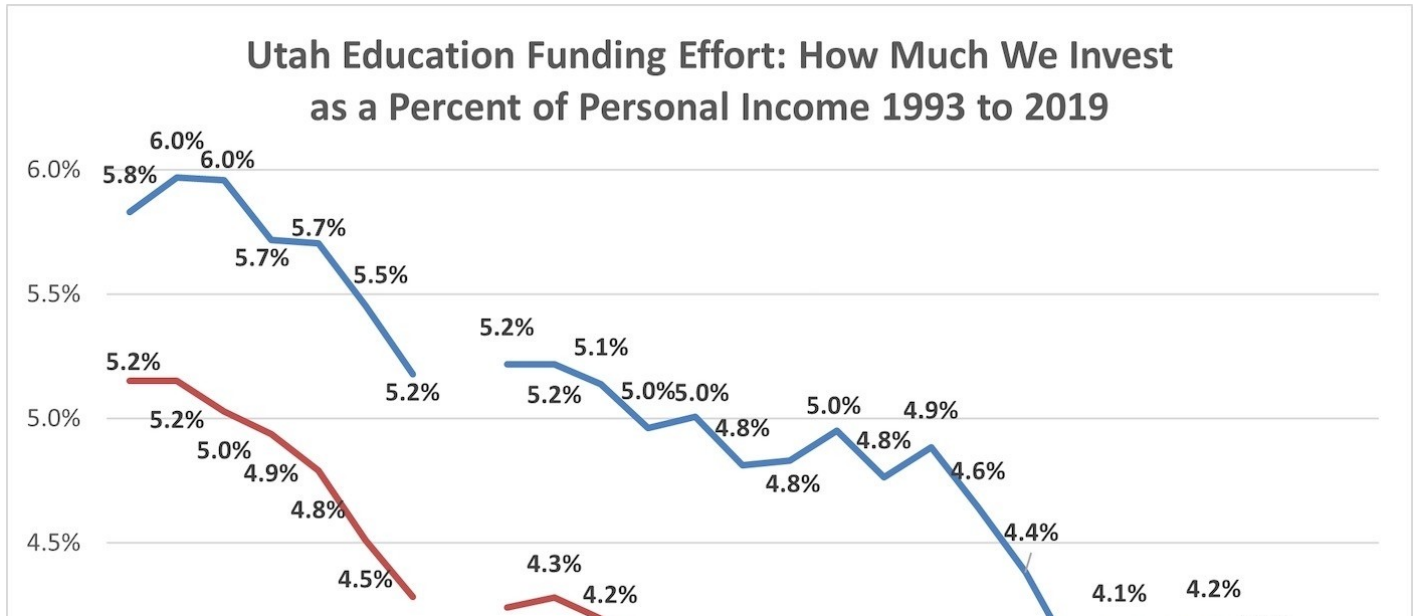


Good News and Bad News for Utah in New Census Report on State Education

Published: Wednesday, 26 May 2021 23:11

Written by: Matthew Weinstein



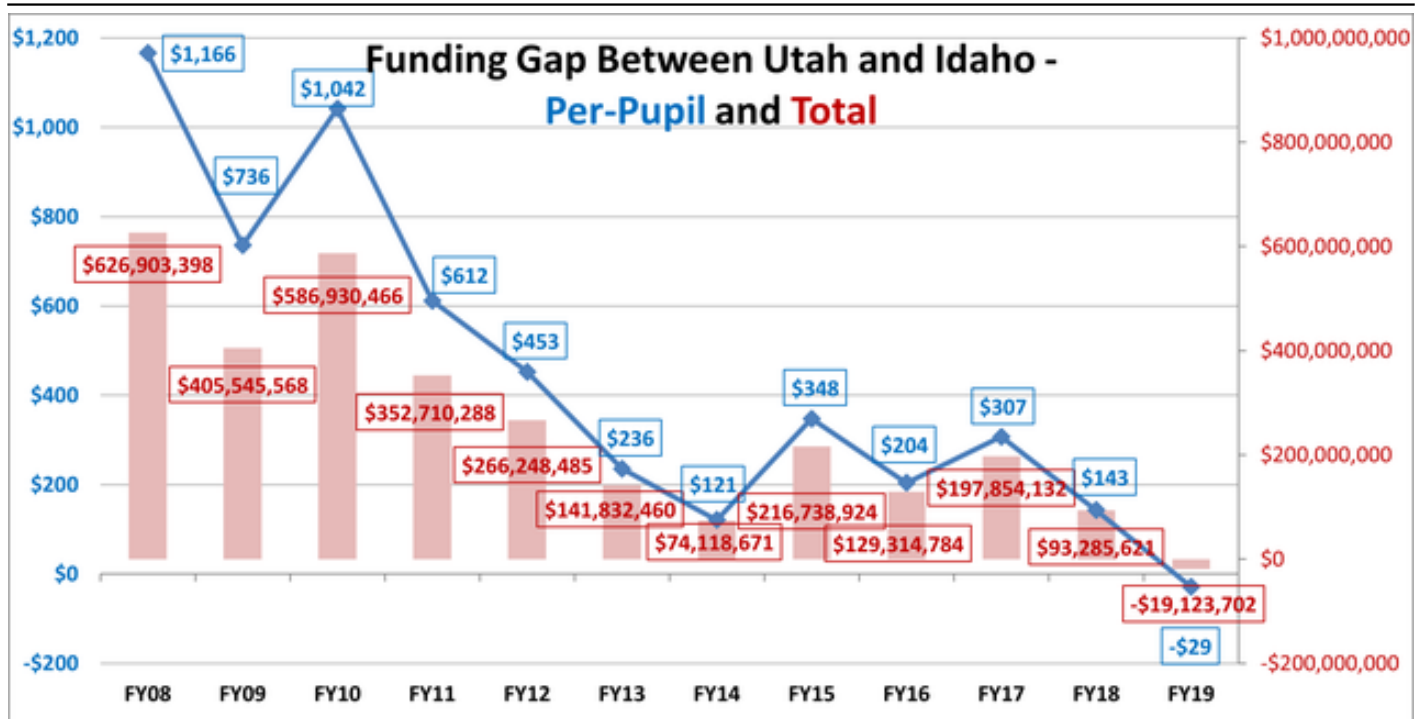
On May 18, 2021, as it always does around this time of year, the US Census Bureau released its [Annual Survey of School System Finances](#). This report is the authoritative source of state education finance data and rankings, including the one we are all familiar with that has ranked Utah last in the nation for per-pupil K-12 education investment every year since 1988. This year's report, which as always covered the data from two years ago (the 2018-19 school year), included both good news and bad news for Utah.

On the positive side, Utah has finally defeated Idaho in the annual fight for 49th place. Voices for Utah Children has been tracking this annual battle for a number of years. We've come close in the past, and in FY2019 we finally won, by a grand total of \$29 per pupil or \$19 million overall, as illustrated in the chart below:

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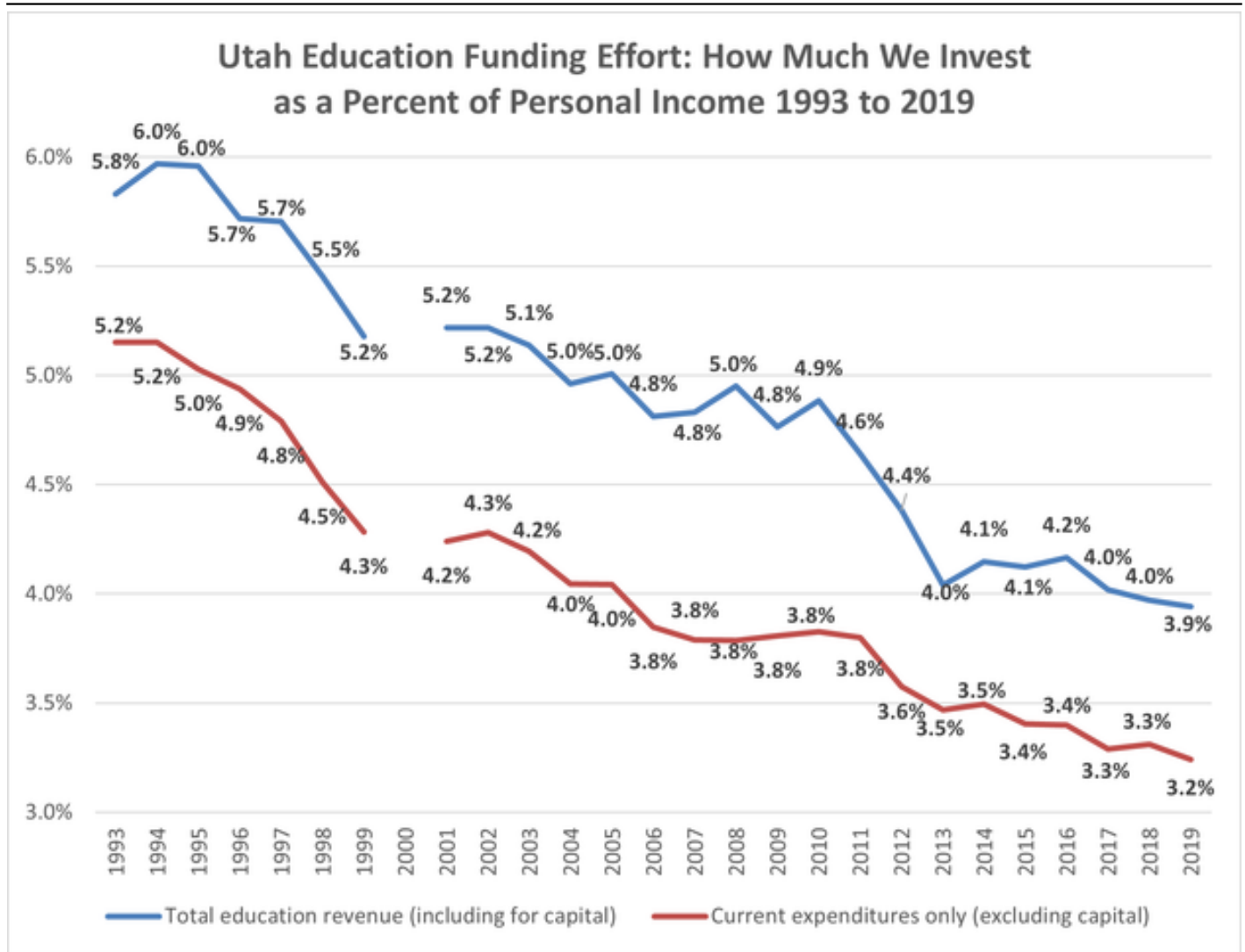


On the negative side, Utah's "education funding effort," a measure of the share of state personal income that we invest in K-12 education, continued its long decline. In the 1990s, Utah invested a total of 6% of our personal income in our education system, but that share has fallen by more than a third, to under 4% today, as shown in the chart below:

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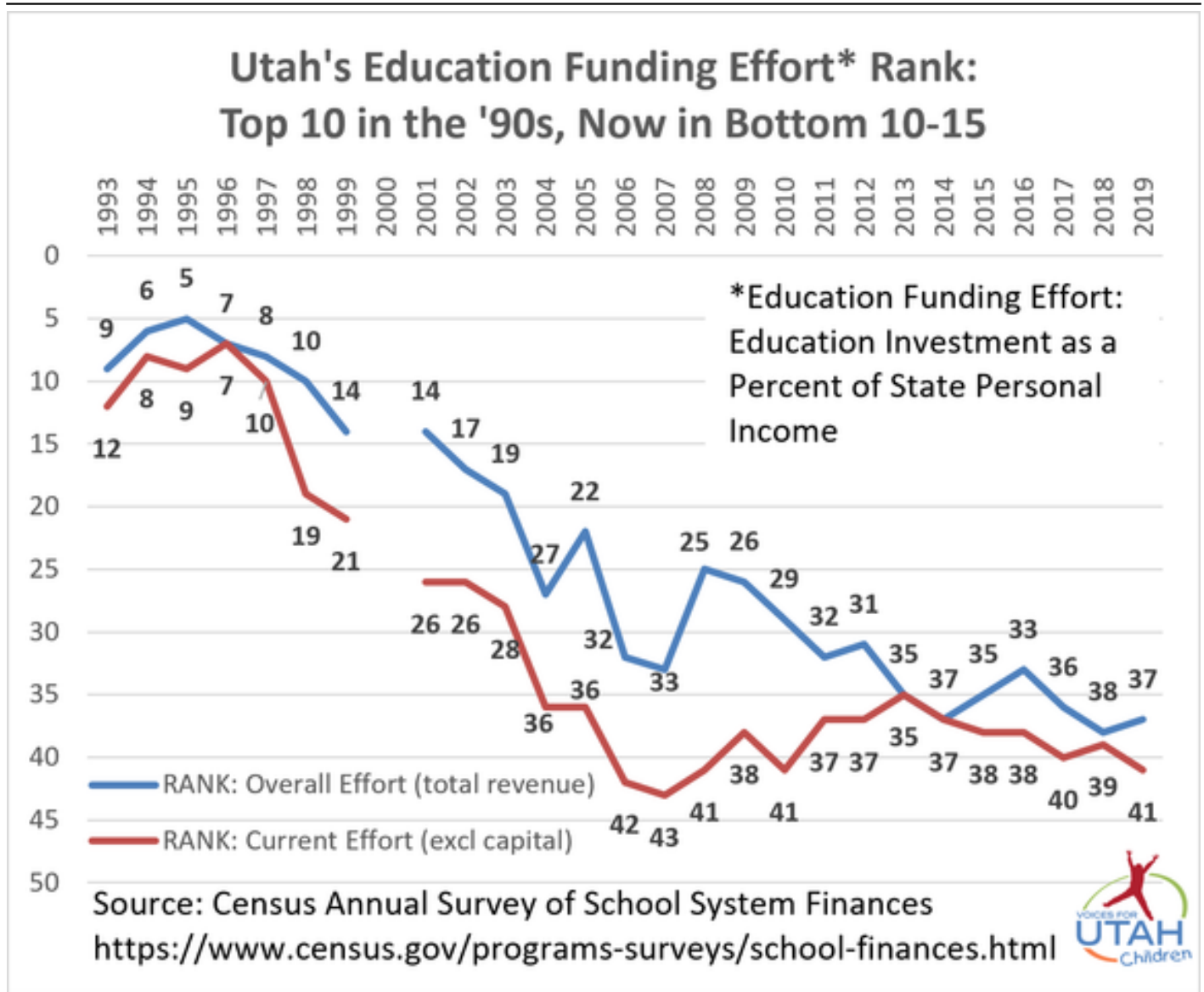
The blue line is total education revenue, including revenues used for capital spending (such as new school buildings), while the red line shows only current expenditures, which excludes capital spending. (Utah tends to spend a higher share of overall education revenue on capital compared to other states because our rapidly growing population requires more frequent construction of new school buildings.)

As our education funding effort has declined, so has our national ranking for education funding effort. In the 1990s we consistently ranked in the top 10 nationally for education funding effort, but now we're in the bottom 10-15, as shown below:

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Voices for Utah Children's most recent [economic benchmarking report](#), comparing Utah to Arizona and to the nation as a whole, discusses the question of whether Utah's economic development strategy needs to transition away from our practice of passing regular tax breaks (on average [\\$100 million annually for the last 25 years](#), adding up now to about \$2.5 billion each year, intended to spur job growth) and instead focus on rolling back some tax breaks and restoring some revenues so we can address the unmet needs in our education system -- our high class sizes and rates of teacher attrition that are contributing to our low high school graduation and college completion rates, including large gaps between different demographic groups.

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MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE NEW CENSUS DATA:

- KUER
radio: <https://www.kuer.org/education/2021-05-27/utahs-not-last-in-the-country-for-per-pupil-spending-anymore-but-funding-still-isnt-making-the-grade>
- KUTV-2: <https://kutv.com/news/beyond-the-books/utah-no-longer-last-place-in-per-pupil-education-spending>
- Salt Lake
Tribune: <https://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2021/05/18/utah-is-not-last-nation/>