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## State education department submits plan to cut \$20 million from budget

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The Kentucky Department of Education has submitted to state budget officials its proposals for cutting education spending by about \$20 million for the rest of the fiscal year.

Department leaders will meet with Gov. Steve Beshear's budget officials Friday for detailed discussions of the proposed cuts, education department spokeswoman Lisa Gross said Thursday.

It will then be up to budget officials to accept or reject the proposed reductions.

Gross emphasized that even if the education reductions are approved, it is unclear when or whether they would occur.

"It would simply mean that if it comes to cutting spending by 6 percent, this is how it would be done," Gross said. "At this point, it is only a plan."

The reductions, which Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday outlined via e-mail to state school superintendents Monday, are to conform with Beshear's plan for a 6 percent state spending reduction to offset declining revenue.

Education officials have said that items such as the SEEK program, which provides local schools' basic operating funds, and health care coverage for education employees would be spared from any reductions. They said many programs affecting local school districts around the state potentially could be cut, including dropout prevention, gifted and talented education, family-resource and youth-services centers, and preschool programs.

The possibility of cuts already has raised objections from some advocacy groups. On Thursday, Cindy Heine, associate executive director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, said reductions in preschool funding could be particularly threatening.

"We know that the revenue situation is very challenging and that the governor and the legislature don't want to cut education," Heine said. "But we're particularly concerned about the short-term and long-term effects of not providing pre-K, or perhaps leaving some children out of pre-K."

"If we don't start early with our children's education, it becomes more challenging through the rest of their years in school. Those early years are very important."

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