WASHINGTON—Faced with ongoing budget crises, underfunded schools nationwide are increasingly left with no option but to cut the past tense—a grammatical construction traditionally used to relate all actions, and states that have transpired at an earlier point in time—from their standard English and language arts programs.

A part of American school curricula for more than 200 years, the past tense was deemed by school administrators to be too expensive to keep in primary and secondary education.

"This was by no means an easy decision, but teaching our students how to conjugate verbs in a way that would allow them to describe events that have already occurred is a luxury that we can no longer afford," Phoenix-area high-school principal Sam Pennock said. "With our current budget, the past tense must unfortunately become a thing of the past."

In the most dramatic display of the new trend yet, the Tennessee Department of Education decided Monday to remove "-ed" endings from all of the state's English classrooms, saving struggling schools an estimated $3 million each year. Officials say they plan to slowly phase out the tense by first eliminating the past perfect; once students have adjusted to the change, the past progressive, the past continuous, the past perfect progressive, and the simple past will be cut. Hundreds of school districts across the country are expected to follow suit.

"This is the end of an era," said Alicia Reynolds, a school district director in Tuscaloosa, AL. "For some, reading and writing about things not immediately taking place was almost as much a part of school as history class and social studies."

"That is, until we were forced to drop history class and social studies a couple of months ago," Reynolds added.

Nevertheless, a number of educators are coming out against the cuts, claiming that the embattled verb tense, while outmoded, still plays an important role in the development of today's youth.

"Much like art and music, the past tense provides students with a unique and consistent outlet for self-expression," South Boston English teacher David Floen said. "Without it I fear many of our students will lack a number of important creative skills. Like being able to describe anything that happened earlier in the day."

Despite concerns that cutting the past-tense will prevent graduates from communicating effectively in the workplace, the home, the grocery store, church, and various other public spaces, a number of lawmakers, such as Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, have welcomed the cuts as proof that the American school system is taking a more forward-thinking approach to education.
"Our tax dollars should be spent preparing our children for the future, not for what has already happened," Hatch said at a recent press conference. "It's about time we stopped wasting everyone's time with who 'did' what or 'went' where. The past tense is, by definition, outdated."

Said Hatch, "I can't even remember the last time I had to use it."

Past-tense instruction is only the latest school program to face the chopping block. School districts in California have been forced to cut addition and subtraction from their math departments, while nearly all high schools have reduced foreign language courses to only the most basic phrases, including "May I please use the bathroom?" and "No, I do not want to go to the beach with Maria and Juan." Some legislators are even calling for an end to teaching grammar itself, saying that in many inner-city school districts, where funding is most lacking, students rarely use grammar at all.

Regardless of the recent upheaval, students throughout the country are learning to accept, and even embrace, the change to their curriculum.

"At first I think the decision to drop the past tense from class is ridiculous, and I feel very upset by it," said David Keller, a seventh-grade student at Hampstead School in Fort Meyers, FL. "But now, it's almost like it never happens."