



Carol Spalding

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Tough economic times are hitting close to home for Rowan-Cabarrus Community College.

Gov. Mike Easley has already ordered state agencies, including community colleges, to reduce their budgets by 2 percent. The chief financial officer at RCCC said Monday he won't be surprised if the governor calls for an even higher reduction — maybe up to 6 percent.

"If the well dries up and consumer spending stops ... it could be very bad," Robert Keeney, RCCC's vice president of business and technical services and chief financial officer, told the school's Board of Trustees Monday.

More than half of RCCC's \$51.3 million budget for 2008-2009 is coming from state funds, Keeney said.

A 2 percent reduction means RCCC won't get about \$505,000 it would have gotten otherwise.

A 6 percent reduction, as Keeney predicted, would be about \$1.5 million — a sizable chunk.

Anything above the the 2 percent mark "will be painful," Keeney said.

He said the state can reduce community colleges' budgets for two reasons: low state tax revenues and lower-than-expected enrollment.

In this case, the former scenario is in play. A sagging economy is bringing in fewer tax dollars than lawmakers had budgeted for.

Enrollment isn't the issue at RCCC.

The state doles out funds to community colleges based on the number of students enrolled.

"That's probably going to be fine," Keeney said.

RCCC President Carol Spalding reported Monday that the school's enrollment has jumped 6.3 percent over last year's numbers.

This year, 5,868 students are enrolled, Spalding said. That compares to 5,521 in December 2007.

"It does reflect the economy," she said. "Our enrollment goes up as the economy goes down."

State funding at RCCC pays for things like the administration, continuing education services and student and academic support.

The school is expecting about \$24.8 million from the state, based on enrollment figures, after the 2 percent reduction is taken away.

The total amount expected from the state is about \$28 million.

RCCC will also start to receive \$3.3 million a year in state funds to pay its lease to operate at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis.

The school will receive nearly \$3.5 million from Rowan and Cabarrus counties — about \$1.8 million from Rowan and \$1.7 million from Cabarrus.

The remainder of the budget will come from federal and other funds.

The board unanimously approved the budget during its meeting in Kannapolis Monday afternoon.

During her report to the board, Spalding said the college does not have plans to halt classes due to recent gasoline shortages.

But Spalding said she's aware that some students are struggling to deal with gas issues.

"We have had students call and say, 'I can't get there, I don't have any gas,' " Spalding said.

Jonathan Furnas, president of the college's Student Government Association, said he has noticed, too.

"I've heard mention from several students that they didn't know how they were going to get to class," Furnas said.

Spalding said the school is encouraging students to carpool.