

Education Funding FAQ

Delaware's funding system is in no way simple – which has contributed to the lack of action to address systemic issues. But misconceptions or lack of information should not be the excuse for inaction. So that we can all be better informed, here are answers to a few common questions that are frequently asked in discussions about changing the funding system. *This document accompanies a letter signed by twenty organizations with recommendations about a transition to a foundation formula over time.*

Questions about the current system

1. Isn't the unit count already student-based?

Delaware's funding formula allocates units (or fixed staff positions) rather than dollars based on students. Even though student ratios underpin the unit allocation, the lack of direct allocation of dollars based on students is significant – it means that there is no set amount of funding for each student. A unit generates state funding for districts based on teachers' degrees and years of experience, not based on the needs of students. This has led to inequity across the state.

2. Can't we fix these problems by simply adding more money to the current system?

Additional allocations that take into account the needs of students, such as low-income students and English language learners, is a necessary first step. But simply layering money on top of the current system will not address the fact that allocating units leads to funding disparities not only between districts, but within districts.

Questions about the recommended future system

3. Is a foundation formula the same as weighted student funding?

The term "weighted student funding" (WSF) is interpreted many different ways. Generally, WSF means funding is allocated in accordance to the student needs. A majority of states accomplish this through a foundation formula. In a foundation formula, every student is guaranteed a base amount of funding annually. Weights can then be added on top of the base as supplements for high-needs students.

4. Will districts and charter schools lose money in the new system? Will funding be reliable and predictable?

In a foundation formula, funding is guaranteed in a number of ways. First, there is a guaranteed base amount that every child must receive. Second, districts should be held harmless throughout the transition to the new system. Finally, moving to a foundation formula does not prevent Delaware from maintaining a state salary schedule for teachers, which guarantees a certain level of state funding.

Questions about the process

5. What is meant by "multi-year phased rollout"? Is this just another pilot? Will this have statewide impact?

The transition to a foundation formula should be similar to that of the recent funding changes for special education. Every school will be included gradually, with adequate notification for schools about when they will transition. The transition for each school should take multiple years – allowing for sufficient planning and course corrections. We must begin deliberately with the intention of expanding statewide and improve continuously.

6. How does this relate to the Education Funding Improvement Commission (EFIC)?

EFIC is still working on producing recommendations. The letter intends to add and contribute to discussions throughout the state about how to transition to a student-centered funding system, the original charge of EFIC. The letter advocates that any changes made this year are accompanied by a process for moving away from the unit system in coming years. Many of the organizations signing this principle statement are represented on EFIC.

7. Will the transition process be expensive?

Costs include additional resources for students with needs, professional development for school and district leaders, potentially new accounting or technology systems, and technical expertise and capacity to support the transition process.