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## **EDUCATION SPENDING VS TEACHERS' SALARIES**

Headlines have been dominated lately by teachers protesting low pay and on April 27 it came to a head as my local newspaper, the Pueblo *Chieftain*, front page read, “No classes at 11 D60 schools today – Participation in Denver rally the cited reason.” The two-day rally was designed to inspire lawmakers to increase education funding. But the strange thing about that is, when you actually look at the facts you see that Colorado is spending more dollars on each public school student than ever before. Unfortunately, the bureaucrats managing those dollars have not used them on pay raises for teachers.

According to a 2017 nationwide study titled “Back to the Staffing Surge” by Dr. Benjamin Scafidi at Kennesaw State University, Colorado has enjoyed a 15% increase in spending per student from 1992 to 2014 when adjusted for inflation[i]. Put another way, in 2014 Colorado public school students had 15% more real resources spent on their education compared to students in 1992. During that same period, however, the average Colorado teacher’s salary has gone down by 11% when adjusted for inflation[ii]. This of course begs the question, where did all that money go?

The answer is a huge hiring binge of non-teachers. From 1992 to 2015 Colorado has seen a 50% increase in public student enrollment, and the number of actual teachers hired has gone up by about the same, but the number of non-teachers hired has gone up a whopping 94%[iii]. These include district and school administrators, teachers’ aids, counselors, social workers, reading and math coaches,

janitors, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, curriculum specialists, etc.[iv] All this might be justified if it meant kids were benefiting from this big staffing increase, but the data show otherwise. Despite the large investment in additional personnel, student achievement outcomes did not improve. From 1992 to 2012 the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) long-term trend for 17 year olds remained flat[v], and graduation rates during the same period only increased slightly from 74% to 76%[vi].

What it did do, however, is hurt teachers. In other words, after hiring so many non-teachers there wasn't any money left over to give teachers pay raises. Had administrators simply limited the number of additional non-teachers hired to match pace with student enrollment, Colorado would have saved \$784,000,000. That would've been enough money to give each one of the 50,000 teachers in Colorado a \$15,500 pay raise.[vii]

According to the Colorado Joint Budget Committee brief for 2017-2018, almost 40% of the entire Colorado general fund is spent on K-12 education[viii]. Nothing else gets more funding than K-12 education. If you look at your paystub under "State Tax Withheld," more of that goes to public schools than anything else[ix]. The next time you buy something, if you look at your receipt under "Sales Tax," more of that goes to public schools than anything else[x].

Colorado taxpayers are not to blame for our teachers' dismal pay. The blame lies squarely with those policymakers and administrators who have mismanaged the huge amount of education money the taxpayers have already forked over.

John Pickerill, is a former columnist with the Indiana Policy Review Foundation. He now resides in Pueblo and contributes regularly to *The Chieftain*. He advocates for individual liberty, free market economics, private property rights, and Constitutionally-limited government

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[i] Scafidi, Benjamin, "Back to the Staffing Surge," May 2017, Appendix 1, Table 1.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Ibid, Appendix 1, Table 2.

[iv] Ibid, p1.

[v] Ibid, Figure 3 and Figure 7.

[vi] Ibid, Figure 4.

[vii] Ibid, Appendix 1, Table 2.

[viii] State of Colorado Joint Budget Committee, "Budget in Brief Fiscal Year 2017-18," p5.

[ix] Ibid, p6.

[x] Ibid.

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