

### **Allegheny County school district financial data over the last ten years**

**Summary:** This *Policy Brief* looks at data on average daily membership, expenditures and revenues for Allegheny County school districts over the last 10 years by looking at changes from the 2011-12 school year, the 2015-16 and 2020-21 school years. The latter is the most recent year with available data, all of which comes from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

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#### *Average daily membership*

There are 43 school districts in Allegheny County. In the 2011-12 school year, the average daily membership (ADM) in the 43 districts stood at 152,629 students. The largest enrollment was in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (28,206) followed by Mt. Lebanon (8,346). There were three districts with fewer than 1,000 students—Cornell (702), Duquesne (739) and Clairton (937).

Four years later, 2015-16 ADM in the 43 districts had fallen to 148,405—a decrease of nearly 3 percent. Of the Allegheny County districts, 34, or 80 percent, experienced ADM declines over the period. Wilkinsburg suffered the biggest loss (-19.58 percent) followed by Steel Valley (-12.88 percent). It's worth noting that the Wilkinsburg district agreed to send its high school students to the Pittsburgh district for the 2016-17 school year. That agreement has been extended to the 2026-27 school year.

The largest percentage ADM gains were posted by South Fayette (18.11 percent) and Duquesne (8.73 percent). It's important to note that Duquesne entered into an agreement to send its high schoolers to neighboring districts in 2007 and middle schoolers in 2012. Thus, Duquesne's ADM only covers those attending grades k-5.

For the 2020-21 school year, county ADM was down further from five years earlier, dropping to 144,901—2.36 percent lower than in the 2015-16 school year. In this time frame, 27 districts, or 63 percent, had lower ADMs. The Cornell district had the largest decline (-15.35 percent) followed by the Highlands district (-11.57). The biggest gain again occurred in the South Fayette district (12.70 percent), followed closely by West Jefferson Hills (12.32 percent) and Duquesne (12.31 percent).

When looking at the overall ADM changes from 2011-12 to 2020-21, Pittsburgh, the county's largest district, lost the most students with a 3,184 drop. The biggest gainer was South Fayette with an increase of 854.

There was a change in how the data were presented in the 2019-20 school year as the state broke out charter school enrollment as a separate category. Prior to that, the ADM count for each district included students for whom the district was financially responsible (*Policy Brief, Vol.21, No. 37*). In the 2020-21 school year, there were 10,000 students attending 24 charter schools located in Allegheny County—6.9 percent of the total public-school population for that year. Three years prior, 2019-20, there were 8,926 pupils attending 22 Allegheny County-based charter schools—6.1 percent of school district enrollment of 147,032.

In the few years that the Pennsylvania Department of Education has kept track of this data, the number of students enrolled in charter schools has increased, albeit slightly, and it will be worth looking at as time progresses. However, adding the number of charter school students to the 2020-21 totals, the result (154,901) shows scant growth to the number of students attending Allegheny County school districts over the last 10 years (152,629)—just 1.5 percent.

### *Revenues*

As mentioned above, there are 43 school districts in Allegheny County, although one district, Sto-Rox, did not submit financial information for the 2020-21 school year.

Districts receive money from three sources: local, state and federal governments. Local revenues are primarily derived from property taxes and wage taxes. Obviously, wealthier districts with higher property values rely more heavily on local tax revenues. For the 2020-21 school year, the average school district in Allegheny County received 62.6 percent of its support from local sources (\$46.8 million of \$74.8 million). It ranged from a low of 11.5 percent (Duquesne) to a high of 81.9 percent (Quaker Valley).

Statewide revenues are based on formulas (see *Policy Briefs, Vol. 21, No. 31 and Vol. 15, No. 29*) where poorer districts receive more funding per student than wealthier districts. In the 2020-21 school year, the average state support was 34.4 percent. State support ranged from a low of 15.3 percent (Quaker Valley) to a high of 80.5 percent (Duquesne). Pittsburgh, with much larger ADM, received (41.5 percent)—\$288.1 million of \$693.5 million in total revenues.

For the 2020-21 school year, county districts received \$3.14 billion in revenues from all sources. This was up 29 percent from 10 years earlier, the 2011-12 school year (\$2.43 billion, Sto-Rox not included). From local sources, the increase was 29.6 percent, 35.8 percent from state sources and 18.2 percent from federal sources.

The federal increase came primarily from the stimulus money doled out in the pandemic aftermath. From the 2011-12 school year to 2015-16 school year, the federal contribution to the average Allegheny County school district had decreased by 20 percent (\$2.2 million vs. \$2.8 million). From 2015-16 to 2020-21, the jump in federal funding was 48 percent (\$3.3 million vs. \$2.2 million).

### *Expenditures*

In the 2011-12 school year, the average school district in Allegheny County had \$58.7 million in total expenditures—a bit higher than the average total revenue realized (\$57.1 million). That amount increased 11.7 percent to reach \$65.6 million in 2015-16 and then another 20.1 percent to reach \$78.8 million in 2020-21.

As total expenditures cover a wide range of areas such as capital, debt, administration and transportation, the focus will change to instructional expenses.

Instructional expenses make up more than half of expenditures for the average school district in the county. In 2011-12, instructional expenses comprised 55.6 percent of total expenditures and that grew to 56.5 percent in 2015-16 and then to 57.3 percent in 2020-21.

Average instructional expenditures grew from \$32.3 million in 2011-12 to \$37.1 million in 2015-16 (15.1 percent) to \$45.2 million (21.8 percent) in 2020-21.

### *Per pupil amounts*

A more appropriate way to look at educational revenues and expenditures is on a per pupil basis. For the 2011-12 school year, the school district average per pupil instructional expenditure was \$8,572. Wilkesburg had the highest (\$13,086) followed by Duquesne (\$12,961) and Pittsburgh (\$12,359). South Fayette (\$6,242) had the lowest instructional expenses per pupil followed by South Park (\$6,769). By the 2020-21 school year, that amount jumped 47.9 percent to \$12,678. The most expensive districts remained unchanged: Pittsburgh (\$18,438), Wilkesburg (\$18,419) and Duquesne (\$16,198). The bottom changed, as Baldwin-Whitehall had the lowest (\$8,992) followed by South Fayette (\$9,371). No other districts were below \$10,000.

Total expenditures per pupil also had a similar jump of 43.9 percent during this time frame (\$15,690 to \$22,583). The top spending district in 2011-12 was Montour (\$24,519) followed by Pittsburgh (\$20,999) and Quaker Valley (\$20,365). South Allegheny was the lowest spending district (\$11,522) followed by West Jefferson Hills (\$12,340).

For the 2020-21 school year the districts with the highest per pupil total expenditures were Montour (\$40,401) Riverview (\$34,263) and Moon (\$29,944). These districts carry a high amount of debt that makes the per pupil expenditures high. The lowest spending district is Baldwin-Whitehall (\$15,447) followed by West Jefferson Hills (\$17,442).

Per pupil revenues from all sources were, on average, \$15,365 in the 2011-12 school year before jumping 39.3 percent to an average of \$21,405 in the 2020-21 school year. Per pupil total revenues, on average, are close to per pupil expenditures. The district with the most total revenue per pupil in 2011-12 was Pittsburgh (\$20,906) followed by Quaker Valley (\$20,812) and then Duquesne (\$20,744). They were the only districts to collect more than \$20,000 per pupil in total revenues.

For the 2020-21 school year the top per pupil revenue district was Wilkesburg (\$29,027) followed by Quaker Valley (\$28,109) and then Pittsburgh (\$27,716). Wilkesburg's per pupil number was obviously aided by the reduced ADM number which is the denominator

for this value as 253 of their students were lost when they sent their high schoolers to Pittsburgh.

### *Conclusion*

The worrisome trend for Allegheny County school districts is the stagnant enrollment. This does not bode well for not only the school districts but for the economy, as any viable economy relies on a steady stream of people entering the workforce. A stagnant school-aged population over the last 10 years could hamper future economic growth in the county and region as it is likely this is not a problem confined to Allegheny County. Bear in mind that the lack of appreciable growth in school-age population is consistent with the lack of significant population growth since 2000.

Nationally, the Consumer Price Index has increased by 20.5 percent from 2011 to 2021. Total revenues for all school districts in Allegheny County have increased by 31 percent during this time while total expenditures have increased by 34 percent. Keep in mind that the federal stimulus funding that helped boost revenues in the wake of the pandemic will eventually run out. Where will districts find replacement funds?

And as we have been documenting for years, most recently in *Policy Briefs, Vol. 22, No. 15, and Vol. 21, No. 38*, despite such high expenditures and revenues, some districts produce subpar academic results.

There has been no progress, or even desire, to rein in education expenditures over the years. There has been no appetite at the state level to either provide parents with school choice or eliminate the right of teachers to strike. As a result, these costs will continue to increase as the public-school monopoly will maintain its grip on Pennsylvania.

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