

ARKANSAS

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 Arkansas'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

Arkansas' inflation-adjusted education revenue grew from \$10,081 per student in 2002 to \$11,828 per student in 2020, a 17.3% growth rate that ranked 32nd in the U.S. During this time, real spending on employee benefits grew by 34.7%—ranking 41st in the country—going from \$1,302 per student to \$1,753 per student. In 2020, Arkansas had \$5,463,673,000 in total education debt, up \$6,495 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	\$10,081	\$11,828	17.3%	32	40
Support Services	\$2,926	\$3,992	36.4%	17	38
Instruction	\$5,450	\$5,810	6.6%	39	44
Benefits	\$1,302	\$1,753	34.7%	41	48
Capital	\$769	\$1,536	99.7%	9	25
Total Debt	\$4,972	\$11,467	130.6%	7	14

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

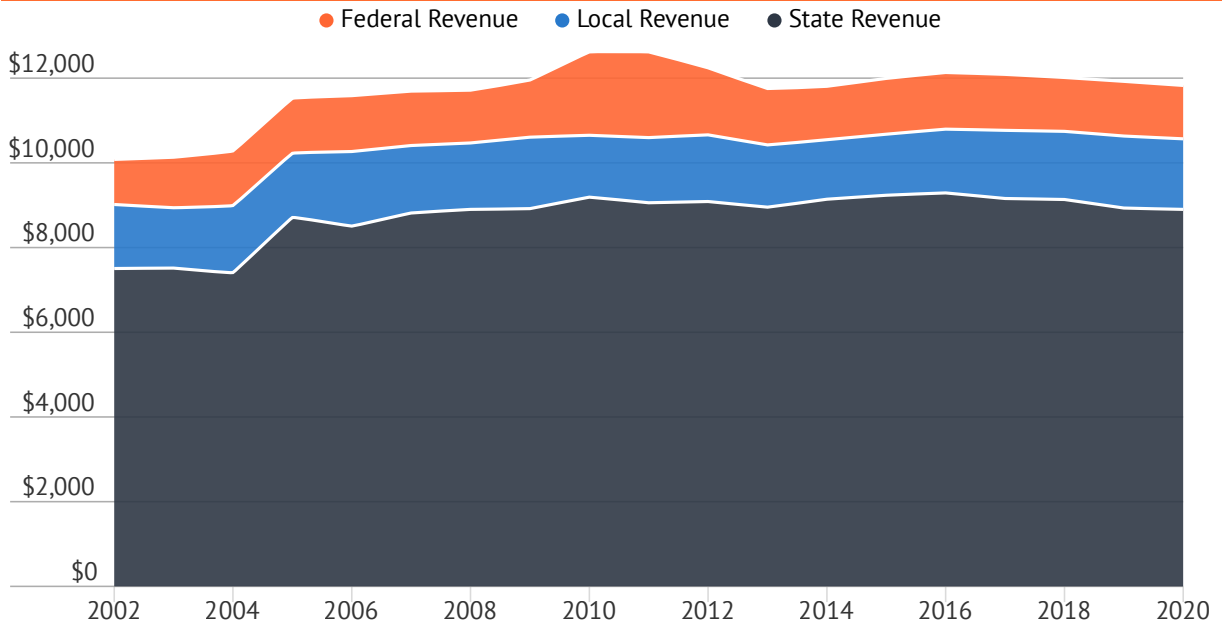
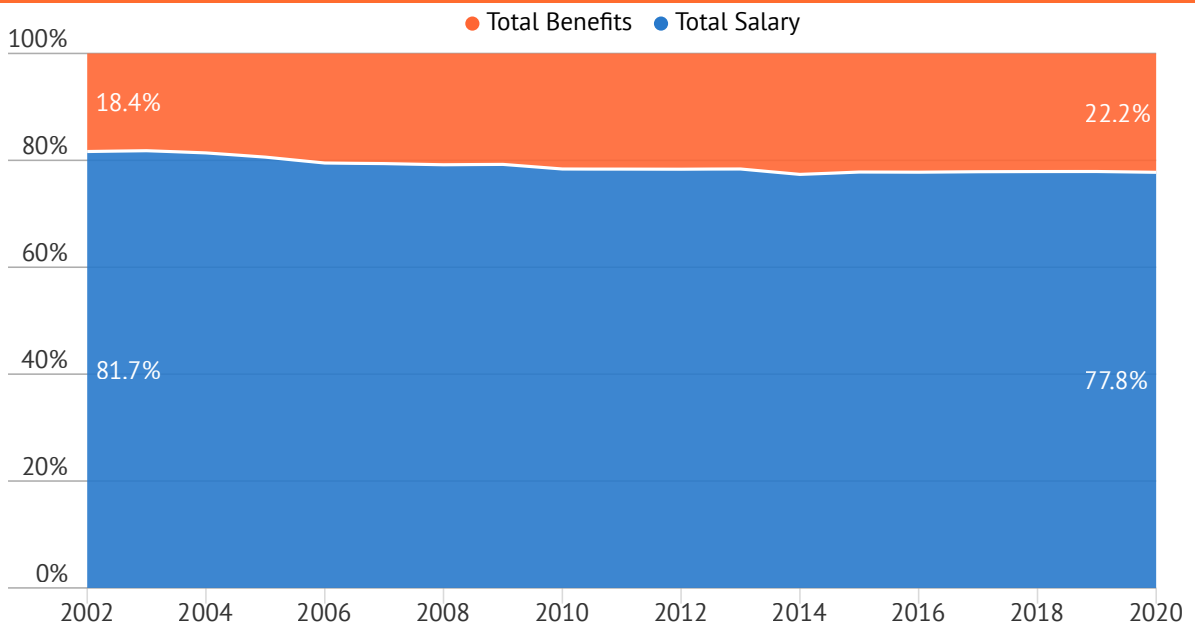


FIGURE 2: K-12 TOTAL SALARY & BENEFITS (2002-2020)



ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS

Between 2002 and 2020, Arkansas' student population grew by 10.5%. At the same time, the number of total public education staff grew by 15.7%, with teachers increasing by 16.8% and non-teachers increasing by 14.6%. The average inflation-adjusted teacher salary in the state went from \$53,373 in 2002 to \$50,456 in 2020, a -5.5% growth rate that ranked 40th in the U.S.

TABLE 2: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Enrollment	449,805	496,927	10.5%	17	34
Total Staff	66,578	77,034	15.7%	22	29
Teachers	33,079	38,629	16.8%	11	28
Non-Teachers	33,499	38,405	14.6%	32	30
Average Teacher Salary	\$53,373	\$50,456	-5.5%	40	46

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

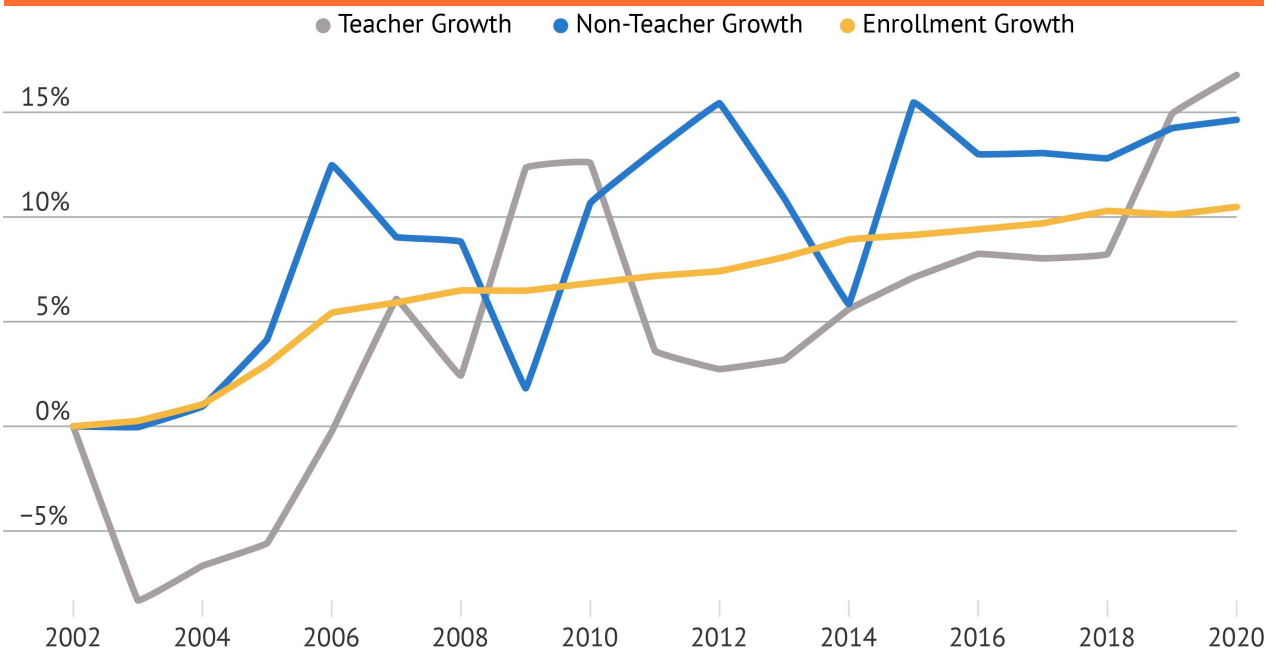
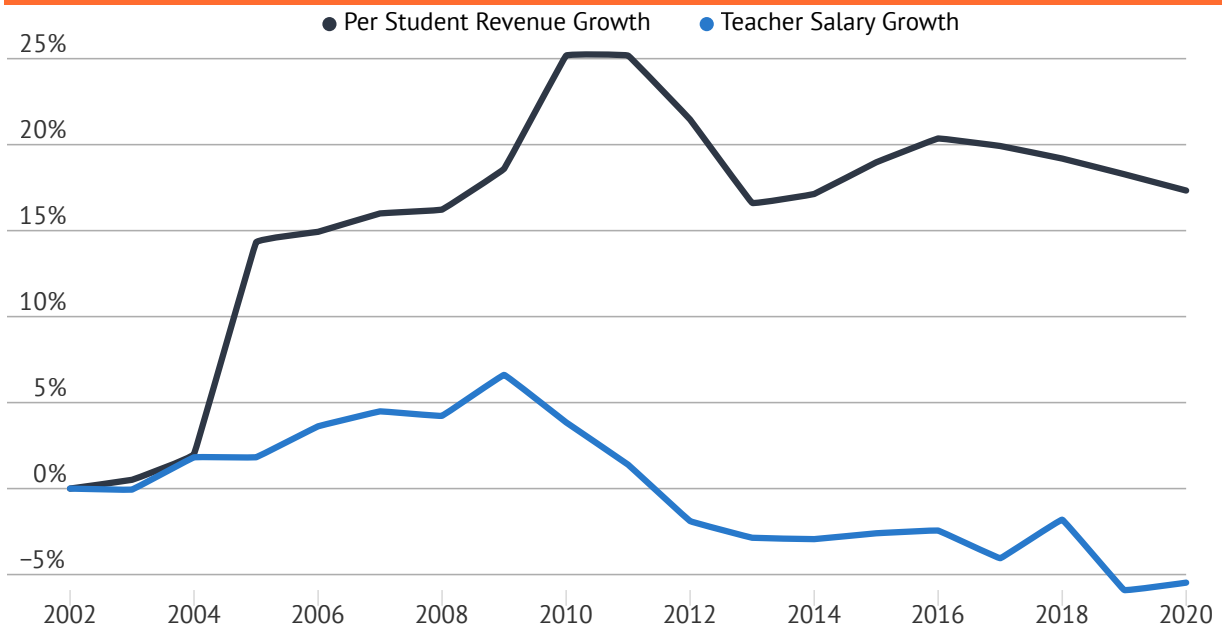


FIGURE 4: TEACHER SALARY GROWTH VS. REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH (2002-2020)



NAEP TRENDS

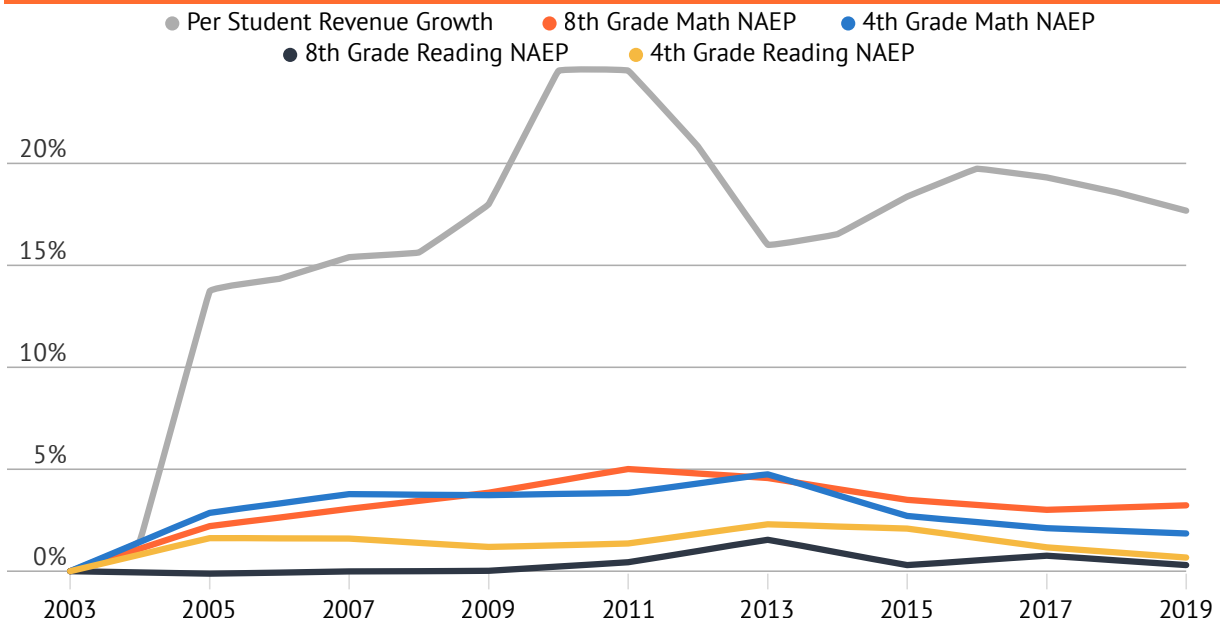
Between 2003 and 2019, Arkansas' 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by one point (+0.7%), ranking 23rd in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by four points (+1.9%), ranking 32nd. During this time, the state's 8th grade reading scores increased by one point (+0.3%), ranking 21st in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by nine points (+3.2%), ranking 7th.

Table 3: NAEP Scores (2003-2019)

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	23	45	1	21	40
Math	4	32	45	9	7	43

FIGURE 5: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH¹



LOW-INCOME NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, Arkansas' low-income 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by three points (+1.5%), ranking 23rd in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by five points (+2.3%), ranking 29th. During this time, the state's 8th grade reading scores decreased by zero points (-0.0%), ranking 32nd in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by seven points (+2.8%), ranking 19th.

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	3	23	23	0	32	28
Math	5	29	39	7	19	37

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

