

K-12 education

Funding Ohio's future

How Ohio funds K-12 education & how we can do better

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Ohio educates 1.6 million children attending school in our big cities, suburbs, and small towns. For years, our school funding system pitted communities against each other and private and charter schools against public schools.

Based on nationwide Education Week performance rankings, our state currently ranks 46th in equitable distribution of funding. We can draw a straight line between the racial and economic achievement gaps and decades of the state's failure to provide Black, brown, economically disadvantaged students¹ and students with disabilities what they need to succeed in school.

Long before COVID, many policymakers neglected public schools, siphoning away their funding for tax giveaways² to corporations and undercutting them with schemes that send public money to charters and private schools. Combined with the effects of COVID, Ohio's legacy of inadequate and inequitable funding has weakened the role school plays as a foundational public service for families and communities.

Key Findings

1. The budget proposed by Gov. DeWine would shrink the total biennial investment in K-12 education from \$30.54 billion to \$28.69 billion, a \$1.85 billion (16%) reduction.
2. When adjusted for inflation, foundation funding in Gov. DeWine's proposal would remain nearly 3% below spending in the FY 2020-21 biennium.
3. Gov. DeWine proposes continuing to phase in the Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP) over the next two years, though he has not allocated any additional funds to do so. The governor's budget uses outdated cost estimates from 2018 to calculate funding without accounting for inflation.
4. Ohio is experiencing a school transportation crisis resulting from a shortage of buses and qualified drivers.³ In the next budget school transportation funding is expected to increase by 8.7% in FY 24 and an additional 7.4% in FY 25.

¹ "Economically Disadvantaged" refers to students who are either eligible for free or reduced-price school meals or live in households where another household member is eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Some of the increase in this class of students is due to changes in school meal programs to ensure more kids have access to food.

² Schiller, Zach and Wendy Patton, "Senate tax cuts would go mostly to the affluent," Policy Matters Ohio, June 3, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3a0vxn6>

³ "Parents frustrated over bussing delays and no shows, more districts could face penalties," March 4, 2022, <https://bit.ly/4037cfw>

5. The proposed budget for FY 2024-25 includes \$15 million for school-based healthcare.⁴ School-based health centers help more children in underserved communities get the health services they need.
6. The governor would spend \$388 million to place School Resource Officers (SROs) in every school.⁵ Considering how little data is available to assess SROs' efficacy and impact on safety, the program's high price tag is cause for concern.
7. The Governor's Literacy Challenge would distribute funding for literacy improvement ahead of the legislature's budget recommendations.⁶ This includes getting more parents and families involved in literacy development, improving literacy among inmates, a one-time \$64 million investment in instructional materials, \$18 million for literacy coaches in districts with low test scores, and \$48 million for teachers to attend professional trainings on the science of reading.⁷
8. Gov. DeWine's proposed budget also includes increased funding to make teacher certification and licensing more affordable, increasing from \$12.2 billion in FY 2022 to a proposed \$14.7 billion in FY 2025. There will also be a modest increase for improving teacher quality with a proposed \$77 million allocated in both FY 2024 and FY 2025, up from \$70 million in FY 2022. Educator preparation funding will receive the greatest increase, from \$4.7 million in FY 2022 to \$13.4 million for FY 2024 and FY 2025 — a 285% increase.⁸
10. In FY 2022 the state sent \$1.45 billion to charter schools — up from nearly \$620 million in 2007.⁹
11. The governor's budget proposal continues to fund vouchers using foundation funding, allotting \$660.8 million in FY 2024, and \$61.6 million in FY 2025. This will further erode the share going to traditional public schools.

Ensuring a thorough and efficient system of common schools means correcting disparities generated from over-reliance on property taxes by fully implementing the Fair School Funding Plan, with accurate estimates of how much it really costs to educate our kids.

The state has sufficient revenue to meet these challenges, so long as lawmakers make public schools and kids a priority. Ohio has the money to fully commit to the FSFP in this budget. Instead of phasing in funding piece by piece, year after year, lawmakers should dedicate the funds needed to fully fund the FSFP now. Ohioans must come together to demand lawmakers live up to the promise of the FSFP in the next biennium and beyond.

⁴ 2022 Kids Count Data Book," Annie E. Casey Foundation, <https://bit.ly/3zLHMd3>

⁵ Executive Budget FY 2024-25, <https://bit.ly/3MA3Kap>

⁶ "Governor DeWine Signs Executive Order" March 23, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3UrOs9v>

⁷ LePard, Clay, "Gov. DeWine signs executive order urging support to improve literacy among children," News 5 Cleveland, <https://bit.ly/3ZW2RvP>

⁸ See note 6.

⁹ Maloney, Larry, "Charter School Funding: Inequity Persists," <https://bit.ly/3zMGb6L>