

Missouri schools: Busing cut proposal will hurt classrooms

 www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/missouri-schools-busing-cut-proposal-will-hurt-classrooms/article_84ac13ff-0a5e-5d07-b479-3666d17a5092.html

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. • Republican Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens' plan to slash an already depleted public school bus fund will wind up taking money from classrooms he promised to leave alone, school administrators across the state say.

When Greitens rolled out his budget proposal last week, he touted a \$3 million increase in funding for K-12 schools, saying "not a single penny" would come out of classrooms. But administrators say they'll have to take money from classrooms to make up for the 34 percent cut from next year's busing aid that Greitens wants to make.

"It's not like I can just say, 'We're not going to transport kids,'" said Heath Halley, the superintendent of the Putnam County R-1 district. "We will have to come up with (the money) or put off planned expenditures like textbooks or computers."

In 2008, the state reimbursed districts for almost 40 percent of allowable transportation costs such as mileage to and from school each day. This year, that number fell to 16 percent, according to numbers from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Greitens has already withheld \$8.6 million in transportation funding for K-12 districts from this year's promised \$105.3 million in busing aid. His budget plan for next year calls for \$69.27 million in busing aid.

The bus aid cuts come especially hard to rural districts with big geographic areas and few students.

In Halley's district — the largest in the state when it comes to land mass — buses drive more than 1,000 miles per day. Last year, the state paid for just \$95,000 of the north-central Missouri district's approximately \$400,000 transportation costs, Halley said. The district already buys gently used buses from wealthier districts or leasing companies and has cut back on services such as contracting out for school maintenance, Halley said.

The governor's office didn't respond to requests for comment about administrators' concerns. When Greitens unveiled his budget proposal at a school in the southwest Missouri town of Nixa last week, he told students: "We've ensured that our K-12 classrooms are protected."

Nixa Superintendent Stephen Kleinsmith said previous cuts caused his district to look at expanding how far students can walk to school before they qualify for busing from 1 ½ miles to 2 miles.

"It caused way too much concern for our school board that too many families were going to be putting their kids at risk of walking to school without proper sidewalks or intersections, lights, or crossing guards," he said.

House Minority Leader Gail McCann-Beatty, a Kansas City Democrat, said there's not a lot of wiggle room for schools to absorb the proposed cuts.

"I don't know any district that's going to be able to take that kind of hit and not going to have to pull those dollars from somewhere else," she said.

I understand that registration constitutes agreement to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).