



K-12 Funding and Resources

November 2024

Background

During the 2024 legislative session, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee directed our office to conduct an evaluation of Idaho's K-12 education system. In particular, the request asked our office to look at disparities between districts based on a district's characteristics and their access to resources.

While school districts are operated at the local level, their primary funding comes from the state. The state apportionment funding formula provides funding to school districts on a per-support unit basis, calculated using district size and student counts by grade range. Additional distributions from the state, such as money from the school district facilities fund, are dispersed based on the average daily attendance of a district.

These formulas do not take differences among districts into consideration, such as the number of high-needs students, the cost of living, or the local property tax base. Consequently, funds distributed by the state may be insufficient to address the diverse needs of districts with different student and regional profiles.

As discussed in our 2021 report on K-12 school buildings, many districts rely on supplemental levies to cover operating costs the districts believe necessary but are not covered by the state. Since the release of that report, the Legislature has increased discretionary funding for districts and passed bills, such as HB 292 in 2023 and HB 521 in 2024, to reduce the property tax burden from school levies. This evaluation will allow us to update the uses of supplemental levies by districts since 2021.

Scope

This evaluation will be delivered in two parts:

1. Descriptive overview of school districts

The first part of the evaluation will provide descriptive information on school districts to serve as a snapshot of Idaho's public K-12 system, focusing on:

- access to and sources of funding for districts,
- funding gaps and inefficiencies within current funding formulas,
- student and classroom characteristics,
- and comparisons of resources and characteristics between similar districts.

2. Impact of resource disparities on education delivery

The second part of the evaluation will explore how disparities in resources and district characteristics affect educational services for students, including:

- key areas of concern for districts, such as providing services to students and access to resources (e.g., qualified teachers),
- updates on school building conditions and funding mechanisms since our 2021 report,
- differences between districts in providing specialized services to students (e.g., English Language Learners and students on Individual Education Plans),
- and policy recommendations to reduce funding and resource access disparities across districts.

Projected completion date:
phase 1 January 2025,
phase 2 May 2025