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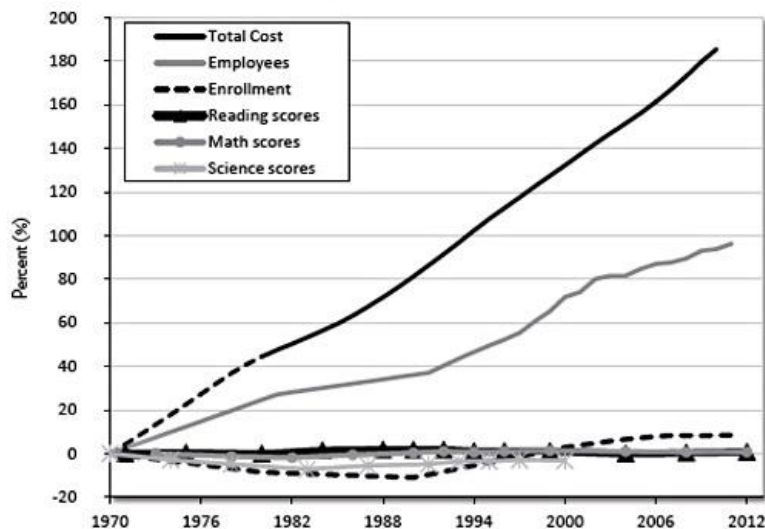
Money Isn't the Problem With Education

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Our children's education has been a national concern practically since the nation's founding. In 1788 the Northwest Ordinance decreed that “schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” Over the last 40 years or so, that encouragement has taken the form of upward spiraling educational spending, much of which was needed to pay for thousands of new school employees.

But according to a recent study by the Cato Institute, that increased spending hasn't produced dramatically improved outcomes. Using a matrix which compares aggregate SAT scores state by state compared with their spending trends, researcher Andrew J. Coulson found that test scores in most states have remained flat or slowly declined. Even in cases with lengthy declines in spending – Coulson cites Alaska, California, Florida and New York as examples – there was a lack of correlation between spending and results.

Trends in American Public Schooling Since 1970



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, "Digest of Education Statistics"; and NAEP tests, "Long Term Trends, 17-Year-Olds."
Note: "Total cost" is the full amount spent on the K-12 education of a student graduating in the given year, adjusted for inflation. In 1970, the amount was \$56,903; in 2010, the amount was \$164,426.

Granted, the SAT isn't a perfect example of academic prowess. Yet in most states the SAT is usually only taken by college-bound students, whom one would expect to be the best and brightest. Knowing our top academic achievers have a stagnant performance on an important college assessment doesn't bode well for average students.

The problem with this result is that it punches yet another hole in the theory that the cause of our failing education system is the lack of funding. In the last 40 years we have adopted new curricula, shaved the classroom size from about 30 per class to 20 or so and spent billions on new school infrastructure. Yet none of it seems to produce measurable results. The highest achievers today are the ones taught *outside* the public school system, whether they're homeschooled or attend alternative parochial or charter schools. Those parents, and others with no children in school, bear the brunt of the additional educational spending. The only ones who seem to be happy about it are the government employees for whom mediocrity is job security.