

Source: Idaho Dept. of Education

Leg. dist(s)	County	School district	2015 per-pupil spending		
	1 Bonner	West Bonner County 083	\$10,356		
		Lake Pend Oreille 084	\$9,481		
	1 Boundary	Boundary County 101	\$8,969		
3 and 4	Kootenai	Coeur d'Alene 271	\$7,500		
		Lakeland 272	\$7,818		
		Post Falls 273	\$6,883		
		Kootenai Joint 274	\$16,654		
7	Boundary	Boundary County 101	\$8,969		
7	Clearwater	Orofino Joint 171	\$12,057		
7	Idaho	Cottonwood Joint 242	\$12,222		
		Salmon River Joint 243	\$20,187		
		Mountain View 244	\$11,800		
		7	Shoshone	Kellogg Joint 391	\$11,428
		Mullan 392	\$20,818		
		Wallace 393	\$11,769		
		Avery 394	\$35,197		
8	Boise	Garden Valley 071	\$15,104		
		Basin 072	\$9,045		
		Horseshoe Bend 073	\$9,536		
8	Custer	Challis Joint 181	\$9,497		
		Mackay Joint 182	\$11,444		
8	Gem	Emmett Independent 221	\$8,314		
8	Lemhi	Salmon 291	\$8,462		
		South Lemhi 292	\$17,042		
		8	Valley	McCall-Donnelly Joint 421	\$14,552
		Cascade 422	\$13,161		
9	Adams	Meadows Valley 011	\$12,606		
		Council 013	\$10,160		
9	Canyon	Nampa 131	\$7,039		
		Caldwell 132	\$7,217		
		Wilder 133	\$9,476		
		Middleton 134	\$6,909		
		Notus 135	\$8,596		
		Melba Joint 136	\$6,536		
		Parma 137	\$7,919		
		Vallivue 139	\$7,365		
9	Payette	Payette Joint 371	\$7,225		
		New Plymouth 372	\$7,417		
		Fruitland 373	\$6,598		
9	Washington	Weiser 431	\$7,188		

		Cambridge 432	\$16,002
		Midvale 433	\$12,945
14 to 22	Ada	Boise Independent 001	\$9,190
		Meridian Joint 002	\$6,498
		Kuna Joint 003	\$7,002
	23 Elmore	Prairie Elementary 191	\$22,310
		Glenns Ferry Joint 192	\$9,122
		Mountain Home 193	\$7,270
	23 Owyhee	Marsing Joint 363	\$7,902
		Pleasant Valley Elementary 364	\$40,242
		Bruneau-Grand View Joint 365	\$13,992
		Homedale Joint 370	\$6,739
23 to 25	Twin Falls	Twin Falls 411	\$7,846
		Buhl Joint 412	\$7,488
		Filer 413	\$7,299
		Kimberly 414	\$6,641
		Hansen 415	\$10,421
		Three Creek Joint Elementary 416	\$14,024
		Castleford Joint 417	\$8,624
		Murtaugh Joint 418	\$10,066
	25 Jerome	Jerome Joint 261	\$6,682
		Valley 262	\$8,593
	26 Blaine	Blaine County 061	\$18,834
	26 Camas	Camas County 121	\$14,684
	26 Gooding	Gooding Joint 231	\$7,433
		Wendell 232	\$6,922
		Hagerman Joint 233	\$9,266
		Bliss Joint 234	\$13,845
	26 Lincoln	Shoshone Joint 312	\$8,459
		Dietrich 314	\$10,103
		Richfield 316	\$9,557
	27 Cassia	Cassia County Joint 151	\$6,716
	27 Minidoka	Minidoka Joint 331	\$7,074
	30 Bonneville	Idaho Falls 091	\$6,466
		Swan Valley Elementary 092	\$21,782
		Bonneville Joint 093	\$6,556
	31 Bingham	Snake River 052	\$7,300
		Blackfoot 055	\$7,487
		Aberdeen 058	\$8,121
		Firth 059	\$6,930
		Shelley Joint 060	\$6,277

# School Funding: A Private vs Public Comparison

Opinion by Briana LeClaire

There are a few things everybody knows about living in Idaho:

1. When someone asks, "Where'd you go to school?" they mean high school.
2. "Open range" doesn't mean watch out for a stove with the door ajar.
3. Our public schools are woefully underfunded.

To address item three, school districts more-or-less continually urge local taxpayers to increase their property taxes via levies and bonds. If only it were that simple. In reality, all the money the public schools could ever ask for would never fix the Through-the-Looking-Glass world of K-12 education funding.

Public education finance defies rationality because public schools are funded according to inputs. School districts receive state funding according to a Byzantine formula with three primary factors: the number of students in a district, its types of students, and its mix of personnel. Smaller districts receive more money per pupil than larger ones. Districts with many high school, special education, and/or English Language Learners receive more money than districts with many kindergarteners. Districts with experienced teachers holding post-graduate degrees receive more money than districts with young teachers having only bachelor's degrees.

What it actually costs to teach students is not a public school funding factor.

Private schools, on the other hand, must be sensitive to costs and customers, so they use a

more rational model for funding and providing education. If costs get out of control, or if services suffer, then the private school will lose students and possibly have to shut down. Byzantine, irrational formulas would lead to private schools' demise.

The difference between private and public education spending is stark. Compare private school tuition to what is spent to educate public school students. The median tuition for Idaho's private schools is \$3,550 per year for elementary schools, and slightly more than \$5,000 per year for high schools. (Source: The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.)

In contrast, these were the per-pupil spending amounts of various Idaho school districts in 2012-13, which is the most recent school year for which information is available at the Idaho Department of Education website:

#### 10,000 or more students:

Idaho Falls, \$6,810

Pocatello, \$7,152

Boise, \$9,067

Nampa, \$6,479

Coeur d'Alene, \$7,341

#### 1,000 – 9,999 students:

Blackfoot, \$7,120

Bear Lake County, \$7,828

Mountain Home, \$7,032

Lewiston, \$9,127

Lake Pend Oreille, \$8,962

#### Fewer than 1,000 students:

Clark County, \$14,685

Castelford, \$11,203

Midvale, \$16,781

Culdesac, \$16,166

Plummer/Worley, \$14,802

It's true you can't put a price on some things, but as every parent of a college student knows, an education isn't one of them. District per-pupil spending is a critical performance measure because it's the only measure that comes close to the price of educating one child.

Price is supposed to convey value. A private school's price and its value must match, or nobody would send their children there. The perverse incentives that are built into the public school funding formula mean what districts get is what education costs – and it's never enough.

K-12 education should be publicly-funded, but like Pell Grants or GI Bill benefits which can be used at public or private universities, publicly-funded shouldn't necessarily mean publicly-delivered. Like food stamps, Medicare and other entitlements, those who qualify for education services should be free to choose for themselves where to spend their education dollars. People spending their own money on their own children would necessarily be an improvement upon lawmakers and bureaucrats in Boise deciding how to spend other people's money on other people's children.

Funding students, not schools, would prompt increased parental involvement as well as families began to act like customers, rather than as passive receivers of district offerings. Undoubtedly, some education customers would choose to spend their



Briana LeClaire

education entitlement monies at non-district schools, but no bank, grocery store or church is entitled to one's patronage. No school should be, either.

In the future, knowing that families have money ready to spend on education, entrepreneurs would build schools that don't yet exist. A true market for K-12 education would come into being, like the market that already exists for college.

Sometimes what everybody knows "ain't necessarily so." There is an alternative to metasizing property taxes. Choice and competition work everywhere else in the world. Whether it is through vouchers, tax credit tuition scholarships, education spending accounts, or something else, school choice and competition can make Idaho K-12 education work, too.

*Briana LeClaire is the executive director of the Idaho Federation of Independent Schools, a statewide private school association. She lives with her family in Meridian.*



## Idaho's Private Schools: Fast Facts

- 124 private schools serve 11,262 - four percent - of Idaho k-12 students.<sup>1</sup>
- 47 percent of Idahoans say a private school would be their first schooling choice if money were not an issue.<sup>2</sup>
- Ada and Kootenai Counties collectively have 38 percent of Idaho's private schools.<sup>3</sup> Private schools also are located in Bannock, Benewah, Blaine, Bonneville, Bonner, Boundary, Canyon, Elmore, Idaho, Latah, Minidoka, Nez Perce, Teton, Twin Falls and Valley Counties.<sup>4</sup>
- Private school median annual tuitions<sup>5</sup>
  - Elementary schools: \$3,550
  - Middle schools: \$3,600
  - High schools: \$5,081
- 69 percent of private schools are religious and 31 percent are not.<sup>6</sup>
  - Most religious private schools are Protestant Christian of no specific denomination (41 percent). The next largest group is Catholic (22 percent) followed by Seventh-day Adventist (15 percent) Lutheran - Missouri Synod (9 percent) and Assembly of God (4 percent).<sup>7</sup>
- At least 5,000 seats are available in Idaho's private schools, right now, without a single levy or bond.<sup>8</sup>
- 94 percent of private schools give tuition assistance.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results from the 2011-12 Private School Universe Survey." <http://goo.gl/CXtVby>

<sup>2</sup> "Idaho Ready for Change: What Idahoans Really Think About Education in Idaho" <http://goo.gl/9Ga7VW>

<sup>3</sup> "A Survey of Idaho's Private Schools" <http://goo.gl/hXqeNz>

<sup>4</sup> Idaho Federation of Independent Schools website, <http://www.idfis.org/members/>

<sup>5</sup> "A Survey of Idaho's Private Schools" p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 3.