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## Budget deal may save great deal of budget cutbacks

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That huge whooshing sound you may have heard Thursday was made by school administrators across Ohio breathing a sigh of relief.

It's not that the Legislature made their jobs any easier, mind you; implementing changes expected to follow the governor's evidence-based education reform plan could present another set of challenges.

But the deal reached late Wednesday and brought to the House and Senate for a vote should avert a large reduction in state funding for schools. The impact on districts in our area could have reached seven figures - all to the left of the decimal point. That likely would have translated into fewer teachers, larger classes and less money for textbooks and technology.

The agreement delays a scheduled income tax reduction for two years, in order to bridge an \$850 million gap in the current two-year state budget. For the majority of Ohioans, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, that means foregoing a tax cut ranging from \$2 to \$69, depending on a taxpayer's income.

It was vastly easier - and much more expedient - to delay the 4.2-percent income tax reduction than for a school district to take an ax to a budget, then ask voters to pass another levy.

Of course, drafting the next biennial state budget might not get easier, either. Billions of dollars in federal stimulus funding won't be available. And the fate of Ohio Lottery-run video slot machines could be decided by voters next year.

But, hopefully, Ohio's economy will be growing by that time, and state coffers and local school boards will see revenues increase. If not, the jobs of school administrators will get even tougher.

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