

# THE PLAIN DEALER

## How much money should schools get from the state? Democrats and Governor's office spar over funding plans



State Rep. Denise Driehaus, the ranking Democrat on the House Finance Committee, challenged Gov. Kasich this week over how much of the state budget he is devoting to Ohio's schools. She is pictured here with other Democrats on the committee in a press conference before Kasich released his budget. (Jeremy Pelzer/Northeast Ohio Media Group)



By [Patrick O'Donnell, The Plain Dealer](#)

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Gov. John Kasich is giving [more money to Ohio schools in his budget proposal](#) than ever before.

But schools are receiving the smallest share of the state budget since 1997.

These two different ways of looking at Kasich's proposed school funding dollars framed some of the budget debate in Columbus this week -- both at a Tuesday hearing and as Kasich's budget staff continued sparring behind the scenes with House Democrats afterward.

Since [State Rep. Denise Driehaus](#) charged Tuesday that [Kasich should be giving schools more money and making them a larger priority in his budget](#), each side has offered evidence why it should prevail in the budget debate.

Here's a look at Driehaus' claim, why Democrats agree with it and why Kasich's staff think voters should just look at the bottom line increase in dollars going to schools.

The data and comments below do not deal with how the state should best [allocate those dollars between the rich and poor](#), or between urban, rural or suburban schools, just how much money the state should spend on schools.

### **What is the proposed increase?**

-- Kasich proposes increasing aid to schools from about \$7 billion this school year to \$7.4 billion in 2015-16 to \$7.7 billion in 2016-17.

-- About half of Ohio's districts will receive more money under this plan, but half will receive less, with the numbers changing each year.

-- The increases are reduced, however, by Kasich also making large cuts in payments to districts to compensate them for the state's decision to kill two business taxes they used to rely on.

-- After those cuts, schools will receive \$250 million more next school year, then another \$209 million for the year after. In the end, Ohio districts will receive \$459 million more in 2016-17 than they do in 2014-15 -- not the \$700 million.

### **What's the Democrats' complaint?**

Driehaus, the ranking Democrat on the [House Finance Committee](#), said Kasich is giving 27.7 percent of the state budget to schools for this school year -- the lowest percentage since 1997.

She said in Tuesday's finance hearing that the percentage will drop further in Kasich's new proposal.

Driehaus, from Cincinnati, said that drop will force local school districts to continue relying on local tax levies -- the concern of the Ohio Supreme Court in multiple rulings that found Ohio's school funding system unconstitutional.

How much should the state spend on schools? Tell us below.

She and other House Democrats said [districts will need to seek local tax increases because Kasich isn't covering enough of the costs.](#)

State budget director Tim Keen immediately questioned how Driehaus came up with that calculation and other Kasich staff challenged it.

### **So, where did the percentage come from?**

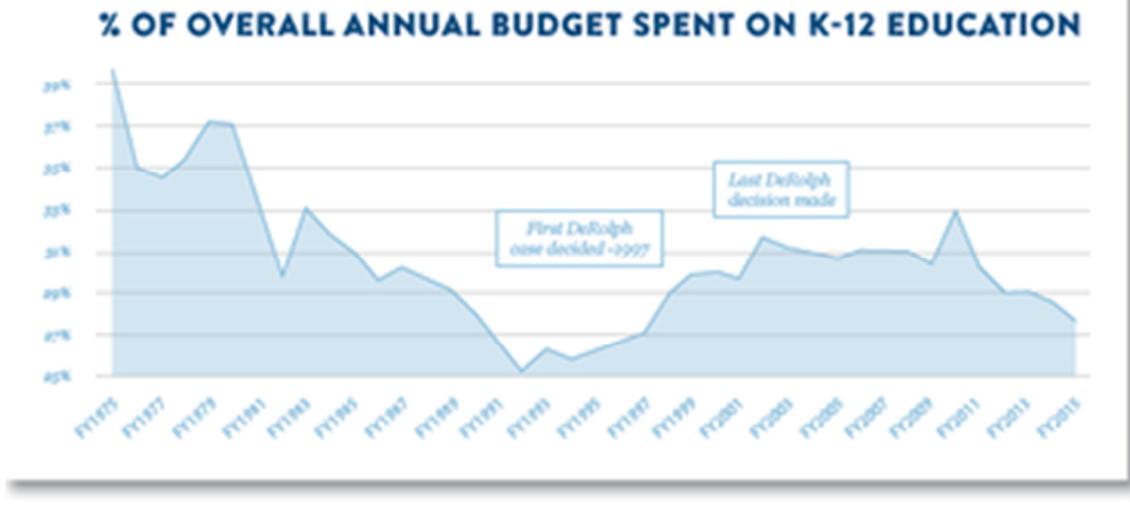
It's from a spreadsheet from the [Legislative Service Commission](#) that lists historical budget amounts in several categories going back to 1975. The LSC is the nonpartisan research arm of the state government.

Just as Driehaus said, the budget percentage for schools was above 28 percent each year since 1997, until dropping below that in 2015.

See the [full LSC budget spreadsheet](#) here. Note: The LSC calculations count more education budget items than some others do, so totals will not always add up.

To make it easier, we have included a chart below with just the state's school funding totals, by year, and the percentage of the total state budget they represent.

Figure 1: Historic state budget commitment to primary and secondary education funding



*Innovation Ohio*

The left-leaning [Innovation Ohio](#) think tank provided the chart to the right shortly after the hearing showing those changes.

### **But these numbers don't cover the new budget proposal**

The LSC projections here do not include the spending increases that Kasich included in his proposal.

Driehaus told The Plain Dealer late Wednesday that a new LSC report due out soon will show school funding taking up 26.3 percent of the state budget in FY 19 and 26.1 percent in FY 17.

### **Kasich staff says that measure is misleading**

Jim Lynch, a budget spokesman for Kasich, called Driehaus' claims "cheap politics" and an attempt to distort numbers.

He wanted voters to look at the increased money.

"Ohio is investing a record amount in K-12 education, with a \$1 billion increase in the last budget, and the governor is proposing another \$700 million in this budget," Lynch said in a prepared statement.

Kasich staff said different budget categories go up different amounts in every budget, so looking at the percentage that one area gets is not "an accurate or viable approach."

Staffers a major distortion comes from Ohio's [increased spending on the expansion of Medicaid](#). Because more Medicaid spending significantly increases the budget, the schools percentage looks lower even though school dollars increase.

### **State school spending has risen dramatically**

Kasich staffers say voters should look at a different historical percentage instead -- how much school spending has increased.

The same LSC chart shows that state spending on education has effectively doubled since 1997 -- from \$4.4 billion to nearly \$8.8 billion in FY 15.

That's a 98 percent gain, compared to inflation of 40 to 49 percent, they said, depending on which inflation estimates you use.

### **Democrats disagree**

Both Driehaus and [House Minority Leader Fred Strahorn](#) said Medicaid spending does not fully account for the education share drop.

Driehaus said pointing at Medicaid is just a way to divert attention from Kasich's state income tax cuts.

Instead of cutting income taxes to help those with higher incomes, she said, Kasich could be putting more money into schools.

### **How much do Democrats want to spend on schools?**

That's a question Kasich's staff posed, in response to the criticism of the budget.

But Democrats won't say.

Pressed for a dollar amount that would satisfy state Democrats, both Driehaus and Strahorn declined. They said school funding needs to be based on what it takes to educate children -- a calculation Kasich isn't making.

Strahorn said that calculation, which former Gov. Ted Strickland made some attempt at it in his budgets, is required to make sure funding is adequate. That calculation, Strahorn said, is what the Ohio Supreme Court wanted the state to make when it first found school funding unconstitutional in 1997.

"We're not being accountable for what an equal branch of government instructed us to do 17 years ago, and that's not right," said Strahorn, a Democrat from Dayton.

### **State contributions to schools since 1975.**

Source: Legislative Service Commission

<b>School funding in Billions % of Budget</b>		
FY 1975	\$1,173.30	39.7%
FY 1976	\$1,130.06	35.0%
FY 1977	\$1,227.37	34.5%
FY 1978	\$1,376.42	35.4%
FY 1979	\$1,592.32	37.2%
FY 1980	\$1,819.09	37.0%
FY 1981	\$1,790.45	33.2%
FY 1982	\$1,696.65	29.7%
FY 1983	\$2,223.06	33.0%
FY 1984	\$2,334.47	31.8%
FY 1985	\$2,430.37	30.9%
FY 1986	\$2,610.25	29.5%
FY 1987	\$2,906.03	30.1%
FY 1988	\$3,007.87	29.7%
FY 1989	\$3,101.55	29.1%
FY 1990	\$3,247.64	28.0%
FY 1991	\$3,320.93	26.6%
FY 1992	\$3,301.67	25.2%

FY 1993	\$3,572.67	26.3%
FY 1994	\$3,721.31	25.8%
FY 1995	\$3,910.26	26.1%
FY 1996	\$4,205.40	26.6%
FY 1997	\$4,432.93	27.0%
FY 1998	\$4,923.27	28.8%
FY 1999	\$5,377.50	29.9%
FY 2000	\$5,751.39	29.9%
FY 2001	\$6,250.90	29.7%
FY 2002	\$6,836.74	31.6%
FY 2003	\$7,067.69	31.2%
FY 2004	\$7,365.86	30.9%
FY 2005	\$7,618.86	30.7%
FY 2006	\$7,700.92	31.0%
FY 2007	\$7,789.57	31.0%
FY 2008	\$7,980.43	31.0%
FY 2009	\$8,125.42	30.3%
FY 2010	\$7,926.94	32.8%
FY 2011	\$7,923.72	30.2%
FY 2012	\$7,631.85	28.9%
FY 2013	\$7,966.05	29.0%
FY 2014	\$8,257.44	28.6%
FY 2015	\$8,784.54	27.7%

**Original Article:**

[http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2015/02/how\\_much\\_money\\_should\\_schools\\_get\\_from\\_the\\_state\\_democrats\\_and\\_governors\\_office\\_spar\\_over\\_funding\\_plans.html](http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2015/02/how_much_money_should_schools_get_from_the_state_democrats_and_governors_office_spar_over_funding_plans.html)