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Incarceration vs. education: America spends more on its prison system than it does on public schools – and California is the worst

- Most American states spend more on their prisons than they do on education - and California is the worst, investing \$64,642 per prisoner compared to \$11,495 per student - a \$53,146 difference in spending priorities
- The reasons include an incarceration rate that has tripled over the past three decades, the higher cost of caring for people in prisons 24 hours a day, and the higher number of workers required to operate a prison
- New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Rhode Island round out the top states spending more on prisons

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The U.S. spends more on prisons and jails than it does on educating children – and 15 states spend at least \$27,000 more per prisoner than they do per student, according to a new report.

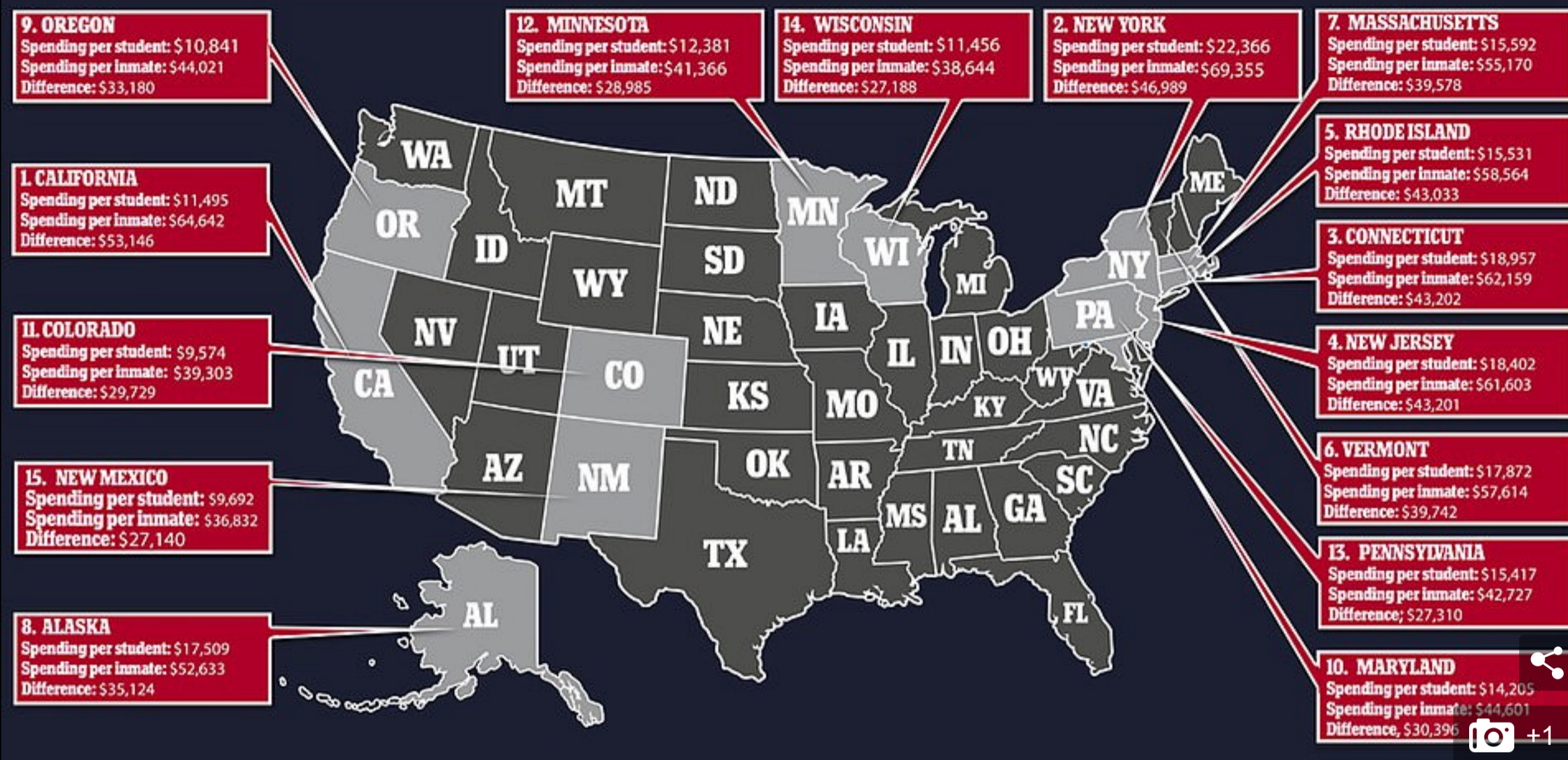
Americans account for 4.4 percent of the global population, but 22 percent of the world’s prison population.

California spends \$8.6 billion a year on its prison system, more than any other state, averaging \$64,642 per inmate. It’s also the state with the biggest gap between education and prison spending, paying just \$11,495 per student for a difference of \$53,146, according to a new **analysis** by personal finance site GoBankingRates.

Several factors play into the imbalance, including U.S. incarceration rates, which have more than tripled over the

past three decades – even as crime rates have fallen. During the same period, government spending on K-12 education increased by 107 percent, according to a [report](#) by the U.S. Department of Education.

Top 15 States Spending More on Prisons Than Education



The U.S. spends more on prisons and jails than it does on educating children – and 15 states spend at least \$27,000 more per prisoner than they do per student. This map breaks down the spending for those states, per student and per inmate, plus the difference between the two figures

Another factor in the spending gap between education and incarceration is that it takes more workers to run a prison than a school, with each American teacher supervising an average of 20.8 students, while prison guards oversee an average of 5.3 prisoners.

In addition, it costs more to house and feed prisoners three times a day, compared to school children who do not require the same 24-hour oversight.

While it may seem that prison spending and education spending are disparate, experts have drawn correlations between the two.

When the two:

For example, about 66 percent of state prison inmates haven't graduated high school, and young black men aged 20-24 without a high school diploma are more likely to be in jail or prison than they are to have a job, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

New York had the second-largest gap between per student and per prisoner costs – and spends more on each than any other state. Spending per student in New York is \$22,366, compared to the \$69,355 it invests per inmate, for a difference of \$46,989.

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Connecticut follows, with a \$43,202 gap between its \$18,957 spending per student and \$43,201 per inmate costs.

New Jersey narrowly ranks fourth, with a \$43,201 gap between per student spending (\$18,402) and per inmate expenditures (\$61,603).

Rhode Island lands in fifth place, with a \$43,033 gap when comparing per student spending (\$15,531) to costs per inmate (\$58,564).

Vermont ranked sixth, with a \$39,742 gap between per student (\$17,872) and per inmate (\$57,614) spending. Massachusetts followed with a \$39,578 gap comparing per student (\$15,592) and per inmate (57,614) spending.

With a gap of \$35,124, Alaska ranked eighth, spending \$17,509 per student and \$55,170 per inmate. Oregon came in ninth, with a \$33,180 gap between spending per student (10,841) and per inmate (\$44,021).

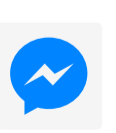
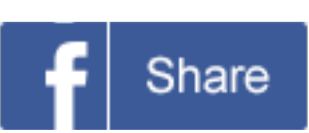
Maryland came in tenth, with a \$30,396 gap between per prisoner (\$44,601) and education (\$14,205) spending.

Colorado ranked eleventh (\$29,729), followed by Minnesota (\$28,985), Pennsylvania (\$27,310) and Wisconsin (\$27,188).

New Mexico rounds out the top 15, with a \$27,140 difference between education (\$9,692) and prison (\$36,832) spending.

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