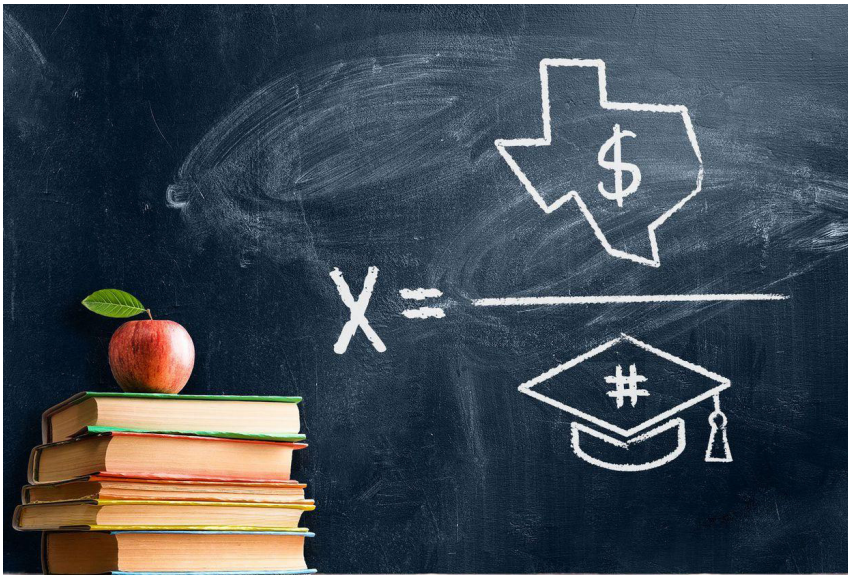


Texas ranks 36th nationally in per-student education spending. Here's how much it spends.

Total spending on public education has stayed relatively steady over the past decade. But who is paying for it has shifted.

BY **ALEX SAMUELS** MAY 15, 2018 8 HOURS AGO



TEXplainer

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Today's Texplainer question was inspired by reader Kathie Glass.

Hey, Texplainer: How much is spent educating the average public school student in Texas?

It depends on who you ask.

Both the Texas Education Agency and the National Education Association track per-pupil funding. But their numbers don't quite add up.

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The former, which calculates budgeted expenditures by school district, will tell you that Texas spent \$9,150 per student for the 2016 fiscal year — a slight increase from the year prior when Texas spent \$8,937 per student.

The [NEA](#), a teachers group, tells a slightly different story.

According to the latest data released by the NEA, Texas spent \$10,456 per student for the 2017-18 school year — \$2,300 below the national average. Clay Robison, a spokesman for the Texas State Teachers Association, which is affiliated with the NEA, said the national education group gets its figures from the Legislative Budget Board.

In the 2016 fiscal year, the NEA said Texas spent roughly \$9,471 for each public school student.

So what accounts for the slight difference? Sheryl Pace, a senior analyst for the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association, said it's because the NEA's numbers aren't adjusted for inflation and likely don't include debt service expenditures.

“That's money they spend to pay off bonds that they issued, to build building and classrooms and football stadiums,” Pace said. “If NEA does not include debt service and if you added the debt service to their number, it'd be very close to TEA's number.”

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Overall, the NEA ranked Texas 36th in the nation for per-pupil spending for the 2017-18 school year — same as in the 2016-17 school year. The District of Columbia (\$21,159), New York (\$23,384) and Alaska (\$23,005) are among the states with the highest per-student expenditures. Idaho (\$7,142), Utah (\$6,986) and Indiana (\$7,267) fell on the lowest end of the spectrum.

Texas' ranking in per-pupil spending has drawn the ire of Texas teachers associations.

“The bottom line on this is that local property taxpayers pay more per student, on average, than the state government does,” Robison said. “That's because the state refuses to adequately pay their share for public education.”

Total spending on public education has stayed relatively steady over the past decade. But who is paying for it has shifted. The money used to educate the average public school student comes from state, federal and local dollars. In 2008, state and local districts were

contributing about \$18 billion each to fund K-12 public education. By 2017, the Texas population had grown significantly, but the state's contribution had only grown slightly — to a little more than \$19 billion. Meanwhile, local school districts' shares had grown to roughly \$27 billion.

The issue of state versus local funding for public education has been a point of contention in the Legislature and doesn't seem to be going away anytime soon.

“The trend line of a drop in state aid, specifically to school districts over the past decade or more, is one of the more significant problems in school finance and will continue to be,” said Ellen Williams, an Austin-based consultant and attorney for several education associations.

Tensions came to a head during last year's legislative session after House and Senate education leaders clashed on how to best address school finance. But lawmakers are looking to iron out their disagreements: In late January, the Texas Commission on Public School Finance met for the first time to work toward developing legislative recommendations for overhauling funding for the Texas public education system.

The bottom line: The TEA says Texas spent \$9,150 per student for the 2016 fiscal year — a slight increase from the year prior when Texas spent \$8,937 per student. The NEA says Texas spent \$10,456 per student for the 2017-18 school year — a number \$2,300 below the national average.