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Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

www.cascadepolicy.org
info@cascadepolicy.org

4850 SW Scholls Ferry Road
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

t: 503.242.0900
f: 503.242.3822
info@cascadepolicy.org
www.cascadepolicy.org

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.

Steve Buckstein is Senior Policy Analyst and Founder of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.

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