



# D.C. Public Schools Spend Almost \$30,000 Per Student

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You would think \$30,000 a year would get you a decent education. For just a few thousand more, you could cover the cost of [Harvard's yearly undergraduate tuition](#) or send your child to the prestigious [Sidwell Friends](#) School, which the Obama daughters attend.

But spending \$30,000 to cover the cost of a child's education in a district that has one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation and produces some of the country's lowest achievement scores? Seems a bit steep. But this is the hefty per-pupil bill taxpayers are made to foot for D.C. public schools every year.

Despite this astounding price tag—[\\$29,409 for the 2009–2010 school year, to be exact](#), compared to the national average of just under \$12,500 (both figures are total expenditures calculated on a per-pupil basis, including capital outlays)—the graduation rate for D.C. students hovers around 60 percent, [well below the nationwide average](#) of 74 percent. Math and reading scores are also [among the lowest in the country](#).

Andrew Coulson of the Cato Institute, who calculated D.C.'s per-pupil cost, [explains](#) that the first time he revealed D.C.'s high per-pupil spending a few years ago, he received considerable pushback. Critics claimed his estimate was too high and was inconsistent with the Census Bureau's numbers.

"Indeed, the Census Bureau figures for DC's total K-12 expenditures were substantially lower than mine," he explains.

Why the inconsistency?

"It turns out, [Census] got [D.C. spending data] from a DCPS [D.C. Public Schools] official," notes Coulson. "We presented evidence to the Bureau that that DCPS official had missed a few line items when completing the Census Bureau's forms—to the tune of about \$400 million." Census agreed, and their "data now show DC spent a total of \$29,409 per pupil."

When it comes to improving education, [more spending has failed to achieve results](#).

On the other hand, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP), which provides scholarships to low-income students in the nation's capital to attend private schools of their choice, not only produces [significantly higher graduation rates](#) than D.C. public schools but costs significantly less. A DCOSP scholarship stands at just \$8,000 for a K-8 student or \$12,000 for a 9-12 grade student.

Children in D.C. and around the nation deserve the best opportunity for academic success, and taxpayers deserve that their dollars be used effectively. Rather than investing more in the same failed approaches, policymakers and local leaders should look to innovative reforms, including school choice, to improve education and give students the brightest hope for a promising future.