EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School Funding Equity in France

Risk and resource analysis of public collèges, nationally and by académie

Bruce D. Baker · University of Miami · October 2026

A school finance system exists to deliver the resources schools need to give every child an equal opportunity to achieve common, adequate outcome goals (Baker, Atchison & Levin, 2026). Because children face different obstacles to reaching those goals, equal opportunity requires differentiating resources by need. French law makes a similar commitment: the Code de l'éducation (art. L111-1) provides that the distribution of the education service's means takes account of differences in situation, particularly economic and social ones.

This summary applies the first step of that framework to France's roughly 5,300 public collèges (grades 6–9). **Risk analysis** identifies which measurable characteristics of pupils and communities most strongly predict lower outcomes. **Resource analysis** asks whether resources are directed toward the collèges where those risks are concentrated, after accounting for size, special units and remoteness. Because the State pays teachers on national scales and allocates them as teaching hours, the main resource measure is weekly **teaching hours per pupil (H/E)**, published for every public collège for 2023–2025. Département spending on collèges, the second layer of finance, is analyzed separately.

Bottom line

France's State allocation of teachers is progressive, but modestly and through labels. High-need collèges receive about 15% more teaching hours per pupil than low-need collèges in the same académie, mostly as smaller groups. Most of that differential is delivered through the éducation prioritaire (REP/REP+) map drawn in 2015, which leaves many disadvantaged collèges outside it. Départements' spending on collèges is unrelated to need.

Key findings

- **Pupils' social background dominates risk.** The Ministry's social position index (IPS) alone explains 76% of the variation in collège outcomes (brevet results and grade-6 entry tests). Collèges in the highest-need tenth average 8.7/20 on the brevet written exams against 12.4 in the lowest-need tenth, a gap of about three standard deviations that is already present at entry to sixth grade.
- **Teaching hours rise with need.** Holding size, special units and remoteness constant, collèges at the 90th percentile of need receive 1.15 times the hours per pupil of those at the 10th; within académies, 1.15. For a 400-pupil collège that is about 3.7 extra full-time teachers.
- **The extra hours buy smaller groups,** about 22 pupils against 25, rather than more instruction time per pupil.
- **The label creates cliffs.** REP collèges receive about 9% and REP+ 13% more hours than otherwise similar collèges. Only 27% of collèges in the eighth tenth of need, and 64% in the ninth, are in the network.
- **Mayotte is left behind.** The highest-need académie, with a mean IPS of 70, receives no more hours per pupil (1.18) than the national average, and its collèges are not differentiated by need.
- **Département spending is unequal and need-blind.** Départements spent an average of €1,641 per collège pupil in 2020–2025. The 90th-percentile département spends 2.1 times the 10th, unrelated to need (r = -0.10) or département revenue.

Within and across académies

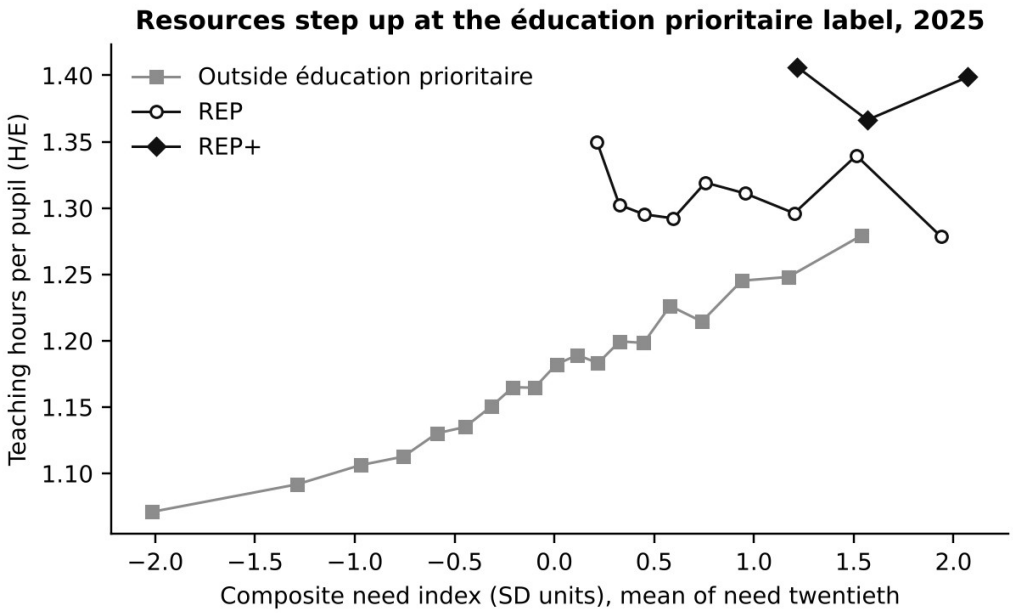


Figure. Teaching hours per pupil by need and éducation prioritaire status, 2025. At every level of need, collèges outside the network receive fewer hours than REP and REP+ collèges.

Académies. Every metropolitan académie allocates hours progressively within its borders. Ratios run from 1.11 in Versailles to 1.23 in Nancy–Metz. The most progressive are in the north and east (Nancy-Metz, Reims, Lille, Amiens) and Paris; the least are Versailles, Toulouse, Nantes and Bordeaux. Across académies, hours also rise with average need, with the notable exception of Mayotte.

What this analysis does and does not show

Teaching hours are not euros. High-need collèges have less experienced teachers and more contract staff, which lowers the cost of each hour, while REP+ hour weighting and priority-education allowances raise it; support staff and département spending are also outside the hours measure. The analysis shows whether resources move with need, not how much more would be enough. Estimating that requires the cost-modeling step that follows. Private collèges under contract, which enrol about a fifth of pupils with a markedly more advantaged intake (mean IPS 125 against 101), are not covered by the published hours data.

Implications

- **Replace steps with a slope.** Allocate supplementary hours continuously by IPS, as the Cour des comptes recommended in 2018, so that disadvantaged collèges outside the 2015 map are reached.
- **Size the differential to the gap.** A 15% resource differential is small relative to a three-standard-deviation outcome gap; cost modeling should determine what equal opportunity requires.
- **Address Mayotte's resource deficit** as a priority of the national allocation.
- **Equalize the département layer,** whose spending varies widely for reasons unrelated to need or capacity, and publish school-level spending including staff costs.

Scope and data: DEPP open data on H/E and E/S indicators (public collèges, rentrée 2023–2025, 15,940 collège-years), IPS, DNB and value-added indicators, national 6e evaluations, enrolments, éducation prioritaire, remoteness; INSEE Filosofi 2021; OFGL département functional accounts (function 221). Need: composite index of IPS and QPV location selected for its ability to predict a collège outcome factor score. Full methods: "Risk and Resources in French Public Collèges."