

Big Spending Increases – No Improvement

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July 9, 2013

Washington State [Governor Gregoire's Education Legacy](#) provides an in-your-face, reaffirming example of the typical failure to address [root causes](#); that without a laser focus on those causes, additional funding won't yield noteworthy improvements. I called it an 'in-your-face' example because we apparently need frequent, new concrete reminders that the disappointing performance of the current K-12 system is not caused by inadequate funding. Commonplace evidence such as Washington state's failure to reap improved academic outcomes from a nearly 30% increase in per pupil funding has not deterred repeated claims that increased funding is the key policy reform. Those claims fail to note how much we already spend, or that the tripling of inflation-adjusted, per-pupil funding in the last forty years has not yielded any noteworthy gains in the most trusted performance measures.

The defenders of the status quo are hoping that the combination of widespread ignorance and that funding should matter will sustain support - [hope triumphing over experience](#) – for continued rapid long-term growth in per pupil funding; that somewhere above the current huge national average annual per pupil expenditure exceeding \$13,000, average student outcomes will begin to rise above abysmal. Except in some school funding adequacy lawsuits, advocates of increased funding never specify the funding level that will finally begin improving outcomes, overall. Having won court decrees to increase funding to the levels specified as adequate in some states, and in cities like Kansas City, the additional money failed to yield the promised gains; [spectacularly so in Kansas City, MO](#).

Governor Gregoire must be a classic case of hope and politics triumphing over experience.

["I came in here](#) determined to make the system work better. I put a lot more money into K-12. But then you sit there and say, "Why have I not been able to get the result I set out to achieve?"

But how can it surprise a Governor; someone with learned advisors and a state education agency to review other states' experiences with increased funding, plus many state and national think tanks warning against such school system improvement strategies? But political correctness combined with wishful thinking repeatedly yields 'more-of-the-same-harder' and 'the same things over and over' even though one definition of insanity is trying the same thing again and expecting a different result. Inertia is an awesome foe and a terrible master.

Perhaps surprisingly, the [policy recommendations](#) of the state think tank (Washington Policy Center) that publicized the failure of the Gregoire school system improvement strategy also largely fail to address the [root causes](#) of low performance (more implicit [denial](#) of the awful track record with 'priceless' reform strategies), which means low rates of success engaging diverse children in high value academic content.