



## The Nevada Policy Research Institute

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### **Study: Nevada spends about \$13,000 per pupil**

Nevada will spend far more per pupil during the 2008-09 school year than citizens have been led to believe, an education policy analyst with the Nevada Policy Research Institute finds.

“Funding Fantasies: Nevada K-12 education spends more than you think” is a detailed examination of all K-12 education funding sources by NPRI analyst Patrick R. Gibbons. Although it is often reported that Nevada spends only about \$5,000 to 7,000 per pupil, the Silver State actually spends almost twice that amount. Those who calculate Nevada’s official per-pupil expenditure figure ignore several funding sources, including food services, capital projects and debt services, the report finds.

The report comes as the Nevada Legislature is struggling with how to balance the state’s budget and as Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford is calling for tax hikes to fund increases in K-12 education spending.

NPRI found:

- Across Nevada, the actual amount budgeted for K-12 education during the 2008-09 school year averaged \$13,052 per pupil.
- The amount budgeted per-pupil during the 2008-09 school year ranged from \$10,889 in Churchill County to \$49,551 in Eureka County.
- Although the Clark County School District officially reports per-pupil expenditures for the 2008-09 school year will be \$7,175, the actual cost per pupil will be \$13,387. Washoe County will spend around \$11,393 per student.
- Nevada budgeted just \$6,746 per charter-school student for the 2008-09 school year.
- Only 34 percent of the Clark County School District’s budget is allocated toward instruction.
- Both the Clark and Washoe county districts employ at least one fulltime equivalent staff member for every 10 students enrolled.

“When studying K-12 public expenditures, it becomes very apparent that *how much we spend* on education impacts the public discussion less than *who counts how much we spend*,” said Gibbons. “Including or excluding accounting categories causes a great deal of variation in the amount that taxpayers think we spend on education.

“While Sen. Horsford’s call to preserve education funding sounds high-minded, citizens and legislators need to be aware of Nevada’s real spending levels,” continued Gibbons. “Nevada currently spends as much per pupil as do many of the nation’s elite private schools — without the elite level of achievement. Any new money that lawmakers steer toward education through tax increases will likely not reach the classroom and might not even be reported as per-pupil spending the next time education-system bureaucrats go to Carson City looking for more money.”

Nevada citizens need to know how much is actually being spent on K-12 education, said Gibbons. “Until parents have the freedom to choose where their child goes to school, no amount of money — not even the elite private-school equivalent that Nevada spends now — is going to be enough. This is why Nevada’s charter schools have achieved results similar to the public schools for around half the cost.”

The full study is available at: [http://npri.org/docLib/20090429\\_Funding\\_Fantasies.pdf](http://npri.org/docLib/20090429_Funding_Fantasies.pdf).

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