

Money Matters: How increased supports improve education

The reality is that money matters. Targeted funding directed at instructional practices that are supported by evidence can have dramatic impacts. Money impacts class size, which matters, especially in the early grades. Giving teachers smaller “caseloads” means more individual attention for students, more tailored lesson plans, more specific feedback to students, and more in-depth learning. Art and music are supported by research, as well as extended learning time.

The biggest potential for change lies in how well we develop school leadership. We need to recruit excellent teachers and principals, respect them as professionals and provide good compensation packages. Training staff, analyzing data, goal setting, follow up, planning, giving people feedback and quality evaluations –all these beneficial things take time. We need to provide school staff with this time — which means adequate staffing levels, staff support for principals, and planning time for teachers. All of these things have a cost associated with them.

Specific programs lead to higher student achievement in numerous ways:

- **Higher per-pupil funding results in having better quality facilities and more access to necessary materials.**¹

- **Students perform worse in math on national testing when computers are not a part of their everyday curriculum.** The state’s average access to computers is 7 students to a computer. Some districts have as many as 20 students to a computer.² Having more access to technology is important and can only come from more funding.

- **Research shows that teachers with higher education levels have a better grasp on the subject matter, which improves student learning.** Teachers with higher education tend to go to districts where compensation is higher.³

- **Increasing teacher wages improves education.** Higher salaries lead to better quality of teaching, which in turn leads to better student performance. In fact, raising teacher salaries by 10% decreases the high school dropout rate by 3-4%.⁴

- **Teachers need ongoing training throughout their careers.** Pennsylvania schools can only spare 1-3% of their budgets on continuous training; the suggestion is to spend 10%.⁵

- **Smaller class sizes have shown better rates of achievement.** Children in smaller classes in grades K-3 score 60% higher on testing than their peers in larger classes.⁶ Even in high school, students who were in

smaller classes during their early education continue to outperform their peers.⁷

- **Smaller classes also help close the racial and socio-economic achievement gap.** In small classes the achievement gap declines by 38% in K-3, and declines by 15% in the years after.⁸

- **Children who attend pre-school have a 10% better chance of graduating high school and are 29% more likely to graduate from college.** Pennsylvania must work toward providing universal pre-school to children in the commonwealth.⁹

- **Participation in arts programs for low-income students has many benefits including higher G.P.A and higher scores on testing.** Participants are five times more likely to graduate high school and are much more likely to pursue a four-year college than their peers who did not participate in the arts. Yet arts programs are being cut across America due to lack of funds.¹⁰

- **Putting money into the education system saves money!** For every \$1 put towards reducing class size, society saves \$2 in economic benefits.¹¹ Reducing class size in elementary grades alone will yield a savings of almost \$170,000 per high school graduate. These savings are even higher for low-income students, saving \$195,000 per high school graduate.¹²

Skeptics say that even with increases in funding, we do not see measurable improvements. When education funds are raised incrementally, the money is often dedicated to rising costs (operational & personnel). Over the past 15 years, more resources have been directed at the costs of required testing. Inadequate resources are going towards the things that are proven to work— maintaining arts programs, attracting desirable teachers, tutoring and extended learning times, enriched curriculum, and lowering

class size. If new incremental money merely goes to cover the rising costs of current operations, then expecting different results is not reasonable. Yet research shows that funds put towards creating and maintaining early education and arts programs, reducing class sizes, and attracting highly-qualified teachers, makes a big difference. Money does truly matter— it plays a vital role in creating a better and more efficient education system.

One of the ongoing questions people have about educational programs is: what works? What should we do with money if we have it?

- **Students who attend full-day kindergarten have higher long-term achievement** (especially for low-income students.)¹³

- **Schools with better ratios of guidance counselor to students have higher entry to college rates.** Application guidance, provided by guidance counselors, increases the percent of low-income students who apply (55 to 67%), are accepted (30 to 39%), and enroll in selective institutions (29 to 34%).¹⁴ The American School Counselor Association recommends 1 counselor for every 250 students. Some schools in Pennsylvania have as few as one guidance counselor to 3,000 students and do not have the ability to employ more with the present funding.¹⁵

- **Getting exercise increases students' math scores and executive functions, in addition to their health.**¹⁶ This is why we need physical education classes, recess (which means adequate staff and facilities), and after-school sports. Increasingly, as money gets tight, extracurricular activities, such as school sponsored sports, and physical education programs are being cut. Currently, only a little more than half of the nation's students are enrolled in physical education.¹⁷

- **Students who participate consistently in well run after-school programs show improvements in grades, in testing, in school behavior, and in work habits.** Well run after-

school programs require good staff, high-quality facilities, and access to materials, all of which require funds.¹⁸

- **Having teacher aides in the classroom allows more one on one time between teacher and student.** It also improves class behavior and helps students be less distracted throughout the day.¹⁹ As such, being able to employ teacher aides allows the teacher to be more efficient in the classroom.

- **High school teachers with degrees in the field they teach provide better rates of achievement.** In Pennsylvania 16% of high school teachers do not have a degree in their field. This number rises in high-poverty areas (22%) and schools with high minority populations (26%) where the budget is tighter.²⁰ Without the funds to hire more qualified staff, many districts employ less efficient teachers.

- **Access to digital textbooks aid children with disabilities as well as English-as-a-second-language students by providing audio, images, pronunciations, and interactivity as the student needs it.** Students with access to digital textbooks perform better than those who do not have access to this type of technology. Some forms of technology also help save money. Technology such as soundfield amplification allows students with mild hearing lost and students with ADHD to stay in the classroom instead of being in more costly special education classes.²¹

Endnotes

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