



## Study: No Link Between School Spending, Student Achievement

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**WASHINGTON (CBS DC)** – Decades of increased taxpayer spending per student in U.S. public schools has not improved student or school outcomes from that education, and a new study finds that throwing money at the system is simply not tied to academic improvements.

The study from the CATO Institute shows that American student performance has remained poor, and has actually declined in mathematics and verbal skills, despite per-student spending tripling nationwide over the same 40-year period.

“The takeaway from this study is that what we’ve done over the past 40 years hasn’t worked,” Andrew Coulson, director of the Center For Educational Freedom at the CATO Institute, told Watchdog.org. “The average performance change nationwide has declined 3 percent in mathematical and verbal skills. Moreover, there’s been no relationship, effectively, between spending and academic outcomes.”

The study, “State Education Trends: Academic Performance and Spending over the Past 40 Years,” analyzed how billions of increased taxpayer dollars, combined with the number of school employees nearly doubling since 1970, to produce stagnant or declining academic results.

“The performance of 17-year-olds has been essentially stagnant across all subjects despite a near tripling of the inflation-adjusted cost of putting a child through the K-12 system,” writes Coulson.

Data from the U.S. Department of Education incorporating public school costs, number of employees, student enrollment and SAT scores was analyzed to explore the disparity between increased spending and decreasing or stagnant academic results.

Congressional mandates and the provision of comprehensive special education, after school programs and increasing technology costs have increased public education budgets. This is in contrast to private schools, where students excel over public school peers, but manage to operate at budgets about 34 percent lower than taxpayer-funded schools, US Finance Post reports.

Public schools spend, on average, \$11,000 per student, per year.

Coulson noted an Arizona study he conducted which showed that the average per-pupil spending at private schools was only about 66 percent of the cost of public schools.

“It’s really impressive how disconnected spending and achievement have been in our state public systems,” Coulson said in a telephone interview with New Mexico Watchdog.

The 60-page report confirms data showing that American students have remained internationally mediocre since 1970, even amid a tripling in inflation-adjusted dollars being spent per-student. A National Public Radio analysis finds that U.S. students are not in the global top 20 for math, reading or science scores.

“That is remarkably unusual,” Coulson wrote, “In virtually every other field, productivity has risen over this period thanks to the adoption of countless technological advances — advances that, in many cases, would seem ideally suited to facilitating learning. And yet, surrounded by this torrent of progress, education has remained anchored to the riverbed, watching the rest of the world rush past it.”

The study includes charts comparing national versus state-level spending increases that suggest “that there is essentially no link between state education spending (which has exploded) and the performance of students at the end of high school (which has generally stagnated or declined),” Coulson writes.

However, the CATO Institute-funded study also showed that lowering per-student spending has no affect to overall student performance.

“At one time or another over the past four decades, Alaska, California, Florida and New York all experienced multi-year periods over which real spending fell substantially (20 percent or more of their 1972 expenditure levels),” Coulson wrote. “And yet, none of these states experienced noticeable declines in adjusted SAT scores.”