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Washington, D.C. spends \$10,829 per pupil: study

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Washington, D.C., led the nation in school budgets, spending \$10,829 per pupil, which worked out to almost three times what last-placed Utah spent, according to a report released on Monday.

Lightly populated Utah also had the most children, when measured as a percentage of its population, with 33 percent of its residents either 18 years old or younger, the study said.

By that gauge, West Virginia had the oldest population, as only 23 percent were school children.

Second on the list of big spenders was New Jersey at \$9,297 per student, followed by New York at \$8,949. Connecticut was fourth at \$8,592, just edging out Vermont at \$8,569, according to the study by The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government.

Most of the states that spent the least were clustered in the South, where property taxes often are much lower than in the Northeast. Schools typically get much of their funding from this source of revenue.

Mississippi was next to last at \$3,974 per pupil, according to the report, which was based on 2004 data. Idaho came next at \$4,274, topped by Alabama at \$4,349 and Tennessee at \$4,354.

Twenty-eight states spent less the U.S. average of \$6,047 for all 50 states and the nation's capital. All

but eight of the 28 low spenders were located in the Great Plains, the Southeast and Rocky Mountain regions, according to the study by the Albany, N.Y.-based institute.

Many of the latest rankings were little changed, when compared with earlier years, which suggests that these spending patterns and economic differences are fairly entrenched.

"States that were poor in 1992 were typically poor in 1998 and 2004," said the report, citing its analysis of how much states could afford to spend based on their gross domestic product, their economy's broadest measure.

States and the various levels of local government spent a total of \$467 billion of their own dollars on children's programs in fiscal 2004, the report said. Elementary and secondary education sopped up 90 percent of that sum.

Many states start their fiscal years on July 1.

Most of the nation's 77 million children — 55 percent — lived in just 10 states. They were: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Georgia and New Jersey, the report said.

On average, states, counties, cities and towns increased the amount they spent on children by 34 percent, or \$1,526, from 1992 to 2004. All but \$122 of this amount, which was adjusted for inflation, was spent on education.