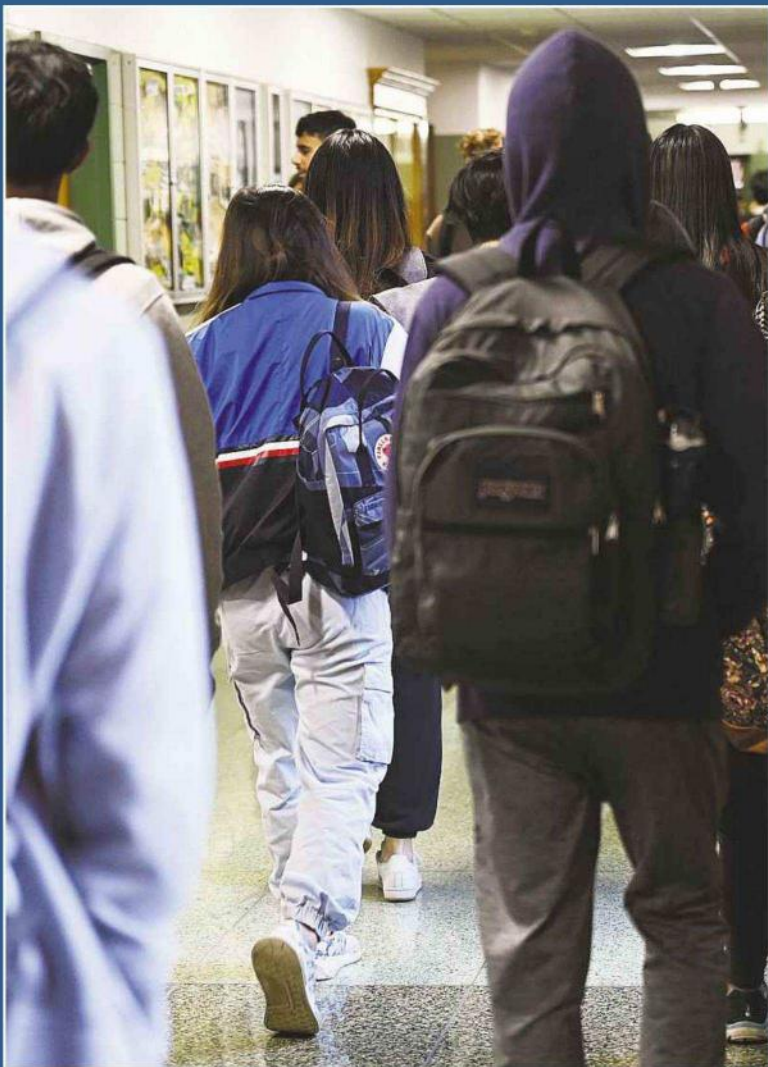


ONLY IN NEWSDAY



DANIELLE SILVERMAN

Students head to class at Jericho High last year. Statewide, the average per pupil cost was \$31,950.

\$36G PER STUDENT

That average cost at
LI schools is up
nearly 6% from last year,
Newsday analysis finds

A2-4 | VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.TV

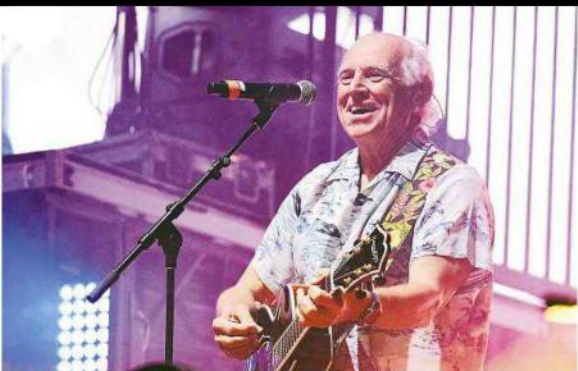


NEWSDAY/THOMAS A. FERRARA

HS Football

Previewing every team,
plus the Top 100 players

HS SPORTS | VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.TV



BOB RICH / SOCIETYVALLEY.COM

Jimmy Buffett Dies

'Margaritaville' icon was
an East End mainstay

A8-10



JOHN KOCA

New Day for Labor

Recent wins show unions'
revival, but some struggling

LI BUSINESS | A27

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Business	A27	Nation	A24
Corrections	A23	Obituaries	A40
Editorials/Opinion	A36	Reaching Newsday	A23
Flash!	A20	Weather	A39
Long Island	A22	World	A26
Lottery	A67		

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The following pertains to mailed subscriptions as required by the USPS:

Newsday (USPS# 388-760)
ISSN 0278-5587 (print) ISSN 2643-9417 (online) is published daily except Sunday and Christmas Day by Newsday LLC, 6 Corporate Center Drive, Melville, NY 11747. Periodicals postage paid at Huntington Station, NY. Postmaster: Send address changes to 6 Corporate Center Drive, Melville, NY 11747.

TOP STORIES

ANALYSIS: SPENDING ON LI HITS RECORD \$366 PER STUDENT

Changes by state make performance tough to measure

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
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School spending will hit a record \$36,105 per student on Long Island this school year, a Newsday analysis shows, amid growing questions about whether money is effectively directed toward boosting academic achievement.

That average cost per student is up nearly 6% from last year, Newsday found. Expanded spending reflected both inflationary pressures and a major infusion of state financial aid totaling more than \$770 million for this region alone.

Statewide, the average per pupil was \$31,950.

Expenditures for the great majority of the Island's 124 school districts ranged from \$25,000 to \$50,000 per student, according to Newsday's review. For a handful of the smallest systems, spending levels are far higher — for example, \$175,377 per pupil on Fire Island, \$160,228 in Quogue and \$104,528 in Bridgehampton.

Overall, the Island is one of the highest-spending regions in a high-spending state, studies show. New York ranked No. 1 among states last year in per-student expenditures in a survey by the National Education Association, a teachers union organization. NEA's calculations pegged New York's per-student expenditures at \$31,299, with Vermont ranked a distant second at \$26,771 and New Jer-

WHAT TO KNOW

- **Per-student spending on Long Island** will rise to more than \$36,000 this school year, driven by inflationary pressures and also record hikes in state financial aid.
- **Statewide costs will average more than \$31,000 per pupil**, amid growing questions over whether the money is effectively directed toward boosting academic achievement.
- **Achievement is mixed, with superior results** on advanced exams taken in high schools across the state, but mediocre at best on federal survey tests given in fourth and eighth grades.

in public education," Bob Vecchio, president of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association, said in a recent phone interview.

In some respects, New York does do relatively well, results show. Last year, the state ranked second nationwide, and only slightly behind Massachusetts, in the percentage of graduating high school seniors who passed at least one Advanced Placement test.

New York had ranked as low as eighth among states in 2019. AP's program sponsors college-level coursework and exams in high schools. It is sponsored by a private group, College Board, headquartered in Manhattan.

On the Island, dozens of districts, including Jericho, Manhasset, East Williston and Hericks, led the state in achievement on passage of AP tests and also on International Baccalaureate exams that are sponsored by a Swiss-based organization of the same name. Regionwide, more than 85,000 such tests were taken in 2022.

"The rigor of those courses really prepares students for college," Vecchio said. Vecchio added the Island's schools generally exceed state averages on tests and high school graduation rates.

However, state achievement by some other measures appears mediocre at best. A prime example can be found in scores collected by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federal program that compares results of state-by-state sample testing in math and reading every two years.

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New York's lower rankings

In 2022, New York ranked

sey third at \$25,024.

For its analysis, Newsday drew on 2023-24 data from school budgets and projected enrollments for 668 districts statewide, including 121 on the Island. Figures are compiled annually in "Property Tax Report Cards" by the state's Department of Education. This is a common method of calculating per-pupil costs, though some government agencies use more complex systems.

As costs rise, growing numbers of fiscal and academic experts ask whether this translates into better student performance. School representatives on the Island said the answer is yes, while some critics say differently.

"I do believe we're getting good return on our investment



Nassau County schools average \$36,721 in spending per student. ■ Video: [newsday.com/education](https://www.newsday.com/education)

TOP 10 LI DISTRICTS, PER-STUDENT SPENDING

Many small Long Island districts have higher per-student spending because of smaller class sizes and other disadvantages in terms of economy of scale.

District	Enrollment (2023-24)	Per-student spending (2023-24)
Fire Island	33	\$175,377
Quogue	62	\$160,228
Bridgehampton	208	\$104,528
Amagansett	138	\$95,410
East Quogue	365	\$77,705
Shelter Island	180	\$70,356
Montauk	330	\$68,891
Fishers Island	60	\$65,681
Southampton	1,305	\$58,926
Remsenburg-Speonk	298	\$53,698

SOURCE: NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT; NEWSDAY CALCULATIONS

46th among states in fourth grade math, 23rd in eighth grade math, 31st in fourth grade reading, and ninth in eighth grade reading. In those same subjects, rival Massachusetts ranked either first or second in every category.

Massachusetts' rise in national standings goes back to the 1990s, when the state made sweeping changes in its testing and learning standards, influenced by standards used in NAEP's program. In August 2022, the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education took another step toward high standards by raising passing scores on a 10th grade English exam required for graduation.

Three months earlier, New York State opted for a different approach. The Board of Regents, which sets much of the

state's education policy, approved a temporary rules change allowing local school superintendents to grant waivers to students, so they can earn graduation credit on Regents exams with scores as low as 50. The traditional passing score is 65.

State authorities in Albany justified the waivers as an effort to level the playing field for students facing wide variations in school conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, some independent advocacy groups contended New York had watered-down standards.

Critical groups included The Education Trust-New York, a Manhattan-based organization that focuses on the educational needs of minority students who are impoverished. The organization's deputy director, Jeff

Smink, told Newsday that NAEP data and other test results signaled a need for this state to maintain academic rigor.

"This is particularly concerning when neighboring states such as Massachusetts have recently increased the rigor of their exit exam system, while New York moves in the opposite direction," Smink said in a written statement.

In response, JP O'Hare, a spokesman for New York's education department, said his agency relied on multiple sources to measure students' learning that included NAEP scores, but also extending to teacher interactions, classroom assessments and state tests.

"Our strategy is informed by the premise that no single test score, on its own, can fully or accurately depict what a student knows and can do," O'Hare said in statement.

Hard to track progress

Another sore point with critics is the state's latest effort to revise "cut" scores that determine which students achieve proficiency level on state tests. The state's scoring system sets four different levels of achievement for students, with the top two levels considered proficient or beyond. Among tests affected are those in English and math administered each year to hundreds of thousands of students in grades 3-8.

The state has revised cutoff levels frequently in the past, and many outside experts have complained this makes it

PER-STUDENT SPENDING

Current school-year spending per student in Long Island districts. Newsday based calculations on voter-approved budgets and projected enrollments compiled by the state Department of Education. No figures were released for the New Suffolk, Sagaponack and Wainscott districts, due to their small size.

District	Per-student spending	District	Per-student spending
NASSAU			
Baldwin	\$34,980	Center Moriches	\$35,828
Bellmore	\$34,976	Central Islip	\$31,900
Bellmore-Merrick	\$36,474	Cold Spring Harbor	\$49,291
Bethpage	\$34,066	Commack	\$41,050
Carle Place	\$41,680	Comsewogue	\$31,355
East Meadow	\$31,134	Connetquot	\$40,477
East Rockaway	\$38,242	Copiague	\$36,260
East Williston	\$42,498	Deer Park	\$33,876
Elmont	\$33,081	East Hampton	\$42,243
Farmingdale	\$38,406	East Islip	\$36,316
Floral Park-Bellerose	\$25,659	East Moriches	\$30,457
Franklin Square	\$23,987	East Quogue	\$77,705
Freeport	\$37,136	Eastport-South Manor	\$40,689
Garden City	\$33,100	Elwood	\$36,466
Glen Cove	\$34,505	Fire Island	\$175,377
Great Neck	\$40,443	Fishers Island	\$65,681
Hempstead	\$48,802	Greenport	\$32,479
Herricks	\$31,536	Half Hollow Hills	\$40,627
Hewlett-Woodmere	\$46,606	Hampton Bays	\$30,966
Hicksville	\$30,027	Harborfields	\$34,776
Island Park	\$43,249	Hauppauge	\$41,144
Island Trees	\$34,736	Huntington	\$29,571
Jericho	\$41,907	Islip	\$37,278
Lawrence	\$44,621	Kings Park	\$39,589
Levittown	\$35,832	Lindenhurst	\$32,913
Locust Valley	\$50,333	Longwood	\$33,825
Long Beach	\$44,848	Mattituck-Cutchogue	\$46,090
Lynbrook	\$37,073	Middle Country	\$30,095
Malverne	\$38,076	Miller Place	\$33,555
Manhasset	\$35,462	Montauk	\$68,891
Massapequa	\$35,152	Mount Sinai	\$32,989
Merrick	\$36,919	North Babylon	\$31,272
Mineola	\$38,047	Northport-East Northport	\$42,058
New Hyde Park-Garden City Park	\$30,500	Oysterponds	\$40,874
North Bellmore	\$31,692	Patchogue-Medford	\$30,852
North Merrick	\$32,405	Port Jefferson	\$50,447
North Shore	\$47,627	Quogue	\$160,228
Oceanside	\$31,705	Remsenburg-Speonk	\$53,698
Oyster Bay-East Norwich	\$46,308	Riverhead	\$34,909
Plainedge	\$34,532	Rocky Point	\$34,440
Plainview-Old Bethpage	\$34,739	Sachem	\$30,724
Port Washington	\$34,571	Sag Harbor	\$51,077
Rockville Centre	\$39,553	Sayville	\$40,066
Roosevelt	\$43,685	Shelter Island	\$70,356
Roslyn	\$39,223	Shoreham-Wading River	\$42,061
Seaford	\$36,498	Smithtown	\$36,888
Sewanhaka	\$30,671	South Country	\$36,087
Syosset	\$40,347	South Huntington	\$36,227
Uniondale	\$37,927	Southampton	\$58,926
Valley Stream 13	\$33,655	Southold	\$47,793
Valley Stream 24	\$35,425	Springs	\$52,531
Valley Stream 30	\$33,063	Three Village	\$42,373
Valley Stream Central	\$32,307	Tuckahoe	\$50,123
Wantagh	\$31,216	West Babylon	\$35,090
West Hempstead	\$46,444	West Islip	\$35,974
Westbury	\$39,051	Westhampton Beach	\$36,287
SUFFOLK			
Amagansett	\$95,410	William Floyd	\$27,596
Amityville	\$38,926	Wyandanch	\$33,487
Babylon	\$38,881	Nassau \$36,721	
Bay Shore	\$34,541	Suffolk \$35,565	
Bayport-Blue Point	\$43,992	Long Island \$36,105	
Brentwood	\$31,006	SOURCE: New York State Education Department; Newsday calculations	
Bridgehampton	\$104,528	— COMPILED BY MICHAEL R. EBERT	

NEWSDAY / ALEXANDRA VILLA LOARCA