

## POLICY NOTE

# Five charts that show how much public school spending and teacher pay have increased

By Liv Finne, Director, Center for Education

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### Key Findings

1. A senior state education official recently said that public school spending has “declined.” It is actually increasing.
2. Public school spending has nearly doubled in ten years, to \$18.8 billion.
3. Per-student spending has nearly doubled, to \$18,000, more than tuition at most private schools.
4. Teacher pay and benefits per year now average more than \$126,000, up 37 percent.
5. Barely half of public school employees are teachers.
6. As public school spending and employees increased, the number of students has fallen.

### Introduction

A senior state education official recently said that public education spending in Washington state has “declined.”<sup>1</sup> This statement is not true, as understood by most people. On examination it turns out the official was referring to education spending as a share of the state budget as compared to budgets in some other states. No one in the general public would use such a cramped and obscure meaning of “decline.”

A true look at spending trends reveals that education spending in Washington state has increased, nearly doubling in ten years, in both absolute and per-student amounts.

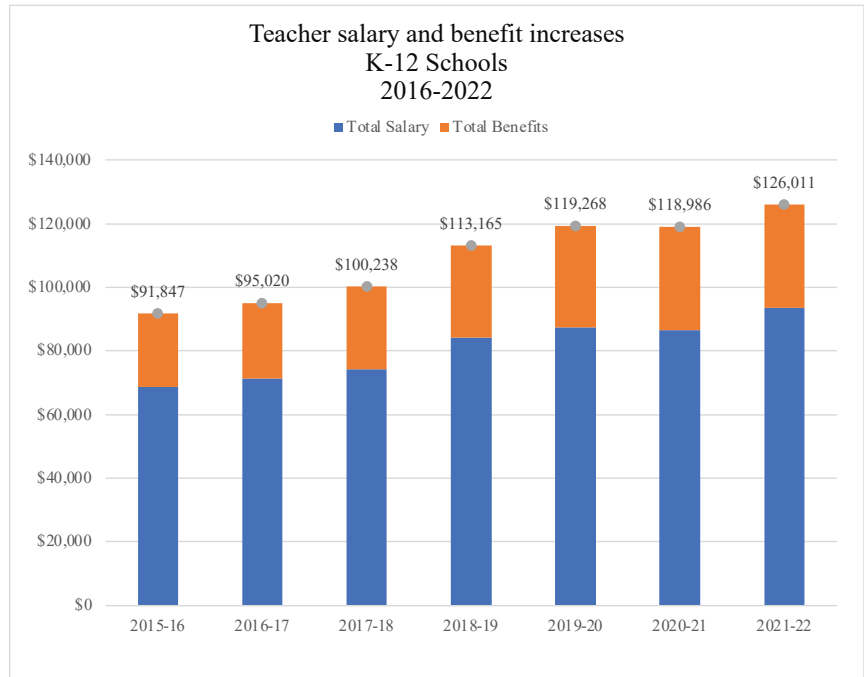
To provide an accurate and objective report to the public, the following charts use official data about teacher pay and benefits, increases in school funding, and increases in school employment and student enrollment.

Details about any of these findings are available at Washington State Fiscal Information ([fiscal.wa.gov](https://fiscal.wa.gov)) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (<https://www.k12.wa.us>).

<sup>1</sup> “State Superintendent Chris Reykdal Press Conference,” TVW, January 9, 2023, at Time Stamp 34:08: <https://tvw.org/video/state-superintendent-chris-reykdal-press-conference-2023011065/?eventID=2023011065>.

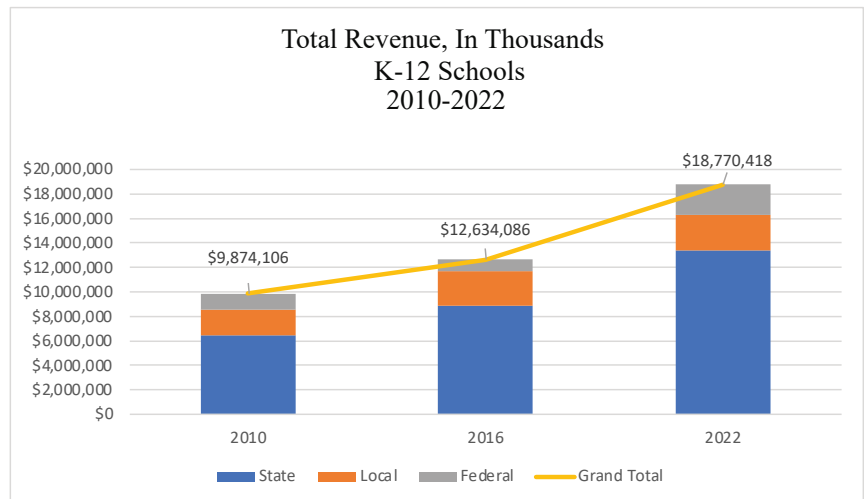
## Chart 1. Teacher pay and benefits average more than \$126,000

Average annual teacher pay and benefits have increased from \$91,847 to \$126,011, up 37 percent<sup>2</sup>:



## Chart 2. Public school spending has nearly doubled, to \$18 billion

Total annual revenue to the schools has increased from \$9.84 billion in 2010 to \$18.77 billion in 2022, an increase of 91 percent.<sup>3</sup>

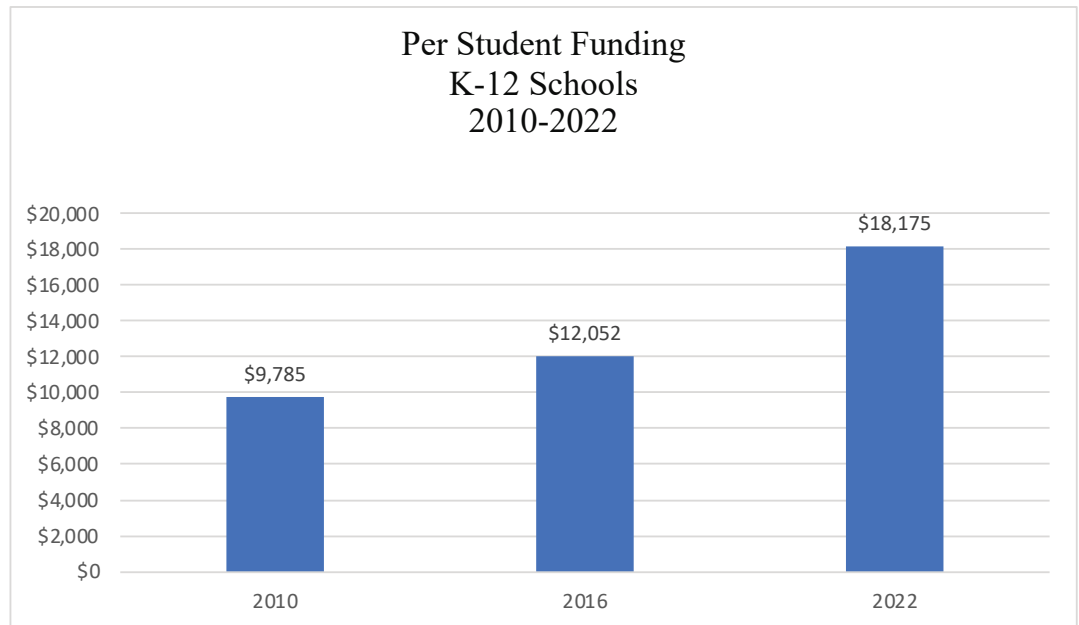


2 “School District Personnel Summary Profiles,” School Apportionment and Financial Services, Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2015-16 through 2021-22, <https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/school-apportionment/school-publications/personnel-summary-reports>.

3 “Workload/Staffing/Finance Statewide, K-12 Public Schools: District Staffing and Finance Data, 2010-2022,” Washington State Fiscal Information, at <https://fiscal.wa.gov/K12/K12FinanceStatewide>.

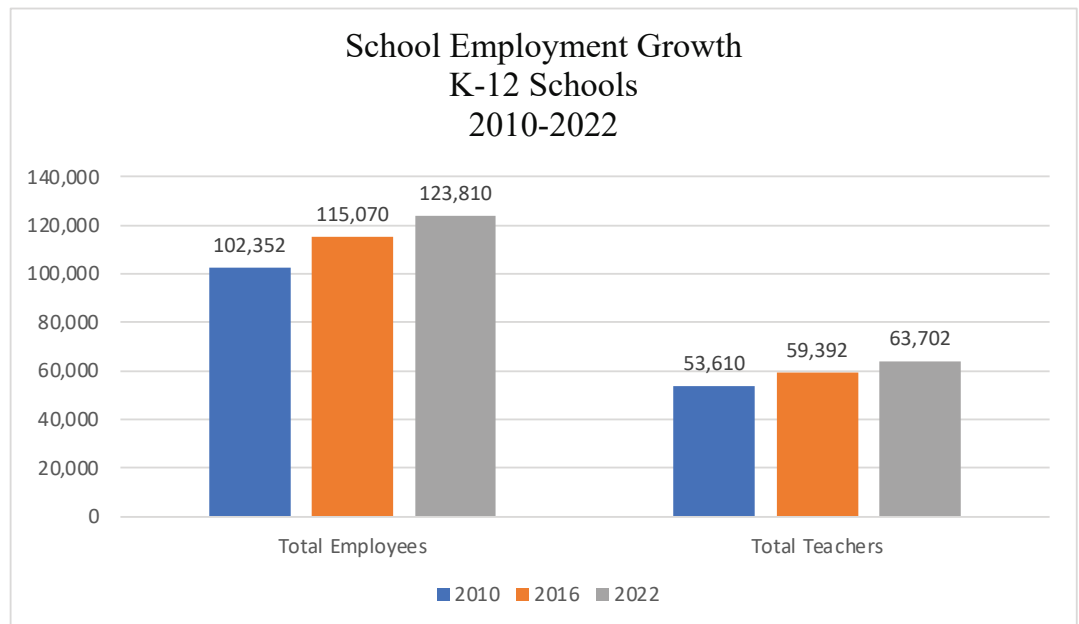
### Chart 3. Per-student spending has nearly doubled, to \$18,000

Per student spending on average statewide has nearly doubled, from \$9,785 per student in 2009-2010 to \$18,175 per student in 2021-22.<sup>4</sup> Public spending is now more than the tuition at most private schools.



### Chart 4. Barely half of public school employees are teachers

Since 2010, the number of full-time public school employees has risen from 102,352 to 123,810, up 21 percent.<sup>5</sup> Yet, only 52 percent of public school employees are classroom teachers.



4 "Workload/Staffing/Finance Statewide, K-12 Public Schools: District Staffing and Finance Data, 2010-2022," Washington State Fiscal Information, at <https://fiscal.wa.gov/K12/K12FinanceStatewide>.

5 "Public K-12 Schools, Full-Time Equivalent Certificated and Classified Employees, Table ETO7," Washington State Data Book, 2019, Office of Financial Management at <https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/dataresearch/databook/pdf/education.pdf>.



**Liv Finne** is the Director of the Center for Education at Washington Policy Center. She is the author of *An Option for Learning: An Assessment of Student Achievement in Charter Public Schools*, which in 2011 reignited the charter school debate in Washington state. She wrote “*Why parents will love charter schools,*” “*Why teachers will love charter schools,*” and many other publications during the 2012 public debate on Initiative 1240, the nation’s first charter school initiative. When charter schools came under attack from the state teachers union, she wrote “*Analysis: Why the state supreme court ruling against charter schools is wrong.*” She is also the author of Washington Policy Center’s widely-read education blog, and of Washington Policy Center’s Education Reform Plan: *Eight Practical Ways to Improve Public Schools*. Liv holds a law degree from Boston University School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wellesley College. She retired from civil litigation practice to raise two children and work as business partner for a small business she owns with her husband.

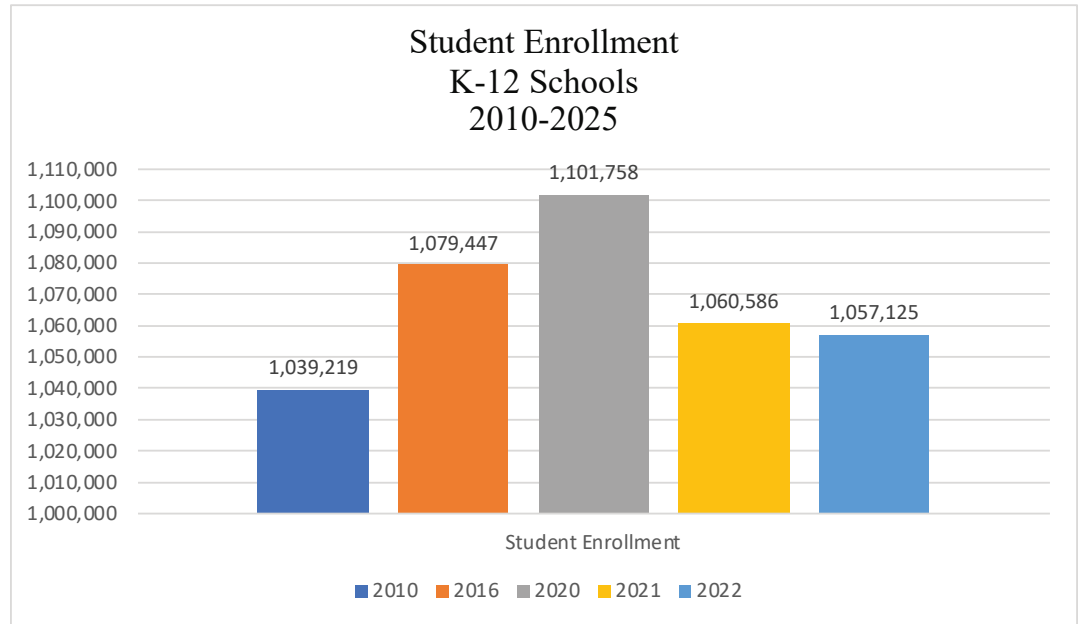
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## Chart 5. As public school spending and employees increased, the number of students has fallen

Public school student enrollment has fallen by 44,633, dropping from 1,101,758 in 2019-20 to 1,057,125 in 2021-22.<sup>6</sup>



### Conclusion

It is misleading at best, and dishonest at worst, for a senior education official to tell the public that school spending is “declining” when it is actually increasing. Such deceptive announcements only increase cynicism and distrust of state officials once the public learns the truth. It is also discouraging when policymakers and parents learn that nearly doubling education spending has not closed the achievement gap, has not improved academics or helped prepare children to succeed in life.

Instead of blindly calling for more money, education leaders should present creative reforms that rebuild trust, empower families and give children access to high-quality learning.

<sup>6</sup> “Public K-12 Schools, Full-Time Equivalent Certificated and Classified Employees, Table ETO9,” Washington State Data Book, 2019, Office of Financial Management at <https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/dataresearch/databook/pdf/education.pdf>.