
Iowa Fiscal Partnership

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Will Iowa Reclaim Education Leadership? Report Notes Trends in Investment, Student Achievement in Iowa

DES MOINES, Iowa (November 14, 2006) — As Iowa's investment in public education declined over a 13-year period, the state's position as a leader in student achievement also declined, a new report shows.

"Actions taken by the 2006 General Assembly began to reverse this trend on the investment side, but have taken only a first step to address this decline in investment, and the new Legislature has major challenges before it," said Charles Bruner, executive director of the Child & Family Policy Center (CFPC) and co-author of the new report for the nonpartisan Iowa Fiscal Partnership (IFP).

The report shows that, from 1992 to 2005, Iowa dropped from second to 19th among states on fourth-grade reading proficiency as measured by the widely quoted National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and from first to 13th on eighth-grade mathematics proficiency. In both areas Iowa remained slightly above the U.S. average.

To better understand the performance of Iowa's relatively homogeneous population in comparison with students in other states, the report shows the NAEP breakdown for white students. By those measures, Iowa's rank has dropped from sixth to 35th in fourth-grading reading among white students, and from first to 26th in eighth-grade math among white students.

"Without strong corrective action, Iowa could be in a position where the state's educational system is considered a detriment, rather than an asset, in seeking to attract new workers and businesses," Bruner said.

In their report, "No Longer a Leader?" Bruner and CFPC senior associate Mike Crawford examine changes over time in Iowa's spending on K-12 education and available data on student achievement through various test scoring systems, particularly NAEP, but also the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and college-entrance tests.

"The report raises two important questions for Iowa policymakers," Crawford said. "First, is it reasonable to be concerned that our decline in investment has affected achievement? And second, should we assure a greater commitment to education in Iowa?"

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The report illustrates that Iowa's public K-12 education spending went from \$5,096 per pupil in 1991-92 to \$7,477 per pupil in 2004-05. While an increase, both levels are below the national average and dropped over the period as a percentage of the national average, from 94 percent to about 87 percent. It also dropped Iowa's ranking in per-pupil spending from 27th to 36th among states.

Similarly, Iowa's ranking on teacher salaries over the period has fallen from 32nd to 40th, and the percentage of the national average has fallen from 86 percent to 82 percent.

"This trend is not exclusive to education," Crawford said. "Overall state spending growth in Iowa has lagged almost all other states. But that may be risky, because public investments not only in education but other social and economic areas contribute to student achievement."

Bruner noted Iowans "place a very high value on public education."

"We do need to continually examine whether we are meeting our goal of providing world-class schools," Bruner said. "Today's global economy demands that we prepare our young people adequately. A look at test scores should give us cause for concern."

Bruner said Iowans should not view the spending and achievement trends as independent from one another.

"This report shows a common thread – a declining relative investment in education compared with other states over a long period of time, and a relative decline in academic achievement over that same period. There is competition out there, and we are not meeting the competition," Bruner said.

The new report for the IFP is available on the Iowa Fiscal Central website <<http://www.iowafiscal.org>>.

The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is a joint tax and budget analysis initiative of the Iowa Policy Project in Mount Vernon and the Child & Family Policy Center in Des Moines, two nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations.

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