

Issue Summary

Pittsburgh Public Schools

The Issue:

The Pittsburgh Public School system is too expensive, with general fund expenditures of more than \$18,000 per pupil. For these outlays, taxpayers are not getting a decent return as the district's pupils continue to rank near the bottom of academic achievement across the state. As a result of high taxes and poor academic performance, the district continues to lose students with enrollment falling below 30,000 in 2006, from 38,500 in 2001.

What We Know:

Pittsburgh's per pupil spending is out of line with other major cities such as Chicago, Orlando, San Diego, and Boston. In 2005, those cities had an average per pupil spending of \$10,500 with the highest being Orlando at \$12,800. Pittsburgh's per pupil amount was 59 percent higher than the average of those cities.

Pittsburgh schools allocate more than half their budgets to expenditures other than administration and instruction. Benchmark cities spent 60 percent or more on administration and instruction. For example it was learned that in 2003, four custodial workers, whose base salaries were below \$40,000 were actually paid in excess of \$90,000 in 2004. A total of 11 custodians earned more than \$80,000 that year—in large part due to overtime. Nearly 10 percent of the employees (390) collected more than 100 percent of their base pay in overtime. In addition to the massive amounts of overtime, many employees are entitled to other pay that is tied to longevity and education. These overly generous compensation packages reflect a breakdown in managerial and financial control.

It is important to note that state funding contributes 40 percent, or more than \$200 million, of the total revenues coming into the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Despite the high levels of expenditures, students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are not performing well. Students continue to lag behind state and county averages in both reading and math proficiencies. For eleventh-grade students, those closest to graduating, less than 51 percent scored proficient on the state's PSSA test, while 40.2 percent scored proficient in math. Overall the district ranks near the bottom of the state in both reading and math proficiencies—a travesty given the amount taxpayers pour into the district.

Recommendations:

The spending of Pittsburgh Public schools should be in line with those of other major cities. Per-pupil spending needs to be reduced to at least \$12,500, with proper adjustments for inflation and enrollment changes.

Spending on compensation packages needs to be given serious consideration. A 2005 audit found that Pittsburgh's total outlays per staff member in 2002 stood at \$97,800 while the average for Midwestern cities Toledo, Kansas City, and Milwaukee, averaged about \$72,000.

- A better approach for Pittsburgh Public Schools would be a "No Excuses" philosophy. This philosophy emphasizes discipline in the classroom, gives principals the latitude to hire and fire teachers, and stresses the fact that children will master the material taught. In a "No Excuses" school, each child is expected to learn and progress educationally. No excuses from students, teachers, or principals are acceptable. Frequent testing to provide feedback is mandatory.
- The District should also encourage the creation of a wide range of Charter Schools that could provide a variety of educational options for parents to choose from as well as creating competition for the non-charter schools.

Allegheny Institute References:

Pittsburgh Schools: Preposterously Expensive But Still Unable to Hold Students. Policy Brief: Volume 6, No.61. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol6no61.pdf>

Pittsburgh School Audit Was a Waste of Tax Dollars. Policy Brief: Volume 5, No.25. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol5no25.pdf>

Pittsburgh Schools: Unconscionable Spending. Policy Brief: Volume 4, No.43. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol4no43.pdf>

Defenders of Spending: Give it up. Policy Brief: Volume 4, No.47. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol4no47.pdf>

Another Lame Education Study Group. Policy Brief: Volume 4, No.9. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol4no9.pdf>

Time to Really Fix Pittsburgh Schools. Policy Brief: Volume 4, No.33. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol4no33.pdf>

A Pittsburgh Educational Proposal. Policy Brief: Volume 3, No.47. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol3no47.pdf>

Pittsburgh Schools: \$15,500 Per Student and Rising. Policy Brief: Volume 3, No.51. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol3no51.pdf>

Pittsburgh's \$18,500 Student. Policy Brief: Volume 2, No.15. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol2no15.pdf>

Pittsburgh Public Schools Need a "No Excuses" Approach. Policy Brief: Volume 2, No.50. <http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org/briefs/vol2no50.pdf>