

**PER STUDENT COST FIGURES**

**For**

**THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**

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**Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs**

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## **Per Student Budget and Expenditures DC Public Schools 2006-07**

Spending per pupil is a measure frequently used to put school budgets into perspective. It facilitates comparisons over time and among school systems, and relates the overall budget to the central purpose of schools – the education of each student.

### **What “Spending” – for Which “Pupils”?**

Public discussions about DCPS spending include a wide-ranging array, often conflicting, of per pupil figures and assertions based on them. Such confusion arises because the definitions and assumptions used in calculating per pupil spending vary widely, are usually unstated, and are sometimes applied inconsistently.

In using and evaluating per pupil spending numbers accurately, several criteria are important. First, the definitions and assumptions must be clear and consistent:

- Which expenditures are included? Federal grants or only state-local funds? Capital? Debt service? Teacher retirement? Food service? State education accounting systems vary widely in the inclusion or exclusion of these and more categories.
- Which students are included? Kindergarten-grade 12 only? Pre-school? Post-secondary? Non-public tuition grant students?
- Which year do the numbers represent? Are they all from the same year?
- Do the numbers represent actual expenditures or budget? if budget – as of when? Requested budget? Adopted budget? Revised budget? New revenues only? Carryover revenues? Budgets and anticipated revenues both change in the course of a budget cycle, sometimes by tens of millions of dollars. The school system usually receives less money than it requests. A retroactive teacher pay increase funded with a supplemental appropriation can change a budget dramatically, as can mid-year budget cuts during fiscal crises. DCPS cannot carry over local funds, but does carry over some federal funds each year, which appear in City documents as though they were new funds.

Second, the spending included should be limited to dollars spent on the pupils included in the per pupil count used. For example, the federal grants in the DCPS budget include monies passed through to charter and private school students, who are not included in any DCPS pupil count. These funds should be eliminated from any DCPS per pupil funding figure, but seldom are.

Third, the kinds of expenditures and pupil count selected, in addition to matching each other, should match the question to be answered. Are we looking for a gross general indicator? The amount budgeted from local funds only? The amount actually spent on the typical student without special needs regardless of revenue source?

Fourth, comparisons and benchmarking exercises require that numbers be consistent throughout comparisons. For example, Virginia school budgets do not currently include amounts spent on non-public placements for special education students, while DC and

Maryland budgets do. Comparisons are not accurate if they are not based on consistently standardized data.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, one must bear in mind that school districts differ over time and from each other in characteristics that affect cost, especially

- Geographic cost differentials. Costs of education are especially high in the northeastern and mid Atlantic states and DCPS' stiffest competition for teachers and principals is with the surrounding suburbs. Some cities elsewhere in the country have comparably high costs, but many do not.
- Recognized student needs, notably special education, non English proficient and low-income pupils. DCPS has much higher percentages of special education and low-income pupils than its suburbs. Federal grants for these students increase DCPS revenues but not by nearly as much as the additional costs.

The following section presents DCPS per pupil spending calculated on several different – but all valid and useful – bases

### Basis 1. The Basis on Which the DC Government Provides Local Revenues

The DC government funds operating costs of DCPS and public charter school on the same per student basis each year. Formula funding does not include tuition for non-public special education students, special education transportation, or other “state-level” costs.

Average per pupil local funding for general education and overhead (excludes funding for special education and ESL instruction):

Last year FY 2007	\$8,614 per pupil
This year FY 2008	\$9,036 per pupil

Average per pupil additional local funding for ESL services, FY 2007:

Last year FY 2007	\$3,201 per ESL pupil
This year FY 2008	\$3,329 per ESL pupil

Average per pupil additional local funding for special education services:

Last year FY 2007	\$10,720 per special education pupil
This year FY 2008	\$10,917 per special education pupil

### Basis 2. DCPS Local Budget as Allocated Among General, Special and ESL Education

Per pupil figures in this budget allocation chart are similar to those in the preceding revenue listing, but not the same. The 2007 amendments to the Home Rule Charter made allocation the responsibility of the Chancellor, Mayor and City Council, but the Formula legislation provides that revenues need not be spent exactly as they are allocated by the Formula, which is based on general assumptions made well in advance

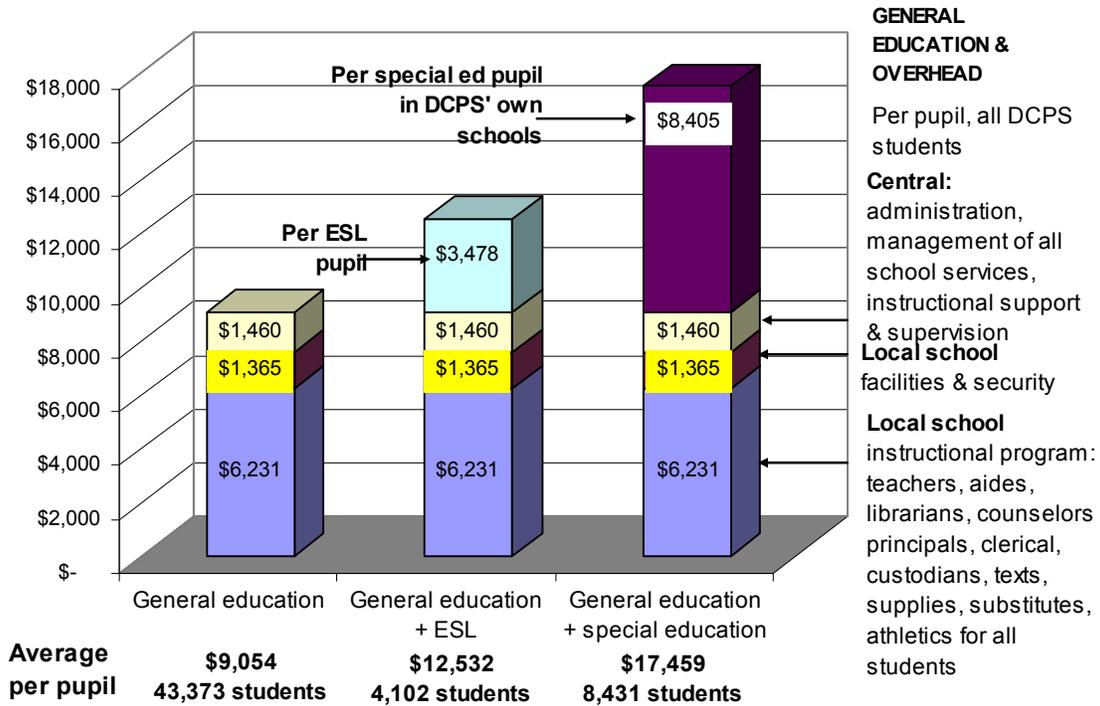
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<sup>1</sup> DC suburbs use a standardized methodology to compare per pupil budget costs, results of which appear below. The United States Department of Education collects, standardizes and publishes expenditure data nationwide. However, the process takes several years, so current data are not available from this source. The most recent fiscal year data available are discussed below.

of the fiscal year without information on details of DCPS programs and enrollment when the money is actually spent.

## DCPS Per Pupil Budget for General, ESL and Special Education FY 2006 - Local Funds

(does not include state agency costs or private/suburban placement tuition and special education transportation)



Special education and, to a lesser extent, language minority (ESL) education costs skew the overall averages. The budget for the typical DCPS student is a little over \$9,000 annually for instruction, facilities, security and all central overhead.

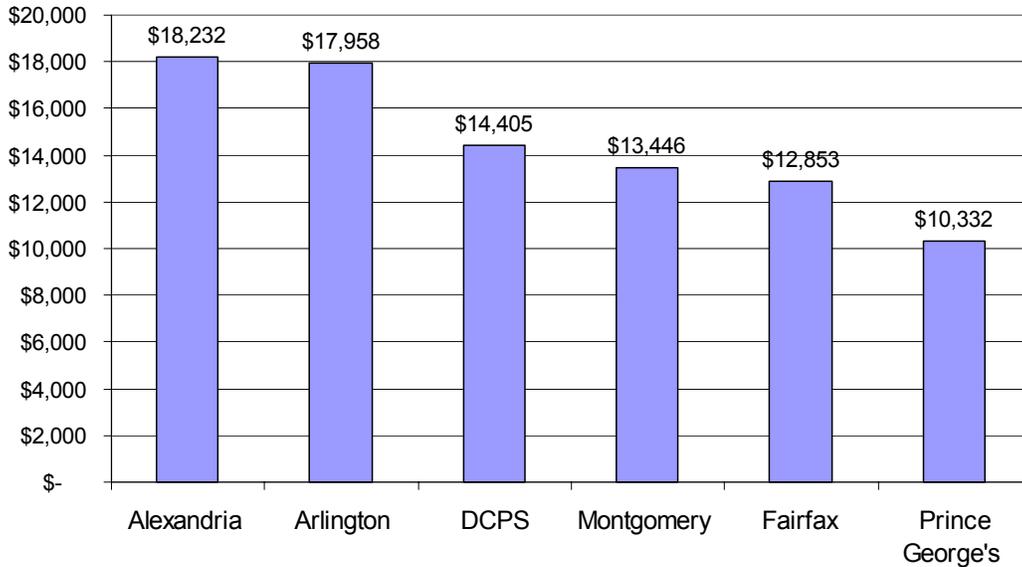
### Basis 3: Comparison with Suburban District Budgets

The chart below depicts the FY 2007 per pupil budgets of DCPS and its surrounding school districts. The suburban numbers are calculated by the Washington Area Boards of Education (WABE) by a standardized methodology that meets all the criteria above. We have applied the same methodology to the DCPS budget and enrollment.

The WABE methodology differs from the previous figures by including federal entitlement grant funds. As applied to DCPS, it also includes teacher retirement, which we added from the city budget. In FY 2007 DCPS had almost \$4,000 less per pupil than Alexandria, about \$3,500 less than Arlington County, roughly the same as Montgomery County, and about \$1,500 more than Fairfax County. Prince George's County is far behind all the others. Although the figures in the chart exclude special education tuition,

they include transportation. DCPS transports only special education students whose IEPs require it, while the suburbs transport most students. Despite the relatively small number of students transported, DCPS per pupil transportation costs spread across all students were far higher -- \$1,293 -- than suburban costs -- \$492 to \$755 per pupil.

**Per Pupil Operating Budget: Including Transportation  
DCPS and Surrounding Suburbs FY 2007  
State, Local and Federal Entitlement Revenues**



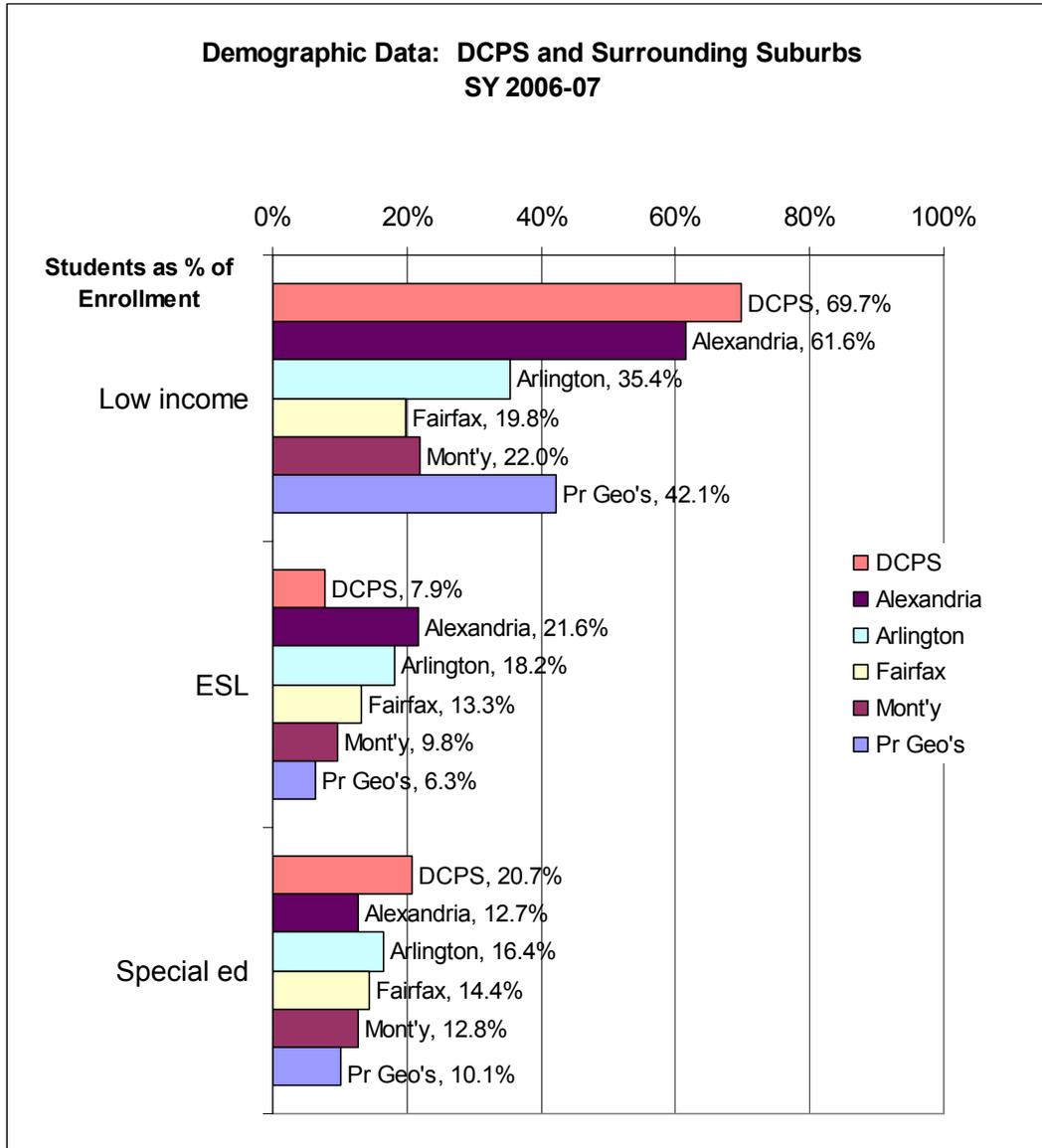
The WABE methodology includes all local and federal funding in the districts' budgets except:

- Food service
- Construction/capital and debt service
- Summer school
- Adult education
- Special education tuition
- Other state level costs (DCPS only): state agency functions, charter school oversight
- Federal funding for state agency functions, private & charter schools, and short-term restricted programs
- Private grants and intra-District transfers

WABE figures include:

- DC Teacher Retirement
- Transit Subsidy
- Federal '06 funding for DCPS LEA:
  - Titles I, II, IV, VI, VII
  - Vocational education
  - Special education
  - Impact Aid, Indirect Cost
  - Head Start
  - Reading First
  - Tech Literacy Challenge Fund
  - Comprehensive School Reform
  - State Assessments

What the chart above does not reflect is any factor for student needs. As the chart below illustrates, DCPS has the highest percentage of low-income students in the area, three times as high as Fairfax and Montgomery Counties, and a much higher percentage of special education students, who receive higher cost services. Based on student characteristics, DCPS should spend significantly more per pupil on average than any of its suburbs.



**Basis 4: Nationwide comparison: National Center for Education Statistics**

The United States Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Bureau of the Census (Census) collect data on actual expenditures annually from every school district in the country. These differ from preceding methodologies in being based on expenditures rather than budget and in including all

federal grants, private and intra-District funds. In the latest year for which NCES/Census figures are published, FY 2005, DCPS expenditures are shown as \$12,979 per pupil.<sup>2</sup> The published figures include all school districts with more than 10,000 pupils. DCPS spent less than 22 urban and 10 other of these school districts. Many of these are located in areas with costs of education as high or higher than the District's, but even when adjusted by a geographic cost index, all but one spent more than DCPS.

**Per Pupil Amounts for Current Spending -- Public School Districts FY 2005**

<b>Urban districts</b>	<b>Nominal \$\$</b>	<b>Cost adj'd \$\$</b>	<b>Other large districts (&gt;10,000)</b>	<b>Nominal \$\$</b>	<b>Cost adj'd \$\$</b>
Newark, NJ	\$ 20,482	\$ 17,794	Arlington County, VA	\$ 15,275	\$ 12,649
Trenton, NJ	\$ 18,726	\$ 16,485	Sachem, NY	\$ 14,676	\$ 13,060
Jersey City, NJ	\$ 17,549	\$ 14,262	Half Hollow Hills, NY	\$ 14,666	\$ 13,051
Camden, NJ	\$ 16,683	\$ 15,999	Smithtown, NY	\$ 14,551	\$ 12,949
East Orange, NJ	\$ 16,681	\$ 14,492	Newton, MA	\$ 14,473	\$ 12,848
Paterson, NJ	\$ 16,302	\$ 13,249	Alexandria, VA	\$ 14,467	\$ 11,980
Boston, MA	\$ 16,124	\$ 14,282	Arlington Heights, IL	\$ 14,450	\$ 13,243
Union City, NJ	\$ 15,773	\$ 12,819	William Floyd, NY	\$ 14,206	\$ 12,642
Passaic, NJ	\$ 15,531	\$ 12,622	Brentwood, NY	\$ 13,789	\$ 12,271
New Rochelle, NY	\$ 15,529	\$ 12,620	Cherry Hill, NJ	\$ 13,067	\$ 12,531
Elizabeth, NJ	\$ 15,467	\$ 13,437	Palatine Township, IL	\$ 12,964	\$ 11,881
Yonkers, NY	\$ 15,333	\$ 12,461			
Hartford, CT	\$ 14,704	\$ 13,933			
Stamford, CT	\$ 14,308	\$ 11,381			
Mount Vernon, NY	\$ 14,145	\$ 11,496			
Buffalo, NY	\$ 14,025	\$ 15,311			
New Haven, CT	\$ 13,967	\$ 13,346			
Syracuse, NY	\$ 13,839	\$ 15,181			
New York City, NY	\$ 13,755	\$ 11,179			
Rochester, NY	\$ 13,634	\$ 14,379			
Norwalk, CT	\$ 13,502	\$ 10,740			
Newburgh, NY	\$ 13,337	\$ 13,011			
DCPS	\$ 12,801	\$ 10,748			

At the state level, the District (actually DCPS only) was the third highest spending in nominal dollars, but ninth in the nation when adjusted for geographic cost differences:

**Per Pupil Amounts for Current Spending -- Public Elementary-Secondary School Systems by State FY 2005**

<b>State</b>	<b>Nominal \$\$</b>	<b>Cost adjusted \$\$</b>
Vermont	\$ 11,835	\$ 14,001
Wyoming	\$ 10,255	\$ 12,709
New York State	\$ 14,119	\$ 12,632
New Jersey	\$ 13,800	\$ 12,269
Maine	\$ 10,106	\$ 12,084
Alaska	\$ 10,830	\$ 11,449
Pennsylvania	\$ 10,552	\$ 11,108
Montana	\$ 8,058	\$ 10,861
District of Columbia (DCPS)	\$ 12,979	\$ 10,748

<sup>2</sup> Published in U.S. Census Bureau, *Public Education Finances 2005*, issued April 2007. Table 8 provides per pupil amounts at the state level, and Table 17 per pupil amounts at the local school district level.

Census/NCES figures include no adjustments for differing costs of living or education in different regions. A geographic cost index recently issued by NCES, based on wages of professional persons educated comparably to teachers, shows that DC has a higher cost of education than the average for any state. In addition, like other cities, DCPS has a significantly higher proportion of higher cost students – special education and low income – than the averages in the states.