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## Back-to-School Blues

By [Scott Mayer](#)

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I have two children who just started back at public school here in sunny California and I've already got the back-to-school blues. It looks to be another year of adjusted schedules, fundraisers, buying supplies that I thought the school was supposed to provide, and watching teary-eyed teachers getting sent home with pink pieces of paper. Also, it seems like I'm always hearing something to the effect that -- *it's because of those budget cuts*. And I've been hearing it for years.

The problem is that I am having hard time finding these supposed *cuts*. From what I've been able

to discern (using the government's numbers) [here](#) and [here](#) for starters, it looks like *after adjusting for inflation*, spending per student *nationally* has increased almost threefold over the last 40 years (remember: per student spending accounts for population increases). Shouldn't we be getting three times the services (heck, I'd settle for 1 1/2 times) instead of the continued reduction of services? And after reading this [Cato](#) piece about the costs being even higher than advertised, I'm not sure what to think. Am I reading all this stuff correctly?

And [this](#) gives a little perspective to some of what we've been told in the past:

After adjustment for inflation, current expenditures per student in fall enrollment at public schools rose during the 1980s, remained stable during the first part of the 1990s, and rose again after 1992-93. There was an increase of 37 percent from

1980-81 to 1990-91; a change of less than 1 percent from 1990-91 to 1994-95 (which resulted from small decreases at the beginning of this period, followed by small increases after 1992-93); and an increase of 32 percent from 1994-95 to 2007-08.

Wait a minute! I thought we were told that Reagan and Bush 41/43 instituted massive *cuts* in education! Keep in mind that the 37% and 32% increases quoted were after *inflation!* In real dollars, both increases were around 100%.

Back in [Cali](#) you'll find that recent per student spending peaked for the 2010/11 year at \$11,154 and for 2011/12 drops to \$10,703, which is slightly less than the 2009/10 year at \$10,921. Hardly draconian, given the increases over the years. Considering the current economic environment in the US, I doubt the average [household](#) would have any problem "surviving" that kind of *cut*.

The California pie [chart](#) shows that 61.5% of the spending goes to "classroom instruction." I think my daughter's classroom has 32 kids in it this year. So that's \$342,496 total or \$210,635 for "classroom instruction" -- in just one classroom. Shhhh -- don't tell the teachers.

Who would tolerate this in the *real* (think free-market) world? If you hired a contractor 40 years ago to build a semi-custom home, in an average neighborhood, using average finishes, wouldn't you think that -- again, *using inflation-adjusted dollars* -- you could build the same home today for the same price? What if your contractor told you that to build this same house would cost nearly three times

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price? What if your contractor told you that to build this same house would cost nearly three times more than it did 40 years ago (yes, *inflation-adjusted*) but that the roof would leak and you would have to paint it yourself? You would show him the door (or just throw him out the window). If you're able to understand 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade math, you would rightfully expect either three homes for that price or a much, much larger custom home.

We all need to raise our hands and start asking questions instead of just blindly accepting the narrative -- *it's because of those budget cuts*. Logic seems to dictate that the money isn't going to the places that it should. Don't you think that it may be time for a bunch of people to get expelled over this?

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**allahwins** Today 06:29 AM

Over-staffed administrative offices eat up lots of money in education. In our school system last year cuts were made in the teacher population. The number of administrators not only wasn't cut, but actually increased this coming school year by "creating" new positions in administration. The amount of money that finally ends up in the classroom is nowhere near the figures you hear for "per student" expenses. There IS money in education, lots of it, especially if you're a Superintendent, or assistant to the Superintendent, or assistant-to-the-assistant Super. And on it goes.

**chuckh** ★ Today 07:55 AM

There are certain sacred cows in politics and one of them is education. We are spending a lot of money on education but is it translating into results? Of [course it](#) isn't, but no one has the political courage to buck the system and try something different.

When you stop to think what is available to our children today to aid in their education, the internet, you have to wonder why are scores going down? There are two possible reasons among several. Schools are educating more and more students where English is not their first language. This would certainly slow the progress of learning in any class. Secondly, federal mandates in education are everywhere. We have going past the three Rs to social issues that our children are simply too young to decide for themselves. Education should be purely a local responsibility. That way, if you don't like what is going on you can vote with your feet by moving.

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