



A New Year's Resolution for Education Reform

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By: *Emily Stahly*

A new year and a new legislative session are upon us, and with them, most likely the same old debates over school funding. A [new study](#) from EdChoice, however, could help reshape conversations in Missouri by showing that in general, people greatly underestimate how much we spend on education.

So just how much do we spend per student each year? This survey found that *only 11 percent* of people selected the correct range of \$8,000 to \$12,000. In fact, the national average is a little over \$11,000, while Missouri spent on average \$10,899 per student for the 2016–2017 school year.

Nevertheless, 31 percent of respondents thought America spends less than \$4,000 on each student every year, while 29 percent did not know or did not want to answer.

Then the survey asked if people thought we spend too much or too little on education. For this question, however, half of the respondents were given the actual spending figure and half were not. Here are the results:

Respondents were asked if current levels of spending on education are too high, too low, or about right.

	Too high	About right	Too low	Don't know/did not answer
Split A: Without information	11%	28%	54%	7%
Split B: With information	19%	32%	38%	11%

Source: [EdChoice, "2017: Schooling in America."](#)

When presented with the real numbers, the proportion of those who think spending is “too low” fell significantly. So when people say that our schools are underfunded, it seems that many base their opinion on estimates of actual spending that are too low.

Too often, our debates over education policy get hung up over funding even though many of us lack a clear picture of how much we are spending now, let alone how much should be spent. If we want to accomplish meaningful education reform in 2018, resolving to have informed discussions about spending would be a good place to start.

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