

RESEARCH REPORT

COLORADO EDUCATORS SPEND OUT-OF-POCKET



How teachers spend their own resources
on student needs to fill the gap left by
underfunding of public education

THE RESEARCH

Because Colorado short changes public education funding by close to a billion dollars per year, and because there is a growing crisis of a shortage of qualified teachers, the Colorado Education Association wanted to know the answer to a simple question: ***How much of their own money do educators spend on their students and classrooms?***

The answer is shocking.

CEA surveyed over 2,200 educator members over several days in January. Responses show that, on average, members spent approximately **\$656 a year out of their own pocket for students for a total of about \$23 million per year**. Note: \$23 million was calculated by taking the average of \$656 per year multiplied by 35,000 - the number of members in CEA.

Respondents included licensed educators and Education Support Professionals (ESP). The money was spent on books, pencils, tape, glue, binders/folders, food, toothpaste and personal care items, teaching materials, lunch money and field trips. Other conclusions are:

- The data reflected some interesting disparities in out-of-pocket spending. For example, in some more affluent districts educators reported spending less money in out-of-pocket expenses than educators in districts with fewer resources.
- The report shows that those who have eleven or more years in their professions spent more on average than their younger counterparts. However, even educators in their first five years spent over \$600 per year out-of-pocket.

This report shows that students often don't have the resources they need to learn in the classroom and educators are having to fill in the gap. While corporations are getting millions in tax breaks, educators are spending their limited salary dollars on classroom supplies. Colorado consistently underfunds public education and this groundbreaking research clearly demonstrates the need to increase funding for public education.

BACKGROUND

A strong public education system is the cornerstone of a successful community and the engine for economic success. However, for years Colorado has underfunded education at every level. Colorado currently underfunds K-12 education by more than \$800 million.

[\(https://www.greateducation.org/statistics-faqs/funding-faqs/\)](https://www.greateducation.org/statistics-faqs/funding-faqs/)

Having the practical resources so educators can do their jobs results in better outcomes for students. Because of the way our state funds education and the confluence of state constitutional measures like TABOR that limit spending, Colorado students and educators are not receiving their fair share of the state's economic success.

At the same time, we lose revenue every year to tax incentives that support large corporations; over the last 10 years those incentives have added up to over a billion dollars. Four of the five largest companies headquartered in Colorado have received large tax subsidies totaling more than \$31 million and Colorado has lost more than \$121 million in revenue to subsidies for the oil and gas industry alone (www.goodjobsfirst.org).

This research shows that educators are deeply committed to the success of their students and communities. So much so, that every year they spend money out of their pockets and from their own paychecks. We don't believe Colorado will solve its educator shortage crisis without fully funding and resourcing our public education system.

THE DATA

Methodology

The survey was sent to 19,076 members including both ESP and licensed educators. Two primary questions were asked:

Q1. How much did you spend, out-of-pocket, on classroom supplies in 2017, without being reimbursed by your employer?

Q2 What were the primary items you purchased?

They were also asked in which district they work and how long they have been in the profession.

Responses

2,141 respondents answered the question about how much they spent of their own money to do their jobs last year. Respondents were from 107 school districts out of 178 throughout the state of Colorado.

The total dollar amount for the 2,141 who answered the question was \$1,404,639.07 and the average was \$656 per respondent resulting in about \$23 million per year. Again, \$23 million is the result of \$656 multiplied by 35,000 CEA members.

Only nine educators said they spent nothing out-of-pocket and the remaining spent a total ranging from \$10 to more than \$17,000 in the past year. For context, during 2016-17 the average teacher salary was \$51,810. While we don't have a calculation of average ESP wages in the state, the starting pay for a custodian in Westminster is \$14.76 per hour and the starting pay for a bus driver in Jefferson County is \$23,912.

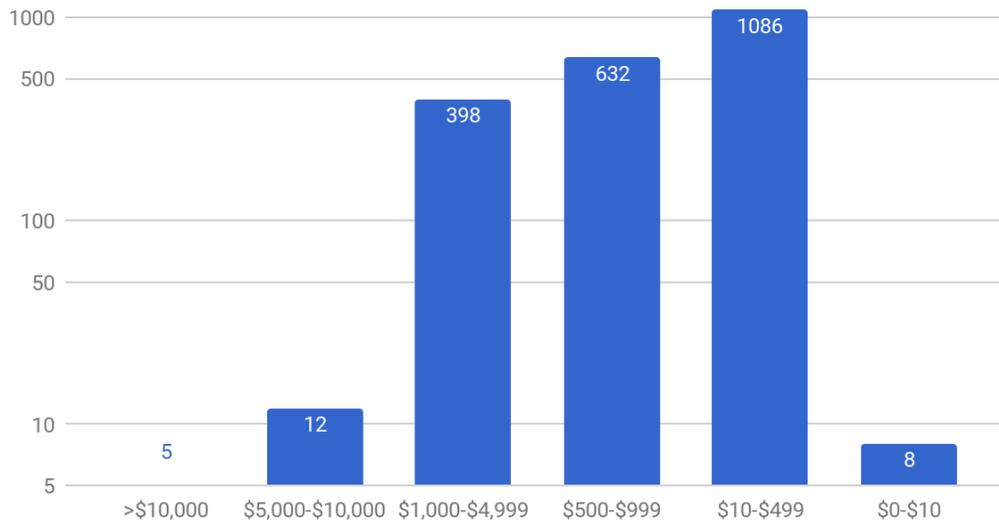
The data reflected some interesting disparities in out-of-pocket spending. For example, educators in Cherry Creek and Boulder Valley School districts, which have more resources, higher teacher pay and more per pupil funding were on the lower range of average out of pocket spending; \$499 and \$517 respectively. At the other end of the spectrum, educators in Greeley and Johnstown-Milliken, districts with fewer resources, spent an average of \$991 and \$1132 respectively.

Yolanda Calderon, an elementary music teacher in Aurora Public Schools, spent more than \$200 last year on culturally responsive books for her classroom, clipboards and markers. "This data demonstrates the incredible commitment that educators make to our students and profession. Since our schools are significantly underfunded, educators must spend their own money to ensure that our students have the resources to be successful. In my own classroom, even with my out-of-pocket expenses, my students still need so much more."

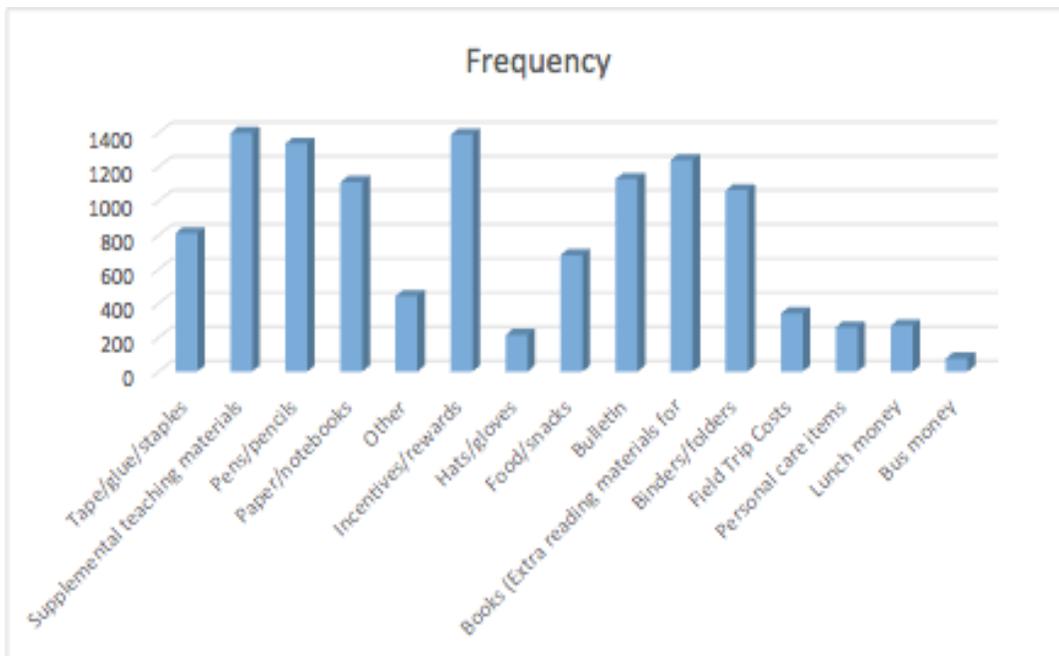
"Transportation employees, bus drivers and bus assistants spend an average of \$100 out-of-pocket per school year for students that ride our buses. We buy everything from cleaning supplies, paper towels, Kleenex, school supplies, snacks, and positive incentives for students such as pencils and other prizes," said Wally Maistryk, a bus driver in Jefferson County.

Based on the data received, CEA members - who are educators in our schools - spent an average of \$656 per year out of their pockets to do their jobs last year, or a total of \$23 million.

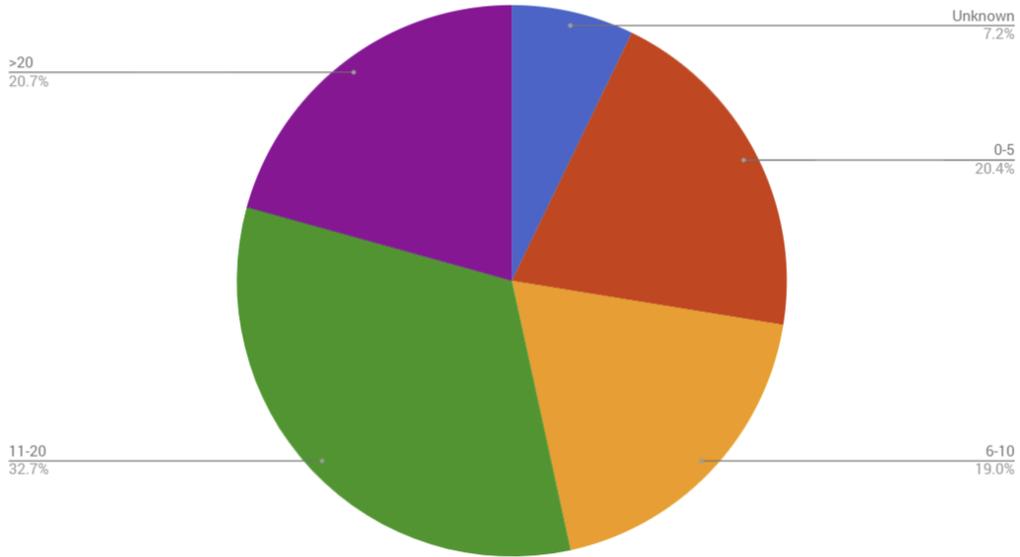
Money Spent Out of Pocket Last Year



The graph below shows the frequency of how educators spent the money and on what items.

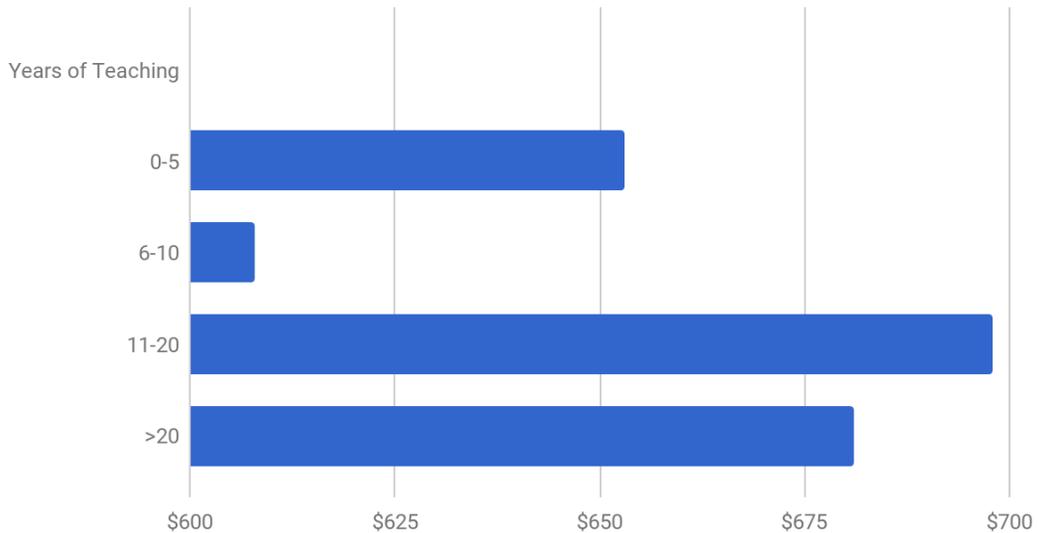


Years in the Profession



The report shows that those who spent eleven or more years in the profession spent more on average than educators early in their careers. At the same time, educators in their first five years in the profession still spent \$636 per year on average.

Average Spent by Years of Teaching



CONCLUSIONS

Is it any wonder educators don't feel supported and leave the profession when it is necessary to spend personal resources?

In our society, we don't expect that a doctor would pay for prescriptions or copays for their patients, or that firefighters would have to pay for their own water hoses, or that police officers would have to buy their own radios or pepper spray to do their jobs. Then why is it that educators must consistently use their own limited resources to do their jobs?

Losing high quality educators is bad for all of Colorado. It hurts our competitiveness and quality of life, but this turnover hurts students the most. When students do not have professional, experienced educators in their classrooms and schools, ample research shows that student outcomes diminish. This is true not only of assessment scores, grades, and graduation rates, but also in attendance and behavior.

We know that one of the main reasons young educators do not stay in the profession is lack of support. The lack of support is compounded by a lack of basic resources for students, including pencils, paper and quality materials, field trips, snacks and lunches, recreation, and even basic-need items such as clothes and jackets.

Ultimately, a budget is a document of our priorities. It is a mirror to reflect back to us ***what we really value***. If we value the education and experience students receive in the classroom, and if we value qualified educators who provide the classroom experience, then *that* is what needs to be reflected in our state and local budgets. Instead, current budget decisions are prioritizing the support of very profitable corporations over the needs of Colorado's students.

Please stand with us to ensure all Colorado students have the public schools they deserve.

ABOUT CEA

The Colorado Education Association is a membership-based organization that represents 35,000 Colorado educators. The CEA promise to our students and communities is that the members of the Association will lead the way in guaranteeing every student access to the best public education. By working collectively with all education stakeholders, we will provide the best public education for every student and assure Colorado's standing as an excellent state in which to learn, live, work, and raise a family.

For more information, contact the Colorado Education Association at comm@coloradoea.org.