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## Bernard Taylor: Asking employees to pay more for health care won't cover budget cuts

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By [Dave Murray](#) | [The Grand Rapids Press](#)

Making all Grand Rapids Public Schools employees pay 20 percent of their health care premiums wouldn't come close to making up all the proposed budget cuts the district is facing, Superintendent Bernard Taylor told lawmakers.

Taylor today testified before the state House K-12 Appropriations Subcommittee, which is considering Gov. Rick Snyder's proposed budget.

Taylor said the district is facing up to a \$25 million shortfall based on the proposed cuts and rising expenses.

But Taylor said boosting employee contributions to 20 percent would generate \$2.2 million in savings, falling far shy of the planned budget cut and requiring more help from lawmakers. Grand Rapids teachers were the first in Kent County to pay a portion of their health care.

"If jobs are "Job No. 1" for the state, then the state must recognize that investing in jobs starts with investing in education and the talent pool that is going to drive the economy and jobs of the future," Taylor told the commission, according to [statements prepared in advance](#).

"Investing in education is about economic development, workforce development, and positioning Michigan for the future. We can't expect schools to prepare our students to compete in the global economy and then fund them with a Third World budget."

Taylor said he recognizes there are going to be cuts and [shared sacrifices](#), but said reductions to categorical accounts – special programs aimed at particular needs, such as at-

risk students – will hurt urban systems more than suburban districts. The district will lose about \$8.5 million, according to the budget proposals.

“Frankly GRPS has written the playbook on how a large urban district can make deep, right sizing cuts while also improving academic outcomes,” he said.

“The Legislature must ensure that these inequities are corrected; if there are going to be cuts and so-called 'shared sacrifices,' the Legislature must ensure that the school districts with the poorest populations and greatest academic needs are not disproportionately cut.” Like other K-12 leaders, Taylor objects to what he called a “raid” of the school aid fund, saying there is less money for districts because Snyder proposes also giving money from the fund to community colleges and universities from the fund.

“The so-called 'surplus' of \$500 million was intended and should be used by the state to re-invest in public education as part of the state’s overall investment in jobs and positioning Michigan to be more competitive in the future,” he said. “Based on our reading, the \$500 million school aid fund balance will be wiped out within two years --- mostly because of the diversion of funds to cover higher education expenses.”

Taylor last week used ever stronger language, telling his Board of Education that the district **"may be facing our Armageddon"** because of the cuts.

"If we don't make the right decisions, that's what we are facing," he said. "The decisions that we make are just the tip of the iceberg."

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