



## **Mixed results for Iowa student achievement as education spending increases**

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Student achievement in Iowa's K-12 schools has not necessarily increased at the same rate as increases in state funding for public education since 2010.

Public education advocates say, however, the impact of school funding cannot be measured solely by test scores and other metrics and that the state's current assessment program does not accurately measure what Iowa's teachers are teaching.

State lawmakers just concluded their debate over how much taxpayer funding to send to the state's K-12 public education system. In what has become an annual ritual since Republicans regained at least some portion of control at the Iowa Capitol in 2011, Democrats and public education advocates said the state needs to put more money into K-12 schools, while Republicans said they proposed an education funding level that is appropriate within the constraints of the overall state budget.

In the 39 years before Republicans regained control of the Iowa House in 2011, state funding to K-12 public education increased by less than 3 percent only seven times; it has dipped below 3 percent six times in the seven years since.

Nonetheless, per pupil spending in Iowa has continued to increase annually, but student achievement has been a mixed bag, according to the few metrics available.

Total per pupil state funding was \$7,419 in fiscal 2010 and \$9,173 in fiscal 2017.

Since 2010, Iowa's high school graduation rates have increased 2 percentage points to 90.8 percent for the class of 2015.

ACT scores, on the other hand, have hovered steadily between 22.0 and 22.3 since 2010, among the best scores in the nation each year.

Results are mixed from the Iowa Assessments, which measure educational progress in grades 3-8 and 11 in reading, mathematics and science. In the state's most recent condition of education report, for example, Iowa students over a two-year period showed improvement in eighth-grade reading but regression in fourth-grade math.

The question of the extent that education funding translates to student achievement has been debated for years, and the answer varies depending on who is asked. Studies can be found drawing conclusions that fit one's ideology.

Studies by the Albert Shanker Institute, an education think tank, and the National Education Policy Center, an education research center, concluded education funding has a direct effect on student achievement.

"On average, aggregate measures of per-pupil spending are positively associated with improved or higher student outcomes," the Albert Shanker Institute report said.

Studies conducted by the libertarian Cato Institute and the conservative Heritage Foundation suggest there is not a direct correlation between education funding and student performance.

"A basic comparison of long-term spending trends with long-term measures of student academic achievement challenges the belief that spending is correlated with achievement," said the Heritage Foundation report, which compared increases in school funding nationally to stagnant reading scores.

That's how Drew Klein, with Iowa's chapter of the conservative issues advocacy group Americans for Prosperity, sees it. He cited the Cato Institute report when discussing the issue Monday at the Iowa Capitol after he was one of just two people who spoke in support of Republicans' K-12 school funding proposal, compared to the dozens who spoke against it.

Klein supports more school choice — programs that would allow parents to use state funding toward their child's education at a private school or charter school. Such funding typically comes at the expense of funding to public schools.