



How Much Does It Really Cost to Raise a Child?



\$502,152.

That's the average combined public and private cost of raising a child from birth to age 18, according to a new analysis, published in the journal *Nature Communications*. The article is authored by [David Blazar](#), [Michel Boudreaux](#), [Steven Klees](#), NEPC Fellow [Jennifer King Rice](#), [Marvin Titus](#) and [Jiehui Zhao](#), all of the University of Maryland.

The amount varies by parental income, from \$557,382 (in 2024 dollars) for families earning in the highest quintile of household incomes, to \$471,038 for those in the lowest quintile.

The analysis represents an effort to quantify the entire cost of raising a child. This includes formal education to basics like food, clothing, and housing. It also includes parental time and money invested in informal educational experiences such as homework help or museum visits. The researchers account for multiple types of resources, including public expenditures for services such as public schools and food stamps for low-income families as well as direct parental expenditures.

“The findings of this are not surprising,” Blazar told *Chalkbeat*. “What’s most compelling is thinking about investments in kids as a bundle — it’s not just about housing, it’s not just about early childhood. It’s about the investments we make altogether.”

In addition to varying by family income, investments also vary by ethnicity/race. The average White child receives \$529,595 in resources compared to \$496,589 for Asian American children, \$474,588 for Black children, and \$456,459 for Hispanic children.

The researchers found that racial and income-related inequities peak between birth and age five, since public investments are lower—due to a lack of free, universal childcare and education for many in this age group. White and higher-income families spend more on childcare and housing, which provides greater resources and opportunities for these young children.

Once children reach the age of five, more investments in public education kick in and 90% of children take advantage of them. In some cases, these investments are higher for children from lower-income families, who are more likely to receive special education services or compensatory education such as tutoring.

The researchers stress, however, that more does not necessarily mean better. “We made the deliberate choice to be agnostic about the quality of investments children receive,” they write.

As a result, our estimates reflect the raw quantity of time and material that is directed towards children of different groups. We measure hours spent in tutoring, for example, but not the relative productivity of a given hour of tutoring.

That \$502,152 bottom-line figure is, by the way, really not the bottom line. The researchers made conservative choices throughout, so some key resources and expenses are not included. For instance, the cost of public education is too low (\$6,000 per year) because the researchers only account for students’ primary teacher(s)—the data available for “direct teacher-child links.” This is less than half of the total per-pupil cost of public education, since it does not include funding for expenses related to non-primary teachers (e.g., counselors and administrators), facil-

ity costs, and other expenses. The researchers also point out other costs that they did not include in their estimates, such as the earned income credit for low-income families, or tax exclusions for employer-provided healthcare (an even larger amount).

The analysis relies on data from multiple large-scale federal surveys, including the Census Bureau's American Community Survey and the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey Kindergarten Cohort of 2011.

NEPC Resources on Economics

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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