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Superintendents Council: Almost all districts would get less state aid than in 2008-09 under Governor's budget

All but two of the state's 676 major school districts would see their state aid for operating purposes fall below 2008-09 levels if Governor Cuomo's proposed cuts are enacted, a study by the New York State Council of School Superintendents has found.

Robert Lowry, the Council's Deputy Director, noted, "Yesterday, the statewide School Boards Association released results from a survey showing that 81 percent of districts expect to lay-off teachers if the Governor's aid cuts are enacted, and majorities expect to take actions such as increase class sizes, and reduce extra help, elective classes, and extracurricular activities or athletics."

Lowry added, "Our analysis helps explain why districts are finding these grim choices hard to avoid. Although this is Governor Cuomo's first year in office, it is not the first tough year for school budgets. State aid was cut in the current year's budget and most aid was frozen the year before, 2009-10."

"Districts have tried to accommodate diminished state support without hurting opportunities for students," Lowry explained. "But as the need for cuts accumulates, year after year, it becomes harder and harder to spare instruction and student services."

According to the State Education Department's latest *School District Fiscal Profiles*, 76 percent of total school spending is devoted to instruction.

The Council's analysis found:

- ✗ For the current year (2010-11), 74 percent of the state's school districts have had their total state aid drop below what they received in 2008-09.
- ✗ Excluding Building Aid, which reimburses school systems for capital expenditures, 97 percent of districts have had their aid for operating purposes decrease between 2008-09 and 2010-11.
- ✗ Excluding Building Aid, total aid fell by an average of 4.6 percent between 2008-09 and 2010-11.

If Governor Cuomo's proposed School Aid cuts are enacted,

- ✗ Over 90 percent of districts would see their total aid for 2011-12 drop below what they received three years ago, in 2008-09 levels.
- ✗ Excluding Building Aid, all but two of the state's 676 school districts would receive less aid in 2011-12 than they did in 2008-09.
- ✗ Without Building Aid, the average change in aid between 2008-09 and 2011-12 would be minus 12.5 percent, if the executive budget is enacted as proposed.

Most districts seeing aid fall below 2008-09 levels			
	Districts with aid reductions	Districts with aid reductions as % of all	Average change in aid
2008-09 to 2010-11			
Total Aid	503	74.4%	-1.8%
Total Aid without Building Aid	655	96.9%	-4.6%
2008-09 to 2011-12			
Total Aid	617	91.3%	-9.1%
Total Aid without Building Aid	674	99.7%	-13.5%

SOURCE: Council analysis of NYSED School Aid data

Figures for individual districts are available [here](#).

Last week, Governor Cuomo said that, “Schools in this state have gotten tremendous increases in funding over the past decade.”

“The state did provide some generous aid increases in a few years,” said Lowry. “But those increases stopped after 2008-09.”

For example, the enacted budget for the current state fiscal year cut School Aid by 5.2 percent. These cuts were later partly offset by the Education Jobs Fund approved by Congress and President Obama last August, two months into the current school fiscal year.

Lowry noted that schools outside the Big 5 Cities responded to the current year aid cuts by holding the spending increases they asked voters to approve to an average of 1.4 percent. He noted that figure matched what their mandated pension costs alone would have required, suggesting that schools held other costs flat on balance.

Lowry explained that in 2007-08, the state enacted a comprehensive reform program to resolve the Campaign for Fiscal Equity’s challenge to the constitutionality of the state’s school finance system. That year, the Governor and Legislature enacted a new Foundation Aid formula and provided a record overall aid increase.

Lowry said that the Foundation formula was scheduled to be phased-in over a four-year period culminating in 2010-11. A second large increase was provided in 2008-09, but Foundation Aid has been frozen ever since and would be frozen for two more years under the Governor’s budget.

“The Foundation formula was an under-appreciated achievement by state leaders,” Lowry said. “It generally targeted the greatest aid per pupil to the poorest districts, while providing more predictability in aid for all districts and making aid formulas simpler and more transparent.”

He concluded noting that Foundation Aid constitutes roughly 50 percent of total revenues for the state’s poorest districts, so the poorest districts face having half their revenues frozen for four years.

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