

## **East High School to get \$36,000 per student**

### **East**

School, UR say number does not reflect all facts

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Rochester's East High School is budgeted to spend about \$36,000 per student in 2018-19, according to newly released data compiled by the state Department of Budget, far more than any other school in the city and one of the highest sums in the state.

East High School has \$35,516 per student and East Lower School (grades 6-8) has \$36,103. By comparison, the median per-pupil expenditure for Rochester City School District is \$19,583.

When central office costs are excluded, the disparity is even starker. Both the middle and high schools will receive more than twice as much as nearly every other school in Rochester, at about \$27,400 each. None of the state-provided numbers include any contributions, financial or in-kind, from the University of Rochester.

The school has used the additional funding to make significant improvement in terms of its graduation rate. It is estimating a 61 percent mark for August 2018, up from 33 percent in August 2015.

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In a written statement, the East leadership team disputed the specifics of the state's accounting but maintained, "a significant investment and additional resources were necessary — and continue to be necessary — to create and sustain a positive trajectory in student achievement."

Much of the difference at East comes in additional staff, both teachers and support services. The high school has 170 staff members, including 120 teachers. That is the second-most of any school in the city even though nine other schools have a greater enrollment.

The additional cost is no accident; UR only agreed to assume control over East on the condition that it could put in place the level of support it deemed necessary.

There are 17 "student support services" staffers such as guidance counselors and social workers at the school, more than anywhere else; Integrated Arts and Technology High School has 172 more students but just 7.5 people in support services. East has also winnowed its special education population along with the overall student enrollment, another structural change UR believed was necessary.

According to East and UR, the state numbers are misleading because they do not reflect that the school has in the past underspent its budget significantly, and because they include full funding for a sixth grade that has not yet been fully enrolled.

“East is a district within a district,” they wrote. “The district’s data analysis provides a skewed per pupil budgeted cost, as the district continues to doublecharge East for specific central office services that we no longer use. ... This is the same budget that the RCSD Board of Education, NYSED, and East EPO agreed to initially — nothing has changed.”

School Board President Van White, an architect and major proponent of the East-UR partnership, said that even if East does get extra money, it’s worth the investment.

“That would not surprise me, and I’m good with that, because it’s clear to me we’re getting a return on investment,” he said. “People cannot be dismissive of this simply because it’s costing more money. We live in the third-poorest community in the country. That comes with a cost.”

White also said some of the work done at East, including developing new curriculum, can be adopted cost-free at other RCSD schools.

Even apart from East, there exists a wide spread in per-pupil spending among district schools.

Several that have gotten improvement grants from the state, including the former Kodak Park School 41, spend between \$22,000 and \$27,000 per student.

On the other end of the spectrum are schools with less poverty, comparably speaking, such as School of the Arts and Anna Murray Douglass Academy (School 12). They get about \$18,000 per student.

Edison Tech, the district’s most populous school and one of its most challenged, gets less per-pupil funding than all but two other schools at \$17,848.

An RCSD spokesman said the district is looking to direct more money toward Edison Tech, and noted that the state’s funding number does not include some of the career and technical education funding the school receives that could include NYSED School Improvement Grants, Persistently Struggling School Grants, Community Schools Grant and expanded learning funds.

“We are actively continuing to ensure we fund our schools equitably and that the necessary funding exists to meet the needs of all students,” the spokesman said.

The information was required from large school districts for the first time this year, part of what Gov. Andrew Cuomo touted as a step toward budgetary transparency. School districts balked at what they saw as an intrusion on local control, but the measure was ultimately approved as part of the state budget.

Rochester was the only local district required to report. The state budget office and Education Department must approve the spending documents now that they’re submitted.

The Education Trust New York, a nonprofit organization advocating for equity in education spending, compiled the state data into an interactive online tool.

Its analysis shows that funding is not properly distributed between poorer and wealthier schools within the Big 5 districts of Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, New York City and Yonkers. It also shows that inexperienced teachers are more likely to be assigned to schools with the poorest children.

“Equal is not the same as equitable,” Ian Rosenblum, executive director of The Education Trust New York, said in a statement. “The new state law provides needed transparency on school funding and reveals for the first time that school districts are in many cases not doing enough to direct resources to the schools with the greatest needs.”

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**East High School is using increased funding to boost its graduation rate.**

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