



Florida education spending goes up as student performance goes down

By William Patrick
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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — More funding doesn't lead to better student performance.

That's the conclusion of a new [Cato Institute study](#) that tracks public spending and state SAT scores over the past four decades.

It's also a claim tantamount to fighting words when it comes to the billions of dollars at stake in Florida's education budget — the second largest taxpayer expense next to health care.

“In general, the findings are not encouraging,” said Andrew Coulson, director of the Washington D.C.-based think tank Center for Educational Freedom.

Using SAT scores — adjusted for participation and student demographics — the study shows states incurred on average a 3 percent decline in academic performance since 1972, when the federal government began collecting relevant data.

In the same period, inflation-adjusted spending has more than doubled.

“Every state school system in the country has suffered a collapse in productivity over the last 40 years,” said Coulson, the study's author. “Essentially, there has been no correlation between state spending and academic performance.”

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, a government project often referred to as the nation's report card, reported stagnant results among 17-year-olds nationwide in 2012.

“Compared to the first assessment in 1971 for reading and in 1973 for mathematics, scores were higher in 2012 for 9- and 13-year-olds and not significantly different for 17-year-olds,” [states an NAEP long-term trend summary](#).

The Scholastic Assessment Test, or SAT, is primarily known as a college entrance exam. When adjusted to reflect student participation and demographics, it's also considered a comprehensive K-12 measure of both math and reading, and a somewhat predictive measure of college performance.

According to the Cato findings, Florida suffered a 3 percent decline in student performance while boosting per-pupil education funding by 80 percent — far below the national average of 120 percent.

SKY'S THE LIMIT: Florida's public school funding increased more than 80 percent while student performance decreased 3 percent.

Other large states, such as Texas and New York, spent much more. Texas' 40-year SAT score declined 4 percent despite a 140 percent spending increase. New York averaged an 8 percent decline while spending 116 percent more.

"It's a combination of factors," Coulson told Watchdog.org in an email. "Americans value education, but they generally do not know how much is really being spent per-pupil, how that spending has increased dramatically over time, or how little good it seems to have done."

The study contradicts the position held by many education advocates, namely, that student progress depends on more money.

Responding to Gov. Rick Scott's State of the State speech March 4, [Florida Education Association president Andy Ford blasted Scott](#), a Republican, for his approach to education spending.

"The governor touts a historic education budget, but our per-pupil spending is not yet back to where it was when he took office," said Ford, who heads a 137,000 member federation of teachers' unions.

"His budget proposal is totally inadequate to meet the needs of our state, particularly in bolstering all aspects of public education," Ford said.

Facing a tough reelection bid in November, Scott is asking the Legislature for \$18.84 billion in education funding, a key feature of his 2014 proposed "It's Your Money Tax Cut Budget."

"This is the highest total funding level for K-12 education in Florida history," [Scott said](#).

Last year's state budget included \$20.3 billion in total education funding, with per-pupil spending increasing \$400 to \$6,779. Scott also secured \$480 million in bonuses for Florida's K-12 public school teachers.

"The bulk of the funding increase has been rising total employment by the public schools, out of proportion with rising (student) enrollment," said Coulson, in relation to the 40-year state-by-state trend.

"In education there's little choice, next to no competition, and anyone who sets out to run a business educating children is looked at with suspicion," he said. "Until that changes, we can expect spending to keep rising and performance to keep stagnating."