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Kentucky Among States With Deepest Education Cuts Since Recession

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Kentucky is among states that have cut public education funding most deeply over the last decade, according to a new report from the Center on Budget Policy Priorities.

Through its funding formula, the state sets aside 15.8 percent less per public school student than it did in 2008 — the third largest drop in the nation, behind Oklahoma and Texas.

Michael Leachman, director of state fiscal research for the CBPP, said the cuts hurt states' economic competitiveness.

"If we neglect our schools, we diminish our future," Leachman said. "Strong public education is fundamental to our nation's economy and quality of life."

"States disproportionately relied on spending cuts to close the very large budget shortfalls they faced after the recession hit, rather than a more balanced mix of spending cuts and revenue increases."

Kentucky funds school districts across the state using the Support Education Excellence in Kentucky formula, known as SEEK. The state gives out money to local districts based on student population, transportation costs and other factors.

Kentucky is one of many states that relied on budget cuts to address budget shortfalls in the wake of the 2008 economic recession.

Over the last decade, the state has seen a series of shortfalls in SEEK funding as officials have underestimated growth in the student population that has outpaced any funding increases.

The state set aside more money for the SEEK program in 2015, but the increase was outpaced by inflation and an influx of students.

“They could have lessened the cuts to education funding and made more progress in restoring the funding that’s been lost if they’d been more willing to raise additional revenue,” Leachman said.

Kentucky hasn’t brought in enough money to meet budget demands in eight of the last 14 years. The state is already predicting a \$150 million shortfall at the end of the current fiscal year, which ends on June 30.

Gov. Matt Bevin says lawmakers need to change the state’s tax code to bring in more revenue, possibly by eliminating tax breaks.

However, many Republican legislators have been unwilling to pursue the proposal (<http://wfpl.org/lawmakers-still-hesitant-bevins-call-tax-reform/>) out of fear that it would lead to tax increases.

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