



BY JONATHAN KAPLAN

## California’s Support for K-12 Education Ranks Low by Almost Any Measure

Although they do not reflect how much it actually costs to provide California’s students a high-quality education, rankings of state K-12 education spending are frequently used to assess California’s investment in its schools.<sup>1</sup> According to the most recent available information, California’s K-12 education spending lags the nation by almost any measure.

- **In 2014-15, California ranked 42nd among all states in spending per K-12 student after adjusting for differences in the cost of living in each state** (see table).<sup>2</sup> California schools spent \$10,139 per K-12 student, \$1,900 less than the \$12,040 per student spent by the nation as a whole. These figures, and this California ranking, reflect a new Budget Center analysis that adjusts the most recent K-12 spending figures for the variation in states’ costs of living.<sup>3</sup>
- **California ranked 36th among all states in K-12 spending as a share of the state economy in 2014-15.** California’s K-12 school spending in 2014-15 was 3.48% of state personal income – a measure that reflects the size of the state’s economy – compared to 3.88% in the nation as a whole. Gauging school spending

### How Does California’s Support for K-12 Education Compare?

	Rank	California	US	Source
<b>Spending Per Student</b>				
K-12 Spending Per Student Adjusted for Cost of Living (2014-15)*	42	\$10,139	\$12,040	National Education Association (NEA) and Texas A&M University
<b>Spending as a Share of the Economy</b>				
K-12 Spending as a Percentage of Personal Income (2014-15)*	36	3.48%	3.88%	NEA and US Bureau of Economic Analysis
<b>Staffing Ratios</b>				
Number of K-12 Students Per Teacher (2014-15)*	51	22.4	15.5	NEA
Number of K-12 Students Per Guidance Counselor (2011-12)	51	785	440	National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Number of K-12 Students Per Librarian (2011-12)	51	7,572	958	NCES
Number of K-12 Students Per Administrator (2011-12)	47	312	202	NCES

\* Data are estimated.

Note: All figures reflect Budget Center calculations. K-12 spending reflects “current expenditures,” and cost-of-living adjustment calculations use a “comparable wage index” developed by the NCES and updated by Texas A&M University. Spending per student and staffing ratios are based on average daily attendance.

as a share of the personal income received by the state's residents takes into account differences in states' wealth and thus in their capacity to support K-12 schools.

- **California ranked last in the nation in the number of K-12 students per teacher in 2014-15.** California's student-to-teacher ratio was greater than 22-to-1, more than 40% higher than the national ratio of 15.5 students per teacher.
- **California ranked last or close to last in the nation in the number of students per staff.** California's student-to-librarian ratio was more than 7,500-to-1 (ranking 51st), its student-to-guidance-counselor ratio was 785-to-1 (51st), and its student-to-administrator ratio was 312-to-1 (47th) in 2011-12, the most recent year for which data are available.

California's low level of K-12 education spending compared to other states is especially concerning in light of the particular needs of its students. Not only do California schools enroll the largest share of English learners in the US, but the percentage of California students who are from low-income families is greater than the share for the nation as a whole. Since research shows that educating English learners and students from low-income families requires even greater investment, California should be spending *more* per student than other states to allow all of its students to reach state and national academic standards.

Voter approval of Proposition 30 in 2012 helped increase state revenues, providing a significant boost to California's K-12 school spending.<sup>4</sup> Yet, a sizable gap between California and the US remains. Accounting for differences in states' costs of living, California would have needed to spend an additional \$13.0 billion in 2014-15 to equal spending per K-12 student in the nation as a whole, an increase of 18.8%. To reach total spending in the US as a share of personal income, California would have needed to spend an additional \$7.9 billion on K-12 education in 2014-15, an increase of 11.4%.

Substantially increasing California's K-12 education spending almost certainly depends on the state raising additional revenue. However, the revenues from Proposition 30 will decline after 2015-16, the last year its provisions will be fully in effect. This means that unless California voters extend Proposition 30's tax increases or approve an alternative tax measure, the state's schools will most likely receive relatively fewer dollars in the years ahead, raising the prospect that California's school spending would fall even further behind the nation.

<sup>1</sup> All state rankings and related comparisons in this fact sheet include the District of Columbia. For a discussion of why the amount that California is reported to spend per K-12 student, as well as its ranking relative to other states, varies depending on the source of this information and how it is interpreted, see Jonathan Kaplan, *Key Considerations When Comparing California K-12 School Spending to Other States* (California Budget & Policy Center: August 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Without adjusting for differences in states' costs of living, California ranked 29th in the nation.

<sup>3</sup> This adjustment uses a "comparable wage index" developed by Dr. Lori Taylor at Texas A&M University and William Fowler, Jr. at the National Center for Education Statistics, and subsequently updated by Dr. Taylor. This index is a commonly used method of adjusting K-12 spending for differences in states' costs of living. For example, see Education Week, *Quality Counts 2015: Preparing to Launch* (January 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Proposition 30 raised the state sales tax rate through 2016 and the personal income tax rates on high-income taxpayers through 2018.