

“All of our lives are enhanced if [a student] get[s] that good education.”

- Governor Tom Wolf

Pennsylvania Public School State Funding

It may not shock you to learn that the quality of public education varies widely across the commonwealth. Availability of funding is certainly one of many factors determining the quality of education a child receives in their school district. In 2016, Governor Wolf signed Act 35, which provides a new formula for the allocation of state resources to public schools, to be phased in slowly. The act itself describes a complex formula with over fifteen variables for each district.

In an attempt to make the law more accessible to the people it most directly affects - the students - I have created three hypothetical funding formulas¹ and applied them to ten representative districts from across the state. These formulas are much simpler than the formula provided in Act 35 and are intended to give some insight into the considerations lawmakers valued when crafting the law. The three formulas given are only a sample of the wide variety of formulas one might create.

1. **Student Proportional Formula** gives the same amount of money to each student
2. **Need Based Formula** gives more money to districts who contribute less to their schools
3. **Need Ability Based Formula** tweaks the Need Based Formula by giving more to those districts who give a higher percentage of property value to their schools

When teaching these formulas to a high school audience, there are several ways to have students engage with the material. Broadly, students can investigate funding from a mathematical or from a civics viewpoint. Some starting points for student engagement are

Mathematics

- Have students walk through the details of each formula, and understand which choices went into the formulas.
- Have students apply these formulas to other districts, besides the ten in the example.
- Students propose their own formula and justify their formula on the basis of fairness.

Civics

- Public school funding comes primarily from two sources: the local district and the state. What is the state's responsibility when it allocates state funds to the districts?
- Is it fair to give every child the same amount of education funding?
- What factors should the state consider when determining funding for each district?
- What other factors affect the quality of education in a school district?

¹ See <http://internallytangent.weebly.com/home/pa-school-funding> for a detailed description of the formulas as well as a spreadsheet with the calculations.