



September 2023

K-12 Education

State of Ohio Schools 2023

A legacy of neglect — and how to overcome it

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Ohio’s students deserve a world-class education, including safe and well-resourced schools that are staffed with teachers who are well trained and fairly paid. Providing that education is our shared responsibility, and we all share its benefits as well: Every family does better when the next generation is prepared for the future, every community is enhanced when its young people are engaged, curious and active participants, and every boss wants a highly qualified hiring pool.

However, the combined effects of the COVID pandemic and Ohio’s legacy of inadequate, inequitable funding have weakened the role school plays as a foundational public institution.¹ Ohio ranks 21st in the nation for K-12 education,² 46th for equitable distribution of funding,³ and 40th in starting teacher salaries.⁴ Ohio public schools educate 1.7 million students across racial, gender, socioeconomic and geographic lines — and every one of them deserves better.

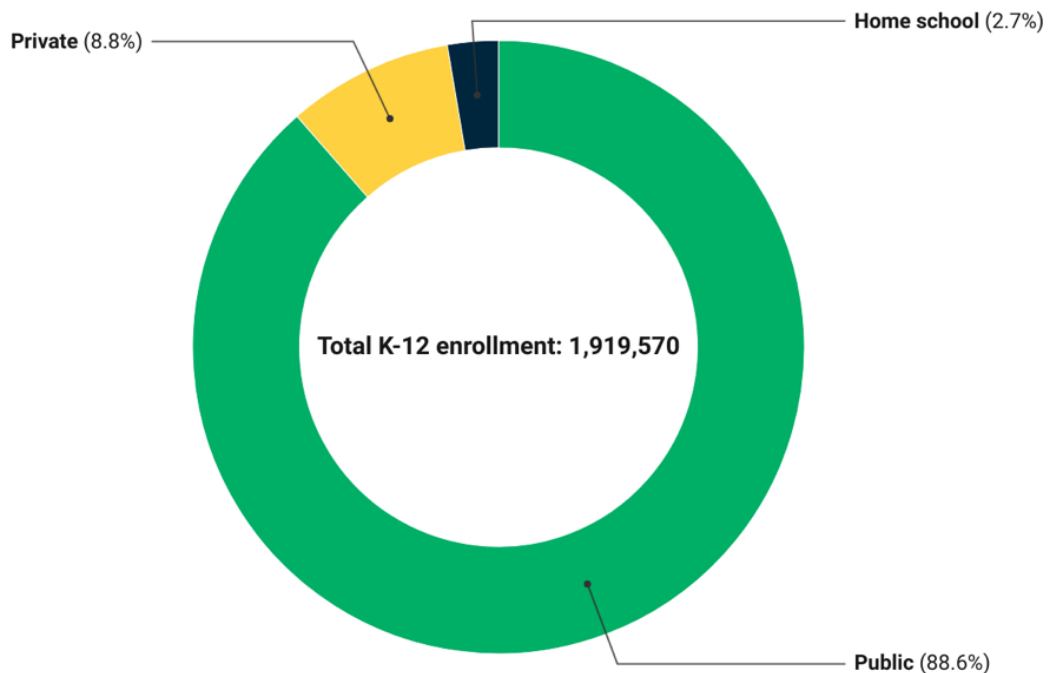
This report describes how Ohio’s schools are funded in the most recent budget, examines staffing issues, summarizes critical performance metrics and identifies new legislation that will impact education throughout the state. We provide policy recommendations that will make our schools better places to learn, grow, teach and work. Most of our recommendations require leaders in Columbus to take action. We’ve seen time and again that they will do so only when Ohioans come together — despite attempts to divide us — to demand every child in Ohio gets the world-class education they deserve.

Ohio schools at a glance

This report focuses largely on public schools, which enrolled 88.6% of Ohio students as of October 2022.⁵ Aside from the small share of students who were home-schooled (2.7%), the remainder of Ohio students were enrolled in private schools (8.8%) In 2021, about 46% of those students received a publicly-funded voucher — such as the EdChoice Scholarship — to pay for their private school tuition.⁶ Private schools are largely concentrated in the counties with larger populations, with 11 rural counties in Ohio having no private schools whatsoever. Divestments from public education at the state level hurt public school students everywhere — especially those in rural counties.⁷

Figure 1
The vast majority of Ohio students are enrolled in public schools

K-12 enrollment by school type, as of October 2022.



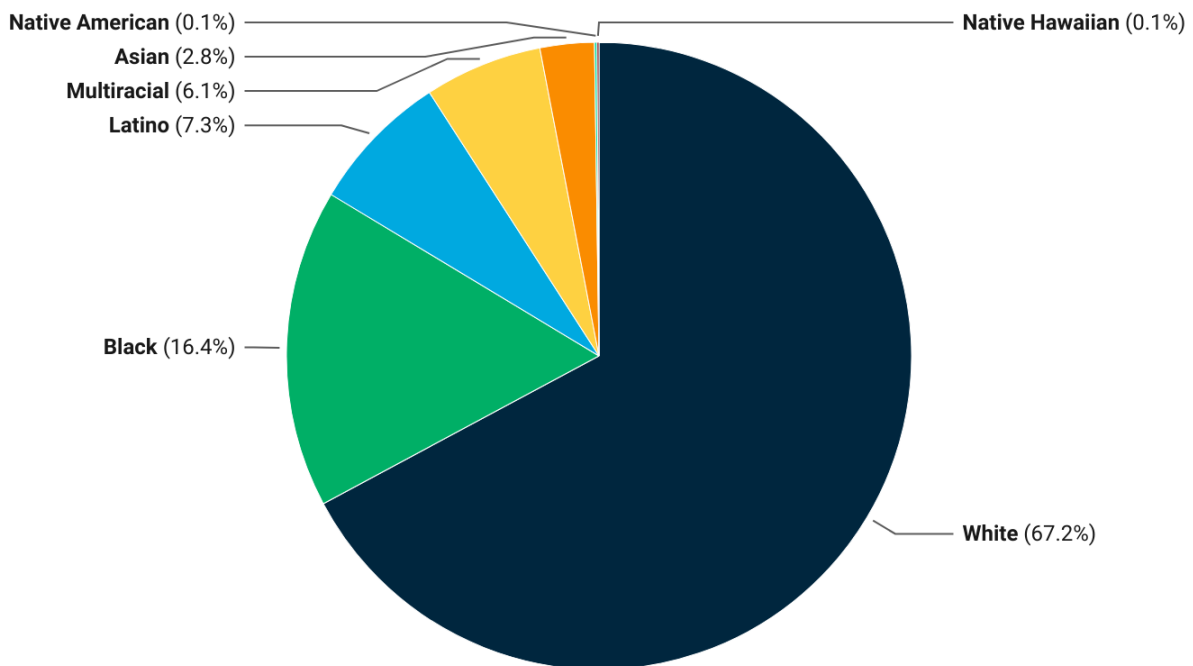
Public enrollment as reported by ODE is the sum of enrollment numbers for traditional public districts, community schools (known as “charter schools” in other states), joint vocational school districts, and STEM schools. Public & private enrollment data from ODE’s Oct 2022 headcount. Home school enrollment data are the most recent available from ODE, collected in September, 2021: <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Ohio-Education-Options/Home-Schooling>

Ohio’s public schools are somewhat more racially diverse than the state overall: Whereas white people make up around 80% of Ohioans, 67.2% of public school students are white.⁸ Black Ohioans make up 13.3% of Ohio’s population but Black students make up 16.4% of the student body.⁹ Similarly, the total Hispanic¹⁰ population in Ohio is 4.5%, but Latino¹¹ students account for 7.3% of students in public schools.¹² Asian students account for 2.8% and nearly 5.9% are multiracial.¹³

Figure 2

Ohio's public schools are racially diverse

Public school enrollment by race as of October 2022



Category names are taken from ODE’s original report. They do not correspond to terms used by the U.S. Census Bureau or, typically, by Policy Matters Ohio. Data from [ODE’s Oct 2022 headcount](#).

Ohio educates large numbers of children who are classified as “disabled,”¹⁴ “gifted,”¹⁵ and/or “English Learners,”¹⁶ and many identified as “economically disadvantaged,”¹⁷ “homeless,”¹⁸ and / or “children of migrant workers.”¹⁹ These broad, overlapping categories are defined in statutes that allow ODE to report the data presented in Figure 3. They only hint at the diversity — within and outside these categories — of students’ learning styles, backgrounds and lived experiences, all of which shape each student’s individual needs.

Figure 3

Ohio's public schools serve students with diverse learning styles, backgrounds & experiences

Number of students enrolled in Ohio public schools by housing stability, learning status, and socioeconomic background.

Student Status	▼ Number of Students
Economically Disadvantaged*	815,221
Students with Disabilities*	270,354
Gifted Students	227,561
English Learners*	69,705
Homeless Students	21,395
Children of Migrant Workers	427

** indicates a student status whose count was updated in ODE's October 2022 headcount. All other data are the most recent available, from 2021-22: <https://education.ohio.gov/Media/Facts-and-Figures>*

Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

K-12 in the budget

In 2020, advocates fought for and passed the Fair School Funding Plan (FSFP). The FSFP set the state on a path toward fixing Ohio's unconstitutional education funding system, which relies too heavily on local property taxes. Ohio's overreliance on local property taxes leaves districts in low-income communities severely underfunded and their students at a disadvantage compared to their peers in wealthier districts.²⁰ When fully implemented, the six-year FSFP will correct the overreliance on local property taxes, eliminate funding caps on districts, and base funding on per-pupil cost estimates that more accurately reflect what it takes to educate a diverse student population.

The ultimate success of the plan is uncertain: Legislators have only incrementally moved funding through the formula, two years at a time, without guaranteeing funding in the next budget cycle.²¹ If legislators follow through on their promise to fully realize the FSFP by 2026, they will be helping every public school in the state to be equitably funded, and helping ensure that we live in a state where every child has what they need to succeed in school and after graduation.

“Foundation funding” is the phrase used to describe the state’s main financial contribution to school districts.²² In FY 24, foundation funding will total roughly \$8 billion, rising to \$8.3 billion the following year. Compared to the previous budget, this is an increase of more than \$881 million over the two years.²³ The increase is largely due to the hard work of advocates, educators, parents and students, who together persuaded legislators to boost foundation funding in the budget. By increasing foundation funding, legislators increased per-pupil spending by 12.1%. They also allowed for a nominal increase in teacher starting salaries, from \$30,000 to \$35,000²⁴ — a net decrease when considering the effects of inflation.²⁵

The current budget increases funding for early childhood education, for kids to get free school meals, and to make up for declines in literacy since COVID.²⁶ These small positive steps are not enough. Every child should have resources that meet their individual needs as learners; every teacher should be paid enough to make ends meet without taking on a second (or third) job; every family should be able to afford high quality early childhood education; every child should have the option of free, healthy meals at school; and every school should have the resources necessary to recover learning lost during COVID. Ohio has the revenue to make these aspirations real. We need leaders to make them a priority.

Lawmakers also used the budget to divert public funding to private schools through a universal voucher program. They did so by making tuition vouchers available to even the wealthiest households in the state — many of which already send their children to private schools, without any tuition assistance. Households with incomes up to 450% of the federal poverty level (FPL)²⁷ (\$135,000 for a family of four), are now eligible for the full value of tuition vouchers: \$6,165 per year per child for K-8, and \$8,407 for 9-12.²⁸ Even households with incomes above that level are now eligible for 10% of the vouchers' full value. To pay for these public subsidies for private (often religious) schools, legislators set aside more voucher money than ever, raising allocations by \$182 million in FY 2024 and \$191 million in FY 2025. In total, Ohio will spend an estimated \$964.5 million in FY 2024 and \$1.04 billion in FY 2025 on private school vouchers. That's about \$1 billion each FY.²⁹ To put this into perspective, in 2014 total voucher allocations were roughly \$175 million; a decade later, that amount will have increased by more than 570%.³⁰

Despite the destructive expansion of private school vouchers, there is reason for optimism about Ohio's K-12 funding future. We are approaching the midway point of the six-year phase in of FSFP and, although legislators have not yet fully implemented it, the state remains on track to correct its funding formula nearly 30 years after the state Supreme Court found it unconstitutional. Bringing the funding formula in line with our constitution will be a great achievement — but as described in this report, the state of our schools reflects decades of budgetary and policy decisions that have prioritized handouts to the wealthiest Ohioans over the academic success of our students and educators. Correcting the formula is necessary but not sufficient to deliver high-quality education to every community in Ohio, no exceptions.

Educators and support staff

It goes without saying that the educators and professionals working in Ohio schools are critical to a well-functioning, high-quality education system. Easing of COVID constraints has not eased the pressures faced by teachers and other education workers, such as bus drivers and aides.

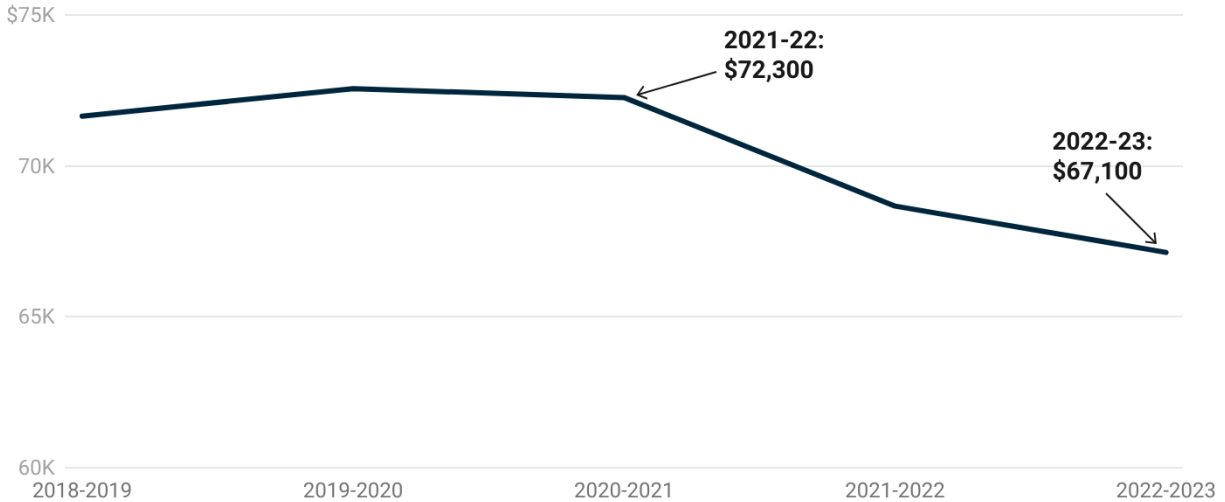
Teachers recently have experienced a rash of targeted political campaigns to stoke division by denying the identities of trans and nonbinary students, as well as censoring what teachers are allowed to teach in the classroom.³¹

These attacks have driven many teachers out of the profession. Those who remain receive too little compensation or support. According to ODE, 113,774 teachers were employed in the 2022-23 school year across the state. Their average salary for that school year was \$69,130, a 6.3% decrease from the 2018-19 school year when adjusting for inflation (Figure 4).³² On average, teachers are paid less than their counterparts with similar training and experience in other professions. This is likely related to the broader gender pay gap,³³ as 75% of public-school teachers in Ohio identify as women.³⁴

Figure 4

Average real salary for Ohio teachers has decreased

Average Ohio teacher salary by school year, in 2022 dollars



Wages adjusted to 2022 dollars using the CPI-U.

Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

These factors contribute to one of the most significant problems facing Ohio schools today: too many have too few teachers to give our kids the education they deserve. According to the Ohio Administrative Code,³⁵ each district’s student-to-teacher ratio should be 25-to-1, a standard met by most districts. But district-level ratios don’t tell the full story. A 2023 analysis³⁶ by ODE looked more closely, analyzing student-to-teacher ratios by region, district type, grade level and subject area. This more precise analysis found ratios upwards of 100-to-1, especially in the Southeast, Southwest and West regions of the state.

A better measure of the teacher shortage would be the number, type and location of unfilled teaching positions — but Ohio does not require districts to report that information. As ODE puts it, “more data, *particularly on teacher demand*, is needed to help inform policy.” [Emphasis in the original.] Absent that data, this report instead considers trends in teacher retention, recruitment and licensure.

Attrition rising, recruitment falling

Since the pandemic began in 2020, a total of 16,012 Ohio public-school teachers have left their classrooms³⁷ — more than 9,000 of them in 2021 alone.³⁸ For at least a decade, early-career teachers (those with five years of experience or less) have made up a disproportionate share of those leaving public schools. These educators represent 20% of the teacher workforce but accounted for 35% of all teachers exiting public schools in 2021.³⁹

It’s worth noting that what Ohio is experiencing is less a shortage of teachers than a shortage of working conditions that can attract and retain teachers. According to ODE, there are over 43,000 people in Ohio with active teaching credentials who are not employed in a public school.⁴⁰ ODE does not report whether they work in private schools or have left the profession entirely, but Ohio’s public school students would benefit from getting even a small share of these credentialed educators into the classroom.⁴¹

Certain regions of the state have been more impacted by recent teacher attrition than others. Urban and rural districts have the highest teacher attrition rates,⁴² especially urban districts in the Southwest (14.5%) and West (13.5%).⁴³ Figure 5 provides attrition rates for Ohio teachers by region and district type.

Figure 5

High attrition especially in urban districts in Ohio's southwest & west

Teacher attrition rates for 2021 by JobsOhio region* and school district type.

Region	Rural	Town	Suburb	Urban	Total
Central	12.2%	9.9%	9.0%	11.8%	10.7%
Northeast	9.4%	8.3%	7.0%	10.5%	8.8%
Northwest	9.3%	8.3%	8.0%	10.8%	9.1%
Southeast	9.5%	9.6%	+	8.4%	9.2%
Southwest	10.5%	8.8%	9.5%	14.5%	10.8%
West	9.0%	10.5%	9.2%	13.5%	10.6%

*ODE uses geographic regions defined by JobsOhio. More info at jobsohio.com/ohio-regional-network

+Data for southeast suburban data is unavailable because there is only one district in the region.

Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

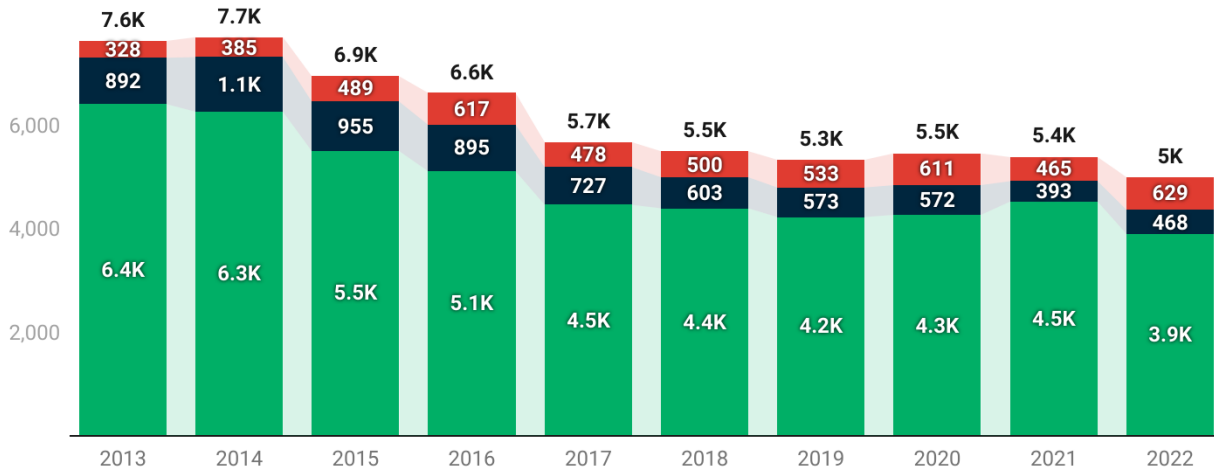
The problem is compounded by the fact that Ohio is not gaining enough new teachers to replace those leaving public schools. In the past decade, there has been a significant decline in newly licensed teachers in Ohio, from 7,634 in 2013, to 5,000 in 2022 (Fig. 6).⁴⁴ In that time, Ohio has licensed fewer homegrown teachers through in-state programs (down from 6,414 in 2013 to just 3,903 last year). We're also attracting fewer new teachers from out of state (down from 892 in 2013 to 468 last year).⁴⁵ Alternative pathways — such as the Alternative Resident Educator license that allows individuals with a bachelor's degree to earn a teaching license in select subject areas at an expedited pace⁴⁶— have grown, but not nearly enough to make up for other losses: All told, they helped 629 new teachers get licensed last year, up from 328 in 2013.⁴⁷

Figure 6

The number of newly licensed teachers in Ohio is decreasing

Number of newly licensed teachers in Ohio by accreditation pathway 2013-2022.

■ In-state university preparation programs ■ Out-of-state university preparation programs ■ Alternative Pathways Programs



Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

The combination of increased teacher attrition and decrease in newly licensed teachers has created a gap in teachers needed in public schools. In 2021, 9,148 teachers left their jobs in 2021, but only 5,388 new educators earned their teaching license, leaving a gap of 3,760 new teachers needed to replace the educators who left.⁴⁸

Policymakers can address these problems by using our public resources to improve conditions for new and experienced teachers, recruiting new teachers from communities they've too long neglected, and removing expensive barriers that prevent Ohioans from becoming teachers.⁴⁹

Improve conditions for teachers

The decline in recruitment is due in large part to low pay, poor working conditions, and other economic factors.⁵⁰ New teachers are paid less on average than they were just a few years ago. If Ohio's starting teacher salary had kept up with inflation since 2018, it would have been \$51,165 in 2022.⁵¹ Instead, it was just \$37,569, well below the national average of \$41,163.⁵² The national average itself is already too low: Teachers in 2021 earned 76.5 cents on the dollar compared to other college graduates.⁵³

Even if the low starting pay for educators does not deter an individual from joining the profession, then the challenges associated with licensing programs or concerns about poor benefits might. Fewer people are enrolling in education degree programs and teacher preparation programs because of the high cost and comparatively small return on their investment.⁵⁴

One way to attract more teachers and retain the ones already in the classroom would be to assist them in paying off their student loans. The Ohio House proposed budgeting \$25 million in FY 24 to do just that for qualifying educators with at least five years of experience,⁵⁵ but the proposal was cut by the Senate and did not pass in the final budget. Lawmakers should

revive this idea in the next budget and fund it generously. Doing so would help relieve the financial burden that debt places on our educators.

Diversify the educator pipeline

Ohio not only needs to find new ways to attract and retain educators; we must also recruit from demographics that are underrepresented in the current teacher workforce. In 2022, Black teachers accounted for only about 4.2% of all teachers in Ohio⁵⁶ but made up 12.3% of the state’s employed workforce.⁵⁷ Recruiting more Black educators can address teacher shortages and close this racial gap. This year, Cincinnati Public Schools Superintendent Iranetta Wright committed to recruiting more educators that reflect the racial makeup of her district.⁵⁸ Other district leaders should follow suit, and use hiring practices proven to help build a diverse educator workforce. Research shows that hiring teachers earlier in the year tends to attract a wider array of candidates, and diversifying the staff who participate in the process — from recruitment fairs to hiring committees — helps create a more open, welcoming culture and ensures inclusion of diverse perspectives.⁵⁹

Research also suggests that by making college more affordable and accessible, we can broaden the pathway to careers in education.⁶⁰ That’s why state-level leaders should; (1) increase the state share of instruction to at least 3% to better keep up with inflation and decrease tuition costs, (2) implement and fund programs such as, the access challenge, which would have provided higher education institutions funding to support students in need, and (3) Increase funding for the Ohio College Opportunity grant program (Ohio’s primary need based aid program) and restructure the program so that students attending more affordable college higher education institutions.⁶¹ They should also fund teacher residency programs that tailor teacher training to schools and subject areas where teachers of color are especially underrepresented.⁶²

Expand options for licensure

The recently passed state budget includes changes to educator licensing in an effort to expand Ohio’s education workforce. Substitute teachers qualify for a one-year temporary substitute teaching license, which is estimated to increase the number of substitutes in classrooms by 2025.⁶³ Out-of-state applicants for Ohio educator licenses who pass Ohio’s foundations of reading exam on the first try are now exempt from having to complete at least six of the 12 required hours of coursework in reading education.⁶⁴ The budget also includes a controversial provision that requires the creation of an alternative military educator license, allowing “eligible military individuals” to receive an educator license on an expedited timeline.⁶⁵ The LSC estimates that these accelerated licensing tracks could increase the available pool of educators.⁶⁶

While these changes have the potential to boost our educator workforce, they weaken teacher training requirements, which could negatively affect the quality of classroom education, especially in high poverty schools that already grapple with recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators.⁶⁷

Ohio’s colleges and universities can also help reduce the educator shortage by providing their own alternative pathways to licensure and making it easier and faster for individuals to enter the profession. Baldwin-Wallace University⁶⁸ for example, created a dual-licensure program that allows students to get two licenses at the same time (primary educator licensure and intervention specialist licensure). Through a grant, John Carroll University⁶⁹ will provide millions of dollars in scholarships to graduate students pursuing teacher education programs.⁷⁰ These initiatives are positive steps, but insufficient without significant state-level investment to ensure that all teacher education programs receive the support they need.

Support staff

Each district employs essential non-teaching staff who support students as they receive their education. These employees include bus drivers, nurses, counselors and psychologists. Recommendations for staffing levels of nurses, counselors, and psychologists are evaluated by the number of support staff per 1,000 students. Statewide employment numbers for some support staff have risen in recent years, but non-teaching staff in Ohio schools are still stretched thin.

Bus drivers

All students should be able to get to and from school safely, and school-provided transportation can give students who live far from school an easy and safe way to get there. School-provided transportation is especially important for students whose families cannot afford or are otherwise unable to provide their own transportation for their children. In Ohio, constitutional guidelines state that all eligible students needing transportation, including those in private and charter schools, must be provided transportation by their home traditional public school district.⁷¹ Districts that fail to take students to school or bring them back home in a timely manner are deemed “out-of-compliance,” and risk fines from ODE. For example, Columbus City Schools received 115 complaints and subsequently \$11 million in fines in the 2021-22 school year for failing to pick up students consistently.⁷² Because the responsibility to transport private- and charter-school students falls to public school districts, struggling districts need help from the state to employ enough drivers to get all students in the district to and from school safely and on time.

Districts have a difficult time attracting new bus drivers. A survey of members of the Ohio Association for Pupil Transportation (OAPT), shows that nearly two-thirds of their members say low pay is the main cause for the shortage, in addition to lack of hours and poor benefits.⁷³ Retirements and the pandemic have only exacerbated the issue, and some districts have had to cancel routes, turn to remote learning, or use bus mechanics and other transportation staff to cover routes to get kids in their classrooms and avoid hefty fines from ODE.⁷⁴

Several provisions in the recently passed state budget address bus driver recruitment and retention, and school transportation in general. First, the budget includes \$1.09 million over the next two years for bus driver training,⁷⁵ an increase from the previous budget, which appropriated \$838,930 in FY22 and FY 23 for training, not adjusting for inflation.⁷⁶ Second, the budget includes the Bus Driver Flex Career Path Model, a pathway for drivers to work as educational aides or student monitors.⁷⁷ The drivers will complete a morning or afternoon bus route, then spend the rest of their workday as an aide or monitor in the school. This new pathway can provide more hours for bus drivers, addressing one of top concerns facing drivers, according to the OAPT survey.⁷⁸

The budget also makes it easier for districts to be deemed out-of-compliance, reducing from 10 to five the number of consecutive⁷⁹ school days a district may fail to meet transportation requirements, for example by dropping off students late.⁸⁰ If a district falls out of compliance five times in one school year, they will lose 100% of their funding for their daily transportation fund.⁸¹ This change will likely punish school districts that already struggle to provide transportation, do nothing to help them address the driver shortage, and create a negative feedback loop.

School nurses

School nurses provide critical aid to ill and injured students. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that schools employ one nurse for every 750 students,⁸² although some

school nurses and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) argue that there is no one perfect nurse-to-student ratio and every district and their students require different nurse staffing levels to meet individual needs.⁸³ Still, examining staff-to-student ratios for school nurses (and counselors and psychologists, as we do below) provides insight into how Ohio schools are supporting their students.⁸⁴

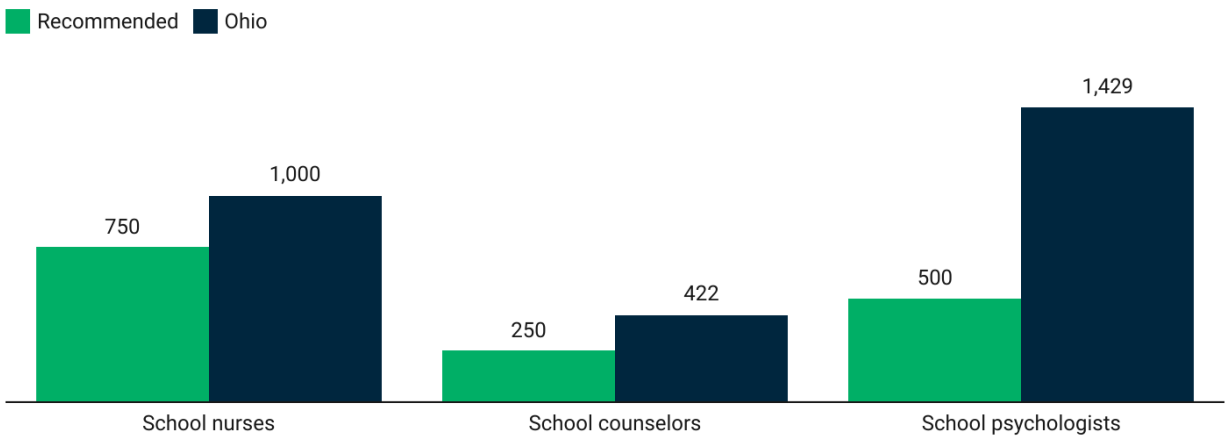
The total number of school nurses in Ohio public schools has steadily increased from 1,626 in 2018 to 1,873 in 2022,⁸⁵ reducing the number of students per nurse from 1,538 in 2018 to 1,000 in 2022.⁸⁶

While this improvement is promising, the ratio is still above the CDC’s recommendation. Employment levels and staff-to-student ratios of school counselors and psychologists in Ohio follow a similar trend.

Figure 7

School nurses, counselors and psychologists are spread thin

Students per FTE nurse, counselor, or psychologist; recommended vs. actual, 2021-22



Ohio data from [ODE](#) | Nurse recommendations from [CDC](#) | Psychologist recommendations from [NASP](#) | Counselor recommendations from [ASCA](#)

School counselors

School counselors guide students through their education, allowing them to build learning strategies, explore career paths, and pursue postsecondary education. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a ratio of one counselor per 250 students, a recommendation it has consistently made since 1965.⁸⁷ Ohio is well below the recommended staffing level.

As of 2022, there are a total of 3,758 school counselors working in schools statewide, an increase since 2017.⁸⁸ Despite this increase in total counselors, Ohio’s school counselors are stretched thin, with about one counselor per 422 students.⁸⁹ Despite the improvement, Ohio stills falls far behind the ASCA recommendation. This issue is no different for school psychologists.

School psychologists

School psychologists address the behavioral and mental health needs of students, and their work can ensure a student’s ability to succeed in and out of school. In 2020, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommended that schools employ one school

psychologist for every 500 students.⁹⁰ Ohio falls well short of this mark, leaving school psychologists with more than double the number of recommended students: 1,429 for each.⁹¹

As with nurses and counselors, Ohio’s meager hiring is too little, too late for a generation of students who, studies show, need more support than ever.⁹² Lawmakers in Ohio must address our educator workforce decline in the next budget and beyond. They should start by increasing the average salary for teachers to a minimum of \$50,000 with a concomitant raise for support staff, to attract and retain committed, talented and well-trained educators in every school.⁹³

Academic achievement

Like other conventional measures of academic achievement, test scores and national rankings do not tell the full story of students, teachers, schools or districts. They do however provide some basis for comparison with other states, and among various groups in Ohio.

Ohio tends to fall in the middle of the pack for academic achievement and quality of education. On the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reading scores for Ohio fourth and eighth graders were not statistically different from the national average, and the math scores for both grades were slightly higher than the national average.⁹⁴ U.S. News & World Report ranks Ohio as the 21st best state in the nation for pre-K-12 education.⁹⁵ However, these statewide metrics can mask a high degree of variability among districts, schools and student populations, with predictable disparities.

State testing

Ohio students in grades 3 through 8 take annual, statewide standardized tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. In grades 5 and 8, they are also tested in science. In high school, students face standardized tests in ELA, math and a variety of other subjects.⁹⁶ All those tests generate a lot of data, which, though imprecise and limited, tell a consistent story: Throughout elementary and high school, and across subject areas, test scores vary by race and economic status.

These disparities have no single cause, but we know that inequities in school funding track closely with gaps in academic achievement.⁹⁷ Black and Hispanic students are more likely to attend schools in larger urban districts that have higher concentrations of students in poverty and fewer resources.⁹⁸ And across races, students who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to live in school districts with concentrations of poverty — including in rural and Appalachian counties — where property-value-based school funding shortchanges them. The combined effects on academic achievement are dire, especially for Black students.⁹⁹

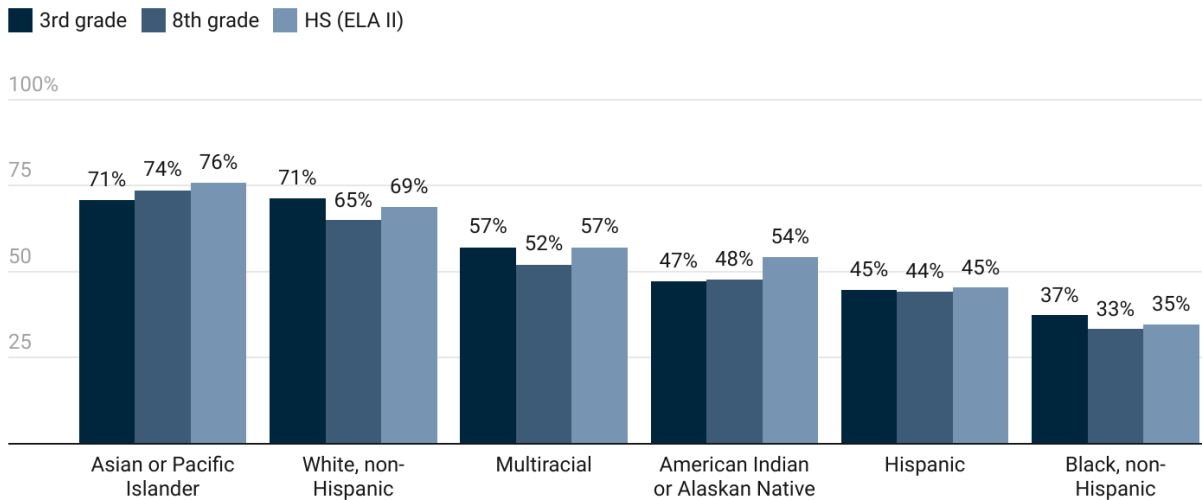
Figures 8 and 9 illustrate racial disparities in state test scores in ELA and math. Figures 10 and 11 illustrate a similar pattern across economic lines. The figures use data from an early round of testing (third grade), the round before entering high school (eighth) and one high-school test. The large amount of performance data not represented here fits a similar pattern.

For this report, we track the proficiency rate: the share of test-takers who scored “proficient” or better on each exam. Students qualify as “proficient” when they have “demonstrated an appropriate command of the state standards for that subject and/or grade level.”¹⁰⁰

Figure 8

Performance on state ELA tests varies by race across grade levels

Ohio students' proficiency rates on ELA subject tests at three representative grade levels, by race, 2022-23



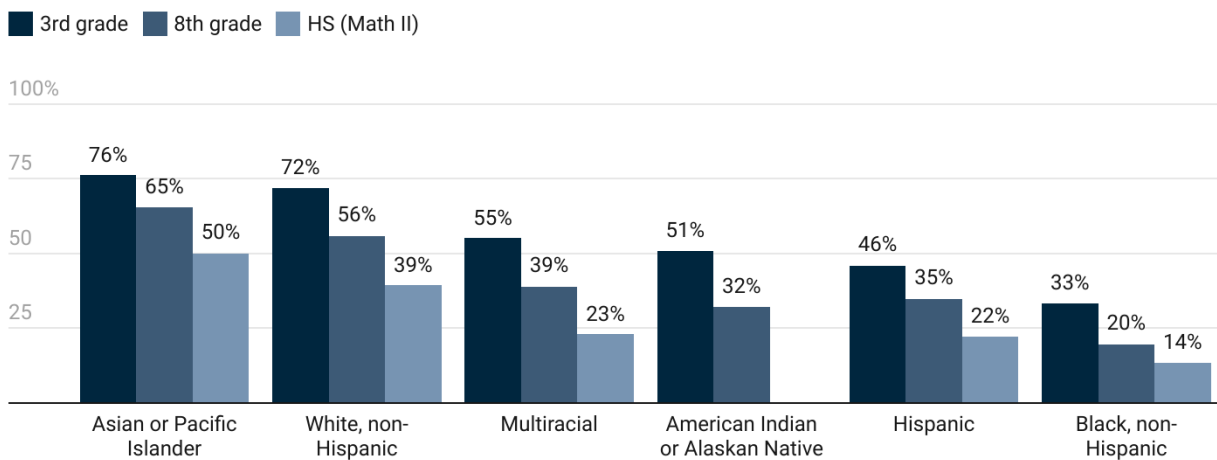
Proficiency rates are the share of test-takers scoring "proficient" or better on annual state exams.

Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 9

Performance on state math tests varies by race across grade levels

Ohio students' proficiency rates on math subject tests at three representative grade levels, by race, 2022-23



Proficiency rates are the share of test-takers scoring "proficient" or better on annual state exams.

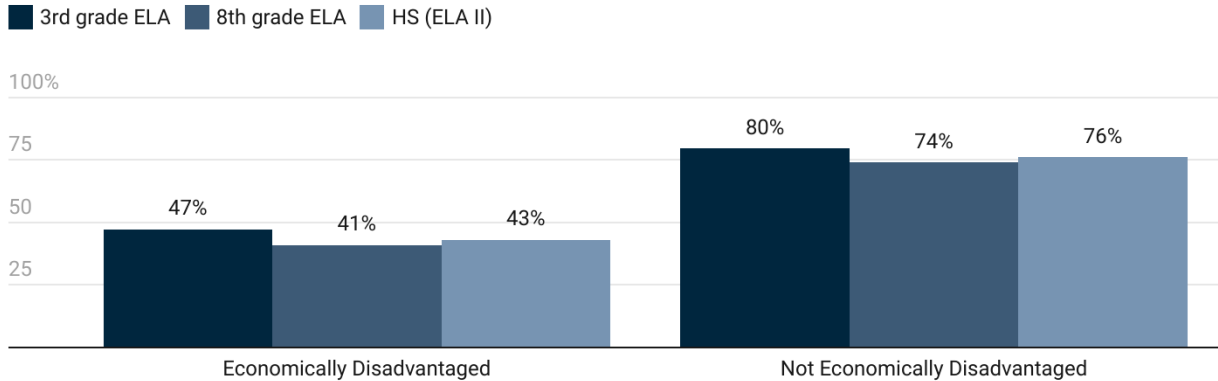
ODE did not report data for American Indian / Alaskan Native students on the Math II exam because fewer than 10 students in that category took the exam in 2022-23.

Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 10

Performance on state ELA tests varies by economic status across grade levels

Ohio students' proficiency rates on ELA tests at three representative grade levels, for students who are classified as ED, 2022-23



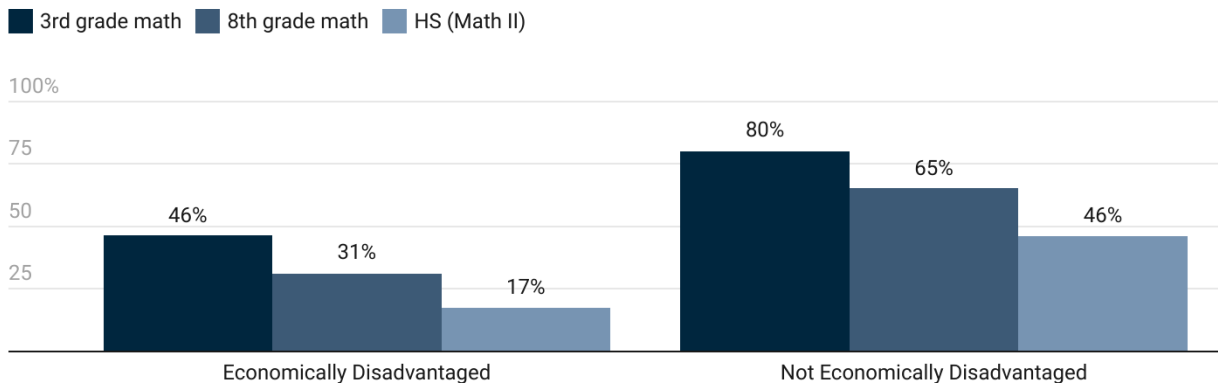
Proficiency rates are the share of test-takers scoring "proficient" or better on annual state exams. For ODE's definition of "Economically Disadvantaged" see here: https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Data/EMIS/EMIS-Documentation/Current-EMIS-Manual/2-5-Student-Attributes_Effective-Date-FD-Record-v13-1.pdf

Chart: Policy Matters Ohio • Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 11

Performance on state math tests varies by economic status across grade levels

Ohio students' proficiency rates on math tests at three representative grade levels, for students who are classified as Economically Disadvantaged, 2022-23



Proficiency rates are the share of test-takers scoring "proficient" or better on annual state exams. For ODE's definition of "Economically Disadvantaged" see here: https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Data/EMIS/EMIS-Documentation/Current-EMIS-Manual/2-5-Student-Attributes_Effective-Date-FD-Record-v13-1.pdf

Chart: Policy Matters Ohio • Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Rural, urban or suburban, schools with high student poverty need greater resources from the state to address these gaps.

Kindergarten readiness

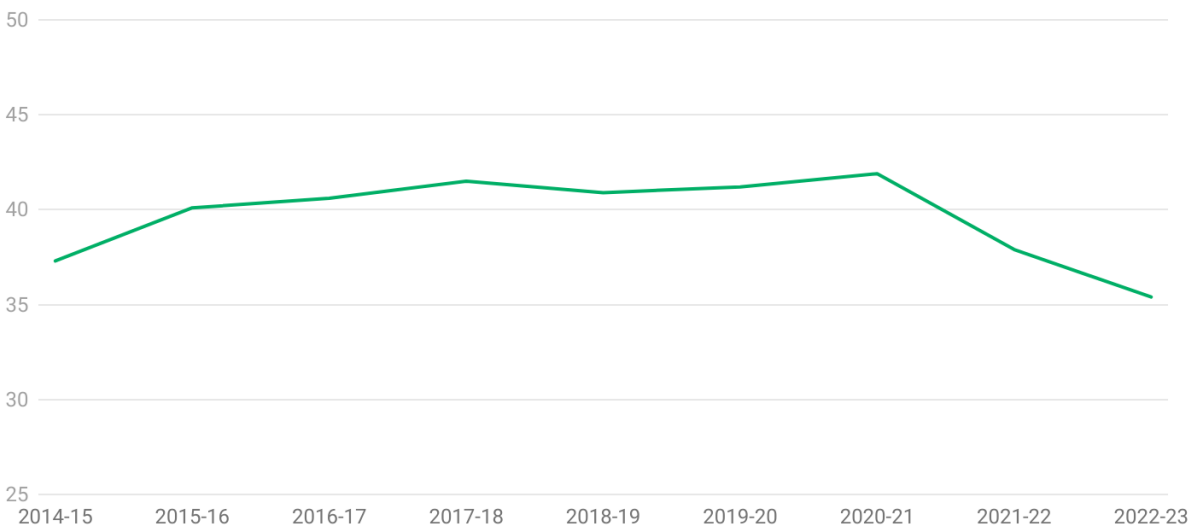
Like students in grades 3 and 8, kindergarten students in Ohio have also struggled to bounce back from the educational hardships brought on by the pandemic. Kindergarteners in Ohio are tested in the beginning of the year on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), which gauges their ability to “effectively engage with kindergarten-level instruction.”¹⁰¹ Students categorized as “demonstrating readiness” are judged to be fully prepared to engage in kindergarten instruction; those “approaching readiness,” are expected to require some support, and those with “emerging readiness” are expected to require significant support.¹⁰²

The share of kindergarten students demonstrating readiness in the 2022-23 school year — just 35%¹⁰³ — is the lowest since the state started using the KRA in 2014.¹⁰⁴ The percentage who need significant support reached a record 30% in 2022-23.¹⁰⁵ A drop-off in kindergarten readiness was likely inevitable after COVID; Ohio needs to make significant investments in early childhood education to begin recovery.

Figure 12

Kindergarten readiness has declined since COVID

Share of Ohio children entering kindergarten who are categorized as "demonstrating readiness," 2014-2023



Source: Ohio Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

ODE data shows that low-income students, Black students, Hispanic students, and students in school districts with high rates of student poverty tend to score lower on proficiency tests and the KRA. The widest performance gap on the third- and eighth-grade proficiency tests is between Black and white students. On the KRA, Hispanic students are most likely to be categorized as “emerging” — the lowest range of scores. These trends have been present in Ohio’s education system since before the pandemic began, and fixing Ohio’s inequitable funding by fully funding the FSFP would be a step toward addressing these disparities.

Graduation rates

According to the most recent data available from ODE, the 2021 4-year graduation rate for all Ohio students was 87.0%,¹⁰⁶ an overall increase since 2015 (83.6%).¹⁰⁷ But as with other metrics, graduation rates demonstrate clear racial disparities: Ohio's Black and Hispanic students graduate high school at lower rates (76% and 77% respectively) than white students (90%). And as with other disparities, these are rooted in systemic inequity that can only be solved by addressing it head-on, with public policies that prioritize the students, families and communities that have been historically denied many of the public resources that contribute to academic success.

Despite Ohio's high graduation rates, not all students have equal access to higher education, and many are unprepared to enter college upon graduation. One way that we can see a disparity in college readiness is by examining the rates of college credit earned by high school students.

College credit

In the 2021-22 school year, 241,232 Ohio high-school students earned college credits.¹⁰⁸ Despite making up 46.6% of the state's entire student population,¹⁰⁹ economically disadvantaged students only make up 25% of those earning college credit in high school.¹¹⁰ This is unsurprising given that high schools with large shares of economically disadvantaged students are less likely to provide college-credit courses.¹¹¹

Racial disparities in college-credit attainment are even greater than those in other metrics: White high-school students in Ohio are much more likely than their Black and Hispanic counterparts to have earned some college credit, likely due to disparities in educational resources and other barriers to enrollment.¹¹² Similar gaps exist gaps at the national level.¹¹³ This is harmful given that research shows that students who enter college with at least six college credits are more likely to graduate.¹¹⁴

Ohio has work to do to address these inequities and provide a quality education for our students. More funding and resources, such as increased tutoring services, summer learning enrichment programs, and increased opportunities for high school students of all backgrounds to receive college credit, are needed to improve reading and math scores in the state to prepare our kids in early grades for success in high school and to ensure that our students are set up for success post-graduation.

To improve education outcomes among early learners, the state should adopt a universal pre-k system, which would provide access to high quality public preschools to all students regardless of how much money their parents make or what they look like.¹¹⁵ Quality universal preschool is critical to reducing inequality in academic achievement and improving educational outcomes.¹¹⁶ The racial achievement gap is visible in children as young as six when they begin their formal schooling.¹¹⁷

Legislators must also increase funding for and access to economic security programs for families in Ohio so that kids can have better educational outcomes. One sure way lawmakers can do this is by boosting eligibility for publicly funded childcare to include families earning 300% of the FPL to help make childcare more affordable, so that mothers and parents can get and keep quality jobs and students can get the stability and support they need for their future.¹¹⁸

K-12 legislative priorities in Ohio

Many Ohio legislators and leaders are attacking Ohio’s students, families and teachers through harmful legislation that will restructure the social studies curriculum in schools. H.B. 103 would change how history is taught in the classroom.¹¹⁹ This legislation could diminish students’ ability to learn their full history.¹²⁰ Additionally, H.B. 8,¹²¹ a bill similar to Florida’s “Don’t say Gay” bill, passed in the House and is headed to the Senate; it would prohibit educators from teaching “sexuality explicit” content, which they define as “any oral or written instruction, presentation, image or description of sexual concepts or gender ideology” and would require teachers to notify parents of a child’s chosen gender expression. This could cause harm to LGBTQ+ students who want to see themselves represented in what they learn and those who do not feel safe at home.¹²²

Legislators are also consolidating their control over who makes decisions about our children’s education by enacting S.B. 1 through the budget bill.¹²⁴ They used the recent state budget to strip most of the State Board of Education’s powers, granting them to the superintendent of public instruction of the newly named Department of Education and Workforce (formerly Ohio Department of Education).¹²⁵ These provisions grant the new director — who is appointed by the governor with Senate approval — sweeping authority, including the ability to set education standards and minimums, establish standardized assessments, oversee community schools, and manage all foundation funding.¹²⁶ These powers were previously held by the State Board of Education. This change concentrates decision-making for state K-12 education policy in the hands of a political appointee, who could use the position to push their own agenda. Several board members have criticized Gov. DeWine for this change, calling it a “power grab” and expressing concern that it will hurt transparency on academic achievement data.¹²⁷

SB 1 in the 135th General Assembly Main Operating Budget
Renames the Department of Education (ODE) to Department of Education and Workforce (DEW).
Creates the position of Director of Education and Workforce to act as head of DEW.
Establishes two new divisions: the Division of Primary and Secondary Education and the Division of Career-Technical Education.
Transfers most of the powers and duties of the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to DEW.
Retains the State Board’s and state Superintendent’s powers and duties regarding educator licensure, licensee disciplinary actions, school district territory transfers, and certain other areas. ¹²³
Parents no longer have to prove their child is being taught by a “qualified” individual for homeschooling.

Recommendations & Conclusion

As detailed in this report, the state of Ohio schools is a direct result of policy choices made by legislators. Tireless teachers, devoted parents and caregivers, hard-working students and the people who support them can only do so much. All Ohioans benefit when public schools thrive, which is why we all should come together and advocate for them, every chance we get. Fully and fairly funded schools in every neighborhood should be the priority of every legislator. Teachers and support staff should be treated so well that they don't want to leave, and that others clamor for a chance to work in our schools. Finally, Ohioans must reject the politics of division that drive book bans and attacks on kids and stand together to ensure that Ohio becomes the best state in the nation for public education.

Where do we need to go in the next budget and beyond?

Fully and fairly fund the FSFP to give every student in every school the resources they need to succeed. Fully implementing the FSFP in the next budget cycle will allow the state to take a step forward in finally repairing our broken K-12 education funding system.

Protect public school students by eliminating universal vouchers. Vouchers have taken money away from public schools for years, and the new universal voucher program benefits Ohio's wealthier families while harming public-school students.

Pay teachers what they need and deserve. Following OEA's recommendation, starting teacher pay should be increased to \$50,000 to draw more applicants to public schools and ensure current teachers are making a living wage.

Make the pathway to becoming an educator more accessible and affordable to boost retention and recruitment. More funding should be dedicated to attracting new educators, especially from underrepresented populations, while ensuring the teachers coming out of these programs are fully qualified and prepared to give our kids the best education possible.

Help public schools struggling with staff shortages. Public schools experiencing shortages of support staff — especially bus drivers — need state support to meet state requirements and expert-recommended staff-to-student ratios.

Fund statewide universal pre-k to set our students up for success in school. Universal preschool is essential to reduce inequality in education,¹²⁸ and a statewide universal pre-k program could chip away at the distinct racial and income inequalities that exist in KRA data, proficiency scores, and college credit utilization.

Get involved

We have the potential and resources we need to make Ohio the best state for schools, but we have to change the way we invest in our students and their families, educators, and our schools:

Join the [All in for Ohio's Kids Campaign](#) to stay in the know on policies that impact kids and families in Ohio and learn about ways to get involved!

Join the [Honesty for Ohio Kids Coalition](#) to protect students by fighting back against harmful K-12 and higher education legislation.

If you are a student, parent, educator, or community member in the Columbus City School district, you can [join the Columbus Education Justice Coalition](#) to advocate for and protect students and schools in the district.

Notes

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² "Ohio," U.S. News & World Report, accessed August 9, 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/ohio>.

³ "State Grades on K-12 Achievement: 2021 Map and Rankings," EdWeek, September 1, 2021, <https://bit.ly/EdFundEquity>.

⁴ Tanisha Pruitt, "Appreciate teachers? Pay them better!" Policy Matters Ohio, May 11, 2023, <https://www.policymattersohio.org/blog/2023/05/11/appreciate-teachers-pay-them-better>.

⁵ Public & private enrollment data from [ODE's Oct 2022 headcount](#).

⁶ ODE, "Facts and Figures," last modified March 8, 2023, <https://education.ohio.gov/Media/Facts-and-Figures>.

⁷ Susie Kaeser, "Where do Ohio's children receive their education?" Public Education Partners, June 13, 2023, <https://publiceducationpartners.org/2023/06/13/a-review-of-public-private-and-charter-school-use-in-ohios-88-counties/>.

⁸ ODE, "Enrollment by Student Demographic (State) – Overview."

⁹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OH/PST045222>

¹⁰ Throughout this report, the term "Hispanic" is used to maintain consistency with data in or derived from [U.S. Census Bureau surveys](#), which use that term to describe people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.

¹¹ In its October headcounts, ODE uses the term "Latino" to describe people from or descended from Latin American communities. It is an imperfect match to the Census Bureau's "Hispanic" category, but there is enough overlap between the two to warrant the comparison.

¹² Statewide in 2022, Black Ohioans made up 13.3% of the population and Hispanic Ohioans 4.5%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. (See previous note for source link.)

¹³ Racial demographics in private schools are only slightly less diverse.

¹⁴ Defined in Ohio Administrative Code as "a child evaluated...as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance...an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, a developmental delay (for a child between the ages of three and five), or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

¹⁵ Defined in Ohio Administrative Code as those who "perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of their age, experience, or environment"

(<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Gifted-Education>) and those who meet a litany of other criteria: <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3324.03>

¹⁶ Defined federally (in part) as a student "whose native language is a language other than English...and...who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency...and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual— (i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards; (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society." For the full definition see <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/essa-act-of-1965.pdf>, Sec. 8101.

¹⁷ Defined by ODE as students who (1) are themselves eligible or live in a household with someone who is eligible for free and reduced price lunch based on criteria from the United States Department of Agriculture, (2) are themselves eligible or have a parent/guardian who is eligible to receive public assistance, (3) are themselves recipients of or whose guardians are recipients

of public assistance, or (4) their parents or guardians have completed a Title 1 student income form.

https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Data/EMIS/EMIS-Documentation/Current-EMIS-Manual/2-5-Student-Attributes_Effective-Date-FD-Record-v13-1.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US

¹⁸ Defined federally; see

<https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>, in Sec. 11434a.

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²⁰ Pruitt, “Funding Ohio’s future.”

²¹ Pruitt, “Funding Ohio’s future.”

²² <https://lsc.ohio.gov/assets/legislation/135/hb33/en0/files/hb33-edu-greenbook-as-enacted-135th-general-assembly.pdf>

²³ <https://lsc.ohio.gov/assets/legislation/135/hb33/en0/files/hb33-comparison-document-as-enacted-135th-general-assembly.pdf>

²⁴ The increase will raise the salaries of roughly 3,400 Ohio teachers. A proposal to raise the minimum salary to \$40,000 would have directly benefitted 16,800 — a nearly fivefold increase. The proposal was rejected by the Ohio Senate, which also rejected a House-proposed loan repayment program that would have awarded up to \$40,000 to incentivize teachers working in high-needs subject areas in low-performance schools. See LSC, [Comparison Document](#), 329.

²⁵ LSC, [Comparison Document](#), 329.

²⁶ Will Petrik, “The People’s Budget Scorecard,” Policy Matters Ohio, July 23, 2023,

<https://www.policymattersohio.org/research-policy/quality-ohio/revenue-budget/budget-policy/the-peoples-budget-scorecard>.

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²⁸ LSC, [Comparison Document](#), 309.

²⁹ LSC, [Comparison Document](#), 313.

³⁰ Pruitt, “Funding Ohio’s future.”

³¹ <https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2022/04/25/ohio-federation-teachers-president-responses-house-bill-616-327-melissa-cropper-ohio-616-schmidt/7414231001/>

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<https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-teacher-report>. Inflation adjustment refers to removing the effect of price inflation from data. The inflation-adjustments represented here reflect data from the Consumer Price Index (CPI). School year pay is indexed using an average of the CPI for September through December of the start year and January through August of the end year (thus, the 2021-2022 school year uses the CPI from September 2021 to August 2022).

³³ Michael Shields, “State of Working Ohio 2022,” Policy Matters Ohio, September 5, 2022,

<https://www.policymattersohio.org/research-policy/fair-economy/work-wages/state-of-working-ohio/state-of-working-ohio-2022>.

³⁴ “District Teacher Degree Profile - Overview,” ODE, accessed August 9, 2023,

<https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-teacher-report>.

³⁵ <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-3301-35-05>

³⁶ Ohio Department of Education (ODE), Ohio’s Teacher Workforce, April 2023, <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Research-Evaluation-and-Advanced-Analytics/Data-Insights/Ohio-s-Teacher-Workforce>

³⁷ ODE, Ohio’s Teacher Workforce.

³⁸ ODE, Ohio’s Teacher Workforce.

³⁹ ODE only has the distribution of experience for teachers available for 2017 and 2022, and 2021 is the most recent year data is available for teacher attrition rates.

⁴⁰ ODE, Ohio’s Teacher Workforce.

⁴¹ https://www.ohea.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/09/PM202209-06_OEA-Educator-Voice-Academy-Cadre_1.pdf

⁴² Teacher attrition rate is the share of teachers who leave their position in a given year. It includes those who do so voluntarily and involuntarily.

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⁴⁴ ODE, Ohio’s Teacher Workforce.

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⁴⁷ ODE, Ohio’s Teacher Workforce.

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Enquirer, October 30, 2022, <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/education/2022/10/31/ohio-teachers-quitting-can-state-local-leaders-fix-it/69600296007/>.

⁵⁰ Nelson, Camri, “OEA Make Recommendations to Help Fix Teacher Shortage,” Spectrum News, September 30, 2022, <https://spectrumnews1.com/oh/columbus/news/2022/09/30/oea-make-recommendations-to-help-close-the-teacher-shortage-gap>.

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