

INFORM. INSPIRE. DEVELOP CIVIC LEADERS.

THE POLICY CIRCLE

EDUCATION K-12



WHAT IS EDUCATION?

Through education, individuals learn knowledge and skills essential for self-sufficiency, self-dependency, and confidence, to establish stability in life and provide for oneself and family.

WHAT IS EDUCATION?

A quality education provides the foundation upon which one can build a productive life, and opens doors to determining and fulfilling dreams and ambitions.

FACTS TO KNOW

Per-pupil spending increased by 27% between 1992 and 2014, but U.S. student performance has changed very little over the last few decades, both nationally and internationally.

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Returns of \$2 to \$4 were typical for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, on top of social benefits such as school readiness that continue into adulthood.

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According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are over 130,000 K-12 schools in the U.S., including over 87,000 elementary schools and over 26,000 secondary schools. Just under 100,000 are public or charter schools, and about 32,000 are private schools.

FACTS TO KNOW

Close to 60 million students attend public schools in the U.S., and just under 6 million attend private schools. An additional 3 million students attend charter schools, and about 1.7 million students are homeschooled. Public schools employ approximately 3.5 million teachers, roughly 70% of whom are members of a teachers' union. Private schools employ about half a million teachers.

GOVERNMENT

Over \$730 billion was spent on public K-12 education across local, state, and federal levels for the 2016-2017 school year, which amounts to \$13,600 per student as a nation-wide average. The federal contribution to elementary and secondary education is on average less than 10% of all education spending

Federal money flows to states primarily based on formulas that consider the need of each state, taking into account the cost of education in each state and poverty data from the Census. For this reason, some states receive more than others; New Mexico, Mississippi, and Alaska all received at least 14% of their revenue from the federal government in 2017, while New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut received less than 5% of their revenue from the federal government.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Despite overall spending increases, the “Nation’s Report Card” from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveals fewer than half of students (and in many cases, fewer than a quarter of students) in grades 4, 8, and 12 are at or above NAEP proficiency levels in civics, geography, mathematics, reading, writing, science, and history. In most subjects, there has been little change in student performance since 2011.

Low teachers salaries have become another major issue for public school districts. Teacher strikes from Arizona to Oklahoma to West Virginia have brought attention to the issue of teacher pay in the last few years, as these are the states with some of the lowest teacher salaries. at the same time, one study found that while the number of teachers increased by 28% between 1992 and 2014, non-teaching staff has also grown by 45%, contributing to salary issues as well as school productivity.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

The impact of COVID has shown learning loss and impacts on students across the country, particularly in lower income school districts. Studies found on average, “students’ achievement scores declined over summer vacation by one month’s worth of school-year learning.” This can affect lower-income students in particular, based on the “faucet theory,” that all students have access to resources during the school year but the flow of resources slows or stops for students from lower-income backgrounds.

Another component of education reform debates centers around school choice. Some argue that families should be able to access the best school for their child, particularly among low-income or minority student groups, or students with specific educational needs such as autism or physical needs such as cerebral palsy. Advocates argue that if parents can choose the school that is best for their child, it can generate better quality educational options and promote greater access to higher quality or more specifically designed education.

SOLUTIONS

Tax credit scholarships “allow taxpayers to receive full or partial tax credits when they donate to nonprofits that provide private school scholarships. Eligible taxpayers can include both individuals and businesses. In some states, scholarship-giving nonprofits also provide innovation grants to public schools and/or transportation assistance to students choosing alternative public schools.”

There are 23 tax credit scholarship programs in 18 states, of which just under 300,000 students are recipients.

VOUCHERS- “School vouchers give parents the freedom to choose a private school for their children, using all or part of the public funding set aside for their children’s education. Under such a program, funds typically spent by a school district would be allocated to a participating family in the form of a voucher to pay partial or full tuition for their child’s private school, including both religious and non-religious options.” There are 29 voucher programs operating in 16 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, of which just under 200,000 students are recipients.

SOLUTIONS

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are a more recent innovation in parent choice programs that “allow parents to withdraw their children from public district or charter schools and receive a deposit of public funds into government-authorized savings accounts with restricted, but multiple, uses such as private school tuition or outside educational services.”

WHAT YOU CAN DO

MEASURE -

Find out what your state and district are doing about K-12 education. Do you know the state of K-12 education in your community or state? Do you know how your district's public school ranks? Do you know your school district's budget? What are your state's laws on school choice?



IDENTIFY -

Who are the members of the school board in your community? Who is your state's superintendent of schools? Who is your school district's superintendent, and who are the principals? What steps have your state's or community's elected or appointed officials taken in terms of education?



REACH OUT-

Find allies in your community or in nearby towns and elsewhere in the state. Foster collaborative relationships with community organizations, school boards, or local businesses.

PLAN -

Set milestones based on your state's legislative calendar or local community calendar.



EXECUTE -

Volunteer at your child's school to learn how the school runs and how decisions are made. Volunteer as a mentor or tutor for an organization or support an afterschool program, maybe by even sharing your own professional talents such as cooking or gardening. Ask to meet with a school board member, or attend school board meetings to ask questions, find out about priorities, and review annual budgets.