



Colorado's Hickenlooper wants to put school budgets online

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper (D) will push the state legislature next year to publish details of every dollar earmarked for public education, a move he says would create the country's most transparent spending system.

"So far, no state's ever had total transparency on how their tax dollars are spent to every school," Hickenlooper said in a recent interview. "So you can create a Web site where every dollar to every school every day is tracked. How much goes to the teacher, how much goes to their pension, how much goes to the bureaucracy, how much goes to maintaining the facility. Really focus on making each school an enterprise."

Most states disclose how much money goes to school districts, and many publish details like teacher and administrator salaries, building and construction costs. But half of states only report per-pupil expenditures, a number that leaves out costs like capital expenditures, according to [a survey](#) published earlier this year by the libertarian Cato Institute. Ten states don't publish data on employee salaries, while 41 states don't provide information on benefits, the Cato report found.

The Cato report gave high marks to just two states — New Mexico and South Dakota — for school spending transparency. Colorado earned a D+ grade.

"There are many school districts that still do not do a good job tracking expenditures," said John L. Myers, an education policy analyst and vice president of the Denver-based Augenblick Palaich and Associates. "They don't see it as part of the state's role to do what Hickenlooper has suggested."

At least a few other states are considering similar disclosure requirements. A Pennsylvania state representative [introduced legislation](#) in September that would make building-level data available to the public, after the founder of a cyber-charter school was indicted on charges he siphoned more than \$8 million from the company for his personal use.

"When school officials know when people are watching, wasteful spending will be exposed, prevented and hopefully stopped. It could change the behaviors of school officials," state Rep. Jim Christiana, the sponsor of the Pennsylvania legislation, said at a September news conference, according to the Harrisburg Patriot-News.

Hickenlooper said disclosing school spending would tell another story: That not all school districts receive the same resources.

"I think once you pull back the curtain, you'll see that we don't spend equally and that low income neighborhoods don't get the same amount of money, when you add it all in," he said.

Colorado spent just over \$8.6 billion on elementary and secondary education in fiscal 2011, according to Census Bureau figures. About 40 percent of that money comes from state coffers, while 48.7 percent comes from local governments. A little more than a third of that money goes to teacher salaries and wages, the data show.