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## Audit estimates cost of educating undocumented children

By **Deborah Bulkeley**

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Educating undocumented children last year cost between \$54.9 million and \$85.4 million in state and local funding, according to a new legislative audit.

That's about 2 percent of the \$3.1 billion spent for education by state and local educational agencies in fiscal year 2006, according to the State Office of Education.

The audit released today by the Utah Legislative Auditor General estimated 10,714 to 16,667 undocumented students comprised roughly 2 percent to 3 percent of the public school system's 505,185 children.

Sen. Margaret Dayton, R-Orem, who chair's the Senate's Education Committee, requested the audit in the recent legislative session. Dayton, who didn't immediately return phone calls for comment, has said she hopes the audit could lead to leverage with the federal government when it comes to federal education funds.

A hearing on the audit's results was scheduled today before the Legislative Audit Subcommittee.

The idea of the audit has been criticized by some Hispanic community leaders, who have questioned whether it would violate students' civil rights. A Supreme Court ruling dictates that all children receive a public education, regardless of their legal status.

Others have said doing such a limited audit is unfair and suggested the state conduct a broader audit into not just the costs but also the benefits from illegal immigration.

In a written response to the audit, State Superintendent Patti Harrington said "it is a reasonable assumption that there are additional costs to educating English Language Learners (ELL) and students who are living in poverty," though she said the State Office of Education can't verify the audit or its methodology.

Auditors estimated the cost for educating undocumented high school students at \$20.7 million to \$32.1 million. The estimated cost for educating kindergarten through eighth graders was \$34.2 to \$53.3 million. The audit doesn't include U.S. citizen children of undocumented immigrants.

The totals were based on an estimated per-pupil expenditure of \$5,140 for students in five school districts who require low-income and English Language Learner services, regardless of immigration status.

**Undocumented student costs** EXPRESSED IN MILLIONS

2006 GRADES	LOW ESTIMATE		HIGH ESTIMATE	
	STATE & LOCAL	FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL	STATE & LOCAL	FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL
High school	\$20.7	\$23.0	\$32.1	\$35.7
K-8	\$34.2	\$40.0	\$53.3	\$62.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$54.9</b>	<b>\$63.0</b>	<b>\$85.4</b>	<b>\$97.9</b>

SOURCE: Office of the Utah Legislative Auditor General

*Deseret Morning News graphic*

The audit's estimated per-pupil cost was \$5,500 for high school students, compared to \$5,000 for a student who doesn't require those services.

The cost was estimated at \$4,900 for elementary school students, compared to \$4,800 for students who don't need the services.

The five districts — Granite, Ogden, Provo, Salt Lake and Tooele — represent 80 percent of all "highly impacted school money," which is in part based on the number of low-income and English Language Learner students.

The estimates are lower than the Office of Education's statewide average of \$5,322 per student for 2006. Auditors said their methodology was likely different from the state's and may not have taken into account all of the costs in the statewide estimate.

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*E-mail: [dbulkeley@desnews.com](mailto:dbulkeley@desnews.com)*

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