



**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

Report of Findings

**Surviving a Thousand Cuts:
America's Public Schools and the Recession**

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Abstract

This study is the tenth in a series of studies conducted by the American Association of School Administrators on the impact of the economic downturn on schools. AASA launched the series in fall 2008 in response to state budget shortfalls, federal buyouts and interventions, and a series of additional events characterizing a slowing, stagnant economy. As the economic situation worsened, AASA continued to monitor its impact on schools through a series of surveys of school administrators nationwide.

The previous studies in the AASA Economic Impact Study Series (<http://www.aasa.org/research.aspx>) include:

- “Impact of Preventing Projected Educator Layoffs for 2010-11 School Year” (June 22, 2010)
- “Projection of National Education Job Cuts for the 2010-11 School Year” (May 4, 2010)
- “A Cliff Hanger: How America’s Public Schools Continue to Feel the Impact of the Economic Downturn” (April 8, 2010)
- “One Year Later: How the Economic Impact Continues to Impact School Districts” (Oct. 27, 2009)
- “Schools and the Stimulus: How America’s Public School Districts Are Using ARRA Funds”(Aug. 25, 2009)
- “Looking Back, Looking Forward: How the Economic Downturn Continues to Impact School Districts” (March 25, 2009)
- “AASA Impact of the Economic Downturn on School Jobs Snapshot Survey” (Jan. 16, 2009)
- “AASA Opportunity for Federal Education Funding Survey” (Dec. 15, 2008)
- “AASA Study of the Impact of the Economic Downturn on Schools” (Nov. 12, 2008)

The AAASA economic impact studies are unique in their ability to provide benchmark trend data round the impact of the economic recession on America’s public schools. The studies demonstrate that school districts in every part of the country are subject to the realities of the recession and that the financial crisis continues to threaten and impact the progress schools have obtained and the stability they have enjoyed in the past.

About This Study

“Surviving a Thousand Cuts: America’s Public Schools and the Recession” is based on a survey of school administrators conducted in December 2010. A total of 692 school administrators from 44 states completed the survey. Many of the questions in this survey are repeated from earlier surveys and add to AASA’s ability to collect and analyze long-term data. New to this survey is a look at what school administrators think should be the legislative and policy priorities for the 112th U.S. Congress, convening in January 2011.

The end of calendar year 2010 finds school districts across the nation continuing to feel the impact of the longest-lasting economic recession since the 1930s. While national economic indicators demonstrate that the recession ended in July 2009, the reality is that state and local budgets continue to feel the heavy burden of declining revenues and multi-year cuts. In light of unprecedented budget cuts, states still face large budget gaps.

Author’s Note: Since the onset of the recession, two rounds of emergency federal funding were made available to public schools and are referenced throughout this paper. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 is abbreviated as ARRA, and the Education Jobs Fund of 2010 is abbreviated as EduJobs.

More than two years after AASA's initial report on the impact of the economic downturn on school districts, we are seeing signs of economic stability at the federal level. Economic stability, though, remains elusive at the state and local levels, with more than a quarter of states already projecting budget deficits for 2013 (NGA/NSBO, 2010). Since the recession began, states have shrunk more than \$430 billion in budget shortfalls: \$110 billion in FY2009, \$191 billion in FY2010, and \$130 billion in FY2011. States are already reporting projected gaps of \$113 billion for FY2012. (Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, 2010)

School districts started responding to the recession almost as soon as it started. Working on the periphery of their budget, they would trim and cut budget items that least directly impacted student achievement. The earliest surveys from this series documented that common initial cuts included limiting field trips and altering thermostats. Unfortunately, as the recession persisted and budget cuts carried over year to year, school districts faced increasingly difficult budgets, ultimately leading to drastic personnel reductions this past summer, many of which were limited and avoided due almost solely to a second iteration of federal emergency funding (Education Jobs Fund).

The best way to describe the progression of the approach school districts have followed over the past two years involves a trip down memory lane. Remember those concentric, round cookie cutters that your mother or grandmother used to make nice, round cookies or biscuits? They nestled nicely inside of each other. Think of those concentric rings, and student achievement is nestled snug in the middle of the smallest cookie cutter. When the recession started, school districts started with the relatively easy cuts from the outer-most cookie cutter, those that least directly impacted student achievement. As the recession persisted, though, and the cuts from last year remained in place, school districts had to make cuts that were coming increasingly close to factors that have direct impacts on student learning.

The AASA studies demonstrate how, over the past two years, unprecedented fiscal hardship has forced school districts to make cuts that directly impact student achievement, moving from initial cuts such as adjusting thermostats and reducing staff travel to where they are today: increasing class size and eliminating teaching positions. Looking forward, the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years will be challenging. District and school administrators will be answering tough questions about items, programs and personnel can be cut while trying to figure out what—if any—economic recovery is in store at the state and local level while facing the inevitable funding cliff with the coming cessation of ARRA and EduJobs.

Three important findings emerge from this survey:

- The cessation of ARRA and EduJobs funding and continued budget strains at the state and local levels continue to represent a one-two punch the education funding, further insulating schools from economic recovery and, more immediately, translating into more budget cuts, more job cuts, and fewer resources for programs and personnel.
- The unprecedented nature of this recession and its impacts on public education warrant two types of evaluation: short term and long term. While educators can already report on the number of jobs cut, the rising increase in class size, and current test scores, the long-range impact has yet to be realized and studied. We are years away from knowing how the budget realities will impact the long-term learning and achievement of today's public school students, moving through a system experiencing unprecedented fiscal strain.

(Continued on next page.)

- As the 112th U.S. Congress convenes in January 2011, AASA members urge certain legislative and policy actions:
 - Legislative: Full funding of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA); Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); and Absent reauthorization, regulatory relief for ESEA.
 - Policy: Distributing federal education funds through formula; Opposing federal funding to non-public schools; and Targeting and distributing ESEA funds based on percentage poverty.

Across the nation, school districts report a breadth and depth of budget cuts for both the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years. More than three quarters (84 percent) of districts described their district as inadequately funded, up from 83 percent reported in April 2010 and 76 percent in October 2009. Three quarters (77 percent) of districts reported a cut in state/local revenues between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. Slightly more (82 percent) of districts anticipated a cut in state/local revenues between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years. Nearly four-fifths (79 percent) of districts anticipated a cut in state/local revenues between the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, compared to 15 percent expecting level funding and 4 percent expecting an increase.

The data from the survey of administrators indicate that stop-gap efforts to avoid job cuts were short lived and that reduction in force will continue to be a reality over the next few school years. Nearly half (48 percent) laid off personnel for the 2010-11 school year and two thirds (66 percent) anticipate doing so in 2011-12. Nearly one-fifth (16 percent) furloughed personnel for the 2010-11 school year and one-third (34 percent) anticipate doing so in 2011-12. School districts, on average, reported 512 employees, and expect to make 17.8 job cuts in 2010-11 (3.5%) and 10.3 in 2011-12 (2.0%).

The anticipated and reported increasing intensity of budget cuts reaches beyond personnel decisions.

- More than half (57 percent) increased class size for the 2010-11 school year and two-thirds (65 percent) anticipate doing so in 2011-12.
- More than one-third (37 percent) eliminated/delayed instructional improvement initiatives for the 2010-11 school year and nearly half (49 percent) anticipate doing so in 2011-12.
- Only 6 percent reduced operations to four-day school week (during the school year) for the 2010-11 school year, while 17 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12.
- More than one-quarter (27 percent) eliminated summer school programs for the 2010-11 school year and 40 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12.
- One-tenth (8 percent) closed/consolidated schools for the 2010-11 school year and 15 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12.

States have received their portions of the education jobs fund dollars. Districts report varying levels of use and ability to save jobs. A large majority (80 percent) of respondents report having received (or anticipated receipt) of EduJobs funds. When asked about the timeline with which their districts will use the EduJobs dollars,

- More than one-third (36 percent) reported *All EduJobs dollars are being used in the current (2010-11) school year.*
- One quarter (24 percent) reported *All EduJobs dollars are being saved and will be used in the next (2011-12) school year.*
- One-fifth (21 percent) reported *The EduJobs dollars are being distributed over a two-year period, covering both the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.*

- When asked to describe how the EduJobs funds helped their district save jobs slated for elimination, respondents reported the percentage of jobs they were able to save:
 - Unable to save jobs: 30 percent and 21 percent reported that they were unable to any save jobs with the edujobs funds for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.
 - Saved less than 25% jobs: 18 percent and 27 percent reported that they were able to save between 1 and 25 percent of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.
 - Saved between 26% and 50% of jobs: 5 percent and 8 percent reported that they were able to save between 26 and 50 percent of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.
 - Saved between 51% and 75% of jobs: 1 percent and 3 percent reported that they were able to save between 51 and 75 percent of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.
 - Saved between 76% and 99%: 3 percent of respondents reported that they were able to save between 76 percent and 99 percent of jobs slated for elimination during both the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.
 - Saved ALL jobs: 3 percent and 2 percent of respondents reported that they were able to save 100% of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.

School administrators are well aware of the impact federal education funding and policy have on day-to-day operations of their school systems. Asked which education policies they think Congress should focus on and consider as they move forward with their education agenda, AASA members listed full funding of IDEA, reauthorization of/regulatory relief for ESEA, distribution of funds through formula programs, opposition of federal funding to non-public schools, and targeting/distributing ESEA funds based on percentage poverty.

Asked to rate their level of agreement with a handful of statements related to education funding, competitive grants and the relationship between federal dollars and the school budget process, school administrators continue to demonstrate a consistent opinion that competitive grants have a role—albeit limited—in federal education funding. More than half of respondents (51 percent) agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants have a place within the funding of public education, along with continued funding and increased investment in proven formula programs such as Title I and IDEA*. A large majority (85 percent) of respondents disagree/strongly disagree with the statement *Competitive grants are the best way to fund America’s public schools—they spur innovation and reform by focusing the spotlight on what works and best practices*. Two thirds (66 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants should compose a small portion of federal education funding*. Less than half (41 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants have no place in the funding of public schools*.

Section I: Snapshot of School Economic Climate

The results of this survey, like the ones before it, demonstrate that school administrators across the nation remain committed to providing the best educational opportunities they can with their limited available resources. It also illustrates that the economic recovery that has taken hold at the federal level has yet to echo through state and local budgets.

It is important to understand the dynamic between state and district budgeting cycles. School districts typically adopt local budgets based on state budgets, meaning state budgets are adopted before school district budgets. While school districts were not immune to the economic recession, they were somewhat insulated from the initial impact, given that districts were operating under budgets adopted under more stable times. As the AASA surveys have documented, when the economic downturn picked up in 2008, districts were operating on already-adopted budgets and made relatively mild cuts and changes in 2008-09. As the recession wore on, the 2009-10 and 2010-11 cuts became illustrative of the full impact of the recession. Unfortunately, the budget lag that helped insulate districts from feeling the full initial brunt of the economic downturn is still in place as the federal economy recovers and will likely persist after state and local budgets have recovered. Even as segments of the federal economy stabilize, school districts will continue to operate on leaner budgets passed/adopted in a tight economy.

Generally speaking, economic recovery at the state and local level lags that of federal recovery by 12-18 months. State and local recovery from this recession, however, given its unprecedented depth and duration, is expected to lag closer to two years behind that of federal recovery. In a 2010 survey by the National Conference of State Legislators, state legislative fiscal directors of only 11 states expect to return to pre-recession revenues by FY2012, (school year 2012-13). Put more simply, only 20 percent of states expect to be at pre-recession revenue levels one year after all ARRA and EduJobs funds are expired.

Earlier this summer, it was announced that the national recession had ended in July 2009, meaning that state and local recovery is still nearly eight months away. It could be even longer for local school districts, a finding confirmed by the results of this survey: while the cuts school districts have implemented for the 2010-11 school year are broad, they are relatively shallow when compared to the anticipated cuts of the 2011-12 school year.

Findings:

- More than three quarters (84 percent) of districts described their district as inadequately funded, compared to 14 percent reporting adequate funds. This is up from 83 percent reported in April 2010 and 76 percent in October 2009.
- Three quarters (77 percent) of districts reported a cut in state/local revenues between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. 14 percent reported level funding, and 9 percent reported an increase.
- Slightly more (82 percent) of districts anticipated a cut in state/local revenues between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, compared to 11 percent expecting level funding, and 5 percent anticipating an increase.
- Nearly four-fifths (79 percent) of districts anticipated a cut in state/local revenues between the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, compared to 15 percent expecting level funding and 4 percent expecting an increase.

- When asked to describe the significance of the changes to state/local revenues between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years,
 - Nearly half (48 percent) reported a cut of 10 percent or less.
 - One quarter (24 percent) reported cuts between 11 and 25 percent.
 - Two percent reported cuts between 26 percent and 40 percent.
- Pressed further,
 - 13 percent responded *Does not apply. Our state/local revenues held steady, due to support from federal ARRA/EduJobs funds.*
 - 5 percent reported *Does not apply. Our state/local revenues grew, due to support from federal (ARRA/EduJobs funds).*
 - 3 percent reported *Does not apply. Our state/local revenues grew on their own, without support from federal (ARRA/EduJobs) funds.*
 - 3 percent reported *Does not apply. Our state/local revenues held steady, without help from federal (ARRA/EduJobs) funds.*
- When describing funding cuts to state education dollars:
 - 32 percent reported *The cuts to education were proportional to the cuts to other state agencies/departments.*
 - 29 percent reported *The cuts to education were disproportionate to the cuts to other state agencies/departments; education cuts were LESS severe.*
 - 21 percent reported *The cuts to education were disproportionate to the cuts in other state agencies/departments; education cuts were MORE severe.*
 - 11 percent reported *This does not apply. My state did not cut education funding.*

Personnel Related Cuts: Districts' stopgap efforts to avoid reductions in force were short-lived. Personnel costs are commonly understood to represent more than 80 percent of most school districts' budgets, and in this economic climate personnel reductions were inevitable. While efforts to institute a temporary solution through furloughing personnel suggests a method for retaining the district's valuable investment in the development of a highly trained workforce, they also represent a level of uncertainty or loss of confidence that appears to now be resulting in permanent loss of some of those employees. Some school districts are bracing for a budget reality absent federal emergency funding, faced with the cessation of ARRA and EduJobs funds beginning as early as the current school year.

- Nearly one-fifth (16 percent) furloughed personnel for the 2010-11 school year, 34 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 54 percent never considered it.
- Nearly half (48 percent) laid off personnel for the 2010-11 school year, 66 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 17 percent never considered it.
- More than one-third (37percent) froze outside professional service contracts for the 2010-11 school year, 56 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 24 percent never considered it.
- More than half (59 percent) reduced non-teaching professional support personnel for the 2010-11 school year, 70 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 8 percent never considered it.
- Half (50 percent) reduced outside staff development consultants for the 2010-11 school year, 61 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 18 percent never considered it.
- More than half (56 percent) reduced staff-level (non-instructional) hiring for the 2010-11 school year, 66 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 12 percent never considered it.
- Nearly one-fifth (16 percent) reduced benefits package (health care) for the 2010-11 school year, 30 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 58 percent never considered it.
- Less than ten percent (8 percent) reduced benefits package (pension contributions) for the 2010-11 school year, 17 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 73 percent never considered it.

Buildings and Facilities Related Cuts: A widely understood but seldom discussed issue by state policymakers, superintendents, boards and their communities is the deferral of maintenance, as well as infrastructure costs (including transportation) and programmatic decisions. These deferrals often begin as economic necessities but evolve into safety and adequacy issues. While some stimulus funding to schools has been provided to primarily increase employment, the state of the physical facilities of many schools has never been worse and promises to decline further. Poorly maintained school facilities invite difficult decision making that promises to erode the quality of schooling.

- More than half (52 percent) deferred maintenance for the 2010-11 school year, 60 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 21 percent never considered it.
- Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) altered thermostats for less heating/cooling in buildings for the 2010-11 school year, 55 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 18 percent never considered it.
- Almost one-fifth (17 percent) delayed a capital debt (bond) program for the 2010-11 school year, 24 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 63 percent never considered it.
- Roughly one-tenth (9 percent) outsourced custodial/maintenance work for the 2010-11 school year, 21 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 70 percent never considered it.
- More than one-third (37 percent) reduced custodial services for the 2010-11 school year, 45 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 34 percent never considered it.

Curriculum Related Cuts: While the impact of class size on achievement is an issue of endless point-counterpoint discussion, it is undeniable that the increase in class size produced by the economic downturn will significantly impact the quality of interaction between teacher and student and subsequently negatively influence the attainment of students. The data paints a disturbing picture. Class-size is quantifiable, while the prolonged economic downturn experienced by school districts shows itself in more subtle and insidious ways. In an environment that wants so much more from its schools, the economic realities facing schools have served to short circuit the research-based school improvement efforts underway, forcing budget cuts in areas that directly impact student learning and achievement.

- More than half (57 percent) increased class size for the 2010-11 school year, 65 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 14 percent never considered it.
- More than one-third (37 percent) eliminated/delayed instructional improvement initiatives for the 2010-11 school year, 49 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 34 percent never considered it.
- More than one-third (37 percent) reduced non-academic programs (afterschool and Saturday enrichment programs) for the 2010-11 school year, 49 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 33 percent never considered it.
- More than one-quarter (29 percent) reduced academic programs (academic interventions and Saturday classes) for the 2010-11 school year, 45 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 40 percent never considered it.
- One-quarter (25 percent) strengthened identification/screening of non-resident students for the 2010-11 school year, 27 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 57 percent never considered it.
- One-quarter (26 percent) reduced elective courses not required for graduation for the 2010-11 school year, 49 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 38 percent never considered it.
- One-half (51 percent) deferred textbook purchases for the 2010-11 school year, 59 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 21 percent never considered it.
- Almost one-fifth (18 percent) reduced high cost course offerings for the 2010-11 school year, 39 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 49 percent never considered it.
- Nearly half (49 percent) reduced instructional materials for the 2010-11 school year, 55 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 27 percent never considered it.
- More than one-third (36 percent) eliminated field trips for the 2010-11 school year, 57 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 26 percent never considered it.

Operations Related Cuts: A student's school experience reaches beyond the classroom walls and the traditional school day, and the development of sound citizenship results from the total school experience. This, too, has been threatened by the economic downturn. From the availability of extracurricular activities and access to current technology in the classroom to providing adequate supplies, transportation or even summer school, there is little question that the lack of any of these resources — or a district's diminished capacity to provide these materials and programs — will negatively impact student achievement and the success of children, and further magnify the long-term impact of the economic downturn.

- One quarter (25 percent) reduced operations to four-day work week (during the summer) for the 2010-11 school year, 35 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 53 percent never considered it.
- Only 6 percent reduced operations to four-day school week (during the school year) for the 2010-11 school year, 17 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 75 percent never considered it.
- More than one-quarter (27 percent) eliminated summer school programs for the 2010-11 school year, 40 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 44 percent never considered it.
- Nearly one-third (30 percent) cut bus transportation routes/availability for the 2010-11 school year, 41 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 43 percent never considered it.
- Almost one-quarter (23 percent) found new transportation efficiencies (tiered pickups) for the 2010-11 school year, 37 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 48 percent never considered it.
- Nearly one-third (31 percent) reduced extracurricular activities for the 2010-11 school year, 52 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 33 percent never considered it.
- More than half (58 percent) reduced consumable supplies for the 2010-11 school year, 65 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 14 percent never considered it.
- Almost half (44 percent) deferred technology purchases for the 2010-11 school year, 56 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 25 percent never considered it.
- More than two-thirds (68 percent) eliminated non-essential travel for the 2010-11 school year, 68 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 8 percent never considered it.
- More than half (58 percent) joined bulk-purchasing groups/co-ops for the 2010-11 school year, 54 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 19 percent never considered it.
- Nearly one-fifth (17 percent) reduced collaborative planning time within the school day for the 2010-11 school year, 26 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 61 percent never considered it.
- One-tenth (8 percent) closed/consolidated schools for the 2010-11 school year, 15 percent anticipate doing so in 2011-12, and 75 percent never considered it.

Section II: Economic Downturn and School Employment

Now more than two years after AASA first started reporting on the impact of the economic recession on school districts, the effects on employment can be best summed as ‘more of the same’. Districts have been—and continue to be—hesitant to cut staff and eliminate positions that directly impact student achievement. While districts were able to resist drastic jobs cuts for well over a year, the compounding effects of a persistent recession and previous cuts forced many districts to cut jobs they had so long protected. Reports earlier this year, used to help drive the argument for the education jobs fund, demonstrated that school districts across the nation were facing massive layoffs. Beyond the economic impact this would have on communities, widespread teacher layoffs would have draconian effects on classroom instruction, manifesting in larger class sizes, modified course schedules and options, and reduced course offerings.

Many school districts used a portion of the ARRA jobs to help save teacher positions. The education jobs fund of this summer was passed with the sole intention of helping to save, recall, protect and create educator jobs. The unfortunate truth remains, though, that hundreds of thousands of education jobs are underwritten by dollars set to begin expiring during the 2011-12 school year. (Hess & Downs, 2010)

The cessation of federal emergency dollars, coupled with continued fiscal hardship at the state and local level means that school districts had to cut jobs for the current (2010-11) school year and anticipate doing so again in 2011-12. The job cuts cut across all aspects of school districts. The impact on student achievement, however, is unavoidable when the top three types of jobs being cut—in both 2010-11 and 2011-12—are teacher aides/assistants, core subject classroom teachers, and maintenance/cafeteria/transportation staff.

Findings:

- Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of respondents eliminated positions for the 2010-11 school year.
- Two-thirds (66 percent) of respondents anticipate having to eliminate positions for the 2011-12 school year.
- School districts, on average, reported 512 employees, and expect to make 17.8 job cuts in 2010-11 (3.5%) and 10.3 in 2011-12 (2.0%).
- When asked to report what types of jobs were being cut in 2010-11 and 2011-12, respondents indicated that cuts were across the board.

<i>Table 1</i>	2010-11	2011-12
	Percent	Percent
Core subject classroom teachers	45.7%	40.9%
Art/music/phys education teachers	23.8%	25.3%
Foreign language teachers	11.3%	12.7%
Special education teachers	15.3%	12.0%
Teacher aides/assistants	49.1%	51.0%
School secretaries	18.2%	18.6%
School librarians	16.8%	14.3%
School nurses	8.4%	9.8%
Maintenance/cafeteria/transportation staff	37.3%	33.4%
Central office/administration	31.9%	27.0%
Other	14.9%	15.6%

The April 2010 economic impact survey was the first time AASA looked into how school districts were beginning to adjust either health care benefits and/or pension contributions as a result of the economic downturn. Beyond the simple cuts to employee benefits reported in Section I, above, the new survey dove deeper into how benefits are provided, trying to determine who contributes to the health and pension benefits:

- When asked to identify who contributes to pension plans:
 - One-fifth (20 percent) of respondents reported that their district contributes to a local/district pension plan.
 - Nearly all (94 percent) of respondents reported that their district contributes to a state pension plan.
 - Nearly one-fifth (18 percent) of respondents reported that the state contributes to local/district pension plans.
 - Three-quarters (74 percent) of respondents reported that the state contributes to the state's pension plan for educators.
- When asked to describe any changes made to pension plan contributions:
 - More than two-thirds (68 percent) reported *My district has not changed any pension contributions.*
 - Nearly one-fifth (17 percent) reported *The state has reduced its contribution to the state pension plan.*
 - Almost one-fifth (15 percent) reported *My state has increased qualifications for pension plans (requiring more years for service and/or older age requirement, etc...).*
 - Less than one-tenth (5 percent) reported *My district has reduced its contribution to local/district pension plans; My district has reduced its contributions to the state pension plan; The state has reduced its contribution to local/district pension plans.*
- One of the more interesting findings of the survey highlighted the different levels of responsibility states and districts bear when it comes to providing health benefits to current and retired employees:
 - Nearly two-thirds (60 percent) of respondents reported that the health benefits offered to their current district employees are provided by the district, while 39 percent reported the state provided health benefits.
 - More than half (53 percent) of respondents indicated that health benefits offered to retired district employees are provided by the state, compared to 35 percent reporting the district.

Section III: Education Jobs Fund (EduJobs) and the Economic Downturn

Emergency federal education funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) will be completely expended, in many districts, during the middle of the current (2010-11) school year. The Education jobs Fund of 2010 (EduJobs), including \$10 billion for saving, protecting, and reinstating educator jobs, will help soften the immediate cliff of the expiring ARRA funds, though EduJobs on its own will also represent a sizeable funding cliff for school districts operating with state and local budgets that have yet to reach pre-recession stability and levels.

EduJobs helped to stave off the even more severe budget cuts to education funding states and districts would have been forced to make, faced with the triple whammy of the cessation of ARRA dollars, continued budget strains and the state and local level, and ever fewer budget items left to reduce/cut. EduJobs funds, when used to supplement (not supplant) state education funding, helped to insulate local school districts from more budget cuts, more job cuts, and fewer resources for programs and personnel. That said, EduJobs comes with an expiration date of its own, and local districts will expend those dollars by the end of the 2011-12 school year, still a year or two before many states expect to have returned to pre-recession revenue levels.

Not surprisingly, then, the results of this survey illustrate that while the ARRA and EduJobs funds were a greatly needed resource, they will also be stop-gap measures, band-aids to deep economic cuts that will start to rip away during the current school year.

Findings:

- A large majority (80 percent) of respondents report having received (or anticipated receipt) of EduJobs funds.
- When asked about the timeline with which their districts will use the EduJobs dollars,
 - More than one-third (36 percent) reported *All EduJobs dollars are being used in the current (2010-11) school year.*
 - One quarter (24 percent) reported *All EduJobs dollars are being saved and will be used in the next (2011-12) school year.*
 - One-fifth (21 percent) reported *The EduJobs dollars are being distributed over a two-year period, covering both the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.*
- When asked to describe how the EduJobs funds helped their district save jobs slated for elimination, respondents reported the percentage of jobs they were able to save:
 - Unable to save jobs: 30 percent and 21 percent reported that they were unable to any save jobs with the edujobs funds for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.
 - Saved less than 25% jobs: 18 percent and 27 percent reported that they were able to save between 1 and 25 percent of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.
 - Saved between 26% and 50% of jobs: 5 percent and 8 percent reported that they were able to save between 26 and 50 percent of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.
 - Saved between 51% and 75% of jobs: 1 percent and 3 percent reported that they were able to save between 51 and 75 percent of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.

- Saved between 76% and 99%: 3 percent of respondents reported that they were able to save between 76 percent and 99 percent of jobs slated for elimination during both the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.
- Saved ALL jobs: 3 percent and 2 percent of respondents reported that they were able to save 100% of jobs slated for elimination in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, respectively.

Unlike ARRA funds, which were labeled as funds for simultaneously stimulating an economy and spurring innovation, the edujobs funds were more narrowly focused on saving educator jobs. Nearly one-fifth of respondents reported a ‘shell game’ of sorts with the edujobs funds, though more reported that the funds were used to fill district budget holes.

- In describing how the EduJobs funds impacted any changes to state/local funding,
 - More than half (54 percent) reported *My district had a net loss before EduJobs. EduJobs dollars filled some, but not all, of the budget holes.*
 - More than one-tenth (14 percent) reported *My district had neither a net loss nor a net gain before EduJobs, and the EduJobs dollars were all in addition to state and local revenues.*
 - One-tenth (12 percent) reported *My district had a net loss before EduJobs. State leaders reassessed the budget situation, further cut state revenues and used EduJobs to offset the cuts.*
 - Five percent reported *My district had a net gain before EduJobs. In light of EduJobs, state leaders reassessed the budget situation, cutting our state revenue and using EDUJOBS dollars to offset the cuts.*
 - Four percent reported *My district had a net loss before EduJobs. EduJobs dollars filled all of the budget holes, and state and local revenues held steady as a result.*
 - Two percent reported *My district had a net gain before EduJobs, and the EduJobs dollars further increased the net gain.*
- In describing how their districts are using EduJobs funds to bring about education reform/innovation,
 - Two-thirds (66 percent) of respondents reported *This does not apply. The EduJobs funds simply fill budget cuts and do not represent enough funding for hire new teachers.*
 - More than one-tenth (13 percent) reported *The EduJobs funds represented a slight increase in funding levels, with much of the EduJobs money simply filling budget cuts. New hiring from the EduJobs funds was limited.*
 - Three percent reported *Most of the EduJobs funds represented an increased funding level; very little was needed to fill budget cuts. As such, we were able to hire new teachers.*
 - Two percent reported *The full amount of our district’s EduJobs funds was an increase in funding; we were able to direct all of the EduJobs funds towards hiring teachers.*

Section IV: Education in the 112th Congress

AASA is a national professional organization representing more than 13,000 school administrators across the nation. One focus of the organization includes its federal advocacy on a host of education-related issues reaching from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to federal funding and child nutrition, among others. The official positions taken by AASA are reflected in an annual legislative agenda determined by AASA members.

Following the November 2010 mid-term elections, a new Congress will convene in January 2011. The 112th Congress will have a markedly different appearance than the previous Congress, with a Republican-led House of Representatives, a smaller Democrat majority in the Senate, and a smaller overall presence of moderates in both houses of Congress. In light of these changes and in anticipation of the start of the new 112th Congressional session, AASA asked members which education policies they think Congress should focus on and consider as they move forward with their education agenda. Ranked in descending priority, respondents reported a host of legislative and policy actions:

Findings:

Legislative Actions:

- Full funding of IDEA (87 percent): School administrators have tasked Congress with meeting a long-outstanding commitment to fund the additional costs associated with educating students with special needs. Covering a federal shortfall year in and year out with local district dollars represents a significant funding pressure for school districts across the nations. Full funding of IDEA would provide services for students with special education needs and allow local school districts to use local dollars to meet local district budgeting needs. The government's underfunding of a federal commitment and mandate puts extreme budgetary pressure on states and locals to cover the shortfall, totaling \$34.9 billion for FY08, FY10 and FY11 (anticipated). (Zember, 2010) The FY09 shortfall of \$10 billion is not included in this total, as ARRA provided enough one-time IDEA funds to provide one year of full funding for IDEA.
- Reauthorization of ESEA (65 percent): No Child Left Behind, the current authorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act (ESEA) is widely acknowledged for many of its provisions, both good (disaggregating student data) and those that need improvement (adequate yearly progress, one-time snap-shot testing, and 100% proficiency mandate). Congress has been actively engaged in work to reauthorize the bill since the summer of 2007, with both Houses of Congress working in a bipartisan manner to reauthorize the bill. As each month of reauthorization passes by, local school districts are falling under increasing scrutiny and punishment under provisions of the law that are widely perceived as overly burdensome. Fully understanding the heavy lift that reauthorization represents in general, let alone in an election year (such as 2012), AASA strongly urges Congress to complete reauthorization of ESEA in 2011.
- Absent immediate reauthorization, regulatory relief for ESEA (59 percent): If, for some reason, Congress is unable to reauthorize ESEA in 2011, regulatory relief will become an absolute necessity. Burdensome provisions of current law will be exacerbated as an alarmingly high number of districts face sanctions. If the bill cannot be reauthorized in 2011, it is broadly acknowledged that the politics of an election year, such as 2012, will make it virtually for reauthorization to remain uncompleted into 2013. Local school districts should not be subject to cumbersome provisions widely believed to be broken and not working. To help school districts stem the tide of election year politics, Congress

should work to provide regulatory relief. AASA has identified areas for proposed regulatory relief, should that be the course of action.

Policy Actions:

- Distributing federal education funds through formula (69 percent): AASA members have long advocated for continued and increased investment in formula based programs. AASA urges Congress to maintain formula grants to provide a more reliable stream of funding to local school districts.
 - Such a strong emphasis on competition implies that competition alone produces innovation and student achievement. School districts and systems need a certain level of financial stability to undertake the ambitious innovation and reform proposed by the President's budget, a level of reliability and consistency that cannot be achieved through competitive funding.
 - Formula-driven funding represents the dedicated funding stream that allows school districts to appropriately plan for and invest in innovation and reform. AASA is concerned that competitive grants would have a disproportionate negative impact on rural and small districts.
 - With limited local resources, school districts do not have the time or the capacity to develop extensive competitive grant applications in order to be competitive. This will lead federal dollars away from students in poverty and to districts that have the resources for grant writing teams.
- Opposing federal funding to non-public schools (vouchers) (62 percent): AASA has long worked to oppose vouchers, or the use of public federal dollars to allow families to pay for non-public school options. The position reflected in the survey results echoes that in AASA's position statement:
 - AASA absolutely opposes undermining universal equal educational opportunity for all, supports the separation of church and state in public school funding, and opposes increasing the segregation of America's children by diverting public funds in support of vouchers and related initiatives.
- Requiring states and school districts to eliminate seniority in staffing decisions for teachers and principals (45 percent)
- Targeting and distributing ESEA funds based on percentage poverty (32 percent): Title I of ESEA was initially created to help federal education funds reach disadvantaged students, primarily those in poverty. The formula by which these funds are distributed is flawed: One provision sends more money for each disadvantaged student in a large school district and less money for each disadvantaged student in a small district, even if the poverty rate in the smaller district is higher than the poverty rate in the larger district. It distributes money based on the *number* of students in poverty, instead of the *percentage*. AASA urges Congress to distribute Title I dollars based on *percentage* of students in poverty, because a 40% poverty is 40% poverty, whether the school has 15 students or 1500.
- Requiring school districts to use common evaluation rubrics for teachers and principals (22 percent)
- Supporting charter schools that are subject to the same accountability measures as regular public schools (16 percent): AASA supports public school choice and charter schools that operate under the governance of local public school boards. There should be a level playing field, including non-discriminatory and unconditional enrollment for all children. The same regulations and accountability should apply to all schools receiving public funding. The manner in which charter schools are financed must be addressed so that their creation does not have an adverse effect on the quality of existing public schools.
- Requiring school districts to base teacher and principal evaluations primarily on quantitative measures of student outcomes (11 percent)

The President's FY11 budget proposal included a significant policy shift toward competitive grants. While the proposed budget represented a 7.5 percent increase in federal funds for education, all of the new dollars are in competitive grants and represent a 65-percent increase in the proportion of federal discretionary education dollars that move through competitive grants. While the federal economy has stabilized, the new Congress is expected to have a close eye on deficit reduction, making federal budget increases harder to come by. In light of these two factors, respondents were asked a sample of questions to illustrate their opinions on federal education funding and the respective roles of both competitive grants and formula programs within federal funding.

School administrators recognize that both competitive and formula funding have a role in helping to fund education while providing opportunity and incentive for innovation and reform. When asked to rate their level of agreement with a handful of statements related to education funding, competitive grants and the interplay between federal dollars and the school budget process, respondents demonstrated a consistency in their opinion that competitive funds have a role—albeit limited—in federal education funding:

- A large majority (85 percent) of respondents disagree/strongly disagree with the statement *Competitive grants are the best way to fund America's public schools—they spur innovation and reform by focusing the spotlight on what works and best practices.*
- Nearly half (41 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants have no place in the funding of public schools.*
- More than half of respondents (51 percent) agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants have a place within the funding of public education, along with continued funding and increased investment in proven formula programs such as Title I and IDEA.*
- A large majority (89 percent) of respondents disagree/strongly disagree with the statement *Competitive grants should compose the majority of federal education funding.*
- Two thirds (66 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants should compose a small portion of federal education funding.*
- A large majority (88 percent) of respondents disagree/strongly disagree with the statement *Increases in federal education funding should be only in competitive grants.*
- More than half (54 percent) of respondents disagree/strongly disagree with the statement *Increases in federal education funding should split between existing formula programs and competitive grants.*
- Almost all (91 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants might unfairly favor states and districts with more capacity to write grant applications.*
- Nearly all (91 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *By the very nature of competitive grants, many states and districts will not be awarded funds, further compounding fiscal stress in states and districts that have significant unmet needs.*
- Three quarters (76 percent) of respondents disagree/strongly disagree with the statement *My district currently has the administrative capacity to complete applications for competitive grants.*
- A large majority (88 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *My district would incur significant time/administrative costs in completing grant applications.*
- More than three-quarters (80 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *My district would need outside resources (grant writers, foundation expertise, etc...) to complete competitive grant applications.*
- Most (90 percent of) respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competing competitive grants applications requires my district to spend time/resources that would otherwise be directed to student instruction/services.*
- A large majority (81 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *My district is required to pass a balanced budget every year.*

- Most (83 percent of) respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Formula funding represents a stable, reliable source of funding around which my district can plan long-term innovation and reform.*
- More than three quarters (77 percent) disagree/strongly disagree with the statement *Competitive grants represent a source of funding around which my district would plan long-term innovation and reform.*
- More than half (56 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants represent a source of funding that, at best, allows my district to budget/plan short-term innovation and reform that lasts the length of the grant.*
- More than three-quarters (88 percent) of respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement *Competitive grants represent budgetary uncertainty; districts do not know if they will receive funds, how much they will receive, or when the funds will be received.*

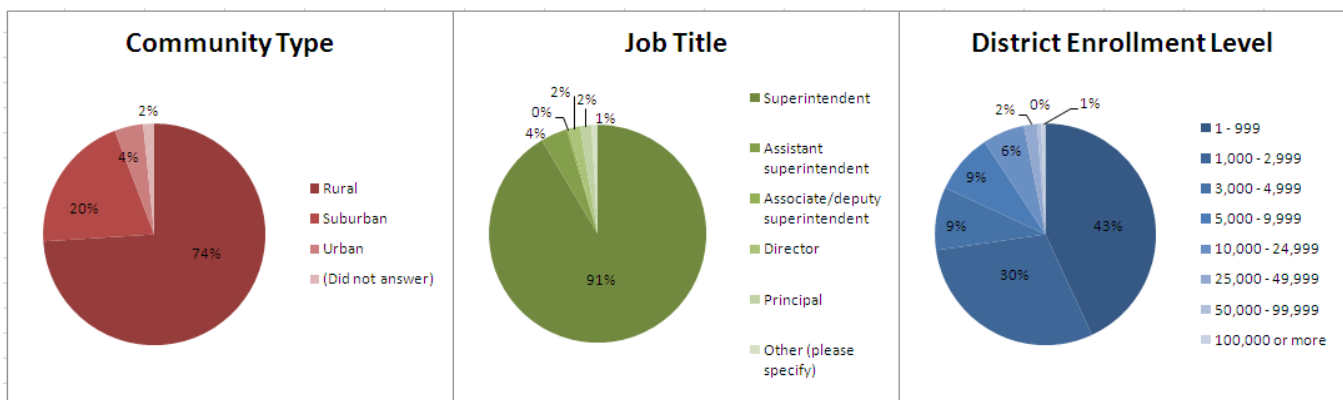
Section V: Methodology & Demographics

Methodology:

The surveyed sample reflects the membership of the American Association of School Administrators and schools not be inferred to represent all public school superintendents. Those responding came from all but six states (Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nevada and North Carolina) and the District of Columbia. While no claim is made that the data reflects a representative sample, the demography reported by those responding to the survey does mirror the distribution of student enrollment in school districts nationwide and reflects the proportion of the number of school districts in their respective state. The data does not suggest favoritism to any one region of the country. No claim is made that the same individuals responded to each of the survey efforts although the population surveyed was with very few exceptions drawn from the same AASA membership listing. The November 2008 study drew 830 responses, the March 2009 study drew 856 responses, the October 2009 study drew 875 responses, the March 2010 survey received 453 responses and, as reflected below, the December 2010 survey received 692 responses. All surveys were distributed electronically using traditional survey software with analysis limited to measures of central tendency. When the number of responses from a particular state totaled 20, the state association was given access to the data for their state.

Demographics:

- Some 692 respondents from 44 states submitted responses to this survey in December 2010.
- Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of respondents described their district as rural, compared to 20 percent suburban and 4 percent urban.
- Almost all (91 percent) of respondents reported their title as Superintendent, compared to 4 percent reporting assistant superintendent, 2 percent reporting director, 2 percent reporting principal, and 1 percent reporting 'other'.
- Enrollment:
 - 81 percent of respondents work in districts enrolling fewer than 5,000 students: 43 percent are from districts enrolling less than 1,000 students; 29 percent are in districts enrolling between 1,000 and 2,999; and 9 percent work in districts enrolling between 3,000 and 4,999.
 - 9 percent are in districts enrolling between 5,000 and 9,999; 6 percent are in districts enrolling between 10,000 and 24,999; and 3.1 percent work in districts enrolling more than 25,000 students.



Section VI: Conclusion

Through ten surveys over the last two years, AASA has documented the continued erosion in revenue for school districts as the recession wears on.

The institution of American public schooling has indeed survived a thousand cuts, demonstrating a capacity to sustain many threats. The persistence of the recession, though, means the scope and number of challenges facing schools are unprecedented and threaten to overwhelm even the resilient public school system. The results of this survey demonstrate that the challenges identified earlier continue to be obstacles to the nation's schools.

This recession is record-setting in breadth, depth, and duration. It is the longest-lasting recession since the Great Depression, and has impacted state and local budgets in previously unprecedented ways. Over the past three fiscal years (2009 through 2011), states closed more than \$430 billion in budget shortfalls. Large fiscal gaps will remain a reality through both FY12 and FY13. More than one-quarter of states already report anticipated budget shortfalls for FY13, a number that is likely to grow, and mean that school districts will continue to feel the impact of this recession into the 2013-14 school year. Education represents a large share of states' general fund budgets. While the national recession is technically over (declared over in July 2009), the reality at the state and local economies have a long, hard road ahead of them on their way to economic recovery. Public education, heavily reliant on state and local funding, will continue to weather the storm.

The endurance of the recession has shifted the response from tightening budgets and implementing moderate changes to implementing increasingly significant changes, including a marked increase in cuts to areas that more directly impact student achievement. By the time school districts are once again operating under pre-recession budget levels, it will mean more than five consecutive years of budget cuts, an unmatched fiscal reality whose impact has yet to be fully realized.

While we see the immediate impact in terms of increasing class sizes and reducing services, there are long-term results that we can't yet pretend to fathom. The continued and increasing budget cuts threaten the capacity of schools to deliver essential services and threaten the gains schools have made in student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap. Considered in total, the economic recession has exacted a heavy toll on schools, communities, families, and learning. Recouping that loss means both replacing tangible items—a relatively easy task—and rebuilding capacity, a task that is difficult at best.

ARRA dollars bumped the federal share of total state budgets from 26.3 percent in FY08 to 34.7 percent in FY10. Looking to FY12 and FY13, states and districts will face the one-two punch of an extremely slow recovery in state revenue and the cessation of federal AARA and EduJobs dollars. (Center for Public Education, 2010; NGA/NASBO) Beyond these fiscal limitations, historical experience and current economic projections indicate that FY12 will be even more trying than either FY10 or FY11. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2010) In the three previous recessions (in the early 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s), state budget problems endured for several years after federal recovery, a pattern expected to repeat itself here. It's a dark picture for school funding, who face a perfect storm of state budget pressures, including lagging state revenues, increasing Medicaid enrollment, underfunded pension obligations, and the cessation of ARRA and EduJobs. (Hess & Downs, 2010; Center for Public Education, 2010)

Looking ahead, beyond the delayed entrance to, and exit from, the recession as detailed in the Abstract, education funding was safeguarded as a priority during initial budget cuts. State funding for education was not on the top of the list of initial cuts when the recession hit, with more states making cuts to non-education funds as budget pressure rose. However, as the recession wore on education funding was cut to help close budget shortfalls. When states do start to regain their budget footing, the protection that education funding enjoyed may further delay new funding, as states put priority on restoring budget cuts to other agencies. (Hess & Downs, 2010)

School administrators remain committed to providing a quality public education, improving student achievement and giving their students the best educational opportunities available. Congress shares an equally ambitious agenda in its education policy priorities, and AASA's members have weighed in with a clear message as to those legislative and policy priorities Congress should focus on as they convene in January 2011. Spelled out in more detail in Section IV, legislative priorities should include full funding of IDEA and ESEA reauthorization. Policy priorities framing Congressional decisions should include driving funds to schools through formulas, not grants; supporting public education and opposing vouchers; and targeting federal education funding to students in need based on percentage poverty.

School districts will operate and open their doors, regardless of fiscal strain. AASA members continue to address the recession with a sense of pragmatism, an approach that has helped them survive numerous cuts over the past two years and will help them weather the budget hardships coming their way over the next two to three years.

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