

Governor's Budget Proposal Would Dig Kansas' Education Funding Hole Even Deeper

THE SECOND BRIEF IN A SERIES

Gov. Sam Brownback's budget proposal would dig Kansas' already substantial education funding hole even deeper, pushing education funding even further below the pre-recession levels of five years ago. This is a major step in the wrong direction. Cutting education funding makes it harder for Kansas schools to pursue much needed education reform and thus harder for the state to cultivate the highly educated workforce it will need to succeed in today's global economy.

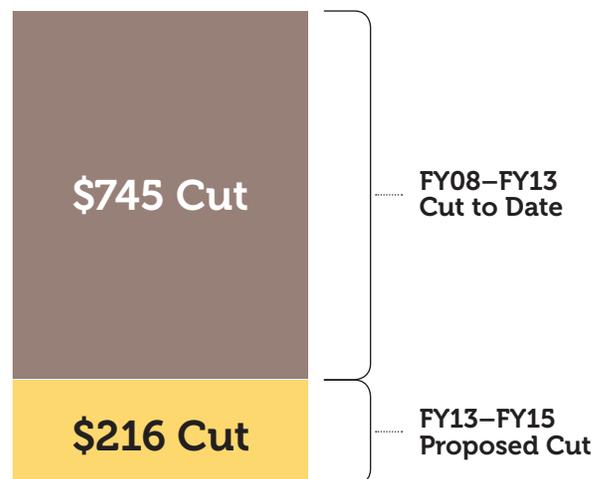
Executive Budget Cuts Education Funding Below Already Depressed Levels

Kansas has already made some of the deepest education funding cuts in the country since the start of the recession, and Gov. Brownback's budget proposal would reduce funding even further. Such education funding cuts have serious consequences for educational quality, economic growth and local property taxes.

More specifically, over the last five years Kansas has cut per pupil state aid to public schools by \$745, or 13 percent. Nationwide, only seven states have made deeper cuts, in dollar terms, over that time period. Gov. Brownback's budget proposal would cut funding by an additional \$216, or 4 percent, over the next two years. (See chart to right)

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET CUTS EDUCATION FUNDING EVEN DEEPER

Change in state education funding per pupil, inflation-adjusted



Source: Kansas Comparison Reports and the FY14 Governor's Budget Report



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Making Further Cuts Would Have Serious Consequences

Reducing education funding even further below already depressed levels would be deeply problematic. Education funding cuts have serious consequences for both students and the state as a whole. They:

■ **Make it Harder to Pursue Much Needed Education Reforms.**

For example:

- » There is widespread agreement that recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers is the single most important thing schools can do to promote student achievement. Yet far from stepping up teacher recruitment and retention, many Kansas school districts are cutting teaching positions.¹
- » Despite strong evidence that smaller class sizes can promote student achievement — particularly in the early grades and for low-income students—and increase the likelihood that students will attend college, Kansas schools are shedding teaching jobs even as enrollment increases. This a major obstacle to maintaining smaller class sizes.²

■ **Place the State's Economic Future at Risk.**

Education funding reductions hamper economic recovery as teacher job cuts mean less business for local stores and services. And businesses that contract with school districts see their bottom line jeopardized, potentially meaning private sector job cuts too. Over the longer term, by undermining education reform, the cuts make it less likely that Kansas can develop the highly skilled workforce needed to compete in today's global economy.

■ **Cause Property Tax Increases.** Increasing local taxes is one of the few ways school districts can offset lost state revenue and limit the need for things like teacher layoffs and class size increases. A majority of Kansas school superintendents responding to a Hutchinson News survey reported property tax increases in their districts in 2011.¹

Tax Cuts Stand in the Way of Much Needed Investments in Kansas Schools

Given these damaging consequences, Kansas policymakers should be boosting the state's lagging education funding, not cutting it even more deeply. But the massive income tax cut that Kansas passed last year makes it much more difficult to do so.

Next year alone the tax cut is estimated to cost Kansas \$704 million in lost revenue.³ That is \$704 million the state could have used to strengthen investment in K-12 education and other services like higher education. The tax cut is a big part of the reason that the governor is proposing digging Kansas' education funding hole even deeper.

For the sake of the future Kansas needs to change course. Instead of giving out tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefit the state's wealthiest residents, Kansas should be renewing its investment in its education system, the asset that is most important to the state's long term prosperity.

¹ See Ken Stephens, "Kansas School Districts Have Tried to Offset State Budget Cuts By Increasing Property Taxes and Reducing Jobs, October 15, 2011, available at <http://www.hutchnews.com/Todaystop/SUN--superintendent-survey>.

² Kansas State Department of Education

³ Kansas Legislative Research Department