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## STATE FUNDS FOR SCHOOLS

### Level of school-funding cuts likely to vary among districts

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**BY JIM SIEGEL THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH**

#### The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio schools have been warned to brace for state funding cuts of 10 to 20 percent, but some key lawmakers say it's unlikely that every district will face the same level of reductions.

Considering that schools are second only to Medicaid as a percentage of the \$50 billion two-year state budget, districts are eager to learn how Gov. John Kasich and lawmakers will deal with an estimated \$8 billion shortfall in the 2012-13 budget. Kasich will introduce his plan in mid-March.

With more than 610 diverse school districts - some poor, some wealthy; some losing students, others growing - experts say simply cutting state funding evenly across the board might not be fair or practical.

"I think there is growing support for a tiered cut," said Rep. John Carey Jr., R-Wellston, a veteran lawmaker and vice chairman of the House Finance Committee.

Although plans are still being worked out for education and all other parts of the budget, Carey suggested that district poverty could play a role in the size of cuts.

Billions in federal stimulus money helped grades K-12 largely avoid the budget ax in the current two-year budget.

"I think there's probably some value in recognizing that state funding is different from district to district," said Rep. Ron Amstutz, another veteran lawmaker and chairman of the House Finance Committee.

The Wooster Republican said there could be other ways to look at the issue of cuts beyond poverty.

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"For example, there are some real high-cost districts and some that show a lot of efficiency in terms of their spending levels," he said. "There are lots of different ways of looking at this to account for the differences that exist from district to district."

Poorer districts generally rely much more heavily on state funding than wealthier ones, so they would lose a larger portion of their budget if every district was cut by the same percentage. Poorer districts also have less ability to make up a state cut with local revenue because their property-tax levies do not generate as much money.

In 2009, 143 school districts received at least 60 percent of their funding from the state, according to state data. Hamilton Local and Westfall were the only central Ohio districts among them.

Meanwhile, 62 districts relied on the state for less than 30 percent of their budgets. That list included New Albany, Upper Arlington, Dublin, Bexley, Gahanna-Jefferson, Worthington and Olentangy.

"We would like an approach where everybody is equally reduced in relation to the effect on their total budget," said David Varda, executive director of the Ohio Association of School Business Officials, who said a number of districts are budgeting for 10 to 15 percent cuts.

Kasich has not revealed details about his education budget. The governor has hit on themes of more money in the classroom, more consolidated services, fewer mandates, collective-bargaining changes and scrapping former Gov. Ted Strickland's "evidence-based" funding model for what some expect will be a per-student formula.

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