

TENNESSEE

Faced with an unprecedented set of challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, public education is at a crossroads. To be sure, much has changed since 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation, but pre-pandemic trends provide policymakers with a critical anchor for navigating post-pandemic decisions. This section provides a snapshot of Tennessee's K-12 public education resources and outcomes so that policymakers are better equipped to make critical choices that will shape generations to come. Looking forward, they should use this information to ask important questions like what their goals are for students and whether resources are being deployed toward those aims.

SPENDING TRENDS

Tennessee's inflation-adjusted education revenue grew from \$9,268 per student in 2002 to \$10,971 per student in 2020, a 18.4% growth rate that ranked 30th in the U.S. During this time, real spending on employee benefits grew by 56.5%—ranking 27th in the country—going from \$1,273 per student to \$1,992 per student. In 2020, Tennessee had \$6,245,176,000 in total education debt, up \$1,125 per student in real terms since 2002.

TABLE 1: SPENDING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category (Per Student)	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Revenue	\$9,268	\$10,971	18.4%	30	44
Support Services	\$2,613	\$3,418	30.8%	23	46
Instruction	\$5,596	\$5,977	6.8%	38	42
Benefits	\$1,273	\$1,992	56.5%	27	43
Capital	\$1,227	\$812	-33.8%	47	48
Total Debt	\$5,039	\$6,165	22.3%	30	34

FIGURE 1: REVENUE PER STUDENT BY FUNDING SOURCE (2002-2020)

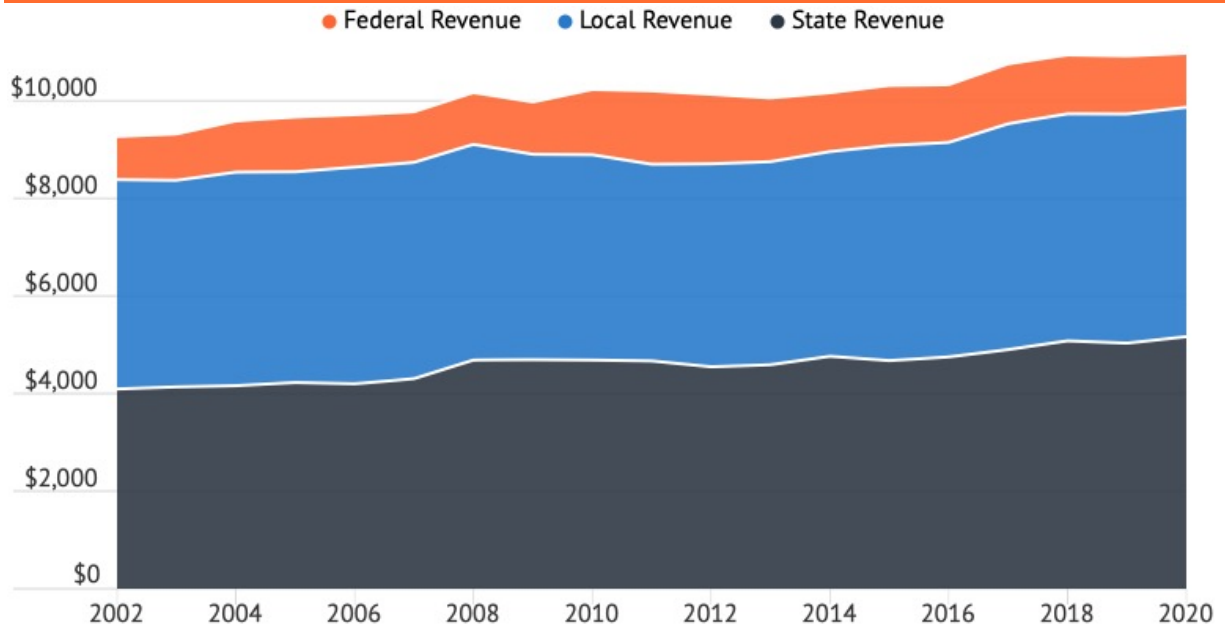
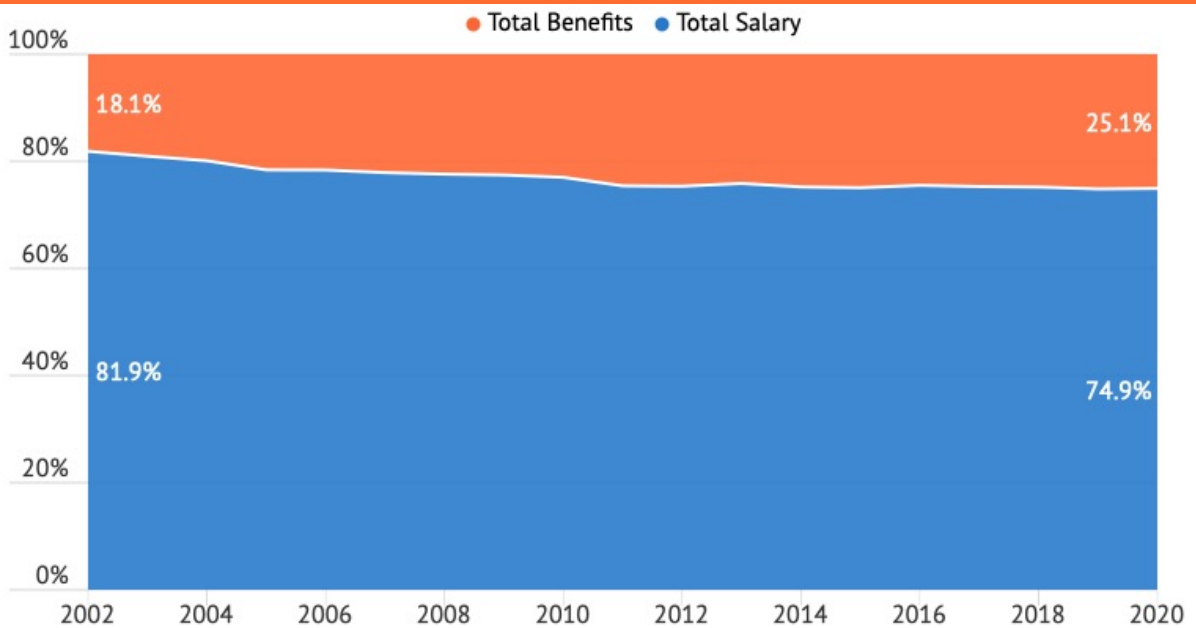


FIGURE 2: K-12 TOTAL SALARY & BENEFITS (2002-2020)



ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS

Between 2002 and 2020, Tennessee’s student population grew by 9.7%. At the same time, the number of total public education staff grew by 20.8%, with teachers increasing by 11.0% and non-teachers increasing by 31.6%. The average inflation-adjusted teacher salary in the state went from \$55,616 in 2002 to \$51,862 in 2020, a –6.7% growth rate that ranked 41st in the U.S.

TABLE 2: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Enrollment	924,899	1,014,744	9.7%	19	16
Total Staff	111,927	135,257	20.8%	16	15
Teachers	58,358	64,784	11.0%	18	15
Non-Teachers	53,569	70,473	31.6%	9	14
Average Teacher Salary	\$55,616	\$51,862	-6.7%	41	40

FIGURE 3: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

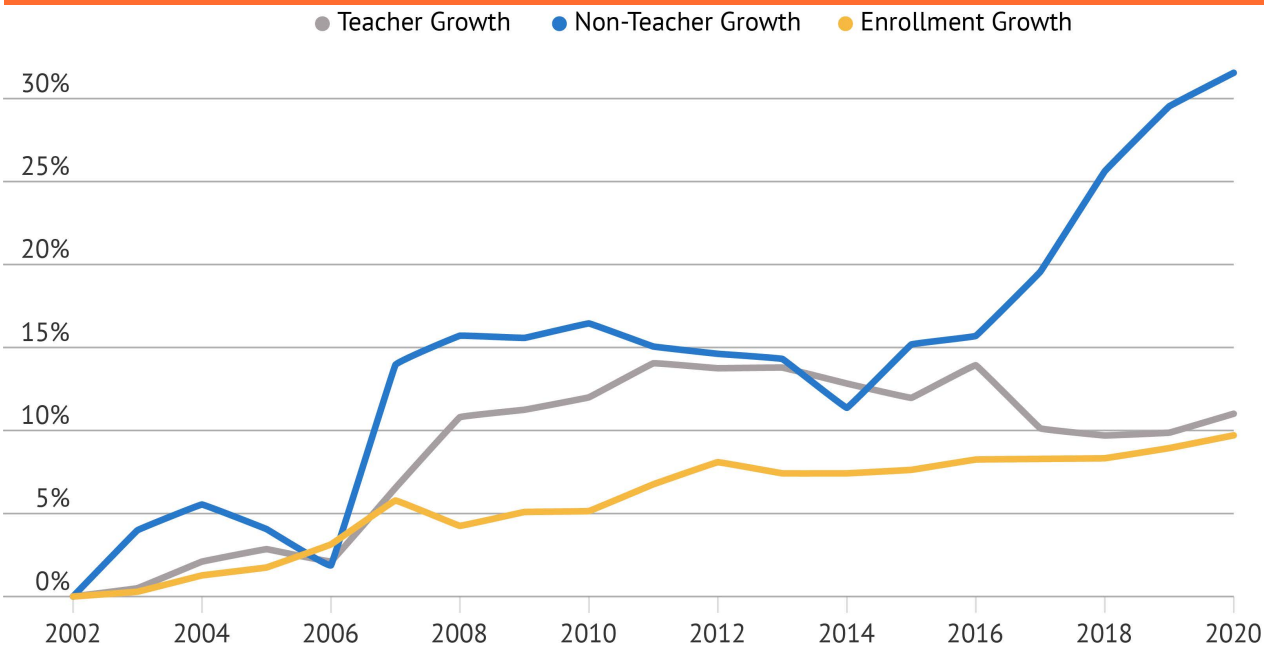
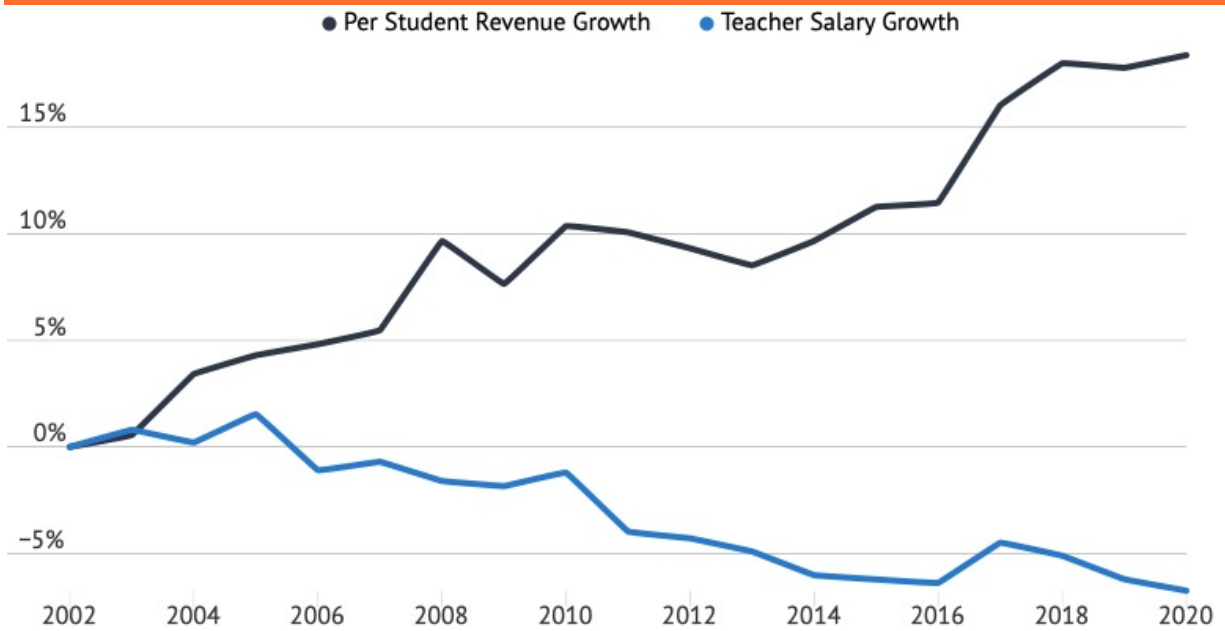


FIGURE 4: TEACHER SALARY GROWTH VS. REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH (2002-2020)



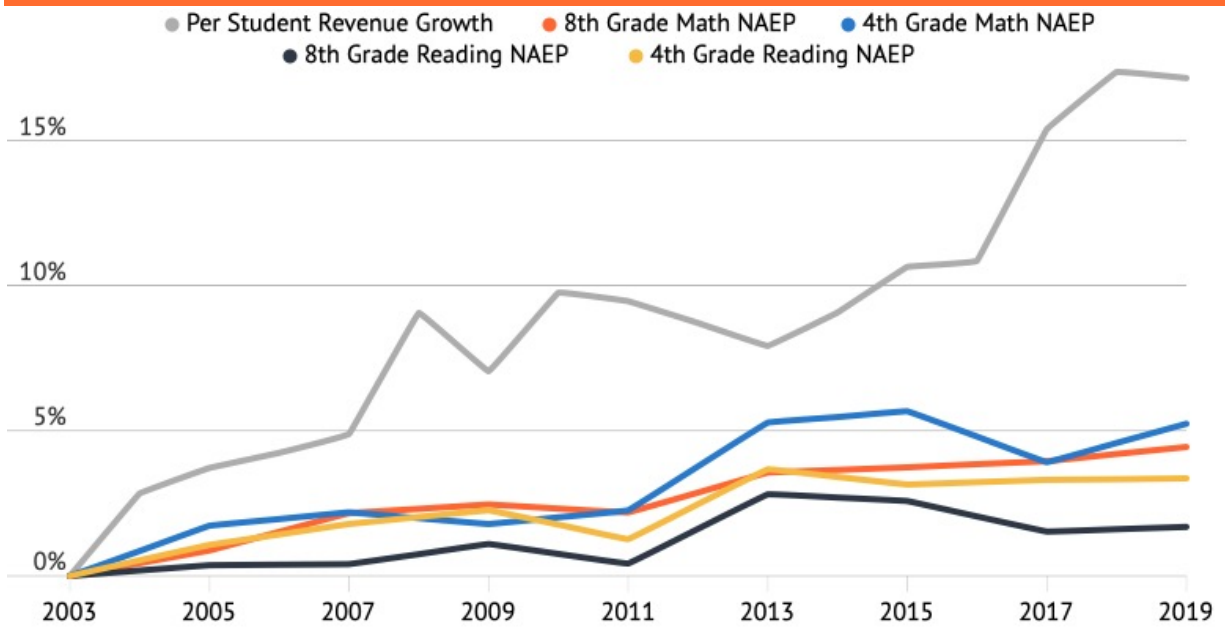
NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, Tennessee's 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by seven points (+3.4%), ranking 5th in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by 12 points (+5.2%), ranking 3rd. During this time, the state's 8th grade reading scores increased by four points (+1.7%), ranking 6th in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by 12 points (+4.4%), ranking 2nd.

TABLE 3: NAEP SCORES (2003-2019)

Subject	4th Grade			8th Grade		
	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank
Reading	7	5	31	4	6	30
Math	12	3	25	12	2	30

FIGURE 5: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH¹



LOW-INCOME NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, Tennessee’s low-income 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by four points (+2.2%), ranking 18th in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by 10 points (+4.6%), ranking 10th. During this time, the state’s 8th grade reading scores increased by three points (+1.3%), ranking 16th in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by 13 points (+5.1%), ranking 3rd.

TABLE 4: LOW-INCOME NAEP SCORES (2003-2019)

Subject	4th Grade			8th Grade		
	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank	Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank
Reading	4	18	45	3	16	37
Math	10	10	42	13	3	40

¹ It should be noted that NAEP scores and revenue are inherently different in their potential for growth and shouldn’t be expected to move in perfect unison (e.g. a 10% increase in funding shouldn’t be expected to result in a 10% improvement in NAEP).

FIGURE 6: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH (LOW-INCOME STUDENTS)¹

