



# FUNDING OUR FUTURE:

Teach Plus Pennsylvania Teacher Leaders on  
FIXING AN INADEQUATE AND INEQUITABLE  
School Funding System



**TEACH  
+PLUS**

**"OUR CURRENT SYSTEM IS BUILT ON THE  
HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS** *in the state. If the  
state cares about educating all students, they  
need to create a system that is equitable for all  
and level the playing field."*

*"As a teacher in [underfunded district] and a  
parent of students in [other underfunded district],  
I SEE FIRSHAND THE LIMITED AND OFTEN  
SECOND-RATE FACILITIES AND RESOURCES  
OFFERED MY CHILDREN versus what I see  
afforded to the children in the wealthier districts  
serving predominantly White students. It is both  
disheartening and disturbing."*



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# INTRODUCTION

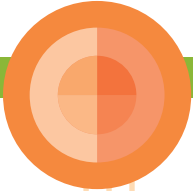
Pennsylvania's school funding system has long been criticized as inadequate and inequitable, as highlighted by the *William Penn School District et al. v. Pennsylvania Department of Education et al.* lawsuit, first filed in 2014 and concluding in 2022, which is challenging the funding system's constitutionality. According to a recent analysis prepared for the lawsuit, Pennsylvania's schools are underfunded by at least \$4.6 billion,<sup>1</sup> and students of color and students living in poverty are much more likely to attend underfunded schools.<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania's wealthiest school districts spend \$4,847 more per student than the poorest districts, and 86 percent of all school districts are underfunded.<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania allocates relatively little state funding for K-12 education—a smaller percentage than 44 other states, to be exact<sup>4</sup>—which forces local communities to front the rest, exacerbating inequities between rich and poor districts. This contributes to Pennsylvania's racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps, some of the widest in the country.<sup>5</sup>

These numbers can be startling, but they are also abstract. What does underfunding actually look, sound, and feel like in Pennsylvania's public school classrooms? What are the concrete and tangible consequences of years of state underinvestment for Pennsylvania's students and families? What can we learn from those with a front-row view of our school funding system: our public school teachers?

We are a group of Teach Plus Pennsylvania Policy Fellows and highly effective teachers who work to advance equity-focused and evidence-based education policies. To answer these questions, we held focus groups with nearly 100 teachers across the state seeking to understand educators' perceptions on how school funding affects a range of factors, including school facilities, student and teacher mental health, class sizes, teacher salaries, and more.

The stories from these focus groups of teachers were powerful, vivid, and heartbreaking. Teachers described schools debilitated by underfunding, with devastating impacts on teaching, learning, student and teacher well-being and health, and student outcomes. They also described how teachers and students experience this underfunding and the messages they absorb about their worth, value, and potential when their schools are so inadequately resourced.

We believe that stories of those closest to our education system are essential for policymakers and the public to hear. In this brief, we present findings from our focus groups and recommendations for legislators as they consider an upcoming state education budget and contemplate how to fundamentally reshape our current state funding system.



## FINDINGS

1.

Underfunding has devastating effects on student and teacher mental health.

2.

Underfunding leads to crumbling school infrastructure and facilities that create an unsafe learning environment.

3.

Underfunding hinders schools' ability to attract and retain sufficient staff to meet student needs.

4.

Underfunding limits academic opportunities and resources, hindering student learning and achievement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1.

Increase state funding to meet districts' adequacy needs and reduce reliance on local wealth.

2.

Target resources to areas of greatest need, such as mental health and school facilities.

3.

Prioritize equity by accelerating resources to the most underfunded districts.

4.

Include teachers in decisions about how to best allocate resources.



# METHODOLOGY

To better understand teacher perspectives on the impact of funding on schools, we conducted a series of online focus groups in January and February 2022 to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from educators across the state of Pennsylvania. We conducted focus groups with 98 public school teachers from 33 different local education agencies in Pennsylvania, including 4 percent working in an early childhood setting, 41 percent working in elementary schools, 24 percent working in middle schools, 28 percent working in middle schools, and 4 percent indicating they worked in other school settings. Participants' teaching experience varied, with 6 percent having fewer than four years of experience, 21 percent with four to nine years of experience, 33 percent with 10-15 years of experience, and 40 percent with more than 15 years of experience.

We actively recruited teachers from more underfunded districts in order to better understand the unique experiences of this population. We used funding data compiled by Professor Matthew Garner Kelly of The Pennsylvania State University as part of the ongoing school funding trial and shared by the Education Law Center to determine the per-pupil annual funding shortfall for each school district. Of the teachers included in our research, 13 percent are from districts that are not considered underfunded, 14 percent teach in districts underfunded by \$1-\$3,000 per student per year, 71 percent teach in districts underfunded by \$3,000-\$6,000 per student per year, and 1 percent teach in districts underfunded by over \$6,000 per student per year.<sup>6</sup>

During the focus groups, teachers responded to both closed- and open-ended questions asking them to rate and describe their level of satisfaction with their school's resources for a range of factors affected by school funding:

- School facilities and grounds
- Technology
- Instructional materials
- Student and teacher mental, social, and emotional health
- Student academic support
- Class sizes
- Staff salaries
- Course offerings
- Professional development opportunities

Teachers were also asked which areas they would prioritize for additional funding and to share any additional thoughts about how our current school funding system could be improved.

# FINDINGS

## FINDING 1.

### Underfunding has devastating effects on student and teacher mental health.

When asked about student and teacher mental, social, and emotional health, 73 percent of teachers in our focus groups reported dissatisfaction with the resources their district is able to provide.<sup>7</sup> When asked to select the areas they would prioritize for additional funding, 57 percent of teachers in our focus groups chose funding for mental health supports as one of their top three priorities.<sup>8</sup> This high level of dissatisfaction comes amidst a backdrop of national concern about student and teacher mental health: according to recent national surveys, 87 percent of Americans are concerned about the mental health of youth in this country,<sup>9</sup> and 81 percent are concerned about teacher burnout.<sup>10</sup> In Pennsylvania, a statewide hotline has reported concerning increases in reports of bullying, suicidal ideation, and self-harm since the pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

In our focus groups, one key challenge noted by many teachers was a lack of sufficient mental health professionals. While the American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-to-1 ratio of students to school counselors,<sup>12</sup> teachers reported double to quadruple that ratio. For schools that contract externally with mental health providers, teachers are finding long waiting lists of six to eight weeks for services to begin. When students do not have access to mental health professionals, mental health crises can escalate, threatening the safety and lives of vulnerable students.

#### The Philadelphia Inquirer

News

### Statewide school tip line shows bullying, suicide, self-harm among top concerns, Attorney General's Office says


More than 80,000 tips have been received through the Safe2Say Something program since the anonymous tip line launched in 2019.

RESEARCH

### Survey shows depression and anxiety among Pennsylvania youth

*Penn State experts team up with state and local organizations to provide support*





*"We lost almost all of our counselors in the 2013 budget cut layoffs and never got them all back. We have five for a school of 2,700 students. A couple of years ago, we had several suicides and attempted suicides and not enough professionals to help. These mental health duties then fall to teachers."<sup>13</sup>*

*"I have seen firsthand the impact that COVID-19 has had on my students. Much of my day is spent providing emotional support to a student whose family was already struggling to make ends meet before the pandemic, but whose situation has dramatically worsened. His behaviors are a result of enduring trauma during the pandemic and he now comes to school strictly to eat, feel warm, and be loved. He would benefit tremendously from the support of a mental health professional or the School Based Behavioral Health Team, but he doesn't have access because our understaffed programs are at capacity. So instead, he spends much of his time in my calming area, tucked under a blanket, getting the sleep he desperately needs, while I return to teaching the other 22 students in front of me instead of receiving the support of a mental health professional."*

Teachers also expressed a desire for social-emotional curricula and instructional materials and training to help them address students' mental health needs and the impacts of trauma.

*"The majority of my students have had major trauma in their life, and I do not have the tools or resources to appropriately help them."*

Underfunding of mental health services is affecting teachers as well. Teachers are burning out at rapid rates, with more than half indicating that they plan to leave the profession earlier than they originally planned in a recent National Education Association poll.<sup>14</sup> Teachers experience vicarious trauma from supporting students with heightened mental health needs, and they are also grappling with the effects of staff shortages and underresourced schools on their own working conditions and well-being. Teachers in our focus groups spoke of "unprecedented" levels of stress brought on by the pandemic that have not been met with meaningful supports for teacher mental and emotional health.

*"We are in desperate need of mental health and behavioral professionals. Students and staff are traumatized from the pandemic and we can barely teach because we are constantly putting out mental health crises daily."*

If students' mental health needs are not addressed, research suggests that schools will see increased rates of absenteeism,<sup>15</sup> bullying,<sup>16</sup> school violence,<sup>17</sup> and self-harm.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the relationship between mental health and student achievement is well-documented<sup>19</sup>: Students who are in crisis cannot learn. And if teachers' mental health is also neglected, the ripple effects on teacher retention will also be devastating. In the wake of the pandemic, a lack of resources to address student and teacher mental health needs is one of the most critical ways in which underfunding is harming current and future generations.

*"We desperately need more mental health support for our students and staff. We have been able to get some grants for therapists, but our students truly need more support—especially after the last two years."*





## FINDING 2.

### Underfunding leads to crumbling school infrastructure and facilities that create an unsafe learning environment.

Another common theme across focus groups was the connection between underfunding and inadequate school facilities, and how crumbling infrastructure creates environments that are not only unsanitary and uncomfortable, but that also threaten the health and safety of the school community and prevent student learning. Seventy percent of participants reported being dissatisfied with the resources their district is able to provide for school facilities.<sup>20</sup> Forty-four percent of teachers in our focus groups chose infrastructure as one of their top three priorities for additional resources.<sup>21</sup>

Many teachers described facilities that are antiquated and outdated, that lack modern amenities and equipment, and that have suffered from years or decades of deferred maintenance. As a result, teachers and students struggle to teach and learn every day in spaces that are dirty, unsanitary, and inadequate.

*"Not all the stalls in the student bathrooms have functioning toilets. The bathrooms are routinely out of soap and toilet paper. Our students deserve to have a place to use the bathroom without waiting in a long line. What kind of message does it send to students if some of the bathrooms don't even have doors, or toilet paper?"<sup>22</sup>*

*"The school building I am in has not been updated in over 50 years, and it shows ... I have been asking for bookshelves for my room for over seven years. Currently teachers use garage shelving to hold materials."*

Education

## Asbestos is shutting down another Philadelphia school

Franklin Learning Center, on North 15th Street, will shut to students and staff through Jan. 2. It is the fourth school this year to have a building shut down because of asbestos.

*"It leaks in my classroom everytime it rains."*

Overcrowding was also a frequently cited concern for those dissatisfied with school facilities: too many students crowded into classrooms and other spaces, and districts forced to combine schools or contain growing student populations in too-small buildings due to lack of funding to build or continue operating more schools.

*"The recent closure of an elementary school building to save money has led to overcrowding in our other buildings."*

*"School is overcrowded and I teach science in three different classrooms, none of which are set up for science."*

Lack of adequate and working heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems was frequently cited. Teachers described students passing out due to heat, schools forced to close every time the temperature rises, and buildings that could not be reopened safely during the pandemic due to lack of ventilation. Teachers also described buildings that are not accessible for people with disabilities, lacking working elevators and other accommodations.

*"Our HVAC system has gone through a number of issues in the past few years causing some areas of the building to be frigid and other areas of the building to be sweltering hot. The difference in temperature from classroom to classroom has impacted student learning as many of our students are distracted by the freezing cold or burning hot temperatures and unable to focus on learning."*

*"The school I work at was built in 1915, the heating does not work in the winter, it's stifling when the weather is warm, and there is absolutely no green space surrounding the campus. The parking lot is crumbling and it has been in this condition for several years."*

Many teachers spoke of the dehumanizing effects of such inferior school facilities on students and staff, as well as the lost learning time for students when teaching is interrupted or schools are closed due to facilities issues.

*"I can't imagine being a student in a building that looks like a prison. Schools should be welcoming and exciting for students. They should serve as community centers. Our buildings are places that we go to for eight hours and then leave as soon as possible."*

*"How can students take pride in their school and themselves when their building is falling down? Why should they care when they see all the things the wealthy district next door has?"*

Most concerning, many teachers described conditions in schools that go beyond causing discomfort and impeding student learning to actively threatening the health and safety of students and educators. Multiple educators described instances of being exposed to lead, asbestos, mold, and other toxins in their school buildings. They also described other threats to safety, such as inadequately lit parking lots and deferred maintenance that raised the risk of accidents.

*"Our facilities are from the early 1900s. We deal with unsafe and unhealthy buildings-mold, asbestos, water damage, rats, mice, and roaches."*

*"There is an ongoing, years-long facilities crisis in Philadelphia—including environmental hazards like lead, mold, and asbestos—which has caused many students to become seriously ill or die. For some context, the average age of a Philadelphia school building is at least 10 years older than the national average."*

A precept of the medical profession is "First, do no harm." The obvious corollary for our educational system is that our schools should not harm students and teachers or obstruct teaching and learning. Providing funding to ensure that all school buildings are safe and conducive to learning is an urgent, life-or-death priority for Pennsylvania.







## FINDING 3.

### **Underfunding hinders schools' ability to attract and retain sufficient staff to meet student needs.**

Another key theme across educators' responses in our focus groups is the effect of underfunding on school staff recruitment and retention. When schools and districts have insufficient resources, there are ripple effects on class sizes, staff salaries, ability to hire specialized staff, and educator workload. This issue is particularly urgent given increasing educator shortages across Pennsylvania in the wake of the pandemic and heightened competition between districts for a shrinking supply of educators.<sup>23</sup>

Many teachers discussed how underfunding has contributed to large class sizes that make personalized learning and individual attention difficult or impossible. Sixty-one percent of teachers we spoke with were dissatisfied with class sizes in their district.<sup>24</sup> Different teachers described struggling to support a kindergarten class of 31, a learning support class of 16, and middle school classes of 35-40, often without any teachers' aides or paraprofessionals to assist.

*"Five classes of 33 meeting daily adds up to 165 students, not including a homeroom. It's not possible to give students the regular, individualized feedback they need to improve their skills."*<sup>25</sup>

In addition to limiting the number of teachers that can be hired, underfunding keeps districts from paying a competitive wage to the teachers they do hire. Sixty-five percent of teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their districts' staff salaries.<sup>26</sup> Many teachers commented that their districts were unable to match the higher salaries offered in more affluent districts and that they saw more experienced teachers leaving their districts to earn higher pay and better support their families. Teachers also pointed to disparities between teacher salaries and pay for other professions that require a bachelor's degree, noting that teaching is one of the lowest-paid professions for college graduates.<sup>27</sup>

*"I am 15 years in and have a masters degree. My salary is so low my children qualify for free lunch and PEAK preschool. I teach summer school, tutor, drive for Uber and Instacart to make ends meet."*

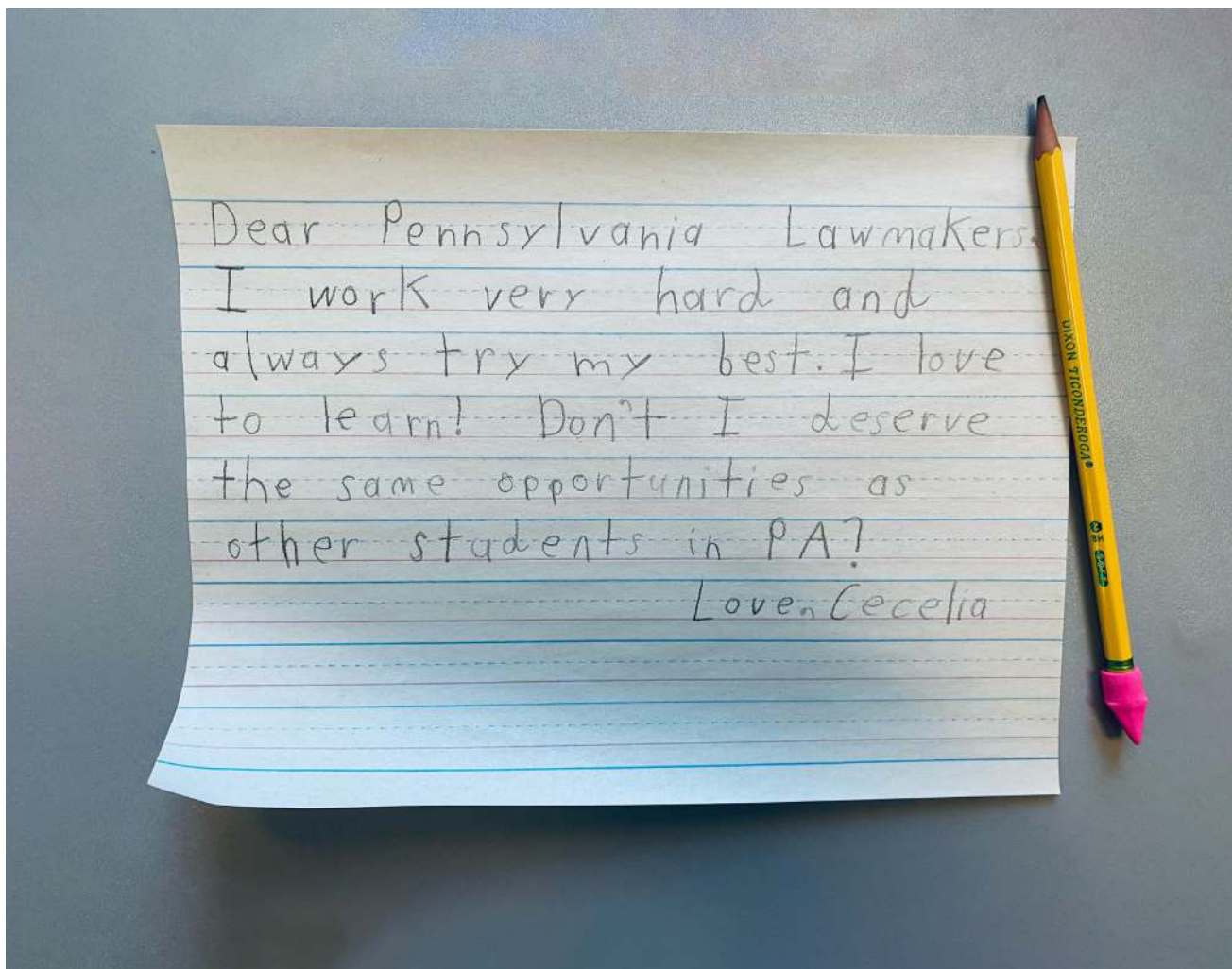
*"We cannot compete with larger districts, county-wide systems, or areas that have more economic opportunities for new-hires. Why would someone choose our small, rural, financially strapped district, when they can go somewhere else and be paid a decent wage?"*<sup>28</sup>

Teachers also discussed a shortage of specialized staff in underfunded schools. In addition to mental health professionals, as discussed previously, teachers addressed a shortage of other support staff, including school librarians, paraprofessionals, reading specialists, nurses, translators, and interventionists. Additionally, teachers pointed to a lack of teachers for special courses, such as art and music, as well as for advanced and vocational courses.

*"Our school has one reading specialist for over 400 students. We also have a high need for interventionists to provide instruction for students who are below grade level. We have also seen a decline in our allotted amount of English Language Development teachers and paraprofessionals. We eliminated our librarians and Spanish teachers at the elementary level."*<sup>29</sup>

*"We have so many students who are talented in the arts, and we have little to offer them. Many of these students struggle academically but they could be brilliant poets, artists, and musicians with the proper mentorship. Their parents cannot afford private lessons."*<sup>30</sup>

Insufficiently staffed schools create additional stresses and increase the workloads of existing staff, creating a vicious cycle of teacher burnout and turnover. The most underfunded districts often have the lowest salaries, the largest class sizes, the fewest supports, and the most unmanageable working conditions, leading to even lower levels of retention in districts where experienced teachers are needed the most. Without additional resources, underfunded districts will remain trapped in a vicious cycle, unable to attract and retain the educators needed to deliver high-quality instruction and support to every child.





## FINDING 4.

### **Underfunding limits academic opportunities and resources, hindering student learning and achievement.**

Schools exist to help students learn. The most central function of our public education system is to provide scholastic opportunities to students that will allow them to unlock their full potential and achieve post-secondary success in college and career. But Pennsylvania's inequitable school funding system prevents underfunded districts from being able to offer the same academic opportunities and resources as wealthier districts can provide. This has a direct impact on student learning and achievement, limiting the trajectory not only of individual students but on the Commonwealth's future workforce and economy as a whole.

Teachers in our focus groups described multiple ways that underfunding limits academic opportunities. The first is through a lack of support for students with special learning needs. Teachers described insufficient staffing and services to support struggling readers, students with disabilities, and English language learners, leading these populations to fall further behind. Many teachers also pointed to the elimination of school libraries and librarians as a key educational resource being denied to students in underfunded schools. Many schools do not have a library at all or have libraries that are only open intermittently due to the lack of a full-time librarian, leaving teachers to volunteer to supervise the library during their lunch breaks or prep periods.

*"Our support for students with special learning needs is far below what's needed, and I often hear the special education teachers and support staff for students with disabilities say they are overburdened with paperwork, which eats into their instructional time."<sup>31</sup>*

*"We do not have any reading specialists to remediate needs for the 3rd, 4th and 5th graders. Another elementary school merged into our building this year, and we have the same amount of interventionists as we did before receiving another population into our school. We have no librarians. We have no technology classes. We have no remedial classrooms for students who may need to repeat a grade level if they do not receive intensive intervention."<sup>32</sup>*

Teachers also described outdated or insufficient instructional materials, including textbooks and curricula, as well as lack of access to facilities such as science labs that are needed for advanced learning. Without these resources, teachers are often forced to try to supplement out of their own pockets by buying books and other materials for their students; other times, students simply miss out on opportunities for hands-on and 21st-century learning that their peers in more affluent schools take for granted.



*"Last year, I was a business teacher in one of the high schools in our district. The books I was using were from the early 1990s. I am not the only one. Most teachers need to supplement with their own materials because the books are so old or they don't even have textbooks."*

*"Updated curriculum materials for math, science, and social studies are needed. Our school district is using a math curriculum that is no longer supported by the publisher, and is not rigorous enough for students to meet grade level mathematics standards."*<sup>33</sup>

In our focus groups, 55 percent of teachers chose increased funding for academic support as one of their top three priorities for additional resources.<sup>34</sup> Because schools are complex and interconnected environments, many of the other factors discussed previously also limit academic opportunities and suppress student achievement. Overcrowded and unsafe facilities can lead to interrupted instructional time and poor conditions for learning. Lack of mental health supports can keep students and teachers from being able to teach and learn. And staffing challenges, including large class sizes and inability to retain experienced staff, can hinder high-quality teaching and differentiated instruction. As national<sup>35</sup> and state<sup>36</sup> data paint a worrying picture of student learning loss and widening achievement gaps during the pandemic, ensuring that our most vulnerable students have equal access to high-quality instructional opportunities is more urgent than ever.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from our teacher focus groups, we offer the following recommendations to policymakers considering how to reform our current school funding system:

## RECOMMENDATION 1.

### Increase state funding to meet districts' adequacy needs and reduce reliance on local wealth.

As Pennsylvania teachers have attested, great schools require adequate resources for safe and functional facilities, comprehensive mental health supports, a strong and thriving educator workforce, and rich academic opportunities. Many teachers pointed to state underfunding and Pennsylvania's larger-than-average reliance on local property tax revenue to fund schools as causes of the detrimental effects they saw in their schools.

*"School funding should not be connected to zip code or real estate taxes. It further perpetuates a history of racism and contributes to wealth gaps and opportunity gaps we see today."<sup>37</sup>*

In order to deliver on its constitutional obligation to provide a "thorough and efficient" education to every Pennsylvania student,<sup>38</sup> the Pennsylvania legislature must establish adequacy as a benchmark and increase state funding to allow all districts to meet adequacy targets that take into account the unique needs of their student populations. The Pennsylvania General Assembly actually included in the 2008 school code law a requirement that "the Department of Education shall determine an adequacy target for each school district" based on a number of different factors,<sup>39</sup> but the state has not calculated these adequacy targets in recent years or committed to an explicit goal of meeting these targets. The legislature should explicitly adopt adequacy as a goal, calculate adequacy targets annually for each district, and commit to closing the adequacy gap—currently estimated at \$4.6 billion<sup>40</sup>—within five years. Pennsylvania can look to other states, such as New Jersey, North Carolina, and New York, for examples of how legislatures have, based on court rulings, revised school funding systems to address adequacy.<sup>41</sup>



## RECOMMENDATION 2.


### Target resources to areas of greatest need, such as mental health and school facilities.

While underfunding affects all aspects of school operations, Pennsylvania teachers are particularly concerned about a few key areas. When asked to select the top three areas they would want to devote additional funds to, teachers prioritized supports for student and teacher mental health, student academic support, and school facilities. In addition to increasing overall educational allocations through basic and special education funding, policymakers should consider creating specific programs, allocations, and line items to channel resources directly into these problem areas.

For example, to address student mental health needs, Rhode Island includes allocations to fund psychologist and counselor positions in their state education funding formula, and at least 11 states allocate funds for student mental health services directly through their funding models.<sup>42</sup> Pennsylvania could also leverage federal dollars, including ESSER and Title IV, Part A funds, toward grants to support student mental and behavioral health.

To address school facility and infrastructure needs, Pennsylvania could end the moratorium on funding for the PlanCon program, which would provide partial grants for districts, to be combined with local funding, to use toward building maintenance, repairs, and health and safety upgrades.<sup>43</sup> PlanCon has been unfunded since 2016, leaving local districts responsible for addressing capital needs using only local sources; this is particularly detrimental for poorer districts with less ability to raise funds locally.





Additionally, to address staffing challenges, Pennsylvania's legislators should make targeted investments in expanding, diversifying, and retaining the educator workforce.<sup>44</sup> Lawmakers should consider investments in Grow Your Own programs and pathways; high-retention pathways into teaching, including teacher residency programs; scholarship and loan forgiveness programs to reduce the cost of college for teachers; and retention measures including salary raises, retention bonuses, and leadership pathways.

## RECOMMENDATION 3.

### **Prioritize equity by accelerating resources to the most underfunded districts.**

While the impacts of underfunding touch schools all across the Commonwealth, rural, urban, and suburban alike, the burden is greatest for poorer districts. These districts, which need additional resources to help students meet state learning standards, instead receive the least funding. As our findings make clear, these funding inequities have devastating impacts on learning conditions and student achievement in our most vulnerable communities. 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.<sup>45</sup>

*"With the way funding is currently given in our state, larger, poorer school districts are at a disadvantage. They do not receive the appropriate funds to provide students with the support they truly need. Students are left in large classes where teachers cannot meet their needs, and have less access to supplemental resources than affluent school districts have. This further perpetuates the inequities we see within schools and communities."<sup>46</sup>*

A more targeted approach is needed to meet the needs of the districts furthest from adequacy. The 100 most underfunded districts, representing the bottom 20 percent in terms of resources available to meet student needs, serve over half of the state's students of color, English learners, and students in poverty. Legislators should embrace the Level Up program to accelerate funding to the 100 most underfunded school districts in Pennsylvania. Level Up, first implemented in 2021-22, calculates a "weighted student" count for each district using the state's Basic Education Funding (BEF) and Special Education Funding (SEF) formulas, then calculates each district's current expenditures per weighted student count in order to identify the 100 highest-need districts. It then distributes a specific Level Up allocation to these 100 districts through the BEF formula, with this funding then becoming a part of each district's base funding.<sup>47</sup> Continuing to include a substantial Level Up allocation in each state budget will ensure that equity for the most disadvantaged schools is prioritized in addition to adequacy across the system as a whole.



## RECOMMENDATION 4.

### Include teachers in decisions about how best to allocate resources.

Teachers are in a unique position to understand the effects of resource shortages in their schools as well as the most pressing needs of their students. But too often, teachers, along with students and families, are not included in conversations about school funding and resource allocation. As Pennsylvania's policymakers consider how to redesign the school funding system for adequacy and equity, it is essential that teacher voice is a part of the process. Teachers and other community stakeholders should be consulted at the state, district, and school level as decisions are made about how to allocate and prioritize limited resources. Policymakers should include processes for gathering educator input and feedback on school budgets and should ensure that these processes are meaningful and generative.



# CONCLUSION

The findings of our focus groups make clear that underfunding has harmful and long-lasting consequences on Pennsylvania's schools. As long as our legislators refuse to pay up for Pennsylvania's schools, it is our students who pay the price through poor mental health, exposure to hazards from unsafe buildings, and lack of access to sufficient educators and academic opportunities. And when our children suffer, our entire Commonwealth, including our future workforce and economy, also feels the costs. The General Assembly doesn't need to wait for a lawsuit ruling to prioritize adequacy and equity in school funding in the Keystone State; they can start with the 2022-23 state budget. It's time for legislators to listen to those who are closest to our schools and students—Pennsylvania's teachers—who are sounding the alarm about the dire consequences of underfunding and how to fix it.





# APPENDIX

**Table 1. Participant satisfaction by area**

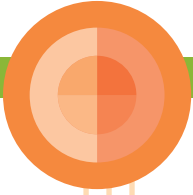
Focus group participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the following categories (n=98).

Area	Unsure	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
The resources your district is able to provide for your school facilities, including buildings and grounds, parking lots, playing fields, furniture, fixed equipment, etc.	0.0%	50.0%	20.4%	20.4%	9.2%
The resources your district is able to provide for your school technology, including student and teacher devices (Chromebooks, tablets, computers, etc.), software, other educational technology such as Smartboards and document cameras, etc.	0.0%	11.2%	24.5%	40.8%	23.5%
The resources your district is able to provide for instructional materials - textbooks, instructional supplies, subscriptions to digital resources, etc.	0.00%	29.6%	31.6%	27.6%	11.2%
The resources your district is able to provide for student and teacher mental, social, and emotional health, including availability of trained staff (counselors, social workers, etc.), professional development for teachers, social-emotional curriculum and resources, etc.	2.0%	53.1%	20.4%	18.4%	6.1%
The resources your district is able to provide for student academic support, including availability of specialized staff (reading specialists, librarians, paraprofessionals, etc.), supplemental programs (tutoring, after-school and summer programming, MTSS, etc.), support for students with special learning needs (students with disabilities, English language learners, etc.), and enrichment.	0.00%	56.1%	17.4%	18.4%	8.2%
Class sizes in your district	0.0%	28.6%	31.6%	24.5%	15.3%
Staff salaries in your district	2.0%	49.0%	16.3%	19.4%	13.3%
Course offerings for students in your district, including specials (art, music, gym, etc.), foreign language, advanced offerings (AP, IB, dual enrollment), career and technical education, and STEM	5.1%	31.6%	22.5%	26.5%	14.3%
Professional development opportunities at your school and/or district, including coaching, common planning or PLCs, opportunities for individualized or graduate-level learning, and job-embedded professional development and training	3.1%	38.8%	21.4%	24.5%	12.2%

**Table 2. Preferences for additional funding**

Focus group participants were asked, "If your district were to receive additional funding from the state, what are the top three areas you would want to devote additional funds to?" (n=98).

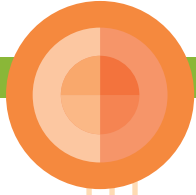
Area	Percentage
Supports for student and teacher mental, social, and emotional health, including availability of trained staff (counselors, social workers, etc.), professional development for teachers, social-emotional curriculum and resources, etc.	57.1
Student academic support, including availability of specialized staff (reading specialists, librarians, paraprofessionals, etc.), supplemental programs (tutoring, after-school and summer programming, MTSS, etc.), support for students with special learning needs (students with disabilities, English language learners, etc.), and enrichment.	55.1
School facilities, including buildings and grounds, parking lots, playing fields, furniture, fixed equipment, etc.	43.9
Increasing staff salaries in your district	38.8
Reducing class sizes in your district	34.7
Instructional materials - textbooks, instructional supplies, subscriptions to digital resources, etc.	19.4
School technology, including student and teacher devices (Chromebooks, tablets, computers, etc.), software, other educational technology such as Smartboards and document cameras, etc.	15.3
Improving course offerings for students in your district, including specials (art, music, gym, etc.), foreign language, advanced offerings (AP, IB, dual enrollment), career and technical education, and STEM	15.3
Improving professional development opportunities at your school and/or district, including coaching, common planning or PLCs, opportunities for individualized or graduate-level learning, and job-embedded professional development and training	12.2





# Endnotes

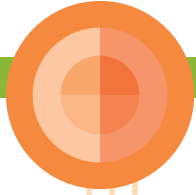
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20. Question: "How satisfied are you with the resources your district is able to provide for your school facilities, including buildings and grounds, parking lots, playing fields, furniture, fixed equipment, etc.?" Responses: (n=98) "Very dissatisfied" (50.0 percent), "Somewhat dissatisfied" (20.4 percent), "Somewhat satisfied" (20.4 percent), "Very satisfied" (9.2 percent), "Unsure" (0.0 percent).
21. See Table 2 in the Appendix.
22. All quotes from this section are in response to this question: "How satisfied are you with the resources your district is able to provide for your school facilities, including buildings and grounds, parking lots, playing fields, furniture, fixed equipment, etc.? Please provide additional detail to support your response."
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24. Question: "How satisfied are you with class sizes in your district?" Responses: (n=98) "Very dissatisfied" (28.6 percent), "Somewhat dissatisfied" (31.6 percent), "Somewhat satisfied" (24.5 percent), "Very satisfied" (15.3 percent), "Unsure" (0.0 percent).
25. This quote is in response to the question: "How satisfied are you with class sizes in your district? Please provide additional detail to support your response."
26. Question: "How satisfied are you with staff salaries in your district?" Responses: (n=98) "Very dissatisfied" (49.0 percent), "Somewhat dissatisfied" (16.3 percent), "Somewhat satisfied" (19.4 percent), "Very satisfied" (13.3 percent), "Unsure" (2.0 percent).
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29. This quote is in response to the question: "How satisfied are you with the resources your district is able to provide for student academic support, including availability of specialized staff (reading specialists, librarians, paraprofessionals, etc.), supplemental programs (tutoring, after-school and summer programming, MTSS, etc.), support for students with special learning needs (students with disabilities, English language learners, etc.), and enrichment? Please provide additional detail to support your response."
30. This quote is in response to the question: "Please add any remaining comments you have on how underfunding affects you and your students or how our current school funding system could be improved."
31. This quote is in response to the question: "How satisfied are you with the resources your district is able to provide for student academic support, including availability of specialized staff (reading specialists, librarians, paraprofessionals, etc.), supplemental programs (tutoring, after-school and summer programming, MTSS, etc.), support for students with special learning needs (students with disabilities, English language learners, etc.), and enrichment? Please provide additional detail to support your response."
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## ABOUT TEACH PLUS

Teach Plus is dedicated to the mission of empowering excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning, to create an education system driven by access and excellence for all.

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