

BUDGET BRIEF



Protecting basic education in these tough budget times

Washington’s constitutional paramount duty is to provide for the education of every child who lives within our state’s borders. The Legislature has defined what a “basic education” is, and the courts have determined that the Legislature must fund that definition. But with over 40 percent of our state budget paying for K-12 education, “non-basic” education cuts are likely as legislators grapple with a multi-billion budget shortfall. The Governor’s proposed 2011-13 budget reduces K-12 funding by \$1.3 billion.

So what is a “basic education?”

Basic education isn’t just a rhetorical phrase. It’s a legal term that describes the state’s minimum funding obligations for our schools.

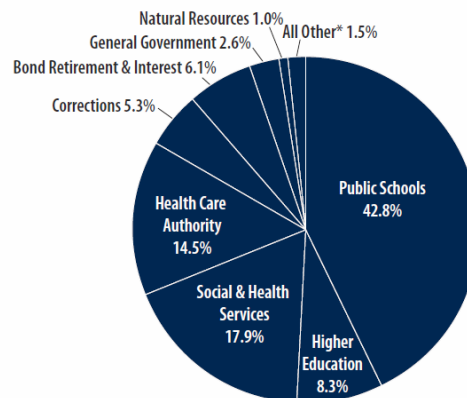
Basic = about \$12 billion per biennium	Non-basic = about \$1 billion per biennium
<p>Nearly 75 percent of basic education* funding is allocated through “general apportionment,” a per-student formula-based system that pays for minimum staffing levels and other various costs such as utilities, school supplies or building maintenance.</p> <p>Also included in “basic education” is special education, pupil transportation, learning assistance program, institutional education and bilingual education. (Bilingual education is only 1 percent of basic education funding.)</p> <p>*In 2009 the Legislature passed HB 2261 which restructured the funding formula and redefined basic education to include highly capable programs, all-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and more hours in high school. Implementation of the legislation is scheduled to be phased in by 2018.</p>	<p>There’s about \$1 billion in “non-basic” education that, while extremely valuable and badly needed in our schools, is not constitutionally protected.</p> <p>Examples of non-basic education funding include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I-728 & I-732 – two voter-approved initiatives related to smaller class sizes and teacher pay • Learning improvement days – paid days for teachers to pursue professional development opportunities • Highly capable • Food services • K-4 enhanced staffing ratio to reduce class sizes in those grades • Levy equalization to support property-poor school districts

If education is our paramount duty, why are we cutting funding? Why don’t we fund it first?

We provide funding for basic education, but we know “basic” isn’t enough. That’s why we passed legislation in 2009 to redefine basic education and ensure additional resources will be protected.

K-12 has been, and will remain, our top budget priority. K-12 spending as a percentage of the state budget has increased from a ten-year low of 38.9 percent in 2005-07. Under the Governor’s proposal, K-12 would make up 42.8 percent of state spending.

General Fund-State: Operating
Distribution of 2011–13 General Fund-State Expenditures

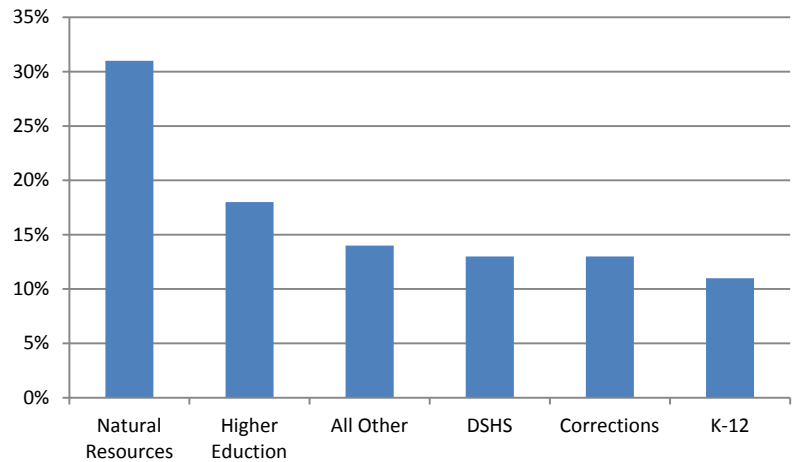


The bottom line: What is going to happen to K-12 funding this year?

In the short-term, we have to balance our budget. We face a \$4.6 billion shortfall for 2011-13 and have only a \$14 billion slice of the budget to work from that isn't protected by constitutional or federal restrictions. K-12, like all other parts of the budget, will be affected.

In December's one-day special session, the Legislature approved \$50.2 million in K-12 reductions (HB 3225). Most recently, the Legislature recently approved an additional \$58.6 million in reductions in the early action budget bill (HB 1086) including:

- Reducing K-4 class size enhancement
- Adjusting the special education safety net
- Eliminating the summer vocational skill centers program
- Reducing funding for School For Blind/Child Deaf Hearing Loss



As a percentage of its base budget, K-12 was cut less than any other part of state government (total 2009-11 reductions including 3225 and HB 1086)

Even with those reductions, we were able to protect more K-12 funding than any other area of state government. So far we've managed to preserve Readiness to Learn, the Highly Capable Program and our levy equalization funding. Our challenge is to find the funding to continue these very effective programs.

The Governor has proposed the following additional reductions for the 2011-13 budget (items in bold are reductions in planned expansions, not cuts in current spending):

- **Suspending I-728 and I-732 (\$1.1 billion)***
- **Continuing reduction of the K-4 class size enhancement (\$216 million)***
- Eliminating the Highly Capable program (\$18.6 million)*
- Eliminating or reducing several smaller pilot programs and specialized programs (\$37.1 million)
- Reducing Washington Achievers and College Bound scholarship outreach (\$742,000)
- Suspending annual bonuses for National Board certified teachers and bonuses for certified teachers employed in challenging schools (\$99.5 million)
- **Suspending expansion of all-day kindergarten (\$57 million)***
- **Suspending pay step increases for teachers (\$56.3 million)**
- Changing funding for school bus replacement from a depreciation payment schedule to an end-of-lifecycle payment, pushing out costs to later biennia (\$95.6 million)

*As the new definition of "basic education" is implemented, these will be folded into the new definition and therefore be constitutionally protected.

If we can barely fund basic education today, how will we fund it tomorrow?

One proposal for increasing K-12 funding comes from the Quality Education Council tasked with implementing the new funding system passed in 2009. They suggest directing at least 50 percent of all future budget growth to K-12. This would guarantee that, as the economy recovers, our schools would be entitled to the lion's share of new revenue.