QuickPoint! – Who says Oregon spends $13,230 per public school student? The National Education Association, that’s who!

By Steve Buckstein

Ever since Oregon’s property tax limitation Measure 5 shifted the bulk of education funding from local sources to the state general fund in 1990, public education advocates have claimed that our schools are severely underfunded, spending less than most other states. They want the legislature to raise taxes now to rectify this supposed crisis.

Ask a knowledgeable Oregonian how much money is spent per student in our public schools and they might say the number is about $8,781, which is what the state currently gives school districts per student.

But, ask the nation’s largest teachers union, the National Education Association, and you’ll get a much different answer. According to the NEA’s just-released Rankings & Estimates report for 2016 and 2017, when you count local, state, and federal funding, current expenditures per Oregon student in Average Daily Attendance are estimated to be $13,230. That puts us five percent above the national average of $12,572. Oregon spends more than 33 other states.*

Add in spending for capital outlays and interest payments, and that $13,230 number goes up to total expenditures per student of $14,911.**

Even at the lower number, public schools spend over $396,000 a year for each 30-student classroom. Subtract the average teacher salary plus benefits of some $85,000, and Oregonians should ask where the additional $300,000-plus is going before even thinking about raising taxes on anyone.

* There are several ways to calculate current expenditures per student. The NEA computes two of those ways in this report. Definitions are given in the report Glossary. Oregon’s 2017 Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of pupils “under the guidance and direction of teachers” is estimated in Table I-3 to be 531,434, Oregon’s 2017 Fall Enrollment of pupils registered in the fall of the 2017 school year is estimated in Table I-6 to be 578,176. Because there are more pupils registered in school districts than actually in class on an average day, current expenditures per ADA of $13,230 (Table J-9) is higher than current expenditures per Fall Enrollment, which is $12,161 (Table J-10). Oregon spends more than 33 other states under both these methods.

** Under the two ways of calculating expenditures per student explained above, the author’s calculation of estimated 2017 total expenditures based on Average Daily Attendance of $14,911 is higher than that based on estimated Fall Enrollment, which is $13,705.

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