



So That's What You Spent Your Money On

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By: James V. Shuls

A few weeks ago I asked the question, "[school administrators, what did you spend your money on?](#)" The purpose of that piece was to show that Missouri has been increasing school funding, but that money has not translated to higher teacher salaries. I showed that much of the money went to additional people, such as aides and administrators, and some went to increased costs for benefits. A recent audit of the Hazelwood school district offers even more answers. The [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#) has the full story, and I suggest you check it out.

Here are some of the highlights:

The audit noted that the School Board and superintendent spent more than \$387,000 in the past two school years on membership fees, travel, gifts, airfare and meeting expenses. The district spends tens of thousands of dollars on items such as sympathy flowers, sympathy cards, "excessive tipping," bellhops, valet parking, extra airline fees, gifts, T-shirts and board meals.

That's enough money to give every teacher in the district about a \$300 raise. That may not seem like much, but things like this add up. Here is another example from the *Post-Dispatch's* report:

The district pays a \$600 monthly car allowance to the associate superintendent in addition to mileage reimbursement, even though the associate superintendent only drove \$250 worth of mileage for the entire last school year.

According to data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the average administrator in Hazelwood earned \$107,526 in 2017. This includes principals and assistant principals, so the salary paid to an associate superintendent is undoubtedly higher than this. I leave it to you to decide whether a \$600 monthly car allowance for an associate superintendent is a prudent investment for the district to make.

The audit also found that the school district improperly over-counted student attendance—leading to the district receiving \$95,000 that it wasn't supposed to receive—and failed to report a principal who allegedly stole thousands of dollars from the district. While those two examples are evidence of wrongdoing, what about the spending practices described above? They don't violate any rules, but they explain a lot about where all that additional education funding is going. In a time of increased focus on teacher pay, it seems incredible that we can say to school administrators, "That's what you spent your money on?"

[As part of the Show-Me Institute's [Checkbook Project](#) , you can see a full breakdown of the [Hazelwood School District's spending](#) .]

About the Author



*James Shuls
Distinguished Fellow of Education Policy*

James V. Shuls is an assistant professor of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Missouri–St. Louis and Distinguished Fellow in Education Policy at the Show-Me Institute.

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Show-Me Institute

5297 Washington Place 3645 Troost Avenue
Saint Louis, MO 63108 Kansas City, MO 64109
Phone: (314) 454-0647 Phone: (816) 287-0370
Fax: (314) 454-0667

Email: info@showmeinstitute.org

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