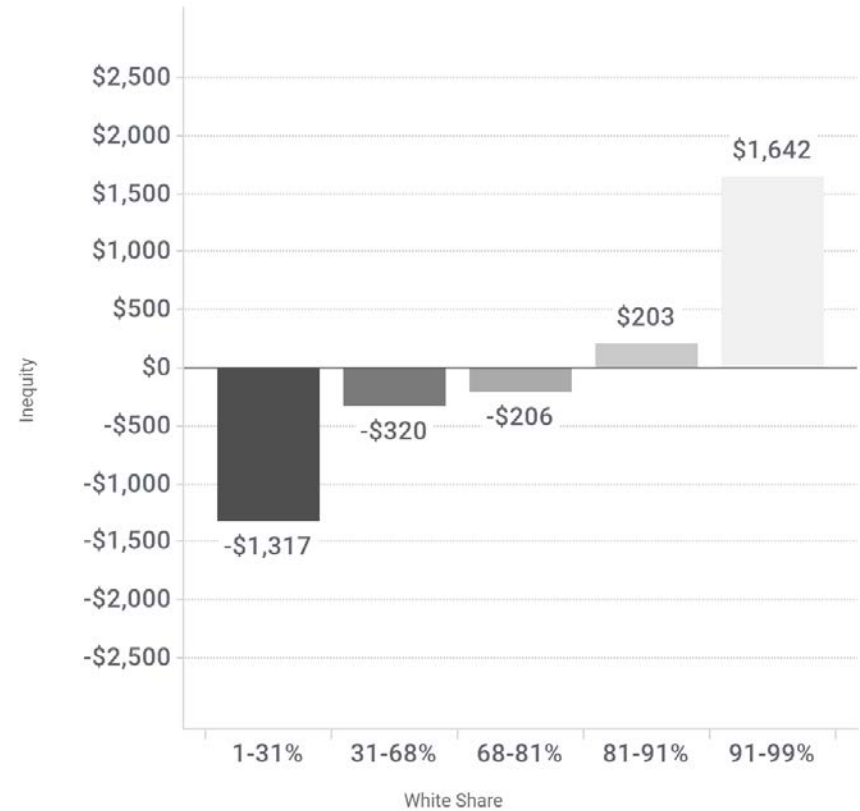
School District	Diff	Per Student Diff
York City SD	-\$21,510,884	-\$2,629
Farrell Area SD	-\$1,629,270	-\$2,325
Alliquippa SD	-\$2,812,233	-\$2,313
Reading SD	-\$42,778,862	-\$2,295
Harrisburg City SD	-\$15,495,056	-\$1,986
Allentown City SD	-\$41,009,405	-\$1,936
Greater Johnsto...	-\$5,831,786	-\$1,911
Sharon City SD	-\$3,559,869	-\$1,740
Chester-Upland SD	-\$12,048,938	-\$1,728
Columbia Borou...	-\$2,409,632	-\$1,645
Steelton-Highsplr...	-\$2,521,781	-\$1,621
Sto-Rox SD	-\$2,901,842	-\$1,621
Shenandoah Vall...	-\$1,779,498	-\$1,508
Lebanon SD	-\$8,031,831	-\$1,488
Forest Area SD	-\$649,331	-\$1,476
Scranton SD	-\$15,170,967	-\$1,469
Erie City SD	-\$18,688,307	-\$1,462
New Castle Area ...	-\$4,592,054	-\$1,379
Lancaster SD	-\$14,782,807	-\$1,334
Wilkes-Barre Are...	-\$10,554,889	-\$1,329
Pottstown SD	-\$4,539,115	-\$1,320
McKeesport Area...	-\$5,061,699	-\$1,319
Carbondale Area ...	-\$2,133,818	-\$1,265
Galetion Area SD	-\$456,916	-\$1,263
Philadelphia City ...	-\$253,401,738	-\$1,245
New Kensington-...	-\$2,466,100	-\$1,218
Panther Valley SD	-\$2,115,978	-\$1,206
Big Beaver Falls ...	-\$2,051,807	-\$1,134
East Allegheny SD	-\$2,045,687	-\$1,130
Riverside SD	-\$1,772,497	-\$1,098
Steel Valley SD	-\$1,776,530	-\$1,053
Haverhill Area SD	-\$2,247,827	-\$1,046
	Diff	Per Student Diff

Per-Student Inequity by Race

2019-20



Wolf Proposal



DC Compensated
Emancipation Act
of 1862

PA Budget Proposal
of 2021

Signed by President Lincoln

Proposed by Governor Wolf

Ended slavery in Washington,
DC

Distribute ALL 2020-21 funding,
plus \$200M of new funding,
through the formula

Gave reparations to
slaveholders

Add \$1.15B of new funding
solely for districts who would
otherwise get a decrease in
funding (Historic Privilege
Retention Supplement)

English Testimony:

Good afternoon, my name is Milka Uribe, I am a member leader of Make the Road Pennsylvania, I am an immigrant from the Dominican Republic and I live for 10 years in the city of Reading in Berks County. My biggest project is Jorge Gabriel, my 16-year-old son, a student at Reading High School. Also, as a member of Make the Road Pennsylvania, I help lead the only parent committee in the city of Reading with over 100 mothers and a few dads representing 13 schools in the Reading School District.

The devastating inequalities in Pennsylvania's education funding system ensure that our state continues to mistreat hundreds of thousands of its historically underserved students, including many students of color, students living in poverty, students with disabilities, students who are learning English as a second language and much more. The problem is that students in our district attend schools that lack the basic resources to meet their needs.

The biggest barrier we face in the Reading School District is the lack of a school equity funding. The lack of school equity funding is seen in the quality of education and the resource limitations that students have. This need for funds can be clearly seen in the following examples:

- Our school district has not been able to have classes in person, or attend alternate days like other surrounding school districts have. Our district has Spanish-only students who are not learning due to a lack of interpreters, ESL teachers.
- Our school district lacks more extracurricular training programs: Students for example want to participate in CTC (Career and Technology courses) but the space is very limited and even if they are interested, they cannot participate. To be able to attend, they even have to register a year in advance and it does not guarantee that they can give you the space. Some students have extraordinary abilities in different areas such as art, music, sports, and much more and the school district does not have the necessary equipment and resources for the development of the student's interests and gifts. Very few parents have the ability to seek out-of-school resources.
- Our school district lacks a good food and nutrition program for our children: The quality of the breakfasts and lunches is of very poor quality, and the portions are the same for all children regardless of age - a preschool student and a high school student like my son will get the same portions. During the

pandemic, as parents, we were able to realize the bad food quality. Our children are not eating this food because it is bad and it is a waste of money.

This scarcity means that our students have few options to invest their time on and the option they have left is the street. We don't want this for our children.

If the basic funding needs were met, what I would like for my son and his peers unfolds in three elementary things:

- Improve the quality of education with a strong school curriculum and ESL teachers and paraprofessionals for classes that need them.
- Creation of more extracurricular programs with all the necessary equipment and resources.
- Creation of food and nutrition programs that respond and satisfy the nutritional needs of children taking into account their age.

In the 2021-2022 budget, the legislature must finally take steps to provide additional funding to schools that have the fewest resources available to meet the needs of their students.

You must commit to fully closing the resource and opportunity gaps that threaten the future workforce, and the economy of our communities and state.

It is unacceptable to continue to ignore the substantial damage that Pennsylvania's current funding system inflicts on students and communities across the state. It's no secret that Pennsylvania has one of the most unequal school funding systems in the nation, and Latino students of color disproportionately experience the consequences of that neglect.

We have the best superintendent in the state and one of the best in the United States, but if we don't have equitable funding there will be no considerable progress. This has to change. We fight for school equity funding and that means meeting the basic needs of good quality learning and more resources for the Reading School District.

Again, my name is Milka Uribe and I am a lead member of Make the Road Pennsylvania. Thanks

Testimonio en Español:

Buenas tardes, mi nombre es Milka Uribe soy miembro líder de Make the Road Pennsylvania, soy inmigrante de la República Dominicana y vivo por 10 años en la ciudad de Reading en Berks County. Mi mayor proyecto es Jorge Gabriel, mi hijo de 16 años, estudiante de la Reading High School. También, como miembro líder de Make the Road Pennsylvania, ayudo a liderar el único comité de padres en la ciudad de Reading con más de 100 madres y algunos papás que representan a 13 escuelas en el Distrito Escolar de Reading.

Las desigualdades devastadoras en el sistema de financiamiento para la educación en Pensilvania garantizan que nuestro estado continúe maltratando a cientos de miles de sus estudiantes históricamente desatendidos, incluidos muchos estudiantes de color, estudiantes que viven en la pobreza, estudiantes con discapacidades, estudiantes que estan aprendiendo el ingles como segundo idioma y mucho mas. **El problema es que los estudiantes de nuestro distrito asisten a escuelas que carecen de los recursos básicos para satisfacer sus necesidades.**

La mayor barrera a la que nos enfrentamos en el Distrito escolar de Reading es la falta de presupuesto escolar. La falta de presupuesto escolar se ve en la calidad de la educación y las limitaciones de recursos que tienen los estudiantes. Esta necesidad de fondos lo podemos ver claramente en los siguientes ejemplos:

- Nuestro distrito escolar no ha podido tener clases en persona, o asistir en días alternados como los tienen otros distritos escolares aledaños. Nuestro distrito tiene estudiantes que solamente hablan español que no están aprendiendo por falta de intérpretes.
- Nuestro distrito escolar le faltan más programas de capacitación extracurricular: Los estudiantes por ejemplo quieren participar de los cursos de CTC (Career and Technology courses) pero el cupo es muy limitado y aunque ellos estén interesados no pueden participar. Incluso para poder asistir se tienen que registrar un año antes y no garantiza que le puedan dar el cupo. Algunos estudiantes tienen capacidades extraordinarias en diferentes áreas como arte, música, deporte, y mucho más y tampoco han los equipos y recursos necesarios para hacer estas actividades. Muy pocos padres de familia tienen la posibilidad de buscar recursos fuera de la escuela para desarrollarse en su área debido a lo limitado de los programas que tiene el distrito escolar de Reading.

- Nuestro distrito escolar le falta de un buen programa de alimentación y nutrición para nuestros hijos: La calidad de los desayunos y los almuerzos es de muy mala calidad, además las porciones son iguales para todos los niños no importa la edad--un estudiantes de preescolar y un estudiante de escuela secundaria como mi hijo. En estos tiempos de pandemia los padres pudimos apreciar más la calidad de estos alimentos, nuestros hijos no se la comen y es un desperdicio de dinero.

Estas precariedades conllevan a que nuestros estudiantes tengan pocas opciones de invertir su tiempo y la opción que les queda es la calle. No queremos esto para nuestros hijos.

Si las necesidades de fondos básicos se cumplieran, lo que desearía para mi hijo y sus compañeros se desarrollan en tres cosas elementales:

- Mejorar la calidad de educación con un currículo escolar fuerte y con maestras de ESL y asistentes de maestras para las clases que lo necesiten.
- Creación de mas programas extracurriculares y con todos los recursos necesarios.
- Creación de programas de alimentación y nutrición que respondan y satisfagan las necesidades alimenticias de los niños tomando en cuenta su edad.

En el presupuesto 2021-2022, la legislatura debe finalmente tomar medidas para proporcionar fondos adicionales a las escuelas que tienen la menor cantidad de recursos disponibles para satisfacer las necesidades de sus estudiantes. Debe comprometerse a cerrar por completo las brechas de recursos y oportunidades que amenazan la futura fuerza laboral, y la economía de nuestras comunidades y estado. Es inaceptable seguir ignorando el daño sustancial que el sistema de financiación actual de Pensilvania inflige a los estudiantes y las comunidades en todo el estado. No es ningún secreto que Pensilvania tiene uno de los sistemas de financiación escolar más inequitativos de la nación, y que los estudiantes de color, Latinos experimentan de manera desproporcionada las consecuencias de esa negligencia. Tenemos el mejor superintendente del estado y unos de los mejores de los Estados Unidos, pero si no tenemos fondos equitativos no podemos progresar. Esto tiene que cambiar. Luchamos por equidad y eso se traduce atender las necesidades básicas de un aprendizaje de buena calidad y más recursos para el Distrito Escolar de Reading.

Mi nombre es Milka y soy miembro líder de Make the Road Pennsylvania. Gracias

Greetings, my name is Chris Forbes-Nicotera and I am a proud Philadelphia resident who also has the pleasure of teaching the children of Philadelphia.

I am a lifelong resident of Philadelphia as well as retired U.S. Army veteran who has led a life of service to others, committed to helping to make my piece of the world a better place for all. As a teacher with the school district of Philadelphia, I'm helping to make the world a better place by helping to make better people. As parents, my wife and I raise our three children with a love of learning and respect for all people while trying our best to support their schools, advocating for better learning conditions for them and their peers as well our entire school-based community.

When I was in the Army, we conducted PRC missions. This was population resource control, where our goal was for us to provide assistance to internally displaced persons during military activities and keep them safe and out of harms way. We fairly and humanely distributed supplies and rations to the local populous, keeping them safe when their country could not. This needed to be deliberately executed to ensure we viewed as impartial to all in need without any perceived bias or favoritism.

Supplies will always be finite, but the trust and cooperation established by conducting fair and humane distribution, seeing and treating everyone as equals deserving the same universal needs was infinite.

To me, the lack of this fair and even distribution of resources to best serve all of our students and their families throughout our commonwealth, regardless of what they look like or where they reside, is the biggest barrier facing our funding and budget. Students in urban or rural areas with lower property taxes or higher melanin levels are not displaced persons, they are our fellow citizens and all deserve the same equal opportunities and supports necessary for their education and future successful participation and contribution of our country. Our students and their families, as well as the future of our country, are suffering as a result of this ongoing systemic neglect.

Our students are our greatest natural resource and they deserve our best effort and support to help them reach their fullest potential. As I've looked around different areas and different districts, I've seen that we're not truly giving them the best support possible. Teachers and parents try to provide our students with our best with what we're given, but the reality is that the needs are far greater than what we're being given and our students and our futures are suffering. I've watched over the years as we've shuttered and sold neighborhood schools, which were once hallowed community hubs, only to have them converted into overpriced housing or higher education facilities, which the constituents of their neighborhoods cannot afford to partake.

I've seen amazing facilities and resources of well-funded districts where students are learning in modern, well-kept facilities with vast opportunities for advancement and success. Many of those districts have been able to safely resume face to face learning during this pandemic because they have adequate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to provide a safe and healthy learning environment, something you'd think would be the bare minimum for every school.

I've also seen and served alongside my colleagues in buildings full of mold & asbestos, amongst unchecked vermin infestations, ongoing roof leaks, deteriorating structures and active construction attempts while still trying to teach and mentor our most vulnerable citizens. Some of the rooms I've worked in required the use of jackets indoors during winters and I've had colleagues succumb to heat exhaustion during the beginning or ending of our school years with unsafe heat levels and poor or no ventilation, both of which are not conducive environments to teach or learn in.

Even after 15 years of state mandated control, which was intended to improve our learning conditions and our fiscal foundation because we couldn't do it locally with the inadequate state funding and support which we're still fighting for, our schools still remain only virtually servicing our students because our facilities continue to be unsafe and unfit for use during this time.

The mental and physical impacts from attending and working in these schools does not send a message that we are cared for and provided for humanely and fairly as other parts of our commonwealth and it is both heartbreaking and infuriating.

What do I wish for our students? I wish each of them the best they rightfully deserve. I wish them to safe well-maintained neighborhood schools easily accessible for optimum parent/guardian involvement. I wish them to have every school to have the safest air quality and temperature conditioned spaces to provide them the most comfortable and enjoyable spaces conducive to learning which will restore public faith in our schools as safe havens to send our children into to help them achieve their greatest potential without the fear of health or environmental barriers to stand in their way.

I wish them safe, engaging class sizes capped at 20 students for all grades with a classroom assistant for every teacher to provide better learning environments and diminish our current learning gaps in literacy and math. I wish each school to have ample landscaped outdoor green space with comfortable seating and safe play equipment to encourage physical activity and learning opportunities in fresh outdoor environment whenever possible. I wish for every school to be fully staffed with enough caring committed adults to keep our students safe, counseled and focused on becoming the best students and best prepared citizens ready to take their happy productive place in whichever opportunity they choose.

I wish I didn't have to sit before you today and ask for things which should've never been allowed to not be a standard for all our students, but until we get what all of our students deserve, we must continue to advocate for it and let our voices be heard.

I thank you for your time and hope you can find a way to make all my wishes come true. They will help make a better future for not only myself, my colleagues, my students and their families, they will make a Pennsylvania a better state for our Union and an inspiration for what should be the norm throughout our country.

**TESTIMONY OF DR. BRIAN A. BLISS
SUPERINTENDENT
SOLANCO SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE POLICY COMMITTEE
HEARING ON CHARTER SCHOOLS AND COVID-19
MARCH 2, 2021**

Good afternoon—my name is Brian Bliss. I am the superintendent of the Solanco School District, which is the largest geographic district Lancaster County; of the 16 school districts in Lancaster County, Solanco encompasses 20% of all the land but only 5% of the population.

Solanco has the lowest tax rate in Lancaster County. We rely more on an earned income tax resultant from voter referendum—we believe that is a fairer way to tax. However, that means we are more subject to the variability of income and the economy. COVID-19 certainly affected, and will continue to affect, community earned income and Solanco's budget.

Solanco innovates in cyber learning; we were the first district years ago to create its own virtual academy—other districts asked us to train them how to set up online learning for them. We knew, and they knew, we could provide virtual education at a much cheaper cost to the taxpayer, which retains more funds for investment in our local school district. This was not cost-savings; this was cost-avoidance.

With that said, our mission is essential: many of our students, just like many across the state, live in poverty. Some live in the circumstances of generational poverty. We aim to disrupt the cycle of generational poverty for those students, to imbue them with hope, possibility, and the education to realize their potential.

Our goal is to inspire, to engage. We want our students to develop into thoughtful citizens.

How do we do this? We hire empathetic teachers who care for students. We hire teachers who feel responsible for both the success and failure of their students. We hire teachers who believe they can impact their students' lives. In our schools, students succeed. They struggle. They overcome. They grow.

Let us juxtapose our expressed mission with what we were tasked to do during COVID-19:

We were tasked to create physical classroom settings that were safe in a pandemic. This required social distancing, classroom restructuring, mask-wearing, alternative scheduling, and employing technology in expanded ways.

We did this with looming quarantines and closures.

We were tasked to provide a comprehensive online option for all students, despite being a rural school, despite intermittent internet, despite areas of our district that do not even have reliable cell service.

Five years prior, 67 Solanco students attended external cyber-charters, and our bill was \$745,000.

Last year, 69 students attended external cyber-charter schools, and our bill was 1.068 million dollars.

Notice the stability of enrollment combined with the greatly increased cost. Our cyber numbers have not changed appreciably in a decade despite comparable increases in many other districts. We attribute that to quality learning environments and flexibility of our own online environments. But it is still a million-dollar annual cost.

This year, that number increased to 88 students, largely because of COVID. The cost: 1.33 million dollars. Nineteen more students went to an external cyber-charter resulting in \$270,000 in increased costs. Remarkably, that is not a huge jump compared to many others. Astoundingly, I state that a quarter million-dollar taxpayer cost is a “success.”

How did we achieve this dubiously titled “success” during COVID-19? All of our work, our innovation, and our communication “kept it” to a quarter of a million dollars.

In our long-standing asynchronous virtual school, our enrollment doubled from 32 to 64 because of COVID. It costs less for us to do this, about \$8,000 dollars per child, which is significantly lower than our average \$21,000 per child for tuition to an external cyber-charter. Our asynchronous learning program costs \$8,000 per child, not \$21,000.

Notably, if all 88 external cyber-charter students from this year enrolled in our own cyber program instead, it would cost taxpayers \$600,000 less.

Further, to bring all 88 external cyber students back to our brick-and-mortar programs, it would effectively cost us nothing. We would not have to hire more teachers, purchase more materials, or add more busses for those 88 students to return. What would return with them? 1.33 million dollars in taxpayer money.

Billions of taxpayer dollars have been invested in Pennsylvania cyber-charters—have brick-and-mortar public schools benefitted from these taxpayer investments in technology, online instruction, online curriculum development? Were local districts able to invest those dollars in their online programming? Could they maintain and improve brick-and-mortars while doing so?

COVID-19 resulted in our creation of a program called Solanco Flex this year. Flex is essentially allowing students to stay home and participate live via remote instruction with their in-person,

brick-and-mortar counterparts. This plan anticipated closures, disruptions, and lengthy quarantines.

How many picked Solanco Flex this year? 629 students. Roughly 1/5 of all our students picked our entirely virtual, synchronous instruction.

We developed this modality in mere weeks. That is unreasonable. Are there successes with it? Absolutely. Struggles? Absolutely. It is the best we could develop given the timeframe and the great uncertainty we were all facing this summer.

This simultaneous in-person and remote instruction is brutal for teachers. Further, technology in rural areas is difficult; internet is slow, sporadic, or unavailable. Was our decision to create this program pedagogically sound? Partially.

Was our decision financially sound? I know this—if we did not offer it, we faced financial devastation.

If we did not offer Flex to our students and they all decided to choose a cyber, the cost would have been almost 14 million dollars. We would have come closer to a dubious metric: our cyber bill would be close to equaling our local property tax income. While unthinkable, this is currently happening right now in Pennsylvania. There are districts where their entire local tax contribution to education is going to cyber-charter schools.

I would also like to talk about the purity of choice during COVID-19. Competition is good; competition results in innovation. In many ways we embrace it. There are things we can offer that cybers cannot. But is it competition?

We are asked to develop robust online environments that could compete with existing cyber-charters in which Pennsylvania taxpayers have invested billions of dollars. Billions of dollars with the sole focus of refining online instruction without the duality of creating excellent brick-and-mortar schools.

And if schools did not provide comparable programming in online environments, the subsequent exodus to cyber charters can be financially devastating to districts. It already is for some, and COVID has greatly amplified this. Many students are not going to return.

But again, we are competing with schools that have been able to invest billions in online only education. That is the competition that has been created. Cyber-charters are online only. School districts are brick-and-mortar with online-only options.

So, this year why did parents choose our synchronous model, our asynchronous model, or external cyber-charters this year? This is what we heard:

- Some said they did not want their children to wear a mask.

- Some said our masking protocols were not enough.
- Some thought our social distancing measures were too aggressive.
- Some thought our social distancing measures were not aggressive enough.
- Some did not support the potential (albeit state mandated) closures.
- Some thought the state-mandated quarantines were too disruptive.
- Some said the laptop the cyber provides is nicer than what we provided.
- Some said our own virtual offerings track attendance too strictly.

I do not cite these to criticize parent rationales; instead, I offer them to show the divergent opinions about protocols and procedures brought by COVID-19. Districts were tasked with responding to this divergent set of opinions. These divergent opinions result in costs to the district. I do not criticize parents for availing themselves of choice options—they want the best for their children however they judge that.

Coherence matters, but I have difficulty seeing it.

For example: we frequently hear talk of consolidating school districts while at the same time we have added hundreds of charter schools. We want schools to compete with cyber schools while also maintaining and enhancing brick-and-mortar instruction.

COVID-19 required districts to jump into large-scale cyber instruction with two feet

Everyone here knows the finances, knows the performance metrics. There is no one statistic that is going to cause us to say, “that changes things.” What I am testifying to is not new or surprising.

But have we created structures where taxes are thoughtfully and efficiently used for maximum impact?

Where I am critical focuses on the table that has been set by legislative action—from a policy perspective and financial standpoint. This has been a growing problem that has been greatly amplified by COVID-19. Increased enrollment in cyber charters, increased budgetary stress on local districts, and an incoherent justification for faulty financial policy.

I became an educator for all too stereotypical reasons—I had a great English teacher. This teacher’s impact on me was so profound that I decided to become an English teacher. What for? To replicate that experience I had for as many students as possible. To enable as many students as possible to be as inspired as I was. That has been my driving ideology. As I became an administrator, I traded intensity of impact for breadth of impact—I could impact more students, perhaps less intensely. That is the trade-off all leaders make—all of you have made in your leadership position.

Is what we are doing here allowing this kind of inspiration to happen on a systemic level? Have we created structures of inspiration in our school system? Is it more likely to happen for more students consequent of our legislative decisions?

I thank you for your time.