

The Pennsylvania Costing-Out Study

Introduction: How much does it cost to educate all public school students in Pennsylvania so they are prepared to meet challenging state academic standards? Are these costs different for schools in urban or rural areas or for growing or small school districts? Are educational funding needs different for students with academic disadvantages, such as children with disabilities, English language learners, and students in poverty?

Until recently, Pennsylvania has never tried to figure out these issues. Pennsylvania adopted challenging academic standards even before the “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) Act was formed by the federal government in 2001. But the state has not provided the funding needed to educate students so they are prepared to meet the academic standards.

In November 2007, Pennsylvania will reveal the results of a statewide “costing-out study.” This study will inform lawmakers and citizens about the exact amount of resources that each school district needs to adequately help all of its students reach academic success. The results of this study present an important opportunity for students, public schools, and all Pennsylvanians.

What is a costing-out study? Costing-out is a scientific approach to learning how much funding school districts need to provide a quality education for all students. Costing-out studies investigate a wide range of factors that impact the cost of education, including factors outside of the classroom. For example, school size and geographic location may impact educational costs. Other factors include the individual needs and circumstances of different students, such as children living in poverty, English language learners, and children with disabilities.

Why are these studies important? Costing-out studies are important because they explain the links between adequate funding, student success, and school accountability. Study results are based on hard data, expert research, and the input of educators, parents, and other stakeholders. Costing-out studies are also important because they provide information needed to fund public schools more effectively, efficiently, and equally. Costing-out studies inform us about the real cost of education and reduce the influence of politics on school funding. Performing a new costing-out study every few years can help to ensure a fair school funding system for the future.

How was Pennsylvania’s costing-out study performed? Nearly 40 other states have conducted costing-out studies over the last twenty-five years. The Pennsylvania General Assembly authorized the first Pennsylvania study in June of 2006. The State Board of Education was given funding for the study and in December of 2006 the Board hired an experienced consulting company – Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) – to conduct the study. Since December, the Board has supervised the study, issued an interim report in May of 2007, and will issue a final report in mid-November of 2007.

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Under the supervision of the State Board, APA obtained data, performed analysis, and met with experts, educators, and parents to assess education funding in Pennsylvania. APA evaluated this information using four methodologies:

- Successful School District: Estimates what all schools should spend based on the average costs of the highest achieving schools.
- Professional Judgment Method: Uses the experience and knowledge of teams of experts (including parents and educators) to determine what schools and students need for a quality education.
- Evidence Based Approach: Creates model schools using current education research and conducts web-based inquiry asking educators and citizens for feedback.
- Cost-function Approach: Relies heavily on statistics to analyze performance, spending and efficiency.

APA and the State Board of Education will release the findings of the study in November of 2007. The State Board will then hold six regional public briefings where citizens can ask questions and give their opinions on the results of the study.

What will Pennsylvania's costing-out study tell us? The study will tell us, for each school district and statewide, how much it costs to give all students a quality education and provide them with a genuine opportunity to meet state academic standards. The study's data and conclusions will explain how the cost of education is impacted by factors such as: poverty; limited English proficiency; student disabilities; scarcity and density of population; issues related to rural, urban, or suburban nature of the school district; and gifted students. The study will also specifically address the cost impact of student population growth and decline, different transportation needs, and other variables such as school district size.

How can citizens participate in the release of the costing out study? Citizens can participate in the release of the costing-out study by staying informed, spreading the word, and sharing their stories. Up-to-date progress on the costing-out study and its release can be tracked on the State Department of Education Website: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/site/default.asp.

Please let us know how we can help. We encourage you to tell others about the release of the costing out study, attend meetings, organize meetings, write to local legislators encouraging them to support the results of the study, and contact local media outlets. Please share with us your stories about the problems caused by the under-funding of public schools. Similarly, we welcome your letters or photographs showing what it's like for you to learn and work in under-funded schools.