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TAMPA BAY SCHOOLS:
LATEST POLL

Poll: Performance pay
Some Democrats in Congress are pushing for teacher performance pay as a way to encourage excellence. Are they on the right track?

- Yes
- No



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July 01, 2009

How much do we really spend per student in Florida?



Is it really about \$7,000, as the *St. Petersburg Times* and every other Florida newspaper says? Or is it more in the \$12,000 range?

In a recent email to the Gradebook, relentless voucher die-hard [Andrew J. Coulson](#) of the Cato Institute says obviously it's the latter. By his calculations, which include federal money and construction dollars, it was about \$12,000 in 2007-08.

The bigger figure makes corporate tax credit vouchers, which cost the state \$3,950 each, look like an even better bargain, Coulson says. (He sent his email after reading Tuesday's *St. Peterburg Times* [story about vouchers](#).) But his point about per-pupil spending, and whether the figures most frequently used are the most accurate, matters beyond the voucher debate.

The oft-cited, in-the-\$7,000-range figure (this year, it's \$6,871) is from Florida Department of Education calculations, based on state and local dollars.

DOE officials say it's fair to roll federal money into a per-pupil spending figure - that money does go to operational costs - but not capital outlay and debt service.

Coulson disagrees: "If you want to buy a car, and you're trying to comparison shop among different models, would you be satisfied with only knowing the labor cost that went into the vehicle? Or the cost of all the metal parts, but not the plastics? Or would you want to know the honest to goodness total cost?"

Counting federal money, Florida spent \$8,868 on operational costs per pupil in 2007-08 (according to the [figures on page 4 of this DOE document](#).)

- Ron Matus, state education reporter

July 01, 2009 in [Funding](#), [School Choice](#) | [Permalink](#)
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E-mail Jeffrey S. Solochek: solochek@sptimes.com

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