

NY spends \$22,593 per pupil, but there's wide disparity

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The New York state Education Building in Albany, NY (Photo: Albany Bureau)

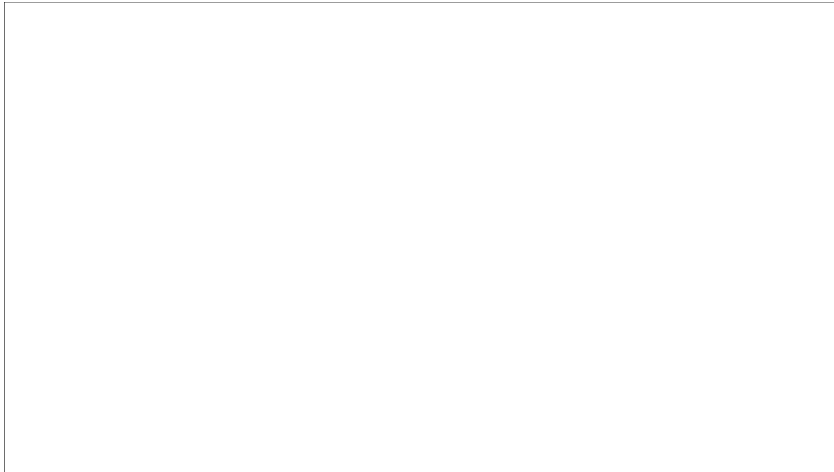
ALBANY -- [New York](#) spends the most in the nation on its schools, but the disparity between rich and poor schools continues to grow, a report shows.

Rich schools spent on average \$23,000 in New York while poor districts spend \$17,200.

The reason: Wealthy districts can tap into its property-tax base, and poor districts can't, the report Wednesday from the state Association of School Business Officials said.

"These facts show that both the level of funding and how that funding is spent are equally important to providing a sound basic education to all students in the state," the group's executive director Michael Borges said in a statement.

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The report serves as the latest salvo between school groups and the state as the sides gear up for next year's budget battle over education aid.

In the current fiscal year, state aid is up 6.5 percent from the previous year -- reaching nearly \$25 billion.

Highest in the nation

New York spends an average of \$22,593 per pupil, far exceeding any other state. It's 87 percent above the national average.

New York has increased school aid by \$5.3 billion over the past five years, up 27 percent, while state agency budgets have been largely flat and the state has maintained a 2 percent spending cap, said Morris Peters, a spokesman for the state Budget Division.

He said the spending proves that schools are a top priority, saying, "New York public schools now spend more per pupil than any other state and 87 percent above the national average."

But school groups contend the numbers can be misconstrued: New York's wealthy districts can raise more money through property taxes than poorer ones, creating a disparity that has not been made up by state aid.

School taxes represent about 60 percent of a homeowner's annual tax bill.

New York schools spent nearly \$63 billion on education in the 2014-15 school year, up 4 percent from the year before.

But the average state aid came to \$9,330 per pupil, the school business group said.

High vs. low wealth

The report said in the 2013-14 school year, low-need, wealthy schools spent about \$5,800 more per pupil than high-need, poorer districts.

Part of the issue is the state's school-funding formula, which uses demographic data to determine how much aid each of the state's roughly 700 school districts.

School groups have railed against inconsistencies in the formula, which was first installed in 2007.

A report by the USA Today Network's Albany Bureau in August [found a series of problems \(/story/news/2016/08/25/new-york-state-education-school-districts-funding-formula/89306728/\)](#) with the formula, such as using outdated data and being influenced by politics.

The state Board of Regents, which governs education policy in New York, has recommended [a series of changes \(/story/news/local/new-york/2016/09/12/school-aid-formula-changes-recommended/90266428/\)](#) to the formula for the state Legislature to consider next year when it returns to the Capitol next year.

The board on Monday, meanwhile, expects to review its proposal for state education aid for the fiscal year that starts April 1.

The proposal, which has yet to be released, will then be forwarded to Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who will put out his budget plan in mid-January. The Legislature has until March 31 to approve the spending plan.

Aid increases

School groups last month called for a \$2 billion increase in school aid -- a similar request to what it sought last year.

The Legislature and Cuomo last year agreed to \$1.5 billion more.

The groups are also seeking changes to the state's property-tax cap, which has limited increases in property taxes to less than 2 percent a year.

This year, the cap was a mere 0.12 percent. The groups want to keep the cap at 2 percent each year; now, it's based on the inflation rate, leading to the recent drop in the cap limit.

Cuomo has opposed any major changes to the cap, which he has touted as successfully limiting the growth in property taxes.

"Schools are making progress, but more must be done," John Yagielski, chairman of the Educational Conference Board, an umbrella group of unions and school advocates in New York, said in a statement.

"This requires adequate state aid for next year, along with broader action on issues such as foundation aid and the tax cap to provide a more stable, more sustainable future for our schools."

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