

HANDOUT # 1

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Budget plan bumps property tax

Change in school payments would mean 23 percent increase
BY PATRICK SWEENEY
Pioneer Press

Property taxes for schools would increase an estimated 23 percent next year under the budget that Gov. Tim Pawlenty is scheduled to recommend to legislators today.

In each of the two years after that, the portion of property taxes homeowners pay for schools would rise about 9 percent annually, the Education Department predicts.

Changes that Pawlenty is urging in the way school districts pay for their operations would accelerate a trend — in place since the recession of 2001 — toward property taxes paying an increasing share of school expenses. The property tax increases have come as lawmakers and Pawlenty struggled to cope with a series of state budget deficits, the most recent of which is a \$700 million shortfall predicted for the next two years.

The result is that a huge property tax cut that homeowners and businesses received under former Gov. Jesse Ventura is gradually being eaten away by tax increases approved in school district referendums across the state.

When Pawlenty announced major elements of his school funding plans two weeks ago, he talked a lot about the 2 percent annual increases he wants the state to make in the basic school funding formula and about teacher merit pay systems he wants school boards to adopt. He did not talk in detail about the property tax implications of his proposals.

But the 23 percent property tax increase, which homeowners would begin paying in the spring of 2006, is predicted in documents the Education Department gave the Pioneer Press.

In recent interviews, Republican legislators and a top Education Department official said the trend toward higher property taxes for schools, including the 23 percent jump, is acceptable because voters can accept or reject most of the increases.

"It's up to the local voters to decide if that's a good trend or not," said Chas Anderson, deputy education commissioner who helped develop Pawlenty's budget recommendations.

Democratic-Farmer-Labor lawmakers said the property tax increases are unacceptable and result from Pawlenty's 2002 campaign promise to veto any increase in state sales or income tax rates.

"We're going to fight like hell to have something better," said Rep. Mindy Greiling of Roseville, the lead Democrat on the House Education Finance Committee.

And some school leaders say they never supported Ventura's insistence on school property tax cuts and view property tax increases as their best hope for stable school funding.

"Yes, it's going to increase property taxes, but we have to have revenue from somewhere," said Lori Grivna, a Mounds View School Board member who chairs an organization of 26 metro-area school districts.

The 23 percent school property tax increases predicted next year and the two 9 percent increases predicted for succeeding years are not a certainty.

Rather, they are estimates by the Education Department of how school boards and school district voters would react if all the budget changes proposed by Pawlenty were enacted into law. The estimates are based on assumptions about rising property values and the likelihood of school boards seeking tax increases and local voters approving those increases in levy referendums.

The assumptions do not include a prediction about the possible effect of Pawlenty's proposal to allow taxpayers to mail in postcards to demand referendums on property tax increases proposed by cities, counties and school districts.

The assumptions "are our best guess," Anderson said. Part of the increases, including tax increases resulting from assessment growth, would occur regardless of what Pawlenty recommends, she said.

The Education Department estimates that Pawlenty's recommendations represent about half the projected 23 percent increase.

At present, school taxes make up about one-fourth of all property taxes. The effect of a 23 percent increase in the school share of property taxes would vary widely across the state. But it would represent an average increase of about \$122 for homeowners, based on estimates by the nonpartisan House Research staff.

Major school funding changes that Pawlenty is recommending on property taxes include:

- Letting school districts significantly increase the tax levies they ask voters to authorize.
- Permitting school boards to impose a new special education tax that would not have to be approved by voters and allowing many boards to impose new taxes, subject to voter review, to pay for deferred maintenance.
- Encouraging boards to raise property taxes \$70 per pupil to go with new state money of \$155 per pupil if the boards successfully negotiate performance-pay contracts with their teachers.

Rep. Barb Sykora, R-Excelsior, the chairwoman of the House Finance Committee, said Monday that Pawlenty's school-funding proposals were acceptable to her because of the multiple opportunities for local voters to reject parts of the property tax increases.

"Is there an increase in taxes?" Sykora asked rhetorically. "Yes, if they choose to do it. ... I can vote for that kind of budget because I think there is local control."

Sykora predicted that a growing economy eventually will allow the state to put more state money into schools and to reverse the trend toward property taxes paying more of the cost for schools.

Sen. Ann Rest of New Hope, the assistant leader of the Senate's DFL majority, said Pawlenty's budget would renege on a commitment legislators made to keep funding schools with the income and sales taxes when they voted to significantly cut school property taxes in 2001.

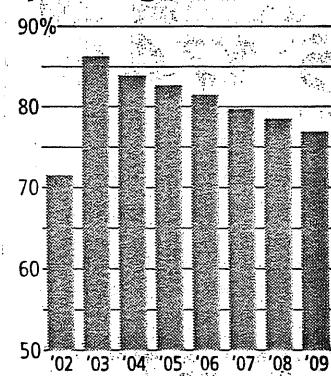
"It looks like we're going to, by the back door, start relying on the property tax some more," Rest said.

Patrick Sweeney covers state government and its effect on Minnesotans. He can be reached at psweeney@pioneerpress.com or 651-228-5253. **Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty** will announce his budget proposal at a news conference today. The proposal will answer how the Republican governor will solve a \$700 million shortfall in the state's budget.

The Minnesota Senate approves a \$1 billion construction program, but that amount is likely to be reduced.

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State share of local and state education spending to decline



Source: Minnesota Department of Education PIONEER PRESS

More property taxes go to schools

Fiscal year	Property taxes	Change	Percent change
'00	\$1.84 billion		
'01	\$1.79 billion	\$46 million	-2%
'02	\$1.92 billion	\$129 million	7%
'03	\$984 million	-\$939 million	-49%
'04	\$1.18 billion	\$197 million	20%
'05	\$1.27 billion	\$92 million	8%
'06	\$1.37 billion	\$101 million	8%
'07	\$1.69 billion	\$313 million	23%
'08	\$1.83 billion	\$147 million	9%
'09	\$2.00 billion	\$164 million	9%

Note: Property tax increases are based on Department of Education assumptions about assessment growth, about how many districts will seek tax increases and how many districts will persuade voters to approve increases through referendums.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education PIONEER PRESS

MAP EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES BASED ON PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT PANELS
FY 2002 Data

Total General Fund Expenditures:

	Total \$	Total Change	% Change
CURRENT (2001-02)	6,026,749,517		
RED TEAM	6,112,184,145	85,434,628	1.42%
PURPLE TEAM	5,856,608,808	(170,140,709)	-2.82%
YELLOW TEAM	6,915,916,066	889,166,549	14.75%
YELLOW-REV1	6,439,315,631	412,566,114	6.85%
YELLOW-REV2	6,441,792,563	415,043,046	6.89%

Expenditures per Student:

	ADM	Expenditure per Student	Change per Student	% Change
CURRENT (2001-02)	789,267	7,636		
RED TEAM	801,288	7,628	(8)	-0.10%
PURPLE TEAM	785,005	7,461	(175)	-2.30%
YELLOW TEAM	801,288	8,631	995	13.03%
YELLOW-REV1	801,288	8,036	400	5.24%
YELLOW-REV2	801,288	8,039	403	5.28%

Inflation Adjusted Revenue per Student Less Building Debt and Spec Ed Expenses

