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K-12 Education Funding in Michigan: Inadequate and Inequitable

Background

For two decades, Michigan’s school funding system has suffered from inadequate state and local investment. Between 1995 and 2015, Michigan had the sharpest decline in education revenue of all 50 states. The current funding scheme provides school districts with a grossly inadequate “per-pupil” allowance, gives less money to low income districts, underfunds special education, and ignores the need to invest in adequate school facilities, particularly in poorer school districts.

Core Message

Michigan has underfunded its public schools for over 20 years. The State cheats low-income school districts and pupils by giving them less money than wealthier districts, despite their greater needs. MI underfunds special education and provides no State money for investment in school facilities. The dismal results of all this underinvestment—falling rates of MI student achievement—are tragic but hardly surprising. We must turn things around by electing Democrats this November 3 and committing ourselves to supporting Michigan’s public school districts, teachers, and most of all, the students who are Michigan’s future.

Key Arguments

Statewide Underfunding. In fiscal year 2019, MI provided school districts with per-pupil funding that was only 73%-84% of what was needed. MI is one of only 12 states providing no direct funding for school construction projects, science and computer labs, libraries, sports equipment, and art studios. Wealthier districts can pay for adequate facilities and enrichment (through local property taxes and fundraising), while poorer districts and students are left behind.

Funding Inequality. Michigan has earned a “D” rating in education funding equality by being one of only 16 states providing its poorest school districts with *less* funding than wealthier districts.

	2003	2015
All Students	28 th	41 st
African American Students	38 th	41 st
Latino Students	22 nd	33 rd
Low-income Students	35 th	45 th
White Students	13 th	49 th
Higher Income Students	24 th	48 th

Underinvestment Results in Falling Student Achievement.

MI ranked a dismal 41st in the nation in 4th grade reading skills, down from 28th in 2003.

Charter Expansion Hurts Public Schools.

Pushed by Betsy DeVos and others, for-profit charter schools have sharply cut enrollment in MI public schools, depriving them of already-inadequate per-pupil funding. Public schools face fixed costs and serve higher concentrations of students needing more

resources, including impoverished students, English language learners, and special education students.

Unfunded Pension Liabilities Make Things Worse.

The growth in Michigan’s unfunded retirement liabilities continue to siphon money away from other education spending such as teacher salaries, which have stagnated, threatening hiring and retention.

See complete reports: [K-12 Education Funding in Michigan](#), [Michigan’s Broken School System](#), and [Teachers](#)

TALKING POINTS

- Michigan reduced its public school spending more than any other state between 1995 and 2015.
- Public school funding is both inadequate and inequitable.
- Michigan is one of only 16 states providing *less* funding to low income districts than to wealthier ones, despite the additional needs poorer districts face.
- Nearly 80% of MI charter schools are for-profit in comparison with 16% nationally. For-profit charter schools are accountable to corporations and shareholders, not students and families.
- Charter schools have siphoned off students and badly-needed resources from Michigan’s public schools.
- Michigan’s underinvestment in public education has resulted in lower student achievement rates, a tragedy for Michigan’s youth and for the State’s future.