



Which States Snag The Most K-12 Cash From Everyone Else?

Joy Pullman

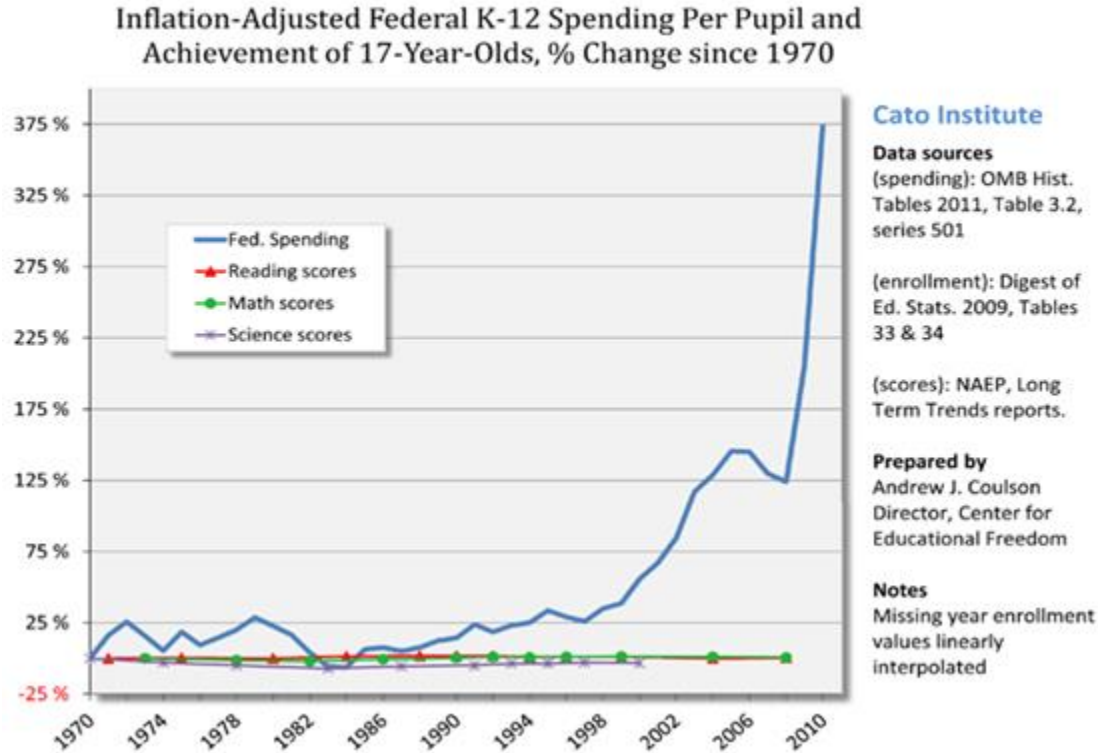
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The five states with the biggest appetite for federal K-12 cash are Mississippi, Louisiana, South Dakota, New Mexico, and Arizona, according to an analysis of new federal data by a Kentucky researcher. Congress just approved another increase in education spending above and beyond five decades of exploding K-12 spending despite flatlined student results and research showing spending above a basic minimum has no effect on student achievement.

Richard Innes's chart below shows how much each state spends on each student each year (minus capital costs such as school bonds, which can be extensive), and ranks states according to what proportion of that spending comes from the whole country's taxpayers via the federal government. Looks like Mississippi taxpayers should be super grateful to the rest of us, to say the least. But they're not the only ones. Find your state below.

The Cato Institute chart below depicts the massive increase in federal education spending against an utter lack of improvement among American students. This is one of many pieces of evidence showing that big influxes of federal cash don't help students learn more. The top five states binging on everyone else's K-12 money also help confirm this reality, as national test results show their students at or below average. Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico are among the five worst performers of all states, and Arizona and South Dakota are merely average.

Figure 1.



A large chunk of federal money goes directly to state-level bureaucrats, giving them a big reason to support higher federal education spending. As Rep. Scott Garrett of New Jersey points out (perhaps not coincidentally because New Jersey is the biggest education tax loser), the Congressional Budget Office says federal mandates cause 41 percent of state-level administrative costs despite supplying just 7 percent of the average state's education funding.

In other words, federal requirements cost approximately six times as much as federal money supplies, *if you only calculate state-level costs*. A number of state studies conducted in the wake of No Child Left Behind found that federal regulations cost *local taxpayers* even more than they do state taxpayers. Yet state leaders keep demanding federal money even though in the end it costs them more than rejecting it. A new federal study found teachers reporting paperwork takes them *an hour or two every day*. It concluded they should therefore tax us all (or our children, through even more expanded federal debt) more to pay for the costs of these regulations rather than simply ending the regulations!

Federal regulations are not only financially costly, but culturally costly. One of teachers' top complaints is that regulatory paperwork and related time-wasting meetings make their jobs a lot less rewarding, causing many teachers to leave the industry in disgust. Last month, NPR followed around a representative special-education teacher from Utah, who depicts how this feels:

From the outside, it looks like Stephanie has everything under control. But that's not how she feels. 'I don't know how to describe it,' she says. 'It's just so much work.'

She's not talking about teaching or lesson planning or even working with disruptive students. She really likes those parts of the job. 'It's all the other compliance and laws and paperwork.'

All of that stuff can be summed up with three letters: IEP, for Individualized Education Program. Each student in special education has one. It's required by [federal] law. And each IEP requires hours and hours of upkeep. Forms need to be updated, data have to be tracked and there are additional meetings with parents and other staff. Multiply that by the 43 students Stephanie has, and there goes all of her free time.

'I stay at work hours typically every day,' Stephanie said. What she doesn't finish, she takes home.

In just the past 25 years, the typical teacher has gone from having 15 years of experience to having just five, meaning teacher turnover has increased drastically (see chart below). Right before the recession, the most common teacher was just in her first year of teaching, but recent job scarcity has caused many teachers to hold on to jobs when they would really rather have switched careers. It's super great for kids to have teachers who would rather be elsewhere, right?

The first three years of teaching are when teachers are at their worst, because they're green. This means many more children are getting lower-quality teachers than they would if schools were able to better retain employees. Especially harmed are poor and special-needs children, because the federal government has made them a special target of its "help." Federal "help" means even more layers of red tape, increasing the incentives for the teachers we need most to leave.

Garrett's LEARN Act would allow states to off-ramp from this roundabout to nowhere and get their own education dollars back yet without these disastrous federal mandates: "Instead of paying federal education taxes and having large percentages of that money get lost in bureaucratic waste; states that opt out will receive a tax credit from the federal government for the exact amount they pay, which in turn can be used to locally fund education."

U.S. Parents Involved in Education, a national coalition of parents, has launched an effort to end federal meddling in education and return power to states and parents, which are closer to children's needs and therefore better at meeting them. I don't need a federal permit to hug my children or teach them math, and neither do their other teachers. Every one of the best-favored GOP presidential candidates has voiced support for at least cutting the U.S. Department of Education, if not eliminating it, so it's great timing. I'm a USPIE supporter, and you should be, too.