

The Hazleton Area School District, which encompasses 256 square miles, serves students from a cross representation of urban, rural, and suburban communities. The District encompasses 16 municipalities. Most of the District is located in Luzerne County; however, portions of the radius include Carbon and Schuylkill Counties.

The Hazleton Area School District, among the top 10 largest school districts in PA, is comprised of 16 school buildings. The organizational structure includes six (6) K-8 elementary/middle schools, two (2) 3-8 elementary/middle schools, two (2) K-2 elementary schools. The high school students (grades 9-12) are served by four (4) buildings that include the Hazleton Area Academy of Science, the Hazleton Area High School, the Hazleton Area Arts and Humanities Academy, and the Hazleton Area Career Center, which is the District's own Career and Technical Center. The Hazleton Area School District operates a K-12 Cyber Academy that is uniquely designed and housed at our local mall. The Hazleton Area School District operates the Luzerne/Wyoming counties early intervention programs. Hazleton Area School District also educates Pre-Kindergarten students. Our Early Intervention and Pre-K students are located in The Academy near our Arthur Street Elementary School. Hazleton Area also operates a Newcomer Center for our K-6 students. Our Newcomer 7-12 students are serviced in our other schools.

Our student population has grown in both diversity and numbers over the last several years. In 2018-2019, the District's population was approximately 11,500 students with a minority population of 54% Latinx. For the 2023-2024 school year, our student population is in excess of 13,200 students with a minority population is approximately 64% Latinx. In the last year, alone, the District increased its ELL population from 2,600 to 3,400. To meet the needs of our children, we have an ELL staff of 53 certified teachers at a cost of \$4.5 million annually. All of our schools have bilingual liaisons and bilingual paraprofessionals to assist our students and parents as well. We continue to enroll new students every day. New enrollments continue throughout the school year. The District employs approximately 1600 people. We are one of the largest employers in the area.

Although Spanish accounts for the largest percentage of languages spoken in the District buildings, there are a total of 22 different languages across our schools. The special education population was approximately 12.8% in 2018-2019 school year. The special education population in 2023-2024 is about 15%. Due to our Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) percentage, all of our students receive free breakfast and lunch.

We have addressed the increasing population through creatively renovating spaces within our existing schools. For example, we closed four (4) pools located in four (4) of our elementary/middle schools to create classroom space. Additionally, we remodeled our existing libraries in most of our schools to provide additional classroom spaces. With those projects, we were able to secure 34 classrooms for \$10 million. We purchased and renovated two (2) buildings recently. They now house our Early Intervention students, Pre-K students, and Arts and Humanities students. By doing so, we were able to provide more space in our High School, Career Center, and Early Learning Center. By redesigning our Cyber Academy and providing a home in our local mall for those who have chosen to learn online, we increased enrollment from 70 students to over 600 students. This increase in enrollment into our Cyber Academy has

allowed for additional space in our other buildings. However, with all of these changes, we are still not able to address the large influx of children we are seeing. As we know, educating children in smaller groups is a better learning environment and can positively impact their academic careers. Our regular education classrooms have large numbers of students in them. Our special education population is increasing which reduces the available space considerably due to the limited number of students permitted in a special needs classroom. For example, we are only permitted, by law, to have eight (8) Autistic Support children in a classroom. We have had to add a number of additional classrooms because of our increased Autism Spectrum Disorder population. As mentioned, this reduces the available space for regular education areas greatly.

The District's budget for the 2023-2024 school year is \$225,512,780.00, which has drastically increased over the last several years to address the needs of our growing student population. Unfortunately, we are not adequately funded to meet all the needs of our children. We are 497 out of 500 school districts for per pupil spending. We are the lowest or next to the lowest tax base in all three counties our District reaches. We do increase taxes, at least, to the index each year. Many families are on fixed incomes or are renting, which makes it difficult to continue to complete our maintenance of effort with our tax increases.

Districts of similar size and demographics receive millions of dollars more than HASD. For example, Lancaster School District received \$77,641,742. They are of similar size and demographic. Reading School District received \$201,949,819. Again, similar size and demographics. HASD received \$64,505,080, which is \$13,136,662 less than Lancaster and \$137,444,739 less than Reading.

Although we have our own Cyber Academy we are still forced to pay for students who attend cyber charter schools. We expend approximately \$6 million on cyber charter tuition each year for about 400 students. With our own Cyber Academy, we are able to minimize the costs associated with its operation. To educate a student in the HACA is approximately \$5,000 per student for roughly 600 students. Basically, we are able to educate more students in our Cyber Academy for much less. We teach students synchronously. We have dedicated special education teachers, psychologist, school counselor, administration, as well as regular education teachers who support all of our students in our Academy.