

Kansas Schools Struggle With Recent Budget Cuts

Kansas school districts are facing major challenges in the wake of deep cuts in state funding for K-12 education. With debate heating up over a state Supreme Court ruling that the Legislature is failing to adequately fund schools and further income tax cuts threatening to take another major bite out of state resources, it's a good time to take a look at where school districts get their money, how they spend it and how recent funding cuts have harmed Kansas' students and the state's economy. While some argue that school districts can cope with cuts simply by shifting more resources into the classroom, the bottom line is that more than 95 percent of school spending goes toward instruction and support services that play a vital role in educating Kansas' children, and further cuts will only make it harder for school districts to deliver a top notch education.

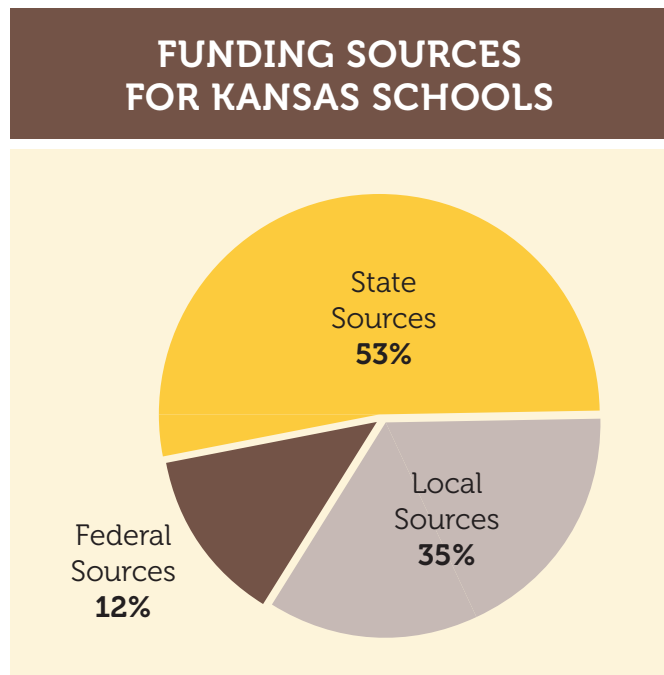
Kansas schools rely on funding from three sources.

Kansas school districts get their funding from three sources:

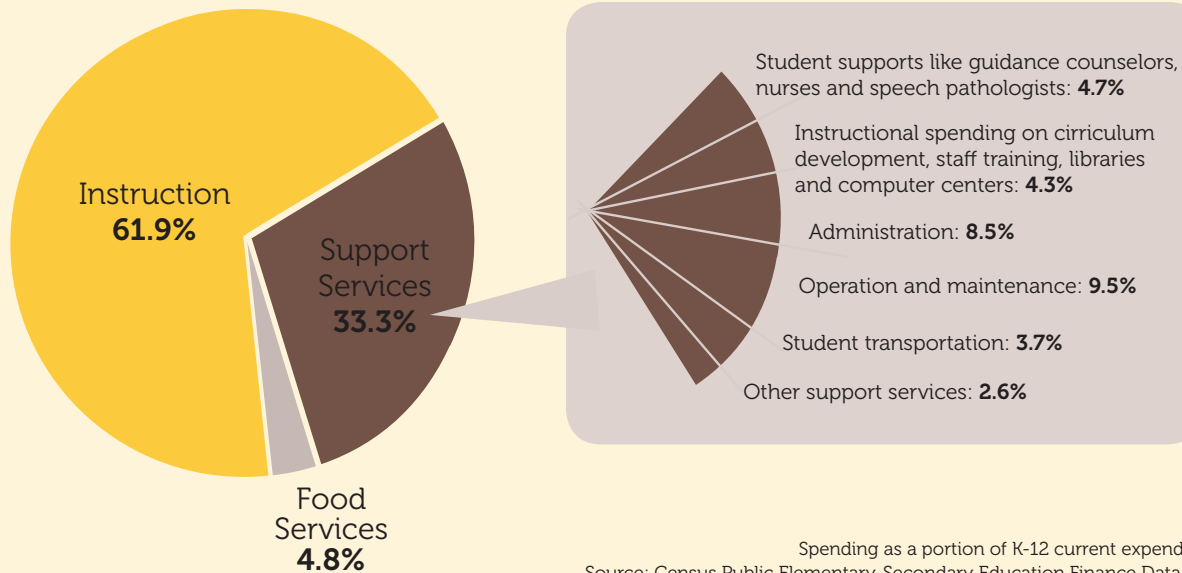
■ **Local Sources.** Local revenues provide 35 percent of school district funding and largely come from local property taxes. This means that school districts with higher property values can more easily raise revenue from local sources.

■ **State Sources.** State revenues make up 53 percent of school district funding. Kansas distributes most of its state funding for local school districts through a formula that targets additional dollars to school districts based on need. For example, it sends more money to districts with high concentrations of low-income students because these students cost more to educate. The formula also sends more funding to school districts with less ability to raise money locally.

■ **Federal Sources.** Federal revenues are 12 percent of school district funding. Federal money is largely used to supplement funding in districts with high concentrations of students living in poverty and to help educate students with disabilities.



IN KANSAS, MOST SCHOOL SPENDING GOES TOWARD INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES



Spending as a portion of K-12 current expenditures
Source: Census Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, 2010

More than 60 percent of funding goes to instruction in Kansas.

Schools spend their money on classroom instruction and a range of support services that keep schools running and contribute to students' education (see chart on page 2).

INSTRUCTION

More than 60 percent of school district spending in Kansas goes directly into the classroom, paying for teacher salaries and benefits, textbooks, workbooks, audio-visual equipment and other supplies. This category also includes salaries for sports coaches and music and theater teachers.

SUPPORT SERVICES

The remaining 40 percent of school district spending pays for a range of support services, including:

- **Student Supports:** 6 percent is used for services like guidance counselors, social workers, school nurses, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and other professionals to improve the well-being of students and to help them do well in school.

- **Instructional Staff:** About 5 percent goes to fund the salaries of curriculum coordinators, teacher trainers and librarians. This money is also used to pay for trainings and seminars to improve the quality of teaching and to purchase Internet service, library books and computer databases.

- **Administration:** Around 9 percent is spent on this. The funds support local school boards, as well as superintendents, principals and other administrative and leadership positions. The money helps principals maintain school records, evaluate staff and direct instruction. Strong school leadership promotes student achievement. Talented principals and superintendents set high academic expectations, improve teacher and staff performance, and create a positive school culture that encourages students to succeed.

- **Operation and Maintenance:** Around 9 percent is used for utility expenses, grounds maintenance, janitors, equipment repairs and school security.

- **Transportation:** A small portion, less than 4 percent, is used for bus driver salaries, buying and maintaining school buses, and fuel to transport students to and from school safely.

Kansas schools face major challenges in the wake of recent funding cuts.

Kansas has cut state education spending, the largest source of funding for local school districts, by \$745 per student, or more than 13 percent, since the start of the recession, after adjusting for inflation. This is one of the deepest cuts in the country and will make it harder for Kansas school districts to pursue much-needed reforms. For example, there is widespread agreement that recruiting, training and retaining high-quality teachers is the most important thing that schools can do to help students succeed. But many Kansas school districts have been eliminating teaching positions in recent years, even as enrollments increase. Failure to pursue education reform, in turn, will make it harder for Kansas to develop the skilled workforce it will need to compete in today's global economy.

Moreover, the income tax cut that Kansas enacted last year threatens to dig Kansas' education funding hole even deeper. Gov. Brownback's recent budget proposal, for example, recommends cutting education funding by an additional \$216 per student over the next two years, on top of the deep cuts the state has already made. And Kansas policymakers are considering new tax cuts this year that would further reduce the amount the state can invest in education and other services. For the sake of the future, Kansas needs to change course. The state should be boosting its lagging investment in its schools, Kansas' most important economic asset. It should not be cutting that investment even further.

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