

Pennsylvania budget makes drastic cuts to education

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The state of Pennsylvania will cut \$1 billion dollars from public education, another \$660 million from the state universities, impose a pay freeze on state workers and eliminate 1,500 jobs, according the 2011-2012 budget announced Tuesday by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett.

The \$1 billion cut in K-12 education is the single biggest cut. The Philadelphia School District, the largest in the state, will lose nearly \$300 million or about \$1,500 per student. Other districts will lose proportional amounts. School districts across the state are already warning that they will be forced to cut teachers, staff and programs drastically, raise local taxes or carry out a combination of both.

The \$1 billion cut includes \$550 million cut from basic funding to education, 10 percent of the current year's state funding to local schools. Added to that is \$260 million cut from grants to fund pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten and class-size reduction in kindergarten through 3rd grade. Corbett is also cutting \$224 million in reimbursements to school districts for money they give to charter schools.

Corbett has proposed that all teachers and school staff take a pay freeze and has introduced legislation to make it easier for local school districts to lay off or furlough teachers.

State funding for higher education will also be cut nearly in half. The biggest cuts will be for Pennsylvania's 14 state-owned universities. Under Corbett's budget their funding will be reduced to the level of 1983, nearly 30 years-ago, when the colleges were first brought together as The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

State funding for these schools has already been cut and currently represents about 30 percent of their revenue down from a high of 60 percent. Corbett's

budget will mean that state support for these schools will decline to only 15 percent of current revenue.

State funding for four other public universities that are classified as "state-related" will also drop by a similar amount. These include Lincoln, Temple, the University of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania State University.

The state funding for Penn State alone will drop from \$334 million to just \$165 million, a cut of \$169 million. PSU President Graham Spanier says that tuition will go up, professors will be laid off, and the school will be forced to close some of its branch campuses throughout the state. PSU operates 24 campuses, besides its central campus in State College, PA. Most of these are in rural areas that don't have other colleges or universities.

Currently, in-state tuition for freshmen and sophomores is about \$14,000 a year at Penn State, already one of the highest in the country. As a result of the budget cuts, tuition will go up dramatically. Spanier said that the state funds were used to keep the in-state tuition rate down. Out-of-state students pay roughly \$26,000 a year.

The 50 percent cut in funding for higher education is the largest cut ever made to higher education in any state in the country, including California, Texas and New York, all with much larger populations. Corbett is seeking to effectively privatize higher education, while reducing public K-12 education to nothing but a shell.

The cuts in education were part of a \$27.3 billion budget, a 3 percent reduction from the current year. Pennsylvania faces a \$4 billion deficit. While drastically cutting education and social programs, Corbett's budget includes huge tax breaks for corporations and for the natural gas drilling industry in particular.

The administration will resume the phase-out of the

capital stock and franchise tax and will not tax the gas companies for the extraction of natural gas from the underground formation known as the Marcellus Shale. Pennsylvania is the only state with Marcellus Shale gas drilling that does not have an extraction gas. In addition, Corbett is opening up more state land for gas drilling, with the lease fees being used to support the state parks. The clear implication is “if you don’t accept gas drilling on state lands there will be no parks.”

Since taking office January 1, Corbett has repeatedly warned that he planned to make major cuts to spending but gave few details. On February 28, he ended the adult basic health insurance program, which provided health insurance to over 42,000 adults who did not qualify for Medicare or Medicaid. Nearly half a million people in Pennsylvania are on the waiting list for the program.

State workers are also targeted for assault. Corbett’s budget will mean the layoff of over 1,500 state workers, almost half of them in mental health services. Corbett also said he will seek cuts in wages and benefits from tens of thousands of state workers whose contract negotiations begin this spring.

Unlike some of his fellow Republican governors, however, Corbett has not included any anti-union measures in his first budget. He evidently intends to pursue the tactics of the Democrats, using the unions to help him impose cuts on the workers.

Many programs for the poor and elderly will also be cut. Corbett would also cut many optional Medicaid benefits including dental and pharmaceutical services. His budget would reduce Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals by \$150 million, which will result in the state’s losing \$183 million in federal matching funds and lead the additional closing of hospitals in low income communities.

The Human Services Development Fund is being eliminated. This fund is distributed to county governments to help them meet human services needs. It provides funding for homeless shelters, food banks, home heating assistance, foreclosure assistance and much more.

The Department of Economic and Community Development will see its funding slashed from \$337.9 million to \$223.6 million. The DECD funds many local building and development projects that will now be

canceled.

County governments will also see large reductions in funds for libraries, museums, public transportation, home heating assistance and many others programs.



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