[Senate budget would give 60% of public schools funding increases](#)

By Laura Hancock
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COLUMBUS, Ohio - The Fair School Funding Plan is in, so are financial rewards for high-performing and fast-growing school districts, according to the Ohio Senate's version of the two-year state budget.

A school funding stabilization mechanism known as "the guarantee" is out.

[The Senate unveiled dozens of budget proposals on Tuesday](#) afternoon. The chamber's plans for education were part of a wide-reaching budget bill that included tax cuts for the wealthy and [funding for a new Browns stadium](#).

Senate leaders said that their funding overall provides more money to education than proposals in the Ohio House and from Gov. Mike DeWine -- $633.9 million more over the biennium than the House.

"The education funding that we have put into this budget, we have invested more in this budget than any other budget before," said Senate President Rob McColley, a Henry County Republican. "There will be a record amount of investment in public education in this budget."

However, in the last biennium budget, the legislature spent [$1.2 billion more on education](#), when combining spending on traditional public, charter and private school vouchers.

And of the $633 million, the Senate provides $101.9 million for traditional K-12 public schools in the fiscal year that begins July 1 and $90.5 million in the following fiscal year.

The budget needs to pass by July 1, the start of the new fiscal year. In coming weeks, the Senate is expected to finesse their budget plan.

After it passes the chamber, the Senate and House will begin reconciling their differences in the legislation, [House Bill 96](#).

Sen. Nickie Antonio, a Lakewood Democrat and minority leader, said the Senate's plan doesn't meaningfully address property tax burdens that Ohioans are experiencing, since property values have soared in recent years.

"They're blaming the schools," she said. "They want the communities to go look at the schools and say, 'The schools are the reason why your property taxes are high.' It's not the fault of the schools. It's the fault of the mercenaries that came into our communities, bought our property and then the prices just skyrocketed. And now we're all experiencing the results of that."

All in for Ohio Kids, a coalition made up of teacher unions, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative and Policy Matters Ohio, criticized the Senate's funding as insufficient.

"The Senate Leadership found $600 million for a handout to the billionaire owners of the Browns," said Ryan Wynia, a parent involved with the Organizing Collaborative. "Imagine what kind of state we could have if they put the same energy into funding our public schools. I've waited long enough for our state lawmakers to keep their commitment to my children and all Ohio kids. It's time for lawmakers to do their job. Pass the Fair School Funding Plan, with updated costs, as they promised us four years ago."

Fair School Funding Plan

The Senate's version of the budget would implement the last two phases of the Fair School Funding Plan, a bipartisan funding structure that designed to inject roughly $2 billion into public schools above 2018 funding levels of $6.9 billion.

The plan is supposed to be phased in over six years. It was created to alleviate many districts' overreliance on local property taxes, which the Ohio Supreme Court found unconstitutional in a series of rulings in the early 2000s.

Under the Senate's version of the budget, the Fair School Funding Plan would provide more money to 63% of school districts than they now receive in the fiscal year that begins July 1; 62% would see a raise in 2027, leaders said.

This is different than what the House and Gov. Mike DeWine proposed in their versions of the budget.

This year, Ohio's traditional K-12 public schools are on track to receive just over $8.1 billion in state foundation funding, which is the pot containing most of the state aid that goes to public schools and includes dollars from the Fair School Funding Plan.

Under the Senate's plan:

-Total state foundation funding for traditional public schools in the fiscal year that starts July 1 would be $8.2 billion. That's just over $1 million more than the House's plan and $133.5 million more than DeWine's proposal.

-Total foundation aid for the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2026 is $8.3 billion, which is $13.2 million over the House's proposal and $261.1 million over DeWine's proposal.

The House's version of the budget does not implement the last phases of the Fair School Funding Plan. Instead, the House provides direct funding to ensure every district would receive more money for K-12 schools than they currently get.

-House proposal for fiscal year that begins July 1: $100.8 million more over the current fiscal year's $8.1 billion.

- House proposal for fiscal year that begins July 1, 2026: $179.1 million more over the current fiscal year's $8.1 billion.

Gov. Mike DeWine's version of the budget distributes aid according to the Fair School Funding Plan's guidelines, although he allotted less money than the Senate proposal in overall traditional public school funding.

DeWine wants to reduce money known as "the guarantee" that districts typically receive when they experience sudden plunges in state aid from one year to the next, to help level out their finances.

-DeWine proposal for fiscal year that begins July 1: $31.6 million less than this year's $8.1 billion.

-DeWine's proposal for the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2026: $71.8 million less than this year's $8.1 billion

Neither the Senate, nor DeWine, update the "inputs" that go into the Fair School Funding formula. Inputs are costs of technology, teacher salaries and other expenses. They are relying on inputs for 2022. The formula was designed for inputs to be regularly updated.

The Senate also eliminates the guarantees.

Carryover balances

The Ohio Senate announced Tuesday that its version of the budget would cap the amount of cash that districts "carry over" from one year to the next to 50% of their annual operating cost.

Any amount of cash above that level will be given to homeowners through future property tax discounts.

This is more generous to school districts than the Ohio House, which [capped carryover balances at 30%](#).

DeWine's budget said nothing about carryover balances.

The Senate's version of the budget will allow carryover balances to balloon over 50% for capital projects that will be initiated within three years.

That's in response to districts' complaints that their carryover balances sometimes appear excessive when they have started to receive levy or bond revenue that they haven't yet spent on their expected construction projects.

Levies, property taxes

The Senate's version of the budget prohibits districts from seeking additional money through levies if they have 100% of their operating expenses in carryover balances.

This is in addition to a provision the Senate has that prohibits districts from seeking emergency levies.

Local school districts would not be able to put a levy on the ballot unless a resolution doing so passes with a two-thirds majority, up from the current simple majority, according to the Senate's plan.

Furthermore, the Senate's version of the budget contains parts of House Bill 309, [which requires most county budget commissions to annually review](#) property tax rates and reduce them if they collect more than what a district needs.

Growth and performance awards

The Senate's version of the budget would also provide additional funding for school districts with fast-growing enrollment, as well as high-performing districts.

Vivek Ramaswamy, the 2026 Republican gubernatorial frontrunner, has a similar plan to link state aid to high performance, with his plan to reward teachers [based on merit](#).

Ramaswamy's would likely prove controversial, as teacher compensation is now based on provisions established in collective bargaining agreements negotiated by their unions and the local district officials.

Anna Staver contributed to this report.