



School Spending, Explained

What principals and parents need to know about new “per pupil expenditure” provisions

A new provision of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes new public reporting requirements that impact principals directly. States are now required to calculate a per pupil expenditure (PPE) based upon the local, state, and federal dollars spent at each school.

Communities will now be able to compare spending from school to school, as opposed to getting

an aggregate number for the district, with student outcomes. Principals will be on the front lines of this discussion with community members, district leaders, and the media.

Here’s what you’ll need to know:

1. **Know when and where PPE data will be released.** States will release per pupil data no later than the 2019–2020 school year.

While not every state will report PPE data on report cards, some have made it available on websites in order to make comparisons between schools.

2. **Understand your school’s funding costs.** Multiple funding streams impact a school’s operational costs and budget. Know how much money your school spends and how PPE results are calculated.

3. **Identify gaps in resource allocation.** Funding is one of many resources that can support equity and school success. Schools might serve students with high spending but be underresourced in other areas, such as access to a rigorous curriculum, teacher and leader expertise, and access to professional development.

4. **Build principal autonomy and advocate for your needs.** While many decisions about funding and staffing are within the purview of district leaders, principals still have opportunities to leverage resources and ask for support. Use the data to talk to district leaders about your school's needs and determine ways to achieve desired outcomes.

5. **Communicate with parents, faculty/staff, and community leaders.** Upon reviewing PPE data, parents and community members might have questions about funding discrepancies and spread misinformation. It is important to communicate with parents and community leaders about the PPE results in a productive manner, including any important contextual information about your school. Here's how:

- Work with district leaders to ensure that communications about PPE for your district and school are in a format that is understandable; include accessible language and visuals.
- Share PPE results with teachers and staff in your school before the results are released.
- Include a paragraph about PPE results in

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communications to parents. Have publications translated into different languages as needed.

- Solicit input from parents and teachers for recommendations to remedy any resource gaps.
- Meet with community and business leaders in your district to educate them about your school's PPE results and how they can support your efforts toward meeting students' needs.

Talking Points

A few frequently asked questions from parents—and their answers—include:

My school's per pupil cost seems high/low. What is included in the calculation, and why is it high/low?

States are required to report how much each school spends in federal, state, and local dollars. To determine this cost, the state includes expenses such as salaries and benefits for teachers, textbooks and classroom supplies, transportation, and additional funding for students with special needs and English-language learners.

Why do schools in my district have significant differences in per pupil expenditures? There are lots of factors that impact the cost, including the numbers and demographic backgrounds of students (e.g., serving a large percentage of students with disabilities) and the types of programs offered (e.g., AP/IB or special education). In addition, the number of teachers or leaders and the length of time they have served is another

significant factor in these differences; salaries often make up the biggest share (60 percent or more) of a district's budget.

A neighboring school spends less money but serves students who need more support and resources. Why don't they get enough support? I can't speak about what is happening at a neighboring school. What I can tell you about our campus is [insert success stories from your school].

As a parent/guardian, is there anything I can do to help get more funding for our school/district? Your involvement is crucial to helping us achieve our school's goal, which is to serve all students equitably. Regularly attending district town halls and board meetings can help ensure that PPE data is prioritized.

In addition, you could research parent/guardian committees, advisory boards, and task forces that exist at the district level for the purpose of informing budgetary decisions. These contexts provide a space to ask questions about how budgets are determined and to inquire how money is spent.

Watch the numbers and help parents interpret what they might mean. Together, you can maximize the effect of the dollars spent on every student in your school. **P**

Content for this article was developed in partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Find more resources at www.naesp.org/pupil-expenditure-requirements.