

School budgets report lacked some data

Progressive group claims to have complete breakdown

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By Joe Vardon

The Kasich administration failed yesterday to respond to *The Dispatch's* request for figures breaking down the \$730 million public schools could lose from cuts in tax revenue in the Ohio governor's two-year budget.

Numbers released Thursday by Kasich's budget staff showing proposed K-12 funding for local schools didn't include the funds schools receive through reimbursements that have protected districts from the elimination of the tangible personal-property tax, or TPP.

The administration's figures also didn't include the loss of \$454 million in federal stimulus money that schools used this year for basic operations. *The Dispatch* included stimulus funds in its calculations and reported yesterday that more than 590 of Ohio's 612 school districts will see cuts in basic operational funding next year if Kasich's two-year budget is enacted.

Numbers released by Kasich on Thursday show a 1.9 percent funding increase in 2012, but when the loss of stimulus money is added the result is a 5.2 percent cut. Calculated losses for schools will likely mount when tax revenue cuts are included.

"The governor's budget accelerates the phase-out of TPP and public-utility replacement funds but also gives schools powerful new tools to control their costs so they can cope with changes," said David A. Pagnard, spokesman for Kasich's office of management and budget, in a written statement. "There isn't final, approved data on TPP funds per district, but we hope to have it completed and distributed by next week."

Yesterday a Columbus-based progressive policy group claimed it had obtained all of Kasich's district-by-district funding data, including the reductions in tax reimbursements.

Information displayed by Innovation Ohio shows an overall cut in school funding of about \$675 million next year, or a 10.7 percent drop from 2011. Dale Butland, communications director for Innovation Ohio, said the figures were leaked from within the Kasich administration Thursday night.

"Obviously, what they released the other day wasn't the full story, and the facts do eventually come out," Butland said. "School officials are trying to put their budgets together, and it's just shameful that the Kasich administration would withhold these numbers."

Innovation Ohio's president is Janetta King, a deputy chief of staff for former Gov. Ted Strickland. Democrat Strickland lost his re-election bid to the GOP's Kasich last fall.

Kasich spokesman Rob Nichols rejected Butland's claims that the administration withheld data from the public. Nichols would not confirm or deny the authenticity of the figures posted online by Innovation Ohio.

"It's not our job to proofread what a partisan, liberal group chooses to post on its website," Nichols said.

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