

OPINION

In Delaware, teachers are being paid less while bureaucracy is paid more (opinion)

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Public schools in Delaware are financially well supported and yet inflation-adjusted teacher salaries have been falling. Why?

Last school year, Delaware spent more than \$2.4 billion on public education, including state, local and federal funds and the state capital budget — more than \$17,500 per student.

According to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Education (school year 2015-16) Delaware ranks 14th highest among all the states in expenditures on public education per pupil. Yet, the U.S. Department also reports that the inflation-adjusted average annual [salary of Delaware's elementary and secondary public school teachers has been going down](#), dropping from \$65,223 in 1989-90 to \$60,484 in 2017-18.

And, for the last 20 years, the performance of Delaware public school eighth graders on the National Assessment of Education Progress test has shown no improvement. Consistently, roughly two-thirds of the eighth graders have tested below proficiency in reading and math.

A [2017 report from the nonprofit EdChoice](#) provides some insights.

Looking at national data over the past 25 years, EdChoice, found that, "While the number of [full-time] teachers increased almost two and a half times as fast as the increase in students — resulting in significantly smaller class sizes — the number of non-teachers or 'all other staff' increased more than seven times the increase in students."

The study continued: "Instead of increasing teacher salaries over and above the cost of living, the American public education system continued its staffing surge."

For Delaware, EdChoice found that between 1992 and 2015 public school enrollment rose 31%, the number of teachers increased 58%, and all other staff surged 82%.

Certainly, one would expect such staff as custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers to increase at the same pace as pupil enrollment. The above average surge has been in school district and school staff.

And while staffing data is not available, the budget of the state's Department of Education rose 50% between FY00 and FY20.

EdChoice estimates that since 1992 there has been staff growth in excess of enrollment growth of 2,487 positions. At \$60,000 per job, DE would have saved \$149.3 million — allowing \$15,268 more per year in average teacher salaries.

The most obvious response to Delaware's staffing surge is to cut back from 19 school districts to a more reasonable number ... eliminate all the administrative staff redundancy.

The Caesar Rodney Institute also favors shifting the control over curriculum and finances back to the teachers and administrators in the local school. The teachers in the local school know the needs of their students and the community far better than a school district board or a bureaucrat in Dover.

The decision to hire a social worker or a reading specialist is best made by the teachers who are with the students daily. Fiduciary restraint is imposed by the fixed amount of funding each school receives annually.

Accountability results from parents choosing, over time, which schools are providing their children with the best education.

Regardless, it is time in Delaware to start the flow of funds back to the teachers and the classroom and stop the flow in the other direction.