



WV UNITED CAUCUS REPORT

2018

THE SCHOOLS WEST VIRGINIA DESERVES

A publication of West Virginia United Caucus



'THE COMMUNITIES THEY TEACH IN ARE OFTEN RAVAGED BY POVERTY AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE'

Roughly a quarter of a million students each year are enrolled in public schools in West Virginia and a quarter of them live in poverty.¹ Children are the most important investment for our communities, and school personnel are the agents of that investment. Educators are tasked with teaching important skills while they struggle with higher insurance costs, non competitive pay, and legislation that seeks to defund and privatize public education. The communities they teach in are often ravaged by poverty and substance abuse.

In 2018, West Virginia teachers and state employees led a *9 day state-wide walkout* to protest against insurance costs, low pay, cuts to important after school programs, attacks on seniority, and legislation intended to create charter schools and school vouchers.

In this publication, we will examine important social and economic factors either missing or misrepresented in The West Virginia Chamber of Commerce publication *Public Education in West Virginia: An Overview of Teacher Pay and Benefits, and Student Achievement*.

Furthermore, we examine the deleterious effects of intergenerational poverty on the cognitive development of children. This data is left out of the Chamber of Commerce report.

Our children and our communities deserve a fair examination of the long-term factors that continue to impact education in our state. We provide reasonable solutions to these problems.

Long Term Effects of Poverty

West Virginia continues to be one of the nation's poorest states. Its legacy of intergenerational poverty carries important implications that can not and should not be ignored in an honest assessment of our education system. The accumulation of years of physical and mental health problems, lost or underdeveloped skills, and inadequate education have long-term effects that impact education outcomes.

24% of children in West Virginia live in poverty, and our state ranks at the top in terms of children who suffer from the lack of hard to cover basics like food and housing. 52.4% of WV children have suffered at least one childhood traumatic experience.² According to a recent report by the WV Department of Health and Human Resources, the number of youth in state custody increased 46%, and accepted abuse/neglect referrals increased 22% over the past three years (mostly drug related).³ Our state suffers from a crisis of poverty and its attendant problems.

Decades of research by experts in the fields of developmental psychology, sociology, economics, neurology, epidemiology, and pediatric medicine have established a clear link between poverty and deficits in cognitive development.⁴

A 2015 study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* states, "Children living in poverty generally perform poorly in school, with markedly lower standardized test scores and lower educational attainment".⁴ Poverty creates a wide variety of disadvantages, and often its effects begin in early stages of development. In *Consequences of Growing Up Poor* (1997), researchers concluded that poverty in the prenatal or early childhood years appears to be particularly detrimental to cognitive development and physical health.

¹2018 County Health Ranking. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

²National Survey of Children's Health, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2016.

³"Officials: WV has among nation's highest neonatal abstinence syndrome rate", Ryan Quinn, *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, June 26, 2018.

⁴"Association of child poverty, brain development, and academic achievement", Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, *JAMA Pediatrics*, 2015.

The Chamber of Commerce paper asserts that West Virginia "lags behind in terms of test scores". It does not examine the crisis levels of substance abuse, poverty, and their demonstrable effects on cognitive development, standardized test scores, and school rankings.

Fair Compensation

The WV Chamber of Commerce paper contends that West Virginia's cost of living is moderate. It also portrays state employee pay and insurance costs as adequate when compared with private-sector jobs.

A state-wide cost of living measure is not relevant to a specific, subpart of the total population. Teachers and school service personnel do not buy goods and services like the average person. They buy classroom materials and books, travel, and rely on the internet for work at home. They also undertake the expense of formal education. In order to provide a fair analysis, a price index for the goods and services disproportionately purchased by teachers would have to be made and then compared with their cash salaries. Furthermore, private sector jobs are not a basis for comparison, since no real private sector equivalent to the vast public school system exists.

Pay and the rising costs of insurance

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy reports that the average out-of-pocket expenses and premiums for teachers on PEIA insurance has increased by \$1,000 over the past three years.⁵ Significant increases were set to take effect July, 2018, and this was a motivation for the state-wide walkout.

The starting salary for a teacher with a bachelor's degree was \$30,000. After the 5% raise, the average yearly salary for a teacher will increase by roughly \$2,000 (before taxes and insurance costs).

Yearly step increases do not keep pace with inflation. When insurance costs and taxes are used to calculate take home pay of a teacher with a master's degree and five years of experience, his or her salary is roughly \$27,000. Increased insurance costs serve to further erode wages.

Employees and their families who struggle with low incomes need and deserve health care that is readily usable: little or no copays, little or no deductibles, and comprehensive coverage.

Teacher retention problem

In a recent article in the peer-reviewed journal *Psychology Today*, Dr. Ronald Riggio states that teachers who quit often feel like a "scapegoat for the problems caused by a lack of accountability".⁶ Politicians and policy makers sometimes lay blame at the feet of teachers when high stakes test scores are lower than average. Lack of autonomy and lack of support also contribute to attrition.

'EMPLOYEES AND THEIR FAMILIES WHO STRUGGLE WITH LOW INCOMES NEED AND DESERVE HEALTH CARE THAT IS READILY USABLE.'

⁵ "Public Employee Health Care Costs Have Risen Nearly \$1000", *Ted Boettner*, West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, 2018.

⁶ "Why Teachers Quit Their Jobs", *Ronald D. Riggio*, *Psychology Today*, 2018.

⁷"A Coming Crises In Teaching",
Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond,
Sutcher, LPI,

A recent analysis and report by the Learning Policy Institute indicates there is a shortage of 60,000 qualified teachers in the U.S., and the turnover rate is very high.⁷ The costs associated with processing a teacher's exit and the recruitment of a new hire consumes valuable district resources. These replacement costs average \$9000 per teacher in rural areas (Learning Policy Institute).

Our state continues to suffer from a lack of licensed teachers, particularly in high-need subject areas and schools. We must foster greater collaboration between teachers and all stakeholders in order to retain highly-qualified teachers. Paying a competitive wage is crucial for our state to attract top talent.

Personal Leave and Leave Banks

The Chamber of Commerce paper addresses personal leave and leave banks, but it fails to provide the reasons for these benefits.

Roughly 75% of teachers in West Virginia are women (National Center for Education Statistics). Women in the 21st Century workforce expect paid maternity and parental leave. A woman should not have to decide between caring for a newborn and work. Hard fought benefits such as leave banks and personal leave help mothers (and fathers) care for their children. These benefits also serve older and ailing employees who need paid medical leave.

In an effort to hire and retain highly-qualified employees, we must offer competitive benefits that serve the needs of the 21st Century workforce.

PEIA funding

The Chamber of Commerce paper takes the current tax structure as a given. The extra taxes needed to properly fund salaries and health insurance should come from those who (1) were instrumental in making the decisions that led to long-term economic decline in West Virginia, and (2) fared the best over recent decades in terms of income and wealth accumulations (corporations now benefiting from large tax reductions due to the tax law passed in December 2017).

Conclusion

Globally, most business leaders highlight education as the focus of their social responsibility. West Virginia's business leaders and policy makers must understand that investments in education yield returns in the form of an educated workforce and the retention of talented people in our state. Unquestionably, education investment will determine our future.

West Virginia suffers from a history of poverty. The only way out of the consequences of such a history is to provide the children of our state with the kind of education that can break with the past's inadequacies that were passed on from one generation to the next. West Virginia's history — not comparisons to other states — ought to be what drives funding.

The children of our state deserve good schools and highly-qualified educators. We provide a list of solutions for policy makers on the next page.

Policy Solutions

- Provide *the most competitive pay and benefits* to attract highly-qualified teacher candidates.
- Partner with teacher preparation programs throughout the state to recruit talent.
- Conduct exit interviews to better understand and address turnover.
- Tax those who were instrumental in making the decisions that led to West Virginia's long-term decline, not further tax West Virginia's citizens.
- **Increase the natural gas severance tax from 5% to 7.5% to help pay for PEIA costs. Natural gas production and prices are forecast to rise (U.S. Energy Information Administration).**
- **Increase the corporate net income tax to help pay for PEIA costs.**
- Use student loan subsidies to help attract people to the teaching profession.
- Expand universal pre-K program to include 3-year-olds.
- Expand after school academic enrichment programs for children in need.
- Lower the student-to-school counselor ratio.
- Mandate lower teacher/pupil ratios throughout all grade levels.
- Mandate school nurses and mental health specialists for employment at each school.

'PROVIDE THE MOST COMPETITIVE PAY AND BENEFITS TO ATTRACT HIGHLY-QUALIFIED TEACHER CANDIDATES.'

‡Research related to the effects of poverty on cognitive development:

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