

D.C. schools get \$30,000 per pupil and still fail students

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Taxpayers of the District of Columbia spend nearly \$30,000 per year to educate each student in the public school system.

It's a stunning figure that has been grossly underestimated by the media because D.C. school officials have not properly reported school expenses to the Census Bureau in the past. But education analyst Andrew Coulson, who first reported the discrepancy in 2008, has finally forced officials to set the record straight, according to [Coulson's blog](#) on the Cato Institute website.

"Back in March of this year I asked my then research intern to contact the Census Bureau and ask where they got their total spending data. It turns out, they got it from a DCPS official. We presented evidence to the Bureau that DCPS official had missed a few line items when completing the Census Bureau's forms – to the tune of about \$400 million," Coulson wrote.

"The Census Bureau agreed and is in the process of obtaining corrected data for the 2008-09 year. In the meantime, they made sure to ask DC officials to include all relevant items when filling out their forms for the 2009-10 school year.

"The result: Census Bureau data now show DC spent a total of \$29,409 per pupil. This is just a bit higher than my calculation for the preceding year," Coulson wrote.

Coulson first reported that DC taxpayers spend nearly \$25,000 per student in 2007-08 in an editorial for the Washington Post, but reporters ignored his findings and continued to use the Census Bureau's skewed and much smaller figure.

The situation is a perfect example of how the country's mainstream media underreports the serious issues plaguing public education, most of which are tied to excessive and unnecessary spending dictated by union contract agreements. It also illustrates how some school officials, whether intentionally or not, have misled the public about education spending for a long time.

But we're encouraged that diligent watchdogs like Coulson are willing to call officials out when they're wrong, and that Census Bureau officials were willing to review his findings and correct the mistake.

The public deserves to know how its money is spent, especially when so much of it is fritted away on things that have no bearing on student instruction. That reality becomes especially

obvious when comparing DC's staggering per-pupil spending to the cost of educating students through the city's voucher program, as Coulson points out.

"Oh, and, BTW, this spending figure is about triple what the DC voucher program spends per pupil – and the voucher students have a much higher graduation rate and perform as well or better academically," he wrote.