

**April 14, 2009**

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# PLATTE CHAT

## **K-12 EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS IN "NEBRASKA'S SPENDING HABITS" MAKE SENSE**

We may be in the midst of When the Platte Institute released ["Nebraska's Spending Habits: Are We Frugal or Frivolous?"](#) three weeks ago, some of the recommendations Dr. Ernie Goss of Creighton University made which got a bulk of the attention centered on education spending.

Let's take a closer look at a pair of those recommendation and revisit why these issues deserve to be debated rather than dispelled, starting with the 65 percent solution.

In short, the 65 percent solution would require that school districts put at least 65 percent of their funding directly into the classroom experience. As it stands now, Nebraska spends – by far – more on administration than any of its bordering states.

### [Adopting the 65 Percent Solution in Nebraska:](#)

- Adopting this solution would theoretically increase direct classroom instruction by \$37 million, reduce administration expenses by \$74.1 million and provide tax relief of \$37.1 million.
- Adopting this solution would mean each K-12

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student in Nebraska would receive roughly \$130 more each year in direct classroom instruction.

- Adopting this solution would bring Nebraska's K-12 administrative expenses more in line with surrounding states. As a percent of K-12 education spending, states spend the following amounts on administration (data provided by National Center for Education Statistics): Nebraska (7.5%), South Dakota (5.6%), Kansas (5.0%), Iowa (4.8%), Missouri (4.3%), Colorado (3.6%), Wyoming (3.5%).
- Since 1999, per-pupil spending in Nebraska has risen from slightly more than \$7,000 per pupil to more than \$9,300 per pupil. During the same time frame, Nebraska fourth-grade reading scores have gone from being five points higher than the national average to just three. Also, fourth grade math scores have gone from being above the national average to below the national average. Meanwhile, eighth-grade reading scores have gone from being seven points above the national average to just five and eighth-grade math scores have gone from eight points above the national average to just four. Statistically, of the amount per-pupil Nebraskans are increasingly paying, apparently not enough is actually getting to the pupil.

Taking a closer look at raising the student-teacher ratio in Nebraska to the national median, a recommendation by Dr. Goss, shows that the student-teacher ratio in Nebraska has been dropping in recent years. At the same time, however, achievement scores in Nebraska have improved at a slower rate than the national average.

### [Raising the student-teacher ratio to the national median:](#)

- Nebraska would have saved almost \$102 million in 2006 if the state's student per teacher ratio increased from its current level of 13.83 to the national median student per teacher ratio of 15.11.
- In a time period from the 1997-98 school year through the 2007-2008 school year, the number of K-12 students in Nebraska DROPPED by 818. In

the exact same time period, the number of K-12 educators in Nebraska INCREASED by 4,428.

- While the student-to-teacher ratio dropped, the scores improved at a slower rate in Nebraska than the national average. Nebraska's scale scores for fourth-grade reading rose one point from 2002 to 2007 while the national average rose by three points in the same time period. From 2002 to 2007, Nebraska scale scores for eighth-grade reading DROPPED by three points while the national average dropped by two.
- From 1996 to 2007, the scale scores for fourth grade math rose in Nebraska by 10 points while the national average during the same period rose 17. From 1996 to 2007, scale scores for eighth-grade math rose by one point in Nebraska while the national average rose by nine points.

By implementing both the 65 percent solution and raising the student-teacher ratio to the national median, Nebraska taxpayers could theoretically save approximately \$140 million a year, which makes this a debate worth having.

\* Statistics and information from the [Nebraska Department of Education](#) and the [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

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