Educators brace for cuts to budget

Impact likely to be felt at local schools by early 2011

The school year has barely begun to

The school year has barely begun to

The school year has barely begun to

The school year has barely begun to
Schools:

From Page A1

defederal money up front," he said. "The aid should protect classroom employee ranks "all the way through 2010-11," he said.

That's good, because Olympia must dial down its spending spigot by next spring, once lawmakers adopt a supplemental budget to cover all state programs through June 30.

Given the task of patching a roughly $520 million deficit for that period, legislators are likely to enact cuts swiftly in January, Merlino predicts.

That's before they begin to

bite off an immense $4.5 billion deficit estimated for the following 2011-13 budget cycle.

The Vancouver school board will absorb the latest news when it meets Tuesday.

Other school districts also are gearing up for changes that hinge on lawmakers' choices, "until they put this stuff in action," said Mary Beth Lynn, budget director for Battle Ground Public Schools.

What local districts do know is the dollar loss if legislators strip the most likely, non-constitutionally mandated state funding streams for 2011-12.

Those include levy equalization funds, intended to help districts with below-average total property tax values; supplemental funds that pay for extra teachers in grades K-3; and highly capable learning programs.

Legislators might even order partial repayment of Initiative 728 school enhancement funds disbursed this summer, the final shred of that voter-approved state learning assistance.

Evergreen and Vancouver districts each would lose $15 million to $20 million per year, should all those funds dry up.

Higher ed impact

WSUV has launched a campus budget review after last week's directive from Pullman leaders to identify 6.3 percent in spending reductions.

"Lawyers are unlikely, but the Salmon Creek campus will keep many vacant positions open," said Lynn Valentine, vice chancellor for finance and operations.

As a result, students will notice fewer class sections and others staffing shortfalls, she said.

"Our hope is to shield students as much as we can, but we've been doing that all along," Valentine said. "Tough stuff. We continue to try to do more, with less."

At Clark College, the current mood is less dire.

President Bob Knight has issued campus notice the two-year school will maintain current cost-containment efforts.

But there's no sign any student programs or jobs are threatened, much less any solid plan.

All job vacancies and academic support and other costs remain under close scrutiny, said Bob Williamson, vice president for administrative services.

Clark, too, is in "wait-and-see" mode until the state supplemental budget takes shape, he said.

Role in recovery?

Given previous support for community colleges, labeled as "job engines" by some, Clark has reason for hope any new cuts in January will be smaller than those ordered elsewhere, Williamson said.

The school already has plenty of campus feedback on cost-cutting options "that is still useful and relevant," he said.

But frustration abounds at both Clark and WSUV, where employees and students alike recognize that higher education is critical to sustained economic revival. Until the state claws out of its budget hole, additional spending cuts only undermine that relevancy, however.

"It's bleak," Valentine said, looking at the 2011-13 budget gap. "It's just challenging when the state doesn't have sufficient funds to meet demand."

Howard Buck: 360-735-4515 or howard.buck@columbian.com.