

## When the Cuts Hurt

The biggest challenge out state legislators are facing is how to handle the different budget crisis' they are facing. How to raise the budgets, cut budgets, how to be fair about cutting them, and the various other odds and ends that come with the finances of the state. But one of the bigger budget issues that are at the forefront of Kansan's minds is how education is being affected by the current problems our economy is dealing with.

This year, K-12 school districts state-wide have experienced hard budget cuts, harder than any previous years for some districts. With today's economy still in a state of distress it doesn't look like Kansas will have any major jumps in funding heading our way. The problem with cutting the budget even more than it has been cut down now will cause districts to cut programs which student's need that could weaken the public school education that students receive.

The budget cuts were inevitable, but when they arrived, they caused upset. Differing from district to district, schools have had to cut programs and some are unable to pay their staff members. Locally in Arkansas City, USD 470 employees are lucky to receive their paychecks.

According to Dr. Ron Ballard, USD 470 Superintendent, our district has enough local money to cover the payroll even though the state is behind on their payments.

Although in Winfield, our neighboring community, the teachers were not as fortunate as in our district. Our district has already met 85% of this year's budget, so our teachers and administrators are learning to save supplies and continue the year as frugally as possible. Winfield is fearful that they will not be able to pay their teachers. They have already made cuts with saving energy and resources throughout their buildings, but more cut backs will be seen in the near future.

However, some taxpayers may feel that funding education is not important or they we should not give any more money towards education. The typical student would be opposed to that position. The funding for education has been reduced to a slim margin and students are suffering because of these cuts.

"You'll hear people say that K-12 Education needs to feel more of the pain, I come from a different school of thought, I feel that we need to figure out how to ease your pain," said Representative Eber Phelps of District 111.

No one knows of an easy way to fix the problem that our state and nation are currently facing. Lobbyists are giving their opinions and community members want their voices to be heard. The Schools For Fair Funding group might try to reopen the litigation with the Montoy vs. State to try to restore the education funding to an adequate amount.

In 2001, a state court dismissed *Montoy v. State*, which challenged the state regarding capital outlay and special education excess costs funding statutes under the state constitution. Re-opening the case would allow for

school districts to receive what the Schools For Fair Funding finds adequate funding and to make sure that the funding is distributed equally among districts.

On the contrary, Dr. Ballard and Arkansas City Representative Kasha Kelley feel that reopening the lawsuit is not the best way to handle the situation. They believe that there are better ways to try to obtain adequate funding without opening another lawsuit.

The reality is that because of the economic situation that our country is facing, cuts are going to be made. Right now, even though we may think that we are having trouble dealing with the stress of the limited amount of finances; states such as California are in a lot more danger than we are here in the mid-west.

"Cutting into the budget without cutting into education is going to be a challenge, so at some point in time education must help bare the pain," Senator Dr. Steve Abrams said.

However, Abrams does not feel that education must be cut. According to Abrams, in the legislators last session, everything but education was cut into basically. Senator Abrams, along with other senators and representatives, wishes not to cut into education, but he acknowledges that it may be unavoidable.

As a state and participants in education system we will either experience more cuts, a raise in taxes, or a combination of both. All in all, Kansas is going to have to tighten its belt, and grit its teeth. The future of how Kansas will end up after cuts are made is unknown but for the sake of all students hopefully, students will still be able to go to school five days a week, with heat and air conditioning, have books to read, and teachers to teach them.