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THE FINAL WORD

LABOR VOICES

Will Michigan schools run out of money?

By Steven Cook

March Madness.

For some, it means college basketball's biggest tournament. For many Michigan drivers, March Madness has meant dodging crater-sized potholes as our roads continue to deteriorate. But for Michigan school districts, March Madness has taken on a new meaning: the growing fear that money will run out before the year ends.

Last year saw the tip of the iceberg with Saginaw Buena Vista closing its doors three weeks early. This year, many other districts are teetering on the brink of financial collapse. Just like Michigan's roads, Michigan's school districts have been denied adequate funding to sustain themselves.

To see just how badly each district in the state has been hurt by Gov. Rick Snyder and legislative leaders, the Michigan Education Association recently unveiled a new website, kidsnotceos.com.

Just as the melting ice uncovers the worst road conditions in modern Michigan history, kidsnotceos.com uncovers the worst financial situation our schools have ever found themselves in.

This website — kidsnotceos.com — lists every district in the state and, using data from the Michigan Department of Education, shows exactly how much Gov. Rick Snyder's time in office has cost Michigan students.

Take the Wayne-Westland school district, which has lost \$40,465,325 during Snyder's tenure. Even with the proposed funding increase this year, they're still \$770 per pupil short of where they were pre-Snyder in 2010-11.

Here's a fact: Every single district in the state receives less money per pupil now than it did in 2010-11.

The funding cuts our students are suffering under are the result of the \$1 billion cut to public education rammed through in Snyder's first year in office. That \$1 billion cut has continued to compound. When you add up the total impact of the cuts over the last four years, it comes to a loss of \$2.27 billion.



(Carlos Osorio / AP)

Before anyone gets a tax break or a giveback, let's make sure Michigan's classrooms have the resources they need.

That's \$2.27 billion that should have been invested in our kids.

Why is the website called kidsnotceos.com? Because during that same time, corporations and CEOs have been the winners in the Republican budget "sweepstakes."

While our students were dealing with larger class sizes and fewer courses to choose from, corporations were celebrating their tax break without having to create a single new job. The \$2 billion tax cut handed to corporations and CEOs during Snyder's first year in office was funded in part by that \$1 billion taken out of our schools.

Here's another fact: Michigan now has the largest number of school districts in deficit in the history of our state.

Education funding appears to be the major issue in this year's campaign. Snyder often talks about "reinventing Michigan," but during the Super Bowl, many of us witnessed his first attempt to reinvent his record on education funding.

Snyder claims he has increased education funding during his time in office — and his campaign spent over a half million dollars on one 30-second TV spot to make us believe that.

The Snyder campaign and some Republican legislators

can spin their campaign rhetoric all they want, but school employees, administrators, parents and students know education funding has been cut.

Recent polls show that voters aren't buying Snyder's spin either.

The kidsnotceos.com website isn't campaign spin — it shows the state's own hard numbers on districts' foundation grants. I urge you to take a look at the website and see how much funding your district has lost in the past four years.

When you do, you will see exactly why our schools, much like our roads, have been allowed to deteriorate under Gov. Snyder's watch — sacrificed in favor of corporate tax cuts.

Michigianians lose — while corporate CEOs win.

Labor Voices

Labor Voices columns are written on a rotating basis by United Auto Workers President Bob King, Teamsters President James Hoffa, Michigan AFL-CIO President Karla Swift and Michigan Education Association President Steven Cook.

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