

Twelve Ways to Improve Learning

Improve School Funding

Definition and Source

The per-pupil operating expenditure includes spending for instruction, pupil and staff support services, school administration, business support services, central support services, community services, debt services, payments to other governmental units for services provided and central administration services. It does not include spending for summer school, adult education, bond principal returned or capital. Per-pupil spending was calculated by dividing total operating expenditure by the nine-month average daily attendance. Districts with a high percentage of low-income students receive additional state funding through “poverty grants,” and schools also receive funding from local property taxes and other sources. Please note that county-level data may mask wide funding disparities within a county. Data are from the Illinois State Board of Education.

Trends and Key Findings

Schools have vastly different resources available for teaching and other services due to differences among communities in property tax rates, wealth, school size and other factors. How much a school district spends on education affects the services, resources and opportunities available to students and, ultimately, their academic success. Spending ranges from \$4,000 to more than \$18,000 per pupil. The spending disparity is primarily due to differences in property taxes, income levels and student needs. Statewide, per-pupil spending was \$8,181 for all schools in 2002-03, a 14.5 percent increase since 1999-00.

Illinois ranks 49th in the nation in the size of the per-pupil spending gap between wealthy and poor school districts and 48th in the percentage of funding the state provides for education.¹ State funding in Illinois covers, on average, just 38 percent of the cost of educating a student, far less than the national average of about 50 percent. Many schools across Illinois – in city, suburban and rural districts – are being forced to make tough decisions that compromise the quality of education such as increasing class sizes, laying off teachers, cutting

¹ *Education Week (2004) and The Education Trust (2003)*

AVERAGE PER-PUPIL SPENDING (\$)

	1999-00	2002-03	% CHANGE
Illinois	7,146	8,181	14.5
Adams	6,237	6,726	7.8
Alexander	7,116	7,872	10.6
Bond	5,256	6,047	15.0
Boone	4,950	5,568	12.5
Brown	5,489	6,931	26.3
Bureau	6,213	7,573	21.9
Calhoun	6,022	7,453	23.8
Carroll	5,992	7,529	25.7
Cass	5,739	7,290	27.0
Champaign	6,381	7,493	17.4
Christian	5,191	5,789	11.5
Clark	5,004	5,818	16.3
Clay	5,504	6,764	22.9
Clinton	5,325	6,321	18.7
Coles	5,854	7,103	21.3
Cook	8,524	9,685	13.6
Crawford	5,658	7,002	23.8
Cumberland	5,027	5,629	12.0
De Kalb	6,191	7,225	16.7
De Witt	6,776	8,572	26.5
Douglas	5,492	7,100	29.3
Du Page	7,501	8,802	17.3
Edgar	6,254	7,259	16.1
Edwards	4,881	5,934	21.6
Effingham	5,053	5,808	14.9
Fayette	5,390	6,611	22.7
Ford	5,731	7,162	25.0
Franklin	6,278	7,060	12.5
Fulton	6,326	7,250	14.6
Gallatin	6,529	7,376	13.0
Greene	5,301	6,568	23.9
Grundy	6,491	7,582	16.8
Hamilton	5,895	7,365	24.9
Hancock	5,299	6,601	24.6
Hardin	7,580	8,203	8.2
Henderson	5,989	7,187	20.0
Henry	5,292	6,526	23.3
Iroquois	5,569	7,037	26.4
Jackson	6,201	7,692	24.0
Jasper	5,891	7,413	25.8
Jefferson	5,812	6,927	19.2
Jersey	5,299	6,656	25.6
Jo Daviess	6,115	7,854	28.4
Johnson	5,645	6,847	21.3
Kane	6,560	7,791	18.8
Kankakee	6,097	7,087	16.2
Kendall	5,871	6,610	12.6
Knox	5,683	6,165	8.5
Lake	7,923	8,841	11.6
LaSalle	6,665	7,972	19.6
Lawrence	5,849	6,722	14.9

AVERAGE PER-PUPIL SPENDING (\$)

	1999-00	2002-03	% CHANGE
Lee	5,861	7,326	25.0
Livingston	6,262	7,352	17.4
Logan	6,289	7,538	19.9
Macon	5,450	6,279	15.2
Macoupin	5,232	6,339	21.2
Madison	6,057	6,976	15.2
Marion	6,094	6,895	13.1
Marshall	5,904	7,123	20.6
Mason	6,131	7,280	18.7
Massac	5,640	7,224	28.1
McDonough	6,455	7,550	17.0
McHenry	6,050	7,389	22.1
McLean	6,187	8,069	30.4
Menard	5,387	6,076	12.8
Mercer	5,264	6,664	26.6
Monroe	5,560	6,243	12.3
Montgomery	5,684	6,439	13.3
Morgan	5,765	6,936	20.3
Moultrie	5,435	6,553	20.6
Ogle	6,335	7,351	16.0
Peoria	6,660	8,111	21.8
Perry	6,241	7,088	13.6
Piatt	5,822	6,572	12.9
Pike	6,061	7,088	16.9
Pope	6,007	6,839	13.9
Pulaski	6,312	7,172	13.6
Putnam	5,561	6,151	10.6
Randolph	5,954	7,137	19.9
Richland	5,837	6,897	18.2
Rock Island	6,099	7,298	19.7
St. Clair	6,329	7,340	16.0
Saline	6,059	7,036	16.1
Sangamon	6,349	7,291	14.8
Schuyler	6,140	7,487	21.9
Scott	5,590	6,209	11.1
Shelby	5,522	6,339	14.8
Stark	6,358	7,537	18.5
Stephenson	6,042	7,152	18.4
Tazewell	6,193	6,908	11.5
Union	5,674	7,211	27.1
Vermilion	6,471	7,281	12.5
Wabash	5,535	6,777	22.4
Warren	5,546	6,473	16.7
Washington	5,608	6,663	18.8
Wayne	5,678	6,732	18.6
White	6,100	7,049	15.6
Whiteside	6,441	7,314	13.6
Will	5,935	7,095	19.5
Williamson	5,224	6,119	17.1
Winnebago	7,731	8,440	9.2
Woodford	5,681	6,799	19.7
Chicago	7,827	8,482	8.4

programs such as teacher training and relying on outdated textbooks and equipment.

Action Steps

How much a school district spends on education affects the services and opportunities available to students, resources, teaching quality and, ultimately, academic success. Schools have vastly different resources available due to a community's size and wealth, school size, the grants that a community qualifies for and other factors. But Illinois' school-funding system is too dependent on local property taxes, and the quality of a child's education should not depend on where she lives.

The A+ Illinois campaign – a statewide coalition of diverse, influential groups – is working toward meaningful reform in the funding and quality of public education (learn more at www.aplusillinois.org). A+ Illinois advocates a comprehensive restructuring of state finances to improve funding for education and the human services that support children and families. The campaign calls on the state of Illinois to assume primary responsibility for funding schools by increasing the state's share of school funding to at least 51 percent (up from the current 38 percent). As a leader of A+ Illinois, Voices recommends the following action steps:

- Reform school funding in a manner that generates more money and distributes funds more fairly. Reduce schools' reliance on property taxes by increasing revenue from other, fairer sources, including income and sales taxes. This approach should "bring the bottom up" and not take away resources from higher-spending districts.
- Increase the minimum per-pupil funding level to the recommended \$6,000 that's needed to provide an adequate education. Also, guarantee additional funds to address particular needs of low-income schoolchildren.

Illinois' Current Education Funding Method is a Failure

By Dr. Gene Amberg, Superintendent
Urbana School District 116

Less than 30 percent of the public now has school-aged children, so most people rarely see what is actually going on inside their local schools. Sometimes, the only glimpse they get of public education is what they see in the media. The only other peek they have inside our schools is that once-a-year tax bill with a hefty dollar amount for the local school district that keeps our doors open, our teachers teaching and our children learning.

The current education funding method in Illinois is a failure. We can no longer make minor repairs in this method because we are dealing with a major structural deficit, not just a temporary economic setback. Illinois is one of the richest states in the nation in terms of personal wealth, yet we have one of the very lowest income tax rates. Perhaps it's time for those who can most afford it to pay a greater share of educating our future.

Thomas Jefferson said, "If the children are untaught, their ignorance and vices will in future life cost us much dearer in their consequences than it would have done in their correction by a good

education." Raising, changing, and/or adding to our tax load is not a popular move for any elected official. However, it will cost our society more money in the future to support the unemployed, to prepare an inadequately trained workforce, and to build more prisons, if we don't have quality schools today.

In a community like Urbana, where about 25 percent of our school district's real estate is held by tax-exempt entities, we live the flaw in funding schools through real estate taxes on a daily basis. And in our agrarian economy, our farmers who work the soil will tell you that land does not equal wealth.

Thirty percent of the population relinquishes their children to us 180 days a year with a certain degree of trust in the miracles we will work in our classrooms. I can't fathom why our lawmakers are procrastinating on restructuring our school funding method, other than it will be an unpopular move. However, our children only have us as their voice and we owe it to the future to make long overdue changes now.

Dr. Gene Amberg, pictured at left in a classroom, has been the superintendent of Urbana School District 116 for 14 years. His district is located in east central Illinois and serves 4,500 students. Amberg began his career in public education as an elementary teacher in Jacksonville, Ill. Prior to moving to Urbana, Amberg held the top post in Joplin, Mo., as well as in a Tulsa, Okla., school district. In October 2004, he was one of only 15 superintendents nationwide to participate in the Fulbright Superintendents Biennial Seminar in Germany.

