

The Basics

- 15 school districts with 69,796 students
- The instructional spending gap between the highest and lowest spending districts is at least \$100,000 per classroom
- 1 in 3 students are low-income and qualify for free and reduced-price lunch
- Only one-third of the kindergarten students attend full day kindergarten
- The county-wide graduation rate is 3% above the state average
- \$45 million in additional state aid would adequately fund Delaware County Schools

The Bottom Line Is Children Public Education In Delaware County



In September 2013, Delaware County leaders hailed the release of the ten-year economic growth plan called *Growing from Within*. The plan aptly highlights the critical relationship between education, economic development, and workforce development. In fact, the plan specifically points out that any strategy for growth in Delaware County will depend on the strength and success of public schools. To fulfill the plan's goals in each sector and to increase the likelihood that the county can truly grow from within, county leaders must carefully study school district data to understand and address the biggest challenges to economic growth.

Delaware County is home to fifteen school districts, some of which rank among the highest in the state on annual student assessments.

Growing from Within points out that the county's median income is significantly above the national average. That's good news. However, the county's true economic competitors are not all counties across America.

While the county's economic performance is strong, the rising share of low-income residents will mean new economic and educational challenges for the county.

Instead, Delaware County's toughest competitors are Bucks, Chester, and Montgomery counties, where the median income is higher and the density of poverty and deep poverty is lower. These economic factors make it harder for school districts to meet the needs of all Delaware County students. What follows is Public Citizens for Children and Youth's summary and analysis

of key data pertinent to nearly 70,000 Delaware County students. Numbers alone cannot tell the complete story of Delaware County schools, but the data can provide a clearer picture of educational strengths and opportunities in the county. Specifically, our intention is to inform county efforts to support districts in their quest to provide students with a quality education.

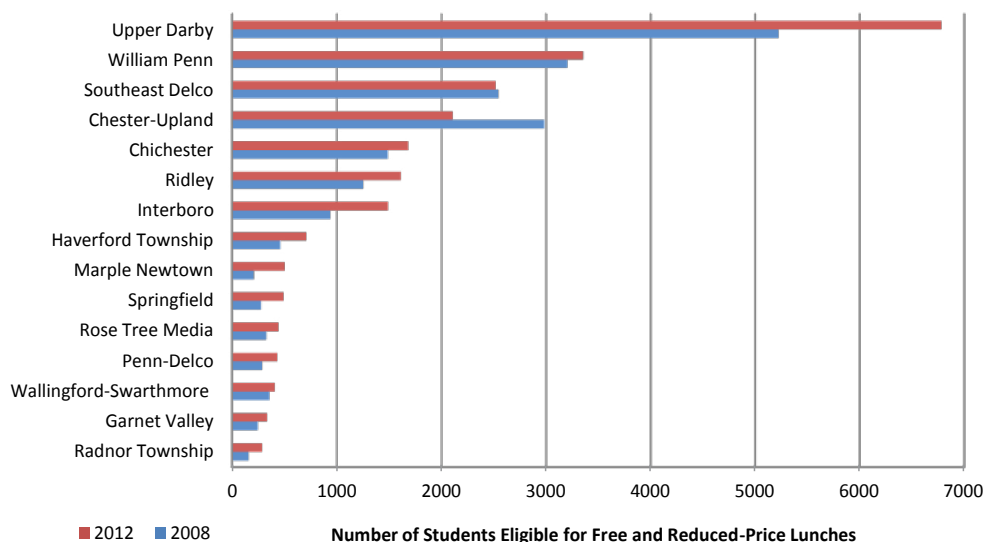
Essential Strategies

- Give every child the option to attend full day kindergarten
- Increase resources and supports to close the academic achievement gaps within every school district
- County leaders must build a county-wide coalition to focus on boosting the state's investment in every district

Who Are The Students?

Delaware County has fifteen school districts, serving 69,796 students. In terms of racial and ethnic breakdown, 61% of public school students are White followed by 27% Black and 7% Asian. Only 3% of students are Hispanic. The share of Delaware County students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) has grown from approximately 20,000 students in 2008 to more than 23,500 students in 2012. That's an increase of 18% in just four years. Upper Darby has the largest number of students who qualify with nearly 6,800, a 30% increase since 2008. The number of eligible students has increased in thirteen Delaware County school districts, including Marple-Newtown where eligibility more than doubled and Springfield where it grew by 78%. In fact, the only two school districts that saw declines in the number of students eligible for FRPL

The Number of Delaware County Students Eligible For Free and Reduced Price Lunches Grew by 18% Between 2008 - 2012



were Chester-Upland (which experienced a 33% decline in enrollment between 2008 and 2012) and Southeast Delco (where enrollment contracted slightly).¹

Data show that children living in economically-disadvantaged families have greater difficulties meeting the demands of schools.² To address the needs of these and all students in Delaware County, leaders must work to ensure that the 23,500 low-income students in the county get the support they need to meet their unlimited potential.

Delaware County Lags in Terms of Access to Full Day Kindergarten

A strong start in school is highly correlated with a lifetime of success.³ For this reason, many school districts in Pennsylvania have expanded from half day kindergarten to a full day.⁴ Extended kindergarten time gives teachers of young children more opportunity to develop the basic skills that serve as the foundation for primary grade learning. It is encouraging that one-third of Delaware County districts exclusively offer full day kindergarten, including Chester-Upland, Southeast Delco, and William Penn.

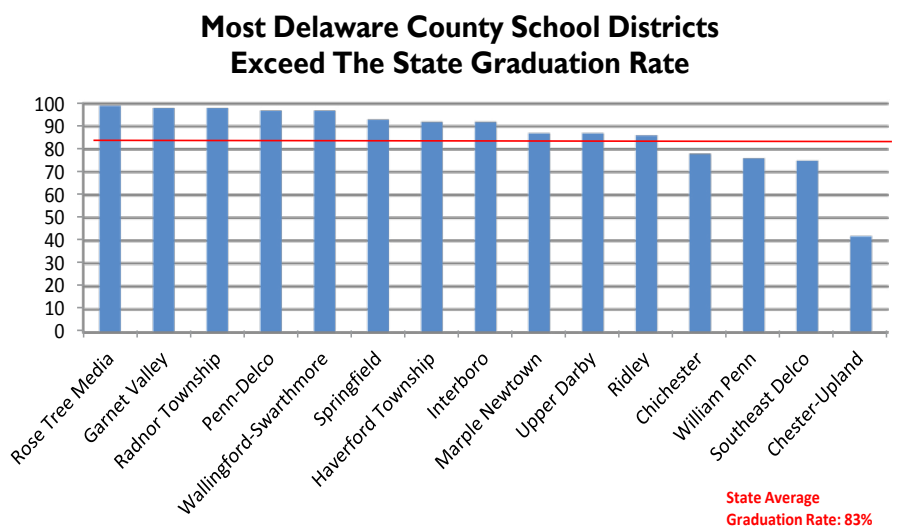
	Half Day Kindergarten Enrollment 2012 - 2013	Full Day Kindergarten Enrollment 2012-2013
Chester-Upland	-	166
Chichester	-	301
Garnet Valley	289	-
Haverford	408	5
Interboro	-	262
Marple Newtown	180	5
Penn-Delco	223	21
Radnor	197	2
Ridley	221	107
Rose Tree Media	235	3
Southeast Delco	-	312
Springfield	265	-
Upper Darby	859	4
Wallingford-Swarthmore	222	-
William Penn	-	407
Total	3,099 (66%)	1,595 (34%)

However, much more progress needs to be made. Only 1,595 of the 4,694 kindergarten children in Delaware County – or 34% – attended full day kindergarten in 2012-2013.⁵ Three districts do not offer full day kindergarten at all and another five each enroll fewer than ten kindergarten-

age children. These may include districts that offer full day only to students with the greatest needs, including students that are English language learners, economically disadvantaged, or come from historically marginalized communities.

Delaware County's Graduation Rate Tops State Average, But Lags in Region

It is in the best interest of the entire community to ensure that the graduation rate is consistently increasing. Graduation rates have been linked to stronger economies and reduced crime rate.⁶ While the county-wide graduation rate of 86% (in 2011) is higher than the state average of 83%, Delaware County has the lowest graduation rate of the four suburban Philadelphia counties.



Four districts fall below both the state and county average: Chester Upland, William Penn, Chichester, and Southeast Delco.⁷ However, as our analysis of PSSA scores will show later in this report, graduation rates are not a clear indicator of academic performance.

Academic Performance Full Of Bright Spots But 17,000 Students Need Help

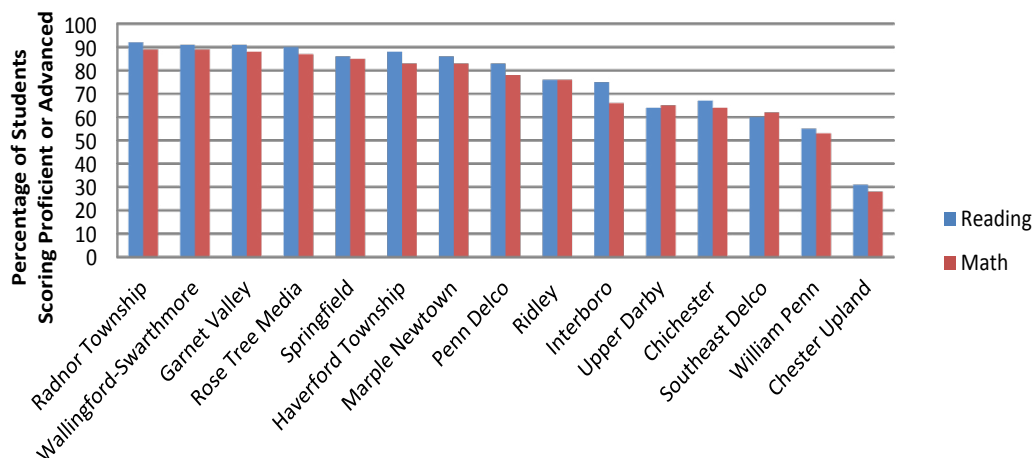
The County's Workforce Development Strategy released with *Growing from Within* reads, "the education and skills obtained by the County's workforce will be a critical component to the health of Delaware County. To achieve the goals of the plan, good math and reading scores are imperative. Delaware County students will need to meet higher levels of student achievement."

The annual Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is a standards-based assessment designed to measure student performance as it relates to state standards. Student scores are categorized into four levels: (1) Advanced, (2) Proficient, (3) Basic, and (4) Below Basic. Scoring proficient or advanced indicates that a student is

performing at grade level or above in the tested subject. Delaware County boasts some of the highest performing districts in the state, yet overall it has the lowest PSSA average of the four suburban counties.⁸

PCCY's analysis also found that while on average most districts were exceeding the state average on student test scores, many vulnerable populations — even in high-performing districts — were not. Unfortunately nearly a quarter of the students in the county are below grade level in reading and a full quarter are also behind in math. Essentially, between 17,000 and 18,000 students need more support to achieve at levels high enough to graduate ready for a decent job or college.

Some School Districts Excel on 2012 PSSA's While Others Show Need For Improvement



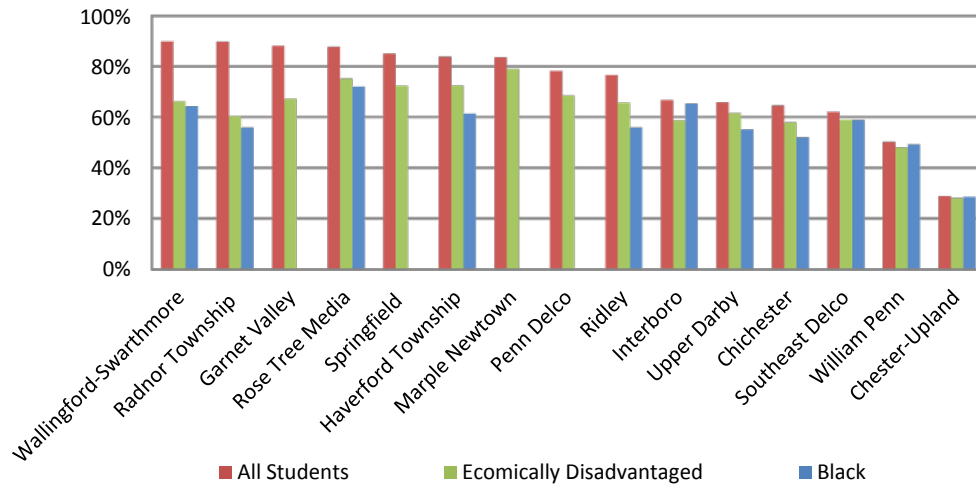
A Closer Look Spells Trouble In Some Districts

A closer examination of student subgroups within high-performing districts reveals a troubling trend. Students from families that face economic challenges are not doing as well as their more financially stable peers across all school districts.

Students are struggling significantly in Chester Upland and William Penn School Districts, the districts with the highest concentrations of low-income students. Fifty percent of William Penn students — and only 28% of students in Chester Upland — are on grade level in math, defined as scoring proficient or above on PSSA's.

Meeting the needs of low-income students has proven challenging even for wealthier and high performing districts. In Wallingford-Swarthmore, Radnor Township and Garnet Valley about 90% of students score at grade level or above. Yet low-income students in Radnor score 30 percentage points below the district's average, and in Wallingford-Swarthmore and Garnet Valley they are 20 percentage points below the average. Among black students, Wallingford-Swarthmore, Radnor Township, Haverford Township and Ridley all have achievement gaps of 20 percentage points or more.⁹

Math Achievement Gap Varies Across Delaware County School Districts



Disparities Narrow In Some Districts

The gap between all students and student subgroups on the PSSA math section is widespread among districts, but in some, disparities are less pronounced. For instance, in Marple Newtown there is only five percentage-point gap between low-income students and the overall student body. Penn Delco and Ridley have relatively small disparities, with gaps of 10 percentage points or less for low-income students. Rose Tree

Media stands out as the only top performing school district where the percentage of Black and economically disadvantaged students scoring at grade average or above exceeded 70%. Though much work has to be done to improve students' overall performance in Upper Darby, Chichester, Southeast Delco, William Penn and Chester-Upland, these districts have small achievement gaps among the students.

Education Funding Affects Academic Outputs

A report on educational outputs would be incomplete without an examination of monetary inputs. Sufficient funding alone will not fix all the challenges of public education,

but without adequate funds, schools cannot provide the resources necessary to help their students succeed.

Pennsylvania: One of Three States Without A Funding Formula

Research shows that investing in public education is central to a strong economy and improving social outcomes.¹⁰ Yet despite this research, Delaware County school districts, along with hundreds of others throughout the state, function year-to-year without a consistent funding formula. Formulas help to ensure that school funds are distributed in a way that reflects student needs.

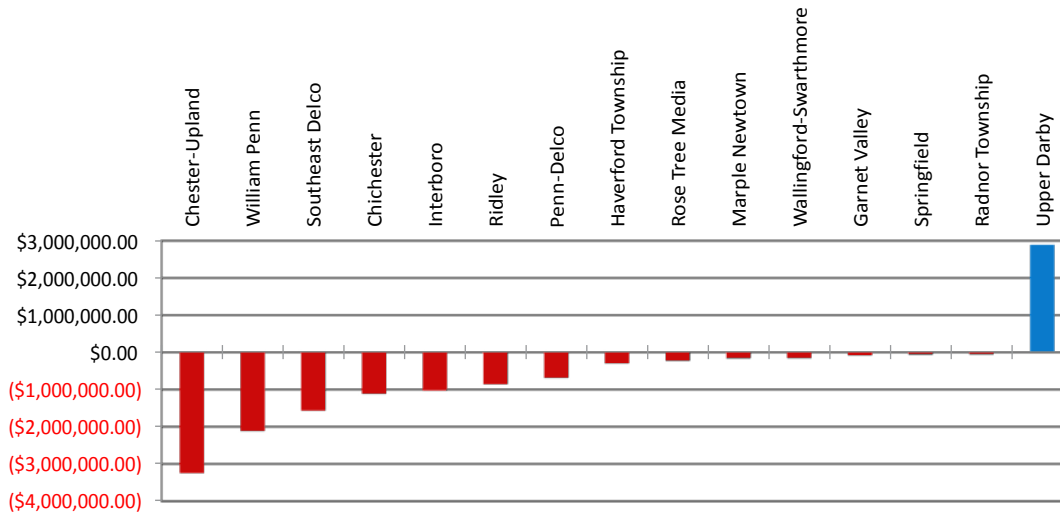
On a policy level, distributing funds without considering the actual cost necessary to address the specific needs of students and school districts is unwise. Most states use an accurate student count, along with some variation of student and district weights. On a practical level, this forces school districts to

operate without the ability to plan or project their budgets.

In Delaware County, the absence of a funding formula harms the students and districts that need it the most. The effects of no funding formula were exacerbated in 2011 when the state cut \$1 billion in aid to public education.¹¹ These cuts were felt across the state by nearly every school district.

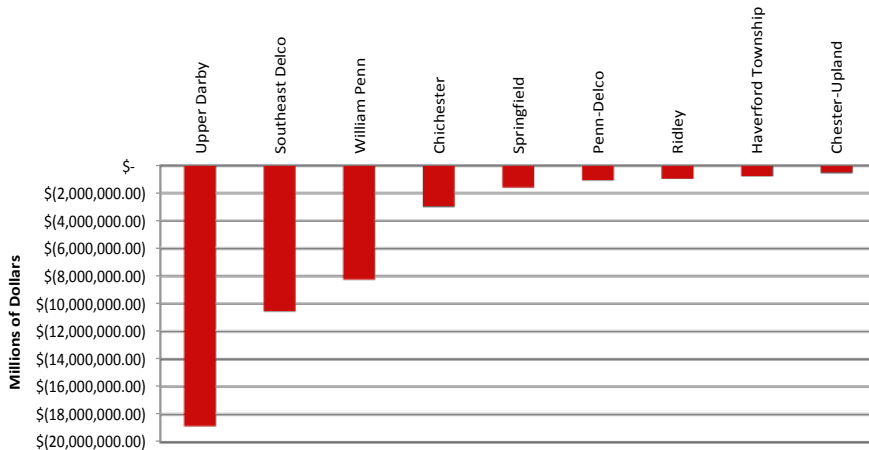
In 2012-2013, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a politically motivated formula that awarded \$30 million to just 21 school districts in the state. Meanwhile, every school district in Delaware County is receiving less funding this year than they received in 2010.

93% of Delaware County School Districts Are Receiving Less Funding Than 2010 - 2011



Delaware County Schools Underfunded by \$45 Million

\$45 Million In Additional State Aid Would Adequately Fund Delaware County Schools



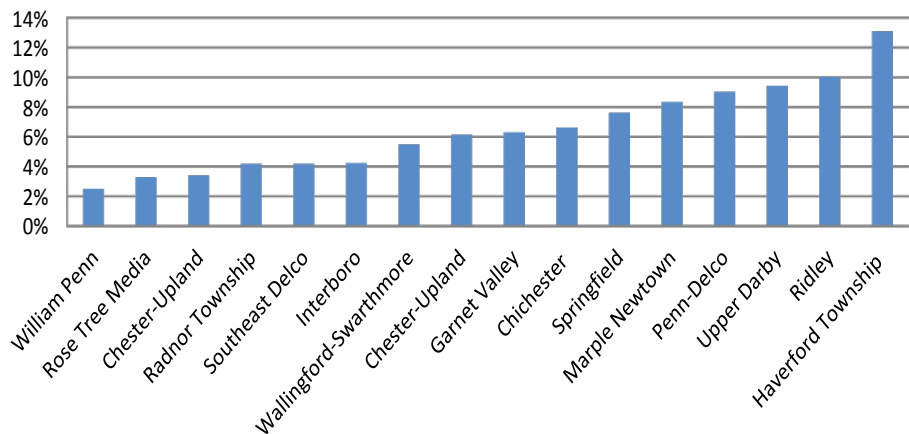
To better understand how Delaware County’s current funding levels compare to the research-based state funding formula, PCCY updated the formula to reflect present day conditions. Our updated analysis indicates that following the formula would bring Delaware County School Districts \$45.3 million in additional funding this year to adequately educate students.¹²

As Funding Disparities Rise, So Do Taxes

To cope with state budget cuts, the burden of funding schools has fallen on local communities.

In the past three years, every school district in Delaware County has raised property taxes at least once and two-thirds of districts have raised property taxes for three consecutive years. However, even when districts do opt to increase property taxes, disparities between the districts continue to grow.¹³

15 of 15 Districts Have Raised Property Taxes In The Last Three Years



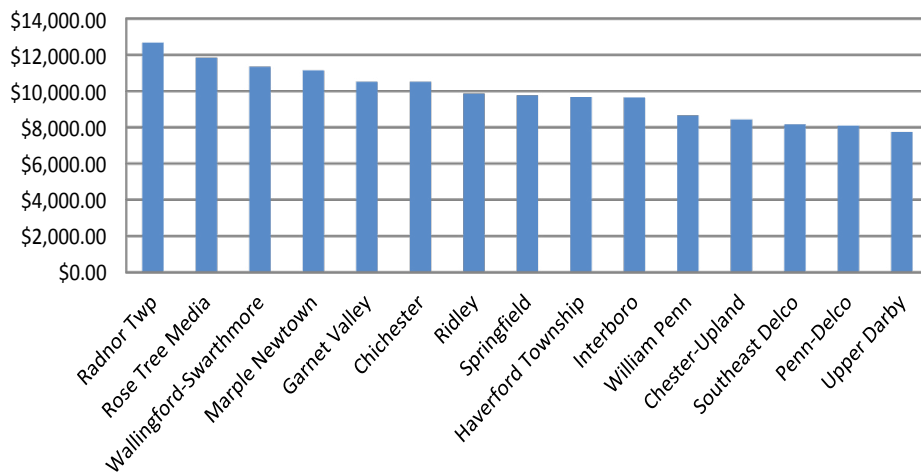
Chester Upland is shown twice because the school district is based in two municipalities that impose different millage rates for the district revenue.

While wealthier communities can increase the local tax effort minimally and generate funds to compensate for state cuts, districts with a weak property tax base – the very districts with the highest concentration of students who need extra assistance to achieve, are not able to raise taxes enough because local tax burdens are already disproportionately high. As a result, low wealth communities, no matter how heavily taxed, typically yield very little new revenue.

This disparity in local tax effort is quite stark in Delaware County. For instance, the millage tax rate for the William Penn School District is highest in the county at 30.2 and is approximately twice as high as the Radnor Township School District rate of 13.8. Yet despite the high millage rate, William Penn is only able to spend 64% of what Radnor spends. Consequently the spending gap among districts in Delaware County has been growing.

The absence of a funding formula perpetuates disparities among districts across the county. In 2011-2012 the instructional spending gap between the highest and lowest spending school districts was \$5,000 or about \$100,000 for every classroom of 20 students. Radnor Township School District had the most to invest per student at \$12,683 while Upper Darby School District spent only \$7,742 per student in instructional costs. This means that the lowest spending district spent 64%

64% Per Classroom Spending Difference Across The County



less to support students than the highest spending district.

Conclusion

Delaware County has proposed a sound economic development strategy that sets out a wise plan that builds on the county's strengths and addresses its challenges. *Growing from Within* recognizes that while the County's growth is relatively strong today, the headwinds holding back the U.S. economy overall require local government, higher education institutions and school districts to up their game.

Worldwide employer demands are rising; yet as this report points out, school districts are already finding it difficult to prepare every graduate for the global economy. School districts across the county are likely to have an even harder time preserving their high performance as share of low-income children attending public schools rises.

For this reason, PCCY recommends that Delaware County leaders and concerned residents help districts redirect existing resources or push for new funds to be invested to ex-

pand access to proven performance boosting strategies such as full day kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs for every child. Likewise, more effort must also be directed to bring up the skills of students who are struggling. To ensure that growth and prosperity is a reality in every community in the county, local leaders must step up efforts to advocate for more state education funding. Additional state investment in schools is an essential part of a strategy to reduce the tax disparities facing communities with the highest local tax burdens.

Without question, schools across the county must do a much better job helping students who are not succeeding to meet the high performance of their peers. At the same time, county leaders and concerned citizens must do their part to ensure that every district has the state and local funding in place to make that possible.

A History of School Funding in Pennsylvania

2006: The General Assembly called for an independent study to determine the actual cost of educating students in the commonwealth with a focus on adequacy and equity.

2007: The Costing Out Study found that Pennsylvania was underfunding education by \$4 billion annually, and that 94% of districts had inadequate resources to meet state standards. The report also found that the state relied too heavily on local property taxes to fund education, thus perpetuating the gap between resources available to rich and poor school districts.

2008: The Study was used to develop:

- 1)** Adequacy target, or the amount of funding districts would need to meet state standards. This number was reached by subtracting the amount of funding that districts would need to meet state standards, from the amount of money that districts were actually spending.
- 2)** Student and District Weights, or additional funding that reflected the real cost of educating students.
 - For small districts
 - For districts with high local cost of living
 - English Language Learners
 - Students in poverty

2008-2010: Three years of state funding increases distributed to school districts via the formula.

2011: \$1 billion cut made to state aid for public education.

2012: Cuts to public education locked in with level funding.

Endnotes

1. Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education:
<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=509210&mode=2>
2. Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. J. (1997). The effects of poverty on children. *The future of children*, 7(2), 55-71.
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4. Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. (2013, November) Full Day K: A Proven Success. Retrieved from:
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5. Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education:
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6. Lochner, L. & Moretti, E. (2004). The effect of education on crime: evidence from prison inmates, arrests, and self-reports. *The American Economic Review*, 94(1) 155-189.
7. Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education:
http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_department_of_education/7237/info/757639
8. Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education:
http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/school_assessments/7442
9. Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education: http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/school_assessments/7442. Calculations of the achievement gap by district rely on the 2012 PSSA data released by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for grades 3,8, and 11. For this analysis, student subgroups i.e Black, economically disadvantaged, or Hispanic are only reported on if ten or more students in grades 3,8, and 11 took the PSSA.
10. In <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SavingFutures.pdf>
11. Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education:
<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=509059&mode=2>
12. Analysis done by Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY)
13. Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education:
http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/financial_data_elements/7672



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