



LEVEL UP:

A PROPOSAL TO ACCELERATE EQUITABLE SCHOOL FUNDING IN PENNSYLVANIA

The Problem

Many school districts in Pennsylvania are **severely underfunded**, despite high local tax efforts. These most underfunded districts serve a disproportionate share of the Commonwealth's **students of color**, students living in **poverty**, students with disabilities, and **English learners**.

These large **adequacy and equity gaps** prevent districts from meeting the needs of hundreds of thousands of our most underserved students, limiting their educational opportunities and threatening the Commonwealth's future workforce, tax base, and economy.

While Pennsylvania's Basic Education Funding (BEF) formula provides weighted student funding for districts with higher levels of need, only new education spending is distributed using the formula.

At the current rate of increases in state educational spending, it will take decades or more for the most underfunded districts to reach adequate funding through increases in new BEF spending; the increases are too small and spread across too many districts to close the gap.

The Solution

In addition to increasing BEF spending to meet the needs of all 500 districts in Pennsylvania, a separate **Level Up supplement fund** is needed to accelerate the path to adequacy and equity for the **20% of districts** that are most underfunded.

We propose that Pennsylvania allocates **\$100 million** for the **Level Up** fund for 2021–22, which will be distributed pro-rated through the weighted BEF formula to the **100 identified districts**.

The Methodology

We identified the 100 districts (bottom 20%) with the fewest resources relative to their student needs:

The methodology calculates a “weighted student” count for every school district, using student weights employed in the state’s Basic Education Funding formula (BEF) and Special Education Funding formula (SEF) to measure the additional needs of students in each school district and create a weighted student count.

Both the BEF and SEF formulas distribute funding to each school district based on multiple factors, including poverty, English learners, charter school enrollment, and special education population. These “weights” are multipliers, based on research showing that underserved student populations require greater support, increasing the costs of educating them.

The weighted student count is used for each district to calculate a more meaningful measure of spending per pupil: Each school district’s current expenditures (e.g., spending on school programs) is divided by the weighted student count, thus measuring “current expenditures per weighted student.” The 100 districts with the lowest amount of funding available per weighted student are the districts with the fewest resources available to meet their students’ needs.

The 100 identified districts include rural, suburban, and urban districts in every region. While this list includes 20% of Pennsylvania’s school districts, those districts serve:

- 65% of Pennsylvania’s Black students
- 58% of Pennsylvania’s Latinx students
- 58% of Pennsylvania’s students in poverty
- 64% of Pennsylvania’s English learners
- 35% of Pennsylvania’s students with disabilities
- 32% of Pennsylvania’s total student population

