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Financing K-12 education in Virginia

By Paul Manna, Jack Cooper and Elizabeth Pelletier

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Violence on School Performance,” won an honors fellowship award from the college.

Elizabeth Pelletier

In the United States, elementary and secondary (K-12) education consistently ranks as one of the largest items in state and local budgets. The shock of the Great Recession and the lingering effects of the sluggish national economy have challenged state and local policymakers across the country as they have wrestled with how to fund their schools. At the same time, numerous forces are creating increasing pressure on schools to perform well and use their funds wisely. These include concerns about international competitiveness and the need to implement recent state education policy changes focused on new approaches to student testing, teacher and principal evaluation, and school turnarounds.

Supporting Unc
Schools in Virgi

By Laura Fornash

Virginia's K-12 E
Funding Frame

By VIA Staff

Across the states, recent debates about education funding arrangements have taken many forms. Questions about funding equity and adequacy, which focus on whether schools receive financial resources commensurate to their needs, have become more intense as the broad theme of rising inequality has received more attention in political discussions at all levels of government. In Illinois, for example, concerns about the equity of the current system have recently taken center stage. Responding to claims that Illinois has the second-least equitable system of school finance in the nation, advocates for school funding reform and some legislators have suggested that the state's formulas should allocate funds based more on district need to make the system more progressive (Strauss; Wall, “Measure Would Simplify School Funding System”; Wall, “Manar Introduces Bill”). State supreme courts have ruled on such matters in recent years as well, criticizing their legislatures for funding schools in an inadequate or inequitable manner. Such a ruling was issued in Kansas in March 2014, and Texas and New York are waiting for court rulings on similar cases (Ujifusa). In Washington state, a 2012 ruling that the state was not doing enough to adequately fund schools launched a multi-year legislative debate that remains unresolved, leading the court to issue another ruling in January 2014 reprimanding the legislature for failing to address the issue (Blankinship; Santos).

In addition to the general theme of equity, funding debates focusing on choice and teacher pay have erupted. Lawmakers in North Carolina passed sweeping policy changes in 2013 that expanded funding for a school voucher program that would provide families up to \$4,200 annually per eligible student to use on tuition and other expenses, such as

transportation, associated with attending a private school (“N.C. Court Suspends Student-Voucher Program”). Also in that state, debates over teacher salaries have prompted much controversy, with educators and others launching protests called “Moral Mondays” that accuse some politicians of devaluing teachers and undermining the quality of public schools (Severson).

In this article, we situate Virginia in this larger national context by focusing on three questions:

How does the financing of K-12 education in Virginia compare to other states?

In Virginia, what patterns of funding do we observe in key functional areas across the state’s school divisions? And do those patterns suggest that the state’s school divisions are equitably funded?

What implications do these patterns suggest should be considered by Virginia’s state and local leaders, school principals and educators, parents, and citizens at large as they attempt to support the state’s schools so that students are prepared to succeed in the nation’s economy and democracy?

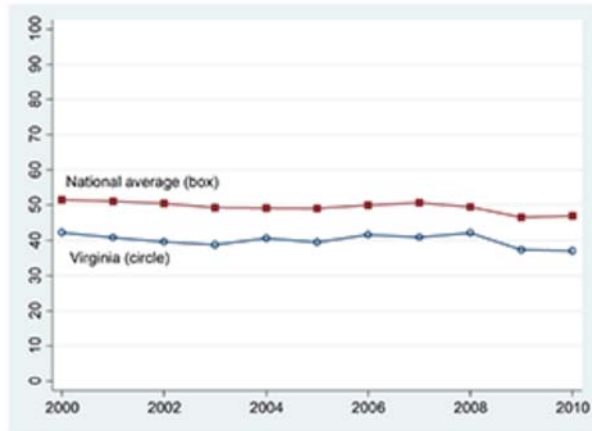
Virginia and the national picture

We begin by comparing Virginia to the rest of the nation in two broad ways: by examining the source of funds for K-12 education and how the money is spent in key functional areas. Each part of the analysis represents data from the 2000-2001 school year through the most recent school year for which data are available. The years reported in the discussion, figures, and maps that follow refer to school years (e.g., 2005 refers to the 2005-2006 school year).

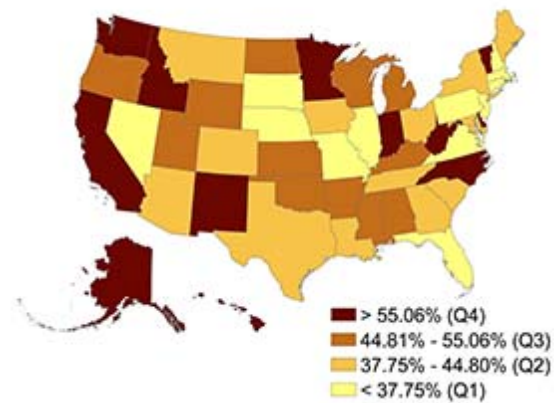
Consider first the source of revenues for K-12 education. Figure 1 reports the data in two ways. Line plots in Figures 1A, 1C, and 1E show the percent of funds that came from state, local, and federal sources from 2000 through 2010. Along with those trends we present national maps in Figures 1B, 1D, and 1F that visualize the results for 2010, specifically. The maps here, and subsequent ones that we present, report values by quartiles, which rank the states and split them into four categories. States at or below the median (50th percentile) reside collectively in the first quartile (Q1, 0-25th percentile) and second quartile (Q2, 26-50th percentile), while the third quartile (Q3, 51st-75th percentile) and fourth quartile (Q4, 76-100th

percentile) together contain states above the median. In general, the results in Figure 1 show that Virginia is atypical compared to the rest of the country.

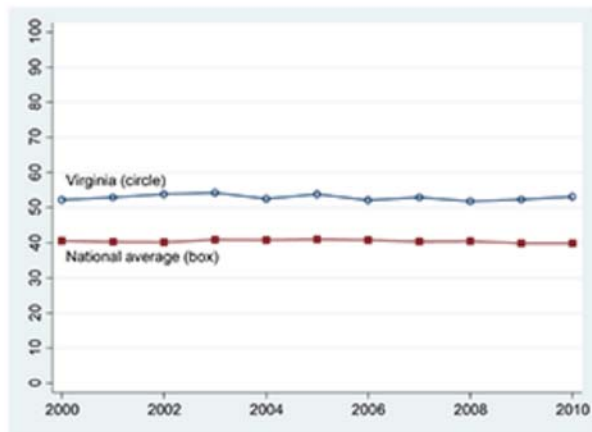
1A. State revenues trend for 2000-2010



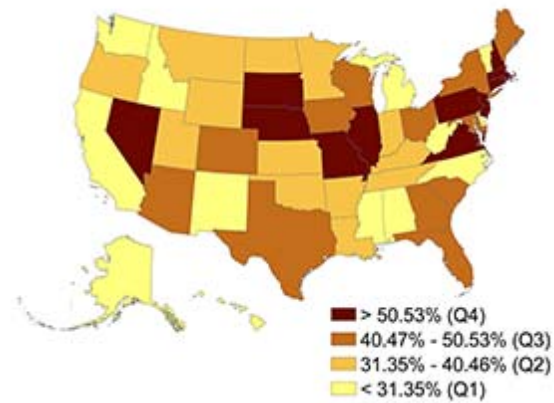
1B. Snapshot of state revenues for 2010



1C. Local revenues trend for 2000-2010

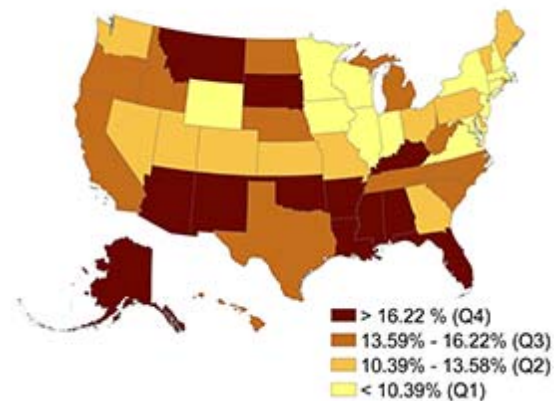
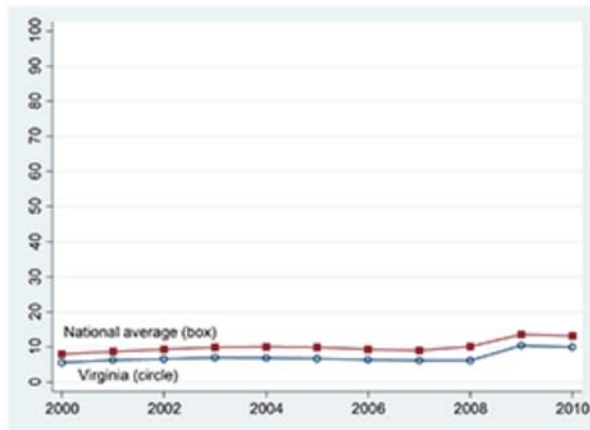


1D. Snapshot of local revenues for 2010



1E. Federal revenues trend for 2000-2010

1F. Snapshot of federal revenues for 2010



Note: The four colors on the map represent quartiles (Q): the lightest is the first quartile (Q1, 0-25th percentile), the next darkest is second quartile (Q2, 26th-50th percentile), the next darkest is the third quartile (Q3, 51st-75th percentile), and darkest is the fourth quartile (Q4, 76th-100th percentile).

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>.

Figure 1A reveals a clear split between the national average and Virginia when considering the percentage of education funding derived from state revenues. The line graph shows that for the bulk of the time period, the national average has hovered around 50 percent. Virginia, however, has provided a smaller fraction of funding, with its contributions typically 10 percentage points below the national average. As shown in Figure 1B, consistent with the national average and the effects of the Great Recession, the percentage of education funding from Virginia's state revenues dropped to 37 percent in 2010, which lagged behind the national average of 46.9 percent. The map in Figure 1B shows that Virginia's contribution from state revenues places it in the lowest quartile among states and differs greatly from its neighboring states of West Virginia and North Carolina, which are both in the fourth quartile.

Figures 1C and 1D report on the percent of revenues from local sources for K-12 schooling. Unsurprisingly, the results on local revenues, both the trend in Figure 1C and the map in Figure 1D, are essentially the flip side of the results on revenues

from state sources. (This is because the fraction of K-12 spending across the nation that comes from federal sources generally is so low). Whereas most other states rely more heavily on state revenues to fund their schools, Virginia relies more heavily on local revenues from local property and sales taxes. Across the decade reported in Figure 1C, Virginia localities typically have contributed at least 50 percent or more of the funds for the state's schools, which is essentially 10 percentage points higher than the national average (Loeb). The map for 2010 in Figure 1D shows that Virginia is in the top quartile of states in relying on local revenues.

Finally, Figures 1E and 1F report Virginia's percentage of education funding from the federal government. In general, the state has hovered below the national average, with these two figures showing that Virginia tends to rely less consistently on federal funds than other states. Although it has remained below the national average in recent years, Virginia saw an increase in the federal share by about 4 percentage points in 2009 from the previous year, as Figure 1E shows. That pattern was common across the states and reflects the effects of the Great Recession as states across the country, including Virginia, were forced to make budget cuts as less tax revenue streamed into their state coffers. Federal funding for education, via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also known as the "stimulus act," helped to offset those cuts and caused the fraction of revenues from federal sources to increase. The map in Figure 1F shows that in 2010 the states most reliant on federal funds (e.g., those in Q4 on the map) tend to have many residents with low incomes, including the concentration of states in the deep South. Virginia's position in 2010, residing in the first quartile, means that it is among the states that are least reliant on federal funding to support K-12 education.

Next, we will consider the overall spending per pupil and spending specifically devoted to instruction, which Figure 2 reports. Compared to the results on revenues, Virginia's spending looks more like the rest of the nation when one considers overall per pupil spending and the fraction of per pupil spending devoted to instruction. Yet the data from recent years suggest that the commonwealth has started to deviate from that historical pattern.

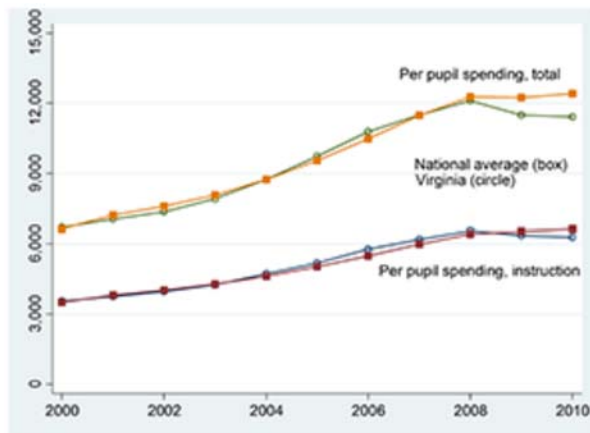
The line graph and maps in Figure 2 focus on two specific measures of per pupil spending. The total spending per pupil in inflation-adjusted dollars, represented in Figure 2A as the higher two lines in the graph for 2000-2010 and in Figure 2B for 2010, rose both in Virginia and across the country. However, the trend flattened out in the most recent period, 2008-2010,

again reflecting the effects of the Great Recession. Interestingly, Virginia's values over the decade reported in Figure 2A essentially mirrored the national average until 2009 and 2010, when it fell below average, suggesting that during the Great Recession, other states cut per pupil spending by lower amounts than Virginia. A parallel, although less distinct pattern exists when one considers only per pupil spending devoted to instruction, shown in the bottom two lines in Figure 2A. As with total per pupil spending, Virginia had tracked the national average for much of the 2000s, before falling below it in 2009 and 2010.

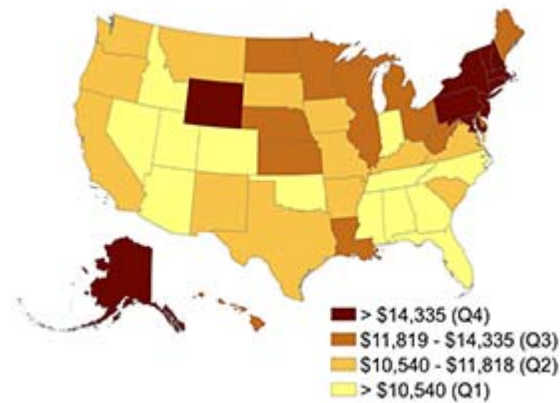
The maps for 2010 that accompany the line plots show a mixed picture of Virginia's positioning. As Figure 2B shows, Virginia was in the second quartile for total per pupil spending, below the median value. Yet it was above the median value in the third quartile for per pupil spending on instruction as reported in Figure 2C. In each instance it spent more per pupil than its southern neighbor, North Carolina, which was in the first quartile on both measures.

Figure 2. Per pupil spending in adjusted dollars, trends, and recent snapshot

2A. Per pupil spending, 2000-2010



2B. Per pupil spending, total 2010

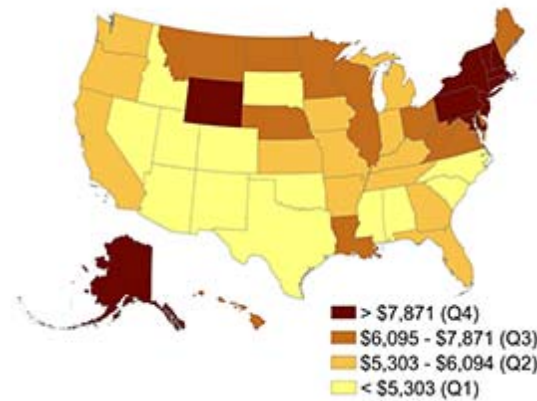


2C. Per pupil spending, instruction 2010

Note: Values are reported in 2010 dollars. The four colors on the map represent quartiles (Q): the lightest is the first quartile (Q1, 0-25th percentile), the next darkest is second quartile (Q2, 26th-50th percentile), the next darkest is the

third quartile (Q3, 51st-75th percentile), and the darkest is the fourth quartile (Q4, 76th-100th percentile).

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>.

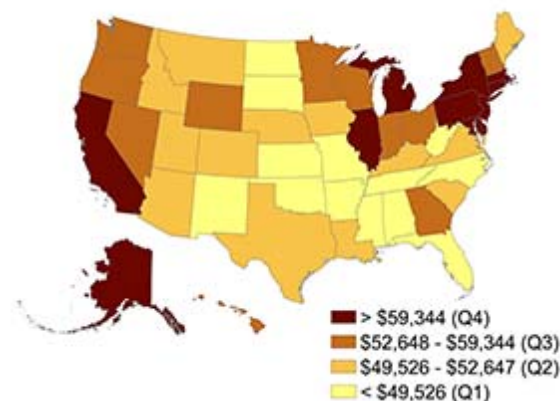
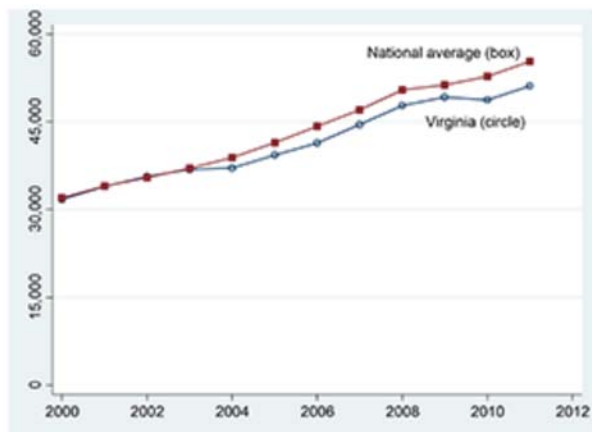


Teacher pay is the next topic we examine, with the results appearing in Figure 3. Like the per pupil spending measures just discussed, we report teacher salaries in inflation-adjusted dollars. The line graph in Figure 3A shows that average teacher salaries increased for every year in the series both in terms of the overall national average and for Virginia specifically. In the early years of the 2000s, the average salary of Virginia teachers tracked the national average quite closely. Then beginning in 2004 Virginia's value slipped below the national average, where it stayed for the remainder of the time series, through 2011-2012. Notice as well that Figure 3A shows how the gap between the national average and Virginia's value began to widen in the last two years reported on the graph. The corresponding map in Figure 3B that visualizes the states for 2011 shows that although Virginia was not among the states with the lowest paid teachers, it was below the median, situated in the second quartile. That put Virginia above its neighbors of West Virginia and North Carolina, which were both in the first quartile, but far below nearby states to the north—Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, all in the top quartile—that paid their teachers much higher than the national median.

Figure 3. Teacher salaries in adjusted dollars, trends, and recent snapshot

3A. Trends for 2000-2011

3B. Snapshot for 2011



Note: Values are reported in 2010 dollars. The four colors on the map represent quartiles (Q): the lightest is the first quartile (Q1, 0-25th percentile), the next darkest is second quartile (Q2, 26th-50th percentile), the next darkest is the third quartile (Q3, 51st-75th percentile), and the darkest is the fourth quartile (Q4, 76th-100th percentile).

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>.

As noted in the introduction, questions about the equitable distribution of education dollars have animated debates in numerous states. Although these discussions have been quite energized, even leading some state supreme courts to overturn state funding arrangements, equity issues have received less attention from Virginia legislators.

Evidence from the last decade, cited in numerous sources, suggests that Virginia lagged behind other states in the overall degree of funding equity that existed. For example, annual reports of Education Week have tracked different measures of state funding equity since 2005, and have reported data through 2011 ("Quality Counts"). Two measures of funding equity included in these reports—the wealth neutrality score, which shows the relationship between property wealth in the school division and division spending, and the coefficient of variation, which incorporates information about the spread of spending across all school divisions—show Virginia possessing a consistently more inequitable distribution of funds

across school divisions compared to other states. On one other measure reported in these Education Week reports, though, the commonwealth looks relatively better than the national average when one compares the level of per pupil spending in the school division at the 95th percentile compared to the one at the 5th percentile. From 2005 to 2011, there was only one year (2006) that Virginia had greater inequity based on this measure. Still the overall pattern suggests much inequity in Virginia, as a more recent series of funding equity report cards, published by researchers at Rutgers University and assessing all states, has shown (Baker et al). The state received a “D” mark in the 2010, 2012, and 2014 reports.

Funding patterns and issues within Virginia

In this section we shift our analysis from comparing Virginia to the remaining states and instead focus on variation in education finance across the state’s school divisions. As background, it is important to recognize that the General Assembly is responsible for the apportionment of state funds, as governed by the Appropriations Act, for public education. General fund appropriations provide the majority of state funding for Virginia’s public schools. Retail sales and use tax revenues, state lottery proceeds, and other sources also contribute to state education funding (Virginia Department of Education). As dictated by the Appropriations Act, local school divisions receive this funding through the Direct Aid to Public Education budget and its six budgetary categories: Standards of Quality (SOQ), incentive programs, categorical programs, lottery proceeds fund, supplemental education programs, and federal funds (Virginia Department of Education).

The Virginia Constitution requires that the State Board of Education formulate SOQs, which outline the menu of programs and activities that the state’s school divisions are expected to provide. It is the responsibility of the General Assembly to revise the SOQs and determine the costs and cost apportionment between the state and localities for meeting them. The locality is required to match state funding, known as the “required local effort,” based on the composite index, which is defined in the Code of Virginia and the Appropriation Act, and is based on property value, adjusted gross income, taxable retail sales, and population in the school division (Virginia Department of Education). The index is designed to assess each

local school division's ability to pay for education.

In the following figures and maps we see how patterns of funding key school functions have shifted across time in the state's school divisions, in particular revealing the effects of the Great Recession. The values we discuss in this section have been adjusted for inflation. We present the ensuing results using box plots, explained momentarily, to show variation within and across years, and also via maps of Virginia's school divisions for the most recent year for which data are available.

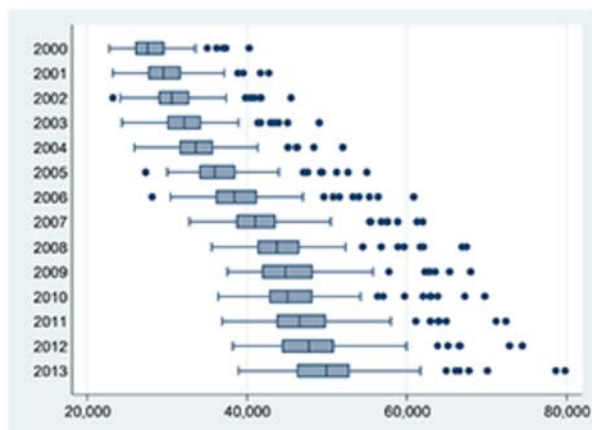
First consider Figure 4, which reports the distribution of teacher and principal salaries from 2010-2013 across the state's school divisions, in addition to a school division map for 2013. The box plots in Figures 4A and 4C contain a rectangle in the center that shows the middle half of all school divisions in the state, comprised of the second (Q2) and third (Q3) quartiles, concepts that we have discussed earlier. The line that splits each rectangle into two parts is the 50th percentile or median value; as noted earlier half of all school divisions reside at or below the median and half are above it. Values outside the rectangle to the left show the first quartile (Q1) and values outside to the right of the rectangle are the fourth quartile (Q4). In cases where school divisions have unusually large or unusually small values when compared to the rest, the division is noted with a dot. Three overall patterns emerge in Figure 4.

First, after increasing somewhat steadily from 2000-2008 (e.g., notice how the median consistently shifts to the right in the box plots for Figures 4A and 4C), teacher and principal salaries stagnated for a period of approximately four years, revealing the effects of the Great Recession. That pattern began to turn around in 2013, with the overall distribution of teacher and principal salaries shifting to the right toward higher values in that year.

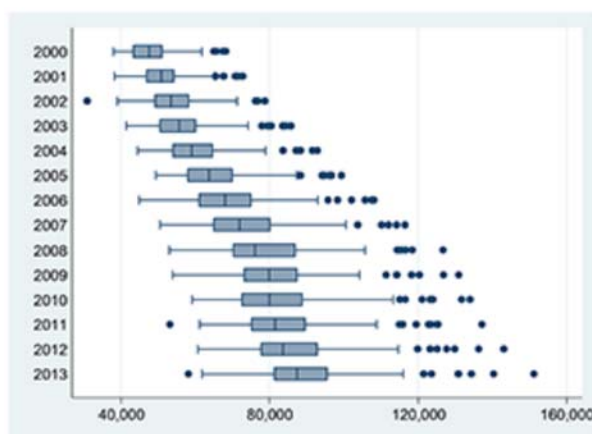
Figure 4. Variation in salaries across Virginia school divisions in adjusted dollars

4A. Teacher salaries, 2010-2013

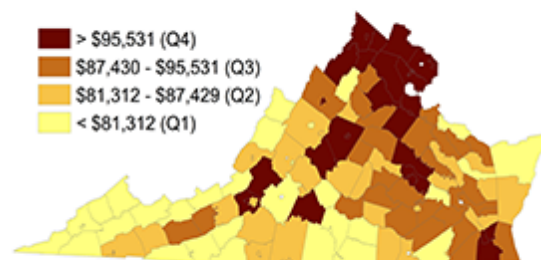
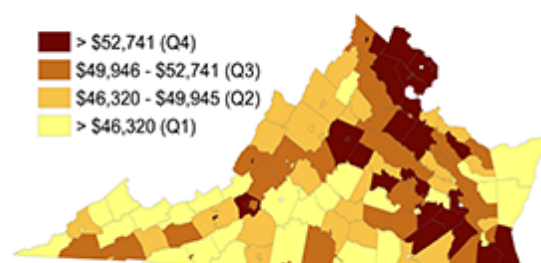
4B. Teacher salaries, 2013



4C. Principal salaries, 2010-2013



4D. Principal salaries, 2013



Note: Values are reported in 2010 dollars. All box plots contain a rectangle in the center that show the second (Q2) and third (Q3) quartiles. The line splitting each rectangle into two parts is the 50th percentile or median value. Values outside the rectangle to the left show the first quartile (Q1) and values outside to the right of the rectangle are in the fourth quartile (Q4). In cases where school divisions have unusually large or unusually small values when compared to the rest, the division is noted with a dot. The four colors on the map represent quartiles that follow the same shading as in prior figures: the lightest is Q1, the next darkest is Q2, the next darkest is Q3, and the darkest is Q4.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Virginia Department of Education at http://www.pen.k12.va.us/teaching/workforce_data/index.shtml.

Second, Figures 4A and 4C also show that over time, the variation in teacher and principal salaries increased across the state's districts. One can see this by comparing the width of the rectangles in the early years of each collection compared to the width that appears for the more recent years. The wider rectangles indicate that there is a greater difference between the district at the 75th percentile and the one at the 25th percentile, suggesting greater variation across the state. In contrast, the more narrow rectangles in the earlier years show that the middle 50 percent of the state's school districts tended to look more similar in terms of these salary measures.

Third, the pattern of unusual districts, represented by the dots that fall either far above or far below the box plots in Figures 4A and 4C, reveals much stability across time. The dots to the right of each plot show that there is a consistent, albeit relatively small number, of school divisions that pay much higher salaries than the rest of the state. In contrast, the state has very few outlier observations on the low-end of each plot, suggesting that the divisions represented in the first quartile have lower salaries, but very few have unusually low ones when compared to the rest of the distribution.

Finally, the corresponding maps for 2013, shown in Figures 4B and 4D, reveal a predictably high concentration of high-salary school divisions in Northern Virginia near the Washington, D.C., metro area. Interestingly, though, there is not a perfect correspondence between the teacher and principal salary measures. In other words, the maps in Figures 4B and 4D show that for 2013 the school divisions with the highest paid teachers are not always the same ones with the highest paid principals, and vice versa. School divisions may be in an upper quartile for one measure but in a lower one for another.

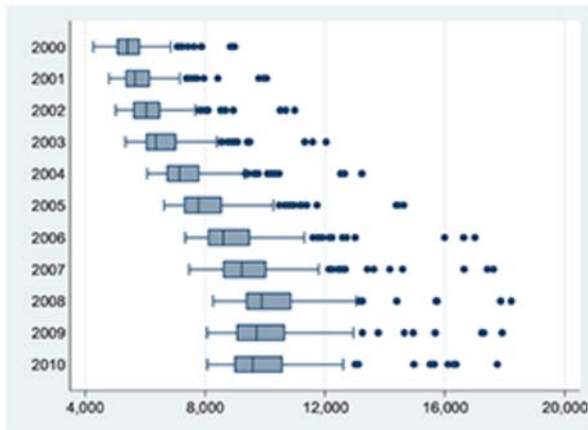
In our final set of results, in Figure 5, we examine the distribution of inflation-adjusted total per pupil spending and per pupil spending on instruction in the state's school divisions. We use the same method we used to analyze teacher and principal salaries, but we cover a slightly shorter time period (2000-2010) due to data availability. The results suggest interesting trends that appear to be somewhat consistent with the data on teacher and principal salaries included in Figure 4. We focus on two main findings.

First, the shifting median values for per pupil spending and spending on instruction, which tend to move to the right for much of the time series in Figures 5A and 5C, respectively, show a relatively steady increase in spending. That pattern reversed in the most recent years on each plot in Figures 5A and 5C. The data show that in inflation-adjusted dollars, the median value in each series actually declined each year from 2008 through 2010, showing that spending was cut. Those results illustrate the impact that the Great Recession had on spending per pupil, and they parallel the findings that we reported in Figure 4 on teacher and principal salaries.

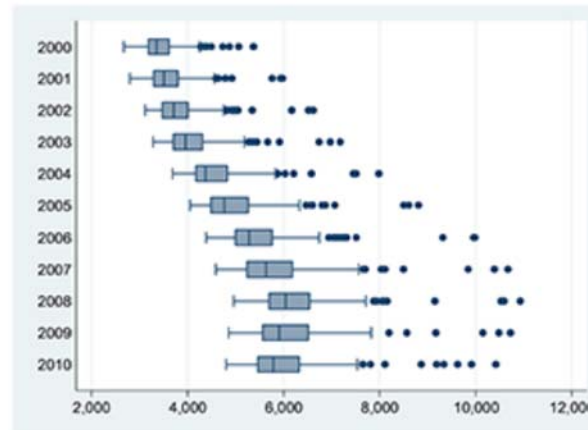
Second, an additional parallel with the salary results from Figure 4 is that there now is much greater variation in the per pupil spending measures compared to earlier periods. In Figures 5A and 5C we see the rectangles for each year widening as time marches forward, revealing growing differences between the division at the 75th percentile and 25th percentile. That larger variation, in part, helps to explain the relatively poor marks that Virginia has received on measures of funding equity described in the prior section.

Figure 5. Variation in per pupil spending across Virginia school divisions in adjusted dollars

5A. Per pupil spending total, 2000-2010



Per pupil spending total, 2010



Per pupil spending on instruction, 2000-2010

Per pupil spending on instruction, 2010



Note: Values are reported in 2010 dollars. The shaded rectangles capture the second (Q2) and third (Q3) quartiles (26-50th and 51-75th percentiles, respectively) for each year, with the vertical line splitting each rectangle at the median value (50th percentile). Values to the left of each rectangle are in the first quartile (Q1, 0-25th percentile) and those to the right of the rectangle are the fourth quartile (Q4, 76-100th percentile). The four colors on the map represent quartiles: the lightest is Q1, the next darkest is Q2, the next darkest is Q3, and the darkest is Q4.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Virginia Department of Education at http://www.pen.k12.va.us/teaching/workforce_data/index.shtml.

Recommendations for the future

As in other states across the nation, K-12 education remains a top agenda item for Virginia policymakers at the state and local levels. Moving forward, we suggest that state and local leaders, as well as residents of the commonwealth more generally, remain attentive to three central issues. First, it would be worth exploring whether Virginia's system of education funding, which relies heavily on local revenues, is possibly due for an overhaul. As the collection of visuals in Figure 1

showed, the overall pattern in the nation is for states to take on a greater funding role in supporting their elementary and secondary schools. Whether Virginia should follow the lead of other states deserves consideration.

A second point, which relates to the first, is that Virginia leaders and residents should engage in discussions about the equitability of current K-12 funding policies, both at the state and local levels. As we described, Virginia is consistently below national averages on various measures of equity. Further, our within-state comparisons that examined salaries and spending across Virginia school divisions (Figures 4 and 5) revealed greater variation across districts compared to earlier years. Of course, in a state as diverse as Virginia, with its rural areas, urban centers, ring suburbs, and metro areas influenced by the presence of large federal installations, the presence of variability in these measures is not surprising. Still, given the emerging patterns revealed in our data, the state would be well-served if policymakers studied this issue more deeply to examine the degree to which the diversity in spending that we describe could become an overall hindrance to the state's ability to serve all of its students well.

A final point centers on the detectable shift in some spending indicators, particularly spending per pupil and salaries, in which Virginia has slipped below the national average. Certainly, money alone is not enough to ensure that a state's students will succeed in school. But the evidence does show that adequate funding spent well can have important impacts on student learning (Ladd and Hansen). The spending and salary patterns that the images in Figures 2 and 3 showed, reporting slippage in Virginia's position relative to the rest of the country, should invite close scrutiny to ensure that the state's school divisions can support their students and attract talented teachers to help them learn. Otherwise, the state may risk losing excellent teachers and principals to other states that more generously compensate their educators.

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