

# Childwatch

A publication  
of Public  
Citizens for  
Children and  
Youth (PCCY)



Helping to improve the lives and life chances of children,  
youth and families in Southeastern Pennsylvania

Summer 2014

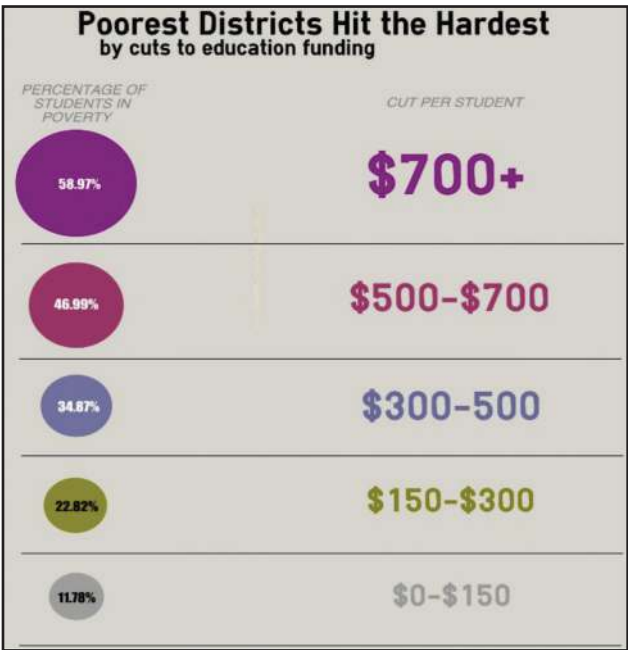
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## IT WAS A TOUGH STATE BUDGET SEASON FOR KIDS

In the last week of the state budget debate, the Senate and House agreed to cut the expected increase for public school instruction funding by 58% from \$241 million to \$100 million. After suffering a billion dollar cut to education four years ago, districts were optimistic that the promised increase of an average of \$141 dollars per student would materialize. The final budget reduced that increase to an average of \$59 dollars per student.

PCCY along with other education advocacy organizations coordinated over 100 visits with state legislators and held numerous rallies and press conferences to push for the state to avoid deep education cuts. The final budget provides a welcome increase, but is still far short of the level of state funding districts expected.



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education and Education Law Center

schools combined, will start this school year with \$17 million less state funding than it expected. This dramatic cut will have serious consequences for children and taxpayers.

Even with the proposed new state funding, 75% of school districts planned to raise their property taxes to “balance their budgets” according to the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials. Keep in mind that the term “balanced budgets” is a misnomer because most district budgets already include cuts to staff, elimination of hundreds of academic programs and swelling class sizes.

For Philadelphia, the budget battle was especially complicated. A “vortex of political hell” is the apt phrase coined by Mayor Nutter to describe the pitched battle over a state bill to permit Philadelphia to increase the tax on cigarettes sold in the city with the new revenues dedicated solely for the School District. The House and Senate have ostensibly agreed to give Philadelphia the ability to raise this new local revenue for the District and City Council, but the legislation to enable this tax increase is still not final.



Students from Cook-Wissahickon Elementary School in Roxborough sing for school funding outside Governor Corbett's Philadelphia office.

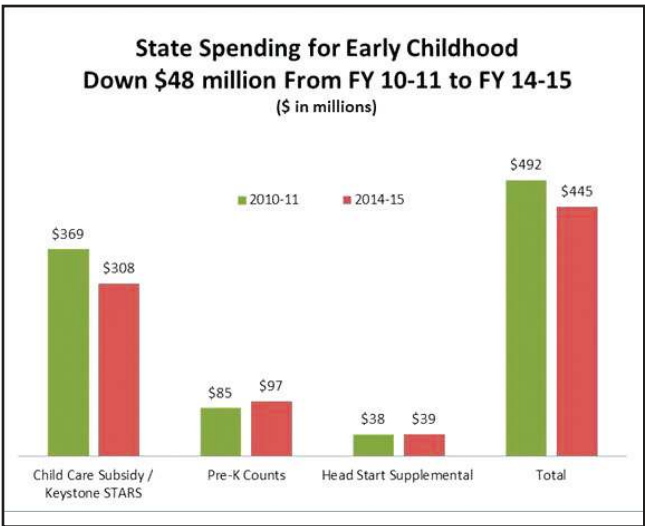
In a last minute move, the Senate amended HB 1177 giving Philadelphia the authority to raise the cigarette tax by \$2 a pack through 2019. This five year sunset of the tax increase means that the District must plan for at least an \$80 million budget gap in five years. Advocates and champions for the District fought to put a permanent, recurring local revenue source in place for the District. For now, the District can tentatively count on these revenues, but the sunset included in HB 1177, pending House action, certainly spells trouble for the District in the years ahead.

The fight for Philadelphia school funding wasn't only in Harrisburg. For months, advocates led by PCCY and allies packed Philadelphia City Council chambers to ensure that 1% of the existing sales tax revenues were transferred to the School District. Philadelphia's 8% sales tax was set to be reduced to 7% on June 30, 2014. School advocates pushed for an extension of the current sales tax rate with the funds dedicated to the District. Meanwhile, some local Council members pushed for a portion of the funds generated by the 1% to meet the City's pension debt. School advocates were successful in securing 100% of the funds for the District up to \$120 million, at least for FY 2015.

Maybe it was the pleas of the Mayor and the Superintendent. Or it was the calls and visits from distressed parents. Or it was the furious editorials that changed the minds of those in charge of the legislative bodies. Or it was all of the above. At the end of the day, the state legislature seems poised to permit the local cigarette tax increase. It was a very, very tough budget season, but due to the collective effort of those who care, the end result is new resources for the public school children in our region.

**PRE-K FOR PA: WORKING TO MAKE SURE ALL CHILDREN BEGIN SCHOOL READY TO LEARN**

Only one in six of Pennsylvania’s 3-and 4-year olds have access to high-quality publicly funded pre-K programs. The benefits of high-quality pre-K are clear: students enrolled in high-quality pre-kindergarten are less likely to repeat grades, require special education services and are more likely to graduate high school and attend college. Nationally respected Democratic and Republican polling firm, Lake/Bellwether, found that 63% of Pennsylvania voters support high-quality pre-K. Meanwhile, state investment in early childhood education programs is \$48 million less than four years ago.

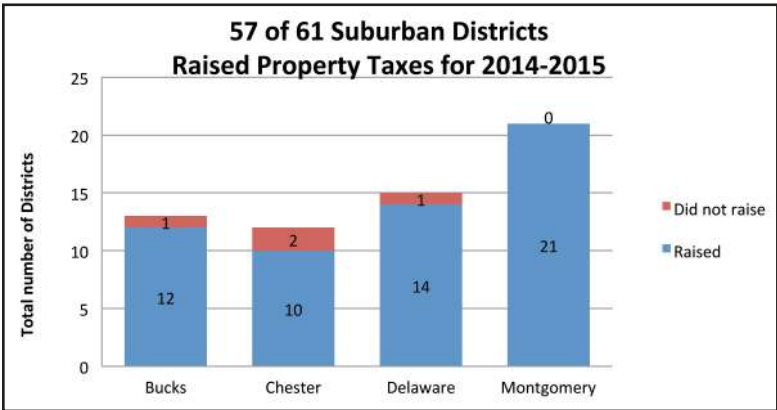


Specifically, state funding for Child Care Subsidy is \$61 million less than in 2011. As a result, fewer resources are available to help low-income families enroll their children in high-quality early learning programs. Major new investments are needed to expand access to every child under five in Pennsylvania.

In January, PCCY and other statewide organizations launched the Pre-K for PA Campaign with a goal of ensuring all children have access to high-quality pre-K. The Campaign works to make access to high-quality pre-kindergarten the defining issue in this year’s election. The candidates for Governor each have pledged their support for high-quality pre-kindergarten but neither has publicly announced their plans for improving access. The Campaign is working to push the candidates to make their plans known ahead of the November election. To date more than 340 organizations and 5,500 Pennsylvanians have signed on to the Campaign. To learn more about the Pre-K for PA campaign or sign the petition, visit [www.prekforpa.org](http://www.prekforpa.org).

**STATE CUTS TO EDUCATION FUNDING CREATE TAXING SITUATION FOR SUBURBAN HOMEOWNERS**

School districts in Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties are underfunded by the state by \$133 million, according to PCCY’s Bottom Line reports on education, and it’s homeowners who are left holding the bag. PCCY’s analysis found that state budget cuts forced 60 out of 61 school districts to raise property taxes at least once in the last four years and 57 local districts put increases into effect as of July 1, 2014. The Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officers found that most districts across the state also had to cut staff and programs for students in order to balance their budgets.



Wealthy communities can increase local tax efforts minimally to generate funds to compensate for state cuts; however, poorer communities do not have that capacity. Because of weak property values in low income communities, poor school districts can not raise property taxes high enough to offset state cuts. To make matters worse, property tax burdens in the region’s poorest communities are already disproportionately high. For example, the millage rate for the William Penn School District is 30.2, more than double the millage rate of the more affluent Radnor School District. A lack of state funding and low local revenue spell double trouble for poor school districts. As a result, poor school districts operate without basic educational supports including guidance counselors, nurses, librarians and art and music teachers.

School districts and teachers are doing their best to educate southeastern Pennsylvania’s children, but without the fair funding from the state, more students will continue to struggle, while homeowners will undoubtedly see their property tax bills rise. PCCY released a series of in-depth reports on rising property tax burdens and educational challenges in each of the suburban Philadelphia counties. **Read the reports at [www.pccy.org/bottomline-countyreports](http://www.pccy.org/bottomline-countyreports) or contact Shanee Garner at 215-563-5848 ext. 23 or email [shaneeg@pccy.org](mailto:shaneeg@pccy.org).**

**CHILDREN’S HEALTH IN THE SUBURBS: BARRIERS PREVENT SOME CHILDREN FROM RECEIVING HEALTH CARE**



More than 20,000 children in Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties are without health insurance, according to PCCY’s Bottom Line is Children reports on the status of children’s health in the suburbs. Of the four counties, only Chester saw an increase in the number of uninsured children since 2008. It’s home to more than 6,000 children without health insurance.

A majority of uninsured children are eligible for the state’s Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or Medical Assistance, but are not getting connected to care. What’s worse, 9,200 undocumented children in the southeastern Pennsylvania are barred from enrolling in the state’s CHIP program (for more, please see “It’s Time to Make Health Insurance Available to ALL Pennsylvania Children”). It does not have to be this way. Five states including New York, California, and Illinois allow undocumented children to enroll in their state’s health insurance programs.

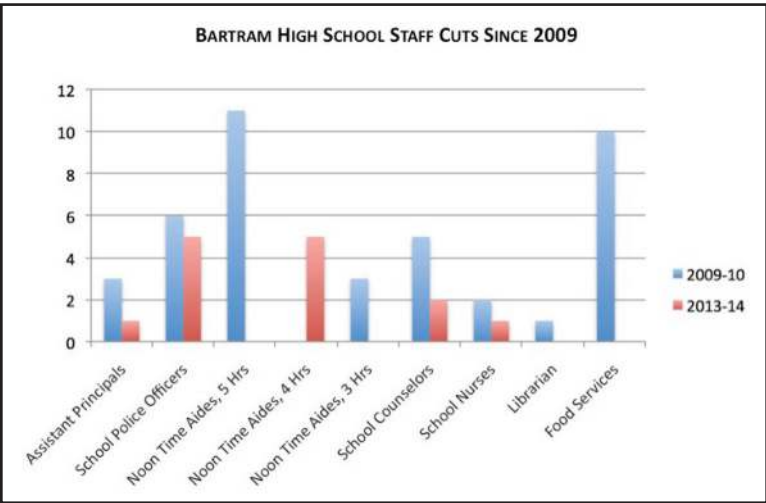
PCCY’s report also found that one in three children in each county was overweight or obese in 2012. The number of overweight or obese children increased in three out of the four counties between 2008 and 2012. Only Delaware County saw the number of overweight or obese children drop during that time, but there are still more than 26,000 children (33%) there who are overweight or obese.

PCCY’s recommendations include building suburban campaigns to enroll all children in health insurance, removing barriers that prevent undocumented children from enrolling in the state’s CHIP program, and working with the state’s Department of Public Welfare to create programs and incentives to reduce child obesity.

For questions about the Bottom Line Child Health report, contact Health Policy Director Colleen McCauley at 215-563-5848 ext. 33 or email [colleenm@pccy.org](mailto:colleenm@pccy.org). To read all of the Bottom Line is Children reports, please visit [www.pccy.org/bottomlinecountyreports](http://www.pccy.org/bottomlinecountyreports).



PHILADELPHIA'S "NEW NORMAL" IS A DANGEROUS STANDARD FOR STUDENTS



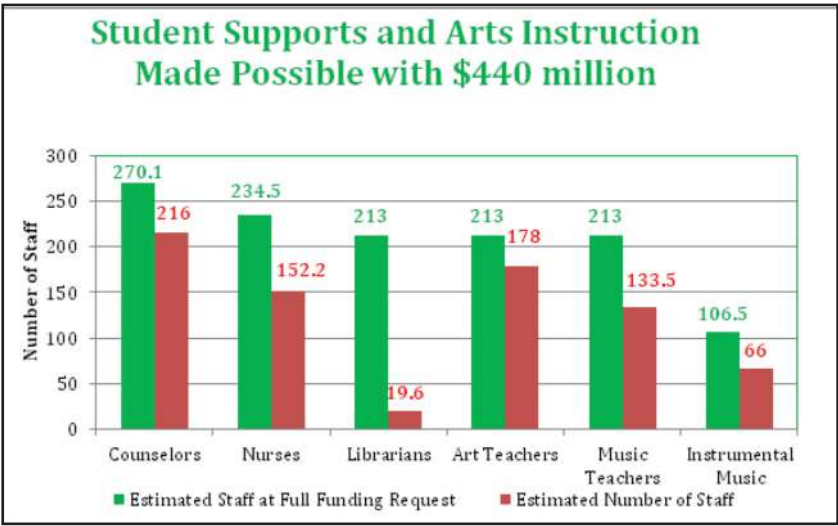
A multi-million dollar deficit. The threat of more layoffs. Public bickering among city and state lawmakers on how to fix public schools. It's a nightmare scenario that parents, students, and staff in the Philadelphia School District have endured for the last four years. The nightmare was a reality for public school students who spent the last school year in overcrowded classrooms without guidance counselors, librarians, school nurses, art or music teachers and extracurricular activities.

Bare bones schools led to chaos across the District. Violence at Bartram High School captured the headlines when a conflict-resolution specialist was severely injured by a student. It's not surprising that things are so bad at Bartram. Based on School District data, PCCY found that the school is operating with 40% less staff than it had in 2009-2010, stretching the school's support staff to the breaking point. PCCY's analysis found that Bartram lost two of its three assistant principals, three of its five guidance counselors, all three of its community relations and social services liaisons, a school police officer and its entire cafeteria staff.

Bartram used to employ 14 noon time aides working a combined 64 hours a day to monitor the safety of students and staff in 2009. For the school year that just ended, with more than 1,000 students, the school's part-time aide coverage was cut by two thirds to a total of five aides working four hours per day.

The tragedy at Bartram unfortunately was not an isolated incident for the district. The district sadly suffered with the loss of students who died at schools that did not have full-time nurses.

To get schools back on track and fully staffed, the district requested \$440 million from the state, the city and the teacher's union. PCCY found that if the district received this funding, it could hire an additional 550 classroom teachers and 350 special education teachers, cutting its swollen classes and ensuring all students receive enough quality attention to learn. Violent incidents would drop because the district could add 50 assistant principals to our larger schools, increase noon time aides by 100 and hire 50 more security staff along with 50 conflict resolution specialists.



Philadelphia schools had most of these basic resources not that long ago. But four years ago the state cut funding for public schools by \$1 billion. Since then schools have been cut to the core, causing chaos and unpredictability for our students.

Information for this report came from PCCY's blog – [www.thepccy.blogspot.com](http://www.thepccy.blogspot.com). For questions about PCCY's blog, contact Communications Director Anthony Hopkins at 215-563-5848 ext. 23 or email [anthonyh@pccy.org](mailto:anthonyh@pccy.org).

HOW EDUCATION CUTS HURT POOR DISTRICTS THE MOST

Pennsylvania school districts had \$696 million less in state funding to operate schools for this past academic year than they did three years ago. The state's \$1 billion cut to education in 2011 hit poor school districts the hardest. School districts with 58 percent or more students living in poverty lost an average of more than \$700 dollars per pupil in state funding, or about \$140,000 per classroom. Wealthier school districts that generate larger property tax revenues for their schools lost less than \$150 per student in state aid.

Low-income students require additional support to succeed in school. Delaware County's most impoverished school districts, William Penn and Chester Upland, are underfunded by the State by nearly \$9 million. Proficiency rates at wealthier school districts like Radnor are twice as high as Chester-Upland.

The way to fix this inequality among school districts is for the state to restore the cuts made to education four years ago and to distribute funding to schools through a fair funding formula that meets the needs of our students. In June, the state legislature approved a bill to create a Basic Education Funding Commission to study how to distribute funding to the state's 500 school districts based on district size, poverty levels and, how many students do not speak English as a first language. In the coming months, PCCY will be pushing the Commission to consider how much it truly costs to fund education as a key component in their findings.

To learn how you can get involved with PCCY's education advocacy efforts, contact Shanee Garner at 215-563-5848 ext. 36 or email [shaneeg@pccy.org](mailto:shaneeg@pccy.org).



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### THE PICASSO PROJECT: Young Artists Lead the Fight for School Funding



Students from Andrew Jackson Elementary School hold up a quilt and signs to call on City Council and the State to save arts programs at their school.

PCCY's Picasso Project provided mini-grants for arts education to these schools, along with 11 others.

Since 2002, the Picasso Project has provided \$462,000 in mini-grants to help more than 30,000 students express themselves through the arts, and in the case of Powel, Jackson and Cook-Wissahickon, help lead the charge for fair funding for education.

Philadelphia's youth once again led the fight for fair funding for schools. On June 5th, students from Powel, Andrew Jackson and Cook-Wissahickon elementary schools teamed up to urge both Philadelphia City Council and the Pennsylvania General Assembly to do their part to provide the funding requested by the School District. Powel students presented Guatemalan-style "Worry Dolls" to members of Council and to the staff at Governor Corbett's office in Philadelphia to symbolize the worries they have about the future of their school. Students from Jackson Elementary used their artistic skills to create an arts advocacy quilt to tell lawmakers to save arts in schools, while the school choir from Cook-Wissahickon struck a note with Council members.



Picasso Project Director Gretchen Elise Walker speaks to the media while holding "Worry Dolls" made by students from Powel Elementary School

### IT'S TIME TO MAKE HEALTH INSURANCE AVAILABLE TO ALL PENNSYLVANIA CHILDREN

Nearly 47,000 children who live in the Commonwealth can't see a doctor when they get hurt, catch the flu or need dental and vision care because their parents entered the United States without proper immigration documents. Current state law prohibits undocumented children from enrolling in the state's Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Just over 9,000 of these children live in communities across southeastern Pennsylvania.

In 2006, the Pennsylvania legislature enacted "Cover All Kids," a sweeping reform to CHIP that extended coverage to all children except those who do "not meet the citizenship requirements of Title XXI of the Social Security Act." These 13 words bar children who were brought to this country illegally, through no fault of their own, from accessing health care.

PCCY has initiated a new campaign to amend state law and enable all children to qualify for public health insurance. The goal of the campaign is to push the General Assembly to remove all barriers to enrollment and cover the health costs of these vulnerable children so that Cover All Kids truly lives up to its name. **Join our campaign by contacting [colleenm@pccy.org](mailto:colleenm@pccy.org).**

#### State Law Bars Health Coverage for Thousands of Undocumented Children in Southeastern Pennsylvania

# of Undocumented Children	
Bucks	1,426
Chester	1,152
Delaware	1,276
Montgomery	1,838
Philadelphia	3,518
TOTAL	9,210

Source: PCCY calculations based on data and analysis from the U.S. Census, Centers for Immigration Studies and Pew Hispanic Center

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