



D.C. Schools Spending Highest in U.S., But Firm Claims It's 'Inadequate'

Group hired to study Michigan school funding has mantra of saying schools need more

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Per student spending by public schools in the District of Columbia outstrips that of all 50 states. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of 2012, D.C. was annually spending a total of \$25,038 per pupil.

Nevertheless, in 2013 Colorado-based Augenblick, Palaich and Associates – the firm recently chosen to produce an upcoming education funding “adequacy” study for the State of Michigan – released a report claiming that D.C. wasn’t spending enough.

APA’s Washington funding study concluded that to adequately educate students D.C. needs to increase the amount of funding it provides by 22.1 percent.

The study concluded: “Despite the current level of education funding, the UPSFF (D.C.’s Uniform Per Student Funding Formula) will need to be increased to ensure all schools have the resources they need to enable students to successfully meet D.C. academic performance standards. The UPSFF should also include additional funding to address the learning needs of students at risk of academic failure.”

Neal McCluskey, an education analyst with the CATO Institute, is skeptical. “The District of Columbia has the highest per-pupil spending in the nation by more than \$4,000 over New York which spends the second most,” he said. “There is really not a whole lot of evidence to support the contention that the more that’s spent on education the better the results will be.”

When asked to comment on the D.C. study, APA Vice President Justin Silverstein said education funding studies involve a myriad of complexities and should not be evaluated superficially.

“You can’t accurately evaluate a study when you do not dig into its context and unless it [the evaluation] points out where resources are to be added and takes all the details into account,”

Silverstein said. "These studies assess many aspects that are very complex and need to be taken in that context."

The D.C. study was one of the 12 most-recently published education funding studies APA conducted for various states. All came to the same conclusion, that current funding is inadequate must be increased.

Michigan is paying the firm to produce a study that is supposed to define how much this state should spend to adequately educate students. During the December lame duck legislative session, Gov. Rick Snyder and legislative Republicans agreed to purchase the study as part of deal to get Democrats to support placing Proposal 1, the ill-fated attempt to secure road funding dollars, on the ballot.

In many states, "adequacy studies" are used as the basis for lawsuits and judicial rulings that require automatic tax increases for more spending. Last year, Michigan Board of Education President John Austin, a Democrat, said education adequacy studies are "a term the teachers unions and Democrats use to argue for more money."

The methodologies used for the D.C. study were dubbed the "Professional Judgment" methodology and the "Successful Schools" methodology. It appears that those same methodologies will be used for the upcoming Michigan study.

At 197 pages APA's D.C. study is voluminous. On Page ES 14 of the study, under the heading of "Recommendations," the following were reported as key factors driving the need for additional funding:

Characteristics of the student population. The District has a high proportion of students from low-income, severely disadvantaged, and non-English-speaking families. These students require additional instructional resources and student support services to be successful learners.

High labor costs. The high cost of living in the city and metropolitan area and the predominance of a unionized workforce in DCPS means the District has a relatively high wage scale for educators.

Education reform. The District of Columbia, along with many states across the nation, is taking steps to implement the Common Core State Standards for kindergarten through grade 12. This will require significant investments in new and upgraded curricula, instructional programs, assessment, and professional development. It will also require increased coordination across grade levels and schools.

Commitment to equity between sectors. By law, the District must provide operating funds through the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula, its primary local funding" to both DCPS and public charter schools. Meeting this obligation requires additional resources because of past differences in funding between the sectors.