



June 10, 2026

Policy Brief: Volume 26, Number 21

School enrollment and education performance

Introduction: This *Policy Brief* examines two aspects of public-school education in several Allegheny County districts. The first section looks at enrollment as measured by number of students per 100 persons in the district. The second section focuses on the state Keystone test scores for 11th graders in each district and the expenditures per enrolled student in each district.

The chosen public-school districts are Pittsburgh; Mt. Lebanon; Upper St. Clair; Bethel Park; Riverview; McKeesport; Clairton; Moon and Keystone Oaks. Note that several districts are made up of more than one municipality: Pittsburgh (2); Riverview (2); McKeesport (5); Moon (2) and Keystone Oaks (3). Data are taken from the U.S. Bureau of Census and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Students per 100-persons 2025-26

School District	Population	Enrollment	Students/100 persons
Upper St. Clair	20,466	4,033	19.7
Mt. Lebanon	32,552	5,470	16.8
Moon	29,119	4,105	14.1
Clairton	5,876	791	13.5
Bethel Park	32,074	4,035	12.6
McKeesport	27,435	2,722	9.9
Riverview	8,972	1,025	11.4
Keystone Oaks	20,494	1,977	9.6
Pittsburgh	310,919	19,122	6.2
<i>Sample average</i>			<i>12.6</i>
Statewide (est.)	13,100,000	1,664,150	12.7

Note, first, the wide range of students-to-population ratio exhibited by the nine districts. Pittsburgh's school district (which includes Mt. Oliver) had by far the lowest ratio of 6.2 students per 100 residents. Enrollment has fallen dramatically over the last few decades as has population. Although its population has picked up slightly recently following decades of decline, it remains far below the 1990 reading of 370,000. By comparison,

Keystone Oaks’ ratio of students per 100 residents was slightly higher than Pittsburgh at 9.6.

The highest ratio of students-to-population was posted by Upper St. Clair at 19.7 per 100 followed by Mt. Lebanon at 16.8. Both districts are notable for their history of very strong academic performances by their students. That likely makes them desired locations to live for parents who prize academic achievement very highly. Each posted a student-to-population ratio well above the 12.6 unweighted average for the group.

Per-pupil spending and 2025 Keystone Exam results

Pennsylvania requires high school juniors to take the Keystone Exams, originally meant to determine suitability for graduation. But after too many years of poor scores by too many students, they are now more of an indicator of the progress *needed* by many students. Nonetheless, they are a statewide test and as such give a quantifiable look at the failures and successes posted by Pennsylvania high school students and the quantifiable differences in performance among the state’s high schools.

Keystone Exam results—percent scoring proficient or advanced

School District	Spending per student	Math (Algebra I)	Science (Biology)	Literature (Language)
Pittsburgh	\$43,841	33.8	35.0	54.4
McKeesport	\$33,263	8.6	22.9	36.3
Clairton	\$27,812	8.3	10.3	36.2
Bethel Park	\$27,486	56.4	64.5	78.5
Upper St. Clair	\$26,248	79.4	82.1	94.5
Riverview	\$26,175	38.6	55.9	71.9
Keystone Oaks	\$25,195	56.6	64.4	77.5
Moon	\$23,516	65.1	64.9	75.2
Mt. Lebanon	\$21,873	81.2	82.6	94.1
<i>State Average</i>	<i>\$23,786</i>	<i>44.3</i>	<i>49.4</i>	<i>62.1</i>

Data on spending per student was taken from the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s 2024-25 expenditures report for each district. Each district’s total expenditure was then divided by the enrollment data from the previous table. Clairton didn’t submit data for 2024-25, so the 2023-24 amount was used.

Clearly, in this sample of Allegheny County school districts, Mt. Lebanon and Upper St. Clair stand out as the best academically in terms of Keystone Exam test scores. Interestingly, Mt. Lebanon’s spending per student is the lowest in this group of districts and is below the state average. At the same time, the three poorest academically performing districts spent the most per pupil.

Pittsburgh’s school district, with over \$43,000 in spending per pupil, posts percentages of students scoring proficient and advanced that are well below districts with far less spending. Massive racial differences in test performance among Pittsburgh’s 11th graders

are very worrisome. On the math test, only 14.7 percent of black students scored proficient or advanced while white students scored 59.7 percent.

Note: The Institute has mentioned often—that the Windber Area School District in Somerset County, a district that is economically challenged, spent \$19,611 per student in 2025, far less than any of the districts reviewed above. Yet, on the Keystone Exams, 60.5 percent of their students scored proficient or advanced on math, 57.9 percent on science and 68 percent on literature. These scores are better than the state averages and certainly far better than Pittsburgh’s, which spends more than twice as much per student and is much better than either McKeesport or Clairton, each spending considerably more than Windber.

Conclusion

Clearly, extremely high spending levels are not necessary to achieve good academic outcomes. Indeed, when spending per pupil exceeds \$23,000 per year it is not clear how much additional benefit is achieved by spending thousands more per student. To the extent that state taxpayers are providing much of the funding in poorly performing districts, the state Legislature and the governor must examine thoroughly what is happening. No doubt entrenched interests such as teachers’ unions will resist any efforts to lower excessive spending per pupil in many districts, especially state spending.

It is an outrage to see \$30,000 plus per pupil—much of it state taxpayer funded—being spent that accomplishes so little in terms of academic achievement.

Years go by and the situation in the relative performance in the districts reviewed sees little change. The poorly performing districts do not show any significant improvement, especially considering such high outlays per student.

Jake Haulk, Ph.D., President-emeritus

Policy Briefs may be reprinted as long as proper attribution is given.

Allegheny Institute for Public Policy
305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234
Phone (412) 440-0079
E-mail: aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org
Website: www.alleghenyinstitute.org
X (Twitter): [AlleghenyInstil](https://twitter.com/AlleghenyInstil)