

Think. Ask. Act.

Oklahoma, Education Spending & Special Education¹

FOLLOW THE MONEY...

\$550 BILLION: annual spending on public elementary & secondary education in US (in 2000, this figure was \$360 BILLION) of which \$90+ billion is spent on special education services.

According to the latest US Census, about 5% of all school children (up to age 17) have a disability –almost 3 million students. Cognitive difficulties comprised more than half of these.

STATE + LOCAL + FEDERAL contribute to public education funding.

Most funding comes from an almost equitable split between local and state sources. Federal money accounts for approximately 10%. Overwhelmingly, taxation and appropriation impacts the amount of LOCAL funding available to public education. In 2008, OK reported receiving only \$769,000 in FEDERAL aid.

\$10,591: US average on spending per student

\$7,800: Oklahoma average on spending per student – placing us 46th nationally. However, our state's graduation rates (75%+) when compared to how much we spend (per student), actually puts us ahead of many states who spend more per student.

While special education costs have risen in our state (because more students require services), federal special education spending (IDEA Part B) as well as state special education spending have not kept pace.

Spending per student differs by state, by district and can even differ by individual school sites.

LEARN THE BACK STORY:

In 2001, President Bush created the **President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education** which held 13 hearings and meetings throughout the nation and listened to the concerns and comments from parents, teachers, principals, education officials and the public. Have things changed in terms of special education and funding in the last decade?

Excerpts from 2001 findings: *There is no scientific or particular public policy basis for defining full funding of the federal portion of special education at 40 percent of average per-pupil expenditure (AAPE). In 1975, the congressional conferees arrived at the 40 percent funding level in reconciling differences between the House and Senate versions of their originally passed bills. The conferees tied special education funding to APPE because they believed the cost of special education was approximately twice the cost of regular education. Since that time, Congress has expanded IDEA eligibility to include students with high-incidence disabilities, who constitute most children currently receiving services under the Act. The U.S. Department of Education now estimates that as a nation, we are spending about 90 percent (1.9 times) more on the average eligible student for special education than we do on the average general education student with no special needs. While the Commission believes that increasing appropriations for IDEA should remain a federal priority, it recommends keeping funding for this program discretionary. While students with disabilities receive civil rights-like protections under IDEA, it is incorrect to claim that the IDEA Part B program is an "entitlement" that should not be subject to the appropriations process. Like many other critical federal priorities, Congress and the Administration should have the ability to determine the appropriate federal funding level for IDEA on an annual basis.*

SUMMARY OF FINDINGSⁱⁱ

Finding 1: IDEA is generally providing basic legal safeguards and access for children with disabilities. However, the current system often places process above results, and bureaucratic compliance above student achievement, excellence and outcomes. The system is driven by complex regulations, excessive paperwork and ever-increasing administrative demands at all levels—for the child, the parent, the local education agency and the state education agency.

Finding 2: The current system uses an antiquated model that waits for a child to fail, instead of a model based on prevention and intervention.

Finding 3: Children placed in special education are general education children first. Despite this basic fact, educators and policy-makers think about the two systems as separate and tally the cost of special education as a separate program, not as additional services with resultant add-on expense. In such a system, children with disabilities are often treated not as children who are general education students. They are considered separately with unique costs—creating incentives for academic isolation—preventing the pooling of all available resources to aid learning.

Finding 4: When a child fails to make progress in special education, parents do not have adequate options and recourse.

Finding 5: The culture of compliance has often developed from the pressures of litigation, diverting much energy from the public schools' first mission: educating every child.

Finding 6: Many of the current methods of identifying children with disabilities lack validity. As a result, thousands of children are misidentified every year, while many others are not identified early enough or at all.

Finding 7: Children with disabilities require highly qualified teachers. Teachers, parents and education officials desire better preparation, support and professional development related to the needs of serving these children.

DID YOU KNOW?

Each year, Medicaid spends more than \$1.6 billion at some schools for students with disabilities including physical, occupational and speech therapy, mental health services and transportation if these are written into a child's IEP. It is the responsibility of local school districts to apply for these funds. Learn more by googling: "NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MEDICAID IN EDUCATION".

During Commission hearings, witnesses reaffirmed...concerns about costs for local districts derived from high-need children with significant disabilities who require expensive placements within and outside of the district. Critical shortages of qualified staff in special education exacerbate these concerns.

[T]he Commission recommends that the federal government assist states and localities in funding the cost of the most expensive students.

Some states – MD, MO, NY, NJ, UT, VT, WA – established extraordinary cost funds to assist local school districts with offsetting the fiscal impact of these high-cost students.”

President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, final report

ⁱ Sources are US Census Bureau, National Center for Education Statistics, New America Foundation Federal Education Budget Project and the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE). You may want to also subscribe to [On Special Education](#) blog @ Education Weekly: <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/speced/> by Nirvi Shah.

ⁱⁱ Excerpted.