

**A Short Analysis of the US Census Bureau Data:  
 Percent of Elementary and Secondary Spent on Instruction  
 in Alaska referred to as PreK-12 funding**

Two questions have arisen concerning the US Census Bureau Data reporting that Alaskan public school instructional costs were 54% of spending in FY 2016. The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) data, per AS 14.17.520 repealed through HB156 in 2016, calculated instructional costs at 76% for FY 2016.

1. Why are the two figures different?

- The US Census Bureau and DEED use **different** definitions.
- DEED calculated the percentage of instruction according to a state law that has been repealed; however, the methodology is still valid.
- The US Census Bureau has a stricter definition of instruction that **excludes** counselors, librarians, required special education specialists, nurses, school principals, and related positions and services. These were included in DEED’s calculation. Using a stricter definition of instruction means the US Census Bureau’s percentage will always be less than DEED’s percentage.
- The US Census Bureau includes more categories in total spending for its calculation such as grants, student transportation and food service. DEED does not include these in their calculation. Including more non-instructional categories in total spending means the US Census Bureau’s percentage will always be less than DEED’s percentage.
- States use different classification systems, so some national data is not categorized the same way by all states.

The US Census reports that on average public school districts in the US spent 61% of their total spending on instruction during FY 2016 whereas Alaska spent 54% on instruction.

2. Why is Alaska spending less on instruction than other states? Let’s look in more depth at some of the US Census Bureau data:

<b>Type of Expenditure</b>	<b>Alaska</b>	<b>All 50 states plus DC</b>		
		<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Highest</i>
Instruction	53.79%	53.22%	60.92%	71.55%
Pupil and Instructional Support	15.59%	5.17%	10.27%	15.59%
<i>Combined Instruction and Support</i>	69.37%	66.00%	71.18%	76.71%
General Administration	1.41%	.70%	1.87%	10.84%
School Administration	6.11%	3.42%	5.38%	7.18%
Operations and Maintenance	11.86%	4.82%	8.75%	11.88%

Alaska spends more on special education service providers, counselors, librarians and similar services that provide vital educational services to students than the national average. When Instruction and Pupil and Instructional Support are combined, Alaska is in the middle of the

state-by-state ranking. Alaska spends less than average on General Administration. Alaska spends more on Operations and Maintenance than average because of higher energy costs, Alaska's harsh environment, and maintaining teacher housing in rural districts.

3. How does Alaska compare with regard to spending per student? Here's the US Census Bureau data:

Type of Expenditure	Alaska	All 50 states plus DC		
		Lowest	All States	Highest
Total	\$17,510	\$6,953	\$11,762	\$22,366
Instruction	\$9,442	\$4,077	\$7,160	\$15,746
General Administration	\$248	\$67	\$226	\$2,260

The above data shows that Alaska district spending per student is higher than the average of all states but is nowhere near the highest in the nation. In the General Administration category, the spending of Alaska districts is very close to the national average. However, it should again be noted that differences in accounting and service delivery practices affect this data, as described above.

In summary, changing definitions of instructional spending and total spending cause confusion. Many Alaskans are familiar with the definition formerly required by state law and regulation. They knew how it compared from one district to another within the state. Using a new definition requires people to adjust to new numbers and their new meaning.

It is also important to note the reduced funding would likely result in a lower percentage of spending on instruction because fixed costs such as energy and property and liability insurance. However, the quality of education provided may not be directly correlated to these percent of spending metrics.