WASHINGTON

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 Washington'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.
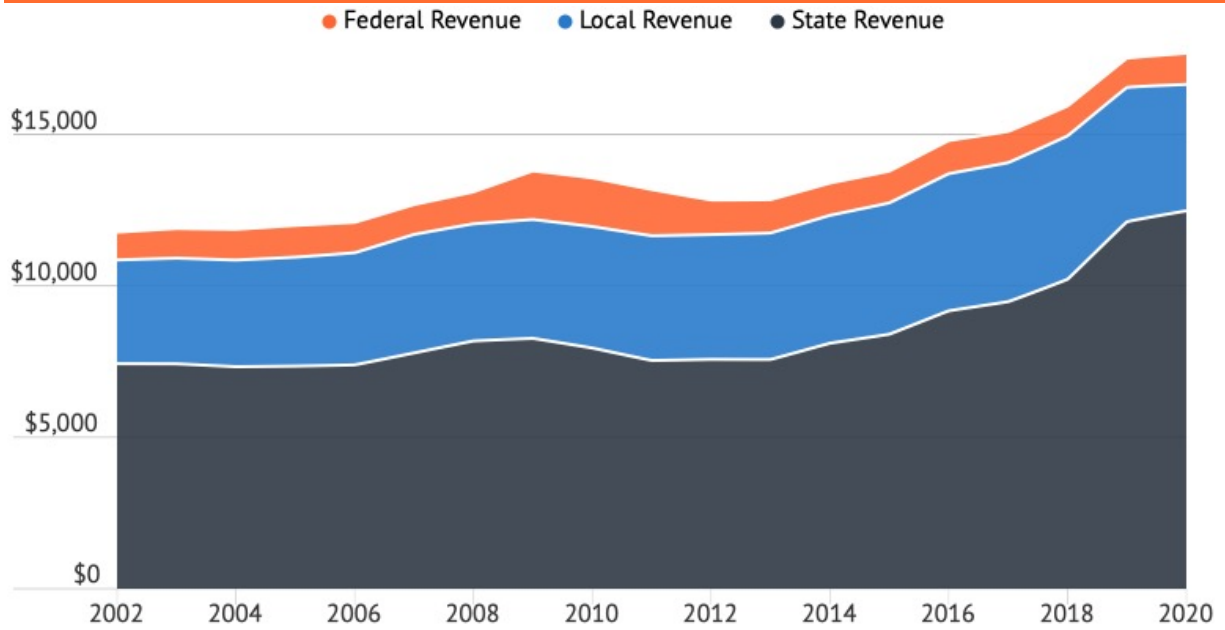
SPENDING TRENDS

Washington's inflation-adjusted education revenue grew from $11,776 per student in 2002 to $17,685 per student in 2020, a 50.2% growth rate that ranked 5th highest in the U.S. During this time, real spending on employee benefits grew by 118.1%—ranking 12th in the country—going from $1,597 per student to $3,483 per student. In 2020, Washington had $15,700,868,000 in total education debt, up $4,457 per student in real terms since 2002.
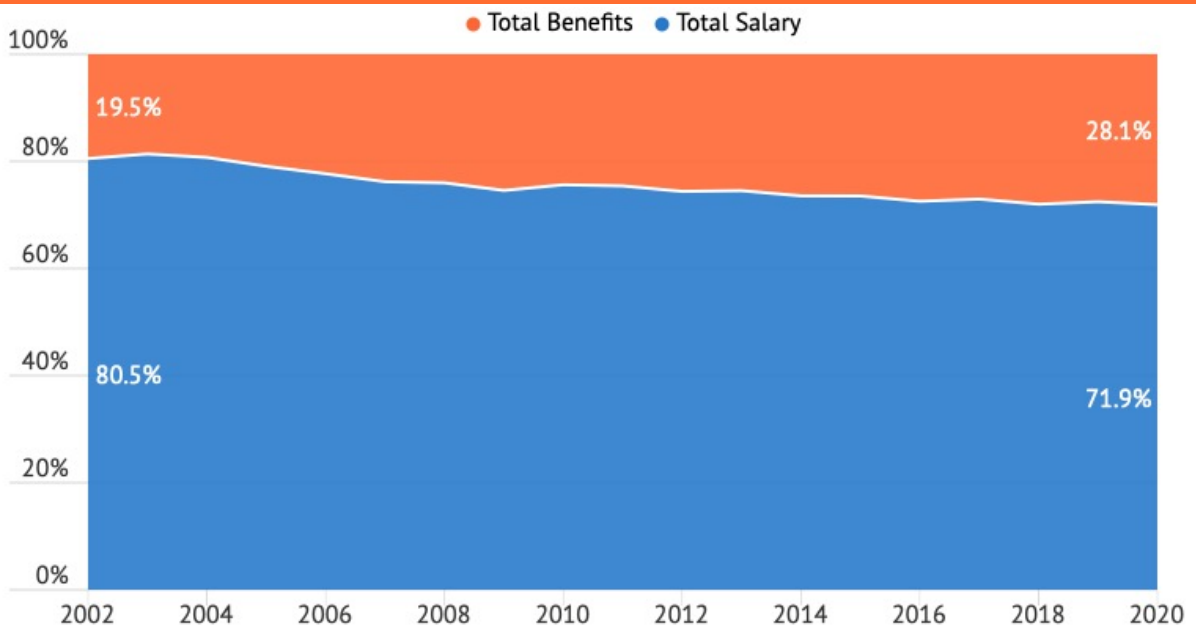
TABLE 1: SPENDING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category (Per Student)	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Revenue	$11,776	$17,685	50.2%	5	15
Support Services	$3,478	$5,590	60.7%	5	15
Instruction	$5,984	$8,592	43.6%	6	18
Benefits	$1,597	$3,483	118.1%	12	20
Capital	$1,484	$3,094	108.5%	8	2
Total Debt	$9,361	$13,818	47.6%	23	7

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

Federal Revenue   Local Revenue   State Revenue

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

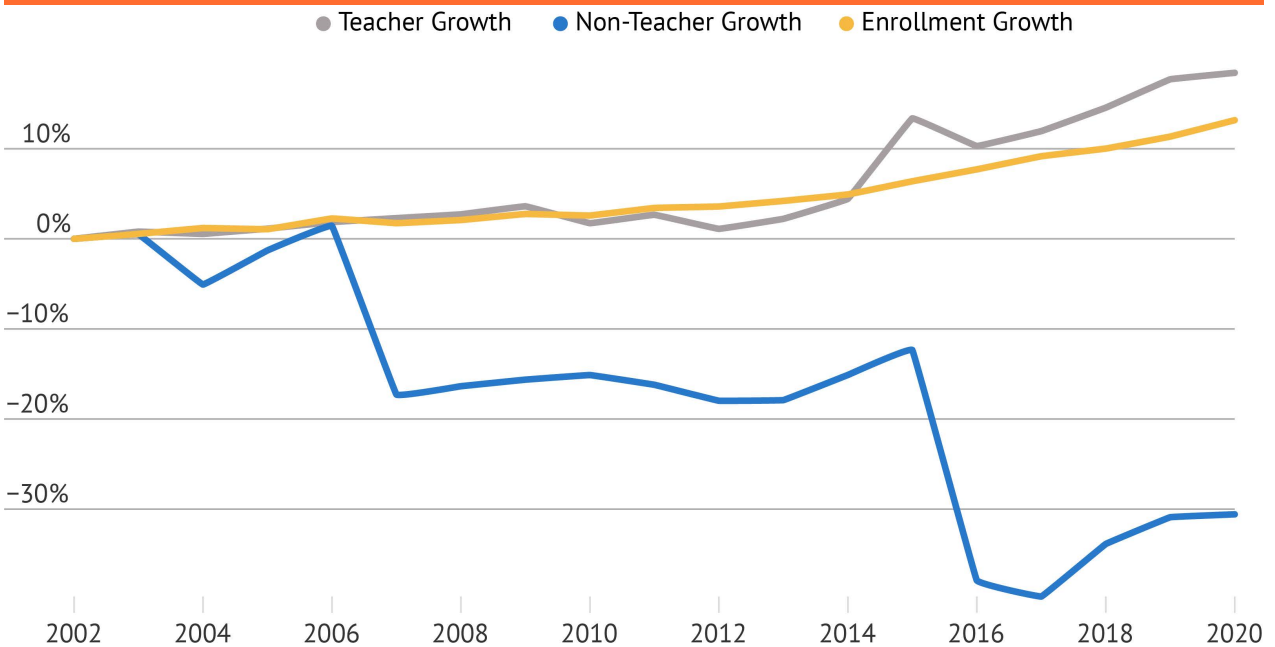Total Benefits   Total Salary

19.5%

28.1%

80.5%

71.9%

ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS

Between 2002 and 2020, Washington's student population grew by 13.2%. At the same time, the number of total public education staff decreased by 7.6%, with teachers increasing by 18.4% and non-teachers decreasing by 30.6%. The average inflation-adjusted teacher salary in the state went from $62,762 in 2002 to $76,743 in 2020, a 22.3% growth rate that ranked 1st in the U.S.
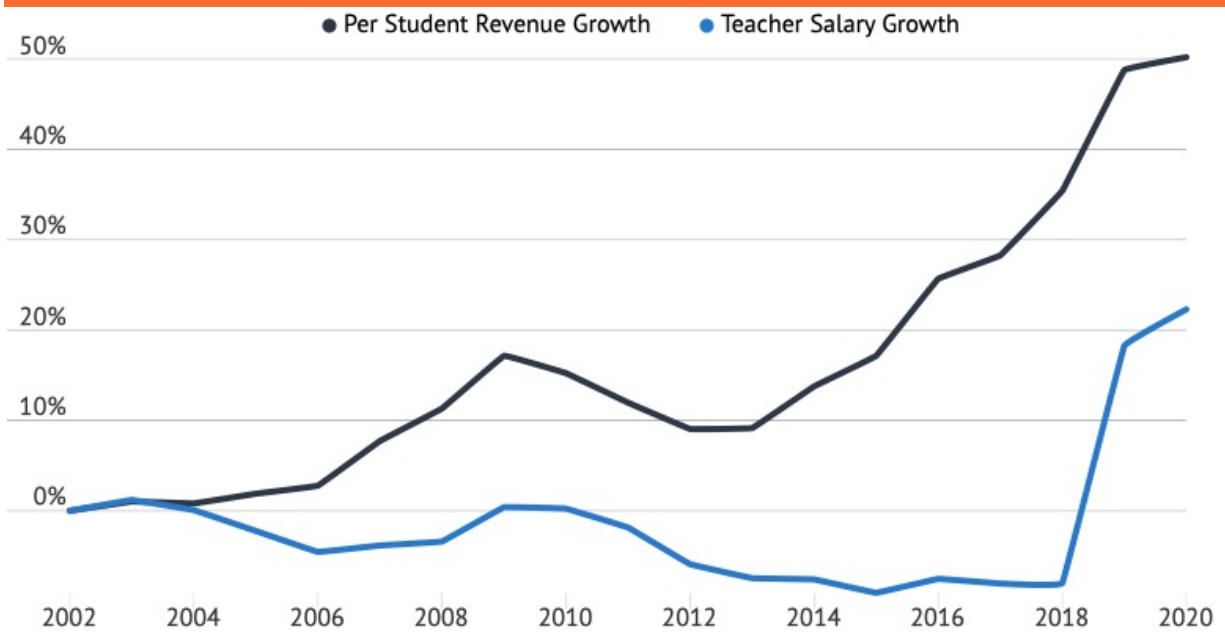
TABLE 2: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Enrollment	1,009,200	1,142,073	13.2%	13	14
Total Staff	112,020	103,507	−7.6%	46	22
Teachers	52,533	62,212	18.4%	9	16
Non-Teachers	59,487	41,294	−30.6%	50	27
Average Teacher Salary	$62,762	$76,743	22.3%	1	5

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

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

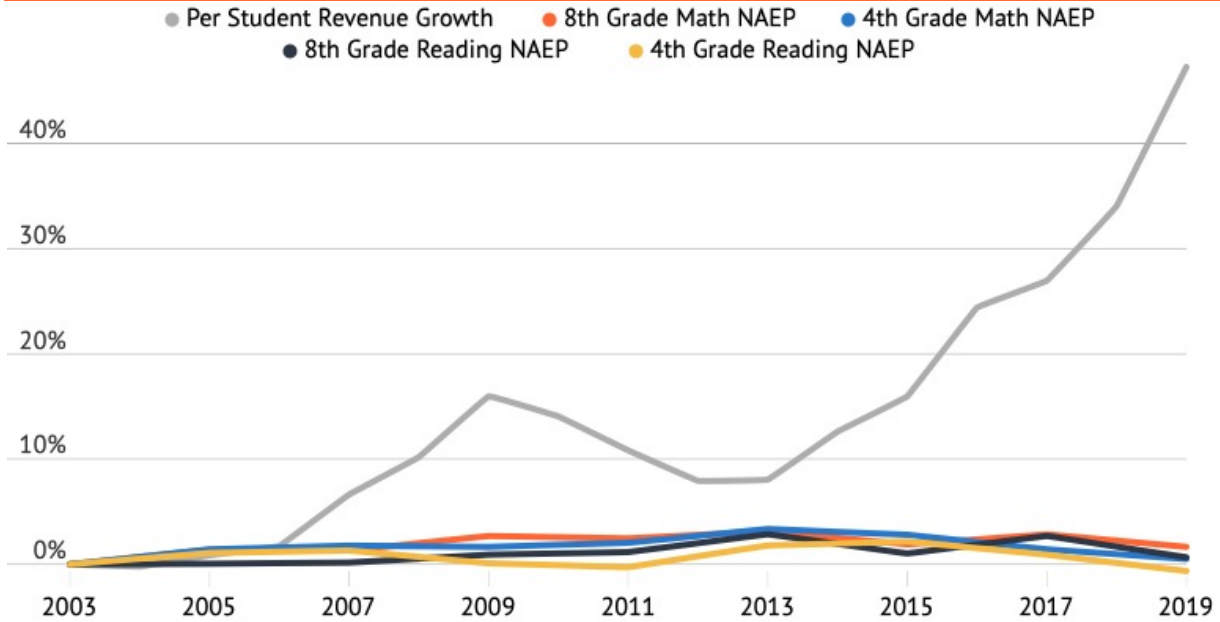
NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, Washington's 4th grade NAEP reading scores decreased by one point (−0.6%), ranking 40th in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by one point (+0.5%), ranking 41st. During this time, the state's 8th grade reading scores increased by two points (+0.7%), ranking 14th in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by five points (+1.7%), ranking 20th.

TABLE 3: NAEP SCORES (2003-2019)

Subject	4th Grade			8th Grade		
	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank
Reading	−1	40	27	2	14	11
Math	1	41	26	5	20	12

FIGURE 5: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH[1]

LOW-INCOME NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, Washington's low-income 4th grade NAEP reading scores decreased by two points (−0.8%), ranking 41st in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by two points (+0.7%), ranking 40th. During this time, the state's 8th grade reading scores increased by one point (+0.4%), ranking 26th in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by three points (+1.1%), ranking 34th.

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	−2	41	28	1	26	30
Math	2	40	25	3	34	18

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[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]