

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

Schools across the state are sweating out the Legislature's decision and crunching numbers for the coming budget year, fearful of what a cut in state school aid will do to their districts .

The state aid situation is complicated by the fact that the state faces a potential revenue shortfall of \$986 million.

A total of \$950 million went to Nebraska's 253 public school districts in the form of state aid this year. Of that money, \$140 million was from federal stimulus money—a one-time deal.

Two bills proposed by Sen. Greg Adams of York, chairman of the Education Committee, would cut state aid back:

LB235, which was drafted when the state's revenue shortfall was thought to be less than the current \$986 million, would set state aid at \$845 million in 2012 and \$901 million in 2013.

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Adams said taking aid down to \$800 million would result in "dramatic cuts" at schools.

Perkins County Schools Superintendent Tobin Buchanan said, "Regardless, Perkins County Schools does not anticipate the state aid cuts to greatly impact us over the next few years."

Due to increasing valuation and an enrollment that continues to be from 375 to 395 students, Perkins County Schools received about \$50,000 in state aid for this school term, Buchanan said.

"That compares to state aid amounts of over \$1 million dollars for our district three and four years ago," he said.

To further solidify the projection that Perkins County Schools will receive little to no state aid, the school board set the overall general fund levy at .75, a decrease in .20 from last year's general fund levy.

Buchanan said the current state aid formula penalizes a district proportionally for each penny they are below .95 cents in the general fund.

"These are difficult times for many schools, and unfortunately the reduction in state aid is going to force many to cut staffing and programs," said Buchanan.

"We are very fortunate at Perkins County Schools to have been able to improve facilities, maintain programs and staff, and reduce the tax levy and overall tax asking from last year," Buchanan said.

Wallace Superintendent R. Todd Porter said they don't rely on state aid as much as most schools, so a cut in aid doesn't mean as much.

"Although we don't really know what the exact numbers are yet, we feel that we will be in a strong position to get through this impending state budget problem," said Porter.

"What we really don't want to see is any additional burden put on our property owners," he said.

Porter said Wallace administration and the board plans to continue to do the very best that they can for their students and do it in a fiscally responsible manner.