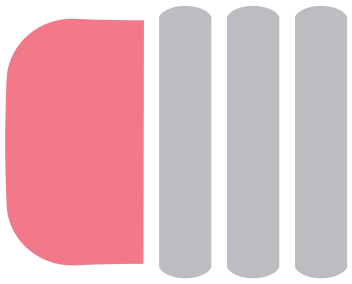




LEVEL UP

Talking Points

- Pennsylvania has one of the most inequitable and inadequately funded public school systems in America – we rank as the 43rd worst state.
- As a result of chronic underfunding at the state level, many Pennsylvania school districts are severely underfunded, often even if they tax their residents heavily.
- The 100 districts with the biggest funding shortfalls serve a majority of the state’s students living in poverty, students of color, and English learners, and more than a third of the state’s students with disabilities.
- The problem is so profound, a Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court judge declared PA’s school funding system unconstitutional. The court ruled that the current system discriminates against low-wealth districts, because it does not provide adequate resources to those students and ordered the legislature and governor to fix it.
- This ruling, along with the \$12 billion available in state surplus and reserves, means that closing the funding gap between wealthy and poor school districts can and must start now.
- The Level Up supplement accelerates funding to the 100 school districts that have been most impacted by decades of underfunding.
- Considering the court ruling and the tremendous bipartisan support the Level Up funding has gained since its inception just two years ago, we were shocked and bewildered to see it left on the proverbial cuttingroom floor – now **we are counting on legislative leaders to rescue Level Up.**
- In 2021–22, \$100 million of new funding was distributed through the Level Up stream. An additional \$225 million is being funneled through this funding mechanism this year. A provision in the PA School Code mandates that Level Up funding becomes part of a school district’s base funding for the following years so that all past funding increases through Level Up are guaranteed to be recurring. [Gov. Shapiro’s budget does not undo that.]



- This year, there is no **NEW** Level Up funding included in the governor's budget proposal. Along with Governor Shapiro's proposed \$567 million in basic education funding, Level Up would have begun to fill an estimated \$4.6 billion education funding gap. If a Level Up appropriation is not added back into the budget, Pennsylvania will have abandoned an important tool and commitment to close long-standing inequities in funding to students in the poorest districts.
- The Level Up concept is simple and sensible: Target a portion of new state education funding to the districts with the greatest need – and guarantee that it will be recurring. This new distribution mechanism provided funding to Pennsylvania's 100 least-funded school districts according to their weights in the state's funding formula.
- Level Up **IS NOT** in itself the remedy to the school funding problem – and, per the court ruling, we are eager to work with Governor Shapiro and legislative leaders to develop and implement a comprehensive, lasting solution over the next few years. In the meantime, Level Up is the best mechanism we have to deal with the worst inequities in school funding.
- That's why we are calling for the General Assembly to **distribute another \$300 million through Level Up this year, on top of, not instead of new Basic Education Funds** distributed through the fair funding formula.
- While the parties work toward a comprehensive reform of the funding system, Level Up is the best existing tool we have to narrow the massive inequity between the state's most underfunded school districts and their wealthier neighbors.
- Level Up is a political strategy that respects all school districts and unites rural, urban, and suburban legislators across party lines. It creates greater equity without taking away funds from any district.
- **Losing Level Up is not an option.**
- Pennsylvania leaders know that this year's final budget must ultimately go beyond the governor's proposal to be a meaningful first step to fixing what the Court has determined is an unconstitutional system.
- Our coalition believes Governor Shapiro has the vision to work toward this achievable goal, and we are eager to work with him, legislative leaders, and the General Assembly to ensure this valuable funding strategy is reinstated.