

State lawmakers want more money for preschool programs

State lawmakers want to send more state dollars to pre-kindergarten programs that prepare children for kindergarten. Sen. Peggy Lehner, R-Kettering, wants to put \$100 million toward pre-kindergarten education for Ohio's youngest and poorest students. Lehner, who serves on a panel of lawmakers evaluating the House version of the state budget bill, said every year the state waits to fund preschool, 130,000 more children go under-served. "This is one issue that we have such overwhelming data on the effectiveness of it, the cost savings and the value of how it can make a difference in a child's life," Lehner said Thursday. Ohio's Early Childhood Education program serves 5,700 3- and 4-year-olds living in homes well below the poverty level, spending \$3,980 per pupil. Gov. John Kasich provided \$2 million in his state budget plan to expand the program for another 500 students. House Republicans proposed an additional \$5 million to cover 2,200 children in families earning below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, or about \$47,100 for a family of four. Students could use vouchers to attend public or private preschools that receive at least a three-star quality rating from the state. Ohio spends \$22 million on pre-kindergarten programs and ranks No. 37 for access to preschool among 4-year-olds, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research. The state covered preschool costs for about 2 percent of four-year-old students in 2012, compared to 19 percent in Michigan and 30 percent in Kentucky. Kettering Schools plans to open a new early childhood learning center in August, but Superintendent Jim Schoenlein said the new facility will barely meet the community's needs. Schoenlein told lawmakers this week that more preschool options are needed, especially because population has increased as state school funding has decreased. Kettering enrolls about 240 pre-kindergarten students, including 73 through the state ECE program. "We have long, long waiting lists — we just don't have spots to serve everyone we'd like to," Schoenlein said. There's room in the \$61.5 billion budget, of which \$13.5 billion has been allocated for K-12 education. Preschool funding could be pulled from programs such as the \$150 million Straight A Fund that gives grants to innovative, cost-savings programs or the \$25.5 million to expand the state's voucher program. Lehner said she was concerned about the voucher expansion, which has been introduced as a two-year pilot to cover kindergarten and first-grade students, but could lock the state into continuing the program at least for those students. "We need to be talking about what does this mean in the long run and is this something we can afford and is this the best use of limited resources in our education system," Lehner said during Thursday's committee meeting. Stephanie Owens, principal for Centerville Primary Village South School, said investing in preschool will improve literacy more than holding back a child in third grade per the state law enacted last year requiring all third-graders to read at grade level before moving to fourth grade. Owens said about 35 percent of Centerville kindergartners start school without any prior education and many start behind their peers. "With reduced oral language and vocabulary skills, many of these students also struggle in literacy skills," Owens said.

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School districts advocate for greater state support in budget

A variety of school personnel from around the state told senators Thursday about the various ways their districts struggle financially, advocating for greater state resources for education in the biennial budget. The House and increased the Achievement Everywhere's per pupil funding level in the budget (HB 59) from \$5,000 to \$5,732. Many districts nevertheless see their funding capped or supplemented with hold harmless guarantee funding. Liberty Union-Thurston Schools Superintendent Paul Mathews, speaking on behalf of the eight public districts and the education service center in Fairfield County, advocated for a per-pupil funding base in excess of \$6,000 in addition to support for other educational needs. Parents and community members in his county have presented concerns regarding school security and, therefore, he said, funding should be provided for armed officers, surveillance systems and point-of-entry security. With online state assessments a year away, Fairfield County districts need dollars for technology infrastructure and devices for not only the tests but blended learning opportunities, Mr. Mathews said. The state must also fully fund education for students with disabilities because the new report card will report on the performance of that student subgroup and others, he said. "If we fail to do this, it jeopardizes the ability for public school districts to properly fund programs for students of all ability levels." Other funding needs for his area districts include: school bus purchase, maintenance and operations and ESC services, he said. Benjamin Jenkins, a teacher in Chillicothe City Schools and president of the Chillicothe Education Association, said his district is struggling financially, having eliminated 60 jobs and in the process of closing a building. Despite the recent passage of a \$6.9-mill levy, the district will make cuts. "Chillicothe City Schools does not have an expenditure problem, we have a revenue problem," he said. "This revenue problem has a myriad of causes: the last budget bill resulted in our district receiving \$1 million fewer dollars; the phase out of the tangible personal property tax has been especially harmful to our district; and open enrollment is negatively affecting our district." The House-passed version of the budget could worsen the "storm" for his district, Mr. Jenkins said. With the EdChoice voucher expansion, the district would lose more money to privates. He said continued support for charters sends money to schools that do not have to pay for the new Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. Wendy Patton, senior project director at Policy Matters Ohio, said her organization surveyed school business officials and found that since 2011, a majority have cut or frozen salaries and benefits, laid off staff and cut back on classroom materials and supplies to deal with the loss of state funding. About 70% of districts responding said they made cuts to balance the budget for 2012-13, which is an increase from about two-thirds that said they made cuts the previous year. More than 90% of respondents said they anticipated having to make cuts next year unless they get new state funds. Stephen Dyer, Innovation Ohio education policy fellow, said the House's version of Achievement Everywhere is even less adequate than the governor's version. The 6% gain cap "short-changes" students by about \$1.6 billion over the biennium, he said. He provided a method for calculating the amount per pupil it costs to fund schools based on the price of teachers and personnel, operations, equipment and other items, which comes to \$6,141 per pupil. Greg Harris, state director of StudentsFirst, offered support for

weighted funding for disabled students and increased transparency but called for accountability measures also be put in place. Districts that do not show effective use of resources should be paired with similar districts to improve the outcome, he said. He also advocated that the Parent Trigger expansion be returned to the bill but with certain "guardrails," saying some struggling schools are going through redesigns under Race to the Top and should be exempt from the trigger. "We think the Senate should support the governor's intention to create systemic leverage for parents who otherwise have no option other than to send their children to failing schools," Mr. Harris said. "We would also like the trigger option for a failing school to re-open as a charter school to be limited to those authorizers and operators that have demonstrated records of success in Ohio." West Carrollton City Schools Information Management Supervisor Frank Groach, former president of the Ohio Association of EMIS Professionals, objected to the House's proposed change to average daily membership counts from once per year to 12 times annually. October County Week is when districts now assess how many students attend their schools and the process takes months to process the information to ensure it is accurate. This year it took Mr. Groach's district 5.5 months. "You see, we just don't count heads for five days in October, we count all children who are residents of the district, even though we might never have seen them, regardless if they are educated in our buildings, or in neighboring districts, group homes, ESC's, Juvenile Detention facilities, Catholic Schools or even Homeschools," he said. "And, in addition to that, we are verifying enrollment dates and withdrawal dates and special needs for every one of those children so that no district will lose state funding. "The idea of twelve counts a year is simply unrealistic in its current configuration. Could it be done? Yes, but not without significant changes. We would be switching from what is known as an ADM count to an ADA - average daily attendance - count. Again, just words, but the underlying requirement would be who we count, and how we can account for the students we educate and how we can account for our residential children who are educated elsewhere." Among other witnesses Thursday were: Ann Brennan, executive director of the Ohio School Psychologists Association, who offered support for the House's maintenance of current law regarding how many school psychologists must be in a school. Rebecca Asmo, executive director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Columbus and board member of the Ohio Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, who urged lawmakers to support an increased role for nonprofit organizations that provide after-school programs that support greater academic achievement. Lynn Elfner, CEO of the Ohio Academy of Science, who advocated for maintaining the Youth STEM Commercialization and Entrepreneurship Program at \$5 million for the biennium within the Board of Regents budget.

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Senators hear from private school voucher proponents

After hearing from a variety of opponents of a voucher expansion in the budget, senators on Thursday got an earful of the other side of the argument from advocates for EdChoice and other scholarship options. The biennial budget (HB 59) includes not only the maintenance of the state's

voucher programs for low-performing schools and autism and special needs, but would create a new category for the Educational Choice Scholarship to allow kindergarteners in families below 200% of the federal poverty level to use the state-funded voucher at a private school. A variety of stakeholders have raised concerns before the Senate Finance Education Subcommittee about the expansion while generally objecting to the EdChoice program altogether. Sen. Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville) and Sen. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) shared their own misgivings about the expansion; (See Gongwer Ohio Report, April 24, 2013) although, the latter said Thursday she "very strongly" supports the existing program. Yet Jason Warner, legislative director of School Choice Ohio, said the expansion of EdChoice to low-income students would address the needs of students whose schools are not a good fit for them despite being in good academic standing. "Families who lack the means to send their children to a private school or move to a different school district have to see their children trapped in a school that they know is not serving them and not preparing them to excel in the 21st century," he said. Mr. Warner also said another limit of the existing EdChoice is resulting from schools "gaming the system." "Rather than make structural changes to improve education for students, a handful of districts have done things like change building IRNs to give the school a re-start on their state ratings or reassign students after the EdChoice Scholarship deadlines so that students lose their eligibility for the scholarship," he said. "The proposals contained in House Bill 59 will address these limitations and extend the opportunity of school choice to many more families throughout Ohio." By expanding EdChoice to allow kindergarteners in families below 200% of the federal poverty level to be eligible, 2,000 students could secure a voucher. The second year of the biennium allows for a second class of kindergarteners to apply, thus growing the reach. "This is an essential progression in the evolution of Ohio's educational choice movement," Mr. Warner said. "For the first time, we are recognizing that choice should not be limited to where a student lives, but also if the family possesses the financial ability to provide an education they believe is best suited to their child's needs." The choice advocate countered other witness claims that voucher recipients perform as well or worse than the home district. He offered data on the 2012 Ohio Graduation Test that show voucher students perform 22% higher in reading, 14% higher in math, and nearly 25% higher in science. In the Cleveland Municipal School Districts, Cleveland Scholarship students performed 32.9 percentage points better on the test. In Columbus, EdChoice students were 40.4 percentage points above students in all the district's schools, including those with decent report card grades. Chairman Sen. Randy Gardner (R-Bowling Green) asked if unless the state provides unlimited school choice with unlimited dollars, if the state is making decisions on choice for families. Mr. Warner answered in the affirmative and said he would support greater expansion of choice options. Mr. Gardner said he thinks the state might have other options to make more meaningful choices available to parents who have no choice. Sen. Lehner said her concern with the program is the state "needs to have our eyes wide open" as this is a "foot in the door" for a considerable change in the state policy on school choice. The proposal includes only 2,000 scholarships, which she said has to grow to cover incoming classes in the future. Kindergarteners can take the voucher without having ever been in a public school

to know that they are struggling. The cost to the state to serve those first 2,000 voucher recipients through grade 12 is \$773 million. If the program is expanded the cost will multiply "exponentially." "This is a huge, huge amount of money we're talking about here," she said. "What does this mean in the long run and is this something we can afford?" Mr. Warner said the proposal is a pilot project and in two years the legislature will have to decide whether to continue it. However, the language says the vouchers will continue to be provided to those first students so long as the General Assembly appropriates money to the line item. Speaking to the existing EdChoice program were two catholic school leaders. Dan Garrick, principal at Saint Francis DeSales High School, said about 153 of 835 students at the school receive the scholarship. The funding level for the program should be increased, however, because it is becoming increasingly difficult financially to maintain the program. Having gone unchanged at \$5,000 per student at the high school level since the program's inception, the voucher does not cover the average cost per pupil of \$7,597 at the school. This compares to the \$11,000 the home districts pay on average, he said. Al Early, president of Purcell Marian High School in Cincinnati, said the tuition costs at private schools usually exceed EdChoice amounts and the difference is covered either by parents and/or the school. Parents are only required to make up the difference if their income is more than 200% FPL. Schools must then make up the gap between the cost of tuition and the full cost of education, as they do for all students. As tuition charges increase as the cost of education increases, the static Education Choice payment amount exacerbates the burden on non-public schools, he said. Sen. Gardner said Ohio's catholic schools have 67,332 fewer students than in 1998 - a 34.6% reduction - and the number of schools has reduced from 531 to 403. He asked if it would be prudent to spend money to help keep the school choice options open. Mr. Garrick said the decline can in part be contributed to the challenges of financing. "Ultimately what we're looking for is a formula...trying to arrive at a dollar figure that would be equitable through all different types of settings," he said. "That would ease some of the strain on parochial schools." Answering the senator, Mr. Garrick said he would appreciate a law change that would allow the schools to ask parents below 200% of the poverty level to volunteer. He said a majority of families above 200% FPL at his school already opt to volunteer rather than pay the difference. Mr. Early said his school has a work-study program to allow families to cover the extra expense. It does not fully bridge the cost gap, however. He said he is worried the schools are going to slip in their competitive edge in terms of the programing and services they can provide. Sen. Manning said lawmakers repeatedly hear "we need more money" from witnesses. She also said other states offer education at a lower cost. She asked how she can go back to her community and tell the district the state is taking its money and giving it to a private school. Mr. Garrick said he can sympathize but his school is saving money through the alternative choice. When students are not in the public district, taxpayers save money because the cost associated with running the school is handled at a private level. He also said competition between schools creates greater accountability. Advocating for the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship was Marburn Academy Headmaster Earl Oremus, who said his school's mission is to prepare dyslexic and ADHD students for college. He said the return on investment for the voucher is "enormous" with

studies showing 35% of dyslexic and ADHD children drop out before completing high school and of those who finish, about 10% attempt college. Of those, 2% complete a degree. All of Marburn's students graduate, and for the past 10 years 100% have been accepted to college. "JPSN scholarship funds allow the children who require special instruction to acquire the skills they need to perform up to their educational potential, and that is a huge plus for the state of Ohio," Mr. Oremus said. He advocated the Senate maintain the House's change to the Special Needs Scholarship calculation that makes it easier to understand. Cassaundra Crawford spoke about her family's experience with the scholarship, which has allowed her dyslexic daughter to attend Marburn. She said the voucher put her child on a level playing field with other students. Sen. Lehner said she has heard that certain ODE rules and regulations hinder schools such as Marburn Academy. Mr. Oremus said the state funding support tends to arrive late in the academic period when many services have already been provided. As to licensure issues, he asked that the law for the scholarship be amended to allow high-performing voucher recipients to seek a waiver from certain regulations that prevent the school from doing what it does.

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Coleman, Gee join advocates in pushing for ‘Columbus Plan’ legislation

A bipartisan plan to shake up oversight of Columbus schools got some high-level support in the legislature Tuesday. The mayor, Ohio State University president, teachers union president and a business leader joined the Democratic and Republican sponsors of the bill [HB 167](#)) in proponent testimony before the House Education Committee. The fast-tracked measure would implement some Columbus Education Commission recommendations, including the creation of a new auditor position. Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman told lawmakers that despite many other positives for the city, it has not excelled in educating children. The city has been growing beyond the boundaries of the school district but Columbus City Schools is losing students. Columbus schools have not met adequate annual progress benchmarks for years and met none of the indicators for math, science and social studies in any grade. It ranks 824 out of 832 districts and charters in the state. “Today our entire community is aligned behind a bold and comprehensive strategy to reimagine education in Columbus, building good schools in our neighborhoods and preparing our kids for a lifetime of success,” the mayor said. Sponsoring [Rep. Cheryl Grossman](#) (R-Grove City) said the bill implements only three of the 55 recommendations that came from the ad hoc commission, the remainder of which will be put in place locally. The measure creates an independent auditor for the district if approved by voters via a ballot issue in November. The employee would be chosen by a committee consisting of the mayor, city council president, city auditor, county probate court judge and school board president, she said. He or she would be appointed for five-year terms. Mayor Coleman said the position is necessary because the Columbus community believes every dollar spent on educating students should be spent with the public’s trust. “We believe these checks and balances will prevent wrongdoing in the future and earn back the confidence of the community,” he said in

reference to an investigation into CCS attendance data manipulation. The legislation would also allow charter schools that partner with the district to share in levy dollars raised by an issue to be offered on November's ballot. The deadline to get on the ballot is July 3, so an emergency clause is included. Co-Sponsor [Rep. Tracy Heard](#) (D-Columbus) said without a levy passed in November, the district will immediately see budget shortfalls. Rep. Grossman said the commission learned 35% of students in Columbus charter schools are in a building rated A or B on the state report card. The district students in such schools amount to only 23%. "Given that 25% of Columbus students are enrolled in a charter school, and these schools are growing, and receive far less per pupil funding than district schools, the commission wanted to begin closing the fund gap and providing funds to high-performing charter schools," she said. The bill would also allow the mayor of Columbus to sponsor charter schools with approval from city council. "The purpose is to increase the number of good charter schools in areas where there are no community schools or the community school is a lottery school," Rep. Grossman said. Mayor Coleman said the question isn't whether Columbus children will attend charters but whether they will attend high-performing ones. "We as a community are asking for more of a voice about the quality of charter schools our kids attend." Rep. John Patterson (D-Jefferson) said the plan seems to suggest charter schools are the answer to the district's problems. Mayor Coleman disagreed. "What we're saying is good schools are the answer whether they're charter or public," he said. "There's not an assumption that charters do better." [Rep. Teresa Fedor](#) (D-Toledo) said she has concerns and a lot of questions about the bill and would presently consider herself a "no vote." She said charters schools are not required to adopt the state's teacher evaluation system, cited cases in which the state auditor has declared certain charters "unauditable," and maintained the state has otherwise struggled to hold charter management companies accountable. Rep. Heard told her colleague the intention of the bill is to allow the independent auditor to oversee the partnering charter schools as well. Fellow Democrat [Rep. Nickie Antonio](#) (D-Lakewood) said she applauds the process that involved a commission of such diverse interests. She said the plan is very specific to the district and how Columbus intends to take local control and develop a strategy for improvement. Rep. Heard described the activities of the commission in acquiring public input – including sending pre-paid postcards seeking input on what should be addressed in the district – and said, "I'm not sure how we could have had a more comprehensive process on this." Mayor Coleman said the 24-member commission hosted four focus groups and 21 community meetings with 2,000 participants. It reached out to more than 700,000 viewers through TV public service announcements and heard from thousands of residents through email and social media. [Rep. Ryan Smith](#) (R-Gallipolis) asked what would happen if the next mayor of the city has a different vision for the direction of the district. Mr. Coleman said the proposals are the will of the community. "We know right now at our level what needs to take place." The mayor addressed concerns of [Rep. Fred Strahorn](#) (D-Cincinnati) about levels of state funding for the district by saying that the city and the private sector are prepared to financially back aspects of the plan. "We got this; you've got to let us get this," he said. [Rep. John Becker](#) (R-Union Twp.) asked if the bill is going to be a model for the urban 8 districts or the state, specifically in

terms of partnerships with community schools. Rep. Grossman said the state needs to be innovative in how it approaches education in the future and this is a step in the right direction. Rep. Heard also added that the Columbus district already partners with charters, but they cannot receive levy funds. [Rep. Matt Huffman](#) (R-Lima) referenced what he called “dishonesty” with recordkeeping at CCS related to student attendance reporting. “Clearly something has to happen in this school district in terms of this independent auditing, but instead of saying that’s going to happen, we’ve left that up to a ballot question,” he said. Rep. Heard said the aim is to receive validation from the community and give the public ownership of the big changes that would be made through enacting the recommendations of the commission. Ohio State University President E. Gordon Gee also threw his support behind the Columbus Plan. He said either the state becomes the agents of change or become victimized by an inability to make decisions. He told [Rep. Andy Brenner](#) (R-Delaware) the concept is not necessarily about local control but local action and innovation. Alex Fischer, president and CEO of The Columbus Partnership and a member of the commission, offered support for the plan, saying the power is not in any single idea but in a business community that has joined with a teachers union to endorse the 55 aspects of the proposal. “Our kids and our teachers need our help, and this plan is a start but it’s not a finish,” he said. “Our work is just beginning, and we think we have 10 or 15 years to stay at it.” Columbus Education Association President Rhonda Johnson joined proponents in saying she was pleased by the commission process that involved the union, surveyed teachers and invited principal input. “It is no secret that our members are deeply concerned about the reputation and integrity of Columbus City Schools,” she said. “The accusations of data manipulation are serious charges and the recent visits by Columbus police officers to secure records were understandable but still disturbing to teachers and students.”

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Ohio universities freeze tuition amid concern over college costs

In response to ballooning student loan debt, which now exceeds \$1 trillion nationwide, a new trend is emerging this year: universities voluntarily freezing tuition. The presidents of three of Ohio’s largest universities, Ohio State, the University of Cincinnati and the University of Toledo, say students and their families need relief. They join several local private institutions, including Wittenberg, Urbana and Antioch Midwest universities, in announcing plans to keep costs level for students next school year. Other colleges will discuss tuition increases in June, amid growing public concerns about the rising costs of higher education. Ohio ranks seventh in the nation for the average debt of its graduates, now \$28,683, according to the Project on Student Loan Debt. The state ranks ninth with 68 percent of students who borrow for college, according to the nonprofit. “The polls are really starting to show resentment toward higher education,” said Patrick Callan, president of the Higher Education Policy Institute in San Jose, Calif. “People think we are passing all our financial problems on to students and families, and they’re very worried about student debt.” Callan said the ability of students to borrow during the last 25 years is partly behind the rising cost of college. The loans can cover tuition, housing, meals, books, transportation and other expenses. “We kind of let this issue drift for 25 years and now it’s

starting to catch up to us,” Callan said. “Year by year, it became the easy way out: Raise tuition, try to find some money for the poorest students and then let the middle class borrow. Now we have a generation in their 20s, 30s and early 40s for whom, increasingly, student debt overshadows every decision they make.” With families demanding affordability, Ohio colleges are adjusting to new economic realities. Ohio will likely cap tuition increases by public colleges to 2 percent (the rate of inflation) or \$188, whichever is greater, when state lawmakers approve the budget in June. Locally, these colleges have approved annual increases for next year: Wright State University (\$188), Central State (\$94), Clark State Community College (\$97.50) and Sinclair (\$100). OSU and UC will vote in June to freeze tuition for in-state undergraduates. Toledo president Lloyd Jacobs said freezing tuition, room and board prices is a “commitment” and comes with challenges. To help the budget, Toledo has asked faculty to teach more classes and has slowed hiring, he said. However, he said freezing costs for students is “the right thing to do.” And it’s an example he hopes other schools will follow. Cincinnati President Santa Ono has pledged to help the university’s budget by controlling his own spending and declining any bonuses or raises to his \$525,000 salary this year. He also asked the university to sell the \$2 million president’s condo, where he does not live, to create a scholarship fund. Ono said he feels it is important to “lead by example” and control his own expenses by always flying coach when traveling, driving himself or taking taxis instead of limousines and avoiding “fancy hotels.” He has asked his senior staff members to do the same. “Every \$10,000 savings is potentially a full scholarship for a student,” he said. “Everything that we can do to contain the cost of an education, I think, is our responsibility. It’s a real struggle for families to afford an education, even as it costs today.” OSU’s decision to freeze tuition comes as the latest figures show President E. Gordon Gee’s \$1.9 salary ranked third among U.S. public colleges for 2011-2012 fiscal year, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education. Gee oversees a \$5 billion a year operation with 65,000 students and 40,000 employees, but his tenure has not been without missteps. Last year, the newspaper detailed how Gee has spent more than \$7.7 million since October 2007 on travel, housing, parties and entertainment. The University of Dayton this year has received national attention for being among the first schools to provide financial aid letters that inform students their exact costs to attend all four years, instead of annual costs. UD also launched a cost guarantee for new students, promising their financial aid will grow dollar-for-dollar with any tuition increases during their four years. UD even eliminated all fees, which are sometimes a surprise to families and can contribute thousands of dollars college expenses and create unplanned debt, said Sundar Kumarasamy, vice president of enrollment management and marketing. Surprise fees previously could amount to as much as \$3,000 in a year, Kumarasamy said. UD’s tuition next year will be \$35,800 with no fees. Other universities are searching for ways to operate more efficiently with the revenue they have. UD and Wright State have launched wellness programs to help cut down on health care costs for employees. WSU will also receive new revenue from companies it hired to improve energy consumption on campus and provide food services. The university has also joined with Clark State and Central State to negotiate better prices on printing services; and WSU expects to save as much as \$500,000 a year, said Mark Polatajko, vice president for business and fiscal affairs and university treasurer. Miami University is continuing a three-year effort to cut expenses. The university has cut more than \$45 million from its budget since fiscal year 2010 and will reduce expenses another \$9.5 million this year and \$6.4 million for 2015, according to David Creamer, vice president for finance and business services and treasurer. However, Creamer said Miami will not be able to accomplish its long-term goals by only being more efficient, and so the university will search for new revenue

sources. He added that Miami is working to hold annual tuition increases to around 2 percent over the next decade to provide predictable prices for families. “We’re trying to find a way to adapt,” he said. “Even once the economy improves, there will be continued expectations about affordability.”

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New teacher evaluation system set to begin

Some school districts, next school year, will begin implementing Ohio’s new teacher evaluation system that will be based equally on teacher performance and student growth measures. Other districts are slated to start using the new, more extensive assessments during the 2014-15 school year. The evaluations, mandated under state law, are part of a nationwide effort to maintain federal funding and improve classroom instruction. In Ohio, the change also is designed to prepare students and teachers for new academic content standards that will be implemented in 2014-15 and to create uniformity across the state. Some educators have voiced concern about various elements of the evaluations — from the accuracy of value-added student growth data, the limited time principals have to conduct classroom observations and that evaluations would be used to determine whether to promote, retain or remove a teacher. Some area districts, including Dayton Public, Beavercreek, Northmont, Mad River, New Lebanon, Tipp City and Xenia, participated in pilot programs to help set up the framework for the state’s teacher evaluation model, the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES). The model would be implemented next school year by districts that received federal Race to the Top funding, while those districts with School Improvement Grant dollars would implement it over the next three years, Ohio Department of Education spokesman John Charlton said. Debbie Baker, Northmont’s assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and technology, said this year’s pilot program at the high school and an elementary school went well. “We learned that it takes a lot of time to complete the teacher performance side of the evaluation,” she said, estimating the teacher performance component could take anywhere from 10-15 hours of principal time to complete. Lori Ward, superintendent of Dayton Public Schools where the OTES was piloted in seven SIG schools this year, said it gave them a better understanding of the resources required for all of the district’s schools to go through the evaluation process next school year. “It’s an intensive amount of time required to do it right,” Ward said. “I’m going to be particularly interested in my staff’s viewpoints on the time, especially in buildings that don’t have assistant principals.” Six pre-k-8 schools don’t have assistant principals. Northmont’s Baker is concerned about the student performance part of the evaluation because “50 percent of some teachers’ evaluations will be based on a test that a student takes one day out of the year,” she said. “Value-added procedures are coming under attack from all over the country but we are still going to attach 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation to that data.” Value-added scores chart whether districts have exceeded, met or not met expected growth on fourth-through eighth-grade math and reading tests as compared to the previous year. Melodie Larsen, a fifth-grade teacher at E.J. Brown PreK-8 School in Dayton Public, was among several area teachers evaluated under the new system this year. Larsen has been teaching in the district for 26 years. She spent 25 of those years teaching kindergartners before she was assigned to a fifth-grade class. She received a good evaluation showing she is proficient, but she hoped it would have been better in some areas. “I felt like she at least seemed to understand the idea wasn’t to be punitive, it was to try to build teaching

skills," she said. Larsen's biggest concern is that basing 50 percent of the teacher evaluation on student growth measures gives an "unfair advantage to teachers in high performing districts over low performing districts." State Sen. Peggy Lehner, R-Kettering, has proposed reducing the percentage of the value-added data component from 50 percent of the teachers' rating to 35 percent. The remaining 15 percent would be made up by teacher-developed assessments to periodic assessments, said David Romick, president of the Dayton Education Association, the teachers' union representing about 1,130 Dayton Public teachers. Romick thinks OTES is a fair system though he sees some pitfalls in administrators being so pressed for time and so much emphasis put on student growth measures. He said value-added measures can have a 30 percent margin of error so he supports Lehner's effort to reduce the percentage and add locally created assessments. "I think anytime you leave how you're going to measure teachers and student growth up to the local district — to the extent that you can — you're better off because that district knows its population and knows how to best serve that clientele," he said.

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Bipartisan bill would adopt health education standards for Ohio schools

The chairman of the House Health Committee said Friday he will jointly sponsor bipartisan legislation to create health education standards for Ohio schools. Rep. Lynn Watchmann (R-Napoleon) joins [Rep. Vernon Sykes](#) (D-Akron) in sponsoring the measure that would require the State Board of Education to adopt the [National Health Education Standards](#) as the guidelines for what should be taught in school health classes. The measure is expected to be dropped in the next couple weeks, Rep. Sykes office said. The national standards are "infused with evidence-based practices that establish, promote and support health-enhancing behaviors for students in all grade levels—from pre-kindergarten through grade 12," the lawmakers said in their cosponsor request. "More specifically, the NHES are written expectations for what students should know and be able to do by grades 2, 5, 8, and 12 to promote personal, family, and community health." The sponsors also said the standards do not prescribe any specific topics, issues or content for classrooms, allowing local districts to determine what will be taught. A Legislative Service Commission analysis also concluded it would not change the current teaching of "sexuality education." "I would not classify it as a mandate as far as any additional work (for schools)," Rep. Watchmann said. The Republican said when he was approached about the bill he was not aware of what was going on in Ohio health classrooms and thought it afforded him a chance to learn what was being done and see if it could be improved. "There are still terrible epidemics with mental diseases among young people, all kinds of other things going on.... I think we owe it to them to see if a better curriculum or a different curriculum put in their schools - and maybe some schools already follow this national guideline - to see if we can improve it," he said. Unlike the subjects of math, English/language arts, science and social studies, Ohio has no set standards for health education, something advocates see as a shortcoming. Judy Jagger-Mescher recently told the House Finance Healthier Ohio Working Group that Ohio and Iowa are the only states that have not adopted such standards for their schools, but even Iowa has guidelines in place. "Ohio needs a healthier population which, in turn, will lead to more productive, engaged workforce," she said in testimony. "But even though programs aiming to keep employees healthy are generally less expensive than the reactive (and) costly, sometimes temporary health care

options, I believe there is a better solution to the wellness in the workplace and community issue." Ms. Jagger-Mescher referenced the 2012 Gallup Healthways Well-Being Index in which Ohio ranks 44th among states for overall wellness covering areas such as life evaluation, emotional and physical health, healthy behaviors, work environment and basic access to health care. She advocated for the Sykes-Wachtmann legislation, saying adoption of the national standards would be cost-free as opposed to paying to develop criteria locally. The National Health Education Standards include skills such as accessing valid health resources, communicating in healthy ways, using consistently healthy decision-making skills, setting positive health goals and advocating for health and wellness among families, friends and communities, she said. House Finance Chairman [Rep. Ron Amstutz](#) (R-Wooster) who convened the Healthier Ohio Working Group said he just learned about the bill last week. "It seemed like it'd be good for the committee to look into that since it handles another aspect of trying to reach out to the younger generation and help them be successful as they're coming into adulthood," he said. "It's very, very short and not a mandate...on any of the local boards." However, [Rep. Barbara Sears](#) (R-Sylvania), who also sits on the working group, raised concerns over what she called a "one size fits all" proposal. "I certainly think by exposing kids and families to lifestyles and healthier diets they'll be drawn to it if it's available to them," she said, adding such a focus could become a "pointless waste of time and energy" if Ohioans who cannot access such tools are subject to the standards. Rep. Wachtmann said the bill is likely to move through the House Education Committee and expects it will get some hearings before the General Assembly recesses at the end of June.

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In raising scores, 1 2 3 is easier than A B C

David Javscas, a popular seventh-grade reading teacher known for urging students to act out dialogue in the books they read in class, sometimes feels wistful for the days when he taught math. A quiz, he recalls, could quickly determine which concepts students had not yet learned. Then, "you teach the kids how to do it, and within a week or two you can usually fix it," he said. Helping students to puzzle through different narrative perspectives or subtext or character motivation, though, can be much more challenging. "It could take months to see if what I'm teaching is effective," he said. Educators, policy makers and business leaders often fret about the state of math education, particularly in comparison with other countries. But reading comprehension may be a larger stumbling block. Here at Troy Prep Middle School, a charter school near Albany that caters mostly to low-income students, teachers are finding it easier to help students hit academic targets in math than in reading, an experience repeated in schools across the country. Students entering the fifth grade here are often several years behind in both subjects, but last year, 100 percent of seventh graders scored at a level of proficient or advanced on state standardized math tests. In reading, by contrast, just over half of the seventh graders met comparable standards. The results are similar across the 31 other schools in the Uncommon Schools network, which enrolls low-income students in Boston, New York City, Rochester and

Newark. After attending an Uncommon school for two years, said Brett Peiser, the network's chief executive, 86 percent of students score at a proficient or advanced level in math, while only about two thirds reach those levels in reading over the same period. "Math is very close-ended," Mr. Peiser said. Reading difficulties, he said, tend to be more complicated to resolve. "Is it a vocabulary issue? A background knowledge issue? A sentence length issue? How dense is the text?" Mr. Peiser said, rattling off a string of potential reading roadblocks. "It's a three-dimensional problem that you have to attack. And it just takes time." Uncommon's experience is not so uncommon. Other charter networks and school districts similarly wrestle to bring struggling readers up to speed while having more success in math. In a Mathematica Policy Research study of schools run by KIPP, one of the country's best-known charter operators, researchers found that on average, students who had been enrolled in KIPP middle schools for three years had test scores that indicated they were about 11 months — or the equivalent of more than a full grade level — ahead of the national average in math. In reading, KIPP's advantage over the national average was smaller, about eight months. Among large public urban districts, which typically have large concentrations of poor students, six raised eighth-grade math scores on the federal tests known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress from 2009 to 2011. Only one — in Charlotte, N.C. — was able to do so in reading. Studies have repeatedly found that "teachers have bigger impacts on math test scores than on English test scores," said Jonah Rockoff, an economist at Columbia Business School. He was a co-author of a [study](#) that showed that teachers who helped students raise standardized test scores had a lasting effect on those students' future incomes, as well as other lifelong outcomes. Teachers and administrators who work with children from low-income families say one reason teachers struggle to help these students improve reading comprehension is that deficits start at such a young age: in the 1980s, the psychologists Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley found that by the time they are 4 years old, children from poor families have heard 32 million fewer words than children with professional parents. By contrast, children learn math predominantly in school. "Your mother or father doesn't come up and tuck you in at night and read you equations," said Geoffrey Borman, a professor at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin. "But parents do read kids bedtime stories, and kids do engage in discussions around literacy, and kids are exposed to literacy in all walks of life outside of school." Reading also requires background knowledge of cultural, historical and social references. Math is a more universal language of equations and rules. "Math is really culturally neutral in so many ways," said Scott Shirey, executive director of KIPP Delta Public Schools in Arkansas. "For a child who's had a vast array of experiences around the world, the Pythagorean theorem is just as difficult or daunting as it would be to a child who has led a relatively insular life." Education experts also say reading development simply requires that students spend so much more time practicing. And while

reading has been the subject of fierce pedagogical battles, “the ideological divisions are not as great on the math side as they are on the literacy side,” said Linda Chen, deputy chief academic officer in the Boston Public Schools. In 2011, 29 percent of eighth graders eligible for free lunch in Boston scored at proficient or advanced levels on federal math exams, compared with just 17 percent in reading. At Troy Prep, which is housed in a renovated warehouse, teachers work closely with students to help them overcome difficulties in both math and reading, breaking classes into small groups. But the relative challenges of teaching both subjects were evident on a recent morning. During a fifth-grade reading class, students read aloud from “Bridge to Terabithia,” by Katherine Paterson. Naomi Frame, the teacher, guided the students in a close reading of a few paragraphs. But when she asked them to select which of two descriptions fit Terabithia, the magic kingdom created by the two main characters, the class stumbled to draw inferences from the text. Later, in math class, the same students had less difficulty following Bridget McElduff as she taught a lesson on adding fractions with different denominators. At the beginning of the class, Ms. McElduff rapidly called out equations involving two fractions, and the students eagerly called back the answers. Because the students were familiar with the basic principles — finding the greatest common factor, then reducing — they quickly caught on when she asked them to add three fractions. New curriculum standards known as the Common Core that have been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia could raise the bar in math. “As math has become more about talking, arguing and writing, it’s beginning to require these kinds of cultural resources that depend on something besides school,” said Deborah L. Ball, dean of the school of education at the University of Michigan. Teachers and administrators within the Uncommon network are confident that they will eventually crack the nut in reading. One solution: get the students earlier. Paul Powell, principal of Troy Prep, said the school, which added kindergarten two years ago and first grade last fall, would add second-, third- and fourth-grade classes over the next three years. Over time, teachers hope to develop the same results in reading that they have produced in math. Already, students at high school campuses in the Uncommon network in Brooklyn and Newark post average scores on SAT reading tests that exceed some national averages. “I don’t think there is very much research out there to say that when you can take a student who is impoverished and dramatically behind, that you can fix it in three years,” said Mr. Javsic, the seventh-grade reading teacher, who also coordinates special education at Troy Prep. “But I do think the signs seem fairly positive that if we can take kids from kindergarten and take them through 12th grade, I think we can get there.”

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