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Budget cuts pose threat to school goals

By [Justin Vick](#) | Independent Tribune

State-mandated budget cuts come at a time when both of Cabarrus County's public school systems have set high goals to be among North Carolina's best districts.

Cabarrus County Schools recently posted its strategic plan online, outlining how the system hopes to become one of the 10 best districts in North Carolina by 2011. And Kannapolis City Schools revised its mission and established a vision in January to become one of the state's top 20 districts.

"I would say the hardest part of this is we are attempting to refocus and raise expectations, and we are doing it at the exact same time we're cutting back on resources," Barry Shepherd, superintendent of Cabarrus County Schools, recently told his Board of Education. "We're just going to have to do more with less."

Cabarrus County Schools has had to endure two rounds of budget cuts this fall. The first resulted from enrollment falling short of projections. And the second, announced last week to be \$1.1 million, was needed to help the state government through its anticipated budget shortfall.

That's in addition to being among North Carolina's lowest state-funded districts since it isn't eligible for funding the state provides to systems in low-wealth areas, said chief financial officer Kelly Kluttz.

Both school systems are mulling over options. They have until Dec. 19 to present plans to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Cabarrus County Board of Education members seemed to favor slashing weekend utility costs and overtime for clerical and custodial, instead of reducing instructional, material and replacement textbook line items.

Andrea Palo, who serves as the board's vice chairwoman, said budget cuts would likely require more collaboration among schools and the community.

"This is probably a time we are really going to have to tell parents that their communication with their teachers and principals is crucial," Palo said. "We need to make sure they understand they need to be involved in their children's education."

Holly Blackwelder, who chairs the board, said those in the community concerned about classrooms being affected by cuts can participate in the Adopt-A-Teacher program, which provides new teachers donations to purchase classroom materials.

Kannapolis City Schools will trim its budget by \$201,593 as a result of last week's cuts.

"It's always hard when your funding is cut," said Peggy Wagstaff, assistant superintendent for Kannapolis City Schools. "That goes without saying, but you just continue working with kids." Wagstaff said both of the county's school systems are creative and resourceful.

"We're going to do the best we can with what we have to work with," Wagstaff said. "We're not going to let this stop our progress toward our goals."

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