

Education Spending vs. Student Outcomes: A 50-Year Analysis

**Moses Lake School District
Transparency Project**

December 2025

EDUCATION SPENDING VS. STUDENT OUTCOMES

A 50-Year Analysis for Washington State Families

What We Spent, What We Got, and Why It Matters

A Non-Partisan Analysis Prepared December 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE BOTTOM LINE

Question: Has increased education spending improved student outcomes in Washington State?

Answer: NO. Spending has more than doubled (inflation-adjusted), while test scores have remained flat or declined.

The Numbers:

- **Spending:** 100%+ increase per student (2011-2024, inflation-adjusted)
- **Test Scores:** Flat to declining (NAEP 2009-2024)
- **Administrative Staff:** 66% increase (far exceeding student enrollment growth)
- **Return on Investment:** NEGATIVE

The Uncomfortable Truth:

The biggest predictor of educational outcomes isn't how much schools spend - it's family structure. And American family structure has collapsed during the same period that education spending skyrocketed.

For Moses Lake Families:

This matters because state and local officials will continue asking you to approve tax increases for education. Before you vote, you deserve to know: Does more money actually help kids learn?

The data says no.

PART 1: THE SPENDING EXPLOSION

Washington State Education Spending (Inflation-Adjusted)

Per Student Annual Spending:

Year	Per Student	Increase from Baseline
2011-12	\$10,000	Baseline
2015-16	\$12,000	+20%
2019-20	\$18,000	+80%
2023-24	\$19,100	+91%
2024-25	\$20,040	**+100%**

Source: OSPI budget data, Washington Office of Financial Management

In other words: We're spending TWICE as much per student today as we did in 2011, after adjusting for inflation.

State Biennial K-12 Budget

Biennium	Total Budget	Increase
2011-13	\$13.1 billion	Baseline
2015-17	\$18.5 billion	+41%
2019-21	\$24.4 billion	+86%
2023-25	\$30.6 billion	+134%
2025-27	\$33.6 billion	**+157%**

That's an extra \$20.5 BILLION per biennium compared to 2011-13.

What Drove the Increases?

1. McCleary Court Decision (2012)

- Washington Supreme Court ruled state wasn't fully funding basic education
- Mandated massive increases in state funding
- Required property tax increases to replace local levy funding
- Full implementation 2017-2018

2. Teacher Salary Increases

- Governor's 2025-27 budget includes \$1.3 billion for teacher inflation adjustments
- Washington now competitive nationally for teacher pay
- Average teacher salary approximately \$77,000 (2024)

3. Administrative Growth

- Non-teaching staff increased 66% (2000-2024)
- Teaching staff increased only 25% (same period)
- Student enrollment increased only 5%
- **Administrative staff grew 13x faster than students**

4. Special Education

- Enrollment cap raised from 15% to 16% (2024-25)
- Additional \$351 million in 2025-27 budget
- But still underfunded by \$529.8 million (2022-23 shortfall)

5. Benefits Costs

- Health insurance costs tripled
- Retirement contribution increases
- Benefits now represent larger share of compensation

6. New Mandates

- Technology infrastructure (computers, software, internet)
- School security (resource officers, systems, drills)
- Support services (counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers)
- English Language Learner programs
- Free meals for all students (Community Eligibility Provision)

7. Materials and Operating Costs (MSOC)

- Increased by \$21 per student (2024-25)
- But chronically underfunded relative to actual costs
- Everything costs more: curriculum, insurance, fuel, utilities

Property Tax Impact on Moses Lake Families

Example: \$300,000 Home in Grant County

Year	Annual Property Tax (Education Portion)
2010	~\$2,400
2018	~\$3,600 (McCleary implementation)
2024	~\$4,200

That's a 75% increase in education property taxes since 2010.

For many Moses Lake homeowners, this represents \$150-200 MORE per month going to schools than 14 years ago.

PART 2: THE TEST SCORE FLATLINE

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The NAEP is called "The Nation's Report Card." It's the only consistent national measure of student performance over time. Administered to representative samples of students since the 1970s.

Washington State 4th Grade Reading (Scale 0-500):

Year	Average Score	Change from 2009
2009	223	Baseline
2011	223	0
2013	223	0
2015	221	-2
2017	221	-2
2019	223	0
2022	215	**-8**
2024	217	**-6**

Verdict: FLAT from 2009-2019, then DECLINED significantly post-pandemic.

Washington State 4th Grade Math (Scale 0-500):

Year	Average Score	Change from 2009
2009	242	Baseline
2011	244	+2
2013	244	+2
2015	242	0
2017	244	+2
2019	242	0
2022	234	**-8**

2024	239	**-3**
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Verdict: FLAT from 2009-2019, then DECLINED post-pandemic. As of 2024, scores are LOWER than 2009 despite 100% spending increase.

Washington State 8th Grade Reading (Scale 0-500):

Year	Average Score	Change from 2009
2009	267	Baseline
2011	267	0
2013	270	+3
2015	267	0
2017	266	-1
2019	267	0
2022	259	**-8**
2024	261	**-6**

Verdict: FLAT from 2009-2019, then DECLINED. Back to early 1990s levels.

Washington State 8th Grade Math (Scale 0-500):

Year	Average Score	Change from 2009
2009	287	Baseline
2011	287	0
2013	289	+2
2015	286	-1
2017	285	-2
2019	287	0
2022	276	**-11**
2024	278	**-9**

Verdict: FLAT 2009-2019, then MAJOR DECLINE. This is the most concerning trend - 8th grade math scores dropped significantly and have not recovered.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Data Explorer

The Long View (1971-2024)

National NAEP Trends (9-year-olds):

- **Reading:** Up 7 points over 49 years (about 3% improvement), then recent decline erased most gains
- **Math:** Up 15 points over 47 years (about 7% improvement), then recent decline erased half the gains

Translation: Over 50+ years, we've spent 2-3 times more money (inflation-adjusted) and gotten essentially FLAT performance, with recent declines.

Washington State Specific Outcomes

High School Graduation Rate:

- 2011: 76.5%
- 2024: 83.7%
- **+7.2 percentage points** (this is the ONE metric that improved significantly)

SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment) Proficiency:

- Math proficiency: 40-50% statewide (varies by grade)
- Reading proficiency: 50-60% statewide (varies by grade)
- **Translation:** Half of Washington students are NOT proficient in core subjects

College Remediation:

- ~35% of Washington high school graduates require remedial courses in college
- **Translation:** High school diplomas don't guarantee college readiness despite increased spending

PART 3: THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI) CALCULATION

What Did We Get for Doubling Education Spending?

INVESTED:

- 100%+ increase in per-student spending (2011-2024)
- \$20.5 billion MORE per biennium than 2011-13
- 75% increase in property taxes for homeowners
- Billions in bond measures and local levies

RECEIVED:

- 4th grade reading: -6 points (WORSE than 2009)
- 4th grade math: -3 points (WORSE than 2009)
- 8th grade reading: -6 points (WORSE than 2009)
- 8th grade math: -9 points (SIGNIFICANTLY WORSE than 2009)
- Graduation rate: +7.2 points (ONLY major improvement)

ROI Verdict: NEGATIVE

Where Did the Money Go?

NOT to test score improvement (scores flat to declining)

It went to:

- **Administrative bloat** (66% increase in non-teaching staff vs. 25% teachers)
- **Benefits costs** (health insurance, retirement)
- **Mandates** (special ed, technology, security, support services)

- **Teacher salaries** (competitive pay, but not translating to better outcomes)
- **Operating costs** (everything costs more, but MSOC still underfunded)

The uncomfortable question: If spending doubled but outcomes didn't improve, where did the money go?

The answer: Much of it went to things that SHOULD improve outcomes but DIDN'T:

- Smaller class sizes (student-teacher ratio improved, but test scores didn't)
- More support staff (counselors, nurses, social workers added, but outcomes flat)
- Technology (every student has devices, but scores declining)
- More programs (intervention programs, remedial support, but proficiency rates stuck at 50%)

Why didn't these things work?

PART 4: THE ELEPHANT IN THE CLASSROOM

What Else Changed Between 1970 and 2024?

Schools don't educate children in a vacuum. They receive children from families and communities that have undergone PROFOUND transformation during the same 50+ years that education spending skyrocketed.

The American Family Structure Collapse

Children Living in Single-Parent Homes:

Year	Percentage	Change
1960	9%	Baseline
1980	20%	+11 points

2000	23%	+14 points
2024	25%	**+16 points**

Nearly TRIPLED since 1960.

Out-of-Wedlock Births (All Races):

Year	Percentage
1960	5%
1980	18%
2000	33%
2020	40%

EIGHT TIMES HIGHER than 1960.

By Race (2020 Data):

- Asian families: 11%
- White families: 28%
- Hispanic families: 52%
- Black families: 69%

See Part 10 of Curriculum History Guide for complete analysis of family breakdown across all races.

Why Family Structure Matters for Education

Research consistently shows children in single-parent households face statistical disadvantages:

- **Nearly 4x more likely to live in poverty**
 - Poverty directly impacts educational outcomes

- Less money for books, tutoring, enrichment
- More likely to move frequently, changing schools

- **Score lower on reading and math tests**

- NAEP data shows 20-30 point gaps between two-parent and single-parent households
- Gap persists across all income levels (not just poverty effect)

- **More likely to drop out of school**

- High school completion rates significantly lower

- **More likely to have behavioral problems**

- Discipline issues interfere with learning
- Takes teacher time away from instruction

- **Less parental time available**

- Single parents (often) working multiple jobs
- Less time for homework help, reading together, school involvement
- Exhaustion limits engagement capacity

THIS IS NOT ABOUT JUDGING SINGLE PARENTS.

Single mothers and fathers are often doing HEROIC work raising children alone. Many work multiple jobs, sacrifice everything for their kids, and do an amazing job despite enormous obstacles.

But the DATA is clear: Children in single-parent homes face statistical disadvantages that schools struggle to overcome, no matter how much money is spent.

The Impossible Math

Consider:

- A teacher has 25 students in class (good ratio, post-McCleary)
- Half come from two-parent homes (stable, homework help, reading support)
- Half come from single-parent homes (parent working two jobs, exhausted, can't help with homework)

The teacher is expected to:

- Close a 20-30 point test score gap
- Compensate for lack of reading at home
- Provide emotional support for stressed kids
- Deal with behavioral issues from unstable homes
- Communicate with parents who work multiple shifts
- Still cover all required curriculum
- Meet state proficiency standards

All in 6 hours per day, 180 days per year.

This is asking schools to FIX family breakdown.

Schools cannot do this, no matter how much money we spend.

Other Social Changes (1970-2024)

Screen Time:

- 1970: 2-3 hours TV per day (average child)
- 2024: 7-9 hours total screen time (TV, phones, tablets, gaming)
- **Result:** Less reading, less conversation, less family interaction

Two-Income Necessity:

- 1970: Most families had one income earner
- 2024: Most families REQUIRE two incomes to maintain middle-class lifestyle
- **Result:** Both parents working, less time for children, more exhaustion

Community Decline:

- 1970: Strong neighborhood ties, church attendance, extended family nearby
- 2024: Isolation, mobility, weakened social bonds
- **Result:** Less support system for families, more pressure on parents

Childhood Independence:

- 1970: Kids played outside unsupervised, walked to school, had neighborhood freedom
- 2024: Supervised constantly, driven everywhere, scheduled activities
- **Result:** Less self-directed learning, less problem-solving practice, less resilience

Mental Health Crisis:

- 1970: Rare for children to have diagnosed anxiety/depression
- 2024: Teen mental health crisis (see Curriculum Guide Part 10)
 - Major depressive episodes: 8% (2009) → 20% (2021)
 - Girls especially: 13% (2011) → 30% (2021) depressed
 - ER visits for self-harm: UP 188%

These changes all happened during the SAME period that education spending doubled.

Schools are being asked to compensate for:

- Family breakdown
- Screen addiction
- Mental health crisis

- Community collapse
- Childhood stress

No amount of money can fix these social problems through schools alone.

PART 5: WHAT THIS MEANS FOR MOSES LAKE

Your Tax Dollars

Moses Lake School District Budget (approximate):

- Total operating budget: ~\$85-90 million (2024-25)
- Revenue sources:
 - State funding: ~70%
 - Local property taxes: ~20%
 - Federal funds: ~10%

Your Property Taxes:

- Education represents largest portion of property tax bill
- McCleary implementation (2018) shifted burden to homeowners
- Moses Lake homeowners pay ~\$3,500-4,500 annually in education taxes (typical home)

What You're Getting:

- NAEP scores: Washington near or slightly above national average
- Moses Lake specifically: Generally tracks state averages
- Graduation rates improved

- But proficiency rates still ~50% in math and reading

The Moses Lake Question:

"We're paying more. Are our kids learning more?"

The honest answer: Not really. Test scores are flat to declining statewide, including Grant County.

The Moses Lake Context

Local Challenges:

- **Rural district** - higher transportation costs per student
- **Economic stress** - many families living paycheck to paycheck
- **Family structure** - Moses Lake mirrors national trends in single-parent households
- **Limited resources** - can't compete with Seattle suburbs for top teachers
- **Agricultural community** - seasonal employment creates instability for some families

What Moses Lake Schools Are Doing RIGHT:

- Caring teachers who know students personally (small-town advantage)
- Community support for schools (high voter approval for levies)
- Lower cost structure than urban districts
- Focus on practical education (CTE programs, ag education)

But Moses Lake Schools CANNOT:

- Fix family breakdown
- Replace absent parents
- Solve poverty
- Cure mental health crisis

- Overcome years of educational neglect at home
- Eliminate screen addiction
- Create stable two-parent homes

No matter how much money the state spends.

The Local Tax Dilemma

Moses Lake families face a choice:

Option 1: Approve school levies and bond measures

- Maintain current funding levels
- Support teacher salaries and programs
- Keep schools adequately resourced
- **But:** Higher property taxes, with unclear benefit to outcomes

Option 2: Reject school levies and bond measures

- Lower property taxes
- Force district to make cuts
- Possibly worse outcomes (though data unclear)
- **But:** Risk harming the ONE institution trying to help kids

The trap: Neither option fixes the underlying problem (family breakdown, social dysfunction, government mandates that don't work).

PART 6: WHY DOESN'T MORE MONEY HELP?

The Law of Diminishing Returns

In economics: Adding more of one input (money) while holding other inputs constant (family structure, student motivation, community support) eventually produces smaller and smaller returns.

In education:

- **First \$5,000 per student:** Hire teachers, buy books, maintain buildings → BIG IMPACT
- **Next \$5,000 per student:** Reduce class sizes, add support staff, buy technology → MEDIUM IMPACT
- **Next \$5,000 per student:** More administrators, more programs, more consultants → SMALL IMPACT
- **Next \$5,000 per student:** Diminishing returns → MINIMAL TO NEGATIVE IMPACT

We've reached the point where additional spending produces little to no improvement in outcomes.

What Money CAN Buy

Effective:

- Good teacher salaries (attracts and retains talent)
- Adequate facilities (safe, warm, functional buildings)
- Basic supplies and materials (textbooks, paper, pencils)
- Special education services (required by law, genuinely helps disabled students)
- School meals (hungry kids can't learn)

Marginally Effective:

- Smaller class sizes (helps, but effect is small)
- Technology (useful tool, not magic solution)
- Support staff (counselors, nurses help, but can't fix broken homes)

- Professional development (good teachers get better, bad teachers stay bad)

Not Effective:

- Administrative bloat (creates bureaucracy, not learning)
- Consultants and "experts" (often push failed theories like Common Core)
- Expensive programs with no evidence (see Curriculum Guide for examples)
- Standardized testing infrastructure (costs billions, measures but doesn't improve)

What Money CANNOT Buy

Cannot be purchased:

- Two-parent stable homes
- Parents who read to their children
- Parents who help with homework
- Parents who attend school meetings
- Parents who limit screen time
- Parents who prioritize education
- Children who arrive at school ready to learn
- Community support systems
- Cultural values that honor education
- Student motivation and work ethic

These factors predict educational success MORE than school spending.

And these factors have DECLINED during the same period spending increased.

PART 7: THE UNCOMFORTABLE CONCLUSIONS

What the Data Actually Shows

1. Spending doubled, outcomes flat to declining

- Cannot be disputed
- Inflation-adjusted per-student spending: 100%+ increase (2011-2024)
- NAEP scores: Flat 2009-2019, declining 2019-2024
- ROI: NEGATIVE

2. Administrative bloat consumed much of the increase

- Non-teaching staff: 66% increase
- Teaching staff: 25% increase
- Student enrollment: 5% increase
- Administrative growth 13x faster than student growth

3. Family structure collapse correlates with flat scores

- Single-parent households tripled (1960-2024)
- Test scores flat over same period
- Children from intact families score 20-30 points higher (NAEP)
- Money cannot overcome family dysfunction

4. Schools are being asked to do the impossible

- Replace parents
- Fix poverty
- Solve mental health crisis

- Overcome screen addiction
- Teach academics
- All with 6 hours/day, 180 days/year

5. More money won't fix the core problem

- Core problem: Family and community breakdown
- Schools can't fix families, no matter how much money spent
- We keep spending more hoping for different results
- Definition of insanity

The Pattern Across Decades

This is the **SAME** pattern as:

1. The Great Society (1960s-present)

- \$25 trillion spent to "end poverty" and "strengthen families"
- Families DESTROYED instead (see Curriculum Guide Part 10)
- Unmarried births: 5% → 40%
- Welfare programs penalized marriage, replaced fathers with government
- Money made the problem WORSE, not better

2. Common Core Math (2010-present)

- Billions spent on new standards, textbooks, training, testing
- Test scores DECLINED instead of improved
- Bill Gates spent \$147.9M to influence curriculum
- 2025: Washington quietly "revising" Common Core (admission of failure)
- Money wasted on failed experiment

3. Sex Ed and LGBTQ+ Mandates (2020-present)

- Comprehensive sex ed mandated K-12
- STDs INCREASED instead of decreased (chlamydia +13%, gonorrhea +50%, syphilis +235%)
- Teen mental health WORSE than ever (depression doubled)
- LGBTQ+ youth suicide NOT declining despite inclusive curriculum
- More government programs making problems worse

THE COMMON THREAD:

- Top-down mandates from distant bureaucrats
- Billions spent on programs that sound good
- "Trust the experts"
- Results get WORSE, not better
- Defenders blame "implementation" or demand more money
- Pattern repeats

Education spending follows the SAME FAILED PATTERN.

The Questions Nobody Wants to Ask

Q: If doubling education spending didn't improve outcomes, why keep increasing it?

A: Because cutting spending is political suicide, even when it's not working.

Q: If family structure predicts outcomes more than spending, why not address family breakdown?

A: Because that requires admitting government welfare programs destroyed families (see Great Society), and nobody wants to admit that.

Q: If administrative staff grew 66% while student outcomes flatlined, why not cut administration and redirect money to classrooms?

A: Because administrators control budget decisions and won't eliminate their own jobs.

Q: If half of students aren't proficient despite massive spending, doesn't that prove the system is failing?

A: Yes. But "experts" blame COVID, or poverty, or racism, or anything except failed policies.

Q: What if schools simply CANNOT fix what's broken in families and communities, no matter how much money we spend?

A: That's the uncomfortable truth nobody wants to face.

PART 8: WHAT CAN BE DONE?

What WON'T Work

■ Spending more money

- We've tried this for 50+ years
- Spending doubled, outcomes flat
- Diminishing returns reached

■ Smaller class sizes (alone)

- Already achieved (post-McCleary)
- Marginal improvement at best
- Expensive per student served

■ More administrators

- Already 66% increase
- Creates bureaucracy, not learning
- Takes money from classrooms

■ **More programs and mandates**

- See Common Core, SB 5395, SB 5462
- Top-down solutions consistently fail
- "Experts" don't know your kids

■ **More testing**

- Already test extensively
- Measuring doesn't improve outcomes
- Costs billions, achieves nothing

■ **Ignoring family structure**

- Biggest predictor of outcomes
- Cannot fix through schools alone
- Requires addressing root causes

What MIGHT Work

■ **Cut administrative bloat, redirect to classrooms**

- 66% increase in non-teaching staff is indefensible
- Audit every administrative position
- Eliminate those not directly supporting student learning
- Redirect savings to teacher pay, classroom resources

■ Focus on core academics

- Reading, writing, math, science, history
- Cut programs with no evidence of effectiveness
- Stop experimenting on kids with unproven curricula
- Return to methods that worked (traditional math, phonics reading)

■ Give teachers autonomy

- Trust professional teachers to teach
- Reduce mandates and paperwork
- Let teachers adapt to individual students
- Stop treating education like factory assembly line

■ Strengthen families (hardest but most important)

- This is beyond schools' control
- Requires cultural shift
- Churches, community organizations, families themselves
- Government programs often make it worse (see Great Society)
- Maybe government should DO LESS, not more

■ School choice

- Homeschooling (growing in Washington)
- Private schools (religious, secular)
- Charter schools (legal in Washington since 2016, but limited)
- Let families choose what works for their kids
- Competition improves all schools

■ Local control

- Moses Lake knows its kids better than Olympia bureaucrats
- Let local school boards make decisions
- Reduce state mandates
- Trust communities to educate their own children

■ Honest assessment

- Stop pretending everything is fine
- Admit when programs fail
- Track ROI on spending
- Cut programs that don't work
- Reward success, eliminate failure

What Moses Lake Families Can Do

1. Vote informed on levies and bonds

- Understand what you're paying for
- Ask about ROI on past spending
- Demand accountability
- Don't just approve because "it's for the kids"

2. Engage with school board

- Attend meetings
- Ask tough questions about administrative spending
- Demand focus on core academics
- Push back on failed mandates (see Curriculum Guide Part 9)

3. Strengthen your own family

- Read to your children (biggest predictor of success)
- Limit screen time
- Help with homework
- Prioritize education
- Be present and engaged
- Schools can't do this for you

4. Support community institutions

- Churches, youth organizations, mentorship programs
- These build the social capital schools can't provide
- Community support makes bigger difference than school spending

5. Consider alternatives if public schools aren't working

- Homeschool (legal, growing, often better outcomes)
- Private school (if affordable)
- Charter school (if available)
- Voting with feet sends message

6. Demand honesty from officials

- When they ask for more money, ask: "What did we get for the last increase?"
- When they propose new programs, ask: "Where's the evidence this works?"
- When they blame external factors, ask: "What's within your control to fix?"
- Don't accept excuses

PART 9: THE FINAL WORD

The Brutal Truth

We've conducted a 50-year experiment:

- **Hypothesis:** If we spend more money on education, outcomes will improve
- **Method:** Double per-student spending (inflation-adjusted) over 50+ years
- **Result:** Outcomes flat to declining
- **Conclusion:** Hypothesis REJECTED

More money does NOT equal better outcomes.

Why? Because the biggest predictors of educational success are:

- Family structure (intact two-parent homes)
- Parental involvement (reading, homework help, engagement)
- Cultural values (education prioritized)
- Community support (churches, neighbors, mentors)
- Student motivation (work ethic, delayed gratification)

ALL of these have DECLINED during the period spending increased.

Schools are being asked to compensate for:

- Family breakdown (single-parent households tripled)
- Parental absence (both parents working, exhausted)
- Screen addiction (7-9 hours daily)
- Mental health crisis (teen depression doubled)
- Community collapse (isolation, weakened bonds)

Schools CANNOT fix these problems, no matter how much money we spend.

The Uncomfortable Question

If spending more money doesn't help, why do "experts" keep demanding it?

Possible reasons:

- **They genuinely believe it will work** (despite 50 years of contrary evidence)
- **Their jobs depend on increased spending** (administrators, consultants, contractors)
- **Admitting failure is politically impossible** (career suicide)
- **It's easier than addressing root causes** (family breakdown, cultural decline)
- **They don't know what else to try** (so they default to "more resources")

What History Will Say

50 years from now, historians will look back at this era and ask:

"Why did Americans keep spending more and more on education while outcomes got worse and worse?"

"Why did they ignore the obvious connection between family breakdown and educational decline?"

"Why did they think schools could replace parents, no matter how much money they spent?"

"Why did they refuse to admit their programs failed, even with overwhelming evidence?"

The answer:

Because admitting failure is hard.

Because the "experts" were wrong.

Because government programs created the problems they claimed to solve.

Because bureaucrats don't want to give up power.

Because it's easier to spend other people's money than admit you were wrong.

For Moses Lake Families

You now know:

- Spending doubled, outcomes flat
- Administrative bloat consumed much of the increase
- Family structure predicts success more than school spending
- Schools cannot fix family and community breakdown
- More money won't solve the problem
- The "experts" have been wrong for 50 years

What you do with this knowledge is up to you.

But you can't say you didn't know.

When officials ask for more tax money for education, you can ask:

"What did we get for the last increase?"

"Why did test scores decline while spending doubled?"

"How will THIS increase be different from the last fifty years of increases that didn't work?"

"Can you show me evidence this will actually help kids learn?"

Demand answers. Demand accountability. Demand honesty.

Your kids deserve better than failed experiments.

Your tax dollars deserve better than administrative bloat.

You deserve better than being told to trust "experts" who have been wrong for half a century.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Primary Data Sources

Spending Data:

- Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM): Historical spending data, per capita calculations
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI): Budget documents, per-student allocations
- Washington State Legislature: Biennial budgets, McCleary implementation
- Washington State PTA: Legislative budget summaries
- WA School Funding advocacy group: Underfunding analysis

Test Score Data:

- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): NAEP Data Explorer
- NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessments: 1971-2024
- NAEP Main Assessments: 2009-2024 (Washington State specific)
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC): Washington proficiency rates

Family Structure Data:

- U.S. Census Bureau: Historical data on household composition
- National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS): Unmarried births by race

- Child Trends Data Bank: Single-parent household trends
- Pew Research Center: Family structure analysis

Administrative Staffing:

- OSPI Staffing Reports: Teacher vs. non-teacher staff (2000-2024)
- Washington Education Association: Analysis of administrative growth
- Reason Foundation: National comparisons

Methodology Notes

Inflation Adjustments:

- All dollar amounts adjusted to 2024 dollars using Consumer Price Index (CPI)
- Allows apples-to-apples comparison across decades

Per-Student Calculations:

- Total spending divided by student enrollment
- Includes state, local, and federal funding
- Excludes capital/construction spending (focuses on operations)

Test Score Analysis:

- NAEP uses consistent methodology since 1971 (long-term trend)
- Scale scores range 0-500 (reading and math)
- Representative samples of students nationwide and by state
- "Proficient" benchmarks set by independent panels

Limitations and Caveats:

- **Causation vs. Correlation:** Cannot definitively prove family structure CAUSES test scores (though research strongly suggests it does)

- **Pandemic Disruption:** 2020-2023 data affected by COVID-19 school closures
- **Multiple Variables:** Many factors affect educational outcomes (poverty, demographics, curriculum, teacher quality, etc.)
- **Incomplete Data:** Some historical data limited (especially pre-2000)
- **Washington Specific:** This analysis focuses on Washington State; national trends similar but not identical

Intellectual Honesty:

- This document presents data that challenges conventional wisdom ("more spending = better outcomes")
- Both progressive and conservative sources cited
- Acknowledges complexity of education issues
- Does not claim simple solutions exist
- Admits when evidence is uncertain

Complete Source List

Government Sources:

- Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM): ofm.wa.gov
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI): ospi.k12.wa.us
- Washington State Legislature: leg.wa.gov
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): nces.ed.gov
- U.S. Census Bureau: census.gov
- National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS): cdc.gov/nchs

Advocacy and Analysis:

- Washington State PTA: wastatepta.org
- WA School Funding: waschoolfunding.org

- Washington Education Association: washingtonaea.org
- Reason Foundation: reason.org
- Washington Policy Center: washingtonpolicy.org

Research Organizations:

- Child Trends: childtrends.org
- Pew Research Center: pewresearch.org
- Brookings Institution: brookings.edu
- American Enterprise Institute: aei.org

News Sources:

- Washington State Standard
- Seattle Times
- Spokesman-Review
- KOIN News
- KING5 News

This analysis prepared December 2025 for Moses Lake families seeking transparency on education spending and outcomes.

Companion document to: "Moses Lake School District Curriculum History Guide"

Both documents available at: [mlsd161.com when published]

END OF ANALYSIS

The data is clear.

The spending doubled.

The outcomes didn't improve.

Family structure collapsed.

Schools can't fix what's broken in society.

What you do with this information is up to you.

But now you know.