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## School districts hit hard by CPI drop

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Local school districts are already starting to feel the sting of the dramatic drop in the Consumer Price Index, or CPI, which fell from 4.1 percent last year to just .1 percent this year.

The CPI determines the increase in property tax revenues a school district can collect from one year to the next.

"We, as a district, could lose as much as \$2 million," said Carolyn Waller, spokeswoman for Warren Township High School District 121. The district, which has an operating budget of \$45 million to \$55 million, collects 78 percent of its revenues from local property taxes.

"It's huge and it's based on the economy," said Waller. "If the economy isn't doing well, (the CPI) is going to drop."

Waller said her district isn't panicking about the CPI drop. She said District 121 will make it through for at least a year thanks to spending reductions that have taken place over the past several years.

"I think what's happening here is people are continuing to be careful about how money is being spent and continuing to find new ways to save money," said Waller.

In Gurnee Elementary District 56, between 85 and 90 percent of expenses are employee salaries or benefits, said Superintendent John Hutton.

"The only way you can really save money is by reducing staff," he said. "That's something we don't want to do."

While Hutton said he has no concrete numbers regarding how much his district could lose with the drop in the CPI, he said "for now, we're OK."

"We're very concerned," said Hutton. "It's devastating news for us."

Ellen Correll, superintendent of Community Consolidated School District 46, said her district is facing a \$2.3 million deficit next year due to the CPI drop and a reduction in revenues due to fewer people moving into the district.

The District 46 Board, she said, has already started talking about ways to reduce expenses.

"We're having to open every drawer and look under every book," said Correll. While staffing issues are being dealt with in closed session for now, Correll said other belt-tightening strategies could include everything from spreading out life safety projects over more years to reducing cell phone and color printing usage.

"My focus is on children first, being fiscally responsible and maintaining a quality education," said Correll.

"We've seen it coming for the last several months in terms of the economy tanking," said Jay Sabatino, superintendent of Community High School District 117. "We're going to get \$1 million less in taxes next year than we are this year."

Sabatino said while his district will receive \$1.1 million in additional property tax revenues this year, that amount will drop to an estimated \$30,000 next year. The district receives \$28 million to \$29 million in revenues each year from local property taxes.

To deal with the projected loss of income, Sabatino said the district is already looking at ways to conserve resources. Cost-saving measures could include cutting back on field trips, offering fewer activity buses and not

replacing employees who retire.

Terry O'Brien, superintendent of Grass Lake District 36, said his district, too, is prepared to operate under a more conservative budget.

"We're not anticipating cutting any programs," he said. The district may, however, spend less on staff development programs and workshops. O'Brien added that the district may even choose to buy used textbooks versus new ones.

"We're feeling pretty good that we'll be able to make it through," said O'Brien.



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