



LEVEL UP:

Accelerating
EQUITABLE

**SCHOOL FUNDING
IN PENNSYLVANIA**



The Vision



Every child in Pennsylvania **deserves robust course choices**, class sizes that allow for personalized support, enough school counselors and nurses, and a **safe learning environment so they can thrive and succeed** in school today and live productive, fulfilling lives after graduation.



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The Problem?



- **Pennsylvania ranks 45th** in the nation for state share of funding for K-12 education.
- As the school funding lawsuit has revealed, there is an adequacy gap of at least **\$4.6 billion**, and our system is deeply inequitable.
- **Only 14% of overall spending** is distributed through the weighted BEF formula; students in districts with the greatest needs are deeply shortchanged.
- Low-wealth communities cannot raise enough money at the local level, even with a very high local tax effort.



Pa. schools need an additional \$4.6 billion to close education gaps, new analysis finds

by Cynthia Fernandez of Spotlight PA and Maddie Hanna of The Philadelphia Inquirer | Oct. 27, 2020

Pennsylvania must do more to help students recover academically from the pandemic | Opinion

Poverty costs schools

The poorer the district, the more limited the school budget. What does that mean for kids?



'It's been a struggle for us': School bus driver shortage reaches some Lehigh Valley districts

School districts grapple with worsening teacher shortage

Joseph Cross The Sentinel Feb 8, 2022 4

Student achievement gap is caused by disparities in funding, says former state education official

Math shows fewer candidates for teaching jobs, and worsening

School District of Lancaster CFO: 'Draconian' cuts possible if state doesn't step up

Allentown School District taxes going up 3% despite windfall of more federal and state funding

Lehigh Valley school districts were already seeing more students with mental health issues. Then the pandemic happened.

'75 kindergartners, one toilet': Witness testimony begins in landmark Pa. school funding trial

'Exhausted and underpaid': teachers across the US are leaving their jobs in numbers



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The Consequences

- Thousands of students must attend schools that **lack the resources** needed to ensure that they can succeed.
- An **entire generation of children is at risk of not being prepared** for the challenges and demands of tomorrow.
- Students of color, students living in poverty, students with disabilities, and English learners **are disproportionately affected**.
- These effects are particularly pronounced in light of heightened student **academic** and **mental health** needs and **teacher shortages** in the wake of the pandemic.



An idea that worked:

LEVEL UP LAUNCHES

- Last June, a \$100 million Level Up supplement, based on a bill sponsored by Rep. Mike Schlossberg, was passed in the 2021-22 fiscal code with bipartisan support.
- Level Up changed the way legislators are talking about equity for the poorest school districts in Pennsylvania.
- Superintendents played a large part in that victory through their advocacy to legislators.
- The 2021-22 Level Up funding becomes part of districts' permanent base funding, but additional funding for this year is not guaranteed.



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EDUCATION

State's Level Up funding supplement helps 3 of Westmoreland's least wealthy school districts

JEFF HIMLER | Thursday, July 1, 2021 12:56 p.m.

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Schools to get funding boost

Level Up coalition targets state's 100 poorest districts

LOCAL NEWS JUL 14, 2021 Seven area school districts are set to receive a boost in funding after state lawmakers recently passed a \$100 million Level Up Funding Supplement.

Pa.'s \$40 billion budget includes more money for poorest school districts, saves bulk of federal relief funding

by Spotlight PA
June 28, 2021 4 min read



Allentown, Bethlehem schools get big boost in state funding as lawmakers endorse Schlossberg proposal to help poor districts

By FORD TURNER
THE MORNING CALL | JUN 26, 2021 AT 4:01 PM



New Level Up state funding initiative boosts Erie School District; board to vote on budget

Erie School District gets \$2.8M through new Level Up initiative, which gives more state aid to poorer districts. With other increases, Erie district's overall basic education funding to rise by \$6.5M.



Ed Palattella
Erie Times-News

Published 10:01 p.m. ET June 29, 2021



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What is Level Up?

- Level Up accelerates the path to adequacy and equity for the **20% of districts** that are most underfunded.
- The allocation is distributed through the weighted BEF formula to just the **100 identified districts** and that allocation **becomes part of their base BEF**.
 - Last year's Level Up supplement is now part of the base for the 2021-22 Level Up districts.
- The proposed 2022-23 Level Up supplement would accelerate **\$300 million** to the Level Up districts.
- This funding would be **separate** from and **additional** to the regular BEF funding districts receive.



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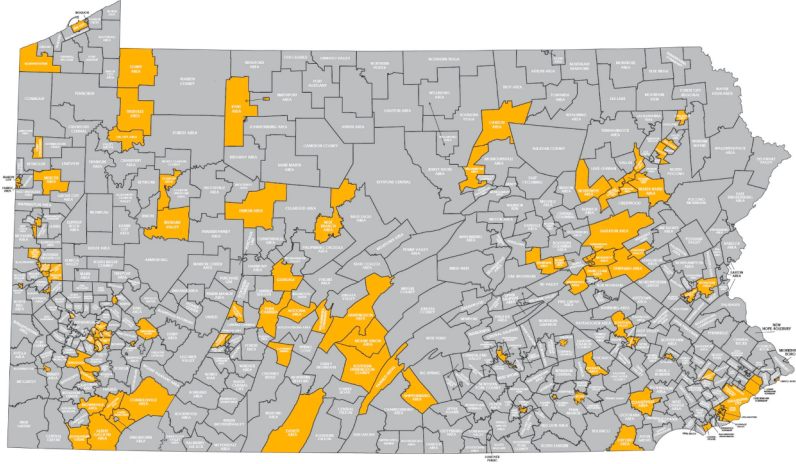
The Methodology

Note: The 2022-23 list is subject to change based on updated Census and enrollment data that will be released later this spring.

- Level Up identifies the 100 districts (bottom 20%) with the fewest resources relative to their student needs.
- Level Up uses student weights from the BEF and SEF formulas to measure the additional needs of students in each school district and create a weighted student count.
- The 100 districts with the lowest amount of funding available per weighted student over the last five years are the districts with the fewest resources available to meet their students' needs, and therefore receive a share of the Level Up funding.



The 100 Districts



- Last year's 100 districts were rural, suburban and urban districts in every region, serving:
 - **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

Note: The 2022-23 list is subject to change based on updated Census and enrollment data that will be released later this spring.



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The Political Challenges

- Continued funding of Level Up is not guaranteed: Lawmakers could choose not to include a Level Up supplement in the 2022-2023 budget.
- Some Republicans have backed off support of Level Up.
- Pandemic-related federal funds have led the public to believe that schools are well-funded—even though stimulus dollars can only be used for one-time expenses and do not address long-term structural funding inequities.



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Where We Are Now

- The lawsuit has highlighted the disparities in school funding and refocused public and legislative focus on Pennsylvania's school funding problem, which leaves the districts with the greatest needs with the fewest resources.
- The state has a surplus of billions of dollars.
- Governor Wolf's proposal addresses both adequacy and equity.
- We need substantial and sustained new investments in state funding for public education, distributed to districts based on need, so that local wealth no longer determines whether Pennsylvania students receive a quality public education.
- **The Level Up Supplement is a solution that is equitable, pragmatic, and politically possible.**



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The Process

- Level Up funding for 2022-23 has been introduced in HB 2414, sponsored by Representative Michael Schlossberg (D - Allentown).
- Senate bill to be introduced by Senator Tim Kearney (D - Delaware County).
- Seeking co-sponsors from both parties and all regions.
- Organizations statewide are building grassroots support for approving both the funding mechanism as well as an allocation during this term.



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How You Can Help

- **Educate** your school board directors, teachers, and families about the benefits of and need for this proposal (we can help!)
- Ask your families and community members to **talk to lawmakers** about supporting Level Up.
- **Write or sign op-eds and letters** of support (we can help!)
- **Explain** how the federal stimulus does not solve your district's long-term funding problems.



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How You Can Help

- **Sign on your district in support** of the proposed Level UP supplement.
- **Share with us** how you used your Level Up supplement last year so we can demonstrate the positive impact the funding had on students.
- **Contact your legislators** and ask them to cosponsor Level Up legislation and to tell their leadership to support Level Up.
- We are here to help!
 - **Susan Spicka**
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