

Platte Chat

*An ongoing conversation about how to best preserve free enterprise,
personal responsibility and limited government in Nebraska*



Education spending increases while student achievement flat lines

by John S. McCollister, Executive Director

As Nebraska's elected officials continue discussions on how to address the state's \$1 billion biannual budget deficit, a thorough review of education funding in the state is imperative. Examining Nebraska's student achievement vs. spending trends in education must be a major focus in this review. For years, the state of Nebraska has been pumping countless taxpayer dollars into a system that is simply not producing sufficient results.

According to a recent report by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the average cost per pupil on a national level has increased from approximately \$4,000 in 1970 to almost \$10,000 today, yet student achievement scores have remained stagnant. In the Cornhusker state, the cost per pupil was \$9,190 in 2005, which increased to \$10,861 in 2007, an increase of 18 percent, while the Consumer Price Index only rose slightly more than 10 percent (ALEC.org).

While Nebraska K-12 education is primarily funded by local property taxes, in the 2009 – 2010 budget, the state provided slightly more than \$1.3 billion in support of local school districts. In fact, state support of public schools has grown to 18 percent of Nebraska's budget.

But consider these startling facts regarding academic achievement in Nebraska:

- Only 29 percent of the 2010 graduating class who took the ACT in Nebraska demonstrated readiness for college work in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science.
- Nebraska ranks 33rd in the country in terms of Education Performance Rank when comparing National Assessment of Educational Progress scores.
- Nebraska received a "D" for our Education Reform Grade by the American Legislative Exchange Council.

President Barack Obama and Annie Duncan, the Secretary of Education, have promoted educational reform in our country. They believe transforming education with charter schools,

improving teacher accountability and modifying tenure policies will advance student achievement and improve our country's abysmal number 25 ranking among 30 countries. Not only will educational reform, coupled with accountability, improve academic success in Nebraska, but it will also ensure that taxpayer dollars going into the system will be used more efficiently. Rather than throwing in the towel, our state needs to embrace education reform for the benefit of our children.

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