

Kasich budget plan increases funding to all charter schools

DATABASE: CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING



Ohio charter schools will be getting nearly \$1 billion a year by 2017 under the two-year budget proposed by Gov. John Kasich. See a breakdown of Ohio's traditional public school districts, and the amount of funding redirected from each to charter schools in their district.

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Charter-school funding in Ohio could exceed \$1 billion by 2017 under Gov. John Kasich's proposed two-year budget, which provides increases to every school.

Most of the attention thus far has focused on the charter-school accountability and transparency provisions included in Kasich's budget. Lawmakers more recently got a look at the breakdown in charter-school funding.

About half of traditional public schools would see funding cuts over the next two years under Kasich's education funding plan, though it spends \$459 million more. The non-partisan Legislative Service Commission calculated that charter-school funding will rise 5.4 percent over two years, with no schools facing a cut.

Database: Charter school funding

The commission estimates total charter-school funding of \$990 million by 2017, though that figure does not assume any growth in enrollment over the next two years. It also does not

include the additional \$25 million in facilities money that Kasich would allow top-performing charter sponsors to use.

In 2017, about 11 percent of all charter-school funding would go to the online Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow, better known as ECOT. With more than 15,000 students who take classes from home, it is by far the largest in the state. Nearly one-third of all charter-school students in Ohio take classes at an online school.

Innovation Ohio, a liberal research group and frequent charter-school critic, questions the fairness of the charter-school funding while so many traditional districts face cuts.

“With school funding levels not keeping pace with inflation, Gov. Kasich’s plan makes matters worse by funding charter schools at the expense of local school districts,” said Keary McCarthy, president of Innovation Ohio.

Very little of the increased charter-school funding, McCarthy said, is going to districts with a performance index score above the state average.

Greg Harris, state director of StudentsFirst Ohio, a supporter of school choice, disagrees that charter-school funding is hurting traditional schools.

“We want to move more towards a system of school funding where parents are empowered over the state to determine what’s best for their children,” he said. “We don’t think public charter schools ‘rob’ traditional public schools.”

But StudentsFirst Ohio and Innovation Ohio largely agree on the charter-school oversight provisions in Kasich’s budget, including requirements that fiscal officers be independent of sponsors and operators, and that every sponsor be approved by the state Department of Education. Sponsors would be prohibited from selling services to their schools.

“We support quality school choice, not crappy school choice,” Harris said. Under the budget and a priority House bill that includes other charter-oversight provisions, “sponsors with bad track records will increasingly find Ohio a hostile state to conduct business,” he said.

Innovation Ohio and the Ohio Education Association also argued for some additional concepts, such as a process for closing failing charter schools faster, a requirement on following state public-records laws, and funding that ensures that traditional schools are not financially penalized.

“If parents want to send their kids elsewhere, there should be a viable choice,” said spokesman David Williams of the OEA, the state’s largest teachers union. “Unfortunately, there are too many charter schools that are underperforming the local public schools, so there is no real choice in a situation like that.”

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