

## POLICY NOTE

# New government report shows massive \$9.7 billion increase in education spending provided no improvement for Washington students

By Liv Finne, Director, Center for Education

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### Key Findings

1. The federal government just announced 2017 scores for Washington's 4th and 8th graders on the NAEP, the national test given every two years to measure student progress in math, science, reading and writing.
2. Washington's leaders promised more spending on schools would improve student learning results.
3. Since 2009 the state of Washington has increased spending on the schools by \$9.7 billion, a 75 percent increase.
4. 2017 NAEP scores show test scores have barely budged. The achievement gap between minority and white students remains as large as ever.
5. Other states are finding that student learning improves when parents are given access to public charter schools, Education Savings Accounts, vouchers, online learning, and other forms of school choice.
6. More money has not improved public schools. Further, state data show that in 2017 administrators sent 160,000 Washington state children to 253 failing public schools.

Last month the U.S. Department of Education reported the 2017 results for the NAEP test, known as the Nation's Report Card. The test is given every two years to 4th and 8th graders in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to measure student progress in math, science, reading, and writing.

For years Washington state has enacted massive increases in education spending on the pledge that more spending would improve student learning, so I decided to go back and review what state leaders have promised us, and compare it with the latest NAEP scores.

I found that the promises made to the public are false – more spending has not resulted in improvements in student learning.

The NAEP results for Washington state show test scores have barely budged. The achievement gap between minority and white students remains as large as ever. Yet these nearly-flat test results come after school administrators and unions have received what they constantly ask for; huge increases in their budgets. Education spending by the state of Washington is up by \$9.7 billion, or 75%, in nine years.

The poor levels of student learning are not what state leaders promised. Here, in their own words, is what they told us in 2009:

Governor Gregoire, on signing a spending-increase bill (HB 2261), said, "As a result of the bill, the financial system of education will be linked closely with education program outcomes." She said more money would help "...those who are struggling in our public school system so that every single child gets a world-class education..."

Rep. Pat Sullivan (D-Covington) said "Our [spending] proposal will make substantive improvements in our schools, our classrooms, for our children."

Senator Fred Jarrett (D-Mercer Island) said, ""We will see improved instruction..." "We think this [funding] will make our kids much more successful in school and in life."

Senator Jarrett also said "...this puts us on track that in three to six years we will see significant improvements in the investment in education and...in outcomes for our kids."

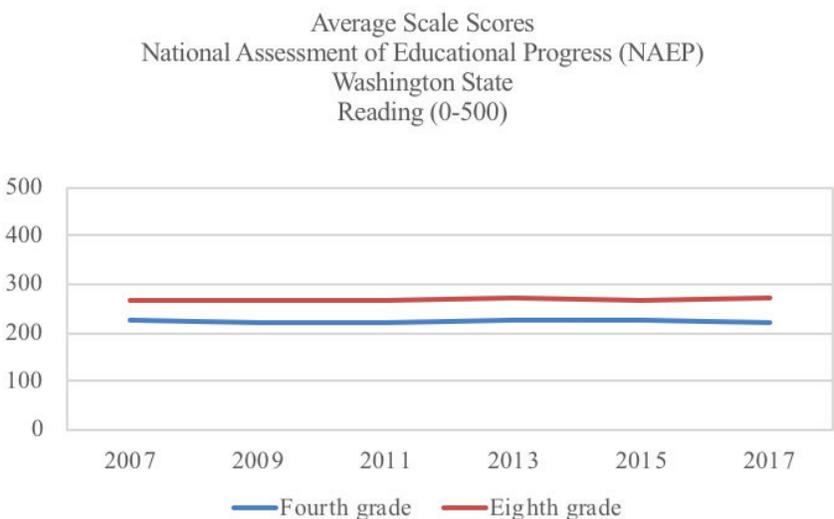
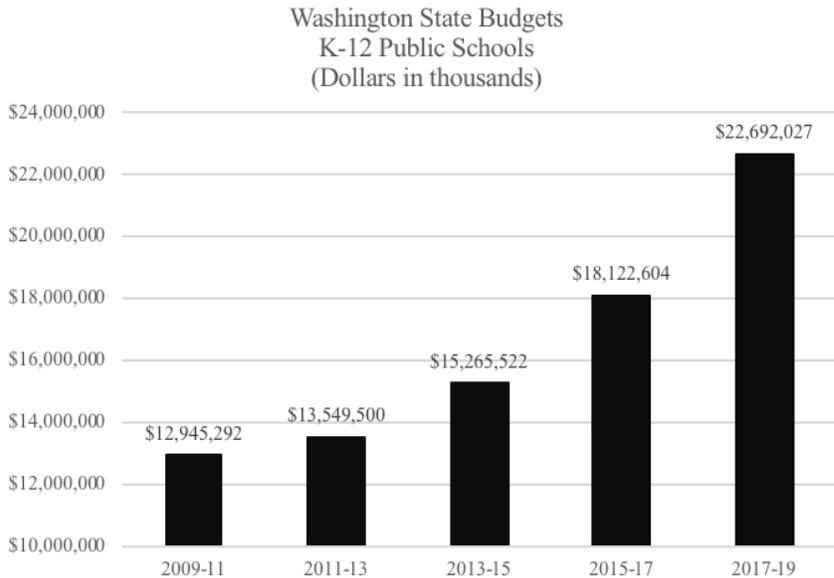
Representative Ross Hunter (D-Medina) said, “We have an opportunity this year to make the structural changes...in a way that results in more increases in student learning.”

Mary Jean Ryan, head of the State Board of Education, said, “These [spending] bills offer a new investment strategy for a vastly better K-12 system.”

When asked by *The Seattle Times* whether increased spending would “...yield significant improvement in education results,” Mary Jean Ryan said, “Yes.”

These disappointing findings are reported in government data. The chart below shows state spending on schools increased from \$12.9 billion in 2009 to \$22.6 billion today, up 75% percent. (Inflation over the period was 18%).

Yet NAEP test results for 2017 show the level of student learning has not moved. Below, for example, are the reported results math and reading. All NAEP results are available from the National Center for Education Statistics.





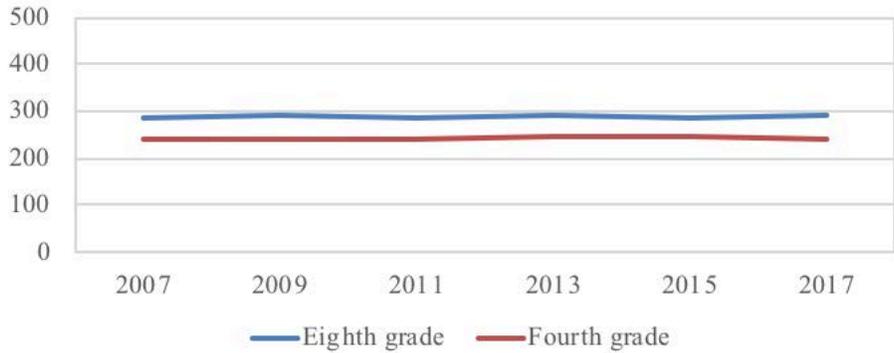
**Liv Finne** is the Director of the Center for Education at Washington Policy Center. She is the author of *An Option for Learning: An Assessment of Student Achievement in Charter Public Schools*, which in 2011 reignited the charter school debate in Washington state. She wrote “*Why parents will love charter schools,*” “*Why teachers will love charter schools,*” and many other publications during the 2012 public debate on Initiative 1240, the nation’s first charter school initiative. When charter schools came under attack from the state teachers union, she wrote “*Analysis: Why the state supreme court ruling against charter schools is wrong.*” She is also the author of Washington Policy Center’s widely-read education blog, and of Washington Policy Center’s *Education Reform Plan: Eight Practical Ways to Improve Public Schools*. Liv holds a law degree from Boston University School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wellesley College. She retired from civil litigation practice to raise two children and work as business partner for a small business she owns with her husband.

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Average Scale Scores  
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)  
Washington State  
Math (0-500)



So here is what we know: More money has not improved public schools. Further, state data show that in 2017 administrators sent 160,000 Washington state children to 253 failing public schools.

Here is something else we know: More money for schools enriches the WEA union. Executives at the powerful union now take a record \$37 million a year from teachers in mandatory dues. Union executives say that any teacher who does not pay will be fired.

Other states are finding that letting families have more choices in education, not more money, is producing results. With school vouchers, tax-free Education Savings Accounts, charter schools, online learning, and other forms of choice, parents, not unions or politicians, are deciding how best to access a good education for children.

Similarly, allowing more learning choices in Washington state would improve outcomes for students. For example, under current funding, every Washington family that wants access to more choices could receive up to \$13,000 to pay for education services.

Parents are not perfect, but they are in a better position, when given a chance, to improve the quality of children’s education than politicians who make empty promises, while delivering no improvement in student learning.