



GUIDE TO THE ISSUES

Bureaucracy Preserved: Funding Priorities for Birmingham City Schools

Background

Birmingham's city population peaked in the 1960s at 340,000 but has been in steady decline since then.¹ In fact, it has decreased by a total of more than 125,000 persons. Over the last decade, it has dropped 13%, from 242,800 in 2000 to 212,200 in 2010.²

Of the 30,600 residents who left the city limits between 2000 and 2010, more than 10,000 of them were school-age students. From the 1999-2000 to 2008-2009 school years—the most recent year complete data are available from the Alabama State Department of Education—enrollment in Birmingham's schools fell 28%, from 38,137 to 27,525.³

As the city's school-age population has decreased, the number of public K-12 schools and teachers have both decreased. In the 1999-2000 school year, Birmingham operated 86 public schools. By 2008-2009, only 65 were open.⁴

The number of teachers in the system has also declined in proportion to the number of its students. In 1999-2000, there were 2,556 teachers in the Birmingham City School System, or about one for every 14.9 students. By 2008-2009, that number had declined to 1,825, or about one teacher for every 15.1 students.⁵

Policy Consideration

The enrollment attrition in the Birmingham City School System has indeed carried financial consequences for the number of schools and teachers. But has it had any impact on administration and support personnel? While the number of schools and teachers in Birmingham have

ISSUE SNAPSHOT

From 2000 to 2010, the number of students in Birmingham City Schools has dropped by 28%, from 38,137 to 27,525.

While the number of schools and teachers has decreased to match this decline, the number of administrators has not. As the number of students has decreased, the number of support staff and other certified personnel has more than doubled.

Alabama needs education options outside of the traditional system, and results for students must be prioritized over politics and public administrator preservation.

been pared down to educate a smaller number of students, specific groups in the city's education system have not cut their ranks to the same degree. For example, Birmingham had 58 school counselors on payroll in 1999-2000, or about one for every 650 students. By 2008-2009, however, that number had increased to 69, or one for every 400 students.⁶

As the city's student population shrank, the number of administrators—including superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and so forth—dropped insignificantly from 121 to 120.⁷ Where there used to be one administrator for every 315 students, there is now one for every 230 students. If the number of administrators declined at the same rate as the students they manage, there would be only 87.