Advocating for School Funding with an Equity Lens

February 23rd, 2021

This session is being livestreamed and recorded.
Welcome

Amanda Lowe
Director of Government Affairs
National PTA
Our Why
School Funding 101

Where does the money come from?
• This varies by district but typically the majority comes from state and local sources. Only about 10% comes from the federal government.

Where does the money go?
• About 80% of a school district’s budget is spent on labor costs (salaries & benefits for staff).
• Other spending categories include facilities, instructional materials, transportation, etc.

*Key Term* Per pupil expenditures: the amount of money a district receives per student. The national average is $12,756 per student.

Who makes the decisions?
• Creating a district budget should be collaborative, but the local school board must vote to approve the final budget.
Research Project Overview & Findings

Rebecca Bauer
Family Engagement Specialist
National PTA
Purpose & Approach

➢ Collaborate with five district PTAs to further school funding focused advocacy

➢ Listen to families’ perspectives on education funding adequacy and equity

➢ Identify areas for research and advocacy efforts
A diverse sample of participants from across the country

- **164 participants**
- **22 listening sessions** and follow-up surveys conducted virtually with families
- **5 sessions in Spanish; All sessions facilitated by National PTA and transcribed and coded for analysis.**
FINDING #1

Families want more information on school funding in their community but don't know where to find it.

“I went through a frenzy of trying to figure out how to influence budgets, back when it became obvious that the kids were not going to have enough teachers to be safe when they went back to school, and it was really hard.” - Participant, Austin, Texas
Families lack knowledge about school spending in their district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree or agree</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a general understanding of how my child's school district uses its funding.</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know where to find information on school funding in my community.</td>
<td>29%</td>
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“I think school funding comes from the state, right?”

“Las escuelas más ricas, ¿por qué tienen que siempre recibir más dinero, y las escuelas más pobres siempre menos dinero?”

“How do individual principals spend their budgets and what are their budgets actually?”

“I have a general understanding of how my child's school district uses its funding.”

“I know where to find information on school funding in my community.”
FINDING #2

Families were unsure if money was being spent effectively and felt skeptical about the district’s role.

“I think our library is adequately funded, but I don't think it's being utilized.”
- Participant, Pinellas County, Florida

“From my point of view, I feel like there is a lot of money that is wasted.”
- Participant, Vancouver, Washington

Lack of information contributes to distrust - 81% of families listed District Central Office Staff as an area for potential budget cuts
FINDING #3

Families value educational equity and support schools receiving funding based on need.

“I think money should be distributed based on the school's needs for each area as well as considering the students that go there as well, [and] what they need.” - Participant, Duval County, Florida
How do families interpret differences in per pupil funding?

Participants were presented with a real-life example of disparities in per pupil expenditures between two schools in their district.

- They guessed differences had to do with the school’s neighborhood, the families’ income levels, the school’s Title I status.

- They wanted more information about why the money was distributed this way and how it was being spent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I believe that schools should get funding according to need.</th>
<th>Strongly agree or agree</th>
<th>Variation between districts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that schools should get the same funding, regardless of need.</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3% - 32%</td>
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FINDING #4

Expenses related to core school operations and learning are being supplemented by the PTA and/or other fundraising efforts.

“It's hard to know what the PTA has provided and what the school has provided.” - Participant, Vancouver, Washington
Families reported that the PTA and other parent organizations provide funding for:

- Copy paper, books and other basic resources
- Supplies for the school nurse
- Expenses related to extracurriculars like sports and music
- Laptops & tablets
- Teacher salaries
- Teacher training / professional development

“There's an actual documented need for a reading specialist. And for whatever reason, the district won't provide it and the PTA spent a whole year paying half of a salary for a reading specialist. To me, that is not something that PTA should be paying for.”
- Participant, Austin, Texas
FINDING #5

Families believe schools need more funding and identified **Teachers & Teachers Aides**, **Counseling Services & Counselors**, and **Specialized Services** as priorities.
Families support increased funding but there are only a few areas where there is strong consensus.
Overall, families believe the state or federal government should provide extra funding for education, not private organizations.

What should be the main source of extra funding for schools in your community?

- Federal government: 35%
- Local government: 40%
- Private organizations: 23%
- State government: 2%

* Varies depending on demographics.
Unmet Need: Teachers & Teachers’ Aides

• Increase teacher pay
• Hire more teachers and staff

“The pandemic has definitely shown us that teachers are completely underpaid, 100%. Please take my kids back.” - Participant, Vancouver, Washington

“There are teachers that are missing in some of [my daughter’s] classes. I don't think she's had a science teacher for a year and a half.” - Participant, Duval County, Florida

“Porque muchas de las veces es mucho el alumnado para un solo maestro. Entonces, a mí me gustaría que como maestros tuvieran, como, una persona apoyándolos para cada una de sus materias.” - Participant, Austin, Texas
Unmet Need: Counselors & Counseling Services

• Hire more counselors
• Ensure equity & consistency of counseling services available

“There's never been enough counselors and psychologists at any school I've been to. Going back to first grade when kids had to be tested for one reason or another, sometimes you were waiting six months for the psychologist to get you in.” - Participant, Hillsborough County, Florida

“College counseling has immense inequities in awareness, knowledge, [and] caseload.” - Participant, Austin Texas
Unmet Need: Specialized Services

- Need better supports for students utilizing
  - Special education services
  - Bilingual services / education for English language learners
  - Gifted & talented services
- Hire more aides to enable more individualized instruction

“There's not enough support to make sure that every student has a special plan to make sure that they can be the most successful and make it as equitable and experience as possible.” - Participant, Vancouver, Washington

“There needs to be more intervention for those kids that aren't primary English speakers. He's falling behind and it's not because he doesn't know it, it's just not in the language that he understands.” - Participant, Austin, Texas
PTA Advocacy & School Funding Panel

*Moderated by*

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At-Large Representative
Board of Education for Aurora Public Schools
PTA Advocacy & School Funding Panel

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Vice President of Advocacy, National PTA

Jen Martinez
President, Florida PTA

Laurie Solis
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For more information....

• Listen to our Notes from the Backpack episodes featuring Marguerite Roza
• Download “Understanding & Advocating for School Funding” for answers to FAQ
• Visit www.pta.org/schoolfunding

Contact us at familyengagement@pta.org