

Kansas Staring Up from a Deep Education Funding Hole

As Kansas prepares its budget for the coming year, the state is working its way out of a deep education funding hole. Failure to restore the severe cuts the state has made in the wake of the recession would have serious consequences for students' and the state's economic future.

Kansas Has Made Severe Education Funding Cuts in Recent Years

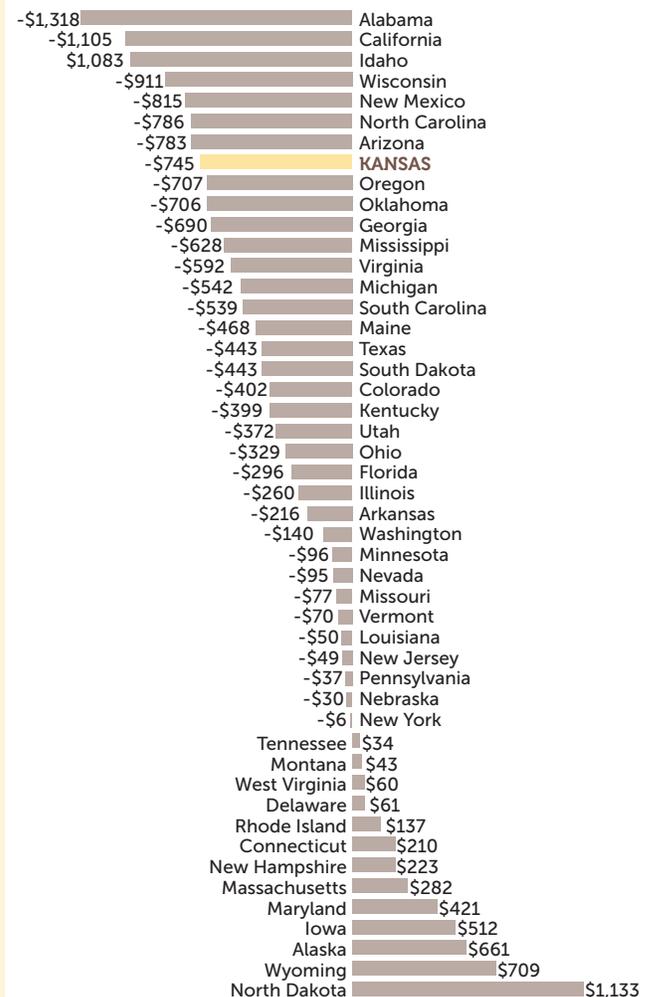
Kansas made deeper cuts to K-12 education in recent years than almost any other state. This has serious implications for educational quality, economic growth and local property taxes. Local school districts have seen state aid drop by 13.2 percent since 2008 (the fiscal year just prior to the recession) after adjusting for inflation. In dollar terms, Kansas cut more than all but seven states over that time (see chart to right).¹



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KANSAS MADE SOME OF THE LARGEST CUTS TO EDUCATION

Charge in spending per student, inflation-adjusted, FY08 to FY13



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities budget analysis and National Center for Education Statistics enrollment estimate

Education Funding Cuts Have Serious Consequences

The funding cuts that Kansas has made have serious consequences for both students and the state as a whole. They:

- **Make it Harder to Move Ahead with Education Reform.** The cuts have made it more difficult for Kansas schools to pursue some of the most promising potential 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.²
 - » There is 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. Yet Kansas schools are shedding teaching jobs even as enrollment is increasing, making it harder to maintain small class sizes.³
- **Place the State's Economic Future at Risk.** The education funding reductions Kansas made in recent years hamper economic recovery as fewer teaching jobs mean less business for local stores and services. And businesses that contract with school districts see their bottom line jeopardized, which could mean private sector job cuts too. Over the longer term, by undermining education reform, the cuts make it less likely 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 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.

Tax Cuts Make it Much Harder to Restore Funding

Given these damaging consequences, restoring recent education funding cuts should be an urgent priority for Kansas policymakers.

But the income tax cut Kansas passed last year makes it much harder for the state to climb out of its education funding hole. The tax cut is a major reason why in the coming budget year Kansas faces a \$267 million gap between existing revenues and what it will take to meet growing needs. Without new revenue, the state will likely cut K-12 education support even further—or make damaging cuts to other essential areas like higher education that are important in creating jobs and building a strong economy.

For the sake of the future, Kansas needs to change course. To make real progress toward meeting Kansans' needs, education cuts should be restored. That means making up what was lost since the recession and recognizing what it takes to go forward. Rolling back last year's state tax cuts is an important start. And Kansas certainly shouldn't cut taxes further. That would widen the gap between educational needs and the resources required to meet them—a big step in the wrong direction.

¹ See Phil Oliff, Chris Mai, and Michael Leachman, "New School Year Brings More Cuts in State Funding for Schools," September 4, 2012, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

² 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> .

³ Kansas State Department of Education