



## Increased education spending doesn't always equal better results

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In the fight over a Mississippi [ballot initiative](#) to increase state spending on K-12 education, a key issue gets overlooked: Are we getting our money's worth?

[Per-pupil spending](#) doesn't always mean good performance, according to nonprofit school choice group Empower Mississippi, which took [data](#) from the Mississippi Department of Education. The highest spending districts — Clay County, Hollandale, Montgomery County, Benoit and Coffeerville — spent between \$18,107 (Clay) and \$13,109 (Coffeerville) per student. None got an A grade on its [annual evaluations by the MDE](#) in 2014. All were given C grades, except Montgomery County, which got a D while spending \$14,811 per student.

Conversely, the top five thriftiest districts per student — Lincoln County, DeSoto County, Union, North Pike and Scott County — earned A or B grades from the MDE while spending between \$7,040 per student (Lincoln) and \$7,371 (Scott County).

[Eric Hanushek](#), the Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at the [Hoover Institution of Stanford University](#), conducts economic analysis of educational spending. Increased spending doesn't always add up to better results, he says.

While Hanushek cautions against too much dependence on per-pupil numbers, there's plenty of other research that shows more taxpayer money doesn't always translate to better outcomes. Take, for instance, a Cato Institute [study](#) from last year by Andrew Coulson.

“There's a long history of research on this subject, and the simple answer is that there is no relationship between spending and student performance,” Hanushek said. “The generally accepted conclusion today is how money is spent is much more important than how much you spend.”

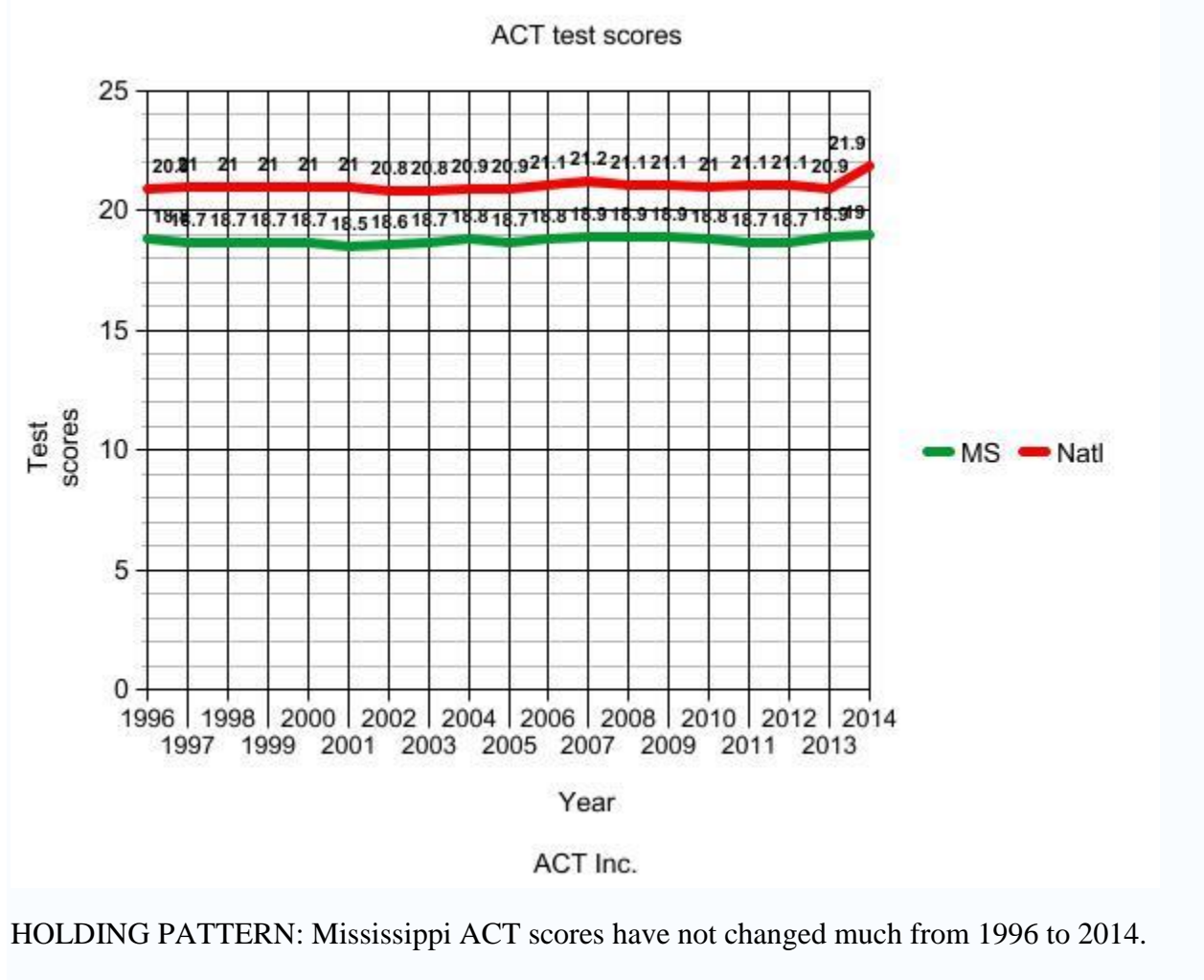
Ballot Initiative 42, if passed, would force the Legislature to “fully fund” K-12 according to the [Mississippi Adequate Education Program](#) formula, which would've increased spending \$260 million this year. State taxpayers spent more than \$2 billion on K-12 in fiscal 2016, the fourth consecutive year under the GOP-led Legislature that K-12 spending has increased.

The initiative would also give the state's chancery courts injunctive powers to force compliance, with the Hinds County chancery court having jurisdiction over any lawsuit.

The initiative is loaded with language that might set the stage for a bushel of lawsuits, which, Hanushek says, has happened in at least 45 states where pro-public education advocates have taken the state to court over K-12 funding.

The initiative reads: “Initiative No. 42 would protect each child’s fundamental right to educational opportunity through the 12th grade by amending Section 201 of the Mississippi Constitution to require that the state must provide and the Legislature must fund an adequate and efficient system of free public schools. This initiative would also authorize the chancery courts of this state to enforce this section with appropriate injunctive relief.”

“That’s the hook,” Hanushek said. “They can put language like that into state legislation or even the constitution that would allow them to always go to court and say, ‘There’s another program that will do wonders for us and the money isn’t adequate to pay for it.’”



HOLDING PATTERN: Mississippi ACT scores have not changed much from 1996 to 2014.

**The pro-initiative group, 42 for Better Schools, claims the additional money would come from the annual growth in revenue and would not result in tax increases or in the cutting of funding for other agencies, such as higher education or parks, to compensate.**

Each year the Board of Education uses the MAEP equation to calculate the amount of money it requires from the Legislature. Only twice, in 2003 and 2007, has the education department received from lawmakers the full amount under the MAEP.