

In determining support for public education in states, politics seems to be a stronger determining factor than economics, at least in the Heartland of America.

Financing Public Education in the American Heartland: A Profile and Analysis

by James G. Ward

The states of the American Midwest (Great Lakes and Plains U. S. Census regions) are sometimes known as the American Heartland. This region comprises states that border on America's fourth coast, the Great Lakes, as well as those deep in the interior plains. Residents of the region often feel that they are part of a "Lost America" in a bicoastal mindset, thought of only as one flies over the region on the way from Seattle to Washington or New York to Los Angeles. The Heartland contains states that are prime producers of corn, soybeans, cheese, and hogs, but also has a significant portion of what has been termed the "Rust Belt." It is a diverse region, but one with a common identity.

This study examines the financing of public education, both elementary and secondary and higher education, in the twelve states of the Heartland. Five of these states are in the Great Lakes region (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin) and seven are in the Plains region (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas). The purpose of this study is to better understand factors affecting financing public education in the Heartland by examining trends over a five year period (1986-91) and placing them in the context of economic changes in the region over the same period.

The States of the American Heartland: The Population and Economic Base

Selected data on the twelve states of the American Heartland are shown in Table 1. They range in population from somewhat sparsely populated, rural states like North Dakota (0.6 million people), South Dakota (0.7 million), Nebraska (1.6 million), Kansas (2.5 million), and Iowa (2.8 million) to heavily metropolitan and highly populous states like Illinois (11.6 million), Ohio (11.0 million), and Michigan (9.4 million).

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Four states fall in a mid-population range: Indiana (5.7 million), Missouri (5.2 million), Wisconsin (5.0 million), and Minnesota (4.5 million).

These states also vary greatly in terms of wealth, as measured by the 1991 state per capita income. The wealthiest states are Illinois (\$20,737), Minnesota (\$19,130), Michigan (\$18,642), and Kansas (\$18,306), while the poorest are North Dakota (\$15,646), South Dakota (\$16,095), Indiana (\$17,193), and Iowa (\$17,251). A different pattern emerges when one examines the change in per capita personal income from 1986 to 1991. The greatest per capita income growth occurred in South Dakota (36.7 percent), Illinois (33.4 percent), Nebraska (31.7 percent), and Indiana (30.7 percent). Slow income growth states over the period were Michigan (25.3 percent), Kansas (26.4 percent), and North Dakota (26.6 percent).

An economic typology of the Heartland states was developed on the basis of proportions of personal income derived from particular industry types in order to attempt to discern economic factors which may help explain education funding. This economic typology is shown in Table 2. Three distinctly different economic base patterns were found.

The three states of Illinois, Minnesota, and Missouri are characterized as "trade and financial services states," with a higher proportion of personal income derived from the industry categories of wholesale trade and finance, insurance, and real estate. These states contain major metropolitan centers (Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul, St. Louis, and Kansas City) which are regional centers for commerce and banking and financial services. While each of these states are industrial, they have a lower percentage of personal income coming from manufacturing than do the states categorized as "industrial states." Only one of these states (Minnesota at 2.9 percent) derived more than 2 percent of its personal income from agriculture. The trade and financial services states tend to be wealthier than the rest of the states in the Heartland. These states account for 37.4 percent of the personal income of the region, but only 35.1 percent of the population.

Four states, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, are classified as "industrial states." Each derived 28 percent or more of their state personal income from manufacturing and no other state in the Heartland exceeded 23 percent. These four states had proportions of personal income coming from wholesale trade and finance, insurance, and real estate below average for the region. Only South Dakota was lower in this category than the four industrial states. Only Wisconsin (2.2 percent) derived more than 2 percent of its personal income from agriculture. These states are dominated economically by manufacturing and contain some of the cities well known for their heavy industrial bases, such as Detroit, Cleveland, Toledo, Gary, and Milwaukee. The industrial states have 49.7 percent of the region's personal income and 51.3 percent of its population.

Finally, the five states of Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas are classified as "agricultural states," with relatively high proportions of personal income derived from agriculture. Only Iowa (20.9 percent) and Kansas (18.2) seem to have significant concentrations of manufacturing. Each of these states have significant income from trade and financial services, but these seem to be secondary trade and financial services centers which feed into the large centers in the trade and financial services states. The agricultural states provide 12.9 percent of the region's personal income and have 13.5 percent of the Heartland population.

Government Finance in the Heartland

There are two important indicators of the willingness of a populace to support public services. One is the overall level of state and local government revenue from own sources per capita, which provides a measure of overall fiscal support. The

second is revenues from own sources as a percent of personal income, which standardizes for ability to pay. Both indicators are shown in Table 3.

In own source state and local revenues per capita, only three Heartland states exceed the U.S. average. These are Minnesota (119 percent of the U. S. average), Wisconsin (103 percent), and Michigan (101 percent). Two states, Missouri (75 percent) and South Dakota (77 percent) raise revenues for own sources per capita at more than twenty percent below the national average. Within five percentage points of the national average are North Dakota (98 percent), Iowa (97 percent), Nebraska (97 percent), and Illinois (95 percent).

Since own source state and local revenue as a percent of state personal income bases revenue production on the basis of ability to pay, it may be a more useful indicator. Exactly one half of the Heartland states exceed the U. S. average on this measure. States that show strong support for state and local government programs are North Dakota (119 percent), Minnesota (118 percent), Wisconsin (110 percent), Iowa (106 percent), Nebraska (104 percent), and Michigan (103 percent). It may be no accident that North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have strong progressive traditions and a history of activist governments.

States with low support for public services are Missouri (80 percent), Illinois (87 percent), South Dakota (92 percent), Ohio (93 percent), Indiana (96 percent), and Kansas (98 percent). All of these states, but most notably Missouri and Illinois, have been characterized by conservative governments over the past few decades and a more probusiness, anti-government climate than many of their neighbors. If the economic typology presented above has any meaning here, it is that a higher level of public services is most prevalent in the agricultural states and least prevalent in the trade and financial services states. The industrial states are in the middle.

Enrollment in Public Education

Enrollments in public elementary and secondary schools and in public higher education in the Heartland states are shown in Table 4, along with enrollment trends from fall 1985 to fall 1990. Overall, between 1985 and 1990, public elementary and secondary school enrollment in the Heartland increased by 76,000 students, or 0.8 percent, while public higher education enrollment over the same period rose by 279,000 students, or 11.2 percent. The latter may reflect a natural increase in college enrollments that occur during recessionary economic times. These aggregate figures mask large state variations.

The trade and financial service states gained 1.9 percent in public elementary and secondary enrollment over the five year period, with Illinois losing 0.3 percent, but Minnesota gaining 7.2 percent and Missouri gaining 2.1 percent. The manufacturing states lost 0.5 percent of its elementary and secondary school enrollment, with only Wisconsin (3.8 percent) gaining students. Losses were recorded in Indiana (-1.1 percent), Ohio (-1.2 percent), and Michigan (-1.3 percent). The agricultural states gained 2.7 percent in enrollments, with two states losing students: Iowa (-0.2 percent) and North Dakota (-0.8 percent). States with enrollment gains were Nebraska (3.0 percent), South Dakota (4.0 percent), and Kansas (6.6 percent).

Gains were made in all the Heartland states in public higher education enrollments from 1985 to 1990, with the exception of North Dakota (-0.3 percent). Five year gains were fairly consistent across all three classifications: trade and financial services states (10.1 percent), manufacturing states (11.6 percent), and agricultural states (12.8 percent). The only states with gains of less than 10 percent were Illinois (6.0 percent), Wisconsin (6.2 percent), and Iowa (7.4 percent). Largest percentage increases in public higher education enrollments from 1985 to 1990 were registered in Missouri (20.2 percent), Kansas (17.2 percent), and Nebraska (16.5 percent).

Financing Public Elementary and Secondary Education

In FY 1986, the per capita expenditure on public elementary and secondary education in the Heartland ranged from a low of \$506 in Missouri to a high of \$707 in Michigan. By FY 1991, the range had increased from a low of \$760 in Illinois to a high of \$964 in Minnesota. Per capita expenditures and regional ranks for FY 1986 and FY 1991 are shown in Table 5.

One way of analyzing these data is to look at both the regional ranks and the change in regional ranks from 1986 to 1991. Three states have demonstrated strong support for public elementary and secondary schools by reason of being in the top half of the regional ranking in FY 1986 and improving that ranking from 1986 to 1991. These states are Minnesota (rank 2 to 1), Wisconsin (rank 3 to 2), and Nebraska (rank 6 to 4). Remaining in the top half of the rankings, but dropping in rank was Michigan, moving from 1 to 3. Dropping out of the top half were Kansas, moving from 4 to 8, and North Dakota, moving from 5 to 10. Two states in the bottom half of the rankings in FY 1986, but moving into the top half in FY 1991 were Iowa (8 to 5) and Indiana (11 to 6). Missouri improved its rank in the five year period under analysis, but only moved from 12 to 11. Ohio (7) and South Dakota (9) did not change their respective rankings. Illinois showed the most dismal record by starting in the bottom half of the rankings and dropping in rank from 10 to 12.

Another measure of support for public education is to take account of ability to pay by examining state and local expenditures for public education as a percent of state personal income. This measure compensates for differing abilities to support public services. In theory, states making equal efforts will have identical percentages of state personal income spent on a particular public service. State and local expenditures for public elementary and secondary education as a percent of personal income for the Heartland states are shown in Table 6.

In FY 1986, the percentage of state personal income going to public elementary and secondary schools ranged from 3.7 percent in Illinois to 5.2 percent in Michigan. Other high ranking states were North Dakota (5.1 percent), South Dakota (5.1 percent), Minnesota (5.0 percent), Wisconsin (4.9 percent), and Ohio (4.6 percent). In FY 1991, the range extended from 3.8 percent in Illinois to 5.5 percent in Wisconsin. Other high ranking states in FY 1991 were Michigan (5.2 percent), Nebraska (5.2 percent), Minnesota (5.2 percent), South Dakota (5.1 percent), and North Dakota (5.1 percent).

Again, these data will be examined looking at relative rankings and changes in ranks from FY 1986 to FY 1991. By this measure, the most exemplary performance was shown by Wisconsin, which improved its rank from 5 in FY 1986 to 1 in FY 1991. Another high ranking state, Minnesota, maintained its rank at 4. Other high ranking states fell in rank, but maintained their position in the top half: Michigan (1 to 2), North Dakota (2 to 6), and South Dakota (3 to 5). Ohio fell out of the top half by dropping from 6 to 9.

Nebraska moved into the top half of rankings by improving its rank from 7 to 3, representing an actual increase in percentage of personal income going to public schools from 4.6 percent to 5.2 percent. Two states improved their ranks, but remained in the bottom half: Iowa (9 to 8) and Indiana (10 to 7). Kansas dropped in rank from 8 to 10. Missouri (11) and Illinois (12) did not change ranks.

Combining these two measures produces results that indicate that the best record of providing financial support for public elementary and secondary schools in the Heartland belongs to Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. These three states all rank in the top half of the region in personal income per capita in 1991, with Minnesota ranking 2, Wisconsin ranking 6, and Michigan ranking 3. However, the states with the worst record in supporting, Illinois and Missouri, ranked 1 and 5 respectively in personal income per capita in 1991. The state ranking 4th, Kansas, did not have a very strong record in supporting

public education. The three states with the best records on education funding are two industrial states (Wisconsin and Michigan) and one trade and financial services state (Minnesota). However, the two states with the worst records, Illinois and Missouri, are both trade and financial services states. Illinois and Missouri are both states with large intrastate inequities in levels of educational funding with some very lavishly funded suburban school districts in major metropolitan areas and larger city districts with very poor levels of funding in relation to need, such as Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, East St. Louis, and Rockford. The agricultural states seem to maintain a moderate level of financial support for public schools, generally not falling at either extreme.

Financing Public Higher Education

The per capita state and local government expenditure for public higher education in FY 1986 in the Heartland ranged from \$177 in Missouri to \$380 in North Dakota, a ratio of over 2:1. By FY 1991, this range increased from a low of \$239 in Missouri to a high of \$509 in North Dakota. As shown in Table 7, over this five year period the relative rankings of the Heartland states was far more stable in public higher education funding than in public elementary and secondary education funding.

Among those in the top half of the rankings in FY 1996, both North Dakota (1) and Michigan (5) maintained their ranks in FY 1991. Those increasing in rank were Iowa (3 to 2) and Nebraska (6 to 4). Dropping in rank were Wisconsin (2 to 3) and Kansas (4 to 6). All six states in the bottom half of the rankings in FY 1986 maintained the same rank in FY 1991: Minnesota (7), Indiana (8), Ohio (9), Illinois (10), South Dakota (11), and Missouri (12).

Table 8 shows the state and local expenditures for public higher education as a percent of state personal income for the Heartland states for FY 1986 and FY 1991. Support for public higher education based on ability to pay in FY 1986 was highest in North Dakota (3.1 percent) and lowest in Missouri (1.3 percent). Other high states were Iowa (2.6 percent), Wisconsin (2.6 percent), Michigan (2.2 percent), Kansas (2.2 percent), and Nebraska (2.1 percent). Joining Missouri at the bottom of the spectrum were Illinois (1.4 percent), Ohio (1.7 percent), and South Dakota (1.8 percent).

Public higher education spending as a percent of personal income also remained fairly stable between FY 1986 and FY 1991. Among those in the top half of the rankings in FY 1986, North Dakota (1) and Iowa (2) maintained their ranks over the five year period, while Nebraska improved its rank from 6 to 3, and three states dropped in rank: Wisconsin (3 to 4), Michigan (4 to 6), and Kansas (5 to 7). Of those in the bottom half of the rankings in FY 1986, states improving their ranks were Indiana (7 to 5) and Ohio (10 to 9). Minnesota (8), Illinois (11), and Missouri (12) maintained their ranks and South Dakota dropped in rank from 9 to 10.

Of those states in the Heartland with the best overall records of supporting public higher education, three (North Dakota, Iowa, and Nebraska) are agricultural states and one (Wisconsin) is an industrial state. Of the three with the worst records of support for public higher education, two are trade and financial center states (Illinois and Missouri) and one is an agricultural state (South Dakota). Missouri, with the poorest record of supporting public higher education, had the highest percentage increase in public higher education enrollment in the Heartland over the five year period. North Dakota, with the best funding record, lost enrollment.

Analysis and Conclusions

An analysis of the findings above shows Wisconsin as the Heartland state with the best and most consistent record of financial support of both public elementary and secondary edu-

cation and public higher education. Wisconsin is an industrial state and has an above average personal income per capita, but it may be political factors rather than economic factors which explains Wisconsin's education funding performance. Wisconsin was a leader of the Progressive Movement in the early part of this century and has supported a strong public sector, as evidenced by a level of state and local government revenue as a percent of state personal income ten percent above the national average. Wisconsin has been a leader in public higher education and was the birthplace of the "Wisconsin Idea" of public service by the state's leading public university.

Michigan also has a strong record in funding both public elementary and secondary education and public higher education. Michigan is a leading industrial state and has a politically strong labor movement that has supported public schools. In higher education, Michigan has been a leader in supporting strong public universities like the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. Michigan lacks Wisconsin's progressive tradition, but still has state and local revenue as a percent of personal income three percent above the national average.

Minnesota, which has a strong record in financial support of public elementary and secondary education, has a less stellar record in support of public higher education. Minnesota has a strong public sector, as evidenced by state and local government revenue as a percent of state personal income that is 18 percent above the national average, but that has not been transferred into strong support for public higher education.

None of the trade and financial center states have strong records in support of public higher education, although Minnesota has the best record of the three. Illinois and Missouri rank in the bottom three of the Heartland states in all higher education finance measures. However, Illinois and Missouri rank extremely low on public elementary and secondary education financial indicators also. Missouri and Illinois both have traditions of weak state governments and a heavy dependence on local governments for services. Both are low tax states and local and state revenues as a percent of personal income rank very low, not only in the region, but nationally. Illinois, in spite of its relative high ability to pay, and Missouri simply do not support public services and do not support public education at any level very well. In Illinois and Missouri traditions of private capital accumulation predominate over a civic culture of community services.

Three states with strong record in public higher education funding, North Dakota, Iowa, and Nebraska, are agricultural states with poorer records in funding public elementary and secondary education. These are states where the relatively ample funding of public higher education may partially be the results of underdeveloped private higher education systems. However, this is also true of other Heartland states with less exemplary records in public higher education finance.

Ohio and Indiana are industrial states with weak records in financially supporting public education, although Indiana has made recent improvements in public elementary and secondary education finance. Kansas and South Dakota are agricultural states with weak public education finance records also.

When considering the economic classifications of states, half of the industrial states have strong records of support for public education and half have mediocre records. One trade and financial services state has a strong record of financial support for public education, but the other two have very poor records. The agricultural states are in the middle range with neither very strong or very weak records. This pattern is too weak to consider drawing too many inferences from it. A conclusion that might be drawn from this study is that history and tradition and political culture and factors may explain more of the variance in financial support of public education among states than economic factors. In particular, the willingness to support public education does not seem to be associated with either personal

income per capita or growth in personal income per capita. Indeed, Illinois and Missouri rank among the best of the Heartland states on these indicators and have the worst records in supporting public education. States with the best records of public education financial support, Wisconsin and Michigan, are high income states, but have low income growth rates.

In determining support for public education in states, whether elementary and secondary education or higher education, politics seems to be a stronger determining factor than economics, at least in the Heartland of America.

Table 1. The States of the American Heartland

	1990 Population (in millions)	1991 Personal Income Per Capita	Percent Change in Personal Income Per Capita, 1986-1991
Great Lakes States			
Ohio	11.0	17,767	28.6
Indiana	5.7	17,193	30.7
Illinois	11.6	20,737	33.4
Michigan	9.4	18,642	25.3
Wisconsin	5.0	17,919	28.3
Plains States			
Minnesota	4.5	19,130	28.4
Iowa	2.8	17,251	29.8
Missouri	5.2	17,980	29.2
North Dakota	0.6	15,646	26.6
South Dakota	0.7	16,095	36.7
Nebraska	1.6	17,780	31.7
Kansas	2.5	18,306	26.4

Source: Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), *Significant Features of Fiscal Federalism, 1993*.

Table 2. The Heartland States: An Economic Typology

	Personal Income 1991 (millions)	WT/FIRE*	Percent Personal Income, By Industry Manufacturing	Agriculture
Trade and Financial Services States				
Illinois	255.6	16.6	19.8	1.4
Minnesota	91.5	14.4	22.1	2.9
Missouri	99.0	13.5	20.3	1.8
Manufacturing States				
Ohio	207.8	11.7	28.2	1.0
Indiana	104.2	10.5	31.1	1.5
Michigan	185.7	10.7	31.5	1.0
Wisconsin	95.9	11.6	28.2	2.2
Agricultural States				
Iowa	52.1	12.7	20.9	7.6
North Dakota	10.9	12.1	6.4	13.0
South Dakota	12.1	11.1	10.9	15.1
Nebraska	30.4	13.4	13.1	11.1
Kansas	48.8	12.1	18.2	4.8

*Combination of wholesale trade and finance, insurance, and real estate.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Survey of Current Business*.

Table 3. The State and Local Government Finances of the Heartland States Fiscal Year 1991

	Per Capita Revenues From Own Sources		As Percent of State Personal Income	
	Amount	Index of US Average	Amount	Index of US Average
Trade and Financial Services States				
Illinois	2814	95	14.0	87
Minnesota	3525	119	19.0	118
Missouri	2224	75	12.9	80
Manufacturing States				
Ohio	2596	88	15.0	93
Indiana	2574	87	15.5	96
Michigan	3009	101	16.6	103
Wisconsin	3054	103	17.7	110
Agricultural States				
Iowa	2865	97	17.1	106
North Dakota	2899	98	19.1	119
South Dakota	2283	77	14.8	92
Nebraska	2878	97	16.8	104
Kansas	2781	94	15.7	98

Source: ACIR, *Significant Features of Fiscal Federalism 1993*.

Table 4. Enrollment in Public Education, The Heartland States, Fall 1985 and Fall 1990 (enrollments in thousands)

	K-12 Public Schools			Public Higher Education		
	Fall 1985	Fall 1990	Percent Δ	Fall 1985	Fall 1990	Percent Δ
Trade and Financial Services States						
Illinois	1826	1821	(0.3)	520	551	6.0
Minnesota	705	756	7.2	174	199	14.5
Missouri	795	812	2.1	169	200	20.2
Manufacturing States						
Ohio	1794	1772	(1.2)	379	426	12.2
Indiana	966	955	(1.1)	194	223	15.0
Michigan	1603	1582	(1.3)	434	487	12.2
Wisconsin	768	797	3.8	239	254	6.2
Agricultural States						
Iowa	485	484	(0.2)	110	118	7.4
North Dakota	119	118	(0.8)	35	35	(0.3)
South Dakota	124	129	4.0	23	27	14.0
Nebraska	266	274	3.0	81	95	16.5
Kansas	410	437	6.6	127	149	17.2

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Educational Statistics, 1993*.

Table 5. Per Capita State and Local Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education Fiscal Years 1986 and 1991

	FY 1986		FY 1991	
	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank
Trade and Financial Services States				
Illinois	546	10	760	12
Minnesota	703	2	964	1
Missouri	506	12	762	11
Manufacturing States				
Ohio	613	7	804	7
Indiana	529	11	817	6
Michigan	707	1	945	3
Wisconsin	648	3	957	2
Agricultural States				
Iowa	570	8	820	5
North Dakota	620	5	771	10
South Dakota	569	9	779	9
Nebraska	616	6	890	4
Kansas	620	4	804	8

Source: ACIR, *Significant Features of Fiscal Federalism, 1993 and 1988 editions*.

**Table 6. State and Local Expenditures for Elementary and Secondary Education as a Percent of State Personal Income
Fiscal Years 1986 and 1991**

	FY 1986		FY 1991	
	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank
Trade and Financial Services States				
Illinois	3.7	12	3.8	12
Minnesota	5.0	4	5.2	4
Missouri	3.9	11	4.4	11
Manufacturing States				
Ohio	4.6	6	4.7	9
Indiana	4.3	10	4.9	7
Michigan	5.2	1	5.2	2
Wisconsin	4.9	5	5.5	1
Agricultural States				
Iowa	4.5	9	4.9	8
North Dakota	5.1	2	5.1	6
South Dakota	5.1	3	5.1	5
Nebraska	4.6	7	5.2	3
Kansas	4.5	8	4.6	10

Source: Same as Table 5.

Table 7. Per Capita State and Local Expenditures for Public Higher Education—Fiscal Years 1986 and 1991

	FY 1986		FY 1991	
	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank
Trade and Financial Services States				
Illinois	207	10	285	10
Minnesota	260	7	385	7
Missouri	177	12	239	12
Manufacturing States				
Ohio	227	9	291	9
Indiana	245	8	370	8
Michigan	296	5	404	5
Wisconsin	338	2	412	3
Agricultural States				
Iowa	332	3	450	2
North Dakota	380	1	509	1
South Dakota	193	11	243	11
Nebraska	280	6	409	4
Kansas	297	4	391	6

Source: Same as Table 5.

Table 8. Expenditures for Public Higher Education as a Percent of State Personal Income—Fiscal Years 1986 and 1991

	FY 1986		FY 1991	
	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank	Per Capita Amount	Regional Rank
Trade and Financial Services States				
Illinois	1.4	11	1.4	11
Minnesota	1.9	8	2.1	8
Missouri	1.3	12	1.4	12
Manufacturing States				
Ohio	1.7	10	1.7	9
Indiana	2.0	7	2.2	5
Michigan	2.2	4	2.2	6
Wisconsin	2.6	3	2.4	4
Agricultural States				
Iowa	2.6	2	2.7	2
North Dakota	3.1	1	3.4	1
South Dakota	1.8	9	1.6	10
Nebraska	2.1	6	2.4	3
Kansas	2.2	5	2.2	7

Source: Same as Table 5.