

Iowa K-12 Public School Funding Per Student in Iowa

Understand the Data

These charts (below and right) appeared in social media posts by legislators as the Iowa Legislature debated the FY 2027 per pupil increase impacting school funding for public school students.

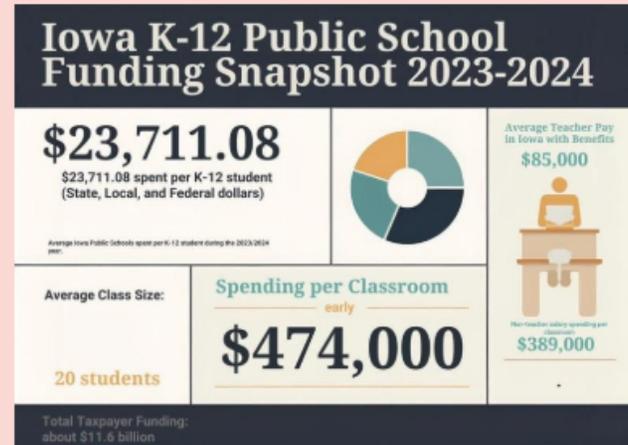
Two variables are needed to calculate Funding Per Student. Comparisons to national averages require apples to apples figures for realistic meaning.

Three questions to ask legislators that share information about Iowa school funding per student:

- 1) How many students are included in the calculation?
- 2) How much money is being considered?
- 3) What national figures are relevant?

In both of these charts, it appears that the number of students funded through the formula is underestimated and the amount of money is overestimated, thus inflating the final dollar of funding per public student claimed. Inconsistent comparisons with other states' expenditures also come into play.

House Proposed School Budget



The Iowa House version of the school funding was released this past week. The Student Supplemental Aid (SSA) is higher than that proposed by the Senate. It sets SSA at 2% which means the state now pays \$8,148 per student, an increase of \$160 over last school year (in 2012 = \$5883). I've heard and read that some are of the opinion the state is underfunding public education. The Iowa Constitution dictates we have a balanced budget.

According to the most recent Certified Annual Report related to Iowa school funding, Iowa public schools spent **\$23,711.08** per K-12 student during the 2023-2024 school year which included local, state, and federal dollars. The national average for per pupil spending is roughly \$16,000 per student.

The total number of students that school year was 483,699. The average class size in Iowa is roughly 20 students. That means Iowa is spending almost \$474,000 per classroom.

The average teacher salary in Iowa is about \$63,500. With benefits included, it is about \$85,000. That means roughly \$389,000 of non-teacher salary spending per classroom.

Iowa's K-12 public schools receive funding from three levels of government. Local, state, and federal governments all provide various amounts of tax dollars for K-12 school districts. Across all three levels of funding plus various other financing sources, the total amount of taxpayer funding in the 2023-2024 school year for public schools was about \$11.5 billion.

FY2027 PK-12 Education Funding* in Iowa

\$4.02B State Ed Funding + **\$3.25B** Local Taxes + **\$720.7M** SAVE Funding

+ **\$639M** Other Local Funds + **\$467M** Federal Funding

\$9.1 Billion

PK-12 public schools

\$19,235

Per public school student

*Estimates by Iowa Department of Management

Understand the Data

How many students? Both pieces appear to use K-12 Budget Enrollment (483,699 in FY 2023-24 and 473,329 in FY 2026-27) rather than counting all students supported with the funds counted. Budget Enrollment excludes:

- Preschool students in public schools (28,682 students), plus those served in community partner PKs funded with SVPP funding.
- Homeschool students served by Homeschool Assistance Programs (HSAP), and homeschool students dual-enrolled in public schools to access courses such as band, calculus, or college credit courses.
- Private school students accessing AP or Community College Courses through the public schools, and private school students with special needs who are provided special education services paid by public school taxpayers.

How much money (and is it really available for classrooms)? The following items are included in the numbers reported on the charts:

- Duplication of Dollars: About half a billion out of the \$11.5 B (FY 2024) or \$9.1 B (FY 2027) is tuition paid from one school district to another for open enrollment. Those funds are received in the district of residence as state aid and property taxes, and received in the receiving district as local revenue/tuition. There are many sharing arrangements through which one school district pays another (operational sharing, whole grade sharing, CTE academies, Therapeutic Classrooms, shared extracurriculars between public/public and public/private schools), which are counted twice in the numbers reported in the charts.
- Private or Other Funds: Public schools receive \$9 million for private school transportation, either paid to private school parents or to provide busing. Additionally, \$363 million (FY 2024) for food and nutrition is primarily parent pay or federal reimbursement for meals, rather than state resources.
- Bonding and Construction Funds: SAVE Fund total revenues are \$639 M, some of which is used locally for property tax relief, busing, technology, and safety, and some for construction (\$402 M in bonds and interest, which future revenues will pay back).
- Over \$1 billion for Special Education Services mandated by the federal government (cannot be used to hire a 4th-grade teacher or provide a theater program, for example).

Relevant National Figures and Comparisons with Other States – Is the data comparing apples to apples?

- The FY2024 analysis in the charts indicates that Iowa spends \$23.7K while the national average is roughly \$16K. The [Education Data Project](#), which may be the source for the \$16K average national expenditure, indicates that Iowa's FY2024 current spending (without capital outlay) is \$14,369 per student, which "ranks Iowa 34th in K-12 education funding and 35th in spending."
- US Census data in May 2025 (requiring consistent reporting from all states) shows Iowa PK-12 instruction spending was \$13,792, ranking Iowa 9th in the Midwest and 36th in the nation. They report the national average of instructional expenditures in FY2023 as \$16,526.

Is it enough for Iowa's students?

- Are there enough applicants for teachers, bus drivers, paraeducators, school counselors, librarians, etc.?
- Do salary increases for school staff keep pace with inflation? Or, are schools losing staff to private-sector jobs?
- Do schools have courses and extracurricular programs that help every student find their passion and engage in learning?
- Does school funding provide resources for unfunded mandates from the state and federal government?