

CHANGES IN COLORADO SCHOOL FUNDING 1988-89 to 1994-95

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From:

Profile of Changes in Colorado School Funding,
1988-89 to 1994-95

Comparison of 1994-95 to 1993-94

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Changes In Colorado School Funding 1988-89 to 1994-95

Concerned about the effect of state policy decisions on public school funding, a group of school district representatives worked with CASE and CASB to secure funding for and broad commitment to, study for the state of Colorado. John Augenblick and John Myers were contracted to prepare the study which was first released in January of 1996. Since then, the original group has grown to include CEA and the Colorado BOCES Association, and is now known as the Colorado School Finance Project (CSFP). CSFP has continued the work of Augenblick and Myers with a revised report that now includes audited data from all school districts from 1988-89 through 1994-95.

The Augenblick-Myers study was designed to present a comprehensive view of school funding in Colorado and how it is changing over time. Their study looked at various cost pressures facing school districts, such as enrollment growth, pupil characteristics, and inflation. It provides data showing how school districts in the state are responding to these pressures, revenues and from what sources the districts have with which to respond, and how Colorado districts compare to those in other states.

All of the data used in the Augenblick-Myers study is from audited financial reports submitted by every school district to the Colorado Department of Education. Everyone involved with this endeavor acknowledges with gratitude the cooperation extended by the CDE. As each successive years' data are available, the CSFP intends to continue to provide and disseminate relevant information to interested Colorado citizens.

The work done so far by Augenblick and Myers covers seven school years. During that time frame, dramatic changes have occurred in public education in Colorado:

- Colorado's student population has grown by 75,857, a 14.1% increase.
 - Special Education students have increased by 32.8%
 - Students eligible for free lunches have increased by 46.4%

- Class sizes are growing. The number of teachers per 1000 students has decreased by 3.5% while the number of students has increased.

- Spending for public schools has been increased to accommodate growth but has not kept pace with inflation (see Table D). Since 1988 the rate of inflation had been 24.6% based on the Denver/Boulder CPI. Per pupil spending in Colorado, when adjusted for inflation, has dropped 10.1% during the same period. As a result, a spending gap of \$310 million has occurred between

1988-89 and 1993-94. This amount averages \$507 per pupil statewide.

Based on 1993-94 figures, Colorado has not kept pace with other states in per pupil support. In 1988 there were 14 states that spent more than this state on a per pupil basis. In 1993-94, 25 states spent more than Colorado.

Because of population growth and the strength of Colorado's economy, total personal income in this state has risen 51 percent since 1988-89. However, the percentage of personal income paid for public education has declined by 15%, from 3.9 to 3.3 percent of personal income. This shift in tax support has resulted in \$489 million less in revenue than if the percentage had remained the same since 1988.

This type of data collection and analysis will continue into the future because it is a valuable tool in assessing policy impacts on public education. It must be kept in mind, however, that these studies provide only a retrospective of policy impact. The next step for the Colorado School Finance Project is to become future oriented and work toward policies that will strengthen the ability of Colorado's public schools to respond to the growing, diverse needs of its student population.