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Truth in Spending: An Analysis of K-12 Public School Spending in Wisconsin



WISCONSIN INSTITUTE
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Executive Summary

From both the left and the right, there is increasing discussion of further increases to school spending in Wisconsin. Yet, before considering further increases, it is vital that policymakers develop an understanding of Wisconsin's current place in the nation and world when it comes to education spending. This paper brings together data from a variety of sources to paint an even-handed picture of school spending in the state. The findings should give policymakers pause regarding the utility of further increases, as the state already spends a great deal for mediocre results.

Among the key findings:

Wisconsin remains a high-spending education state. While several very high-spending states drop Wisconsin's overall ranking, the state remains among a group of states that should be considered "high spending" relative to spending throughout the entire country.

The United States and Wisconsin spend more on education, and get less for it, than most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. The U.S. spends more than all but three Organization for OECD countries, and Wisconsin spends more than all but two. The U.S. has a very low return on this investment according to Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results.

Within Wisconsin, there is no relationship between spending and outcomes. On average, high-spending districts perform the same or worse on state exams and the ACT relative to low-spending districts. The only exception is graduation rates, where higher spending does have some relationship to higher rates of graduation.

Spending on administration, transportation are associated with lower student outcomes. The percentage of money a district spends on these categories relative to others is associated with lower performance on state exams. The relationship between transportation and exam scores is most likely due to characteristics of districts that have lengthy student commute times.

Private choice schools and charter schools do more with less. These schools achieve better academic outcomes despite spending thousands less per student than traditional public schools.

Private choice schools are a boon to public schools. Despite extensive rhetoric by choice opponents that private school choice costs them money, we estimate that ending the choice program would cost public schools throughout the state more than \$130 million dollars.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction	3
Wisconsin Education Spending, U.S. & the World.....	3
Spending Relative to Other States	3
Spending Relative to the Rest of the World	3
The Evidence for Diminishing Returns.....	5
Wisconsin Education Spending: Within the State	6
District-Level Spending and Outcomes.....	6
The Relationship between Spending and Student Outcomes	7
School District Disparities	8
Categories of Spending and Outcomes	11
Recommendations.....	13
References	14
Appendix Figure.....	15

Introduction

Both in Wisconsin and around the nation, significant attention has been paid in recent years to increasing spending for traditional public schools. Former Governor Scott Walker instituted the largest spending increases in state history in the 2017-2018 budget cycle. However, these increases were not enough to stave off attacks that schools in Wisconsin were allegedly underfunded, and Governor Evers has called for an additional \$1.4 billion for Wisconsin’s public schools.¹

While spending more on schools is popular, it is vital that policymakers understand Wisconsin’s current position among the states and the world in spending on education. It is vital that the focus be placed on the proper solutions for Wisconsin’s schools. This policy brief endeavors to move beyond the rhetoric about underfunded schools to paint an objective picture for policymakers.

Wisconsin Education Spending, U.S. & the World

Spending Relative to Other States

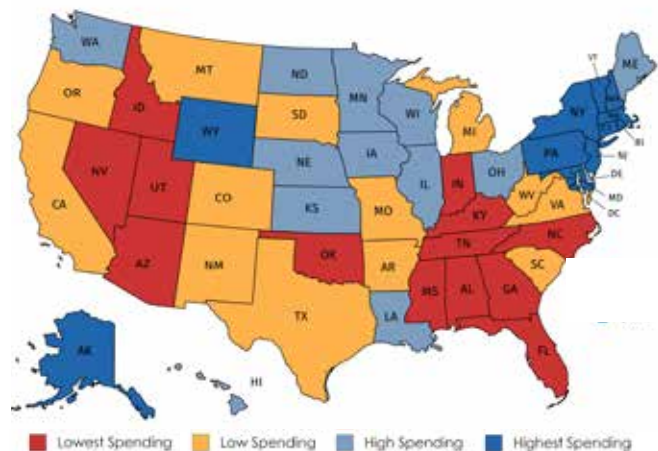
Wisconsin remains in an advantaged position in terms of spending relative to other states, and the rest of the world, despite the prevailing narrative that the state cut its educational spending in recent years. The most recent data on school spending across the nation comes from the annual report of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NCES data combines funding from all sources—state, local, and federal—to create fair comparisons

¹ Beck, Molly. 2018. “Tony Evers Seeks \$1.4 Billion Increase for Wisconsin schools.” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

across the country. On this list, Wisconsin ranks 23 of the 50 states plus Washington DC. But while Wisconsin’s ranking is in the top half, it is a bit deceiving.

There are a cluster of states with very similar levels of education funding, while the highest spending numbers are found primarily in the northeast. To illustrate this point, the figure below shows four quartiles of education spending throughout the country. Wisconsin sits firmly in the second quartile—the second highest spending group of states. Note that these national numbers come from the 2014-15 school year, and Wisconsin has substantially increased its education spending since then. Relative to our neighbors, we spend a similar amount on education as Minnesota, Illinois, and Iowa. We spend significantly more than Indiana and Michigan.

Figure 1. Education Spending by State, Quartiles



Spending Relative to the Rest of the World

When one considers Wisconsin’s school spending relative to the rest of the world, Wisconsin ranks even higher compared to other countries. Using the most recent data on

Figure 2. K-12 Spending per Student, OECD Countries and Wisconsin (2016)

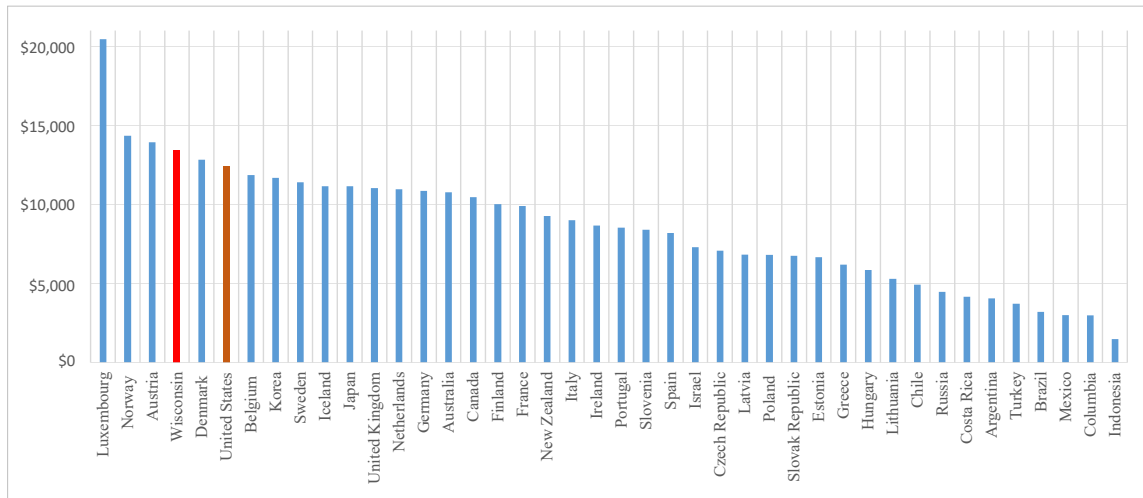
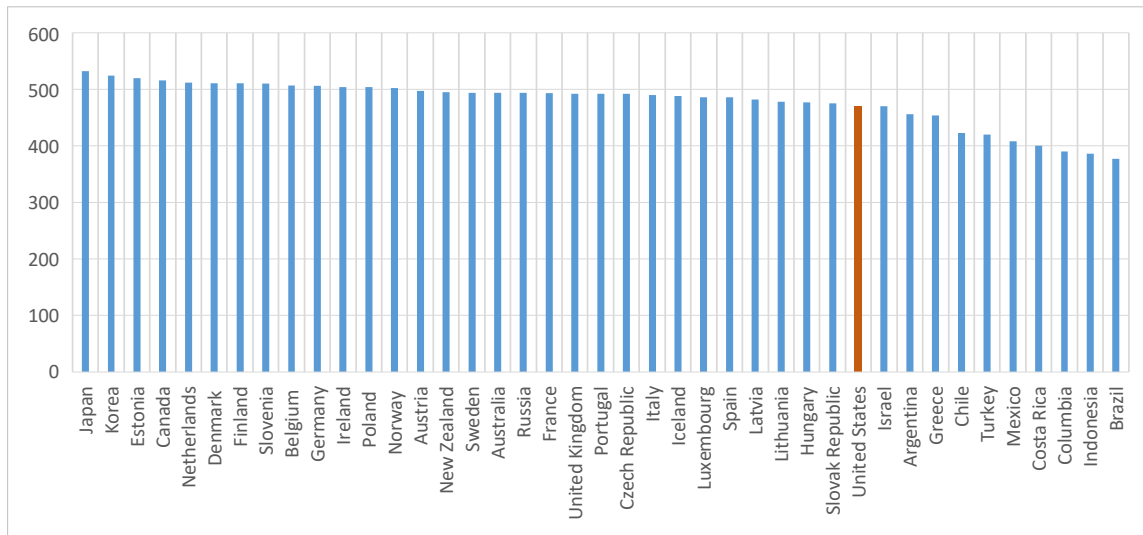


Figure 3. PISA Scores in Mathematics, Reading and Sciences by Country



participating countries in the OECD (OECD 2018), the figure on this following page shows the per-pupil spending in each country with the addition of Wisconsin (in red).

Currently, Wisconsin spends more per student on education than all but three countries in the world: Luxembourg, Norway and Austria. The United States, on average, spends more than all but four countries, falling slightly below Denmark. A number of countries that are broadly considered to have liberal or socialist governments and economies rank significantly lower on this measure. For instance, the United

Kingdom spends approximately \$11,028 per student—\$1,400 less than the United States and \$2,500 less than Wisconsin. The average spending across these countries is \$8,607 per student.

Perhaps this level of spending would be understandable if Wisconsin and the U.S. earned significantly greater academic results than other countries. Do we observe better outcomes in Wisconsin and the United States than other OECD countries? To answer that question, we next compare results on the PISA in other countries to the United States as a whole. The PISA is an international exam conducted once

every three years. The test is provided to 15 year-olds around the world with a sufficient sample size to evaluate the relative performance of individual nations. We are not able to include Wisconsin independently in this analysis, as too few schools participate to create a viable sample.

The position of the United States is depicted in orange in this figure. Despite spending more on education than all but four other nations, the United States ranks 31 in PISA math scores among 41 participating countries. An alternative way to compare spending using this data is to see what kind of a return on investment a country is getting for its education spending. In Table 1 below we compare the number of points on the PISA per \$1,000 spent on education.

Table 1. Return on PISA per \$1,000 Spent on Education

Rank	Country	Points per \$1,000	Rank	Country	Points per \$1,000
1	Indonesia	260.99	22	Portugal	57.66
2	Mexico	136.14	23	Italy	54.47
3	Columbia	130.57	24	New Zealand	53.43
4	Brazil	117.85	25	Finland	50.97
5	Turkey	113.09	26	France	49.81
6	Argentina	112.40	27	Canada	49.30
7	Russia	110.47	28	Japan	47.73
8	Costa Rica	96.22	29	Netherlands	46.72
9	Lithuania	90.34	30	Germany	46.58
10	Chile	85.80	31	Australia	45.89
11	Hungary	81.52	32	Korea	44.83
12	Estonia	78.04	33	United Kingdom	44.61
13	Poland	74.05	34	Iceland	43.77
14	Greece	73.34	35	Sweden	43.33
15	Latvia	70.63	36	Belgium	42.77
16	Slovak Republic	70.40	37	Denmark	39.84
17	Czech Republic	69.55	38	United States	37.83
18	Israel	64.37	39	Austria	35.68
19	Slovenia	60.67	40	Norway	34.98
20	Spain	59.35	41	Luxembourg	23.77
21	Ireland	58.12			

Some of the highest-spending nations, including the United States, rank near the bottom of the list in terms of the “bang for the buck” they receive for education spending. Those that make up the top of the list tend to be low-spending countries, but they probably represent

something of a performance floor—the sort of scores one might expect on the PISA for students with very limited to no education. But there are a significant number of countries in the middle range that exceed the United States in performance while also achieving a greater return-on-investment for school spending.

That said, the fact that this chart is largely ordered in the opposite direction to the one on spending per student, underscores that there has been little relationship between educational spending and educational outcomes (e.g. high-spending countries fall near the bottom).

The Evidence for Diminishing Returns

If the previous section gives the impression that education spending does not matter at all, and that investment in education bears no relationship to educational outcomes, that is too strong of a conclusion. Among the lowest spending countries, there is, indeed a relationship between spending and student achievement. In those countries, an additional dollar of expenditure is related to higher achievement in subjects such as science (OECD 2016). However, at spending levels above approximately \$6,600 per student, the relationship becomes extremely flat. Expenditure is insignificantly related to outcomes.

This is what is known in economics as the concept of diminishing returns—the utility of additional expenditure varies with the total amount of money currently allocated. The reasons for why additional spending begins having a lesser impact are widely speculated. It is entirely possible that after some minimum standard of educational environment is met, factors that are not closely related to spending—such as teacher quality, choice of curriculum, and student familial

characteristics—play a much larger role in student outcomes than money.

By applying this concept to Wisconsin, we conclude that all Wisconsin school districts fall well above the threshold for diminishing returns. The lowest funded districts in the state receive \$9,200 per student, more than \$2,500 above the point where spending has no relationship to student outcomes. That said there remain in the system some fundamental inequities in terms of funding—both between school districts and between school sectors. The next section of this report dives more deeply into this topic.

Wisconsin Education Spending: Within the State

District-Level Spending and Outcomes

Much was made during the gubernatorial election about ostensible declines in education spending that occurred under the Walker administration. Does the data support these claims?

To begin answering this question, we examine the changes in spending per student on a yearly basis beginning in 2010, first in raw numbers and then adjusted for inflation. We include two numbers in this calculation: the revenue limit and per-pupil aid. The revenue limit is set annually for each school district in the state. It is the total amount of revenue that can be raised through general aid from the state and property taxes in that year in that district. Revenue limits are adjusted annually based on changes in enrollment, inflation, and the revenue that the district had in the previous year. Per-Pupil Aid provides a specific amount of state funding to every school district based

on enrollment counts in the three-year rolling average. This money is provided to school districts above and beyond the revenue limit. While the use of a three-year rolling average for this funding makes it imperfectly aligned with the total amount of funding per student, the fact that it can be slightly higher or lower depending on enrollment trends makes it worthy of inclusion. Per-Pupil has increased fairly dramatically since 2012-13 when it was first implemented. Table 2 below shows its growth since that year.

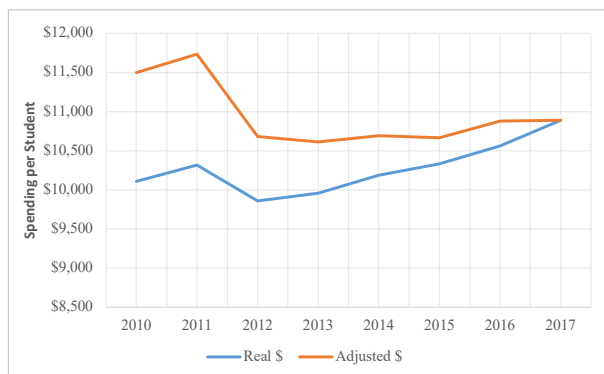
Table 2. Per Pupil Aid Amount by Year

Year	Per Pupil Aid
2012-13	\$50
2013-14	\$75
2014-15	\$150
2015-16	\$150
2016-17	\$250
2017-18	\$450
2018-19	\$654

What was a \$50 per student appropriation in 2012 has grown to \$654 for the 2018-19 school year—an increase of 1,208%. The per-pupil aid amount in Table 1 are added to the revenue limit in each year in the charts below for each district to arrive at the total amount of state and local funding for students in that district. Other categorical aids (such as special education aids) are not applied so simply, and are not included in the Figure 4. This means that the total funding can be even larger for some school districts, but never smaller. The next chart presents the change in spending in real dollars (blue line) and inflation-adjusted dollars (orange line).

In terms of real dollars, Wisconsin's education spending has increased in every year of analysis with the exception of one: 2012. Prior to that school year, a significant amount of federal funding through the stimulus package that had

Figure 4. Real and Inflation-Adjusted Spending on Education, 2010-2017



been used to prop up Wisconsin’s education spending came to an end, meaning that the state was forced to make adjustments across the board. In terms of real dollars, education spending increased in every subsequent year after 2012, and was at the highest level in the history of the state by the 2017-18 school year. Inflation-adjusted spending tells something of a different story. There is the same pattern of decline following the end of federal stimulus, with a sharp drop in 2012 coupled with the passage of Act 10. However, recovery has been slower in this model, and has not eclipsed pre-recession spending.

While inflation adjusted spending has changed to some extent in recent years, what effect does that spending have on classroom outcomes? To help answer that question, the next section of this report examines the relationship between district-level spending and four outcomes: math and ELA performance on the Forward Exam, ACT scores, and high-school graduation rates.

The Relationship Between Spending and Student Outcomes

We additionally control for other factors that can significantly affect student outcomes of interest. This includes the number of non-white

students in the school district, the number of economically-disadvantaged students, the number of students with disabilities, the number of English language learners, and the total enrollment of the school. Additional indicator variables are included for whether a school district is predominantly located in a rural, small town, or suburban area of the state. The omitted baseline is urban schools, meaning that the coefficients on these variables should be interpreted as relative to urban schools.

The table on the next page shows the relationship of spending per student in Wisconsin school districts in a regression analysis using the most recent school data (2016-17). Our variable of interest, per-pupil spending in each district, is highlighted in grey. In the case of Math proficiency, ELA proficiency, and Forward Exam scores, we see no significant relationship between per-student spending and academic outcomes.² While the coefficient on ELA approaches significance ($p < .15$), the coefficient on math is extremely close to 0 ($p < .99$). With regards to graduation, we do see a positive statistically significant effect. However, while this variable is statistically significant ($p < .05$), the coefficient is so small that an argument can be made that it is substantially meaningless. Therefore, a \$1,000 increase in per-pupil spending is related to an increase of .3% in graduation rates. In a high school of 1,000 students, an increase of \$100,000 in spending would be expected to result in three more students graduating—a low return on investment.

Alternatively, some might also make the argument that higher spending could have a positive relationship to better student

² Our previous study on this topic, “Money for Nothing,” showed a negative relationship between test scores and spending. This is likely the result of including more years of data in the previous study.

Table 3. Relationship of Spending to Student Exam Outcomes & Attainment

<i>VARIABLES</i>	<i>Math Proficiency</i>	<i>ELA Proficiency</i>	<i>ACT Composite</i>	<i>Graduation Rates</i>	<i>Suspension Rates</i>
Spending Per Student	4.64e-05 (0.00352)	0.00474 (0.00317)	0.0594 (0.0428)	0.00364** (0.00174)	0.00182 (0.00119)
Non-White Students	0.121** (0.0554)	0.0922* (0.0499)	1.608** (0.675)	0.0470* (0.0277)	-0.0676*** (0.0187)
Low Income	-0.280*** (0.0397)	-0.253*** (0.0358)	-4.380*** (0.484)	-0.0927*** (0.0197)	0.0507*** (0.0134)
Students w/ Disabilities	-0.694*** (0.189)	-0.523*** (0.170)	-5.697** (2.298)	-0.0246 (0.0945)	0.112* (0.0643)
English Learners	-0.150 (0.155)	-0.0104 (0.139)	1.788 (1.879)	0.170** (0.0772)	-0.117** (0.0521)
Enrollment	1.34e-06 (3.30e-06)	-2.31e-06 (2.97e-06)	4.46e-05 (4.02e-05)	-6.90e-06*** (1.63e-06)	4.80e-06*** (1.11e-06)
Rural	-0.00579 (0.0271)	-0.0193 (0.0244)	-0.0288 (0.329)	0.0213 (0.0134)	-0.0126 (0.00912)
Town	0.0129 (0.0274)	-0.00682 (0.0247)	0.397 (0.333)	0.0171 (0.0136)	-0.00976 (0.00922)
Suburb	0.0613** (0.0275)	0.0516** (0.0247)	0.905*** (0.334)	0.0283** (0.0136)	-0.00222 (0.00925)
Constant	0.530*** (0.0825)	0.497*** (0.0742)	20.01*** (1.003)	0.883*** (0.0411)	0.0451 (0.0278)
Observations	363	360	361	356	
R-squared	0.397	0.382	0.441	0.241	

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

behavior—perhaps by increasing the availability of extracurricular outlets for students. To test this theory, we compare spending to suspension rates by school throughout Wisconsin. The relationship is tending towards positive ($p < .12$), meaning that higher spending districts tend to see more suspensions. While this relationship is not statistically significant, we can say confidently that there is no relationship between increased spending in school districts and better behavioral outcomes for students.

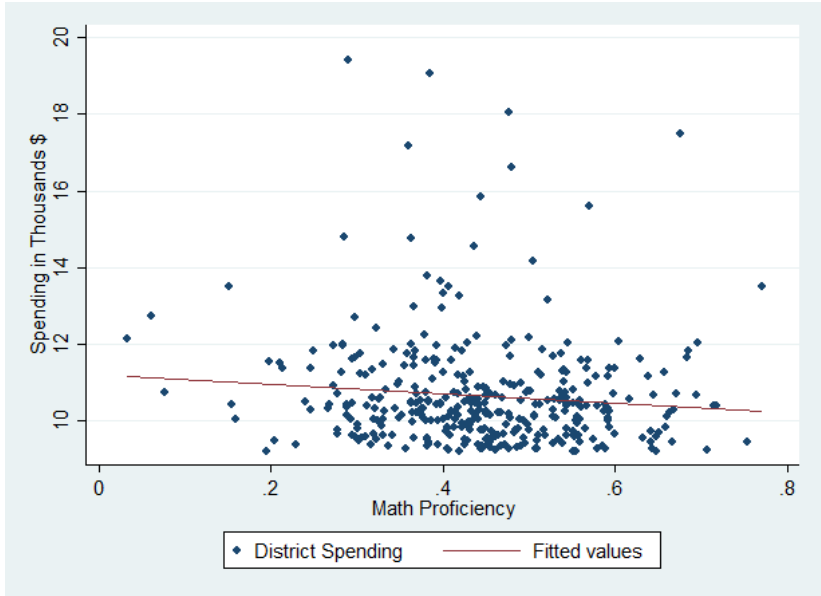
The figures on the subsequent pages further highlight the relatively flat relationship between

academic performance and school spending, which are identified in the preceding tables. Note that a high number of school districts in Wisconsin graduate 100% of their students, as seen in Figure 2. This is one measurement of academic success on which Wisconsin ranks highly nationally.

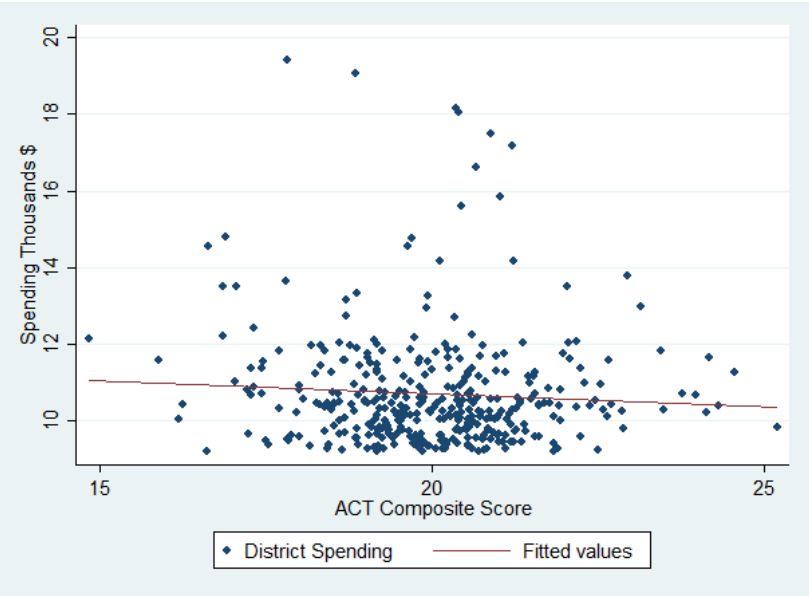
School District Disparities

While we remain doubtful about the role additional funding plays in student outcomes, it is still important to highlight the extent of spending disparities that exist within the state. Wisconsin has more than 420 school

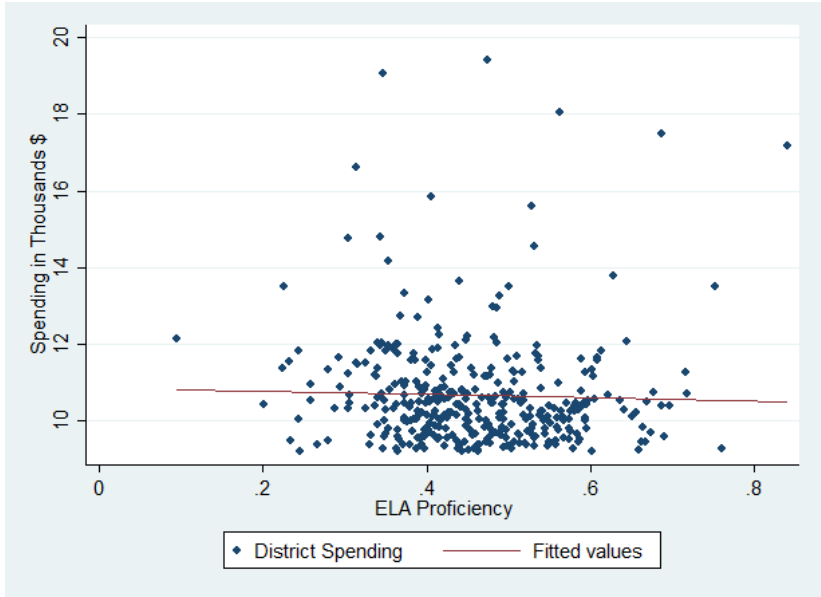
Spending and Math Proficiency



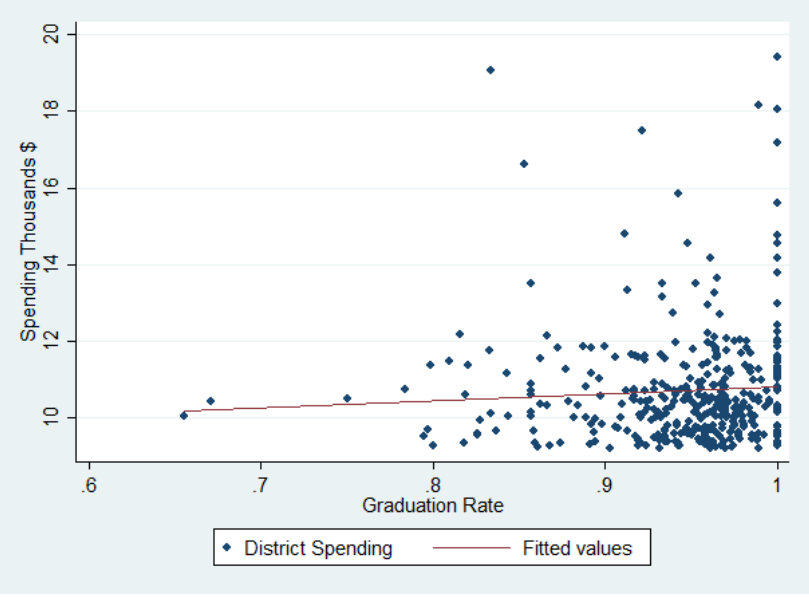
Spending and ACT Scores



Spending and ELA Proficiency



Spending and Graduation Rates



districts, each with an individually determined funding level. Schools are funded through a combination of state and local aid, along with additional categorical aids from the state. In essence, the share of local aid versus state aid is determined by comparing the number of students in the district with the property value of the district under the revenue limit that is also set for each district.³ Districts with more property value per student are “wealthier” in the eyes of the state, and are responsible for a larger share of the total cost of educating students in their district. There are a number of potential problems with the funding formula that are often voiced by critics.

Tied to the Past: The revenue limits are always based on the district’s previous year despite having annual adjustments for enrollment and property value. Because the original revenue limits were set in for the 1993-94 school year, this means that certain districts are always behind the curve.

Differences between Districts: There are substantial differences in funding between districts. According to the most recent data from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), funding ranges from a low of \$9,200 (Beloit) to a high of \$19,417 (Washington). While many districts fall into a middle range, this disparity has drawn the ire of many in the lower-spending districts.

While these problems are real, it is important to understand how Wisconsin ranks in between-district funding disparities relative to the rest of the country before exploring substantial changes to how school funding works. School district funding equity can be

(or should be?) evaluated based on overall disparities between districts or by examining how much funding goes to districts that serve students that are more likely to struggle in school. For example, some states provide additional funding for students from minority backgrounds, or those who are English language learners.

Education Trust attempts to examine the latter version of equity in their report, “Funding Gaps 2018.” The report ranks states by the extent to which districts with more low-income students, and more students from minority backgrounds, receive more or less state and local funding. On both of these metrics, the state of Wisconsin ranks in the “neutral range,” meaning that Wisconsin’s education policy is neither progressive nor regressive.

Of course, it may be the case that Wisconsin wishes to move toward even more resources for students from low-income backgrounds rather than approximately the same amount. More and more, the argument is being made that students from more difficult family circumstances are more difficult to educate, and that more funding should be provided for these students. Wisconsin’s current system, tying school funding to local property taxes, makes this concept difficult to apply in Wisconsin.

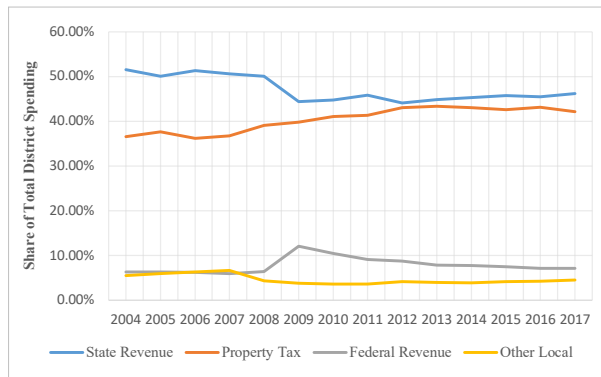
Until 1924, schools in Wisconsin were funded entirely via local property taxes.⁴ However, this increased property taxes and led to disparities in funding far greater than what we see today. To remedy these problems, the burden has been gradually shifted to the state level over time through a number of pieces of legislation (Ford

³ This does not account for aid from the federal government that is on top of all of the aid discussed here.

⁴ Maher, Craig Mark Skidmore and Bambi Statz. 2007. “State Policy Consequences for Wisconsin School Districts: Spending Disparities, Finance Formulas, and Revenue Restrictions,” *Marquette Law Review*

2013). But property taxes remain an important part of the funding formula. The figure below shows the share of revenue per student that comes from each source beginning with the 2004-2005 school year.

Figure 5. Share of Spending by Source, 2004-2017



The state share of total spending has declined over time, but this decline is relatively slight. In 2004, the state covered about 52% of all education spending. This number has declined to about 46% by the 2017-18 school year. At the same time, the property tax share of school spending has increased, going from approximately 37% in 2004 to 42% today. One may note the spike in federal aid that occurs in 2008. This represents the implementation of the federal stimulus package that significantly funded education in the state in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Federal funding has gradually declined since, and has been substantially replaced by increases in state and local aid.

In and of itself, shifting the share of school funding at the state level does not increase funding for *any* school district. Instead, it simply shifts the burden of paying for a set level of education spending under the revenue limit from property taxpayers to the state. Therefore, if the goal is getting more money to certain districts and not the reduction of

property taxes, the state could 1) raise the revenue limit for all districts or 2) alter the funding formula in a substantive manner that provides additional resources for schools with more students from difficult backgrounds. This could include more minority students, more low-income students, or more students with disabilities. Some states have moved away from property tax funding of education entirely. A forthcoming WILL study will look at this possibility in greater depth.

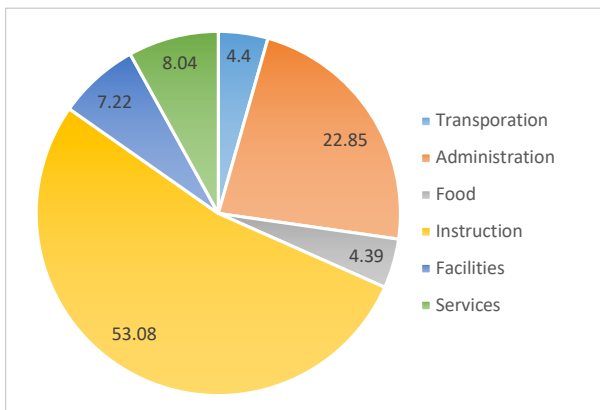
So what is the result of the current funding formula? To at least partially answer that question, we ran a regression with spending as the dependent variable and various socioeconomic and demographic factors as predictors.

Categories of Spending and Outcomes

Having established earlier in this report that there is little relationship between aggregate spending and student outcomes, a reader may ask, “are there any kinds of spending that can be useful?” While the data to fully answer this question are not yet available, the DPI provides some information that can be used to approach this question.⁵ The Comparative Revenue per Member page details the amount of money from state and local sources that each school district spends per student in a number of categories: spending on administration, facilities, instruction, student services, food, and transportation. The meaning of most of these categories is relatively self-explanatory.

⁵ In the coming years, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will increase the financial reporting requirements for schools and may help us gain more leverage on this question.

Figure 6. Wisconsin Education Spending by Category



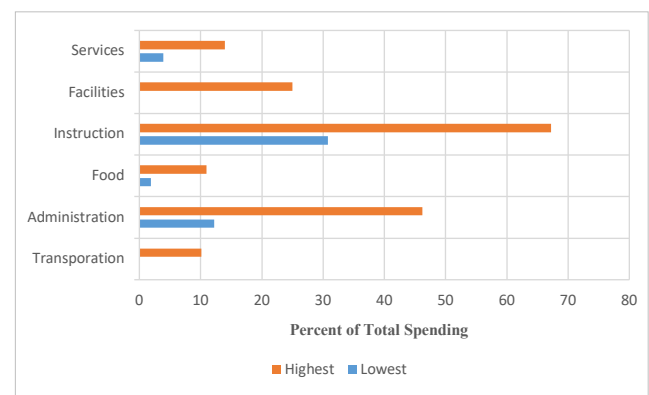
The table below presents the average expenditure breakdown by school districts in these categories. Perhaps reassuringly, spending on instruction and instructional services is the biggest piece of the pie. This portion includes the salaries of teachers, which are one of the biggest single expenditures in the state. The second largest slice is administrative spending. This slice includes things like school secretaries, but also high-salaried district administrators who are among some of the highest paid employees in the state (Flanders 2018).

That said there is extensive variation in the extent of spending on each category in Wisconsin schools. In the figure below, the range of expenditures in the state’s schools is depicted. While some districts spend as much as 67% on instruction, others spend as low as 30%. In contrast, some districts spend about 46% on school administration while others only spend about 12%. Administrative spending and instructional spending do seem to come at a cost to one another. Districts that spend 25% or more of their budget on administrative costs spend about 2% less on instructional costs, a difference that is statistically significant ($p < .01$), though the

substantive impact of such a 2% difference may be open to debate.

One may note that some districts have almost no transportation costs. These are compact, suburban districts such as Cudahy and South Milwaukee which offer no or very limited bus services, allowing them to spend less than 1% of their per-pupil costs on transportation.

Figure 7. Spending by Category, Wisconsin



The wide variation found here in categorical spending allows us to test whether we can observe any relationship of spending patterns to student outcomes. Table 4 below shows the results of a regression analysis using our Forward Exam performance results from earlier in the paper in relationship to spending in each category. Note that all of the variables included in our previous tables were included in the analysis, but excluded from the table for readability. The evidence here remains quite limited that any sort of spending has a discernible impact on student outcomes. The significant coefficients, both in a negative direction, are on administrative costs and transportation costs ($p < .1$). The administrative relationship is only found in math performance. The coefficient on ELA performance is in the same direction, but does not reach traditional levels of significance. A 1% increase in administrative spending is related to a .73% decline in proficiency rates on the math portion

of the Forward Exam. This could be related to the tradeoff that occurs with instructional spending.

Table 4. Academic Outcomes and Categorical Spending

VARIABLES	Math Performance	ELA Performance
Administrative Costs	-0.738* (0.446)	-0.194 (0.405)
Facilities Costs	-0.451 (0.432)	-0.109 (0.391)
Instruction Costs	-0.519 (0.420)	-0.188 (0.381)
Student Services Costs	-0.752 (0.519)	-0.146 (0.470)
Transportation Costs	-1.045* (0.533)	-0.869* (0.483)
Constant	1.239*** (0.415)	0.816** (0.376)
Observations	361	358
R-squared	0.378	0.350

Standard errors in parentheses
*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

The negative relationship with transportation costs is significant for both math and ELA. While it cannot be directly discerned from the data, one likely explanation is that districts that have more transportation costs tend to be those that have to transport students longer distances to school. A number of academic studies have found evidence that longer commute times have a negative effect on student outcomes (e.g. Tigre, Sampaio, and Menezes 2017). However, this is not to say that student outcomes can be improved by reducing transportation expenditure.

Recommendations

Given all of this information, what policy recommendations are likely to be effective at improving educational spending in the state? While overall funding levels for the state are

relatively high, there is little doubt that there is room for creating more equity in education spending in Wisconsin. There is a funding disparity between districts, and tremendous discrepancies between the choice, public charter and traditional public schools.

One intriguing way to remedy this is the implementation of a weighted student funding system. Under weighted student funding system, the amount of funding each student receives is equal, with additional funding for students from backgrounds that data shows make their education more challenging. This includes students from low income backgrounds, minority students, English language learners, and grade levels. The weighted student funding system would give the school the exact amount of funding each student needs, rather than a lump sum to be divided over an entire student population.

Such a system would require the wholesale reworking of Wisconsin’s school-funding formula, something which there may not be the political will to approach at this time. However, it is important to note that weighted-funding formulas have received support from people on both sides of the aisle in the past. In his previous capacity as State Superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction, Governor Tony Evers advocated for increasing the equity of funding across the spectrum of schools (Klein 2017), and libertarian groups like the Reason Foundation have been significant proponents of such measures (Krainin and Gillespie 2015).

Another important idea is to increase transparency in the state’s school funding. While we include some analyses of categorical spending and student outcomes, the categories that we must use are overbroad. For researchers, local taxpayers, and families, it

is vital that information on exactly where and how money is being spent in schools becomes more available. Such a system will allow for better insights into what spending is and is not effective for improving student outcomes, and allow for the creation of smarter spending choices, at both the local and state level.

Finally, private schools in the state's choice programs and charter schools do more with less. Research by WILL (Flanders 2018; Flanders 2017) and others (e.g. Cowen 2013; Witte 2018) have found that achievement in such schools equals or exceeds that in traditional public schools, all while receiving thousands of dollars less per student. Private school choice represents a savings from the perspective of the state, and public schools end up with slightly more money per student when a child leaves for choice. Policymakers should work to encourage more opportunities for students to take advantage of these educational options. This includes lifting the enrollment caps on the Wisconsin Parental Choice program, and lifting the income caps on the state's other school choice options. More chartering should be encouraged by the establishment of a new, statewide authorizer.

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Appendix: High/Low Spending & Outcomes

The chart below shows the districts in Wisconsin the highest and lowest quantile of spending and/or performance. Performance is based on math proficiency. There would be few changes if based on ELA. These districts represent the extremes—many districts fall somewhere in between.

Low Spending, High Outcomes			High Spending, High Outcomes		
Bonduel	Kimberly Area	Randolph	Cassville	Menomonee Falls	Rice Lake Area
Brillion	Luxemburg- Casco	Rib Lake	Chetek- Weyerhaeuser	Mineral Point U.	Richmond
Bristol #1	Mishicot	Rosendale- Brandon	Elkhart Lake- Glenbeaulah	Minocqua J1	Sevastopol
Cornell	Mosinee	Slinger	Elmbrook	Monona Grove	Shorewood
De Pere	Mukwanago	Winneconne	Fox Point J2	New Berlin	Trevor- Wilmot
Hortonville Area	Neenah Joint	Wrightstown	Gibraltar Area	Monona Grove	Washington- Caldwell
Howards Grove	New London		Harland- Lakeside J3	North Lakeland	Wheatland J1
Kaukauna Area	New Richmond		Lake Country	Norway J7	Wisconsin Heights
Kewaskum	Oconto Falls		Linn J6	Oakfield	
Kiel Area	Osceola		Maple Dale- Indian Hill	Paris J1	
Low Spending, Low Outcomes			High Spending, Low Outcomes		
Almond - Bancroft	Omro		Albany	La Crosse	Rhineland
Antigo Unified	Plymouth Joint		Bayfield	La Farge	Rio Community
Beloit	Rosholt		Bowler	Lac du Flambeau #1	Sharon J11
Berlin Area	Shawno		Cadott Community	Lake Holcombe	Suring Public
Black Riverfalls	Sparta Area		Elcho	Madison Met.	Tigerton
Clintonville	Tomorrow River		Goodman- Armstrong Creek	Menominee Indian	Wabeno Area
Colfax	Tri-County Area		Greenwood	Montello	Washington
Marinette	Whitehall		Gresham	Plum City	Weston
Merrill Area			Independence	Prairie Farm Public	White Lake
North Fond du Lac			Iowa- Grant	Racine Unified	Williams Bay