EDUNOMICS LAB The Study of Education Finance

AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Follow the Dollar: Spending, Outcomes, and Tradeoffs in Today's Districts

Maggie Cicco

August 19, 2026

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POLL

A Virginia district used ESSER to pay teachers for 10 PD days to address learning loss.

Reasonable? or **I'm less comfortable with this**

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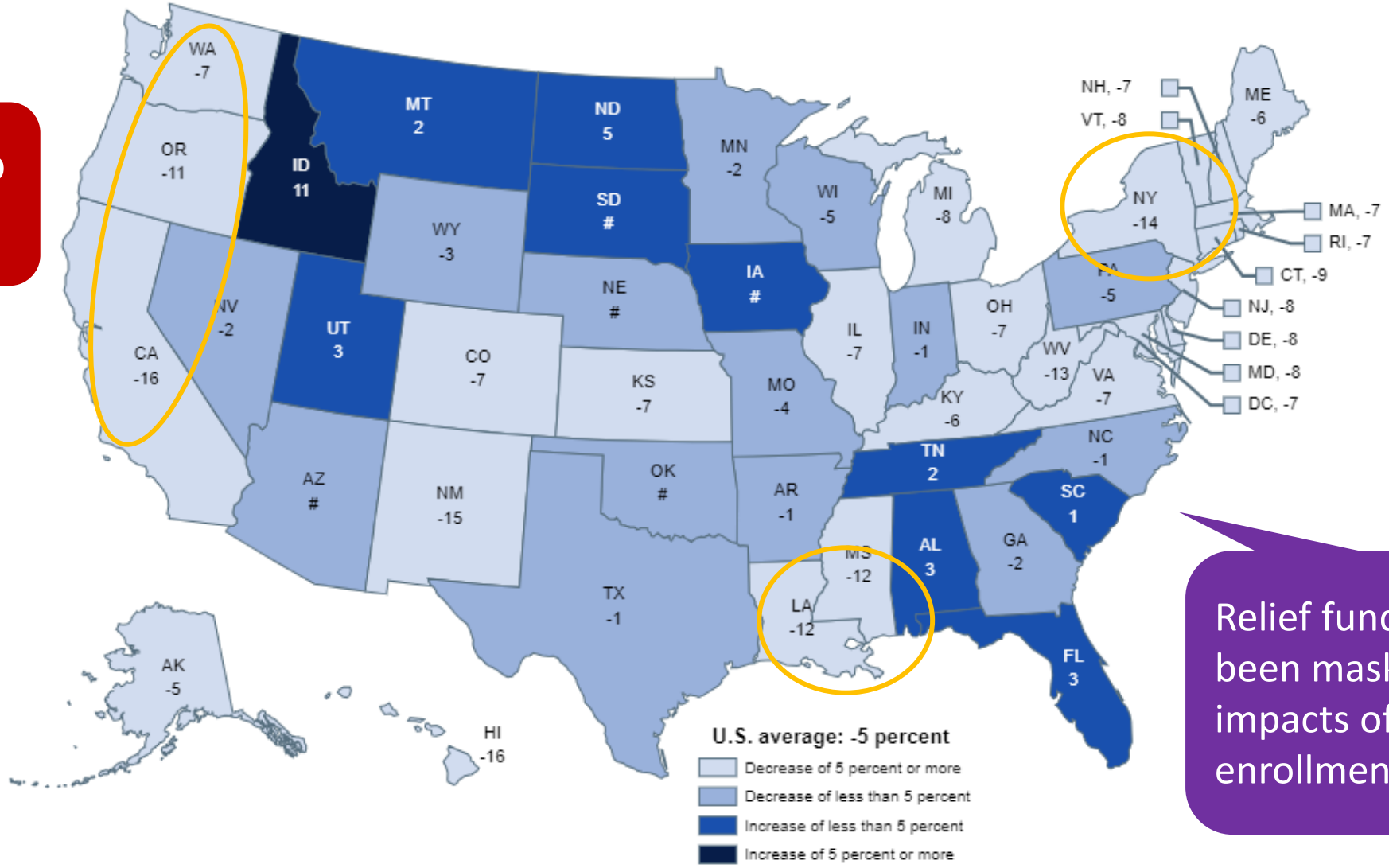
Enrollment declines (2022 to 2031) will force downsizing for years to come:

The US has too many schools.



Relief funds have been masking impacts of declining enrollment.

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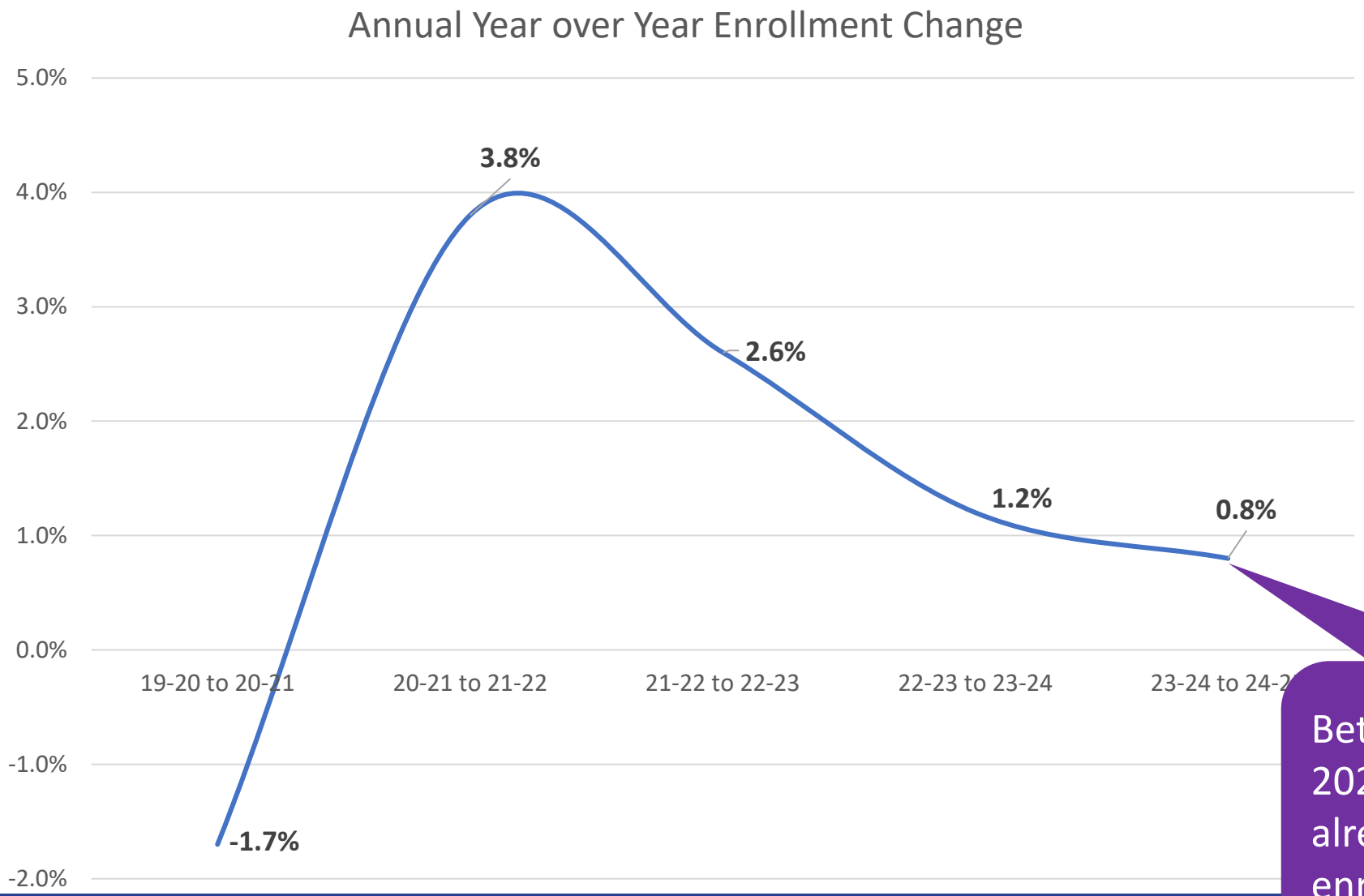
Amongst your districts, the post-pandemic growth is quickly slowing.



Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, 22 districts are already seeing declining enrollment.

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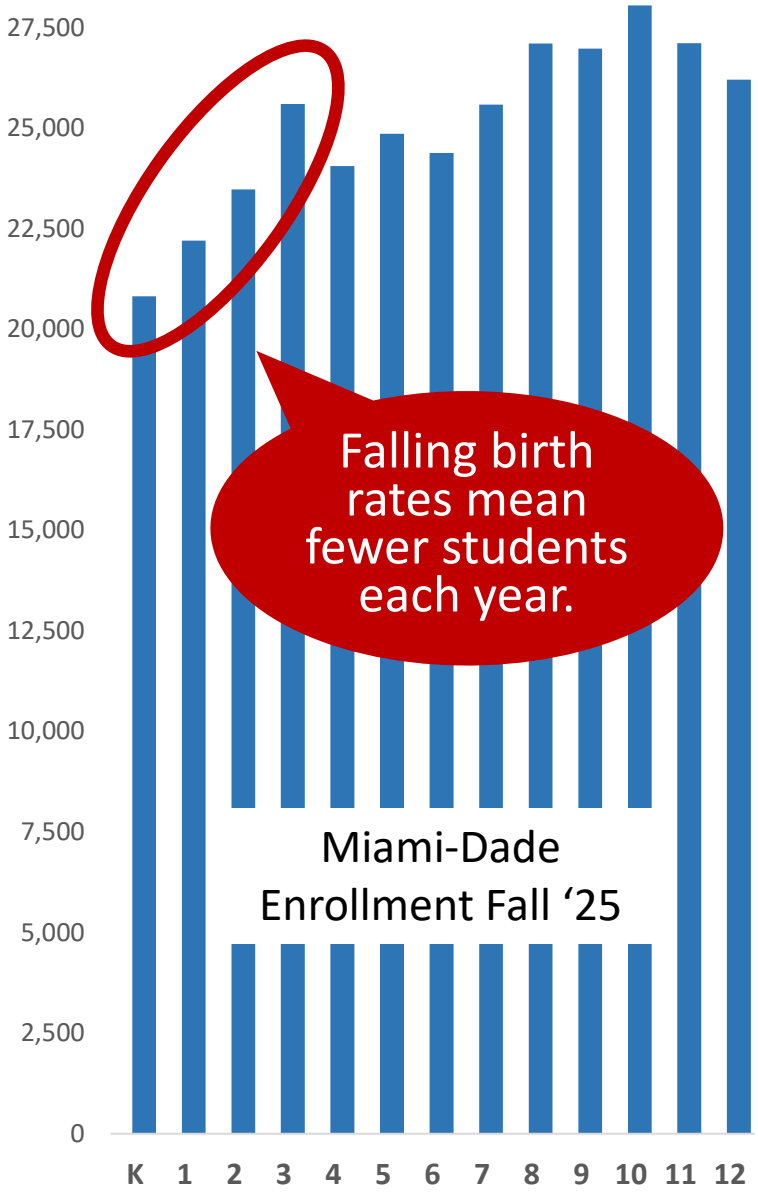
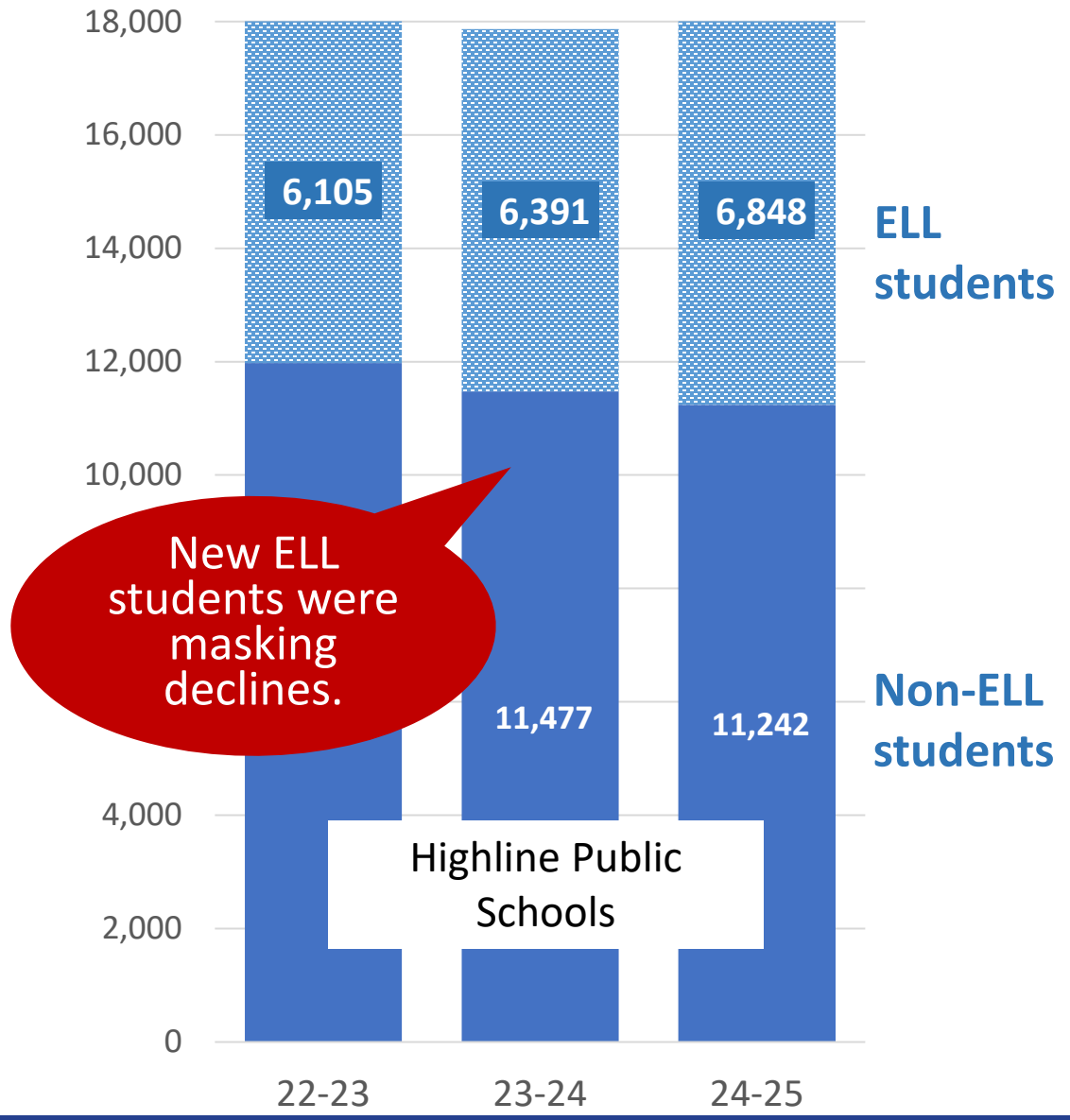
Financial forecasts now require carefully monitoring enrollment





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POLL

Districts have more staff than at any time in history.

Reasonable? or **I'm less comfortable with this**

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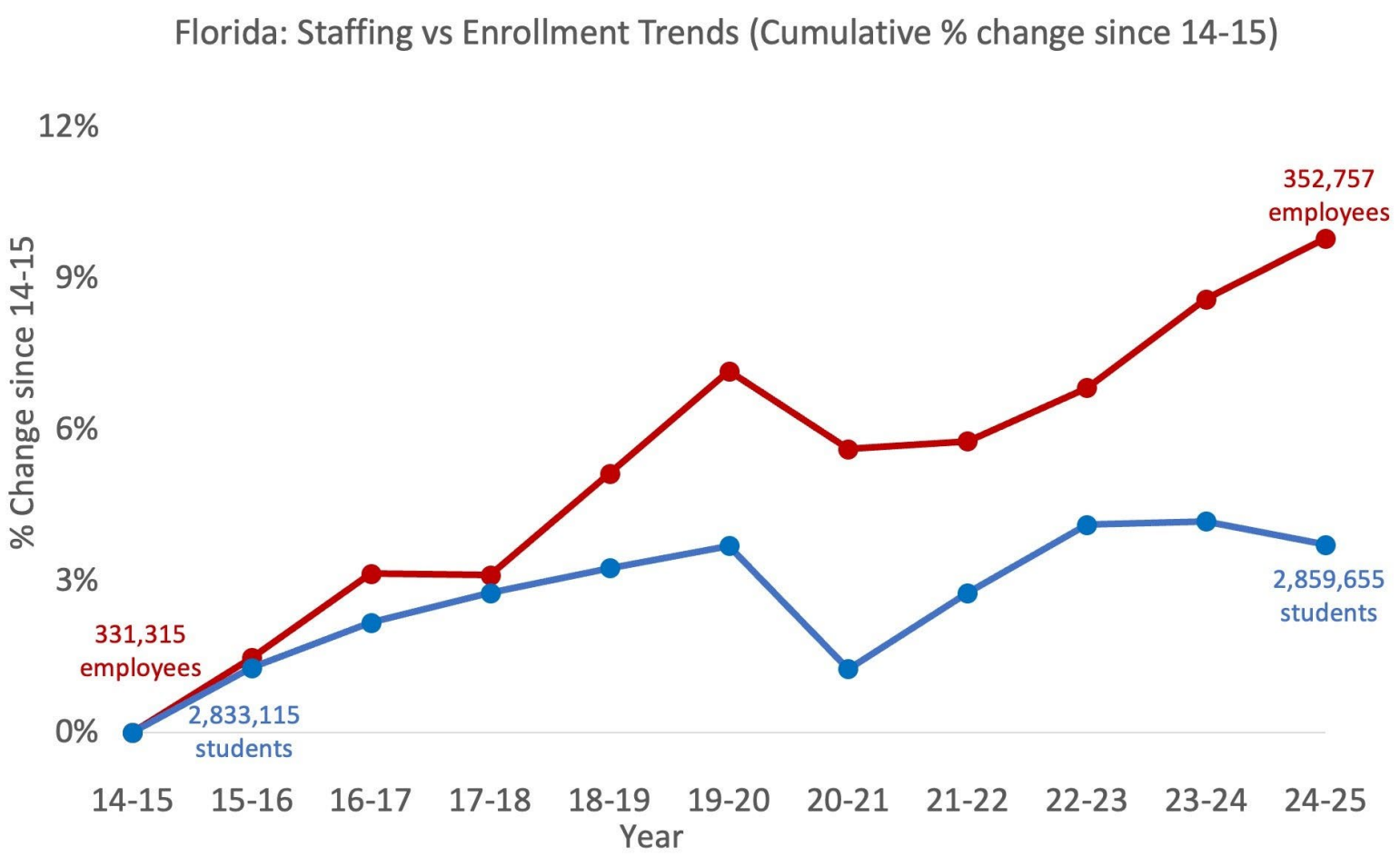
Most districts won’t be able to sustain these heightened staff levels.

Staffing v. Enrollment: **Florida**



Analysis by Edunomics Lab using data from: FLDOE – Membership by Grade, Full-Time Staff

Staffing in FL schools has been increasing as enrollment starts to fall.

Declining birth rates and reduced immigration mean enrollments will continue to fall.

https://edunomicslab.org/staffing-v-enrollment-trends/

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Who are all the new hires?

	Added positions from 2019-20 to 2023-24	Share of new positions
Teachers	42,520	17%
Paras/Aides	46,584	18%
All other (administrator, coordinator, interventionist, counselor, support)	164,016	65%

Edunomics Lab analysis of NCES staffing data, with some states and categories excluded for data quality

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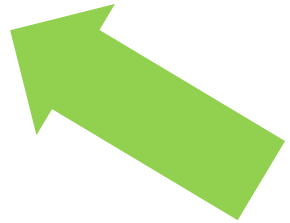
Is this a net benefit for students?

ESSER triggered growth in a middle layer of specialist staff;
some have been with districts for most of their career.

Schools now have more:

- ✓ Reading coaches
- ✓ Interventionists
- ✓ Counselors
- ✓ Specialists
- ✓ Deans/Administrators/APs

Classroom Teachers



New hires from labor pool

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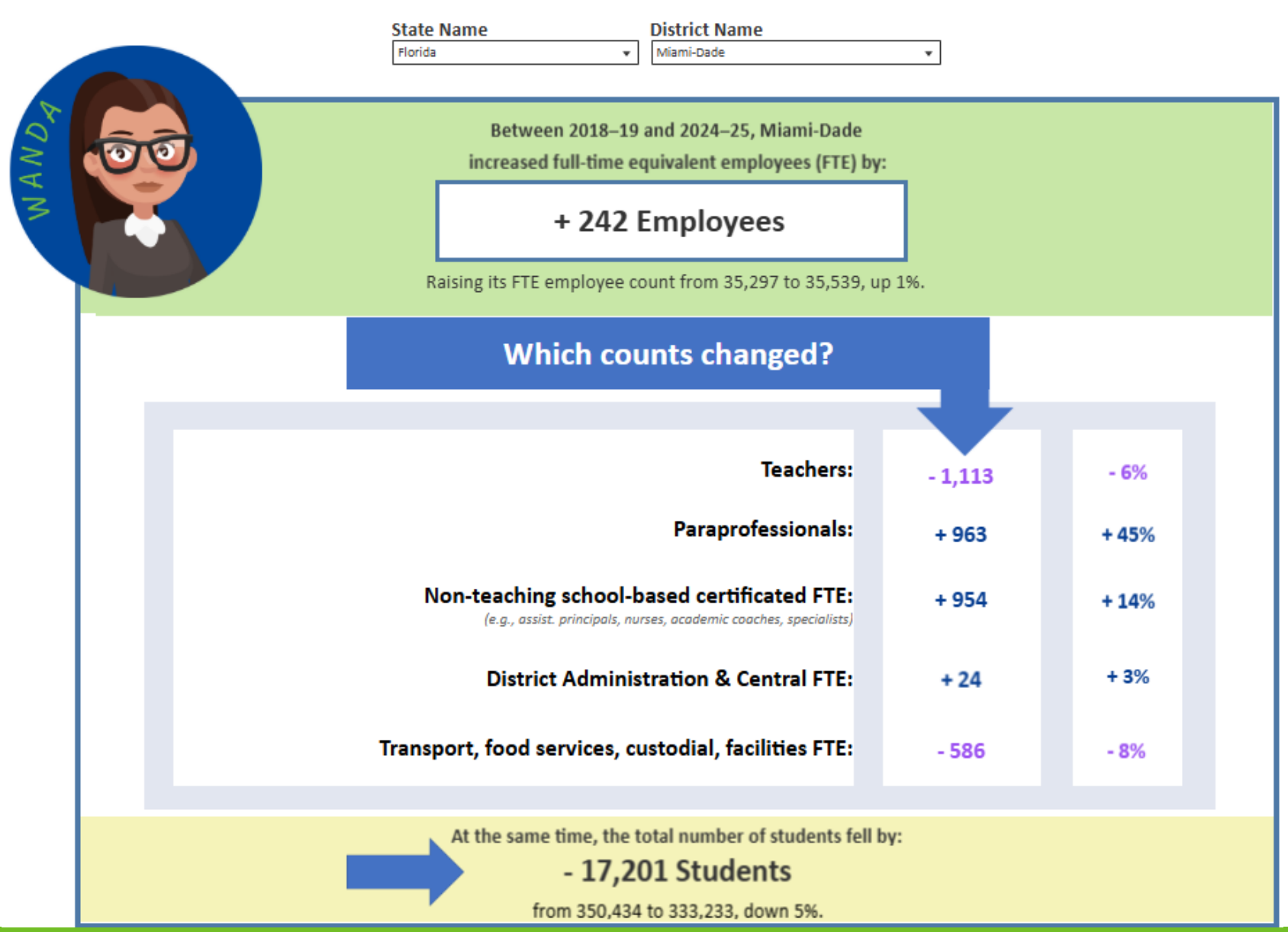
WANDA has the numbers for your district or state:

Edunomicslab.org/wanda



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POLL

Last spring, Ft Worth notified over 100 administrators and specialists their jobs would be eliminated. They could leave or apply for other open classroom positions.

Reasonable? or **I'm less comfortable with this**

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POLL

Leaders are revisiting a long-running elementary class size reduction effort. They were hoping to see improvement in test scores, but never have.

Teachers say it allows them to spend more time with each student.

Leaders are considering cutting it.

Reasonable? or **I'm less comfortable with this**

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POLL

A district hired dozens of counselors, but attendance isn't improving. Leaders are considering redirecting the funds at the end of this year to something else.

Reasonable? or **I'm less comfortable with this**

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POLL

Should schools have a say in how cuts are made to their staff?

Reasonable. Or I'm less comfortable with this.

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Predicting Outcomes

If you had $100,000 to spend in a typical higher-needs middle school (600 students) where fewer than half are at grade level, how many below-grade-level, low-income students could you bring to grade level or above in math in one year?

_____ **students**

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Predicting Outcomes: Ways to use $100,000

A. Pay math coach to work with teachers _____students

B. Purchase a new curriculum with teacher PD _____students

C. Deliver 68 tutoring sessions for 100 students in groups of 3 _____students

D. Lengthen the school day by 40 minutes to add more math _____students

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POLL

A vendor offers tutoring and has excellent results. A school is thinking of using its Title I funds to pay for it, but doing so would mean letting go of a long-running investment in a reading specialist and a parent coordinator.

Reasonable? or **I'm less comfortable with this**

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The Grid

	Investment description	Major cost factors	Total cost	Estimated # students served	Cost per participating student	Risks	Outcome (either desired or realized)
A	Class size reduction in all elem. grades from 25 to 21 students	36 teachers ($65,000 salary + $25,000 benefits)	$3,240,000	4,000	$810 /per student	Difficulty hiring strong teachers	No measurable impact on math/ reading; popular with teachers
B	Planning/prep time (2 x 40 min/ week)	$3,600 stipend for 330 certificated staff	$1,188,000	4,000	$297/per student	Time not well spent	No measurable impact on math/ reading; popular with teachers
C	Add 1 counselor to each of 10 schools	$100,000 total per FTE		4,000		Difficulty hiring counselors	Improved attendance/ behavior
D	Summer school for 15% of students	$8,000 per teacher for 30 teachers	$240,000			Intended students won't enroll	
	Lengthen the school day 20 min/day, 4 days/week	$3,600 stipend for 330 certificated staff		4,000			Better math/ reading for all
	Tutoring: 1-to-1 ratio 3x/week, 30 weeks for 40% of students	Tutors = $25/hour	$3,600,000	1,600		Some students may not attend; no peer interaction; difficulty hiring tutors	Math/reading scores increase for lowest performers
G	Tutoring: 4-to-1 ratio 3x/week, 30 weeks for 40% of students	Tutors = $25/hour		1,600		Difficulty hiring tutors	
H	Other (you choose)						

We love division!
→ It gives us cost per student.

©20

BREAKOUT

Work together to fill in the blanks.

Put an investment of your choice in row H.

	Investment description	Major cost factors	Total cost	Estimated # students served	Cost per participating student	Risks	Outcome (either desired or realized)
A	Class size reduction in all elem. grades from 25 to 21 students	36 teachers ($65,000 salary + $25,000 benefits)	$3,240,000	4,000	$810 /per student	Difficulty hiring strong teachers	No measurable impact on math/ reading; popular with teachers
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D	Summer school for 15% of students	$8,000 per teacher for 30 teachers	$240,000	600	$400 / student	Intended students won't enroll	Math/reading for lowest performers
E	Lengthen the school day 20 min/day, 4 days/week	$3,600 stipend for 330 certificated staff	$1,118,000	4,000	$297 / student	Time not well spent; low-attending students won't benefit; staff burnout	Better math/ reading for all
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		hour	$900,000	1,600			

Communicating desired outcomes can help everyone stay focused (which can drive outcomes).

This is an expensive program. Do we think it will be high value?

Recognize risks to find ways to mitigate them, or ensure early detection.

Circle back regularly to take stock:

- ✓ Take stock of investments
- ✓ Focus attention on intended effects for students
- ✓ Weigh alternatives on cost and value

	Investment description	Major cost factors	Total cost	Estimated # students served	Cost per participating student	Risks	Outcome (either desired or realized)
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H	Other (you choose)						

Think about a school you know well.

Is that school:

A. Higher spending, higher student outcomes

B. Higher spending, lower student outcomes

C. Lower spending, higher student outcomes ROI Superstar

D. Lower spending, lower student outcomes

Scatterplots Worksheet

Work to answer questions #1-4.

Questions 1 & 2 are True/False

For Questions 3 & 4 please refer to the scatterplot on the page.

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Using SSOS to Drive School Improvement and Learning Outcomes

1. Resource allocation across schools in a district
2. Spending versus outcomes across a district
3. Elementary school ROI across a state
4. Middle school ROI across a state
5. High school ROI across a state

2 Spending Versus Outcomes Across a District

COLOR

Green = lower % economically disadvantaged students

Red = higher % economically disadvantaged students

SHAPE

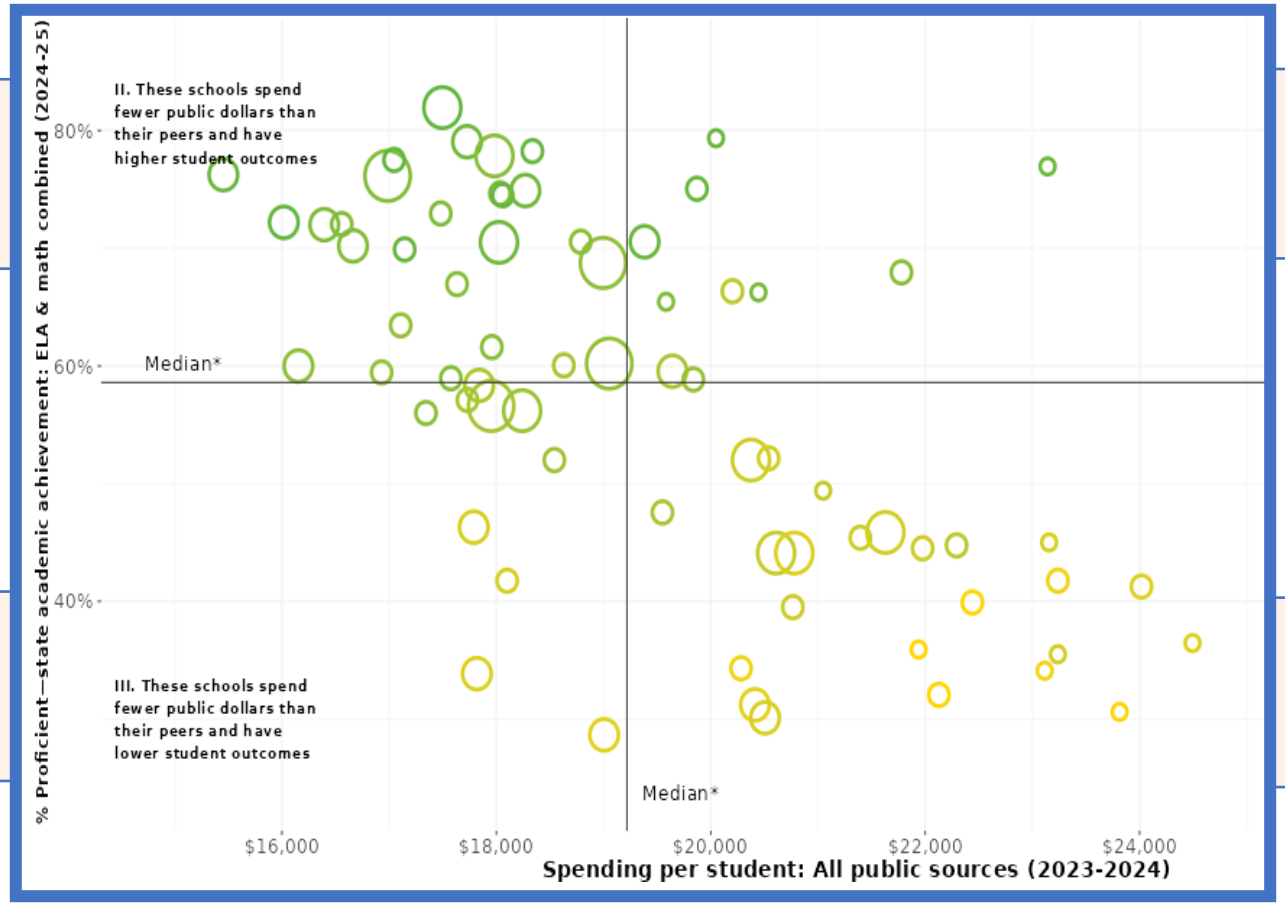
Circle = traditional public school

Plus = charter school

SIZE

The larger the circle or plus sign, the larger the district enrollment

II. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**



I. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**

III. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

IV. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

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3 Elementary School ROI Across a State (Similar Poverty Levels)

COLOR

Green = lower % economically disadvantaged students

Red = higher % economically disadvantaged students

SHAPE

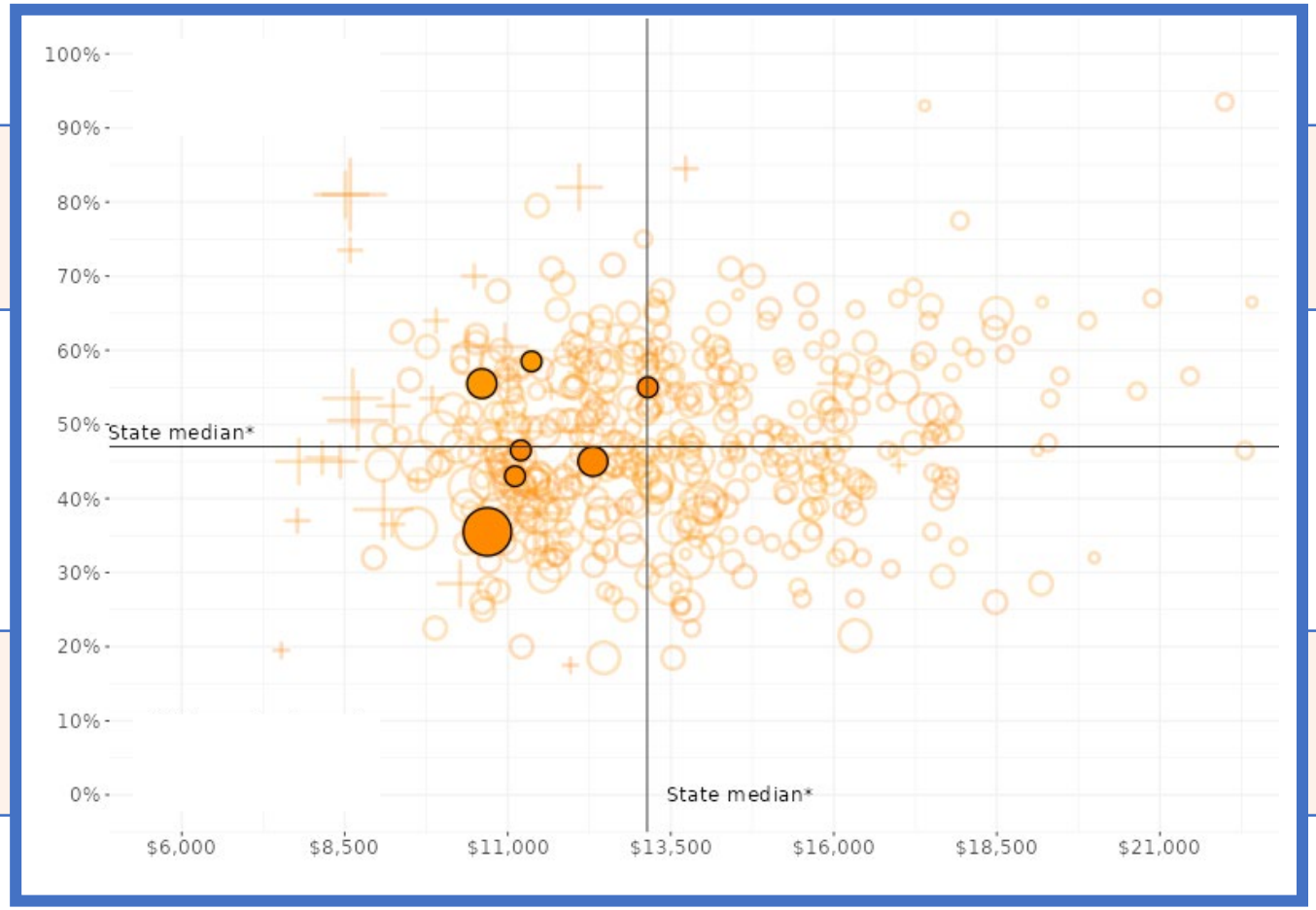
Circle = traditional public school

Plus = charter school

SIZE

The larger the circle or plus sign, the larger the district enrollment

II. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**



I. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**

III. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

IV. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

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4 Middle School Math ROI Across a State

COLOR

Green = lower % economically disadvantaged students

Red = higher % economically disadvantaged students

SHAPE

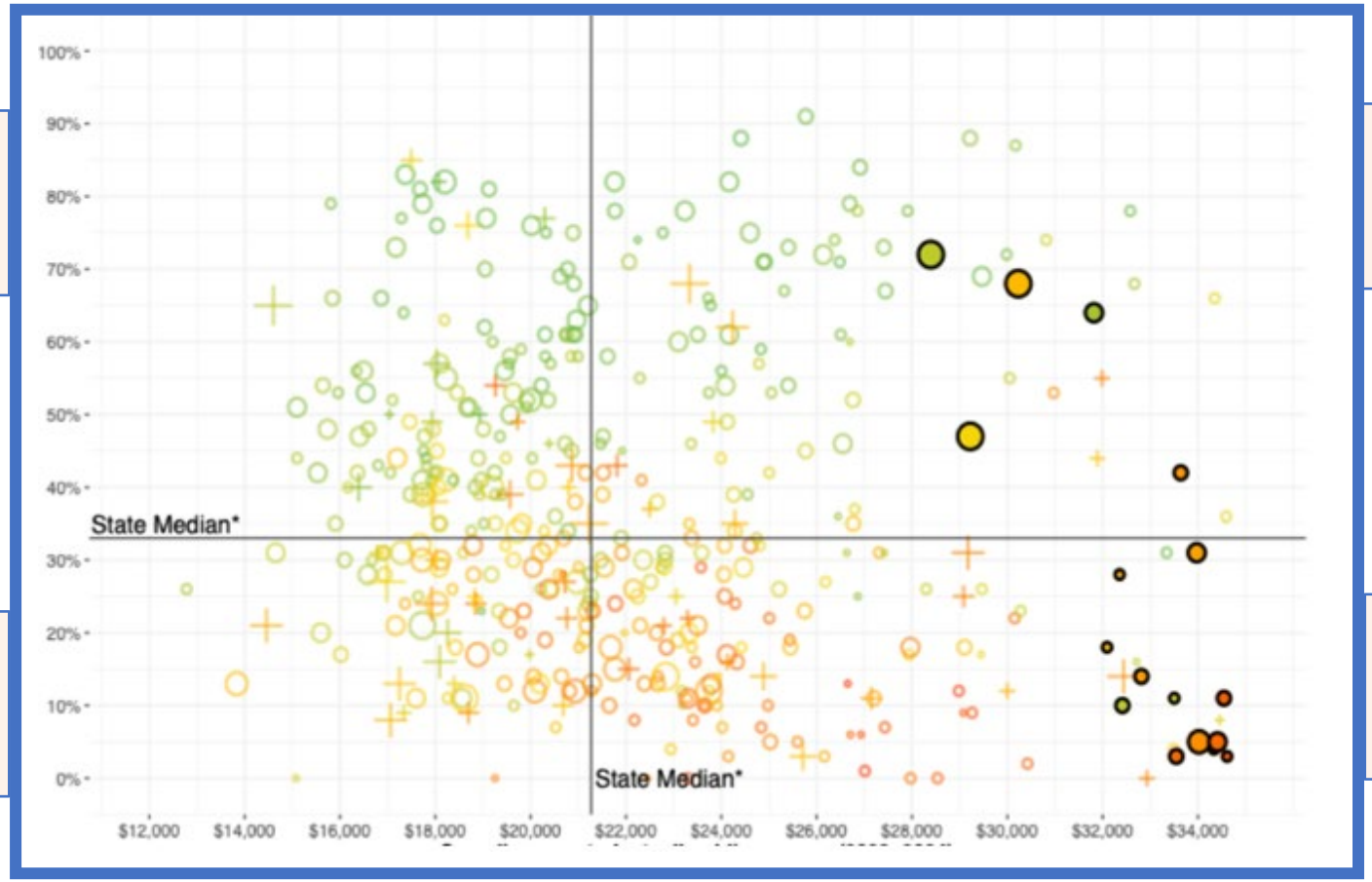
Circle = traditional public school

Plus = charter school

SIZE

The larger the circle or plus sign, the larger the district enrollment

II. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**



I. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**

III. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

IV. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

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5 High School ROI Across a State

COLOR

Green = lower % economically disadvantaged students

Red = higher % economically disadvantaged students

SHAPE

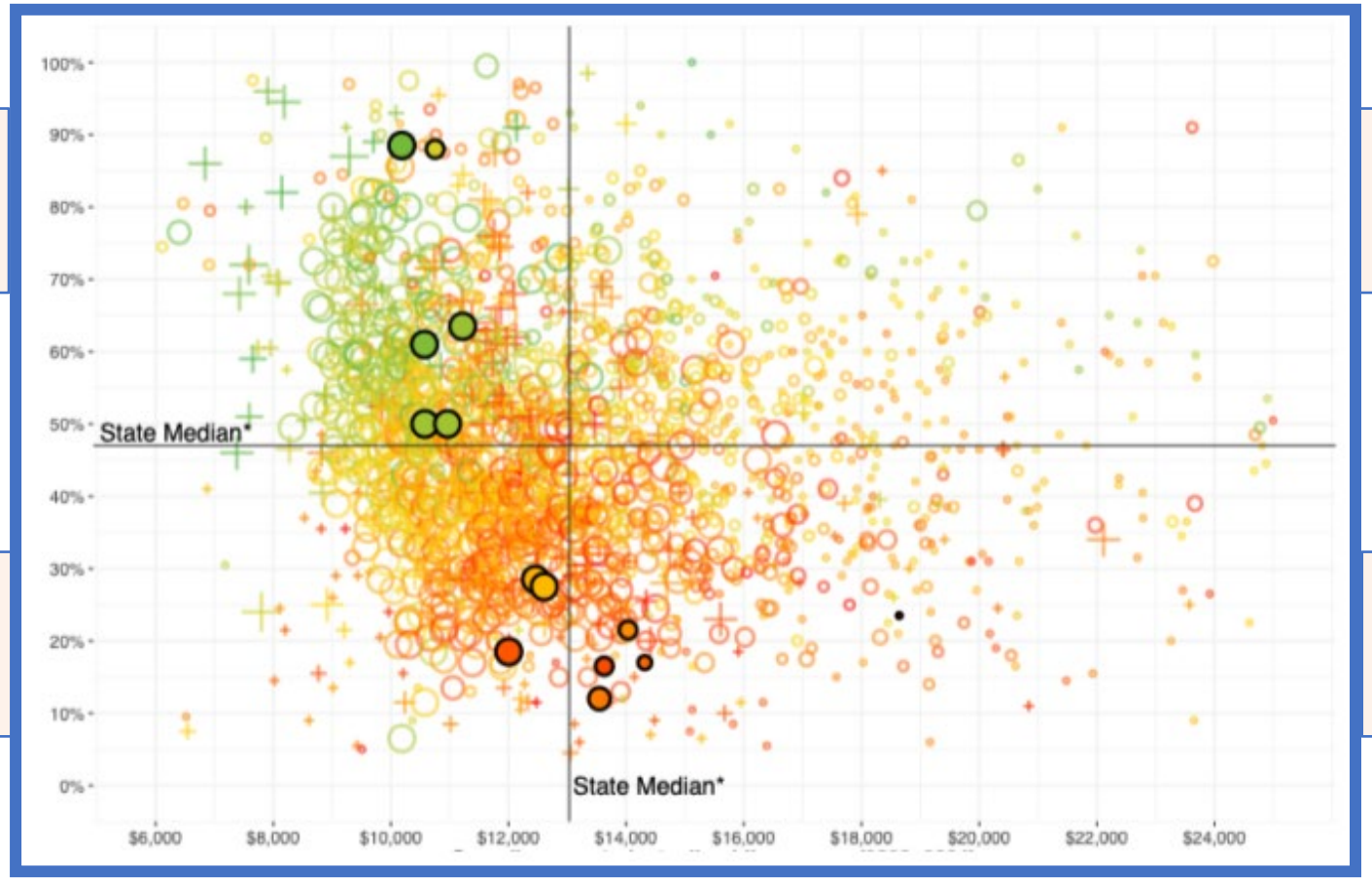
Circle = traditional public school

Plus = charter school

SIZE

The larger the circle or plus sign, the larger the district enrollment

II. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**



I. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**

III. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

IV. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**

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Using the School by School Scatterplots

Visit **CompCenterNetwork.org/resources/SSOS**

Filter to create the displays listed for your district and fill out the worksheet.

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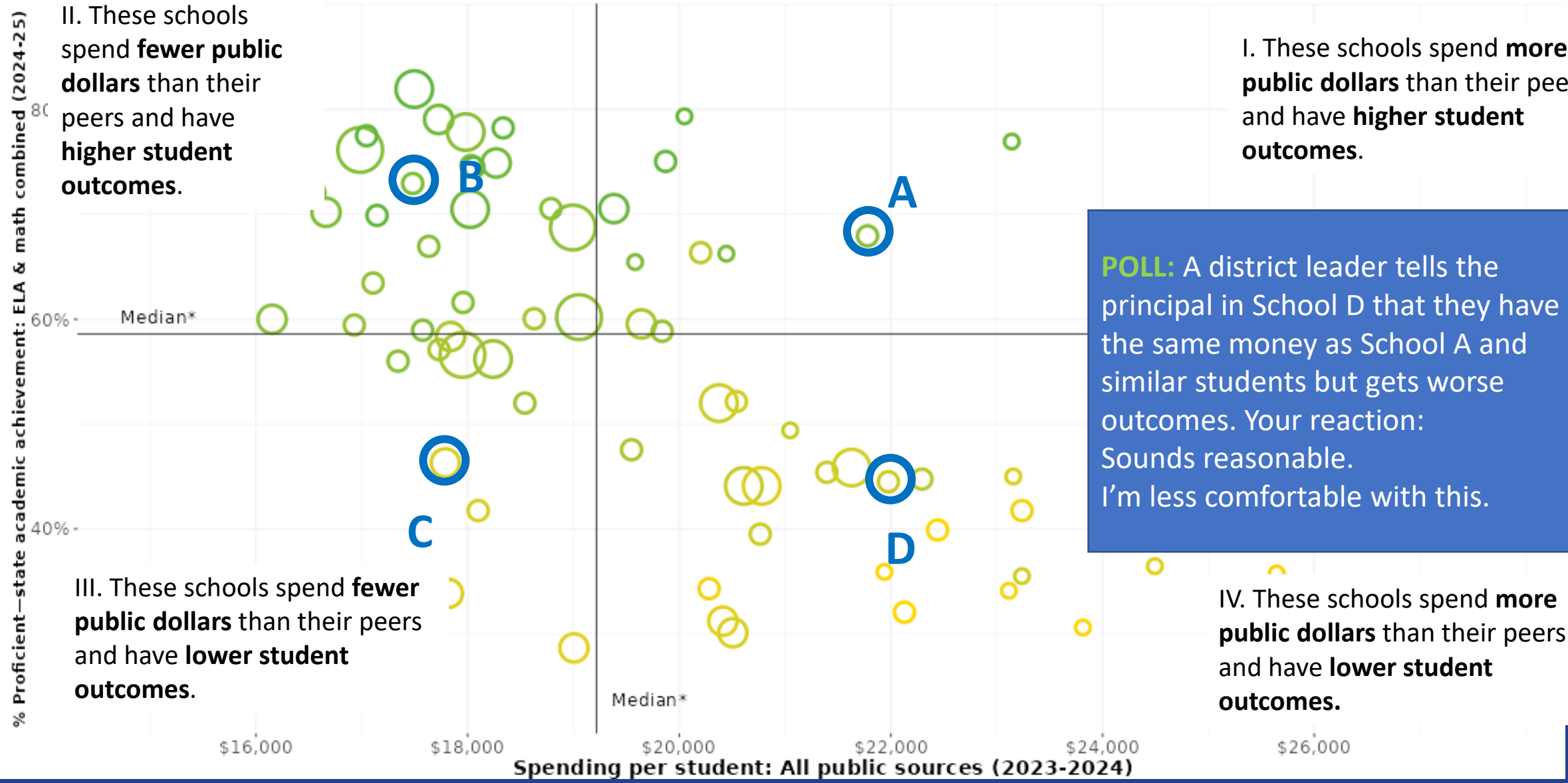
School spending per student by vs. school outcomes in a district (2022-23)



POLL: A district leader tells the principal in School D that they have the same money as School A and similar students but gets worse outcomes. Your reaction:
Sounds reasonable.
I'm less comfortable with this.

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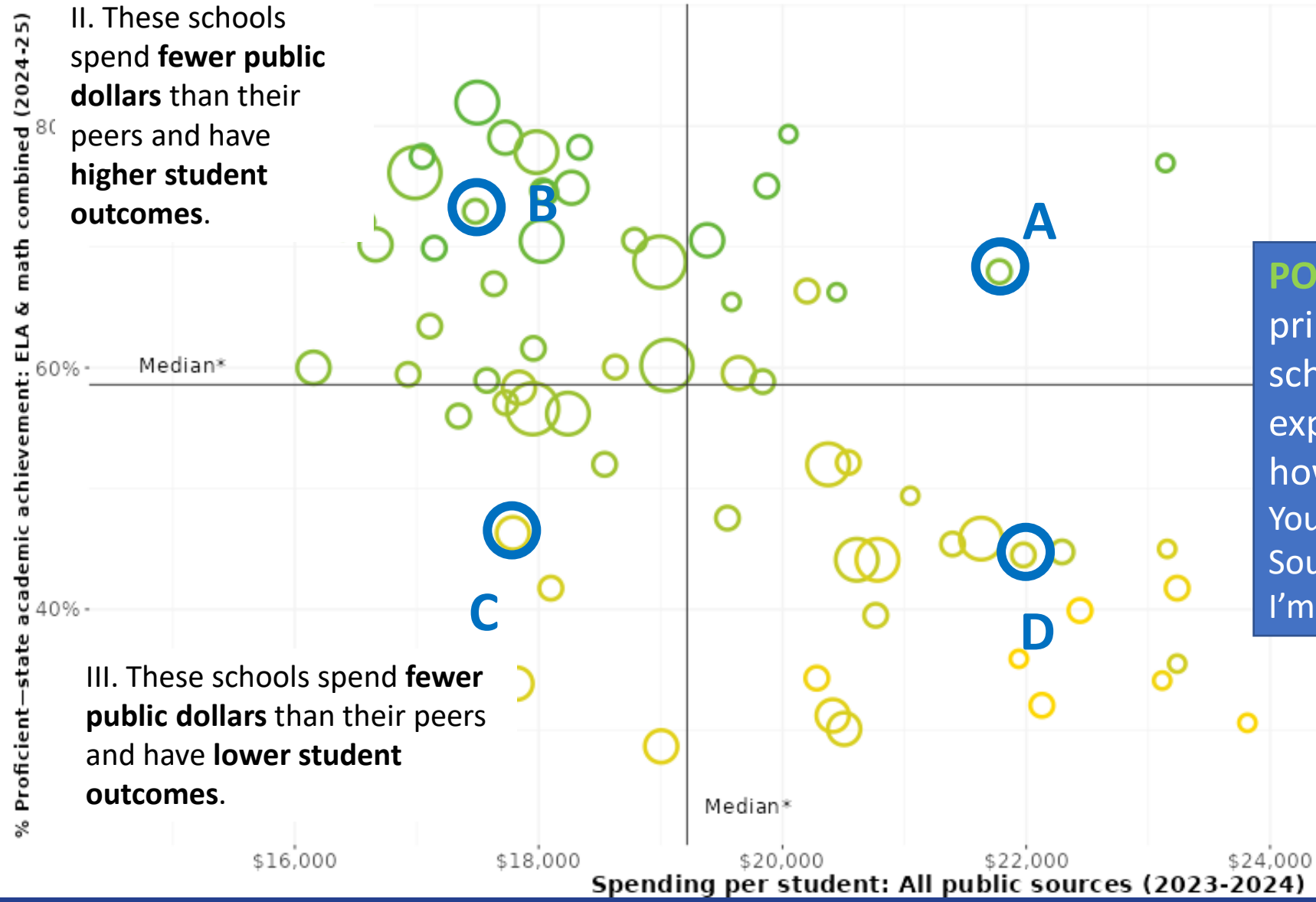
School spending per student by vs. school outcomes in a district (2023-24)

II. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**.

I. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**.



POLL: A district leader tells the principal in School A that the school is high performing but expensive and should consider how to reduce costs.
Your reaction:
Sounds reasonable.
I'm less comfortable with this.

III. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes**.

IV. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes.**

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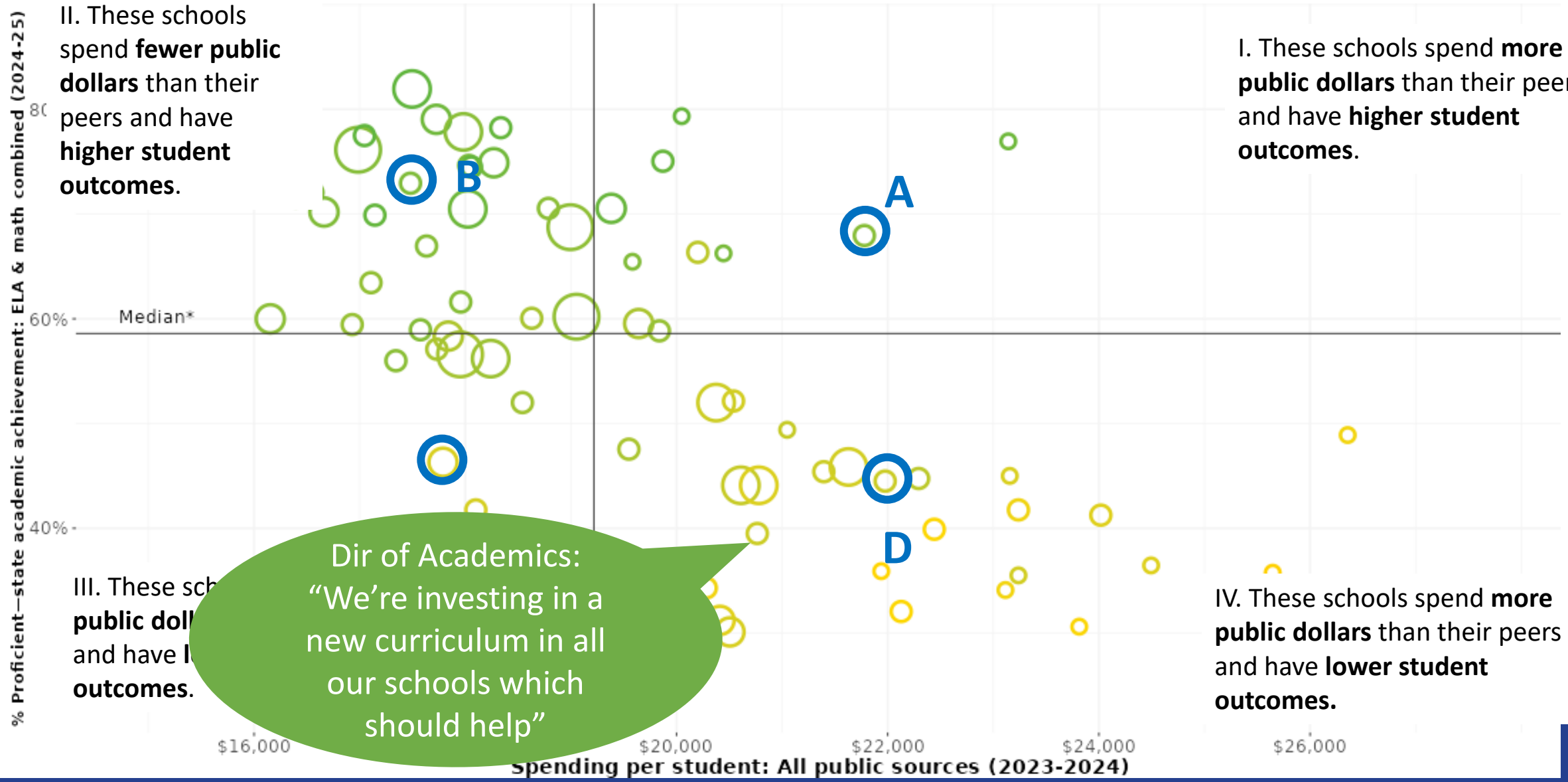
School spending per student by vs. school outcomes in a district (2023-24)

II. These schools spend **fewer public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**.

I. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **higher student outcomes**.



III. These sch
public doll
and have **l**
outcomes.

Dir of Academics: "We're investing in a new curriculum in all our schools which should help"

IV. These schools spend **more public dollars** than their peers and have **lower student outcomes.**

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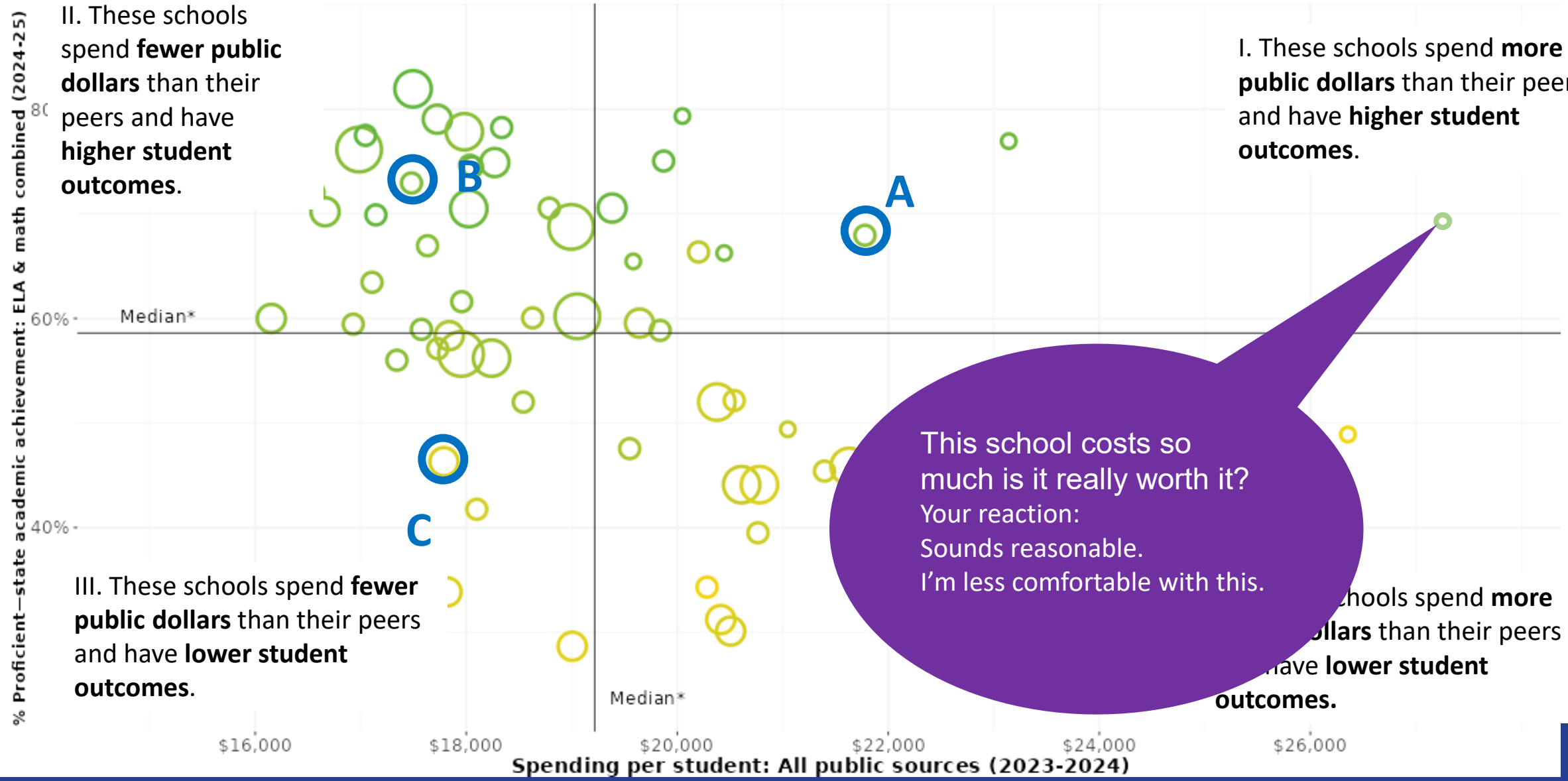
School spending per student by vs. school outcomes in a district (2023-24)



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POLL

A superintendent meets with each principal each year to go over these data

Seems Reasonable **I'm less comfortable with this**

POLL

A superintendent then instructs the principal to use the data in a meeting with the school's teachers/staff

Seems Reasonable **I'm less comfortable with this**

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POLL

A superintendent reviews these data with district leaders

Seems Reasonable **I'm less comfortable with this**

POLL

A CFO includes these data in all budget meetings

Seems Reasonable **I'm less comfortable with this**

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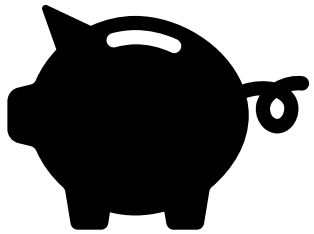
POLL

The Federal Education Tax Credit Scholarships will bring money to school districts.



Seems reasonable
I'm less comfortable with this

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A new source of funding for K12

Each taxpayer can give $1700 to an SGO in any state.

Scholarship granting orgs pay scholarships of any size for eligible kids.

IRS then reduces taxpayer's federal tax bill by $1700.
Taxpayer is made whole.

- ✓ **Qualifying scholarships** are those for private tuition, providers of qualifying services even from **public schools.**
- ✓ **Each SGO must give to >10 kids at 2 or more schools** & be recognized by its state**.**
- ✓ Families **must be less than 300% of AMGI.**

Donations/scholarships are private dollars. Like any tax credit program, while the funding isn't actually federal funding, the resulting tax credits do have the effect of contributing to the national debt, as with each tax credit, fewer dollars come in to Treasury.

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What could this look like for public schools?

Every district student participates in a bundled set of "enhanced" services

- ✓District sets fee for bundled services regardless of individual usage of each.
- ✓Goal is that every student sign up with nearly all receiving scholarships.
- ✓Services serve as an integrated enhancement to basic schooling.
- ✓Bundled services could not include anything required by the state's minimum requirements for public ed.
- ✓Those over 300% of AMGI would pay or get scholarships elsewhere. (PTA?)

Plan includes: access to field trips, devices, AP classes, full day K, assemblies, clubs, drop-in math office hour, orientations, electives, in-school tutoring, mental health, etc.

Plan tuition: $1,000 per student. Through an affiliated SGO, UISD has secured full scholarships for all families earning under $300K.

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THANK YOU

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