



PASA POINTS

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

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About PASA

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) is an organization that is instrumental in developing successful school leadership through advocacy, support, sustainment of high quality school administrators and a statewide collegial network.

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In the last decade, PA
state's share of Special
Education funding
has fallen from

36%
down to
25%

The share of local revenue continues to increase each year to cover the cost of state and federally mandated special education expenses.

In this issue

The Special Education Deficit

- Special Education Enrollment is Rising
- Special Education Costs are Increasing
- Local School District Share is Increasing
- The State and Federal Share is Decreasing

The Growing Special Education Deficit

State and federal special education mandates drive the provision of special education services to eligible students and, as a result, school districts have limited flexibility in controlling these costs. If a student requires special education services, programs, transportation or private placements, school districts must cover those costs.

In 2017-18, school districts spent more than \$5.27 billion on special education programs and services. Of this total, more than \$4.55 billion was spent on special education instructional costs - that's 86% of the total expenditure. The remaining \$720 million represents the special education support services, which include services such as special education transportation, guidance services, psychological services, social work and nursing services.

Growth in school district special education expenditures has been significant, and that impact is compounded by state special education subsidy that hasn't kept pace. Special education costs across all 500 school districts increased by \$1.28 billion between 2012-13 and 2017-18, with special education instructional costs increasing more than \$1 billion during this time frame, and special education support services increasing by \$185 million.

Based on 2019-20 General Fund Budgets submitted to PDE, school districts budgeted \$4.93 billion in 2019-20 in special education instructional costs, a \$368.7 million increase from the actual amount of special education instructional costs reported in AFRs for 2017-18.

What's driving the cost growth? An overall increase in special education enrollment is one of the top reasons for increased special education costs over the past four years.

	2013-2014	2017-2018	Increase	Percentage
Category 1 Students	278,297	303,525	25,228	2.27%
Category 2 Students	18,026	22,180	4,154	5.76%
Category 3 Students	6,754	9,104	2,350	8.70%
Total	303,077	334,809	31,732	2.62%

"It's no use saying, 'We are doing our best.' You have to succeed in doing what is necessary."

Winston Churchill



**Pennsylvania Association
of School Administrators**

Proud Leadership for Pennsylvania's Schools

PASA Principles

All partners in education must stand accountable for their contributions to public schools and the impact their role has on student learning. This includes:

The Commonwealth's commitment to public education and recognition of shared responsibility with local communities for providing resources adequate to comply with laws and regulations regarding public education and essential to support student learning in Pennsylvania's public schools

The teaching profession's obligation to utilize evidence-based and research-based instructional strategies

Administrators' obligation to ensure that high quality leadership is in place to lead efforts to improve student learning

Student and family commitment to pursue, promote and support the value of education and life-long learning

Higher education's commitment to preparing future teachers, offering dual-enrollment courses for students and partnering with school districts to ensure student readiness

Commitment from the profession, the public, the media and the wider community in acknowledging the high importance of public education and the teaching profession to ensure a strong democracy

The greater business community's commitment to workforce development and career and college readiness

School district hiring information reveals an increase in the need for outside or private special education placements, an increase in the need to hire additional special education staff (including teachers, aides and nurses), and an increase in the need for special education transportation services. All of these are consistently reported by school districts as drivers of special education costs. Growth in charter school special education enrollment also exacerbates school district special education costs.

Obviously, as the number of students requiring special education programs and services increases, so does the associated costs. To accommodate the increases in special education enrollment, school districts have hired additional special education staff, adding 356 special education teachers between 2017-18 and 2018-19 alone.

Additionally, school districts continue to report increases in the number of students requiring outside or private special education placements. School district special education payments to intermediate units grew \$97.2 million or almost 13.5% between 2014-15 and 2017-18, while payments to Approved Private Schools and Chartered Schools for high-need special education students grew almost \$37.5 million or 26.7% between 2014-15 and 2017-18.

Overall, the data continues to tell the story of ongoing increases in special education costs for school districts. While the growth in special education costs has been minimally offset by small increases in state special education funding, the fact is that special education costs are growing far faster than state funding increases. The result is that the state's share of funding special education continues to fall year over year, and school districts continue to shift resources from other areas of the budget, reduce or eliminate programs or raise property taxes to balance their budget.

Over the past decade the share of state funding for special education in our public schools has decreased from 36% to 25%. Unfortunately, local taxpayers have been forced to pick up the tab for these programs that children are entitled to receive by state and federal law. Significant increases are needed to assist public school districts in meeting the needs of some of our most vulnerable students to ensure they have the skills necessary to be successful in their life's pursuit.

PASA respectfully submits that the proposed increase of \$25 million in Special Education Funding for fiscal year 2020-2021 is not adequate to provide the educational programs required for our special needs students. It is imperative that state government, the federal government, and local school district share this responsibility as equal partners to ensure that all students are provided the education they deserve. It is time for the state and federal government to provide a fair share of this critical funding for our children.