

# MONEY MATTERS IN EDUCATION JUSTICE

## *Addressing Race and Class Inequities in Pennsylvania's School Funding System*

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### Executive Summary

The Pennsylvania Constitution guarantees that children across the state have access to a “thorough and efficient” system of public education, one that enables them to meet comprehensive state academic standards and graduation requirements. Despite this constitutional mandate, hundreds of thousands of children—particularly children of color and children in poorer communities—are denied the school resources they need to be successful in school and beyond. We have a broken school funding system that further entrenches inequities and fails to support Pennsylvania’s most vulnerable students.

School districts in Pennsylvania are confronted with two interconnected challenges: the state is not appropriating adequate funding to basic education, and the majority of the funding it does provide is distributed inequitably.

- **Inadequate funding.** The state is not appropriating adequate funding to basic education. The state is between \$3-4.5 billion short of providing what districts across Pennsylvania actually need to educate their students adequately.<sup>1</sup>
- **Inequitable funding.** Of the money it does appropriate to basic education funding, Pennsylvania distributes it in ways that reinforce inequality by shortchanging the schools which need the most support. Pennsylvania is one of 14 states that regressively funds its public school system. Although school districts with high numbers of students in poverty and/or students of color generally impose significantly higher local tax rates than their wealthier and whiter neighbors, they are often unable to raise sufficient local funds to adequately educate their students. The state does not provide sufficient funding to address this deficiency and instead sends proportionally more dollars to wealthier and whiter school districts. Although the state recently adopted a funding formula that takes into account factors like student poverty, the formula is currently only applied to about six percent of the \$5.9 billion Pennsylvania spends on public education.

To chart a new course, the governor and legislature must commit to substantial increases in state aid in order to close persistent adequacy gaps. Harrisburg must implement policies that channel increasing amounts of state aid through the funding formula to remedy these historic inequities.

Adequate funding is a key component of educational success because it allows schools to invest in the curricula, facilities, and supports that students need to succeed. Simply put, money matters. To address inadequate and inequitable funding, which disproportionately harms students of color and students in poorer communities, we need sustained increased state investment through the new school funding formula to provide access to a quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures come from several calculations done by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Public Interest Law Center. Details about these calculations are provided in the body of our report.