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School officials: Poorer districts would be hit harder

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Stunned Long Island school officials say Gov. David A. Paterson's proposed midyear aid cuts would fall heaviest on low- and middle-income districts, despite the governor's insistence his plan is progressive.

Overall, Island schools would lose \$139 million this year if the plan wins approval in the State Legislature - and that's a big "if," because many lawmakers have already voiced opposition. The last midyear cuts, imposed in 1990, resulted in widespread teacher layoffs and larger class sizes for students.

Proportionately speaking, low and middle-income districts would take the biggest hit.

Consider, for example, the impact of Paterson's plan on two districts in Suffolk County: Port Jefferson, which is affluent, and Wyandanch, where taxable wealth is only about one-third the state average.

Port Jefferson would lose \$320,404 in aid, an amount equivalent to less than 1 percent of its budget. Wyandanch would lose more than \$1 million, equivalent to nearly 2 percent of its budget.

"If they can do this, we may as well shut the schools down," said Denise Baines, president of Wyandanch's school board, which is already scrambling to close a \$1.5 million budget deficit. "We're at our limits."

Similar impacts would be felt across Long Island, especially among highly taxed school systems in Islip and Brookhaven towns.

This includes such districts as Lindenhurst, Longwood, Middle Country and Sachem, which are middle-class, but heavily dependent on state aid to keep tax rates from going even higher.

"Poor and mid-level school districts that are already struggling would be devastated by these cuts," said Gary Bixhorn, an Eastern Suffolk BOCES official and legislative chairman of the Suffolk School Superintendents Association.

In releasing his plan yesterday, Paterson called for "shared sacrifice" to close a state deficit pegged at \$1.5 billion this year and expected to grow in the future. Aides contend the aid-reduction part of the plan is fair because it is based on students' needs and on districts' wealth and taxing effort.

"This is a fair, equitable and progressive approach," said Matt Anderson, a spokesman for the governor's Division of the Budget.

Under the plan, aid cuts for individual districts would range from 3 to 10 percent of state formula aid.

However, poorer districts are more dependent on state aid than wealthier ones. For example, state aid makes up about 60 percent of revenue for Wyandanch, but only about 14 percent for Port Jefferson. Most remaining revenue come from local property taxes.

Thus, proposed aid cuts represent a far larger share of Wyandanch's overall budget than Port Jefferson's.

Affluent districts have objections of their own to the governor's plan. One complaint is that Paterson's call for cuts was not accompanied by any suggestion that the state might lighten its requirements for school districts, such as academic testing, which boost local costs.

"I think it's hypocritical of the state to pile mandate upon mandate on school districts, in both educational and operational areas, and then take money away," said Ronald Friedman, superintendent of Great Neck schools and president of the Nassau Council of School Superintendents.

Great Neck would lose \$742,118 under the plan - equivalent to four-tenths of a percent of its budget.

Many of the Island's leaders doubt Paterson can win adoption of his plan, given the level of legislative opposition. For example, next year's State Senate delegation from the Island - seven Republicans and two Democrats - all have come out against midyear cuts.

"I think it's going to be very difficult," said Matthew Crosson, president of the Long Island Association, the region's biggest business and civic organization.

"When you see districts such as Sachem that would have to cut \$7 million in the next four-and-a-half months, you have to wonder if this is even feasible."

GETTING LESS ON LI

Gov. Paterson's proposed cuts would reduce the amount of state aid promised to local school districts for the current academic year. The cuts hit hardest in districts where state aid makes up a large percentage of overall budgets, as shown in the last column.

NASSAU

DISTRICT	Reduction in formula aid	% reduction	% of district budget
Baldwin	-\$1,480,781	-6.05%	1.34%
Bellmore	-285,082	-7.29	0.99
Bellmore Merrick	-1,882,849	-10.00	1.59
Bethpage	-767,929	-7.25	1.10
Carle Place	-767,929	-7.45	0.66
East Meadow	-2,452,254	-6.54	1.43
East Rockaway	-364,420	-6.51	1.14
East Williston	-248,280	-9.84	0.52
Elmont	-1,266,347	-6.13	1.84
Farmingdale	-1,540,464	-5.87	1.11
Floral Park Bellerose	-320,084	-8.61	1.28
Franklin Square	-444,098	-6.62	1.41
Freeport	-2,245,388	-4.10	1.59
Garden City	-507,542	-10.00	0.54
Glen Cove	-756,850	-9.62	1.12
Great Neck	-742,118	-10.00	0.41
Hempstead	-2,532,715	-3.00	1.68
Herricks	-604,883	-7.33	0.66
Hewlett Woodmere	-507,638	-8.83	0.54
Hicksville	-1,324,206	-8.92	1.22
Island Park	-194,430	-8.91	0.63
Island Trees	-951,213	-6.63	1.74
Jericho	-464,511	-10.00	0.46
Lawrence	-848,199	-10.00	0.89
Levittown	-2,448,842	-5.14	1.37
Locust Valley	-341,210	-10.00	0.51
Long Beach	-1,878,032	-10.00	1.67
Lynbrook	-621,041	-7.56	0.94

Malverne	-514,534	-6.02	1.18
Manhasset	-370,611	-10.00	0.46
Massapequa	-1,593,732	-7.24	0.96
Merrick	-421,751	-7.97	1.11
Mineola	-457,681	-8.54	0.58
New Hyde Park Garden City Park	-299,952	-7.13	0.98
North Bellmore	-703,544	-6.26	1.59
North Merrick	-411,375	-6.51	1.66
North Shore	-382,201	-10.00	0.47
Oceanside	-1,398,724	-7.26	1.15
Oyster Bay E. Norwich	-218,404	-10.00	0.48
Plainedge	-814,236	-5.32	1.13
Plainview Old Bethpage	-1,012,750	-6.96	0.81
Port Washington	-634,079	-10.00	0.52
Rockville Centre	-779,772	-10.00	0.88
Roosevelt	-1,158,737	-3.00	1.47
Roslyn	-391,330	-9.93	0.42
Seaford	-656,366	-7.03	1.29
Sewanhaka	-2,897,738	-10.00	1.96
Syosset	-969,624	-9.20	0.55
Uniondale	-1,948,801	-5.48	1.26
Valley Stream 13	-577,455	-5.95	1.43
Valley Stream 24	-375,730	-6.98	1.47
Valley Stream 30	-424,821	-7.72	1.45
Valley Stream Central	-1,677,392	-10.00	1.74
Wantagh	-991,138	-7.18	1.57
West Hempstead	-644,407	-7.28	1.22
Westbury	-899,988	-3.21	0.91

SUFFOLK

DISTRICT	Reduction in formula aid	% reduction	% of district budget
Amagansett	-28,176	- 10.00%	0.38%
Amityville	-1,023,329	-5.19	1.42
Babylon	-517,629	-7.14	1.21
Bay Shore	-2,091,722	-5.98	1.60
Bayport Blue Point	-982,948	-7.13	1.67
Brentwood	-5,890,392	-3.00	2.00
Bridgethampston	-73,925	-10.00	0.75
Comsewogue	-1,705,233	-6.26	2.30
Center Moriches	-495,160	-5.43	1.44
Central Islip	-2,438,751	-3.04	1.55
Cold Spring Harbor	-272,077	-10.00	0.51
Commack	-1,923,946	-6.32	1.25
Connetquot	-2,801,431	-7.06	1.80
Copiague	-1,680,850	-3.98	1.71
Deer Park	-1,379,872	-5.67	1.46
East Hampton	-246,347	-10.00	0.42
East Islip	-2,182,043	-6.97	2.24
East Moriches	-414,597	-8.26	1.77
East Quogue	-90,479	-7.62	0.44
Eastport South Manor	-1,085,370	-5.00	1.43

Elwood	-642,516	-6.14	1.34
Fire Island	-33,905	-10.00	0.64
Fishers Island	-26,312	-10.00	0.78
Greenport	-109,477	-7.97	0.77
Half Hollow Hills	-2,239,805	-9.63	1.14
Hampton Bays	-234,877	-5.00	0.57
Harborfields	-854,069	-7.30	1.24
Hauppauge	-1,121,305	-10.00	1.23
Huntington	-1,083,525	-9.62	1.05
Islip	-1,411,730	-8.01	2.19
Kings Park	-1,055,826	-7.54	1.43
Lindenhurst	-2,775,151	-6.04	2.07
Longwood	-3,974,012	-5.36	2.00
Mattituck Cutchogue	-155,374	-5.78	0.45
Middle Country	-4,479,012	-6.07	2.31
Miller Place	-1,019,512	-5.91	1.76
Montauk	-83,595	-10.00	0.52
Mount Sinai	-1,336,608	-8.61	2.53
North Babylon	-2,040,561	-5.18	1.93
Northport East Northpt.	-1,080,052	-9.56	0.75
Oysterponds	-42,651	-10.00	0.69
Patchogue Medford	-3,499,350	-6.43	2.27
Port Jefferson	-320,404	-10.00	0.88
Quogue	-32,070	-10.00	0.46
Remsenburgh Speonk	-56,716	-10.00	0.50
Riverhead	-1,269,921	-6.73	1.24
Rocky Point	-1,277,625	-5.83	1.95
Sachem	-7,205,359	-6.96	2.58
Sag Harbor	-162,924	-10.00	0.57
Sayville	-1,519,932	-6.78	2.00
Shelter Island	-68,699	-10.00	0.72
Shoreham Wading R.	-563,168	-6.39	1.05
Smithtown	-2,339,872	-6.78	1.12
South Country	-2,092,561	-5.00	2.05
South Huntington	-1,517,379	-5.76	1.17
Southampton	-231,650	-10.00	0.44
Southold	-115,003	-6.08	0.47
Springs	-67,007	-5.10	0.32
Three Village	-3,115,136	-9.95	1.95
Tuckahoe Comn	-49,927	-5.74	0.33
West Babylon	-1,889,230	-6.62	2.11
West Islip	-1,941,445	-6.99	1.95
Westhampton Beach	-214,584	-10.00	0.46
William Floyd	-3,692,252	-3.77	1.91
Wyandanch	-1,038,124	-3.00	1.89

Nassau County - \$ 51,892,803

Suffolk County - 87,404,490

Long Island - 139,297,293

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