



## Republicans and Democrats keep throwing bad money for schools after good

David Doerr

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Across the nation, public education is in a crisis, and we're in desperate need of a workable solution. As with many other social woes, the leftist answer is simply to spend money until the problem goes away – an idea that finds support across the political aisle. That's why, on August 21, Gov. Greg Abbott, R-Texas, promised to pressure the state legislature to spend more taxpayer money on schools to applause from Republicans and Democrats alike. And Abbott has good reason to do whatever he can to try and fix the state's education system, since Texan schools rank 40th in the country overall. Furthermore, Texas spends, per student, about \$4,000 less than the national average – making the idea that more money would boost student performance understandable.

The reality, however, is much more complicated. While such measures play well with voters, the numbers show that, for education, money really can't buy everything.

In the 1960s, sociologist James Coleman found that increased school funding and resources largely failed to improve academic performance, and more modern studies continue to support Coleman's conclusions. For example, the libertarian Cato Institute used data from the Department of Education and found that, while public school funding has skyrocketed since 1970, student performance has remained relatively stagnant. Furthermore, the United States is fourth in the world in education spending, spending \$12,300 per student and more than \$600 billion total.

If it were true that funding created better outcomes, American students would, by result, be some of the best in the world. Yet, this lofty level of spending hasn't bought us better academic performance. In 2016, out of all the 35 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, American results were mediocre: the U.S. ranked 30th in math and 17th in science. Clearly, there is more to academic success than just money.

Indeed, countless real-world examples back up this empirical claim. Washington, D.C.’s Anacostia High School, for instance, receives more than \$14,000 per student. Yet, the school’s results are abysmal: only 19 percent of seniors are set to graduate on time.

Compared to the mostly impoverished minority students of Anacostia, the performances of white, statistically more affluent students of D.C. are much better. And while the overall math proficiency rate in Washington was 24 percent in 2016, the rate for white students sat at 70 percent. The black rate, by contrast, was 17 percent. This makes sense, as the black poverty rate in D.C. is more than 27 percent, and black median income sits at only a third of what is brought in by whites.

Since the connection between poverty and mediocre academic results is well-documented, these results shouldn’t come as a surprise. Schools can only do so much, even with unlimited resources, to counteract the effects that socioeconomic conditions like poverty and family instability have on young students.

The key to fixing schools lies in addressing poverty and strengthening the family. As an example, University of Virginia sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox points to Florida, which is 37th in the number of kids living in married homes. Despite the fact that they are some of the most highly-rated in the country, Florida schools deliver overwhelmingly mediocre results. According to Wilcox, this makes sense, as children living in married households have statistically stronger academic performances than those in single-parent households. Although the reason is unclear, one possible connection is that a two-parent household is much less likely to struggle financially than one with only a single parent.

Our educational system’s flaws clearly run deep – making the real cure to what ails schools much harder to identify. Our government has not had a good track record in implementing top-down cultural changes, what with disastrous policies like alcohol prohibition in the 1920s and the ongoing “War on Drugs.” Clearly, we can’t rely on the government to fix our social ills.

Instead, the change will have to happen at the grassroots level. In particular, nonprofit organizations and individuals must be responsible for improving their own communities. David French, a senior writer at National Review, tackled this subject, detailing the efforts of philanthropists in helping children. He also highlighted the importance of positive role models have on kids’ lives, and the fact that the Left’s attacks on the nuclear family have only exacerbated these problems. Clearly, this isn’t a problem that school funding will solve.

That said, not all school funding is created equal, and targeted funding can certainly help in the fight for academic betterment. While merely giving schools more funding to freely spend has little impact on performance, targeted funds do have the potential to help certain schools. Funds that specifically go toward training educators, paying teachers more, and decreasing class sizes have more influential effects than other types of funding, since those reforms more directly impact students. The key is making sure taxpayer money does not get lost in bureaucratic and administrative costs—which is all too often the case.

The answer to the bipartisan calls for education reform across the country isn't more federal involvement. In Texas, Abbott's plan focuses on increasing teacher pay. This isn't completely ineffective, but it's far from enough. What our nation needs to understand is that the government cannot magically fix our problems through funding. If we want stronger schools, the first step comes from us, the citizenry, creating stronger communities that emphasize the importance of family. Throwing more money at the problem is simply another way to ignore the real issues within the system.