

## Report: OH House sends less, not more, to schools

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AKRON, Ohio (AP) — A closer look at state figures shows the [Ohio House](#) budget delivers less money to [Ohio school](#) districts than the governor originally proposed despite initial claims that a revised funding formula would mean fewer districts saw cuts.

During Tuesday's rollout, House Finance Chairman [Ron Amstutz](#) told reporters the revised K-12 budget was "to the point where no districts would be receiving less operating money next year and many of them are receiving more."

Since then, legislative analysts have released spreadsheets showing how each district would fair under the House plan — figures different experts are interpreting in different ways.

[Steve Dyer](#), the former state representative who helped author the last school-funding formula under then-Gov. [Ted Strickland](#), a Democrat, estimates House education cuts at more than \$200 million. Dyer now serves as an education policy adviser to the liberal think tank Innovation Ohio.

Veteran education-funding analyst [Howard Fleeter](#), of the [Education Tax Policy Institute](#) in Columbus, estimates the House budget spends \$114 million less over the two-year budget cycle that begins July 1 than Kasich's budget would have.

Based on [Legislative Service Commission](#) budget documents unavailable at the time of Amstutz's news conference, The Akron [Beacon Journal](#) puts the House education budget at \$82.2 million less than the governor's proposal, according to an article published Sunday (<http://bit.ly/111Ur4f>).

Whichever figure is accurate, the figures mean many of the 225 districts the House said were exempt from funding reductions under a state guarantee may lose money, the newspaper said. In all, the paper reported, 45 percent of Ohio schools — or 275 school districts — would receive cuts totaling \$291.6 million in the first year of the House plan.

Ranking members of the budget-writing [House Finance Committee](#) did not return the paper's calls seeking comment on the discrepancy.

Trimming \$82.2 million from Kasich's education plan marks a reduction of just half a percentage point, with overall funding falling from \$16.3 billion to \$16.2 billion.

Fleeter said the House's intention may have been to send more money to more districts, but the money isn't included in the budget to pay for that.

"They've created a formula that they have not funded," he said.

Spreadsheets provided to the Beacon Journal by the House show 133 districts could receive less funding in 2014 under the House proposal than they are estimated to receive this year, and 479 would receive more. However, significant changes in the funding formula, including pass-throughs to charter and private schools, make it difficult to determine final funding amounts.

"When are you just going to let the formula do its job?" said [Ohio Association of School Business Officials](#) executive director [Dave Varda](#).

Amstutz said last week that changes the House has made to Ohio's embattled distribution formula — repeatedly declared unconstitutional by the [Ohio Supreme Court](#) for its overreliance on property taxes — are an improvement.

"We were able to accomplish this by making some changes in how the formulation and (how) the distribution of the funds is being accomplished," Amstutz said. "And we feel that will be helpful to the districts."

Confusion in analyzing the numbers stems in part from the fact that multiple sets of spreadsheets were released, none making a direct comparison of the two plans and their relationship to the existing distribution rules.

The House said it was restoring basic aid funding of around \$5,800 — up from Kasich's roughly \$5,000. However, the basic aid that's budgeted for is less in the House budget than in Kasich's version, the paper reported.

A cap inserted by the House limits school districts to a change of no more than 6 percent in their funding, resulting in about 364 school districts losing about \$901 million they would have otherwise received.

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