



The Yankee Institute

for Public Policy Studies, Inc.

P.O. Box 260660 • Hartford, CT 06126-0660

(860) 297-4271 phone • (860) 987-6218 fax

FISCAL FOCUS

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Government-School Spending in Connecticut

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

In recent decades, spending on Connecticut's K-12 government-school system has exceeded both enrollment growth and increases in the Consumer Price Index. Adjusted to the purchasing power of today's dollars, the state spent \$3.43 billion on elementary and secondary education in 1981. Twenty years later, that figure had more than doubled, to \$7.15 billion.¹ Enrollment growth was less than 10 percent.²

Connecticut spends more, per pupil, on its K-12 government-school system than 45 other states. Only New Jersey (\$10,235), New York (\$10,002), Vermont (\$9,915), and Wyoming (\$9,439) rank higher than Connecticut (\$9,188).³

The Nutmeg State's effort to "equalize" K-12 education spending is commonly referred to as the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) program. In the current fiscal year, it will spend approximately \$1.6 billion.⁴

Connecticut's large cities receive, on average, \$5,980 per pupil in ECS funding. Suburban towns receive \$1,381 per pupil. Over half of large cities' government-school spending is paid by state taxpayers. For suburban towns, the figure is less than 15 percent.⁵

Teachers in Connecticut earn an average salary of \$57,337, the highest among the states.⁶

School-construction costs represent a substantial portion of the state's highest-in-the-nation bonded indebtedness. In 2002, 46 percent of Connecticut's general-obligation bonding was devoted to school construction.⁷

The high-school dropout rate for Connecticut's class of 2001 was approximately 30 percent.⁸

Connecticut's average combined SAT score is only slightly higher than the national average. Between 1988 and 2003, the state's average combined SAT score was essentially flat, rising by 1.48 percent.⁹

GOVERNMENT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Connecticut's government colleges and universities cost 50 percent more to run, per pupil, than the national average. Among states, only Delaware's system is more expensive.¹⁰

Connecticut's state-funded higher education system will spend over \$2.3 billion in the current fiscal year. This does not include debt payments for the system's building projects.¹¹

In 1999-2000, the most recent school year for which data are available, tuition and fees accounted for 18.8 percent of current-fund revenue for the state's colleges and universities.¹²

According to Connecticut Higher Education Commissioner Valerie F. Lewis, "fewer than half the students who start with us end up with a degree." Over 60 percent of the Connecticut State University system's freshmen do not earn their degrees within six years.¹³

Almost 30 percent of the University of Connecticut's students do not graduate in six years.¹⁴

1. Calculation based on "Public School Finance in Connecticut," Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, Connecticut General Assembly, October 2001. Inflation adjustment made by online CPI calculator provided by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

2. Enrollment data obtained from Connecticut State Department of Education.

3. "Quality Counts 2005: No Small Change, Targeting Money Toward Student Performance," *Education Week* report, January 2005.

4. Loretta Waldman, "Education Funds Finding Other Uses," *Hartford Courant*, July 18, 2005.

5. Jared Schmidt, "How Much Is Enough? State Fiscal Policy and Its Bias Toward Urban Core Municipalities," Connecticut House of Representatives, Republican Research Department, March 2005.

6. Linda Conner Lambeck, "Our teachers get top pay," *Connecticut Post*, June 25, 2005.

7. "Borrow-spend attitude leaves state deep in the red," Associated Press, July 17, 2004.

8. Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, "Connecticut's Unbelievable Graduation Rate," *Hartford Courant*, September 21, 2003.

9. Calculation based on data obtained from "Digest of Education Statistics," National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2003.

10. Robert A. Frahm, "Costs To Run Public Colleges In State Among Highest In Nation," *Hartford Courant*, February 18, 2005.

11. Connecticut FY 2006-2007 Biennium Governor's Budget, February 9, 2005.

12. Calculation based on data obtained from "Digest of Education Statistics," National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2003.

13. Robert A. Frahm, "Attrition Worries State Colleges," *Hartford Courant*, May 27, 2004.

14. Grace E. Merritt, "Students Delaying Degrees," *Hartford Courant*, January 23, 2005.