the chart reveals no clear relationship between spending more on education and achieving better outcomes.

In order to examine the relationship between expenditures and quality more precisely, we ran multiple regression analyses on our data, which included several other variables. The regression results support the view that expenditures are not linked to student performance. It turns out that throwing more money at something isn’t guaranteed to yield improvement—as Kansas City demonstrated when, under court control from 1985 to 1997, it became the highest-spending school district in the country. It also failed to increase its performance.

Our regression results revealed other findings as well. The most interesting is that union strength has a powerful negative effect on student performance. It’s well-known that teachers unions aim to increase wages, which might lead to better teachers and increased test scores. But apparently, other union goals that are harmful to student performance—such as protecting poor teachers from being fired or blocking merit-based pay—have a greater impact. This may come as a shock to those who think teachers unions are a recipe for educational success.

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OVERALL, OUR RESULTS demonstrate that existing state education rankings aren’t to be trusted. When those scores are corrected,