

Cuomo offers a two-year plan

Projections for school aid funding, Medicaid signal budget restraint

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ALBANY -- Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) is offering an unprecedented plan that lays out Medicaid and school aid funding for the next two years in his upcoming budget proposal.

By including the two-year projections in the 2011-12 budget, due April 1, the governor says he is showing a long-term commitment to budgetary restraint.

Lawmakers, however, will still be able to add money to the budget plan and hope that Cuomo doesn't veto them.

"He's putting in a two-year appropriation to provide a signal to the taxpayers," said Cuomo budget spokesman [Jeffrey Gordon](#). "This is what you should expect for next year." Specifically, Cuomo's Medicaid appropriation would go from \$15.1 billion for 2011-12 to \$15.7 billion in 2012-13. That's the state amount that goes into Medicaid -- federal and local dollars push total spending over \$52 billion.

For schools, whose budget year begins July 1, state aid is set to go from \$19.4 billion in 2011-12 to \$20.2 billion in 2012-13. That would mark the first time it's increased since 2009-10.

The two-year plan was included in Cuomo's 30-day amendments to the 2011-12 budget which was due Thursday.

The amendments traditionally include some fine-tuning but Cuomo has gone a step farther.

The governor also plans to tie future growth in Medicaid and school aid to medical inflation and personal income growth respectively.

That, Cuomo contends will add predictability and affordability to the programs.

Reaction from lawmakers was muted Thursday as the plan came out late in the day. Some said they needed to examine all the details before making judgments.

The 30-day amendments also include cost-saving recommendations from Cuomo's [Medicaid Redesign Team](#), which aims to contain the growth in that sector going forward.

By putting those recommendations in the appropriations budget, lawmakers are prohibited from changing what is essentially the policy language in the bills.

Lawmakers still have power over spending levels. They can add, reduce or eliminate individual appropriations in the budget. The governor can veto parts that he doesn't like.

This isn't the first time that budgets have included two-year plans. The MTA, which provides transit services downstate, uses a two-year budget to help in the planning needed to sell capital improvement bonds. And 20 states including Texas, North Carolina, Ohio and Connecticut operate on biennial budgets, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#).

A recent report on budget cycles found arguments both for and against biennial budgets -- it appears to help with long-term planning but can be an extensive exercise in and of itself.

Most of the states that use biennial budgeting, though, can change the spending amounts each year, thus it is used largely as a planning tool.

To be clear, Cuomo is not proposing a biennial budget -- he is simply offering a two-year plan for particular parts of the budget.