

# BIG LOSER

Governor Kasich's funding proposal cuts Mason City Schools budget by \$5.2 million

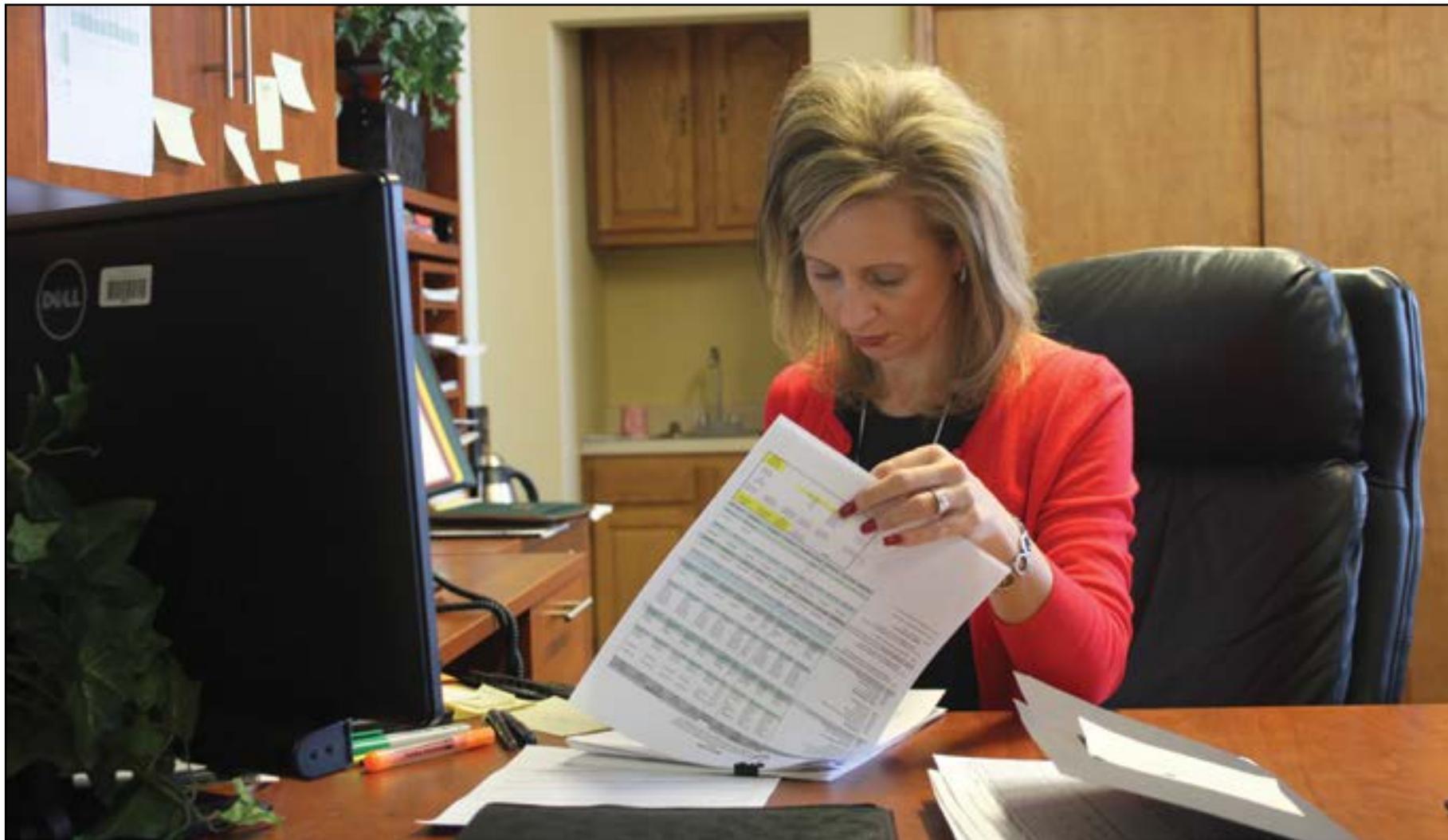


Photo by Sheila Raghavendran

Mason City Schools Treasurer Ronda Johnson reviews budgeting paperwork at her desk. In August, Johnson replaced treasurer Richard Gardner who retired in July.

Sheila Raghavendran | Editor-in-Chief

Mason City Schools is the second biggest loser in Ohio.

Early this month, Governor John Kasich spelled out his two-year state budget, including a proposal scheduled to reallocate state funding for wealthier districts to struggling districts. Through this plan, 307 out of the 610 Ohio public school districts would see a cut in their budget, including MCS at \$5.2 million, just behind Lakota Schools at \$5.9 million.

According to MCS treasurer Ronda Johnson, Kasich's proposal is in its early stages. It has been introduced in the General Assembly and hearings are beginning in the House of Representatives' committees.

"Debate will continue in the House through subcommittees until a substitute bill is introduced and possibly amended—ending with a full vote on the House floor," Johnson said. "We expect this to happen around mid-

April."

The Senate follows the same process after the bill is passed in the House, and Johnson said she expects the Senate to take a full vote in early June.

"Traditionally, the House and Senate version are not the same and the bill is sent to a Conference Committee," Johnson said. "The Conference Committee works to balance both versions to end up with something agreeable to both the House and Senate. The final version is then sent to the Governor for his final signature and this is required to be completed by June 30, 2015."

According to Johnson, this budget cut would scrape off five percent of MCS' operating revenue.

"A reduction in state funding of this magnitude would result in the need for additional local revenue or a reduction in programming," Johnson said. "As we are early in the budget process, we have not identified any programming reductions but rather

are working to impact the budget process resulting in a more favorable result for our school community."

Johnson said MCS is looking to lobbying efforts to influence a change in the plan and curb the loss.

"Our work right now is focused on working with our local legislators and our lobbying groups to impact the budget process," Johnson said.

According to the Cincinnati Enquirer, Kasich has suggested that schools losing large amounts of money should compensate through cost-cutting plans and higher property taxes. Johnson said that if Kasich's plan is passed as proposed, MCS would require a \$4 million levy to make up for the cut.

"Somehow it doesn't feel quite right for districts like Mason to increase their local property tax burden simply to recoup state funds sent to other districts across the state," Johnson said.

According to Cleveland.com, Kasich said this plan is not a redistribution of wealth, but simply "a formula

for driving resources to kids". Johnson, however, said the plan does not show a concern for students' academic performance.

"The proposed formula does not focus on the needs of students—but simply on a yet-to-be-defined measure of local capacity that simply shifts funding from one district to another," Johnson said. "It may drive resources to some kids—but those kids are not in Mason."

Though the plan hurts more than helps, Johnson said she has full confidence that MCS will continue to uphold its academic excellence.

"I have no doubt that even a loss of this magnitude will not impact the academic achievement of our students," Johnson said. "If the Governor's proposal was implemented, it *could* impact tax rates, staffing levels, and or instructional programming—but I do not believe it would impact the rigor of our instruction and the level at which our students achieve success."