

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT PANELS

More than 50 Delaware educators shared their insights and expertise to reimagine the state's school funding system. Here's what they recommended.




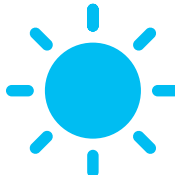

In December 2023, American Institutes for Research (AIR) released the Assessment of Delaware Public School Funding. This independent assessment is the final component of the Delaware education funding lawsuit settlement. As part of this assessment, AIR conducted two types of analysis: one purely outcome-based Education Cost Model (ECM) and an input-based **Professional Judgement Panel (PJP)**.

The results of the Professional Judgement Panel were presented to the [Public Education Funding Commission](#) in March of 2025 to highlight what educators specifically shared was needed to adequately educate all students. The commission will issue recommendations in October and is charged with reviewing the panels' results as part of their work to develop those recommendations.

1. What are Professional Judgement Panels?

- The professional judgement panels conducted by AIR were three-day workshops held during March of 2023.
- 6 total panels were held.
- 51 Delaware educators and other school and district staff comprised the panels, including general educators, early childhood educators, multilingual learner (MLL) specialists, special education teachers, principals, Chief Financial Officers, crisis prevention interventionists, school business officials and superintendents, across all school levels and counties.

What Did Educators Recommend New Funding Support?

	Classroom conditions
	Professional learning during the school day
	School staffing and resources
	Universal pre-K
	Increased resources for high-need schools

2. What Did Delaware Educators Say Schools Need?

Panelists were asked to develop the ideal programs to adequately educate and support all students. In the development of these programs, the following components were recommended by the majority of the panels.

- *Classroom conditions*
 - Two adults in every classroom at every grade level (at least one certified teacher and one special education teacher OR paraprofessional)
 - Lower class sizes (14 in kindergarten up to 25 in high school)
- *Teacher professional learning during the regular school day*
 - Topics should include restorative practices and trauma-informed instruction, implicit bias and antiracism in schools, students' social-emotional learning, and the science of reading
 - Educators recommend a significant increase in professional learning time during the school day to encourage collaboration between teachers and collaboration with instructional support staff
- *School Staffing and Resources*
 - Lower student-to-staff ratios for school psychologists, school counselors, and social workers
 - Full-time nurses in all school buildings, increased nursing staff based on students' needs
 - Full-time (not contracted) occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and school psychologists
 - Full-time, in-building technology staff
 - Full-time special education coordinators in each building
 - Multi-tiered systems of support coordinators
 - Family Liaisons
 - Behavioral interventionists
 - Transition coordinators for middle and high schools
- *Universal pre-K*
- *Increased resources for high need schools such as:*
 - Basic needs such as food pantries, wellness centers, psychologists
 - Additional staff to support MLL and special needs students
 - Additional technology to support students with special needs and IT staff to aid with technology
 - MLL curriculum support including books and curriculum in home language
 - Extended school day and enrichment activities such as field trips, funding for athletics and the arts
 - SAT prep, career education programming

3. What Would These Programs Cost?

From the program designs created by the professional judgement panels, AIR economists priced out and averaged what each program would cost, and determined how much additional funding would be needed and what funding weights would be applied to support high-need students.

Generally, implementing these programs would cost:

- 46% more for district schools, or an additional \$7,238 per pupil
- 43% more for charter schools, or an additional \$5,691 per pupil
- 46% more statewide, or an additional \$7,050 per pupil

When translated into a foundation formula as AIR recommended, the two models recommended:

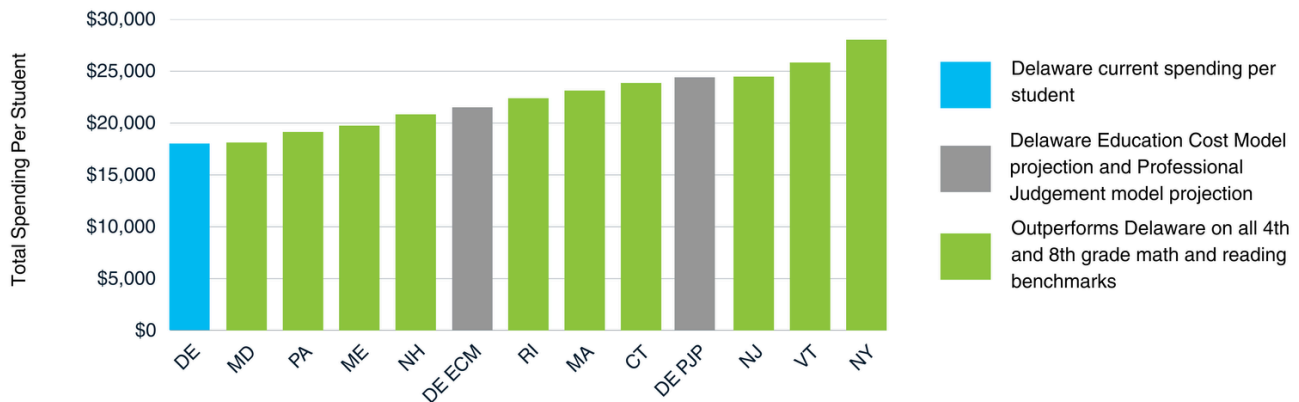
Category	Professional Judgement Panel Weight		Education Cost Model Weight	
	Increase in cost overall	Increase in cost per pupil	Increase in cost overall	Increase in cost per pupil
Base	\$11,996		\$10,074	
Low Income	54%		81%	
Students with Disabilities (Basic)	170%		234%	
Students with Disabilities (Intensive and Complex)	832%		275%	
Multilingual learners	78%		15%	
	Increase in cost overall	Increase in cost per pupil	Increase in cost overall	Increase in cost per pupil
District schools	46%	\$7,238	27%	\$4,196
Charter schools	43%	\$5,691	24%	\$3,181
Statewide	46%	\$7,050	27%	\$4,073

4. How Does Delaware Compare?

Delaware lands among the top spenders in the nation, but compared to its regional neighbors, Delaware lags behind. Each of our neighbors that spend more perform better on standardized tests. If Delaware were to increase spending, it would fall in the middle of our neighbors.

Regional States that Spend More, Perform Better

All regional states that spend more than Delaware perform better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in math and reading.



By following either of the target per-pupil funding models recommended by AIR (ECM or PJP), Delaware would find itself spending a comparable amount to our regional peers, whose students perform better on national assessments.

Note: This graph only includes states within the region. Nationally, Alaska, Illinois, and Wyoming also spend more and perform better. ECM stands for the Education Cost Model approach. It is one of two approaches taken by AIR, and utilizes a formula to determine per-pupil costs. The other approach is the Professional Judgment model, wherein experts estimated values of various cost factors and added them up to get a per-pupil cost. AIR utilized both methods (ECM and PJP) to create their recommendations.

Source: American Institutes for Research. (2023). Assessment of Delaware Public School Funding (p.178). https://education.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/23-22933_1_Delaware_Full_Report-FMT-ed103023-Version-2.pdf

5. What Were Panelists Asked to Do? How Did They Work?

The panels developed model school program designs that would achieve outcome goals set by the Delaware Department of Education for a set of hypothetical schools.

Each panel was asked to create program designs for elementary, middle, and high schools with the below attributes, the base model was developed first, and then panels modified their initial program design to meet the needs of the other hypothetical schools:

- Low Needs (base model)
- High Poverty
- High Poverty and High MLL
- High Special Needs (Basic)
- High Special Needs (Intense and Complex)
- Small School Size

The base model was developed first for a low-needs school, and panels were asked what modifications needed to be made to the base model to address the different demographic needs of the other sample schools.

The program designs needed to meet the following criteria:

- **Goals:** Will your program design achieve the outcomes listed in the goals statement (DDOE student outcomes, including state test scores, graduation rates, etc.)?
- **Evidence:** Is there any evidence supporting your program designs and resource specifications?
- **Efficient:** Are your program designs and resource specifications efficient (i.e., will they achieve intended outcomes at a minimum cost)?
- **Realistic:** Could your program designs and resource specifications be realistically implemented by competent staff if sufficient funding were made available?

Program design components to consider included:

- Core instructional program (e.g., regular classrooms, resource teachers, and subject matter specialists)
- Multilingual learner program
- Special education program
- Instructional and pupil support services
- Professional development services
- Athletics program (for middle and high schools)
- Extended time (after-school and/or summer) programs
- Materials, supplies, and technology (non-personnel)
- Other strategies for delivering services