

Snyder Announces State Budget Priorities

Gov. Rick Snyder unveiled a budget proposal on Wednesday that includes modest education spending increases for fiscal year 2018, including an additional \$50-100 in K-12 per-pupil allowances and an added \$50 per student for high schools.

Other boosts to K-12 spending in Snyder's plan would add \$150 million in "at-risk" spending and \$33 million to pay for early literacy coaches at intermediate school districts and assist teachers and districts in implementing strategies to improve third grade reading levels.

Community colleges would receive only a .6 percent increase in funding under the governor's proposal, while universities would get a 2.5 percent boost - half of it guaranteed and the other half provided only if they hold tuition increases to 3.8 percent or less.

Snyder presented his budget to the joint Senate and House Appropriations Committees. Both chambers must agree on a spending plan, and Republican lawmakers have called for tax cuts which are not a part of Snyder's budget.

The governor also did not include any new efforts to raid the School Aid Fund in this budget, as he did in proposing a funding shift during the lame duck legislative session in December that would have led to a \$400 million fund loss.

Snyder's budget represents a good first step in the budget process, but as negotiations move forward we must remain vigilant against any efforts to siphon off money intended for schools to pay for other political priorities, said MEA President Steven B. Cook.

"Using shell games to free up General Fund dollars - as was done several years ago by moving the community college and university budgets into the School Aid Fund - needs to come to an end," Cook said. "Tax dollars meant for educating K-12 students need to remain focused on that task."

Other education-related changes in Snyder's budget include a reduced funding level of 80 percent of the foundation allowance for virtual schools that shoulder few or none of the facility costs of traditional schools.

In addition, Snyder added \$7 million to help districts with declining enrollments.

While MEA welcomes the governor's commitment to increasing funding for K-12 students and higher education, more is needed to implement the aggressive new third grade reading requirements and to address chronic underfunding issues identified in a state report last year.

The Michigan Education Finance Study, commissioned by the state Legislature and issued last summer, found Michigan needs to spend more money on education across

the board and additional per-pupil funding for special needs students should be added on top of that.

The report cited growing inequity between spending in wealthier, high-performing districts with few at-risk students and poorer districts that have more special education students, economically disadvantaged students, and English Language Learners (ELL).

"The small increase ranging from \$50-\$100 per K-12 student is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done to ensure we meet the high standards laid out by Lansing lawmakers for Michigan students and educators," Cook said.