

WHAT IS ADEQUACY?



For decades in Pennsylvania, the commonwealth has been falling behind other states when it comes to the share of funding they provide to school districts. This leaves the major responsibility for school funding up to local school districts, which vary greatly in their ability to raise local funds for schools. Even with high tax rates, property taxpayers in low-wealth school districts – from big cities to shrinking small towns – cannot generate sufficient school funding.

School funding levels from the state have historically been set by state officials without determining **what resources schools actually need**. We see annual budget fights over how to divide up a too-small pie – although it's clear that funding is **inadequate**. With such a low state contribution, school districts struggle to meet the needs of their students.

But now that education has been recognized as a fundamental right by Commonwealth Court, state officials are constitutionally obligated to ensure that every student receives “a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically.” This requires resources, and it brings up the concept of **adequacy**: The state must ensure that all public schools have adequate resources to meet student needs: quality and experienced teachers, school counselors, nurses, librarians, reading specialists, safe learning environments, and updated materials.

Starting in 2024, each school district in Pennsylvania, by law, has an **adequacy target** – a measure of what level of total funding the district needs. For the roughly 70% of districts (348 out of 500) that are spending less than that target amount, the size of their shortfall is calculated – this is called the district's **adequacy gap**. In 2024, the total combined adequacy gap for all Pennsylvania districts was a stunning \$4.8 billion.

In a step toward closing districts' gaps, state officials created a new funding stream, called the **adequacy supplement**, which is available exclusively to districts with adequacy gaps. In 2024, the state gave districts a total of \$494 million in adequacy supplements via what's called “Ready to Learn Block Grants.” This adequacy funding fills 11% of the adequacy shortfall that Pennsylvania school districts face.

**PENNSYLVANIA
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
ADEQUACY GAP**

11%

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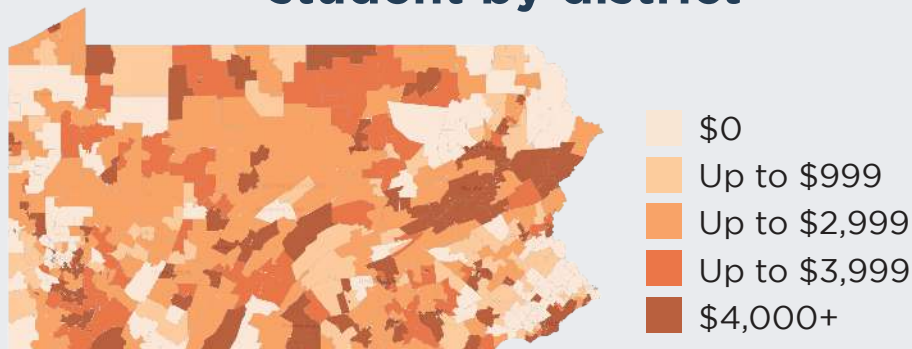


What the state has not yet done is to commit to a timeline for fully closing the remaining \$4 billion adequacy gap in a reasonable number of years.

How is adequacy calculated?

Two key concepts in the adequacy calculation are the **weighted student count** and the **base cost**.

Adequacy shortfalls per student by district



In determining what is an adequate funding level for a school district, the calculation considers the characteristics of the students being served. In Pennsylvania, the state's adequacy targets are calculated using multipliers to adjust for students with additional needs. These multipliers are used to compile a **weighted student count**. Here's an example:

School District A and School District B both serve 1,000 students.

Many students in School District A live in poverty and receive special education or English language instruction. More resources will be needed by School District A to help serve their students. Multipliers are used in the adequacy calculation to adjust for students with additional needs. Therefore, School District A might end up with a weighted student count of 1,500.

School District B serves less students who require additional services, so the weighted student count for their district after the adequacy calculation might only be 1,100.

Each district's adequacy target is calculated by multiplying this weighted student count by a standard base cost per student. The state calculates the base cost for determining adequacy targets using a "successful schools" approach, looking at spending levels in school districts in the state where nearly all students are graduating from high school and meeting state standards. The state calculates a standard base cost per weighted student from the spending levels in these districts. This base cost reflects what level of per-student spending is needed in Pennsylvania to achieve school success.

So, while School District A and School District B serve the same number of students, School District A may have a much higher base cost per student and require additional funding.

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