

Staffing Trends in Kentucky's Public Schools

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Executive Summary

This brief examines historical data on various types of employment in Kentucky's public schools. Publicly available annual data on staffing is available on the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the U.S. Department of Education websites, though there are some differences in definitions and scope of coverage. We find:

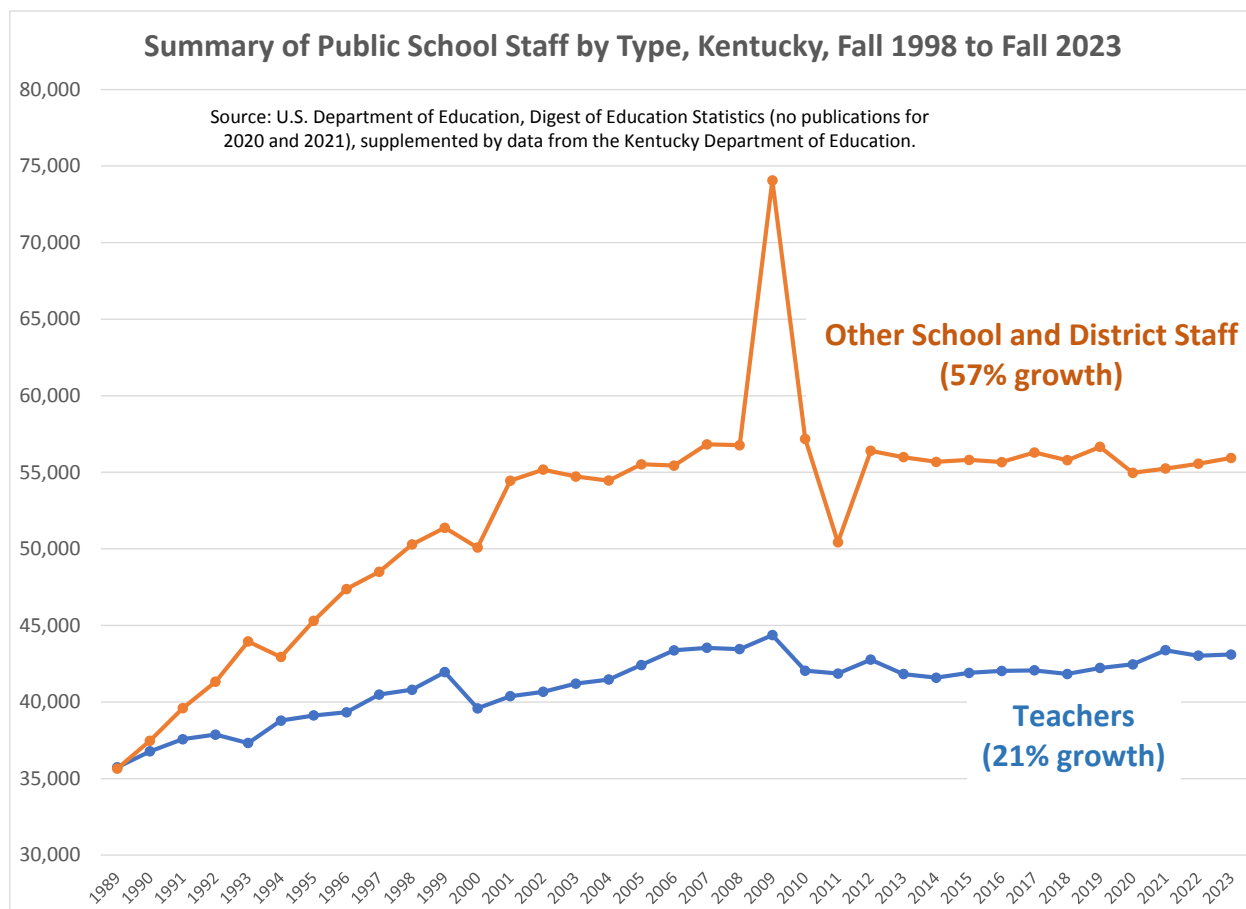
- ▶ Overall, public school staffing has grown steadily, particularly in non-teaching categories. Total staffing grew by about 39% between 1990 and 2024.
- ▶ The number of teachers rose during this time by 21% while the number of non-teaching staff increased by 57%. The latter increase is especially pronounced at the district level as opposed to staff at individual schools. Kentucky ranks 45th among states in the share of total staff who are teachers.
- ▶ The number of students served rose by about 9% from 1990 to 2013 but has fallen steadily since then. In 2024, it was 10% lower than its 2013 peak and also was lower than in 1990. School staffing has changed little since 2013.
- ▶ Per-pupil school funding has grown an inflation-adjusted 136% since 1990. Some of this funding growth occurred as staffing grew, though funding continued to rise even after staffing plateaued in 2013.

Each of these topics is addressed separately below.

1. Overall Public School Employment

Looking back 35 years to the 1989-90 school year, overall employment in Kentucky's public schools has grown by about 28,000 staff, rising from a total of 71,400 to 99,000 – a 39% increase. The number of teachers rose from 35,700 to 43,100 while other support staff at schools and district offices rose from 35,700 to 55,900. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

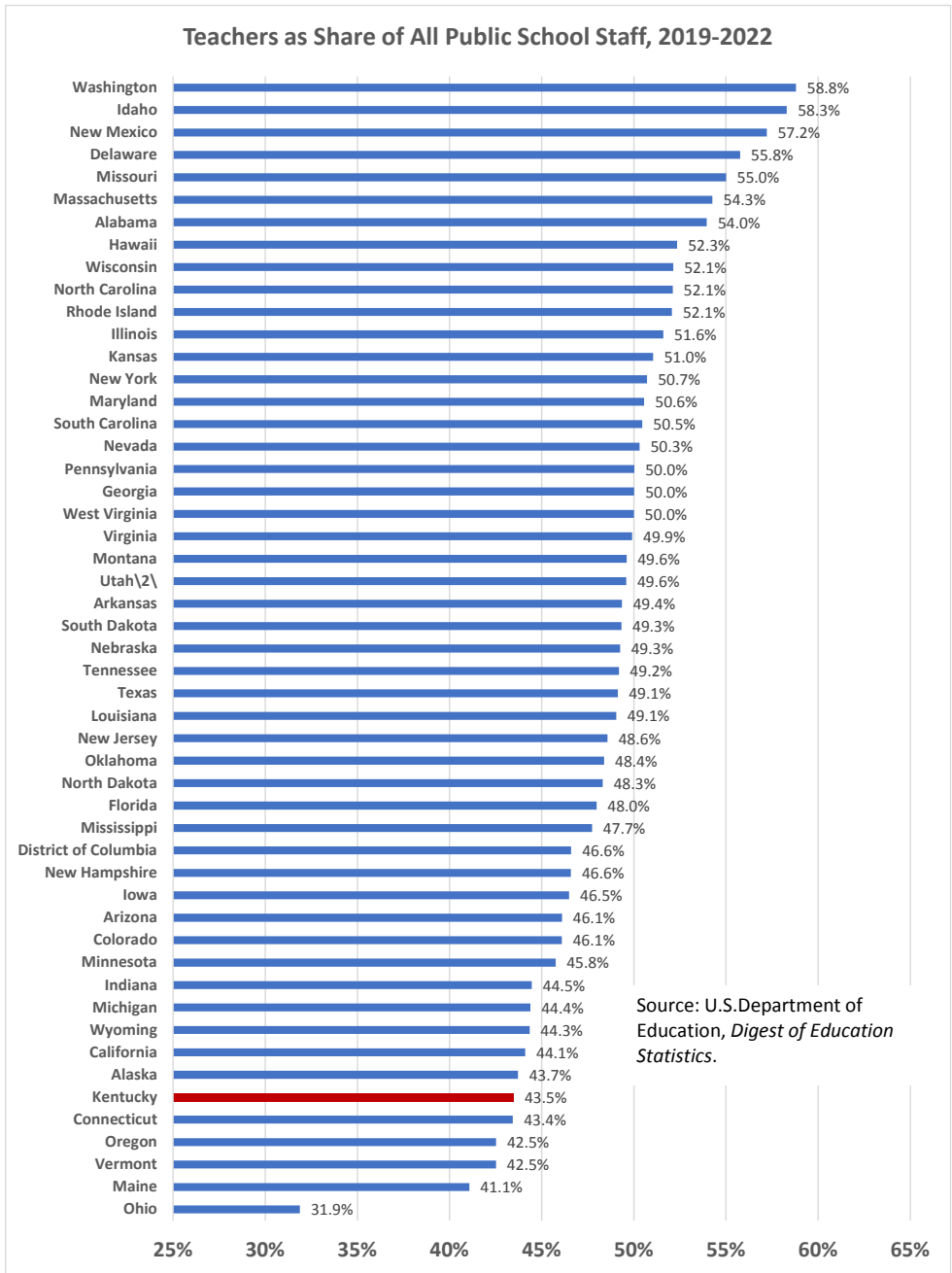


The spike in the number of non-teaching staff in the 2009-10 school year is likely due to the Obama administration's stimulus package related to the recession of 2008-10. This is consistent with data on federal funds going to school districts, as reported by the KDE's "Revenue and Expenditure Reports." Federal funding to Kentucky schools was \$732 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, \$1.14 billion in FY10, \$1.148 billion in FY11, then back to \$971 million in FY12. Apparently, the extra federal funding was spread over two state fiscal years. Federal reports say the focus was on child nutrition programs, education for the disadvantaged (Title I) and special education.¹ The federal "Digest of Education Statistics" shows the annual growth in staff by detailed type. Over half of the spike in staffing in 2010 was in the category "Other support services," 15% in "School and library support" and 15% in "Instructional aides." These all reverted to pre-stimulus levels the next year.

¹ See www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/overview/budget/budget10/summary/10summary.pdf

This runup left Kentucky with one of the lowest teacher-to-non-teacher ratios in the country. We averaged the federal education department’s staffing data for the last four years this detail was published, and compared Kentucky to the other states, as shown in Figure 2. Kentucky ranked 45th among states in the share of total staff who were teachers.

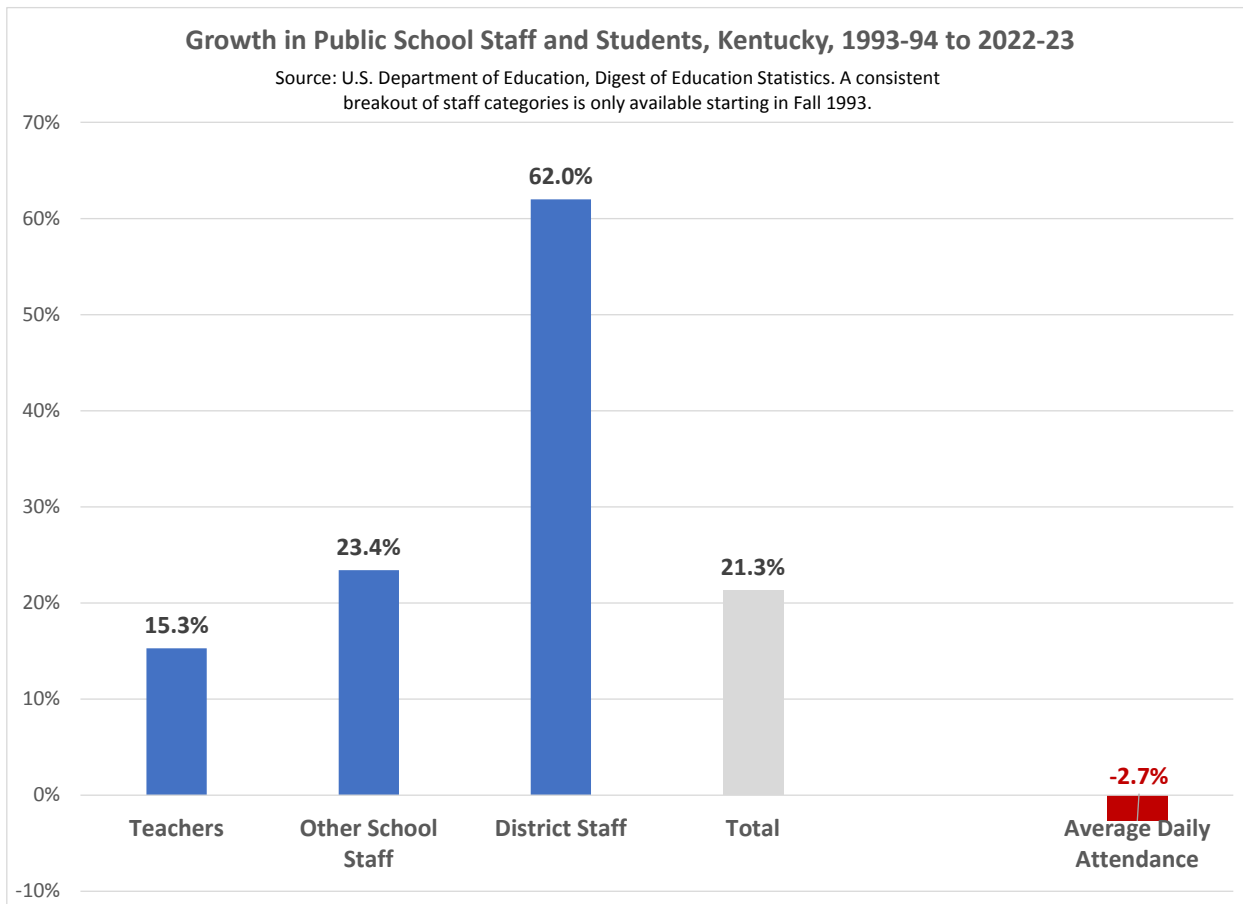
Figure 2



2. Teachers, School Staff, District Staff

The federal government began with the 1993-94 school year to provide more detail for the non-teacher staff categories. This revealed the strong growth in employment at the district level as compared to the school level, as is evident in Figure 3 below. In percentage terms, district staff rose 62%. The number of teachers rose 15% (while average daily attendance of students fell by nearly 3%).

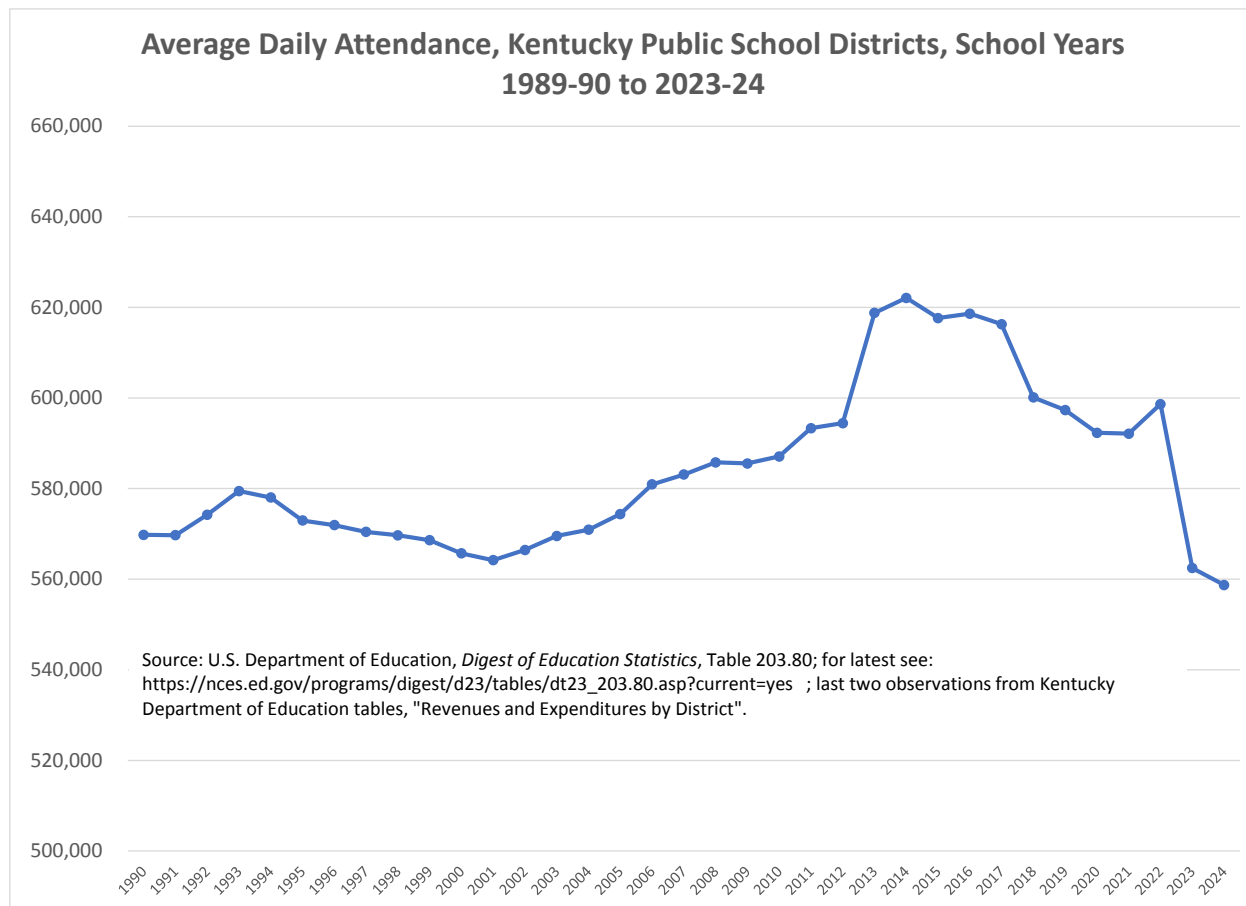
Figure 3



3. School Attendance

Over the full 35-year period surveyed here, the net number of students served fell from 570,000 to 559,000. Average daily attendance (ADA) fell slightly throughout the 1990s, then rose fairly rapidly between 2000 and 2013. It's been falling since, and now is at its lowest level since the 1980s. The path of ADA is shown in Figure 4 below.²

Figure 4



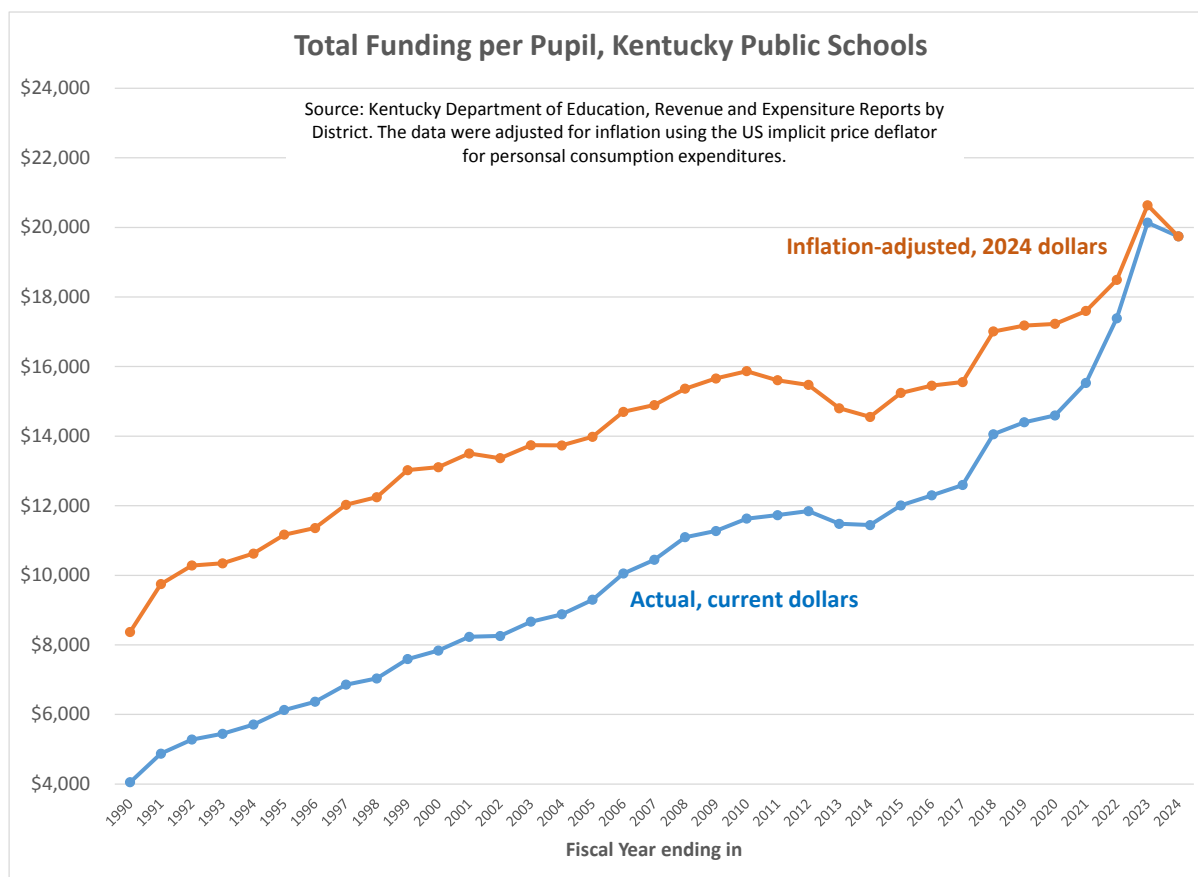
² These are KDE's official counts. However, we're skeptical of their accuracy for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years when schools were closed extensively due to COVID-19 lockdown policies. There were widespread media reports of very high chronic absenteeism during this period, as tens of thousands of students failed to log in on their computers from home. See, for example, www.ksba.org/protected/ArticleView.aspx?iid=6YAYGA0&dasi=1B

4. Per-Pupil Funding

The surge in staffing was accompanied by large funding increases during the 1990s and 2000s. However, funding continues to rise – except for just after the Great Recession – even though staffing had plateaued. Average per-pupil funding, adjusted for inflation, is shown in Figure 5 below. Total actual funding per student served (ADA) rose from \$4,100 to \$19,700 between the 1990 and 2024 fiscal years (the blue line in Figure 5) Adjusted for inflation, in terms of 2024 dollars, per-student funding rose by 136% – from \$8,400 to \$19,700 (the orange line in Figure 5).

For a more detailed discussion of funding trends, as well as academic performance, see “K-12 in Kentucky: A summary of facts and trends.”³ For the history of funding and performance by district, see the dashboard link below.⁴ For estimates of full teacher compensation, including fringe benefits, see “Estimated Growth in Annual Public Teacher Compensation in Kentucky”.⁵

Figure 5



³ John Garen, January 2024, https://22007b8b-42e6-4da8-9db3-4394a5a98bd1.usrfiles.com/ugd/7833d4_f2bc8a43ad6743ee893ad-88f1510906c.pdf

⁴ “KY Public School District Facts & Trends Summary”, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/christopher.butz/viz/KYPublicSchoolDistrictFactsTrendsSummary/KYSchoolFundingDashboard>

⁵ https://1fdf4a5b-1369-48e4-8e0f-7ad62dfd4c02.usrfiles.com/ugd/1fdf4a_5133c173b2cd4c1ca8625204f6aa48e2.pdf

Data Sources

The U.S. Department of Education publishes annual data on public school staffing by type and state.⁶ Consistent data are available from fall 1993 to fall 2022. The fall 2022 data was published in January 2024, indicating the department is behind schedule. No data was released for fall 2020 or fall 2021, likely due to widespread COVID-19 school closures. To estimate staffing for fall 2023, we used the growth rate in total staffing and actual teacher counts reported by the Kentucky Department of Education. Non-teaching staff estimates were calculated by subtracting teachers from the total.

The KDE publishes an annual statement of revenue and expenditures by school district, including a measure of average daily attendance.⁷

The department also publishes annual details on school district personnel by type: classroom teachers, other certified staff, classified staff, principals, administrators, and superintendents.⁸

⁶ Digest of Education Statistics, Table 213: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_213.20.asp, as well as https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_213.40.asp for fall 2019 to fall 2022 history. For fall 1996 the data on total staffing was way out of line from the previous and following years, and we suspect an error (teacher counts seem fine). So we interpolated the total staff number with the 1995 and 1997 average.

⁷ Revenues and Expenditures 2022-23: www.education.ky.gov/districts/FinRept/Pages/Fund%20Balances,%20Revenues%20and%20Expenditures,%20Chart%20of%20Accounts,%20Indirect%20Cost%20Rates%20and%20Key%20Financial%20Indicators.aspx

⁸ School District Personnel data: www.education.ky.gov/districts/FinRept/Pages/School%20District%20Personnel%20Information.aspx

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