

QuickPoint! – Portland Public Schools Needs a Plan for Declining Enrollment

By Mia Tiwana

This year, Portland Public Schools is in a financial sweet spot. Federal and state COVID relief funds will add nearly [\\$100 million](#) to the district's coffers. But, much of that one-time money will be gone.

Since the pandemic began, parents have increasingly favored alternatives to their district schools, including public charter schools, private schools, homeschooling, and learning pods. PPS projects [enrollment will be down](#) 14% from pre-pandemic levels. Since the state's school funding formula relies heavily on student enrollment, the combination of low enrollment and nearly dried-up relief dollars means PPS is in for future budget trouble.

With enrollment down, the school board initially considered staffing cuts. But, under pressure from employees and their unions, the board switched gears, promising no cuts to licensed employees in the upcoming school year. There's no sign that enrollment drops are slowing, though, so there's no telling how many years they can put off cuts.

PPS can't count on ever-increasing state funding to fix things. [Opinion polls](#) show that parents are moving away from public schools for their children. PPS should plan for the possibility that current enrollment declines may never reverse. They need to adjust to the reality of the future.

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