



State Budget's Education Increases Fall Short of Past Funding

Cincinnati Public Schools getting \$15 million less than it did in 2009

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By German Lopez

Compared to the previous budget, the two-year state budget passed by the Republican-controlled General Assembly Thursday increased school funding by \$700 million. But the funding is still \$515 million less than Ohio schools received in 2009.

The result: Cincinnati Public Schools will receive \$15 million less in state funding than it did in 2009, joining three in four school districts who have a net loss to funding between 2009 and 2015.

Still, Republicans are calling the funding boost the largest increase to education spending in more than 10 years.

“No school district in the state of Ohio will receive less funding than current levels,” says Michael Dittoe, spokesperson for Ohio House Republicans. “Eighty percent of Ohio’s students ... are in one of the school districts that is receiving an increase.”

Stephen Dyer, former Democratic state representative and education policy fellow at left-leaning think tank Innovation Ohio, says the claim is dishonest because it ignores longer-term trends in funding.

“It’s like they cut off both of your legs, give you back one of them and say, ‘You should thank us,’” he says.

Republicans defend the cuts by citing an \$8 billion deficit in 2011, which had to be eliminated under state law. Some of the cuts from that previous budget directly impacted school funding, but the decreases also eliminated subsidies that previously benefited schools, such as tangible personal property reimbursements.

Dyer says the state budget situation has changed since then.

Instead of [focusing on tax cuts](#), he argues state legislators should have prioritized education funding.

Another problem, according to Dyer, is how the increased funding is distributed. Although Dyer acknowledges the plan is more equitable than the [governor's original proposal](#), he says some of the most impoverished schools districts, particularly the poor and rural, will get the smallest increases.

Even if there was full equity, Dyer claims there's not enough money going into education as a result of years of cuts. To illustrate his point, he gives an example: "If I'm going to go see *Superman* with three of my friends and it costs \$10 each to get in, I've got \$36 and I give everybody \$9, none of us are getting in. Even though I perfectly distributed the money equally, ... the fact is none of us are getting in."

The budget's tax changes could also impact future local funding to schools. As part of the changes, the state will not subsidize 12.5 percent of future property tax levies — something the state does for current levies. For local taxpayers, that means new school levies will be 12.5 percent more expensive.

That, Dyer argues, will make it more difficult to pass future school levies, and that could force schools to ask for less money if they want levies to get voter approval.

"The legislature and legislators are doing a real disservice to people to tell everybody that they're getting an increase and no one is getting cut," Dyer says. "They need to be honest with people."

The budget also increases funding to "school choice" options, including the addition of 2,000 vouchers for private schooling that will be available to kindergarten students in households making less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Republicans argue the vouchers give lower-income children access to schools and options in education that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

But a January report from Policy Matters Ohio found the extra mobility enabled by school choice options hurts student performance and strains teachers and staff by forcing them to more often accommodate new students.

The \$62 billion state budget for fiscal years 2014 and 2015 passed the Republican-controlled General Assembly on Thursday. It's expected Kasich will sign it this weekend.

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