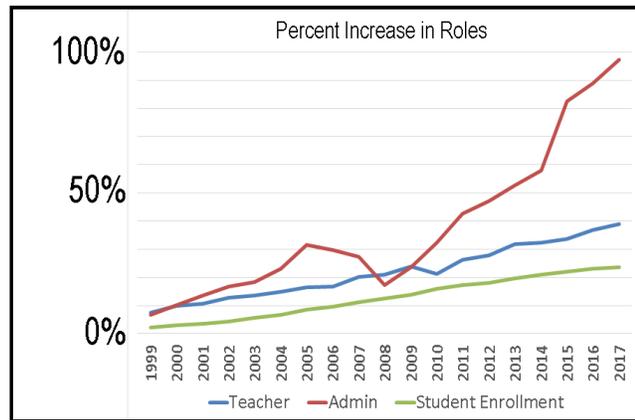


More Money, More Problems: Delaware's Public Education System's Race to the Bottom

In July of 1997 the Notorious B.I.G. released the hit single "Mo Money, Mo Problems". I was just a year removed from High School and I can remember driving to the beach with the top down blasting it for everyone to hear. The song discussed the artist's new found wealth and his continued struggles, that despite increased spending continued to infiltrate his life. It is hard to believe that was 20 years ago. The title still rings true – mis-allocated spending oft exacerbates and magnifies issues when root causes are not addressed. I was happy to be done with High School – it was a rather wasted four years for me – as it was for many of my peers. Delaware's school system at the time had a poor reputation.

Between 1999 and 2017, the average 8th grade math score on the NEAP remained flat (272 and 278 respectively). However, over the same period, per pupil spending grew at nearly two times the rate of inflation, increasing from \$7,255 per student in 1998, to \$14,244 in 2015. If spending had grown in line with inflation, per pupil spending would have been \$11,291 in 2015. So where did the extra \$2,953 go. The short answer is, overhead.

Between 1999 and 2017, nearly four administrative roles were added per each additional student. In 1998, there were approximately 21 students per administrative role and 16 students per teacher. By 2017, there were only 13.9 students per administrator and 14.7 students per teacher. There is now a lower ratio of students per admin staff member than there is for students per teacher. Your tax dollars are going to highly paid people at the top of the org chart instead of the classroom. In total, we are spending nearly 2 billion dollars per year on public education and most of it is caught up in the upper levels of the admin-osphere. At the same time, teacher salaries have taken a hit. While inflation averaged nearly 2.3% per year, over the 20-year period, teacher's only saw an average increase of 1.6% per year. Teachers today, despite our increased spending, are making less money than they were 20 years ago.



It has become rather obvious that our money is mis-allocated. Test scores have not improved, and graduation rates have seen no statistically significant change. This does not bode well for the future of our state or our children. As education becomes increasingly important in a world driven by knowledge and technology, our failure to improve student's ability to compete in a global marketplace will only become more damaging to our progress. Most students graduating from Delaware's public schools, are not college and career ready. Young men and women that do not earn a high school degree earn \$6,000 less than those that graduate. The gap between those that complete a bachelor's degree and a high school graduate is even more pronounced, with college graduates earning nearly \$31,000 more than someone with a high school diploma.

Our spending habits need to change. I don't think anyone would argue against spending more on our children's future if we saw a real benefit to it. That has not been the case. It has truly been, "More

Money, More Problems” as Delaware continues to lag behind the rest of the country. Continuing down this path, repeating the same mistakes that we have made for over two decades, is foolhardy. We must do better, and the answer is not to just throw more money into a system that has become top heavy and inefficient.

Sources:

<https://www.doe.k12.de.us>

<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/education-data/state-education-spending-per-pupil-data.html>

<http://www.edcounts.org/archive/sreports/qc02/templates/state.cfm@slug=17de.h21.html>

written by: Matthew L. Lenzini,
Advisory Council Member
Caesar Rodney Institute