



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

## Mail Tribune

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### **Our View: Oregon schools will have to make do with a little more money**

It's budget time in the Oregon Legislature, and that can mean only one thing: the biennial debate over how much money public schools will get. School advocates should prepare themselves, as usual, to make do with less than they would like.

There are several reasons for that, not the least of which is the likelihood that this year, unlike last time around, Oregon's infamous "kicker" will send an estimated \$350 million back to taxpayers who saw no tax increase.

The other big reason: Schools got a big boost two years ago to restore some of the cuts they took during the Great Recession. This time, it's the turn of other state programs that got less last time so schools could get more.

Those other spending areas include higher education, which the state has underfunded for years. Just last week, Oregon State University announced a proposed 7.6 percent increase in in-state tuition. On average, tuition at Oregon colleges rose 40 percent from 2007 to 2014. If any area of state spending is overdue for an increase, it's higher education.

Public school advocates say legislative leaders' proposed \$7.24 billion for K-12 will mean teacher layoffs, reduced school days and canceled programs. Lawmakers counter that it's a \$600 million increase over the current budget and should keep schools operating at their present levels. School officials say they need \$265 million on top of the \$600 million to cover increased costs.

Remember that \$350 million kicker? There's the \$265 million and more. But that will go back to the taxpayers because tax collections are likely to exceed the official projection by at least 2 percent. Under state law, placed in the Oregon Constitution by voters, all the "excess" gets refunded. Until voters come to their senses and remove that requirement, Oregon will be unable to even out its rollercoaster revenue stream.

Legislators say they hope to be able to add more money for schools in the second year of the biennium, but that depends on how well the economy performs. Lawmakers also are betting that local property tax collections will increase, meaning more money for schools that doesn't come out of the state budget.

That's a lot of unknowns. What's certain is that there is never enough money in the state budget to give everyone all the funding they want. School advocates should be happy that at least their allocation continues to increase, even if it's not at the pace they'd like.

<http://www.mailtribune.com/article/20150324/OPINION/150329855>

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From the Desk of Representative Peter Buckley

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Buckley", written over a horizontal line.