

# Funding far from equal among Calif. school districts

By Louis Freedberg and Stephen K. Doig, California Watch

State lawmakers have struggled for decades to bring equality to how school districts are funded, yet some districts receive thousands more per student than others, a California Watch analysis has found. And the data shows spending more provides no assurance of academic success.

Last year, California schools spent an average of \$8,452 to educate each student, a figure that includes money from local, state, and federal sources, including one-time stimulus funds.

But that average masks enormous differences in spending. The Carmel Unified School District, for example, spent nearly three times as much as the Norris School District in Bakersfield. One tiny district, the Pacific Unified School District on a remote stretch of the California coast near Hearst Castle, spent close to \$60,000 per student.

Figures are typically available only for how much districts, not individual schools, spend on their students. But according to the state's Legislative Analyst's Office, some of the smallest schools in the Sierra foothills, with just a handful of students, received about \$200,000 per student.

Public schools consume the largest share of the state's shrinking general fund – 42 percent of the \$86 billion total. How those funds are allocated is coming under increasing scrutiny by education leaders, advocacy groups, school districts and lawmakers.

In April, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica, chairwoman of the Assembly Education Committee, introduced legislation to reform education financing. Based on a plan

proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown during his gubernatorial campaign, the bill would simplify funding formulas and direct money to students with extra needs, such as those from low-income families.

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