



State to use stimulus money to offset spending

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SPRINGFIELD - State officials announced Monday they'd received \$1.4 billion in federal education stimulus funding, but don't look for a similar increase in actual school spending.

The state has a total budget deficit of more than \$12 billion and is counting on billions in federal stimulus funds to help balance spending. In the case of education, the federal dollars will help fill the gap left by dwindling state tax revenues.

Illinois State Board of Education spokesman Matt Vanover said \$1 billion would help erase a backlog of operational funding owed to schools this year and the remainder would help increase funding next year.

"The extra \$400 million will give education an extra \$174 million above FY09 (the current budget)," Vanover said.

That amount - \$174 million - is the increase in kindergarten through high school funding Gov. Pat Quinn proposed in his plan for the coming budget year. That plan also increases higher education funding by \$40 million. However, many lawmakers say it's not enough.

All told, Quinn hopes to collect nearly \$4 billion in federal stimulus funding over this and next year to help fill the \$12.4 billion budget hole. He's also calling for a state tax increase.

Earlier this month, the General Assembly acted quickly to pass legislation giving Illinois officials the ability to start spending federal stimulus dollars.