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Photo by Nicolas Telep/TMN

The Greenwood School, located at Normal and Haliburton, was built in 1935 and closed in 1998. A plan to transform the Truman-owned building into an interprofessional autism clinic has faced nearly \$5 million in state funding cuts.

## Truman responds to budget cuts

BY NICOLAS TELEP  
Staff Writer

Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens proposed major cuts to the state budget last week, including funding for Truman State University and specifically for the proposed Greenwood Autism Clinic.

Greitens announced the proposed cuts in a video posted on Facebook and Twitter last Monday, citing revenue shortcomings and a need to balance the state budget. According to Greitens' website, the state could need to cut more than \$700 million over the next 18 months to balance the state budget, and the \$146 million withheld this month will be one step toward that goal. Eight percent of Truman's core funding will be withheld, in addition to \$1.5 million that was previously allocated to renovate the vacant Greenwood School and open an autism clinic in the space. The budget changes could result in noticeable setbacks for the clinic and will result in a significant funding shortage for the University. However, efforts are already underway to make up for the deficit in the short term and, eventually, restore the funding.

Dave Rector, Truman's vice president of Administration Finance, and Planning, said under the proposed plan, about \$3,144,000 of Truman's core state funding would be withheld. Rector said this comes out to roughly 4 percent of Truman's general budget. Rector said even though the withholding of state funds did not come as a surprise to the higher education community, they had hoped the cuts would come out to about half of what they eventually did.

"That was kind of the surprise — the magnitude of it," Rector said. "We expected a cut. We just didn't know how big it was going to be."

Rector said preparations for the budget shortage are already underway, with Interim University President Sue Thomas, Interim University Provost Richard Coughlin and those who report to the University president formulating a plan to handle the \$3.1 million budget hole that wasn't there a few weeks ago. Rector said a full plan is expected to be made public in the next few weeks. Rector said the University will be able to save money by freezing equipment purchases that have been requested but not actually made yet. He also said in addition to saving money from vacancies on campus and lower-than-expected utilities expenditures, money has been saved thanks to recent energy-efficient upgrades to campus facilities. He said there will be discussions to determine which purchases are critical — like those related to safety — and those transactions will still be made. Other plans for purchases, especially of equipment and new technology, will be frozen for the time being.

Rector said because of a number of factors, it is unclear as of now whether or not the cuts will significantly affect tuition costs for the next semester or future school years. Rector said tuition depends on whether Greitens continues these budget cuts or restores the funding — partially or fully — in the next fiscal year. While there might be indications over the next

few months, specifics on funding for next year will remain uncertain until the State Legislature's mid-May deadline for passing a state budget for the next fiscal year. Rector said the University president and other representatives from the University will visit Jefferson City to discuss the matter with the state government, and all the state's public universities are working together in the attempt to restore the funding. Even though this is not an ideal situation, Rector said Truman has seen worse.

"The worst cut we ever had, back in 2002, was 17 percent," Rector said. "That was really tough to absorb."

Rector said University staff and faculty understand and have experience cutting costs in difficult financial situations. Additionally, Rector said the cuts will not affect the renovations of Baldwin Hall and Stokes Stadium or the search for a new University president. Rector also said even though the University will have to curb its expenditures, the impact on students will be minimal for the spring semester. He said affordability is still a priority for the University, and recent efforts have been successful in keeping costs low for students. He referenced stability in housing costs over the past few years as an example, saying that, while the cost of a meal plan slightly goes up annually, housing rates have remained stable.

"From a student perspective, we've been trying to keep it as affordable as possible," Rector said. "So even if we do have to raise tuition a little bit this spring, for a student that's living on campus, the total cost probably isn't going to go up that much."

In addition to the cuts to Truman's core funding, Rector said the \$1.5 million to be withheld from developing the Greenwood Autism Clinic — in addition to the \$3 million cut by former Gov. Jay Nixon when he was in office — brings state funding down to just over half a million dollars of the more than \$5 million originally allotted for the clinic. This is enough to complete the design and planning stage of the project but not much else, Rector said.

Janet Gooch, Dean of the School of Health Sciences and Education, Interim Dean of Science and Math, and Department of Communication Disorders staff, has been part of the Greenwood Clinic project since its conception. Gooch said the project began about 20 months ago with a vision from former University President Troy Paino, who was interested in renovating and putting the Greenwood School to good use. After consideration as to how the building could be used to best serve the community and the University, Gooch said the idea of an autism clinic emerged as an option.

"We tossed around a few ideas and felt that developing an interprofessional autism clinic within the Greenwood School would be a wonderful community resource," Gooch said. "Not only a community resource, but a wonderful opportunity for our faculty and students."

Gooch also said many partners from the Kirksville and larger Northeast Missouri communities are involved with the project. She mentioned A.T. Still University as a major collaborator in the project, bringing staff as well as record-keeping systems

and expertise to the clinic. Other partners Gooch listed were the superintendents of the Kirksville R-III and other Northeast Missouri school districts, the Kirksville extension of the St. Louis-based Judevine Center for Autism, and multiple Truman departments and programs including communication disorders, Masters of Arts in Education, special education, psychology, nursing and health sciences. Despite these budget setbacks, Gooch said this is not the end for Greenwood.

"We're not giving up hope — I want to send that message loud and clear," Gooch said. "We really don't feel like the nail's in the coffin. There's hope that we might get the money back, and we're going to do everything possible to express how much this is needed in the community."

Gooch said State Representatives Nate Walker and Craig Redmon are very supportive of the clinic, and efforts will continue to regain the funding and move toward opening the clinic. Additionally, Gooch said, the Office of Advancement has created a website for the project where people can make a donation to the Greenwood Clinic and explore the possibility of obtaining grant funds. Currently, Gooch said, most families in need of autism services have to travel to the Thompson Center for Autism & Neurodevelopment Disorders in Columbia, Missouri, which specializes in diagnostic services. She said while there are therapy services available in local public schools and there are some private providers in the area, there just is not enough to cover Northeast Missouri's needs, especially with many small school districts that do not have the resources to provide services to their students. Gooch said there has been collaboration with architects to continue with the design process. Despite the setback, the planning process will continue.

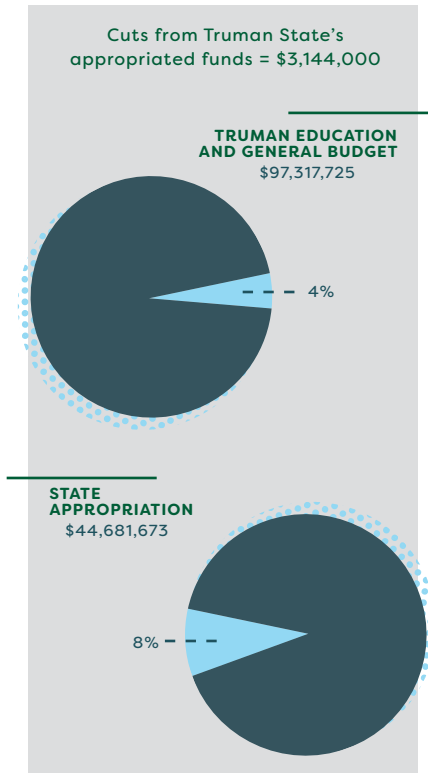
"We're hopeful about this, because it would really mean a lot," Gooch said. "I really look at this more as a resource for this part of the state rather than Truman. Sure, it would benefit our students, but really, it's meant for the people. I think this is one of the best ways that Truman can really live out its public liberal arts and sciences mission."

Paino, former Truman State University President and current President of the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia, said he heard about the proposed budget cuts to higher education and to the Greenwood Autism Clinic last Tuesday.

By the end of summer 2015, Paino said, the University reached out to community members and officials in an effort to advocate for the project during the 2016 legislative season. Paino said it took a coordinated effort of local schools, Northeast Regional Medical Center, ATSU, and local and state politicians, including Rep. Walker and Redmon to gain local support. Paino said he has no doubt support for the project will continue, even with the current budget situation. He said Rep. Walker and Redmon, as well as the leadership in the House and the Senate, are still committed to this project.

"From what I understand, they have been steadfast in their support and their

### WITHHOLDINGS COMPARED TO LARGER BUDGETS



Source: Truman Budget and Institutional Research Office and Missouri Governor's Office

advocacy for this," Paino said. "I have the utmost faith in the local leadership, and in the current leadership at Truman, to continue to carry this until it's complete."

While Paino said he still thinks there is support for higher education in Jefferson City, he said he thinks the value of the liberal arts is not fully understood. He said schools like Truman will always need advocates. Paino said changes over the past several years to Missouri's tax code have created budget shortfalls for higher education, among many other important things, which might have put Gov. Greitens in a tough spot.

However, Paino said the students of Truman might have more influence than they realize.

"Whether the students of Truman know it or not, they have a voice — a statewide voice that needs to be heard," Paino said.

While he was not available to be interviewed, Missouri State Rep. Nate Walker of District 3 said he is still committed to Greenwood.

"I will continue to work with Truman University [Interim] President Sue Thomas, Gov. Eric Greitens, and members of the Missouri General Assembly to get this project funded," Walker said in an email.

While Walker remains a strong proponent of the project, he pointed out the need to balance the state budget before the end of the fiscal year. According to the email, a budget shortfall has made cuts necessary to the state budget on many levels. However, Walker said Greenwood is still a priority for him, and he said he is confident the project will be completed eventually.

State Senator Brian Munzlinger, Redmon, and the Governors' Office were contacted but did not respond to requests for interviews.



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