

Study: States that spend more on education get better results

By [Peter Hancock](#)

October 13, 2014

Topeka — Money matters for public schools.

At least that's the conclusion of a new study by the Kansas Association of School Boards, which says states that spend more on their public schools tend to get better results than those that don't, even after taking poverty rates and the relative cost of living in each state into account.

"The amount of spending ... is a significant predictor of almost all outcome measures, including all (National Assessment of Educational Progress) math and reading scores, college readiness tests and high school completion," the report states.

But Ted Carter, the research specialist at KASB who conducted the study, said Kansas is a special case because it gets higher-than-average student test scores, despite having lower-than-average education funding.

"Kansas gets more bang for the buck," Carter said Monday.

KASB officials plan to present the report on Tuesday to the Kansas State Board of Education during the board's public comment period.

Those findings come as a special task force created by the Legislature this year is preparing to finalize a report on how schools can spend their resources more efficiently. It also comes while a three-judge panel of the Shawnee County District Court is still considering whether funding levels in Kansas are constitutionally adequate.

Education funding has also been a dominant issue in this year's race for governor. Gov. Sam Brownback, a Republican, oversaw large cuts in base state aid for schools, although he says total spending, including teacher pension funding, is now at record levels.

But his challenger, Democrat Paul Davis, has criticized Brownback for enacting what he says are the largest cuts to public education in state history.

The study looked at spending in all 50 states over the last 10 years and used a statistical method called regression analysis to find out how much of the variation in test scores can be explained by spending, as opposed to other factors.

Ted Carter, a research specialist at KASB, said the study looks at spending in three different ways, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau: "total spending," which includes everything from teacher salaries to capital expenses and pension funding; "current spending," such as instructional expenses and support services, but not capital outlay or pensions; and "instructional spending," or just the money dealing directly with the interaction between teachers and students.

The study found that total spending has more impact on educational outcomes than just the percent of money spent on instruction.

Those findings contradict other studies that the state presented during the trial of the Kansas school finance lawsuit in 2012. They also contradict the conclusions of a study released earlier this year by the conservative [Cato Institute](#), which argued that overall test scores have remained flat nationwide since the 1970s, despite huge increases in education spending.

But Rick Ginsberg, dean of the School of Education at Kansas University, said most of the recent scholarly research shows money makes a big difference in student outcomes.

"Money well spent in public schools makes a difference," he said. "Whether it be to attract the best teachers and leaders, provide the strongest support materials, offer technology and tech support, allow for smaller classes, pay for classroom services, etc. More money definitely helps."