



November 2018

School Funding and Student Outcomes

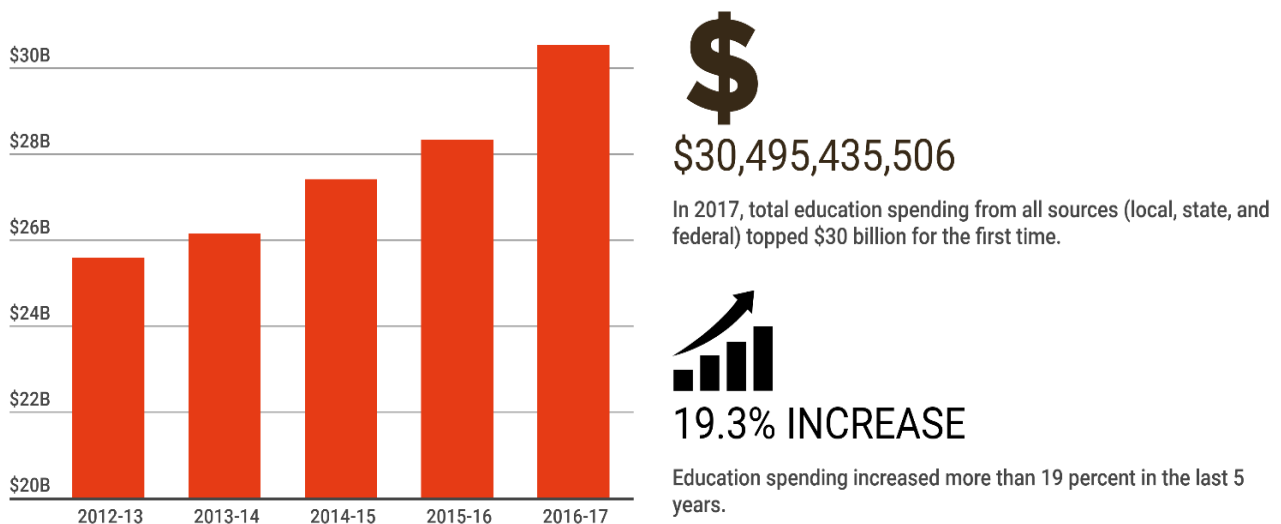
State leaders’ conversations about improving education often *devolve into who will spend more*. This common narrative enables some policymakers to take a one-dimensional solution—more funding—to a multi-dimensional issue—education. Key questions like how to ensure educational quality, how to weigh student safety concerns, who should control education dollars, and where those dollars go are ignored when the goal is simply money. Our children deserve better.

Trends in Education Spending

Despite clear evidence to the contrary, there is a persistent myth that Pennsylvania public schools are underfunded. Department of Education data show this is untrue. Whether measuring total spending or spending per student, Pennsylvania taxpayers have been very generous in their funding of education.

- Overall education spending in Pennsylvania topped \$30 billion for the first-time last year, totaling [\\$30.5 billion](#), a 19 percent increase in the last five years.
- At \$11.3 billion, state aid to school districts [is at record levels](#), and up 23 percent since 2012.
- Average revenue per student is [approaching \\$18,000](#), far above the [national average](#) and up 20 percent over the last five years.
- Nationally, Pa. ranks [9th in average per student funding](#) (most recent data 2014-15).

SCHOOL DISTRICT SPENDING



SOURCE: Pennsylvania Department of Education, [Annual Financial Reports](#) (Expenditure Data for School Districts).

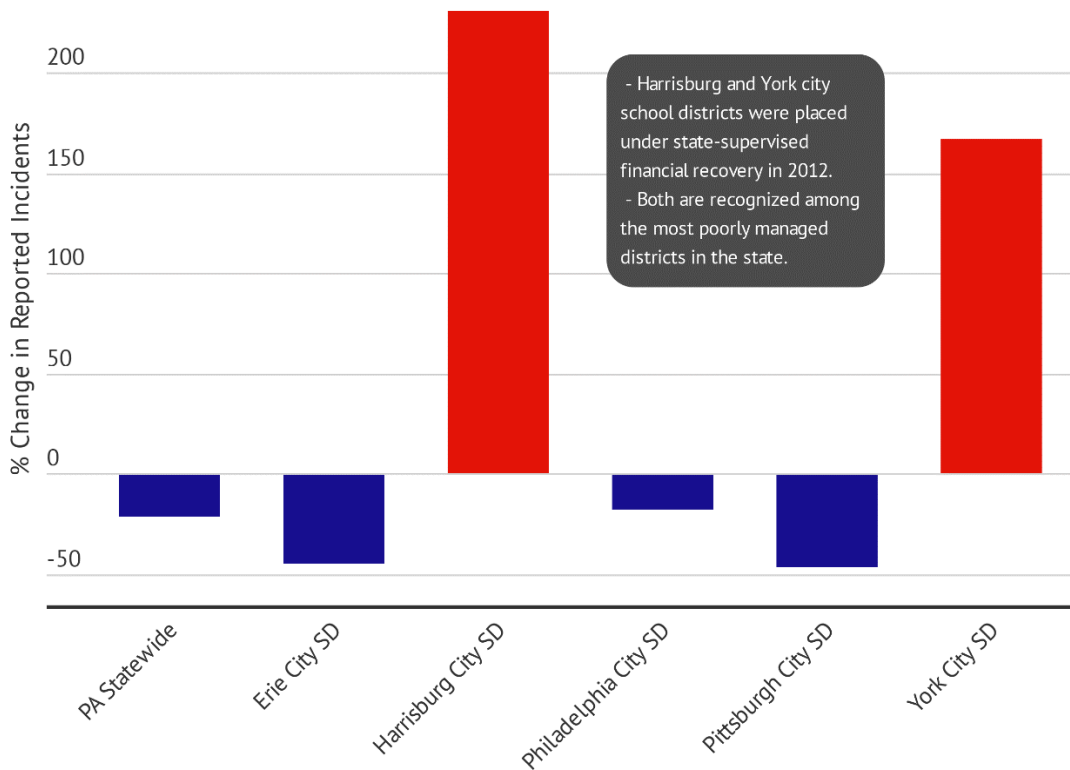
Trends in Public School Safety

In 2011, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* highlighted violence in Philly schools with its “[Assault on Learning](#)” series. In the following years, the number of incidents across the commonwealth have decreased, but violent incidents still occur at a significant level.

- [Pennsylvania schools reported over 43,000 incidents of violence](#), including acts such as assault, bullying, and sexual assault in 2016-17.
- [Pennsylvania was named](#) in the top ten “States of Concern” by Educator’s School Safety Network’s 2017-18 report of school-based violent threats and incidents.
- Ten states reported 51 percent of all violent incidents and threats against schools. Pennsylvania ranked [number five](#).
- Statewide, reported incidents are down 20 percent over the last five years.

PENNSYLVANIA SAFE SCHOOLS TRENDS

2013-17



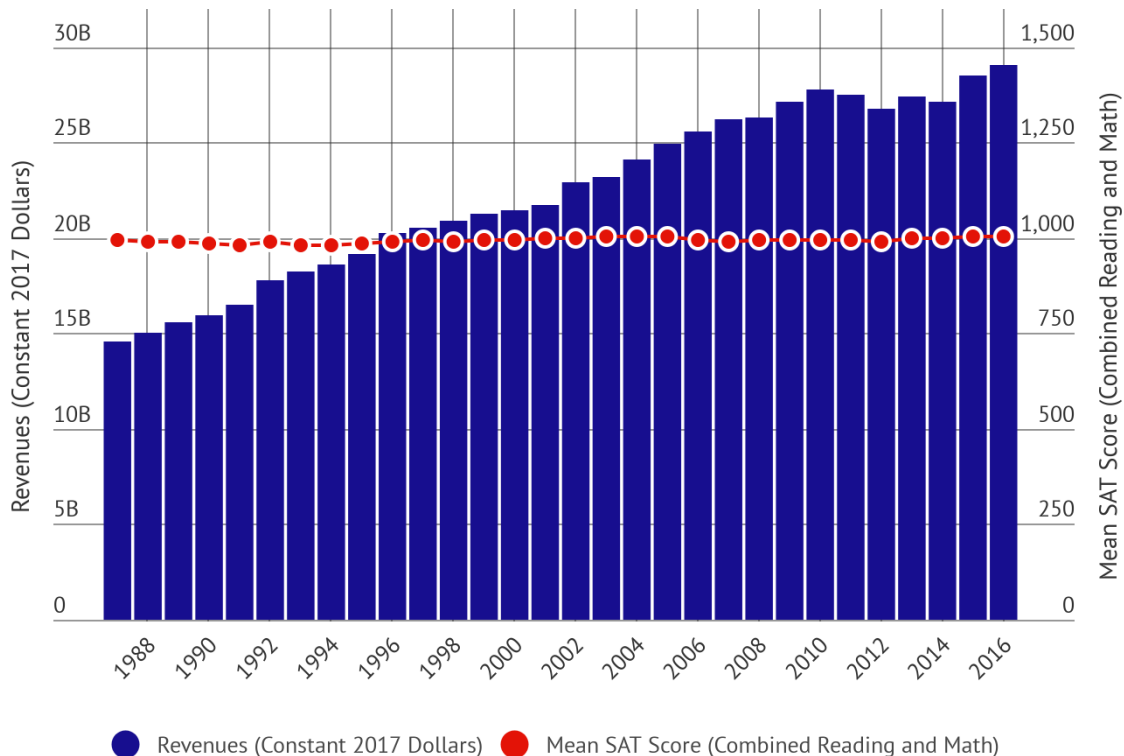
Sources: Pennsylvania Safe Schools online (<https://www.safeschools.state.pa.us>).
SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN FINANCIAL RECOVERY STATUS (education.pa.gov).

Trends in Academic Outcomes

Year-to-year comparisons of tests are dubious because they are testing different kids and the [tests often change](#). Test scores alone are a [weak predictor](#) of future success. Yet, Pennsylvania's persistent academic stagnation and achievement gaps represent a [crisis for Pennsylvania families](#).

- [Five-year NAEP](#) (National Assessment on Educational Progress) scores trend down slightly or show stagnation.
- SAT scores are [largely unchanged since 1970](#).
- Statewide, a [persistent achievement gap remains](#).
 - “NAEP exams shows that Pennsylvania had the 7th largest achievement gap in scores for 4th grade students taking the Math assessment, and the 14th largest gap on the 8th grade Math portion.”
- Poor performance in urban areas:
 - 20 percent of Harrisburg students are proficient in [English Language Arts](#); only 11 percent are proficient in [Math](#).
 - 34 percent of Philadelphia students are proficient in [English Language Arts](#); only 19 percent are proficient in [Math](#).

PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOL SPENDING & SAT SCORES



The Education Choice Solution

Succumbing to the lazy and ineffective strategy of putting more money into the existing system is not a smart solution. A recent [report](#) by Liebowitz and Kelly shows “**spending more money has virtually no effect on student performance.**” The authors retool traditional ranking systems to account for student learning, teacher effectiveness, and student diversity. Pennsylvania receives an [overall ranking](#) of 25th in quality and 38th in efficiency.

Since each child is unique, education funding should follow the child. Such a policy empowers all parents to break free of zip-code based education-segregation, and allows families to determine the best fit for their children.

Additionally, research shows choice and competition are far more effective at improving educational quality than money alone.

- Milwaukee parents who received tuition vouchers were [48 percent more likely](#) to report their children as "safe in class."
- [14 of 18 studies](#) find improved academic outcomes for school choice participants.
- [31 of 33 studies](#) find that choice improves academic outcomes at public schools.
- [9 of 10 studies](#) find that choice programs reduce segregation.

Pennsylvania can increase student opportunities through [expanded tax credits](#) or the establishment of [education savings accounts](#). It's time for a [philosophical shift](#) in education funding. It's time for politicians to understand that the purpose of education funding is to *fund students' educations*, not systems. The only way to promote fairness, opportunity, safety, and success through education is for every dollar to follow every child to the school they choose.