



State budget proposal 'devastating' for York City schools

By **ANGIE MASON**
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York, PA - The York City School District was "impacted in a devastating manner" by the state budget proposal released by Gov. Tom Corbett on Tuesday, according to the district's acting superintendent.

"What we considered to be a difficult task has become almost impossible in terms of closing a budget gap," Eric Holmes told the city school board Wednesday night. "Our original \$14 million to \$15 million budget deficit has increased by roughly \$11 million."

The state subsidy the district would receive under Corbett's plan is about \$1.5 million less than the district had projected, he said. But the changes in the budget "didn't end there," he said.

The governor's proposal would eliminate Accountability Block Grant money, which the district used to fund its kindergarten program, with 25 teachers. That would be a loss of about \$1.9 million for the district.

Other cuts in the governor's proposal chipped away at funding the district uses for special education, tutoring and prekindergarten programs, among others.

But the largest cut would come with the elimination of the charter school reimbursement program, which had paid back school districts a percentage

of the costs they pay to charter schools. The city had expected to receive nearly \$7 million from that program.

Administrators have been working to look at each piece of the proposed budget, Holmes said. The loss of charter school funding will have to be addressed later, he said.

"It's so much you can't attack it all at once," he said.

But the district did work out a way to save kindergarten, he said, though the program would have to be reduced from full-day to half-day.

"What we have done is been creative," he said. Middle managers, administrators and executive staff, and a union made up of exempt employees, have agreed to take a wage freeze next year, he said, so the money can go toward kindergarten.

Through that and some "creative working" with other funds, half-day kindergarten could be provided. Still, 12 kindergarten teaching positions would have to be furloughed.

Kindergarten is "too vital" to the district to eliminate altogether, Holmes said. And, the district knows full-day is a better option, he said, but can only provide half-day at this point.

The school board will have to vote on resolutions to reduce kindergarten and cut other programs, such as standalone art, music and physical education at the elementary level; and technology education, keyboarding and home economics at the secondary level, among others. The district said cutting those programs would allow more time for subjects such as math and reading to improve academic performance.

The district must ask the state for permission to cut

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programs in order to have the option, Holmes said.

Several board members thanked the administrators for agreeing to a pay freeze. Holmes said the city teachers' union will hold a membership meeting next week to discuss the district's request that the group again consider reopening its contract to consider a wage freeze.

In addition to considering cuts, the board last month passed a preliminary budget with a proposed 3.3 percent tax increase.

Board President Sam Beard said the governor's announcement put the district in a terrible position, but it still has to educate kids.

"Times are going to be extremely hard and extremely tight," he said. "We still must accomplish our mission."

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On the blogs

Members of the York City School Board on Wednesday also discussed ways the district could better promote its successes. Read more at www.yorkblog.com/cram.

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