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State BOE Member Says Schools Have Extra Funds

As the state legislature - and schools - grapple with additional budget cuts, at least one official says districts across Kansas have an untapped resource at their hands: their own bank accounts.

Dr. Walt Chappell, a member of the Kansas Board of Education, says schools have millions of dollars at their disposal in funds that have carried over year after year. Records show that across the state, school districts have amassed a combined $1.5-billion dollars in extra funds. The numbers are up 10% from the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

The money constitutes unused funding that rolls over every year. Although school administrators say there are stipulations regarding how and where most of the money can be spent, Chappell points to nearly $700-million available in 'operating expenses' statewide.

Wichita schools, as an example, cut more than $16-million from this year's general fund. But Chappell says the district also has $157-million still available from previous budgets, including $94-million in the general fund alone.

Chappell believes such money could easily offset cuts made by the legislature in recent months. He wants lawmakers to consider lifting restrictions on how much of the money can be used.

Chappell also sees other ways to save money and make the state's educational system more efficient without raising taxes, cutting jobs, or eliminating programs. One example would be to redraw district lines.

"There's at least 300 to 400 million dollars that can be saved by redrawing those boundaries," Chappell says.

In the end, Chappell says school districts are faced with the same challenges as families and businesses in the current economy. To pull through, he says, requires accountability, efficiency, and not letting anything go to waste.

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