



# Executive Summary

## October 2023

### K-12 Education

#### **State of Ohio Schools 2023**

A legacy of neglect — and how to overcome it

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The pandemic brought on unprecedented difficulties for students and educators in K-12 public schools. While Ohio falls towards the middle in national rankings of the quality of K-12 education, test scores for kindergarteners, third graders, and eighth graders have dropped significantly in the school years following the start of the pandemic. Other metrics, like graduation rates, are improving despite the recent challenges for K-12 education. As for school staff, thousands of young teachers are leaving the profession early in their career; districts across the state are facing bus driver shortages; and many schools are not employing enough psychologists, counselors, and nurses to fully support their students. Addressing low starting pay, recruiting teachers from underrepresented demographics, and improving staff-to-student ratios can help Ohio's children get the quality education they deserve.

The recent budget process resulted in some improvements for Ohio schools, including increases in foundation funding and per-pupil spending. However, these positive changes came with an explosion in funding for private tuition vouchers, which could have been better spent on public schools.

Although the budget funds two more years of the Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP), the plan — which would finally bring Ohio's school funding formula into alignment with the state constitution — requires two years of funding beyond that. Legislators' failure to guarantee funds for the full plan could have a deep impact on how we fund our schools. To ensure fair, equitable funding for all of Ohio's public-school students, lawmakers must fully commit to funding the FSFP.

#### **Key Findings**

##### **School funding and the FSFP**

- Lawmakers continued to phase in the FSFP for the FY24 and FY25 budget
- Foundation funding increased by a little over \$500 from the previous budget, increasing allocations to \$8 billion each in each FY.
- Per-pupil spending increased by 12.1%.
- The state share of instruction (SSI), increased from 5% to 10%.

### **State of educators and support staff**

- 16,000 teachers have left the profession since 2020, and teachers in their first five years of teaching account for about one-third of those leaving, despite making up a quarter of all teachers.
- The total number of newly licensed teachers has decreased from 7,634 in 2013 to 5,000 in 2022, indicating recruitment issues for the teaching profession.
- The average starting salary for teachers is \$37,569, well below the national average (\$41,163) and starting salaries for college-educated Ohioans in other fields. The average starting salary is a 7.88% decrease from 2017 when adjusting for inflation.
- The average salary for educators in 2022 was \$69,130, which is a 6.3% decrease from 2018 when adjusting for inflation.
- The FY24 and FY25 budget increases the base minimum salary to 35,000 from 30,000, but this still falls behind the national average and starting salaries for other comparable jobs.
- Although Black people make up 12.3% of the state's entire workforce, only 4.2% of Ohio teachers are Black.
- Changes to state transportation requirements may make it easier for schools to fall out of compliance, resulting in funding cuts that will only exacerbate school transportation issues.
- Statewide staff-to-student ratios for school psychologists, counselors, and nurses fall short of recommended ratios, indicating these key supportive staff are stretched too thin to adequately help all of their students.

### **State of students and academic achievement**

- Racial disparities in school funding are reflected in test scores, graduation rates and access to college-level courses.
- Students who are classified as Economically Disadvantaged have the lowest performance scores on state ELA and math proficiency tests across grade levels.
- The percentage of children demonstrating kindergarten readiness decreased from 41.5% in 2017-18 to only 35.4% in 2022-23, while the share of students showing they need significant help increased from 22.4% to 30.1%.

We can support Ohio's public school students and educators by fully phasing in the [Fair School Funding Plan](#) in the next budget cycle, eliminating universal vouchers to protect public school funding, increasing the starting teacher salary, reducing barriers to the educational profession, and implementing a statewide universal pre-k program to set young students up for success for the rest of their education.