



Governor Corbett's Expanding Excellence Program
A Research for Action Policy Note

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Introduction

Earlier today, Governor Corbett outlined his 2014-15 budget priorities. According to a Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) press release, the Governor's plan includes the Expanding Excellence Program. If enacted and funded, this initiative would "provide competitive funding to schools that have attained a 90 or higher on the School Performance Profile and are willing to analyze and share best practices that have proven to raise student achievement. Grant recipients will be responsible for supporting schools across the state that strive to replicate these strategies and techniques."ⁱ In his budget address, Governor Corbett argued that the proposal will help struggling schools "link up with the top schools in a mentoring partnership, to gain from their experience and knowledge."ⁱⁱ

By way of background, School Performance Profiles (SPP), unveiled last fall, rate public schools on as many as 30 indicators in four categories: academic achievement, academic growth, closing the achievement gap, and other indicators such as graduation and attendance rates. Schools may also earn up to seven points via "extra credit" based upon high performance on state and industry assessments as well as for students earning a score of 3 or higher on Advanced Placement exams. Not all indicators apply to every school; for example, third-grade reading proficiency will not factor into a high school's score. Additionally, not all measures are applicable this year; the "closing the achievement gap" category does not apply to schools until the end of the 2013-14 school year. For a full listing of SPP elements, click [here](#).

To provide detail on the schools and students this initiative may affect, Research for Action (RFA) has prepared an initial analysis based on publicly-available data from PDE.

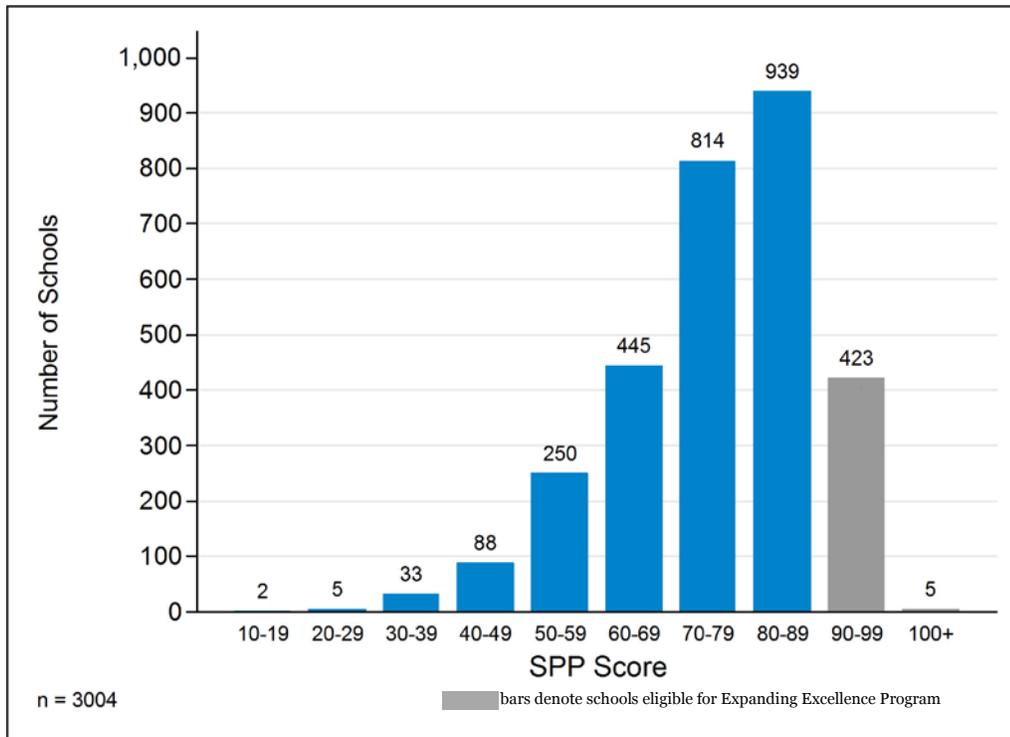
Initial Findings

Data Element I. Considerable diversity of SPP scores for Pennsylvania's approximately 3,000 school buildings.

Figure 1 shows SPP scores based on 2012-13 data for 3,004 public schools. Based on the Governor's proposal, only 428 schools (shaded in gray) would be eligible to participate in the Expanding Excellence Program; this includes five schools with scores of 100 or higher, based on provisions to earn extra

credit. A plurality of scores are clustered between 80 and 89; 80 schools statewide earned scores between 89 and 89.9, and would just miss the threshold for the Expanding Excellence Program.

Figure 1. SPP Scores Across All Pennsylvania Schools, 2012-13 School Year



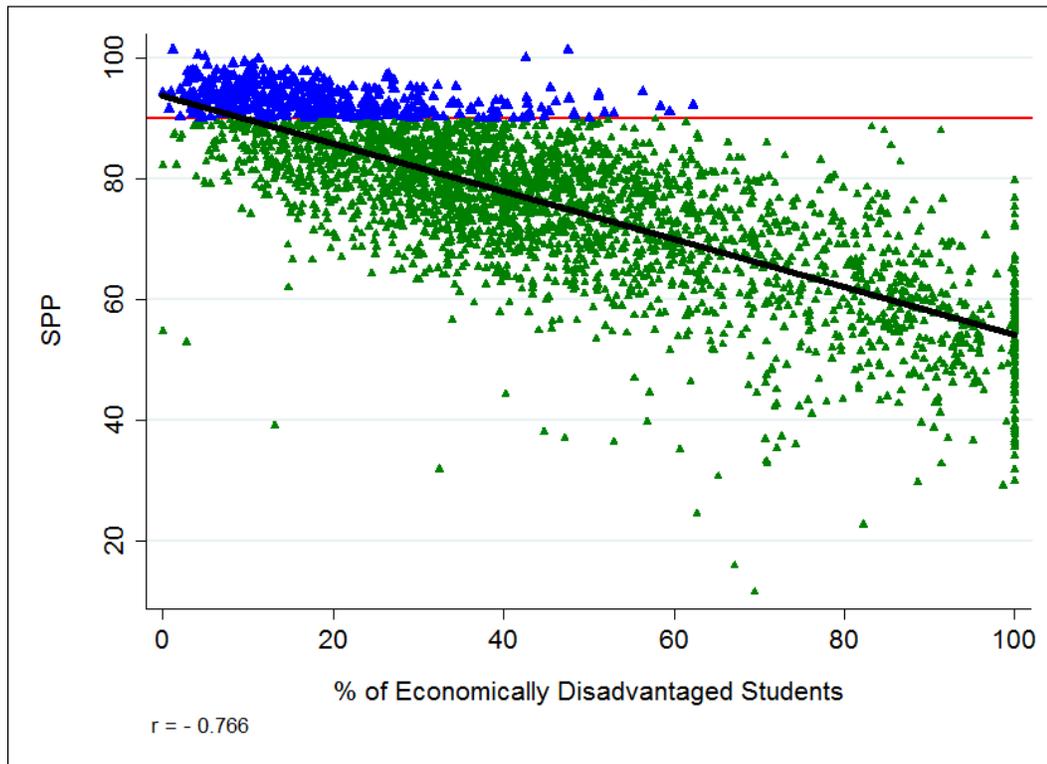
Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education 2012-13 School Performance Profile Building-Level Academic Scores

Data Element 2. The vast majority of eligible schools have lower than average levels of economically-disadvantaged students.

School-level enrollment files reveal that schools eligible for the Governor’s initiative have significantly lower concentrations of economically-disadvantaged students.ⁱⁱⁱ Figure 2 shows the 3,004 school buildings statewide, arrayed based on SPP scores and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students by school building, as reported by the Department. Each school is represented by a single triangle, with schools eligible for the Governor’s initiative in blue, on or above the red line.

The vertical axis reflects a school’s SPP score, ranging from 11.4 percent to 101.4. The horizontal axis displays the percentage of economically disadvantaged students by school building. More than 100 schools had 99 percent or more students in this category, and all but two of these schools are in Philadelphia; these buildings are represented by dots along the right-hand side.

Figure 2. All Pennsylvania Public Schools by SPP Score and Poverty, 2012-13 School Year



Sources: PA Department of Education 2012-13 School Performance Profile Building-Level Academic Score; PA Department of Education 2012-13 School Performance Profile School Fast Facts

Figure 2 shows:

- SPP scores are negatively correlated with poverty; and
- Statewide, no school with a poverty rate above 65 percent is eligible for participation in the Expanding Excellence Program.

Further, as shown in Table 1, on average, 16.2 percent of students in schools eligible for the Expanding Excellence Program are economically-disadvantaged compared to a statewide average of 42.4 percent. Additional demographic detail—showing averages for all public schools and the 428 schools eligible to participate in the Governor’s Expanding Excellence Program—are presented in Table 1. Again, all data is from publicly-available sources on PDE’s website, reflecting the 2012-13 school year.

Table 1. Demographic Breakout for All PA Public Schools and Eligible Schools, 2012-13 School Year

Student Characteristics	All schools (N = 3004)	SPP 90+ Schools (N = 428)
Total enrollment	1,733,949	303,620
Average Percent Economically Disadvantaged	42.4	16.2
Average Percent White	70.2	83.9
Average Percent Black	14.9	4.3
Average Percent Hispanic	9	3.7
Average Percent Asian	3.4	6.3
Average Percent English Language Learner	2.7	1.2
Average Percent Special Education	14.5	13

Source: PA Department of Education 2012-13 School Performance Profile School Fast Facts

Conclusion

Decades of research show income stratification is one of the strongest predictors of student outcomes.^{iv} Since SPP scores are heavily weighted based on standardized test scores, schools that enroll high numbers of traditionally-disadvantaged students face particular challenges in meeting the eligibility requirements for the initiative.

RFA will provide additional analysis of implications of the Governor’s budget address in the weeks ahead.

ⁱ Office of the Governor. (January 28, 2014). Governor Corbett Presents Governor’s Awards to Two Red Lion Area Schools; Previews Education Initiative in Upcoming Budget. Retrieved from:

http://www.pa.gov/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?agency=Governors%20Office&item=15222#.Uu_ATbSwCZQ.

ⁱⁱ Text of Governor Corbett’s Budget Address. Retrieved from:

<http://www.delcotimes.com/government-and-politics/20140204/read-the-complete-text-of-gov-corbetts-budget-address>.

ⁱⁱⁱ The PA Department of Education uses reports from school districts to compile the percent of students who are economically disadvantaged. According to the Department, “poverty data sources such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cases, census poor, Medicaid, children living in institutions that are neglected or delinquent, those supported in foster homes or free/reduced price lunch eligibility may be used” in the district counts. The definitions used in the SPP reports are available [here](#).

^{iv} Reardon, S.F. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations. In R. Murnane & G. Duncan (Eds.), *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.