



Reading School District
Written Testimony for “Student Opportunities For Success” Public Hearing
July 25, 2023

As the Superintendent of the Reading School District, I have been asked to participate in a hearing as a testifier before the Senate Education Committee. The identified topic is “Student Opportunities for Success”. To that end, I have prepared the following written testimonial statement.

The Reading School District (RSD) is a public school district in the City of Reading, which is located in Berks County, Pennsylvania. The City is a diverse, mid-sized city. The latest American Community Survey (ACS), which was conducted by the US Census Bureau in 2020, reported that 67% of the City’s 95,097 residents classify themselves as Hispanic or Latino (of any race), including 33.5% of who identified themselves as Puerto Rican. This is one of the highest percentages of Puerto Rican population of any municipality in Pennsylvania. Other groups are self-identified as follows: 20.4% White (not Hispanic); 13.3% African-American; 1.2% American Indian or Alaska Native; 1.1% Asian; and 16.6% from two or more races.

Our city faces many challenges that impact our students' lives each and every day. Poverty remains one of its biggest challenges. The ACS 5-year poverty rate was reported as 40.71%. The educational attainment levels of our City residents are well-below state and national averages. Currently, 70.1% of residents over the age of 25 possess a high school diploma or higher, as compared to 91% in Pennsylvania and 88.5% across the nation.

Many of our families in Reading are new arrivals from other countries. 99% of our students report speaking Spanish as their primary home language. Approximately 27% of our students are enrolled in the District's English as a Second Language program. According to the ACS, 45.8% of the city’s residents report that they are not U.S. citizens. Over the past several years, we have noted an increase in students who struggle with enrollment in higher education and employment due to issues related to documentation of citizenship.

RSD has 19 schools: 13 elementary schools (Pre-K - 4); 5 middle schools (gr. 5-8); and Reading High School (RHS) (gr. 9-12). RHS is currently housed in one main high school and

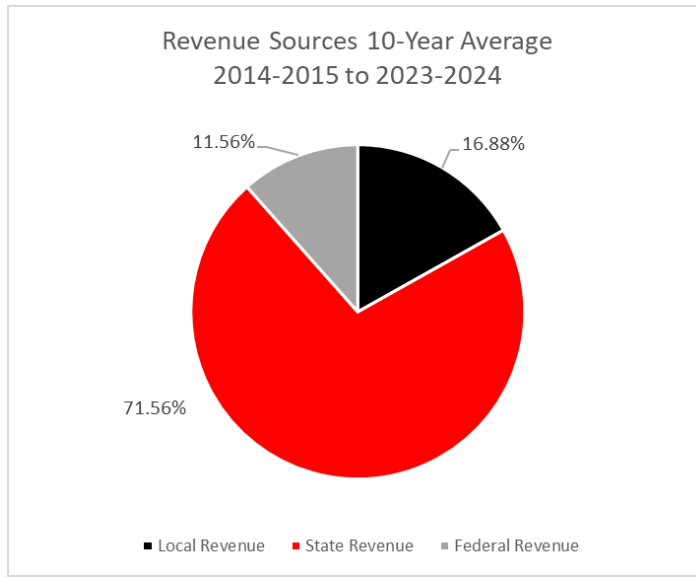
three satellite campuses. Another satellite campus focused on STEM education will be opening up in the 2025-26 school year (*more below*).

As the only public school district in Reading, RSD is open to all students residing within the city. RSD does not pick and choose our students. RSD's enrollment for the 2022-23 school year was 17,581 students. Elementary school building enrollments range from 277 to 746 across buildings. Middle school enrollments range from 678 to 1,942. RHS has an enrollment of 5,537 students. RSD also runs the Reading Virtual Academy (RVA). The RVA services 470 students in grades 1-12 by providing a district-sponsored, comprehensive virtual education. RSD is also home to an English Learner Welcome Center (*more below*). All RSD schools are Title I buildings with Community Eligibility Programs offering universal free lunches and breakfasts due to the high number of students designated as low-income (currently 95.28%).

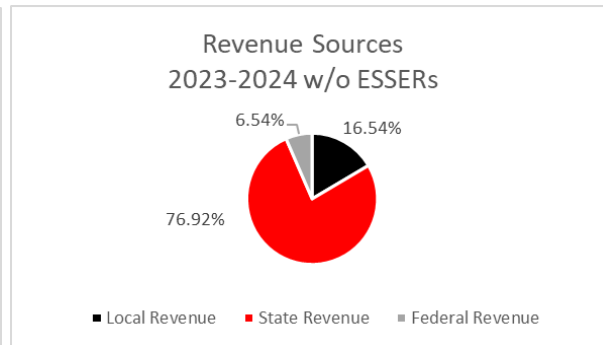
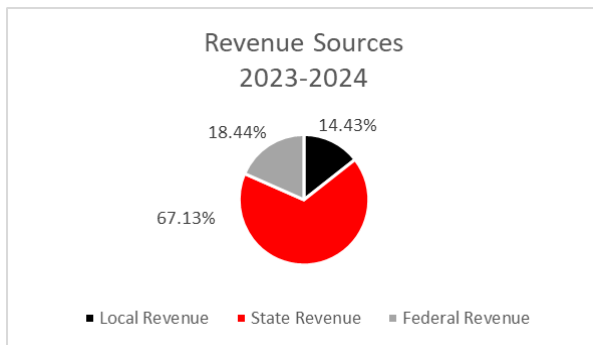
Unlike private schools and charters, which can establish admission criteria, evaluate prospective students, and even reject them based on any number of factors, RSD does not discriminate. Our Special Education population is at 25%, and our English Language Learner population is currently at 27%. RSD upholds the rights of these students and their families because we know that everyone deserves to learn, even if they do so differently. Public schools are subject to federal and state laws and regulations governing the rights of these students and their families. RSD is required to follow these strict rules to ensure that every student receives an appropriate education. RSD has strict guidelines and requirements for special education teachers and teachers working with English language learners, whereas private schools and charters can use different hiring standards.

In terms of staffing, RSD is the eighth largest employer in Berks County, according to the PA Dept. of Labor and Industry reporting as of the 4th quarter of 2022. For the 2022-23 School Year, the District employed approximately 1,300 professional staff and 600 support staff, which is 89% and 73% relative to the number of budgeted-for positions. To cover this gap in staffing, the District relies on a number of local and regional entities to provide needed educational and operational services (*more below*.)

For the 2023-24 school year, RSD will have an operating budget of \$429,944,162 including \$54,845,499 in ESSER Funding. Historically, the majority of our funding has been derived from state revenues. Over the last 10 years, as demonstrated in the chart below, Reading received 71.56% of its funding from state sources, which primarily includes Basic Education Funding, Special Education Funding, Transportation Subsidy, PlanCon Rental Payments, and Property Tax Relief. (Please refer to the 2023-2024 Final Budget).



The following charts provide a breakdown of revenue sources for the 2023-24 school year, including and excluding ESSER Funds. As demonstrated below, when excluding ESSER Funds, revenues received from the state make up 76.92% of total budgeted revenues.



Unfortunately, the RSD has become dependent on state revenue. This is primarily due to the socioeconomic impact of our community and its limited ability to raise real estate tax revenue to support the educational needs of our students. This issue is further compounded by the City of Reading’s financial crisis and prior Act 47 Status. While in Act 47, the City of Reading increased their taxes by 20% in 2011 and have a current millage of 18.129 mills. The county-wide average for municipal real estate tax is 4 mills. Our school board has taken into consideration the impact that the City’s real estate tax burden has on our residents when

evaluating tax increases on an annual basis. The following chart presents the historical tax increase for Berks County, the City of Reading, and the RSD. The highlighted section represents when tax increases were implemented.

COMBINED REAL ESTATE TAXES LEVIED - READING FOR THE COUNTY, CITY, AND SCHOOL DISTRICT

Reading School District
 Summary of Real Estate Tax Increases since 2010
 For County, City and School District

	County of Berks			City of Reading			Reading School District			Total for All Three Entities		
	Tax Rate	Increase over Prior Year Mills	Percent	Tax Rate	Increase over Prior Year Mills	Percent	Tax Rate	Increase over Prior Year Mills	Percent	Tax Rate	Increase over Prior Year Mills	Percent
2010	6.9350			11.9450			16.4600			35.3400		
2011	6.9350	-	0.0%	14.3340	2.3890	20.0%	16.4600	-	0.0%	37.7290	2.3890	6.8%
2012	6.9350	-	0.0%	14.3340	-	0.0%	16.9200	0.4600	2.8%	38.1890	0.4600	1.2%
2013	7.3720	0.4370	6.3%	15.6890	1.3550	9.5%	16.9200	-	0.0%	39.9810	1.7920	4.7%
2014	7.3720	-	0.0%	15.6890	-	0.0%	16.9200	-	0.0%	39.9810	-	0.0%
2015	7.3720	-	0.0%	15.6890	-	0.0%	17.4100	0.4900	2.9%	40.4710	0.4900	1.2%
2016	7.3720	-	0.0%	17.6890	2.0000	12.7%	17.9300	0.5200	3.0%	42.9910	2.5200	6.2%
2017	7.3720	-	0.0%	17.6890	-	0.0%	17.9300	-	0.0%	42.9910	-	0.0%
2018	7.6570	0.2850	3.9%	17.6890	-	0.0%	17.9300	-	0.0%	43.2760	0.2850	0.7%
2019	7.6570	-	0.0%	17.6890	-	0.0%	17.9300	-	0.0%	43.2760	-	0.0%
2020	7.6570	-	0.0%	17.6890	-	0.0%	17.9300	-	0.0%	43.2760	-	0.0%
2021	7.6570	-	0.0%	18.1290	0.4400	2.5%	17.9300	-	0.0%	43.7160	0.4400	1.0%
2022	7.6570	-	0.0%	18.1290	-	0.0%	17.9300	-	0.0%	43.7160	-	0.0%
Increase since 2010		0.7220	10.4%	6.1840	51.8%		1.4700	8.9%		8.3760	23.7%	

RSD has a real estate tax rate of 17.93 mils, which is lowest in Berks County; however, when you factor in the total real estate tax burden by combining, School, City and County Real Estate Tax Rates, we have the 9th highest when compared to all public schools located in Berks County.

COMBINED REAL ESTATE TAXES LEVIED FOR THE COUNTY, CITY, AND SCHOOL DISTRICT

School District	Millage Rate				Rank	SD Rank
	Municipality	School District	County	Combined		
Tulpehocken Area School District	2.144	26.000	7.657	35.801	1	2
Hamburg Area School District	2.979	26.960	7.657	37.596	2	3
Oley Valley School District	2.049	29.037	7.657	38.743	3	7
Schuylkill Valley School District	3.483	27.852	7.657	38.993	4	5
Boyertown Area School District	3.970	29.046	7.657	40.673	5	8
Wilson School District	6.091	27.660	7.657	41.408	6	4
Governor Mifflin School District	5.615	29.100	7.657	42.372	7	9
Conrad Weiser Area School District	3.586	31.382	7.657	42.625	8	11
Kutztown Area School District	5.525	29.954	7.657	43.136	9	10
Reading School District	18.129	17.930	7.657	43.716	10	1
Twin Valley School District	8.111	28.262	7.657	44.030	11	6
Daniel Boone Area School District	4.537	32.384	7.657	44.578	12	13
Fleetwood Area School District	3.983	33.360	7.657	45.000	13	15
Muhlenberg School District	6.050	31.480	7.657	45.187	14	12
Bradywine Heights Area School District	3.214	34.420	7.657	45.291	15	17
Exeter Township School District	3.755	34.197	7.657	45.609	16	16
Wyomissing Area School District	7.800	32.544	7.657	48.001	17	14
Antietam School District	10.225	43.820	7.657	61.702	18	18

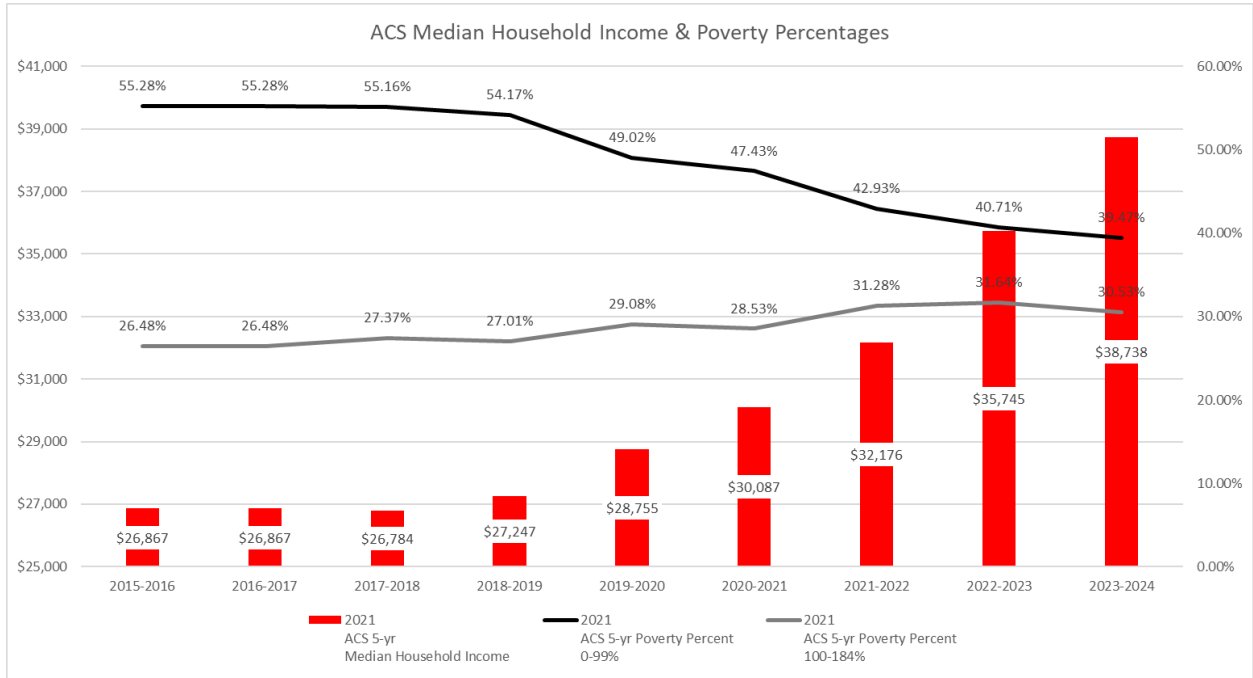
Under the Pennsylvania School Code, school districts are permitted to increase real estate tax rates by the Adjusted Act Index. Had the District increased the millage by the maximum each year, the millage rate at June 30, 2022, would have increased to 23.75 mils compared to the current 17.93 mils and the district would have earned an additional \$36 million in tax revenue and an approximate \$8.4 million in annual income. However, our Board is mindful of the burden this would cause for our constituents.

IMPACT OF THE ADJUSTED ACT 1 INDEX READING SCHOOL DISTRICT TAX LEVY

Year	Assessment Base	Adjusted Act 1 Index	Actual Millage Rate	Actual Taxes Levied Using Actual Rate	Max Millage Rate	Increase	Taxes Levied at Adjusted Act 1 Index	Lost Tax Revenue Revenue
2011-2012	1,450,000,000	2.3%	16.92	24,534,000	16.92	0.3892	24,534,000	-
2012-2013	1,450,000,000	2.8%	16.92	24,534,000	17.31	0.4847	25,098,282	564,282
2013-2014	1,450,000,000	2.8%	16.92	24,534,000	17.79	0.4982	25,801,034	1,267,034
2014-2015	1,450,000,000	3.4%	17.41	25,244,500	18.29	0.6219	26,523,463	1,278,963
2015-2016	1,450,000,000	3.1%	17.93	25,998,500	18.91	0.5863	27,425,261	1,426,761
2016-2017	1,450,000,000	3.9%	17.93	25,998,500	19.50	0.7605	28,275,444	2,276,944
2017-2018	1,450,000,000	4.1%	17.93	25,998,500	20.26	0.8307	29,378,186	3,379,686
2018-2019	1,450,000,000	4.0%	17.93	25,998,500	21.09	0.8437	30,582,692	4,584,192
2019-2020	1,450,000,000	3.8%	17.93	25,998,500	21.94	0.8335	31,805,999	5,807,499
2020-2021	1,450,000,000	4.3%	17.93	25,998,500	22.77	0.9791	33,014,627	7,016,127
2021-2022	1,450,000,000	4.9%	17.93	25,998,500	23.75	1.1636	34,434,256	8,435,756
							Total	36,037,243

In addition to the high tax burden placed on our constituents, we continue to have a significant number of families that are classified as being in poverty or acute poverty for the funding calculation purposes as identified in the ACS.

The most recent ACS data used in the state funding formula for Basic Education Funding is based on 2021. Over the past nine years, there has been a 44% increase in the median household income increasing to \$38,738 from \$26,867. However, 39.47% and 30.53% of households are classified as being in Acute Poverty or Poverty, respectively. The socioeconomic status of our families and students has a significant impact on both our funding and student achievement.



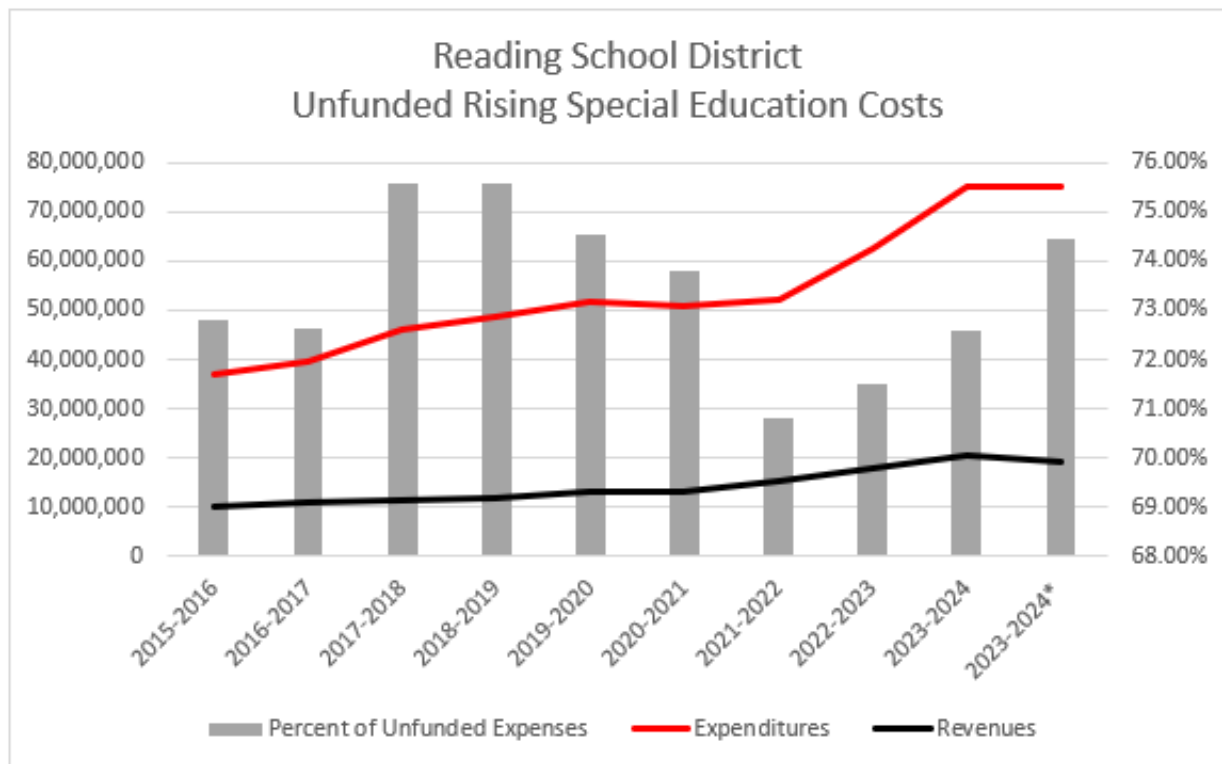
Even though RSD receives approximately 77% of its annual budget from state sources, our students' education continues to be significantly underfunded as outlined in the State Supreme Court Decision. While RSD is greatly appreciative of the Basic Education Funding Formula implemented in 2015/2016 and the subsequent Level-Up Funding Initiatives, the additional funding has not established equitable funding to meet our students' needs. Based on the most recent budget proposal, we continue to be underfunded by more than \$53 million dollars, are ranked 499th based on underfunded status and have been at the rank since the inception of the Basic Education Funding Formula. Our state legislators need to provide greater and more equitable resources to our students.

School Year	Proposed BEF	Using Formula	Underfunded	Rank
2015-2016	123,455,343.55	216,809,640.07	(93,354,296.52)	499
2016-2017	131,153,832.93	226,091,106.13	(94,937,273.20)	499
2017-2018	134,972,052.71	229,572,590.08	(94,600,537.37)	499
2018-2019	139,674,924.77	249,352,082.72	(109,677,157.95)	499
2019-2020	145,029,578.71	245,234,810.16	(100,205,231.45)	499
2020-2021	145,029,294.82	245,234,810.16	(100,205,515.34)	499
2021-2022	157,220,820.88	241,046,098.27	(83,825,277.39)	498
2022-2023	170,728,053.00	231,631,910.26	(60,903,857.26)	498
2023-2024	202,082,047.00	255,416,248.00	(53,334,201.00)	499

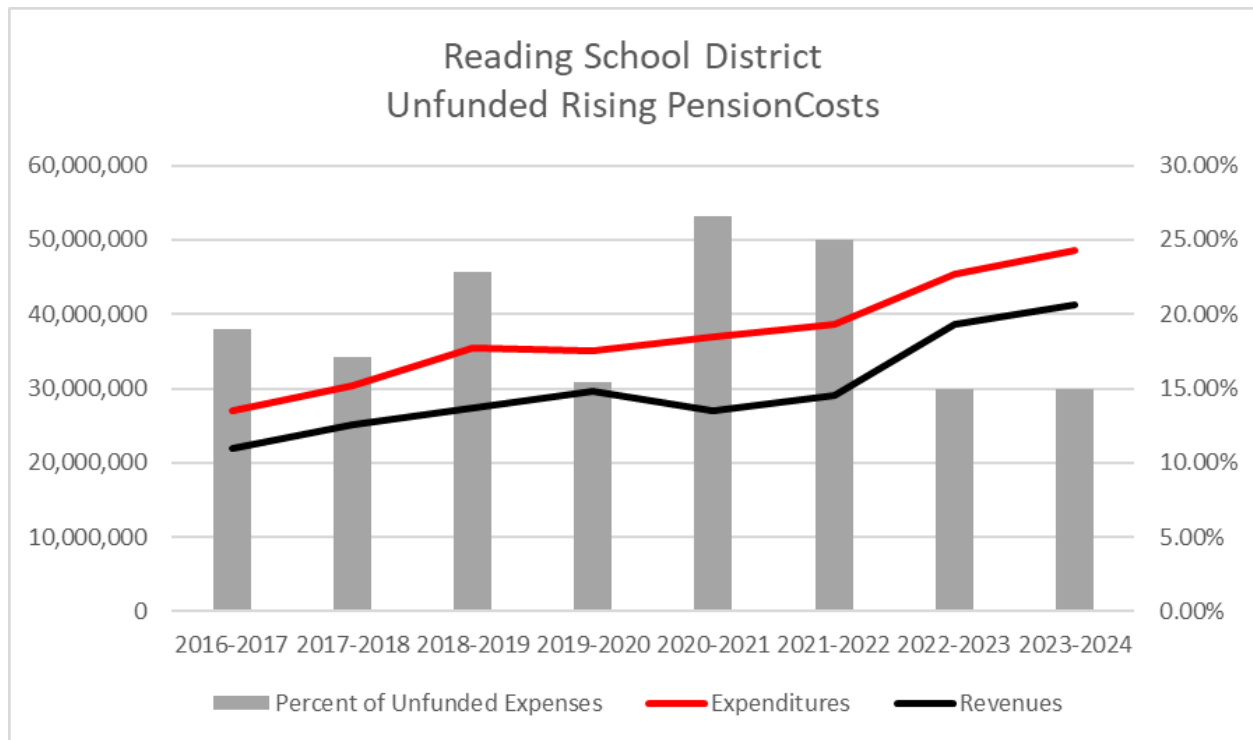
Unfunded mandates

RSD, like every other school district in the Commonwealth, is faced with meeting state mandated educational requirements. As noted above, RSD is open to all students residing within the city. RSD does not pick and choose our students. Unlike private schools and charters, which can establish admission criteria, evaluate prospective students, and even reject them based on any number of factors, RSD does not discriminate. Given the mandates and obligation to educate all students, RSD is not properly funded to carry out these twin aims.

The three major cost drivers that are not properly funded are Special Education Services, Pension Costs and Charter School Tuition. Special Education Costs at RSD have risen 103% since 2015-2016 to \$75,030,000 for 2023-2024, and Special Education Funding has increased by 91% to \$19,179,055 for the same year. Special Education Costs are currently underfunded by \$55,850,811 in our current 2023-2024 budget. In other words, we are 74.4% underfunded when it comes to Special Education Services. Unfortunately, the final version of the budget approved by the Senate and subsequently the House, reduced the funding for Special Education Funding from \$100 million to \$50 million to the detriment of nearly 366,000 special education students across the Commonwealth.



Pension Costs have grown exponentially since the early 2000s when the decision to lower the required contributions rate was enacted. Since then, the rate has skyrocketed to 35.26% last year. For the first time in 16 years, the required contribution rate decreased by 3.57% after increasing 714% since 2008. RSD’s pension expense is projected to be \$48,609,213 for 2023-2024, which is an increase of 79% over the 2016-2017 school year. Fortunately or unfortunately, due to the low personal income and low market value of the properties located in Reading, we have a high aid ratio and have averaged a state contribution of 85%. However, many school districts are only entitled to a 50% reimbursement. Rising pension costs are not sustainable for districts across the Commonwealth. Much of the funding increases are simply offsetting this cost and not allowing districts to expand services.



Charter School Cost is the third unfunded mandate that impacts RSD and nearly every other district across the state. Since the inception of the Charter School Law, RSD has seen an increase in charter school enrollment from 217 students in 2010-2011 to 932 students in 2022-2023. This represents an increase of 429%. As a result of the increase in enrollment, the District incurred charter school tuition expenditures of \$12,000,773 on 2022-2023, which is an unfunded mandate. Reimbursement for charter school tuition was eliminated several years ago

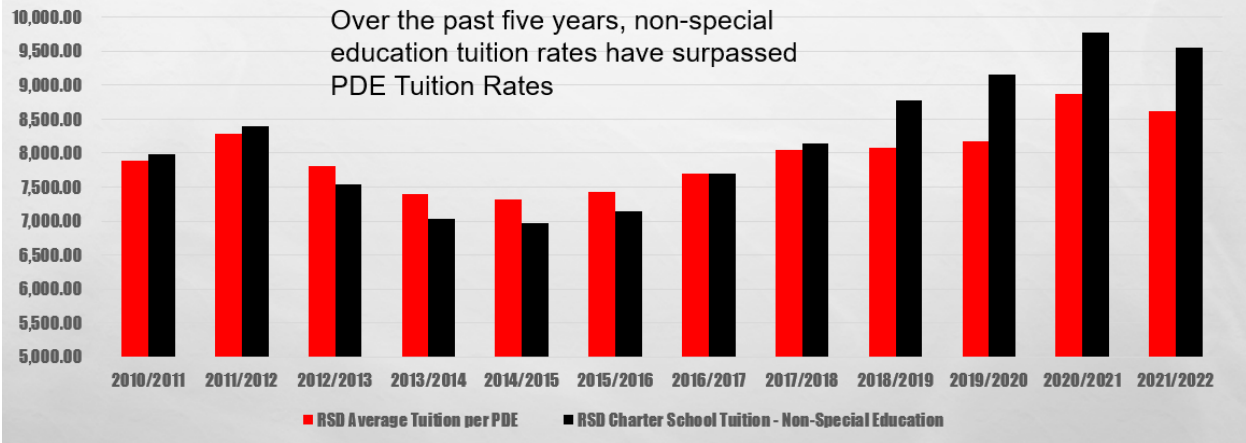
and has had a significant impact on many school districts. Noted below is the historical charter school tuition and enrollment incurred by the RSD.

HISTORICAL CHARTER SCHOOL TUITION AND ENROLLMENT

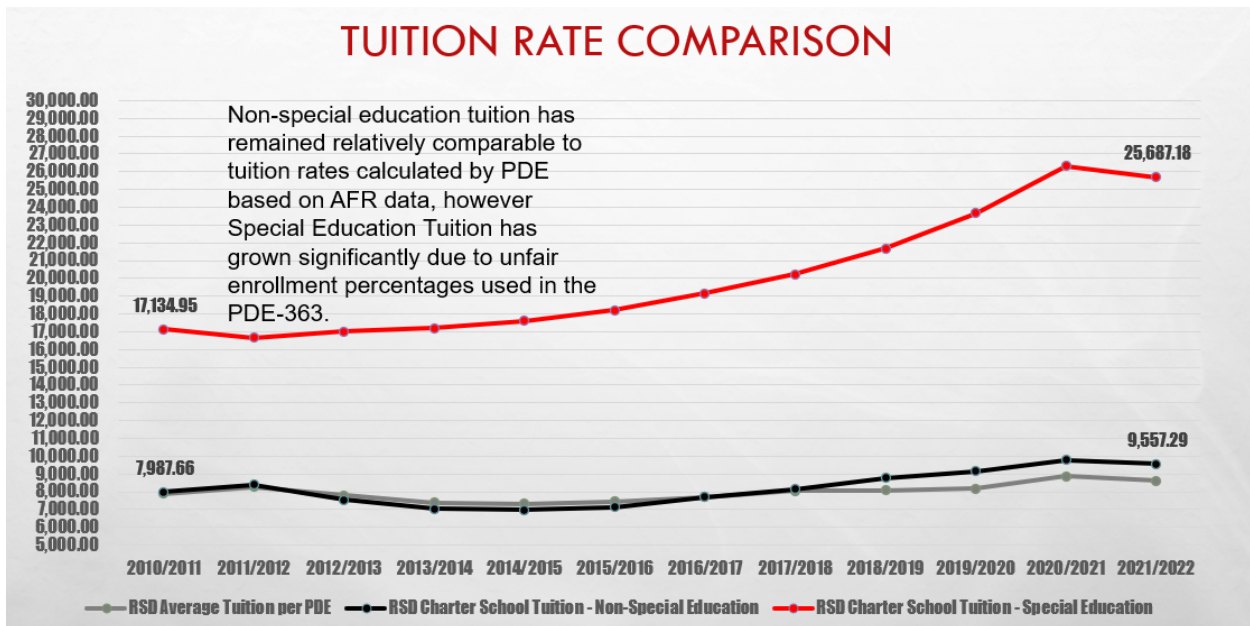
School Year	Tuition			Enrollment - ADMs		
	Non-Special Education Tuition	Special Education Tuition	Total Charter School Tuition	Non-Special Education	Special Education	Total Charter School Enrollment
2010/2011	1,510,730.10	482,948.57	1,993,678.67	189.133	28.185	217.318
2011/2012	3,766,253.17	1,554,670.75	5,320,923.92	448.427	93.272	541.699
2012/2013	4,727,121.10	2,768,593.64	7,495,714.74	627.004	162.812	789.816
2013/2014	5,847,718.41	4,097,430.13	9,945,148.54	832.053	238.249	1,070.302
2014/2015	5,736,666.97	4,315,537.10	10,052,204.07	823.278	244.967	1,068.245
2015/2016	5,470,491.97	4,193,525.42	9,664,017.39	765.426	230.601	996.027
2016/2017	5,414,980.23	4,415,268.37	9,830,248.60	702.963	230.650	933.613
2017/2018	5,777,590.93	4,774,618.66	10,552,209.59	709.080	236.117	945.197
2018/2019	5,898,932.73	5,315,391.83	11,214,324.56	672.217	245.090	917.307
2019/2020	5,937,126.05	6,328,507.91	12,265,633.96	648.801	267.352	916.153
2020/2021	5,113,275.06	5,534,530.40	10,647,805.46	522.818	210.349	733.167
2021/2022	4,452,024.61	5,884,573.32	10,336,597.93	465.825	229.086	694.911
2022/2023	4,943,447.27	7,065,325.66	12,008,772.93	616.343	315.977	932.320

Charter School Tuition consists of two categories: Non-special Education and Special Education Tuition. It should be noted that over the past five years, non-special education tuition rates have surpassed tuition rates to attend Reading School District as calculated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

NON-SPECIAL EDUCATION TUITION COMPARISON



However, the tuition rates for non-special education are much more comparable to PDE tuition rates for Reading than the cost of special education rates. Special education tuition rates have grown significantly due to the unfair enrollment percentages used in the PDE-363 Charter School Tuition Rate Calculation.

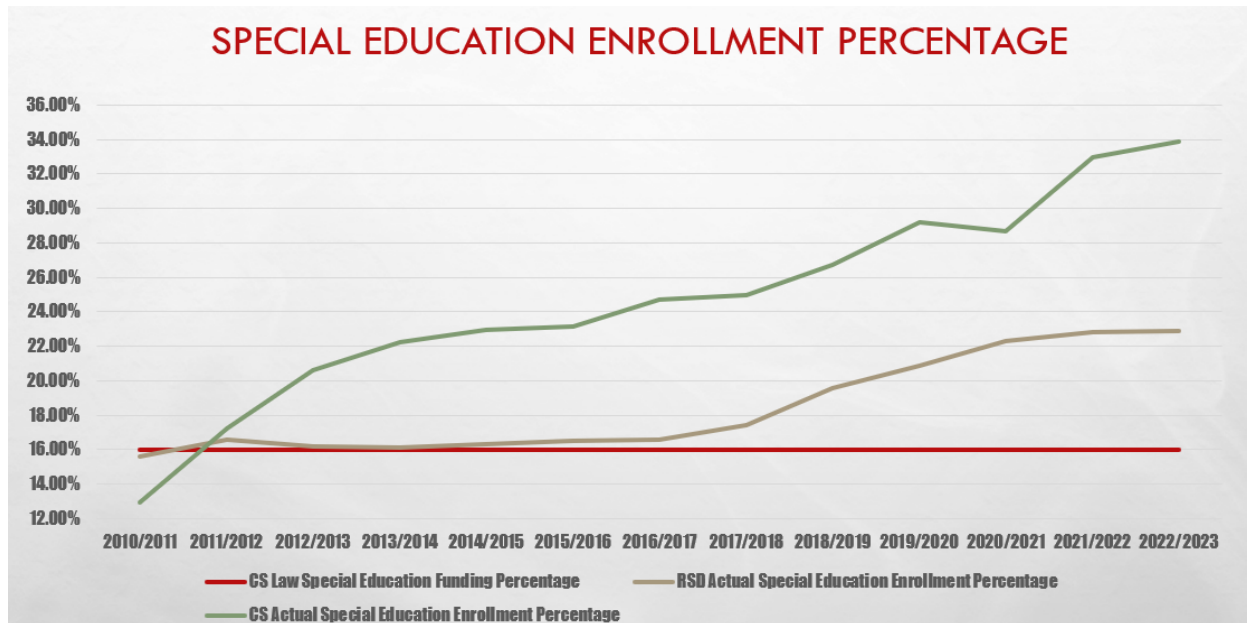


SPECIAL EDUCATION ENROLLMENT

School Year	CS Law Special Education Funding Percentage	RSD Actual Special Education Enrollment Percentage	CS Actual Special Education Enrollment Percentage
2010/2011	16.00%	15.60%	12.97%
2011/2012	16.00%	16.60%	17.22%
2012/2013	16.00%	16.20%	20.61%
2013/2014	16.00%	16.10%	22.26%
2014/2015	16.00%	16.30%	22.93%
2015/2016	16.00%	16.50%	23.15%
2016/2017	16.00%	16.60%	24.71%
2017/2018	16.00%	17.40%	24.98%
2018/2019	16.00%	19.60%	26.72%
2019/2020	16.00%	20.90%	29.18%
2020/2021	16.00%	22.30%	28.69%
2021/2022	16.00%	22.80%	32.97%
2022/2023	16.00%	22.90%	33.89%

The current charter school law does not keep pace with the rise in identified special education students. As a result, the tuition calculated using the PDE-363 significantly inflates the special education tuition paid to charter schools. The current charter school law requires school districts to use a factor of 16% of total enrollment to determine the number of special education ADMs to calculate the estimated special education cost per ADM.

As noted above, RSD has an special education enrollment of 22.9% in 2022-2023 and therefore paid more in charter school special education tuition than we should have. Furthermore, charter schools have historically classified students as special education students after enrolling in charter schools. This is evident by the significant disparity between the RSD Actual Special Education Enrollment Percentage and the CS Actual Special Education Enrollment Percentage noted in the box to the right and Special Education Enrollment Percentage image noted below. The cost burden due to using the statutory 16% special education enrollment factor has caused RSD to pay an additional \$4.5 million to charter schools over the last seven years.



Many supporters of charter schools will indicate that the current Basic Education Funding Formula does take into consideration the number of students that are enrolled in charter schools and provides an additional student weighting that will increase the amount of funding allocated to public schools. However, this reimbursement is insignificant to the amount of charter school tuition paid to charter schools. Since 2015-2016, when the funding formula was enacted, the weighting has ranged from 0.47% to 0.69% of the total weighted student count and had a total value of \$1,441,000 compared to \$121,327,000 in tuition expense. This is only a 1.19% reimbursement factor. In fact, the initial charter school reimbursement enacted had a targeted goal to reach 30% of charter school tuition cost, but the reimbursement factor was eliminated by legislators. If the 30% factor would have remained in effect, RSD would have received nearly \$36,400,000 in reimbursements since inception.

Charter school advocates and legislators have suggested that charter schools have the ability to reduce the expenses of school districts by reducing the staff needed because students enroll in charter schools. Unfortunately, due to the size of our districts in terms of student enrollment, staffing, and the number of schools, we cannot reduce staff levels to offset the cost of charter school tuition based on the reduction of students enrolled in our schools due to attending charter schools. We have not had a large enough reduction in one grade level at one building to make the staff reduction. We continue to need to employ the existing staff. As a result, we continue to maintain the same operating cost, while incurring charter school tuition costs. Our existing students, those that choose to remain in public schools, suffer due to not

having the funds paid to charter schools available for educational programming to benefit their education.

RSD academics

The RSD had shown slow and steady growth on local and state assessments until COVID. The district went fully remote in March 2020 for the rest of the 2019-2020 school year and continued remote learning the following year (2020-2021) in its entirety. When returning to face to face learning in September 2021, it was clear that COVID time and remote learning had a tremendous effect on students. When students returned to face-to-face instruction in September 2021 after 18 months of remote learning, many parents wanted to continue their children in remote learning. They were given the option of enrolling in the Reading Virtual Academy, RSD's virtual program. Student enrollment in the Reading Virtual Academy increased from 200 students to approximately 2,000 students at that time. Due to the immediate increase in enrollment, RSD analyzed student enrollment data across the district and closed/combined classrooms when possible. This allowed classroom teachers to shift to Reading Virtual Academy teachers to ensure all virtual learning students had a live teacher available to them for a majority of the school day.

Students returned to full in-person instruction in September 2021 with significant learning loss and mental health needs. Some with more severe disruptive behaviors. The district had plans in place for accelerated learning with a focus on college and workforce skills at the high school level but basic needs of food and shelter insecurities, lack of social skill development, and mental health quickly became the priority focus.

According to all state standardized assessment data, RSD saw significant learning loss post pandemic. In 2019, 23% of students were proficient/advanced in English Language Arts (ELA) as shown on the Pennsylvania System of State Assessment (PSSA). Participation rate from testing in 2020 and 2021 was so low due to remote learning, data was not a true representation of student proficiency. ELA data dropped to 18% proficiency in 2022 when students returned to face to face. At the time of this report, PDE has only released preliminary 2023 data which shows ELA at 20% proficiency. Eight schools have exceeded their scores from 2019 as shown in the preliminary data. Data also shows a decrease in the amount of students in the below basic category. In 2022, 35% of students were in Below Basic and in 2023 preliminary data shows that has dropped to 30%.

Similar trends are seen in Math data on PSSA. In 2019, RSD students scored 12% proficiency prior to the pandemic. In 2022, Math data dropped to 8% and 2023 preliminary PSSA data show Math at 7% proficiency. Six of the schools exceeded their scores from 2019. More significantly, in 2022, students were at 80% below basic and preliminary reports in 2023 show students at 70%. Math has been a concern for the district. Prior to the pandemic, the district began to explore an alternative more robust Math program for students. This was put on hold due to the pandemic. In September of 2022, the district implemented a new Math program called IReady which is research based and more inclusive to all learners. The 2022-2023 school year was the first year of implementation.

According to the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment (PVAAS) ELA data, all grade levels were above or well above growth achievement except for 8th grade which met its growth goal. There were similar trends in Math data. According to PVAAS Math data, all grade levels were well above growth achievement except for 6th and 8th grade.

According to Keystone State Assessment, the 2022 data also shows significant learning loss for students after the pandemic. Data shows 7% of students scored proficiency in Algebra, 13% proficiency in Biology and 25% proficiency in Literature. At the time of this report, the Keystone data for 2023 have not been released.

Along with the growth of standardized assessments since remote learning, students in Kindergarten through 2nd grades have shown academic growth on our local assessment, Acadience. Acadience assesses early literacy skills in Kindergarten through second grade.

Acadience Data					
Grade Level	2019 - % Benchmark	2020 (remote)	2021 (remote)	2022 - % Benchmark	2023 - % Benchmark
Kindergarten	59%	NA	NA	21%	52%
1st Grade	37%	NA	NA	20%	29%
2nd Grade	37%	NA	NA	22%	31%

The number of graduates from Reading High School have been increasing over the last several years. There were 920 graduates in 2020, 926 in 2021, and 1009 in 2022 . The chart below shows the data on the 2023 graduates. Students who do not earn the necessary credits

expected in the school year are enrolled in summer school for credit recovery. Seniors who use the summer school credit recovery course to meet the graduation requirements are eligible for the current year graduation. In addition to June graduation, a second graduation is held at the end of the summer for students who need additional time to complete courses to earn required credits. Most of these students have faced some kind of trauma, hardship, or homelessness at some point in their lives and need the extra time and support for completion of high school credits. This year, 147 students will be attending summer school and are on track to be added to the graduation class of 2023 if they earn the necessary credits that are required.

2023 Preliminary Graduation Stats as of 7/18/23			
	All Students	4 Year Cohort	5 + Year Cohort
Total Students (Potential Grads)	1371	1184	187
Total Grads	963	876	87
Returning	258	178	80
Summer School Credit Recovery	147	128	19
Grad Rate	70.24%	73.99%	46.52%

The entire senior class (100%) was able to meet the Act 158 requirement through the various pathways. According to data, 24.4% met through the Keystones Proficiency/Composite, 13.1% met through CTC Concentrator, 10.8% met through Alternative Assessment, 48.4% met through Evidence Based, and 3.3% met through other pathways as designated by PDE.

To best prepare our students for academic success, RSD is committed to providing the necessary supports to address socio-emotional and health needs of our students. These interventions include:

9th grade Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment: In 2022, 239 (28%) of students were identified as being at high risk and 150 (18%) of students were identified as medium risk for mental health needs. Of these students, 252 signed consent to disclose information that allowed them to seek services within the school from a variety of trusted entities like Caron and Pennsylvania Counseling Services.

- **Aevidum.** This District-sponsored, student-led club is at each of the secondary schools. It is rooted in the mission to prevent student suicide. The popular club leads school activities and sponsors a county-wide invitational conference that focuses on breaking the stigma of mental health.

- **Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness:** In 2021-22, nearly 900 Reading School District students (K-12) were identified as eligible for McKinney-Vento protection, meaning that these students lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Reading High School staff identified 200 students in grades 9 through 12. In response to the ongoing needs of these students, ARP funds have been set aside to build the Knight's Keep at the High School. The "keep" is the area in the castle where knights went to rest after a battle. The Keep will consist of four private bathrooms that include a shower, laundry facilities, lockers, a kitchenette, study areas, social areas and, most importantly, access to support from a school social worker or counselor. The Knight's Keep was featured in the PDE ECYEH ARP audit and will be duplicated at the new STEM school.
- **English Learner Welcome Center:** The Welcome Center is the central hub of the English as a Second Language Program (ESL). The goal of the Welcome Center is to provide a safe and welcoming environment for new families who are either entering the US from another country or whose primary language is not English. Families are referred to the Welcome Center upon enrollment based on their responses on the federally required home language survey. Upon arrival, families are greeted by a fully bilingual ESL Program Clerk, who reviews their referral documents and checks them in. Families are then transferred to the Family Engagement Suite where they engage with the Title III Family Engagement Specialist who explains the services offered at the Welcome Center and introduces the families to the ESL Testing Specialists. The Testing Specialists interview the families to determine the educational history of each student and review any educational records that the families may have in their possession. After the family interviews, the Testing Specialists then take the students into the Testing Center to conduct English language proficiency and academic testing to determine whether the students would benefit from placement into the ESL Program. While the students complete their assessments, the Family Engagement Specialist then conducts a more detailed family interview and needs assessment to determine if the family is in need of any social services, adult education, or eligible for special programs, such as Migrant Education services. Families are also offered a new family orientation where they learn about the District and gather valuable information about attendance, student code of conduct, dress and grooming policies and other district protocols. In addition to these services, the Welcome Center offers adult ESL classes in collaboration with the Literacy Council of Reading-Berks and also serves as a family engagement center

offering support throughout the school year through workshops, family picnics, advocacy for families who have complaints or issues at the schools and virtual learning sessions for parents on how to support their students academically. Families are referred to the Welcome Center upon enrollment.

- **InMind Services:** This program is a Pennsylvania based agency that provides support to school personnel and caregivers in the form of trauma-informed, restorative practice based tools for use in response to students' challenging behaviors.
- **Out-Patient Therapists:** Each school has offices for one or two local agencies to provide out-patient therapy to students at no cost to their caregivers. Partner agencies include Malvern Community Health Services, PA Counseling, Betterview Counseling.
- **Pennsylvania (PA) Youth Survey:** 2021 PAYS survey results showed increases in the use of cigarettes and vaping, contemplation of suicide, bullying, and all types of abuse except for physical injury. Knowing this data has allowed RSD to formulate strategies to combat these negative behaviors. There has been a decrease in the use of alcohol, suicide plans and attempts, and abuse from physical injury. The impact of the school environment is reflected in students reporting an increase in the opportunity to spend 1:1 time with teachers and opportunities for class participation. This was highest among 12th grade students.
- **Red Knight Response Team:** In 2023, a trained team of caring adults within the Student Services team, e.g., school counselors and school social workers, responded to 18 calls for assistance in schools due to a tragic event that impacted a school, like fires in the school community, death of staff, and other difficult events. In the 5 school years prior, the team averaged 8 calls per year.
 - Restorative Practices Facilitators in the secondary schools: 6 (4 new positions in 2023-24)
- **Restorative Practices:** This framework is used to establish and maintain a positive school culture and climate. It focuses on the five pillars of relationship, respect, responsibility, repair and reintegration. Restorative practices are built into the school day as part of the normal schedule, and are used more formally to address student and staff behaviors and conflict
- **Rhithm:** This tool is a social-emotional wellness check-in tool that uses emoji characters for students to share various needs with caring adults in their schools. Student responses provide valuable data to educators, counselors, and leaders, after which individual wellness activities and lessons are displayed to help educators and students

be regulated and ready to learn. This was provided to students in K - 4th grades in 2022-2023 and will expand to grades 5 - 8 in 2023-2024.

- **Safe2Say:** This is a confidential, tip-based violence prevention program that allows students, staff and members of the community to anonymously share a concern of potential or actual harm to themselves or others before it occurs or worsens.
- **Second Step:** This curriculum is a social-emotional research-based curriculum that empowers students to develop positive relationships, regulate emotions, and set appropriate goals. This has been provided to students in grades PK - 8 for over five years. It is fully incorporated into the K - 4th grade curriculum as of 2020.
- **Student Assistance Programs:** SAP is a systematic team process used to mobilize school resources to remove barriers to learning. SAP is designed to assist in identifying issues including alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues which pose a barrier to a student's success. The primary goal of the Student Assistance Program is to help students overcome these barriers so that they may achieve, advance, and remain in school." Student Assistance Program (SAP) SAP teams are active in every building, meeting weekly or biweekly. There were 3,860 student referrals in 2022- 2023. This is a 30% increase in referrals from 2018-19.
- **Student Services Teams:** Certificated, professional staff are available to provide holistic Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 support for all students. These include
 - School Counselors: 45 (6 new positions in 2023-24)
 - School Social Workers: 43 (11 new positions in 2023-24)
 - School Nurses: 29 (2 new positions in 2023-24)
- **Targeted Counseling Services:** School Counselors and Social Workers provide 1:1 and group counseling to students with IEPs as deemed necessary by quantifiable data from the Social, Academic, Emotional, Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS)
- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** These practices are led by District staff trained by Lakeside Global. Trauma-informed schools strive to use specific skills to improve interactions and communication with trauma-impacted people. Trauma informed staff embrace the responsibility to prevent, avoid, and respond to trauma of students, families and others in the school community.

With increased funding and ESSR allocations, the RSD increased staffing to assist students and created opportunities for students and their families. Below are some of the programs RSD was able to initiate for students:

- **Accelerated Learning through Extended Day and Extended Year Programs:** Utilizing federal funds, RSD made significant investments in afterschool and summer school programs with an emphasis on academic recovery and student re-engagement. Teachers offer lessons that include hands-on and cooperative learning activities. Schools also offer college and career readiness experiences that encourage students to dream about their futures and introduce them to the various career pathways. Schools are working in collaboration with community partners to bring in high-interest programs and clubs like dance, art, STEM, drama, and sports for ALL students.
- **Beyond the Castle Walls Initiative:** In an effort to re-engage our learners after returning from remote learning, the RSD's Beyond the Castle Walls initiative encourages schools to offer more field trips and experiences related to the curriculum. Instead of relying on traditional in-classroom instruction, teachers in PreK-12 grades were given the resources to plan trips to local venues such as museums, local businesses, libraries, zoos, nature centers, and historic sites. Schools also had the opportunity to invite guest speakers into their schools to provide students with motivational assemblies, laser shows, roaming science labs, Lego projects and other fun and exciting learning experiences. The District's goal is to offer its students the rich learning experiences that many of their families do not have the financial resources to provide.
- **Early Career Academy:** In collaboration with Albright College, a cohort of high-school-aged students who were identified as workforce inclined, had the opportunity to spend two days with a business and three days split between Albright campus and Red Knight Accelerated Academy- City Line. During their time at Albright, students completed data analysis, budgeting and public speaking while receiving dual enrollment. While working at the business, students received \$15/hour in wages. Students also receive OSHA certification prior to working at the business sites. Four students will be continuing to work with the businesses after graduation. One student decided to attend Penn State for marketing and another Thaddeus Stevens after this experience. For the 2022-23 school year, three businesses participated in the program. For the 2023-24 school year, we will be increasing the number of students in the program and including an additional six companies.
- **Early College Academy:** Reading School District is collaborating with several higher education institutions to offer an Early College Academy in which high school seniors will be able to enroll in college-level courses and earn both high school and college credit. Students who are eligible will spend their senior year taking courses at Reading Area

Community College, Penn State University - Berks Campus, or Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology earning college credits toward a degree.

- **RSD Internship Program:** RSD is revamping its Internship program for our high school juniors and seniors. Students can participate in paid internships that allow them to have hands-on experiences in a career field of their choice. It is the District's goal to expand internships to include opportunities in a wide range of career pathways including STEM, Arts and Communications, Business and Entrepreneurship, Health Sciences and Public Service. This past school year, the District placed high school interns in our elementary and middle schools to assist in our summer and afterschool programs. Student interns were paid an hourly rate and earned high school credit while learning valuable skills that will help them in their future careers. Many of our interns reported that they had never considered becoming an educator until they completed their internships. Fortunately, this internship program has raised the awareness of our students regarding the dire need for bilingual and bicultural educators in urban education. Thanks to the internship program, the District now has a potential teacher pipeline where we can "grow our own" educators from within the Reading community. In four years, we hope to have a much larger pool of homegrown teacher candidates who will help support the diverse needs of our students. To this end, the District strategically negotiated a five (5) year collective bargaining agreement with its education association. The District has and will continue to market this agreement to our families and students.
- **STEM Academy:** RSD is actively planning to open a new high school STEM Academy set to open in the 2025-2026 school year. The new state-of-the-art building, funded using ESSER dollars, will house between 750-1000 high school students pursuing careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. The District is meeting with local business, colleges/universities, and workforce development organizations to better understand what kinds of STEM jobs exist in the greater Reading community and what skills our graduates will need to fill them. The STEM Academy will be one of 4 high school academies that will focus on career pathways.
- **Total Experience Learning Classroom:** In the 2022-23 school year, the District partnered with Albright College to create a dedicated classroom focused on educational innovation for two groups of 5th grade students with a teacher who is trained in Total Experience Learning. The District has also made a commitment to educational innovation and student engagement by investing in professional development for several cohorts of teachers and administrators through Albright's nationally recognized Total

Experience Learning program. In this training, teachers and administrators learn how to provide students with inquiry-based and authentic learning experiences that improve their research skills as well as literacy, communication and entrepreneurial thinking.

In terms of physical safety, RSD employs its own school security personnel. We currently have 48 Safe School Officers, 3 Safe School Lead Officers, 3 School Police Officers, and one Director of Safe Schools as part of the RSD staff. The Safe Schools team members are assigned to the five middle schools, three RKAA satellite campuses and the main high school. As of the 2023-24 school year, the 5 middle schools, 3 RKAA campuses, and Reading High school will all be equipped with weapon scanners at all student entry points.

In terms of health services, in addition to the provision of mandated services provided by the school nurses and dental hygienists, RSD's Health Services Department provides and supports the following initiatives:

- **Berks Community Health Center Mobile Van:** BCHC and Reading School District will partner in the 23-24 School Year to provide physicals to eligible students at school sites during events such as vaccine clinics. Additional opportunities for this partnership will be explored.
- **Sealant Program:** Since 2019, the certified school dental hygienists (2) have applied sealants to age appropriate elementary students.
- **Vaccines for Children (VFC) Clinic:** a Centers For Disease Control program that provides vaccines for children until the age of 19 who are Medicaid eligible, uninsured or underinsured. Reading School District's VFC Clinic started in 2010 in response to the hundreds of students who enrolled without all of the required immunization, facing exclusion due to the lack of access to care. Reading School District nurses have administered approximately 13,000 doses of required and recommended vaccines during 5,200 student visits. From March to May of 2021, the nurses administered 1,597 doses of vaccines which included COVID-19 vaccines.
- **Vision to Learn:** These mobile clinics provide free eye care and glasses, at no cost, to students who are referred by the school nurses based on the school vision screening. This program was piloted at 3 schools in 2022. Beginning in 2023, elementary and secondary schools will participate in the program in alternating years.
- **Vision Clinics and New Eyes for the Needy:** The middle-school-based clinics are held biannually Vision exams are provided by the school ophthalmologist at no cost to

students. Students receive free glasses from the New Eyes for the Needy program.

In our efforts to support academic success, RSD will prioritize the following areas:

- Increase staffing in high priority areas: English Learners, Students with Special Needs, Mental Health Services, Reading/Literacy Instruction, Academic Interventions, Educational Leadership, Secondary Science and Mathematics. This increased staffing will also lower class sizes.
- Significant investments in professional development for administrators, teachers and other educators in meeting the growing academic and socio-emotional needs of our students
- Targeted efforts to increase student engagement in school by way of clubs, athletics, the arts, afterschool and summer programs that allow students to create lasting, supportive relationships with their peers and school staff.
- Increased focus on family and community engagement with an emphasis on how families and community agencies can support students who are struggling academically beyond the regular school day.
- Extended Academic Day for students who need academic remediation. This extended school day with certified teachers will assist students reaching grade level at a faster rate.

RSD is the only real educational option for most families in our community, making its health and success vital not only to Reading but the state and nation as a whole. The genuine interest and involvement of valued community partnerships are evidence of this mutualism. There are groups that provide GED/ESL classes, mentoring services, academic assistance for students, Head Start, and youth development activities. These organizations help both students and their families reach their highest potential. Examples include:

- **American Red Cross:** ARC is a partner with their Sound the Alarm campaign, installing smoke detectors in the homes of our families where there are high rates of fires of homes without the basic detector. RSD also collaborates with ARC to stand up emergency shelters needed as a result of local disasters that displace residents from their homes.
- **Centro Hispano:** The Centro provides support for all families in need. They offer Abriendo Puertas/ Opening Doors, which is a peer-to-peer training program that seeks to improve the outcomes of Latino children by focusing on building capacity and confidence

of parents to be strong and powerful advocates in the lives of their children. Centro also offers afterschool programming and meals to youth across the city.

- In collaboration with Centro Hispano, the **Harwood Institute** is engaged with the Reading community in creating a community-driven agenda that would ensure every student has access to the American Dream. The work has had a tremendous impact on how the Reading Community, local organizations, and the District operate collectively. There are several community organizations, including the United Way of Berks County, the Wyomissing Foundation, Berks Literacy Council, and RSD who have taken responsibility for action planning around components of the agenda and report. All organizations are now focused on working toward a common goal to improve the community for our youth. A copy of the full Harwood report will be provided as supplemental documentation.
- **Community In Schools:** CIS offers dropout prevention services to students with attendance challenges. Their services include a three-tiered process that serves whole school, small group, and individual interventions.
- **Council on Chemical Abuse:** COCA provides education to students in and out of the school day on drug and chemical abuse.
- **Girls Scouts and Boy Scouts of America. GSA/BSA** provide after-school programming and leadership training in various schools throughout the district. RSD has the only known “cheer-learning squad”, where the district’s cheerleaders also operate as scout troop with a focussed mission of service to the Reading community.
- **Helping Harvest.:** Harvest is a fresh food bank that supplies families with meals that are essential to healthy living. They also provide “Weekender Bags”, which are backpacks full of meals that homeless students take home for the weekend.
- **Literacy Council of Berks:** The Literacy Council holds ESL classes for families of RSD students at the RSD Welcome Center.
- **Olivet Boys’ and Girls’ Club:** The Olivet has partnered with RSD on many occasions mainly with recruitment efforts and a “walking bus” to ensure students get to the club safely after school Olivet provides RSD youth with education support, after school and summer programming, and mentoring.
- **Reading Fightin Phils:** The Fightins’ organization is a local minor league baseball team that has partnered with RSD to provide opportunities for students and their families to participate in community events, internships, careers and baseball.

- **Reading Recreation Commission:** The Commission is a community partnership between the City of Reading and RSD that is largely funded by tax dollars. The Commission provides quality programs and facilities to the residents of Reading, and the youth in particular. There are neighborhood-based recreation locations, feeding sites, and learning opportunities for all ages both during the school year and the summer. The Commission operates out of schools, parks, playgrounds, and at their two recreation centers on the northeast and southwest sides neighborhoods in Reading. The Commission operates the only public pool in the City and administers numerous youth athletic programs in soccer, tennis, swimming, and basketball.
- **United Way of Berks County:** United Way is an integral part of the community and RSD. They specifically assist by operating the Ready.Set.READ! Program, which is designed to boost reading levels in second grade to meet proficiency, and Read Alliance program, which is a teen-tutor program that employs RSD high-school teens to serve as tutors for RSD first-graders. The goal of the program is two-fold: first, to improve reading skills, and second, to expose high-school students to the teaching profession.

There are many more organizations that engage with RSD students and staff to provide services for the whole child, including (but not limited to): Albright College, Reading Area Community College, Penn State Berks, Alvernia University, Kutztown University, Reading Public Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Visions Federal Credit Union, Voice Up Berks, Wyomissing Foundation, Berks County Community Foundation, Reading KTB, Real Deal 610, Care, The Village, Safe Berks, Barrio Alegria, Salvation Army, Reading Tower Health, Berks Community Action Program (BCAP), and Caron Foundation. Addressing the socio-emotional health and well-being of our students to unlock and accelerate their academic success remains at core of these valued partnerships.

Based on the foregoing, despite the challenges posed by forces outside the control of the District and the strain placed on RSD and other public school district by mounting, state-imposed, unfunded mandates, it is clear that our District-sponsored opportunities in combination with our strong community supports provide vast opportunities for success for our students.

At this time, however, we would be remiss in not mentioning what we believe will not create opportunity for success for our students, i.e., state support for direct financial aide to families to enroll their children in non-public schools or other efforts that divert state or federal

funding away from school districts. Whether they take the form vouchers, opportunity scholarships, or education savings accounts, or publicly-funded scholarships for identified cohorts of k-12 students, they all have the effect of undermining public education and subsidizing private interests. They take from the transparent and accountable to benefit the opaque and unaccountable.

For example, when evaluating the Pennsylvania Award for Student Success Scholarship Program, it is our belief that the basis for the scholarship program is fundamentally flawed. Individual students that reside in the geographical footprint of a school (not school district) that is deemed to be in the Lowest 15% of the Low-Achieving Schools may be eligible to receive a scholarship or voucher to attend private or religious schools using public dollars.

The Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OTSC) Program List of Low-Achieving Schools provides the following information on the criteria for the the identification of schools:

- Public elementary and secondary schools within this Commonwealth that ranked in the lowest 15% of its designation as elementary or secondary for the 2021-22 school year based on the combined Mathematics/Algebra I and ELA/Reading/Literature scores from the annual assessments (PSSA, PASA, and Keystone) administered in 2022.
- Pursuant to Section 2010-B of the School Code, 24 P.S. §20-2010-B, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (“PDE”) is required to publish a list of “low achieving schools”. PDE is also required to provide notice to school districts with low achieving schools so students attending or living within the residential boundaries of these schools are eligible to apply for an Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) Program scholarship.
- The term shall not include a charter school, cyber charter school or area vocational-technical school. Closed schools and special education schools were removed from the list.
- By Statute, the definition of a secondary school was one that had an 11th grade and an elementary school was any other school.

First, let's evaluate the identification of the low-achieving schools. The list of schools only includes traditional public schools. It does not include or consider any public charter schools - brick and mortar or cyber charter schools. Again, it does not consider any public charter schools when determining the lowest achieving schools. There are currently 382 public schools that are included on the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OTSC) Program List of Low-Achieving Schools. Currently, as of July 25, 2023, there are approximately 175 public charter schools that have not been evaluated to determine if they are a low-achieving public school. Why are they excluded? Unfortunately, for the many students that attend public charter

schools, many charter schools are low-performing and students do not receive the quality education they are seeking and deserve. If the public charter schools were considered as part of the calculation methodology, there would be fewer traditional public schools on the Low-Achieving Schools List. By excluding public charter schools from this list, the statute supporting this scholarship is discriminatory to traditional public schools and provides specialized treatment to public charter schools.

Second, let's consider the valuation method used to determine the low-achieving school list. The OSTC criteria states students that reside in the geographical footprint of a "Public elementary and secondary schools within this Commonwealth that ranked in the lowest 15% of its designation as elementary or secondary for the 2021-22 school year based on the combined Mathematics/Algebra I and ELA/Reading/Literature scores from the annual assessments (PSSA, PASA, and Keystone) administered in 2022" may attend a private or religious school using public funds. Private and religious schools are not required to administer standardized tests such as the PSSA, PASA and Keystones which are used to determine the combined assessment scores. There are two questions that have to be considered:

- How does a parent know if the school to which the student is eligible to receive a scholarship and attend is a higher performing school than the one they just left if it is not required to administer standardized tests such as the PSSA, PASA or Keystone?
- Why are private and religious schools able to be excluded from the List of Low-Achieving Schools? Is this discriminatory to the traditional public school?

Next, we need to consider why the Pennsylvania Department of Education, pursuant to Section 2010-B of the School Code, 24 P.S. §20-2010-B, is required to publish a list of "low achieving schools," but is not able to provide school districts with the complete list of school performance. Providing the full list will allow school districts to validate the placement of schools on the list and to analyze how high-performing schools are meeting the requirements to be excluded from the OTSC List. Examples of possible analytics are identified in the final point outlined below.

Finally, we need to consider the root cause for schools being included on the OTSC Low-Achieving Schools List. The primary reason schools are not obtaining the highest results in standardized tests is because they are not providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of each student. However, the underlying cause for not being able to provide an appropriate level of differentiated instruction is primarily the lack of funding. In evaluating the school districts that are included on the OTSC List of Low-Achieving Schools, the following outcomes were identified:

- Of the 78 districts included on the 2023-2024 OTSC List, 50 school districts were deemed to be underfunded due to being included on the 2023-2024 Level-Up Funding List.
- When comparing the 78 districts included on the OTSC List to the Top 10 Schools with the most state and local revenue per districts (\$25,355.60 per student and above based on the 2022 Annual Financial Report submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue), the following results were identified:
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts received an additional \$12,475.53 per student than the average of the 78 districts deemed Low-Achieving.
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts received an additional 0.65 years of average experience than the average years of experience than the 78 districts deemed Low-Achieving.
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts paid an average salary that was \$14,666.30 higher than the average salary of the 78 districts deemed Low-Achieving.
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts had an average Student to Staffing Ratio that consisted of 5.45 fewer students than the average Student to Staffing Ratio of the 78 districts deemed Low-Achieving.
 - Only two districts in the Top 10 Funded Districts had schools that were on the Low-Achieving List.
- When comparing Reading School District to the Top 10 Schools with the most state and local revenue per districts (\$25,355.60 per student and above based on the 2022 Annual Financial Report submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue), the following results were identified:
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts received an additional \$15,899.79 per student than the Reading School District which is deemed Low-Achieving.
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts have an additional 4.17 years of average experience than the average years of experience of the Reading School District which is deemed Low-Achieving.
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts paid an average salary that was \$16,792.44 higher than the average salary of the Reading School District which is deemed Low-Achieving.
 - The Top 10 Funded Districts had an average Student to Staffing Ratio that consisted of 11.40 fewer students than the average Student to Staffing Ratio of the Reading School District which is deemed Low-Achieving.

This analysis indicates that if a school district is properly funded, they will have the resources to hire and retain experienced educators, who are justly compensated and maintain a smaller class size to provide the appropriate differentiated instruction to allow students to successfully complete the standardized tests.

Once, and only once, all schools are properly and equitably funded can the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the State Legislature justifiably evaluate and hold all schools and school districts accountable to the same standards. Two-thirds of all schools with low-performing schools are underfunded. Another way to look at this issue is that 50% of all underfunded school districts have at least one low-achieving school. We need and must do better by our students! We need to provide public schools with the appropriate and equitable funding needed to provide our students with the education they deserve.

The families in the district deserve equitable, robust, and sustainable funding from the state. Pennsylvania has a responsibility to ensure every student in every community has equal access to an excellent system of public education. Programs like vouchers, opportunity scholarships, and other similar programs divert precious public resources and attention from the needs of our students to the benefit of institutions that are not accountable or transparent.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Jennifer Murray
Superintendent
Reading School District