

On-site Review Report

Harrison County Schools

July 2026



Office of Accountability



**West Virginia Board of Education
2025-2026**

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Introduction

The Office of Accountability conducted an on-site monitoring visit to Harrison County Schools on April 27, 2026, to examine the current status of the operations of the county with regard to county board of education member effectiveness, efficient and effective operations, and special education. The on-site review consisted of interviews with members of the central office staff, the county superintendent, and each member of the county board of education. Documents and data made available to the team were also reviewed during and following the visit. On May 26, 2026, the team returned to Harrison County and conducted interviews with principals throughout the county.

A team consisting of staff members from the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) compiled the data collected during the review to identify the findings and recommendations contained in this report. The areas denoted as requiring improvement were determined based on written evidence and the overwhelming consistency of comments describing behaviors and conduct exposed through the interview process.

On-site Review Team Members

Alexandra Criner, Director, Office of Accountability, WVDE
Lisa Hindman, Coordinator, Office of Accountability, WVDE
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Background

Harrison County Schools operates twenty-two schools serving approximately 8,926 students. Superintendent Dora Stutler has led the district since 2020. Four of the five members of the Harrison County Board of Education are former Harrison County educators.

Figures 1 and 2 on page 3 illustrate county proficiency data for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics for school years 2015 to 2025. The proficiency data is not available for SY 2019-2020 due to the COVID-19 national emergency.

Student enrollment in Harrison County Schools has declined in recent years. On page 3, Figure 3 illustrates the total enrollment trend from 2019 to 2026.

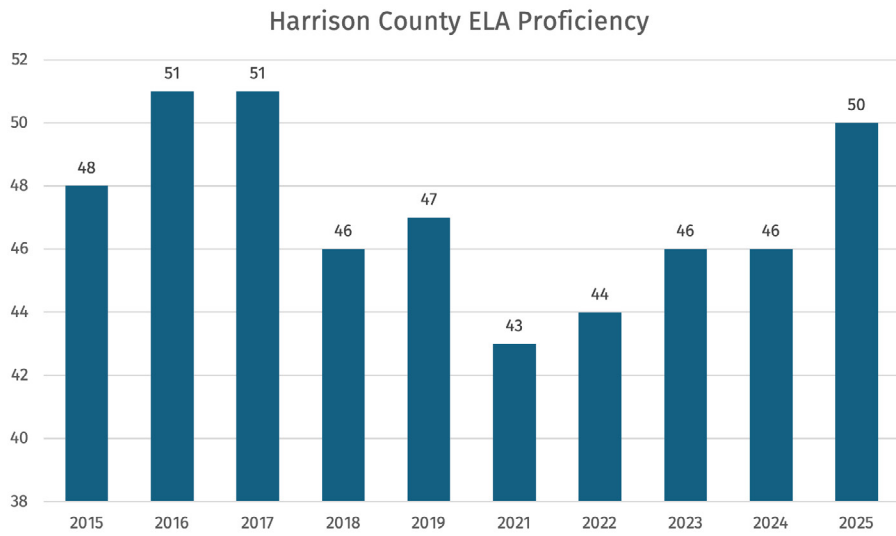


Figure 1

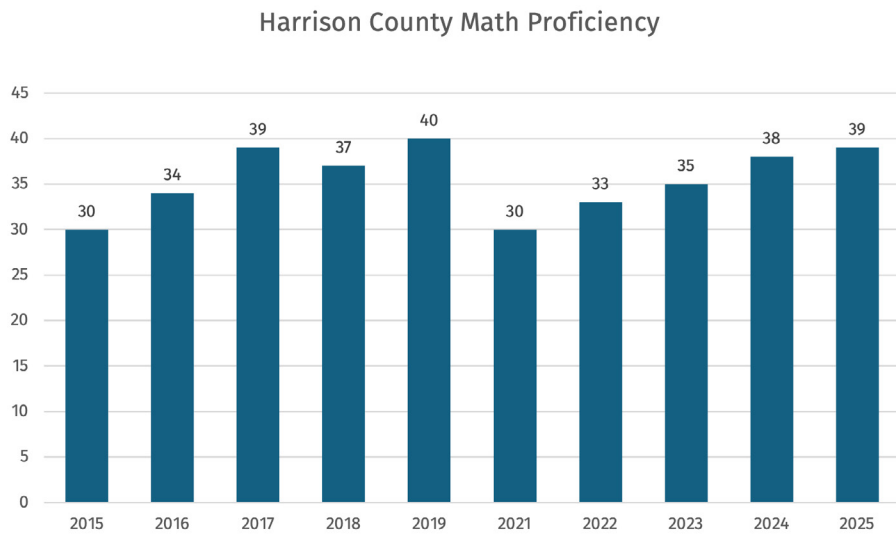


Figure 2

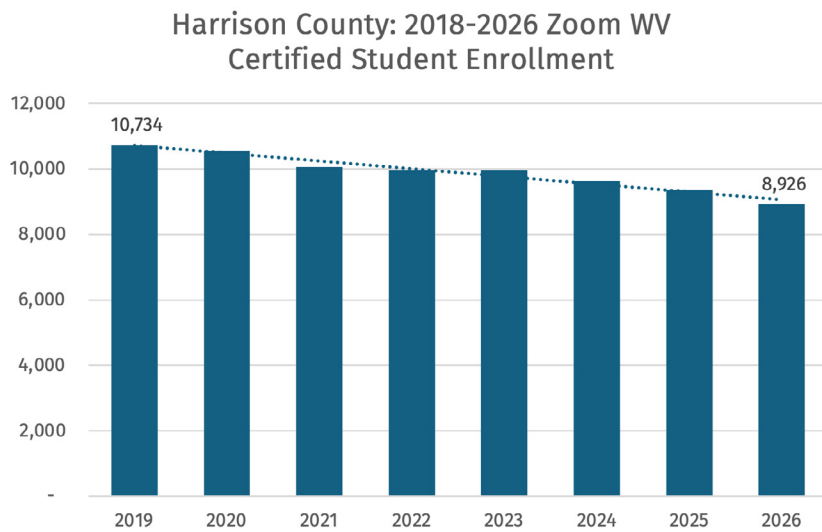


Figure 3

Key Findings and Systemic Concerns

County Board of Education Member Effectiveness

- While some board members articulated appropriate governance principles, all non-board interview groups consistently reported board overreach into administration, including interference in staffing, scheduling, and discipline; advocacy for specific schools, programs, or individuals; undermining of the superintendent's authority; and bypassing the established chain of command.
- A recent example of board overreach into administration was a lengthy board discussion focused on the honor society graduation regalia at one high school. Other board discussions have involved strongly suggesting the selection of specific programs and curricula based on teacher feedback, which is a decision falling under the superintendent's responsibility as the Chief Executive Officer and instructional leader of the school system. Based on observations of local board of education meetings, some board members interject to answer questions directed to the superintendent.
- Some interview responses indicated unclear or questionable compliance with West Virginia's Open Governmental Meetings Act (W. Va. Code §6-9A-1), including allegations of excessive use of executive sessions convened for matters not clearly meeting the statutory criteria, and apparent informal discussions of board business occurring outside properly noticed meetings.
- Observation of Harrison County Board of Education meetings indicates that public delegations have been invited to speak to the board after the meeting. This aligned with interview comments suggesting that discussions with all five board members present have occurred post-adjournment.
- Interview responses from the non-board member groups indicated repeated patterns of board involvement in active personnel investigations, grievance and discipline matters, vendor and employee benefits decisions, and situations involving potential conflicts of interest or the appearance of impropriety. The perception exists that some schools and employees are "untouchable" due to association with certain board of education members. For example, non-board interview groups indicated that if a decision impacts a school in certain areas of the county, a board member will quickly become involved. Consistent interview comments revealed the perception that board members have become aware of and have potentially impeded personnel investigations and disciplinary actions.
- Board of Education interviews indicate support for the superintendent. However, most central office staff believed that the board members had "tied the hands" of the superintendent, thereby impacting the long-term stability and effectiveness of the county school system.

Efficient and Effective Operations

Figure 4 illustrates both the number and the associated cost of personnel in excess of the positions funded through the Public School Support Program (PSSP) in Harrison County from 2016 through 2026. From fiscal year 2020 through fiscal year 2023, federal ESSER funds were available, which may impact the data during that timeframe.

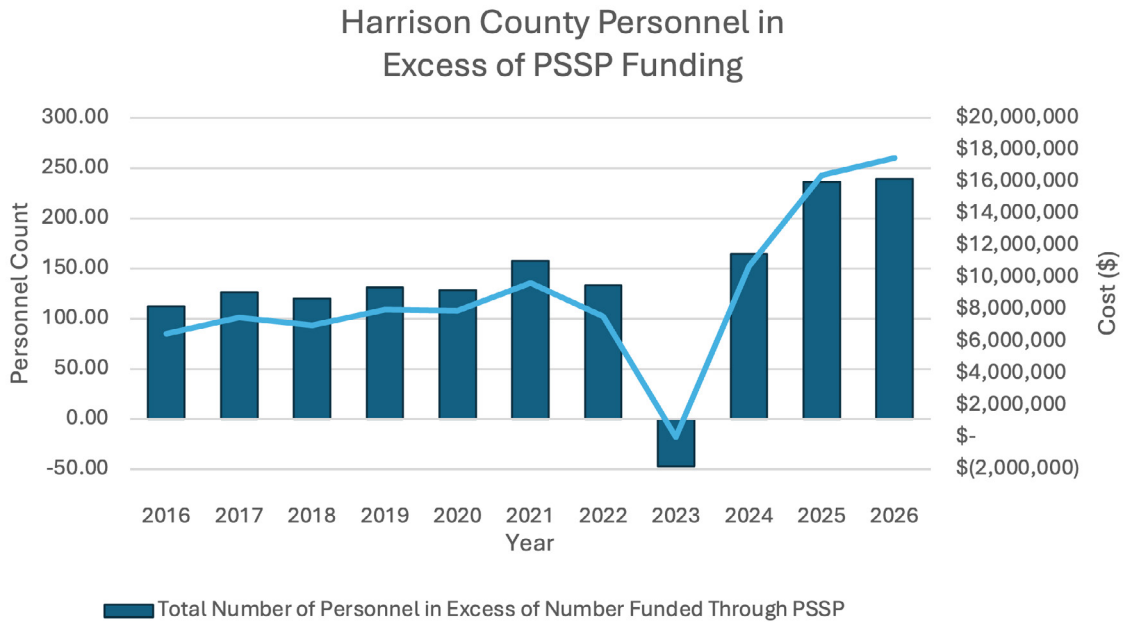


Figure 4

Figure 5 below illustrates a steady increase in per-pupil expenditure data in Harrison County from 2016 to 2025, reflecting a consistent upward trend in spending per student over time.

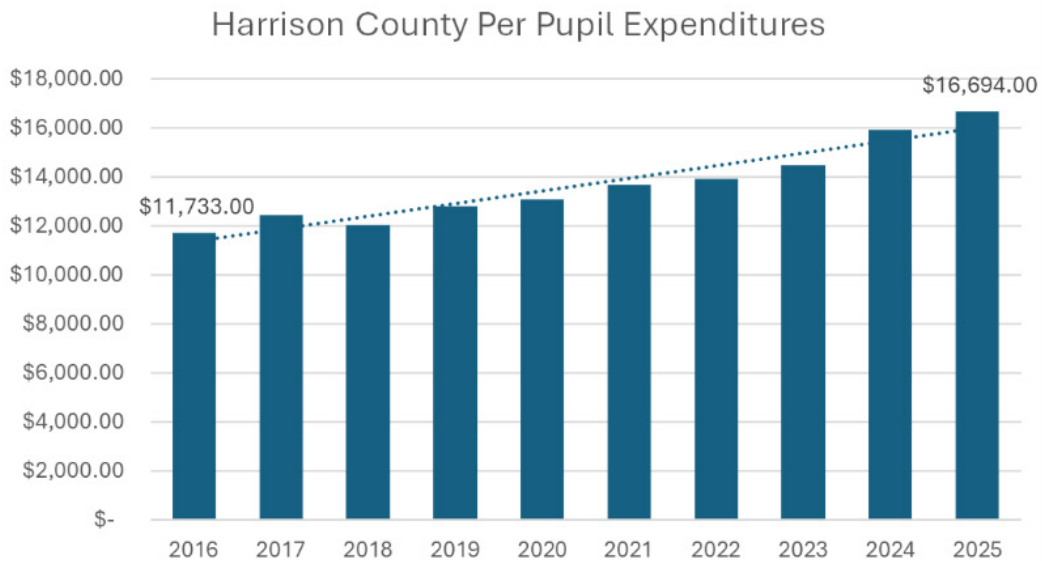


Figure 5

The table below presents per-pupil expenditure data by school from 2018 to 2025, offering a comparative view of spending trends across Harrison County Schools. It is important to note that data are not available for Liberty Middle School, as the 2025-2026 school year marked its first year of operation. Additionally, expenditures are not reported for United High School, Evolution Middle School, and Evolution High School, as these alternative programs are housed within other district facilities.

School Name	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Johnson Elementary	6,295.13	6,891.17	6,950.53	7,621.85	7,015.93	7,269.97	8,025.98	8,777.40
Lost Creek Elementary	8,698.53	9,719.85	10,454.83	12,341.89	13,582.52	11,122.64	13,565.40	15,700.43
Lumberport Elementary	9,251.37	9,746.24	10,334.45	11,840.23	12,123.68	12,816.97	15,456.65	15,805.17
Mountaineer Elementary	8,294.09	8,473.01	8,626.83	9,413.86	10,051.89	11,127.21	12,983.55	14,792.71
Simpson Elementary	6,745.45	6,821.55	7,139.12	7,803.33	8,274.00	8,923.44	9,051.23	9,159.66
West Milford Elementary	6,972.80	7,185.13	8,030.75	9,202.58	9,297.75	9,901.20	10,926.23	12,818.78
Big Elm Elementary	6,876.71	7,133.24	7,612.64	8,147.26	8,086.29	8,738.47	10,385.06	11,485.33
Nutter Fort Elementary	7,930.19	8,646.08	8,726.25	9,953.49	10,142.38	9,164.49	11,612.74	12,560.45
Nutter Fort Intermediate	6,879.03	7,323.68	7,414.54	8,516.39	8,883.72	10,597.62	11,026.01	11,707.31
Salem Elementary	9,471.52	9,799.75	11,414.11	12,716.03	13,062.31	14,830.88	16,043.87	15,570.62
Victory Elementary						9,486.17	12,734.33	15,829.84
Bridgeport Middle	7,366.39	6,957.15	7,085.46	7,223.66	7,958.78	9,095.84	9,622.10	10,312.40
Lincoln Middle	6,791.92	7,114.95	8,255.26	8,732.77	8,543.07	8,341.37	10,105.28	10,777.64
South Harrison Middle	7,830.70	7,561.83	8,014.26	7,782.59	8,537.26	9,187.14	10,777.06	11,270.89
Bridgeport High	7,383.35	7,158.97	7,340.38	7,631.64	7,091.12	7,782.58	9,187.05	9,499.38
Liberty High	8,324.17	9,339.02	9,370.41	10,231.28	10,393.43	10,539.36	11,906.97	13,762.00
Lincoln High	8,611.17	8,544.52	8,353.83	8,990.52	8,806.50	9,637.17	11,308.17	11,835.14
South Harrison High	9,946.74	11,256.90	11,504.50	11,261.37	11,117.09	11,518.43	12,578.53	12,207.14
Robert C. Byrd High	8,370.20	8,613.67	8,421.08	8,159.55	8,506.73	9,089.26	10,180.03	11,119.56

The tables below reflect the number of course sections with fewer than 20 students across Harrison County secondary schools, including both high school and middle school levels, based on data provided by Harrison County Schools.

Secondary School-Level Count of Course Sections with Under 20 Students

High Schools

School Name	Number of Sections with 15 - 20 Students per Class	Number of Sections with 0-14 Students per Class	Total Number of Sections with 20 or Fewer Students per Class
Bridgeport High	80	68	148
Lincoln High	55	55	110
Robert C. Byrd High	48	41	89
South Harrison High	99	104	203

Middle Schools

School Name	Number of Sections with 15 - 20 Students per Class	Number of Sections with 0-14 Students per Class	Total Number of Sections with 20 or Fewer Students per Class
Bridgeport Middle	61	8	69
Liberty Middle	64	55	119
Lincoln Middle	38	33	71
South Harrison Middle	70	42	112

- Data reported by Harrison County Schools indicated that the current excess levy funds approximately 150 of the 239 positions in excess of the school funding formula as of October 1, 2025. Since that date, the overage has increased through filling 20 previously vacant positions. The cost of maintaining the positions over the formula for an additional school year is likely to result in an approximate \$10 million reduction in Harrison County’s unrestricted fund balance in fiscal year 2027. This will follow an estimated \$6 million reduction in Harrison County Schools’ unrestricted fund balance in fiscal year 2026. These projections have been reviewed and verified by the WVDE Office of School Finance.
- In March 2026, the Harrison County Board of Education publicly expressed the intention to address personnel costs through attrition and the elimination of vacant positions in 2026, to allow personnel to prepare for a potential Reduction in Force (RIF) during the 2027 personnel season.

Additionally, the board voted 4-0 to pass a “spending freeze” for vehicle and equipment purchases, overtime, substitutes, contracted services, consumable supplies and furniture, out-of-county travel, supplemental days and hours, and non-traditional instruction days. However, the written guidance for the spending freeze reflected that it is unlikely to generate enough savings to offset the cost of carrying excess positions.

- When addressing the spending freeze, some principals expressed uncertainty as to whether future staffing will be sufficient to meet students’ needs. Others stated the spending freeze had not impacted their school whatsoever. Interview comments consistently indicated that no information about the spending freeze had been communicated directly to principals.

Special Education

- Based on interview comments and observation of board meetings, the review team determined the need for a targeted review of special education services in Harrison County Schools to examine school- and student-specific data to ensure compliance with WVBE Policy 2419: Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Some principals’ interview responses indicated that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are written for the same number of minutes for each student based on the school schedule rather than the student’s individual needs. Additionally, the team received information that special education services may have been modified to justify school scheduling preferences and personnel decisions rather than being based on student goals and progress data.



Michele L. Blatt
West Virginia Superintendent of Schools