

Keystone State ChalleNGe Academy Accepting Applications for January 2026 Class

By State Rep. Ann Flood

The Keystone State ChalleNGe Academy (KSCA) is now accepting applications for its January 2026 class, and for the first time, prospective cadets can apply online through a simpler, faster process. There is no tuition cost to attend, and meals, housing, uniforms and school supplies are provided at no charge.

The KSCA is designed to give teens in jeopardy of not graduating on time or dropping out of school a second chance at obtaining their basic education and much more. Cadets learn leadership, self-discipline, job skills, health and hygiene, values of community service and civic duty, physical fitness, and responsibility to build a better life.

A new online eligibility checker at pa.gov/ksca helps applicants quickly confirm they qualify before completing the full application. Applicants can also request a mailed form by emailing RAMVPACHALLENGE@pa.gov or calling 717-861-7767 or 717-861-8831.

The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program currently operates 37 Youth ChalleNGe sites in 29 states and territories. The program is both federally and state funded. More details can be found at pa.gov/ksca.



Pennsylvania Math, Reading Scores Rank Among Nation's Best

By Danielle Smith / Public News Service

PA - Pennsylvania students continue to excel in reading and math, according to the latest "Public Education by the Numbers" report. It offers a comprehensive look at school funding, enrollment, educator pay and academic performance across the state's 1.7 million public school students.

Christopher Lilienthal, assistant director of communications with Pennsylvania State Education Association, said that while the pandemic caused test scores to decline nationwide, Pennsylvania still ranks among the top states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card for fourth and eighth graders in reading and math.

"Fourth-grade reading, only four states had statistically significant higher scores than Pennsylvania. In fourth grade math, only three states had statistically significant higher scores than Pennsylvania," he said. "We're doing all right compared to the nation."

The report notes that more than six in ten Pennsylvania high school graduates plan to continue their education after graduation. It also found that Pennsylvania ranks 17th nationally for the share of full-time college students who finish their bachelor's degrees.

With Pennsylvania's budget still pending, districts await over \$2 billion in state aid. The report shows basic education funding has improved from a 2020-2021 low, when the state covered just 34% of costs, well below the historic average of about half. That matters most for high-poverty districts that can't depend on local taxes. At its peak in 1974, state funding reached 55% percent.

"So, we hit that low point in 2020-2021 and since then, we've been coming back," he said. "So the most recently completed school year, 2024 25, we were up to 40% of total school district expenditures coming from the state."

Lilienthal said there's still concern over teacher pay. The report shows that both starting salaries and overall pay haven't kept up with inflation over the past 30 years. Teachers are losing buying power because inflation has increased at a faster rate than teacher salaries have increased.

"One way we could address that is by starting our teachers off at a higher rate," he continued. "We've been supportive of legislation that would set a minimum teacher salary in Pennsylvania of \$60,000 a year. That legislation would also set a minimum wage for our support staff of at least \$20 an hour."

Lilienthal said raising teacher pay is key to ensuring educators can cover basic expenses such as rent, bills, and student loans, and added over the past few years, former Gov. Tom Wolf and current Gov. Josh Shapiro have worked with lawmakers to tackle chronic underfunding in public schools.

That effort is helping districts hire more teachers, reduce class sizes, and invest in programs like STEM, literacy and math coaching — steps that are making a real difference for students across Pennsylvania.

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All auction sales are FINAL. Cash only and paid at Columbia Self Storage, 1059 Pennsylvania Ave., Pen Argyl, PA 18072. Columbia Self Storage reserves the right to refuse any bid.