



**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

Report of Findings

A Cliff Hanger:

**How America's Public Schools Continue to Feel
the Impact of the Economic Downturn**

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Abstract

This study is the seventh 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 buy-outs 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 (www.aasa.org/research.aspx) include:

- “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 AASA economic impact studies are unique in their ability to provide benchmark trend data around the impact of the economic downturn on America’s public schools. The studies demonstrate that school districts in every part of the country are subject to the realities of the economic downturn 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

“A Cliff Hanger: How America’s Public Schools Continue to Feel the Impact of the Economic Downturn” is based on a survey of school administrators conducted in March 2010. A total of 453 school administrators from 45 states completed the survey. Many of the questions in this survey are repeated from the six previous surveys and add to AASA’s ability to collect and analyze long-term data. New to this survey is a more in-depth look at how school administrators perceive competitive grants and the role of competitive grants within federal education funding.

Additionally, the members of AASA’s Executive Committee and Governing Board completed an accompanying survey related to school personnel benefits. AASA had heard anecdotal information that school districts were beginning to adjust either health care benefits and/or pension contributions as a result of the economic downturn. While the larger survey of school administrators includes two items related to personnel benefits, the additional survey of AASA’s elected leaders takes a more in-depth look at an emerging trend.

Author’s Note: This study includes data on the impact of the economic downturn for the 2010-11 school year. While districts are far along in their budget process for the 2010-11 school year, please keep in mind that these numbers are subject to change as final budgets are passed and adopted.

Three themes emerge from this survey:

- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act played a vital and important role in helping stave off even more severe budget cuts to education funding.
- The cessation of ARRA dollars, paired with the continued budget strains at the state and local levels and the proposed FY11 federal budget, represent a one-two punch to education funding that will further insulate schools from economic recovery, and will likely translate into more budget cuts, more job cuts, and fewer resources for programs and personnel.
- While school administrators understand and recognize the role of competitive grants in education, they raise distinct concerns, including:
 - competitive grants represent budget instability and are unlikely to be considered for the very long-term innovation and reform the Obama Administration is hoping to spur;
 - the application process for competitive grants uses a school's administrative and financial resources to pursue a funding stream that may or may not come to fruition; and
 - financially strapped school districts across the nation do not have the capacity to complete a competitive grant.

These results are magnified and amplified in small, rural districts.

Across the board, budget cuts are noticeably more significant for the 2010-11 school year than they were for the 2008-09 or 2009-10 school years. Budget cuts to state and local revenues look to be more severe between the 2009-10/2010-11 school years. Forty-three percent of respondents reported budget cuts of 10 percent or less, and 21 percent reported cuts of 11 to 25 percent, between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. Illustrating more severe cuts between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school year, nearly half (48 percent) of respondents reported budget cuts of 10 percent or less and 30 percent reported budget cuts between 11 and 25 percent. On a positive note, education funding continues to hold a somewhat protected position when it comes to statewide budget cuts. One third (34 percent) of respondents report that cuts to education were proportional to the cuts to other agencies and departments.

The data from the survey of administrators indicate that 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. In this economic climate, personnel reductions were inevitable and will be more severe in the 2010-11 school year.

- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of respondents cut positions in 2009-10, and 90 percent anticipate having to do so in 2010-11.
- Regardless of the much needed ARRA dollars, which were used to save an average of 20 positions per school, school districts report eliminating, on average, 29 positions over the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years.
- One-third (34 percent) of respondents are considering personnel furloughs in 2010-11, up from 12 percent who implemented furloughs in 2009-10 and 4 percent who implemented furloughs in 2008-09.
- Almost two-thirds (60 percent) of respondents are considering personnel layoffs for 2010-11, up from 33 percent in 2009-10 and 12 percent in 2008-09.
- The percentage of respondents reducing benefits packages has skyrocketed: 46 percent of respondents will reduce health-care benefits in 2010-11, compared to 12 percent in 2009-10 and 5 percent in 2008-09. Similarly, 20 percent of respondents will reduce pension contributions in 2010-11, compared to 3 percent in 2009-10 and 0.7 percent in 2008-09.

The anticipated and reported increasing intensity of budget cuts for the 2010-11 school year reaches beyond personnel decisions.

- Students will soon be more crowded in their classrooms: While only 9 percent of respondents increased class size in the 2008-09 school year, that number nearly tripled to 26 percent in 2009-10 and then more than doubled to 62 percent for 2010-11.
- After holding steady at two percent for both 2008-09 and 2009-10, the percentage of respondents considering reducing operations to a four-day school week (during the school year) mushroomed to 13 percent in 2010-11.
- More than one-third (34 percent) of respondents are considering eliminating summer school for the 2010-11 school year, a rate that has roughly doubled each year, from 8 percent in 2008-09 to 14 percent in 2009-10.
- Students will face limited bus transportation routes and availability: the percentage of districts implementing transportation cuts grew from 10 percent in 2008-09 and 20 percent in 2009-10 to 38 percent in 2010-11. On a related note, the percentage of districts finding new transportation efficiencies also ballooned, from 9 percent in 2008-09 and 19 percent in 2009-10 to 39 percent in 2010-11.
- More than half (52 percent) of respondents will cut extracurricular activities in 2010-11, a significant growth over 2009-10 (18 percent) and 2008-09 (8 percent) levels.

When asked how ARRA dollars impacted their state and local revenues, 87 percent reported that ARRA dollars did not represent a funding increase. More specifically, only 10 percent of respondents reported that ARRA dollars represented any increase above state and local funding levels. The data continues to illustrate a “shell game” in which state budgets were cut only after it was known that ARRA included money for education. AASA first identified the shell game in the August 2009 survey.

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 consistency in their opinion that competitive funds have a role—albeit limited—in federal education funding. Recognizing that competitive grants have some role in federal education funding, two thirds of respondents (66 percent) agreed/strongly agreed 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.”* Nearly half (46 percent) of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement: *“Competitive grants have no place in the funding of public schools.”*

- Three quarters (77 percent) agreed/strongly agreed with the statement *“Competitive grants should compose a small portion of federal education funding.”*
- Nearly all (92 percent) of respondents agreed/strongly agreed 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.”*
- The proposed funding level for education funding in President Obama’s FY11 budget puts every new, additional dollar in competitive grants, something respondents do not support: 89 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement *“Increases in federal education funding should be only in competitive grants”*

- When it comes to budgeting and planning, three quarters (73 percent) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement *“Competitive grants represent a source of funding around which my district would plan long-term innovation and reform.”*
- Two-thirds (65 percent) of respondents agreed/strongly agreed 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.”* Furthermore, 90 percent agreed/strongly agreed that *“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.”*

Report of Findings

Introduction

Almost 18 months have passed since AASA released the first survey in its economic impact series, examining how the economic downturn has affected America's public schools. *Cliff Hanger*, the seventh in the series, puts AASA in a unique position, able to benchmark trend data and glean insights as to how the initial impact of the economic downturn differs from how schools are being affected now. The economic welfare of school districts continues to be a lagging indicator. While the federal economy has begun to stabilize and rebound, the recovery at the state and local levels is still estimated to be up to a year or more away. (NCSL)

Just as schools felt a diluted impact from the initial economic downturn, their recovery appears to be just as delayed, if not more so. While school districts were not immune to the economic downturn, they were somewhat insulated from the initial impact, given that districts were operating under school budgets adopted in more stable economic times. For example, AASA's November 2008 and March 2009 survey data indicated that school districts felt the onset of the recession immediately, but they were somewhat buffered. When the economic downturn picked up in 2008, districts were operating on already-adopted budgets. They made relatively mild cuts and changes in the 2008-09 school year. It is the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school year budget cuts that are more illustrative of the full impact of the economic downturn.

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 most likely persist even 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.

As you parse through the findings of this survey, several themes emerge. First, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act played a vital and important role in helping stave off even more severe budget cuts to education funding. States and districts were readily able to use the federal dollars—IDEA, Title I and State Fiscal Stabilization Fund dollars, among others—to save jobs, prevent program cuts and help maintain overall funding levels. While there remains concern and frustration that some ARRA dollars were used to supplant—not supplement—state contributions to education funding, the ARRA dollars were much needed and appreciated at the state and local levels.

That said, it brings us to the second theme: the cessation of ARRA dollars, paired with the continued budget strains at the state and local levels and the proposed FY11 federal budget, represents a one-two punch to education funding that will further insulate schools from economic recovery, and will likely translate into more budget cuts, more job cuts, and fewer resources for programs and personnel. The large majority of ARRA dollars will be spent by the middle of the 2010-11 school year, the same school year during which state budgets are expected to reach their low point. The budget holes being filled by ARRA dollars will likely remain, given that state and local economies haven't recovered, and school districts will have to shift whatever flexible funds they have remaining in their already lean budgets. These holes will be further compounded by proposed level funding of both IDEA and Title I in the FY11 federal budget (2011-12 school year), programs for which increased demand is hard to meet without increased funding.

The final theme has less to do with the continued economic downturn and is more closely related to how school superintendents perceive the role of competitive grants and formula programs within education funding and budgets. The proposed FY11 budget and closely related Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization Blueprint include a significant increase in the proportion of discretionary education dollars distributed through competition programs, a significant policy decision to shift dollars away from long-time formula grant programs.

School administrators understand and recognize the role of competitive grants in education. They use a competitive application process when they hire personnel. They know that competition can foster a level of innovation or reform that might be harder to attain through formula funds alone. That said, AASA is concerned with a perceived over-reliance on competitive grants within federal education funding. If education is the civil rights issues of this generation, and states and districts will now have to compete for a significantly larger portion of their education funding, does that mean students are to compete for their civil rights?

While recognizing that competitive grants have a role in federal education funding, school administrators responding to this survey delivered two clear messages. First, competitive grants represent budget instability and are unlikely to be considered for the very long-term innovation and reform the Obama Administration is hoping to spur. Second, even in the best of economic times, the application process for competitive grants uses a school's administrative and financial resources to pursue a funding stream that may or may not come to fruition. These resources would otherwise be available for school personnel and programs that more directly impact student instruction and achievement. These are not the best of economic times, and financially strapped school districts across the nation were clear in reporting that they do not have the capacity to complete a competitive grant, and many would have to use resources to hire outside consultants. These results are magnified and amplified in small, rural districts.

Author's Note: This study includes data on the impact of the economic downturn for the 2010-11 school year. While districts are far along in their budget process for the 2010-11 school year, please keep in mind that these numbers are subject to change as final budgets are passed and adopted. When reporting results for the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school year, this survey reflects implemented changes. Data for the 2010-11 school year, while reported as accurately as possible at the time of this survey, are still subject to change and/or modification.

Part I: Snapshot of the School Economic Climate

As mentioned above, school districts' economic situation does not mimic the stability and recovery beginning to take hold nationwide. The latest survey findings demonstrate that, across the board, school budget cuts are noticeably more significant for 2010-11 than they were in 2008-09 or 2009-10. Most school districts operate with precious little reserve to buffer them from an economic downturn, resulting in an almost immediate call-to-action when a downturn occurs. In previous surveys, AASA has documented the measures districts have taken to cope with revenue shortfalls. This study documents the continued erosion of fiscal resources managed by school districts. While districts have taken incremental steps in an effort to minimize the impact of the cuts, the compounded effect of these cutbacks cannot be overemphasized.

Findings:

- More than four-fifths (83 percent) of respondents describe their districts' current (March 2010) economic situation as inadequately funded, compared to 14 percent reporting adequate funding and 2 percent reporting a surplus. This is up from 76 percent as reported in October 2009.
- Two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) report a cut in state and local revenues between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years, while 14 percent reported an increase to state and local revenues over the same time frame.
- A strong majority (80 percent) report a cut to state and local revenues between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years, and a much smaller amount (6 percent) report an increase. This is down from 14 percent reporting an increase between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years.
- Budget cuts to state and local revenues look to be more severe between the 2009-10/2010-11 school years. Forty-three percent of respondents reported budget cuts of 10 percent or less, and 21 percent reported cuts of 11 to 25 percent, between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. Illustrating more severe cuts between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school year, nearly half (48 percent) of respondents reported budget cuts of 10 percent or less and 30 percent reported budget cuts between 11 and 25 percent.
- While 18 percent of respondents report their state and local revenues held steady between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years due to American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars, only half of this group (9 percent) report that ARRA funds staved off state/local funding cuts between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years.
- Education funding continues to hold a somewhat protected position when it comes to statewide budget cuts. One third (34 percent) of respondents report that cuts to education were proportional to the cuts to other agencies and departments. Slightly less (29 percent) report that education funding was protected and that cuts to education were less severe than cuts to other departments/agencies. One-quarter (25 percent) of respondents report that cuts to education were more severe than cuts to other agencies/departments.
- More than half (58 percent) of respondents report that while their state equalization formula has remained the same, state funding has fallen over the last two years. This compares to 18 percent reporting that the formula was changed through legislative statute and 10 percent reporting that the formula and funding levels have remain unchanged.

Administrators continue to report that the economic downturn has negatively impacted their schools, and that the impact of budget cuts is not felt by students alone. For many communities across the nation, schools are a major employer and a reliable source of revenue. Cost-saving measures have a direct impact on the community, as well. When schools curtail spending through measures such as reducing payroll, conserving energy use, reducing fuel consumption, deferring maintenance and delaying purchases, the local community is the first to share the effects. Additionally, the continued economic downturn increasingly threatens gains in student achievement, progress in narrowing the achievement gap and the capacity of schools to deliver essential services.

Findings:

Administrators were asked how their districts' current economic situation has affected schools' ability to address certain indicators. Asked *to rate the indicators as "not at all," "somewhat," or "a great deal"*, responders reported that the economic downturn has negatively affected their schools' capacity to:

- Maintain employment levels (administrative workforce): 74 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, holding steady from the October 2009 study.
- Maintain employment levels (teacher workforce): 85 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 78 percent in October 2009.
- Maintain employment levels (support staff workers): 86 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 83 percent in October 2009.
- Provide professional development for administrators: 79 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up slightly from 77 percent in October 2009.
- Provide professional development for teachers: 74 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 71 percent in October 2009.
- Recruit/retain qualified staff: 70 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, compared to 56 percent in October 2009.
- Improve student achievement: 79 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 66 percent reported in October 2009.
- Close achievement gaps: 78 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 67 percent reported in October 2009.
- Maintain focus on student learning/instructional improvement: 78 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 62 percent in October 2009.
- Address the learning needs of all students, including the disabled: 76 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 61 percent reported in October 2009.
- Meet or exceed state and federal performance assessment levels: 79 percent responded somewhat/a great deal, up from 66 percent reported in October 2009.

Feeling the Impact

One of the most obvious trends to emerge from this series of surveys is that school administrators across the nation remain committed to providing the best educational opportunities they can with their available resources: they hire the best staff, recruit the best support staff, and provide the best instructional materials they can. The earliest survey (November 2008) showed that the first place school administrators looked to make budget cuts were in those areas that do not directly impact student achievement: altering thermostats, eliminating non-essential travel and reducing consumable supplies. Unfortunately, there are a limited amount of cuts that can be made to any one area, and it was an inevitable reality that cuts would be coming to those areas and items that more directly impact student achievement, including increasing class size and cutting teaching and administrative staff.

Illustrating that economic recovery at the state and local levels lags federal recovery by a year or more, respondents completed the following set of questions to indicate what budget cuts and choices they have made for the 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. The message is clear: The economic downturn continues to impact schools. The ARRA funds, the large majority of which will be completely expended by the middle of the 2010-11 school year, were a greatly needed resource. Unfortunately, the data from this set of questions indicates that the ARRA funding was essentially a stop-gap measure, a band-aid to deep economic cuts that is about to be ripped off. Faced with the cessation of ARRA funds, school districts are reporting a significant increase in the budgetary cuts they will be making for the 2010-11 school year.

Note: Data for 2008-09 and 2009-10 reflect enacted budget cuts. Data for 2010-11 reflect anticipated cuts. While respondents are far along in their budget process for the 2010-11 school year and have a firm recognition of what the final budget cuts will look like, many budgets had yet to be finalized/adopted as this survey was completed.

Findings:

Personnel-Related Budget Cuts: As reported in the October 2009 survey, 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.

- One-third (34 percent) of respondents are considering personnel furloughs in 2010-11, up from 12 percent who implemented furloughs in 2009-10 and 4 percent who implemented furloughs in 2008-09.
- Almost two-thirds (60 percent) of respondents are considering personnel lay-offs for 2010-11, up from 33 percent in 2009-10 and 12 percent in 2008-09.
- More than half (52 percent) of respondents are freezing outside professional service contracts in 2010-11, more than double the 2009-10 level (24 percent) and seven times the 2008-09 level (7 percent).
- Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of respondents anticipate reducing non-teaching professional support personnel in 2010-11, up from 39 percent in 2009-10 and 11 percent in 2008-09.
- More than half (54 percent) of respondents are reducing outside staff development consultants for the 2010-11 school year, up from 34 percent in 2009-10 and 10 percent in 2008-09.
- Almost two-thirds (61 percent) of respondents are reducing staff-level (non-instructional) hiring in 2010-11, up from 40 percent in 2009-10 and 12 percent in 2008-09.
- The percentage of respondents reducing benefits packages has skyrocketed: 46 percent of respondents will reduce health care benefits in 2010-11, compared to 12 percent in 2009-10 and 5 percent in 2008-09. Similarly, 20 percent of respondents will reduce pension contributions in 2010-11, compared to 3 percent in 2009-10 and 0.7 percent in 2008-09.

Buildings and Facilities Related Budget 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.

- The percentage of respondents deferring maintenance continues to rise: from 18 percent in 2008-09 and 36 percent in 2009-10 to more than half (55 percent) in 2010-11.
- The percentage of districts altering thermostats in 2010-11 (43 percent) is down slightly from 2009-10 (48 percent) but up from 2008-09 levels (24 percent).
- More and more districts are delaying capital debt (bond) programs: 21 percent will delay in 2010-11, up from 14 percent in 2009-10 and 7 percent in 2008-09.
- After holding steady for the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years (at roughly five percent), the percentage of districts outsourcing custodial/maintenance work quadrupled to 20 percent in 2010-11. On a related note, the percentage of districts reducing overall custodial services also ballooned, from 11 percent in 2008-09 and 25 percent in 2009-10 to 46 percent in 2010-11.

Curriculum Related Budget 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.

- Students will soon be more crowded in their classrooms: While only 9 percent of respondents increased class size in the 2008-09 school year, that number tripled to 26 percent in 2009-10 and then more than doubled to 62 percent for 2010-11.
- More instructional improvement strategies are being delayed or eliminated: Half (50 percent) of respondents will make this cut in 2010-11, up from 22 percent in 2009-10 and 9 percent in 2008-09.
- Showing almost identical growth, the percentage of respondents reducing non-academic programs such as after-school and Saturday enrichment grew from 8 percent in 2008-09 to 24 percent in 2009-10 and 50 percent in 2010-11.
- The percentage of districts reducing academic programs (such as academic interventions and Saturday classes) continues to grow, from 5 percent in 2008-09 to 20 percent in 2009-10 and 46 percent in 2010-11.
- More schools are strengthening the identification and screening of non-resident students, growing from 8 percent in 2008-09 and 14 percent 2009-10 to 21 percent in 2010-11.
- A significantly larger percentage of schools are reducing elective courses not required for graduation. While only 6 percent reported this action in 2008-09, 16 percent and 51 percent report these cuts in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years, respectively.
- Schools continue to delay textbook purchases. The number of respondents reporting this cut tripled from 14 percent in 2008-09 to 32 percent in 2009-10 before reaching more than half (52 percent) in 2010-11.
- High-cost course offerings are also feeling the pinch. The percentage of school districts making this cut ballooned from 4 percent in 2008-09 and 12 percent in 2009-10 to 39 percent in 2010-11.

- The percentage of districts reducing instructional materials more than quadrupled from 13 percent in 2008-09 to 53 percent in 2010-11.
- Schools continue to eliminate field trips: While only 11 percent reported this cut in 2008-09, this number grew to 24 percent and then 51 percent in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years, respectively.

Operations Related Budget 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.

- More than one-quarter (27 percent) of respondents are reducing operations to a four-day work week during the summer for 2010-11, up from a relatively stable 12 and 14 percent in 2008-09 and 2009-10.
- After holding steady at two percent for both 2008-09 and 2009-10, the percentage of respondents considering reducing operations to a four-day school week (during the school year) mushroomed to 13 percent in 2010-11.
- More than one-third (34 percent) of respondents are considering eliminating summer school for the 2010-11 school year, a rate that has roughly doubled each year, from 8 percent in 2008-09 to 14 percent in 2009-10.
- Students will face limited bus transportation routes and availability: the percentage of districts implementing transportation cuts grew from 10 percent in 2008-09 and 20 percent in 2009-10 to 38 percent in 2010-11. On a related note, the percentage of districts finding new transportation efficiencies also ballooned, from 9 percent in 2008-09 and 19 percent in 2009-10 to 39 percent in 2010-11.
- More than half (52 percent) of respondents will cut extracurricular activities in 2010-11, a significant growth over 2009-10 (18 percent) and 2008-09 (8 percent) levels.
- Schools are reducing their consumable supplies: this cut was included in 18 percent of respondents' 2008-09 budgets and grew to 37 percent and 58 percent in 2009-10 and 2010-11, respectively.
- Technology purchases are increasingly being delayed. While 13 percent made delays in 2008-09, 29 percent and 57 percent report delays in 2009-10 and 2010-11, respectively.
- Non-essential travel continues to be cut: more than half (57 percent) report this cut for 2010-11, up from 20 percent in 2008-09 and 45 percent in 2009-10.
- Bulk purchasing co-ops remain a popular option. Roughly 35 percent of respondents report this option for 2008-09 and 2009-10, and even more (46 percent) report exercising the option for 2010-11.
- Collaborative planning time within the school day is being pushed to the side: While only five percent of respondents made this cut in 2008-09, the percentage rose to 11 percent in 2009-10 and 30 percent in 2010-11.

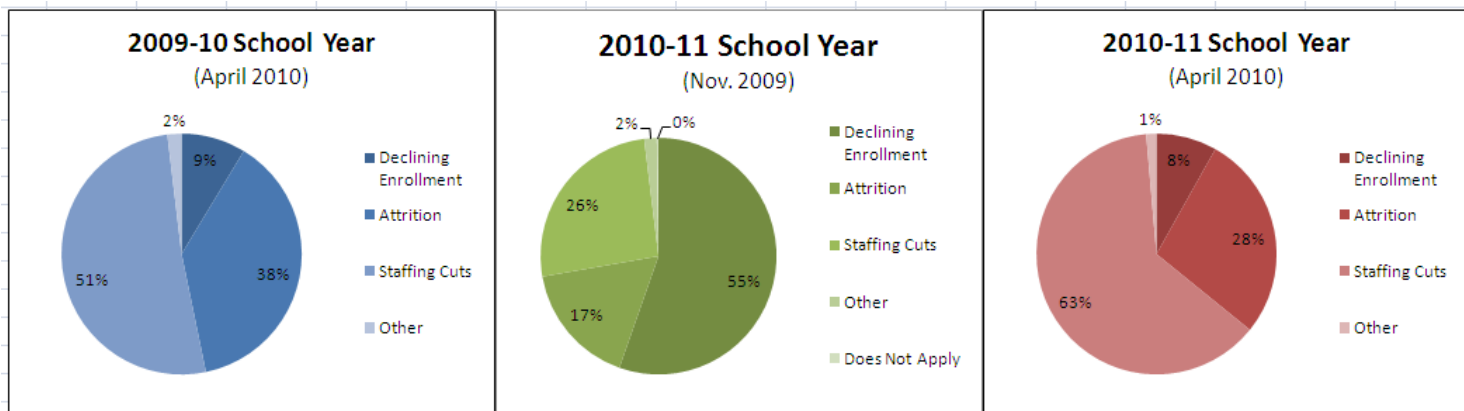
Part II: The Economic Downturn and School Employment

As mentioned above, districts' stopgap efforts to avoid reductions in force were short-lived. These cuts compound the challenges superintendents face in returning their districts to previous levels of operation. When considered in total, the economic downturn has exacted a heavy toll on communities, families and learning. Recouping that loss may mean both replacing tangible items — a relatively easy task — and rebuilding capacity, a task that is difficult at best.

Findings:

- The average number of staffing positions (administrative/teaching/support) in a respondent's school district is 692.
- Respondents report being able to save an average of 20 positions per district with ARRA dollars.
- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of respondents cut positions in 2009-10, and 90 percent anticipate having to do so in 2010-11.
- Regardless of the much needed and used ARRA dollars, each school district eliminated, on average, 29 positions over the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years.
- While declining enrollment accounted for more than half of 2010-11 position eliminations in the October 2009 survey, the latest data shows a significant reversal and illustrates the depth of the economic downturn, with direct staff cuts now accounting for almost two-thirds (63 percent) of job eliminations in the 2010-11 school year. *See Figure 1.*

Figure 1: Why Are Jobs Being Cut?



- School districts are cutting all types of jobs, from instructional teaching positions and librarians to nurses and support staff. Note that job cuts are increasingly across the board and across the school. The percentage of districts laying off core subject teachers grew from 37 percent in 2009-10 to 61 percent in 2010-11. Similarly, the percentage of respondents eliminating special education teachers more than doubled, from 10 percent to 23 percent over the same two years. *See Table 1 (next page).*

| Table 1: What Jobs Are Being Cut? | 2009-10 | 2010-11 |
|--|---------|---------|
| Core subject classroom teachers | 37% | 61% |
| Art/music/physical education teachers | 13% | 33% |
| Foreign language teachers | 7% | 19% |
| Special education teachers | 10% | 23% |
| Teacher aides/assistants | 36% | 59% |
| School secretaries | 16% | 25% |
| School librarians | 10% | 19% |
| School nurses | 4% | 8% |
| Maintenance/cafeteria/transportation staff | 25% | 41% |
| Central office/administration | 23% | 37% |
| Other | 10% | 24% |

Part III: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Economic Downturn

Funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 include roughly \$100 billion for America's public schools, the largest one-time infusion of funds into schools in history. The new data for this report clearly illustrates that ARRA provided welcome, yet temporary, relief. Earlier AASA reports identified the supplanting of state-operating revenue with ARRA funds and articulated that such activity only delays the inevitable and provides a temporary solution to a lingering problem: unstable or inadequate state and local budgets. The latest information illustrates that very point, and highlights that balancing state budgets using ARRA funds is not a solution. The sobering realities reported below present a challenge that can be neither overstated nor ignored, especially as school districts prepare to face the cessation of ARRA funds. If anything, the data in this section call great attention to the fact that the economic downturn and resulting budgetary cuts, while staved off with an ARRA funding band-aid, persist and the ARRA band-aid is about to be removed from cuts that aren't fully healed.

Findings:

- When asked how ARRA dollars impacted changes in state/local revenues:
 - Forty-one percent of respondents reported *"My district had a net loss before ARRA. ARRA dollars filled some, but not all, of the budget holes."* This is up slightly from 39 percent in October 2009.
 - Almost one-third (32 percent) reported *"My district had a net loss before ARRA. In light of ARRA, state leaders reassessed the budget situation and further cut state revenues. ARRA dollars were used to offset these cuts."* This is up from October 2009 levels (28 percent).
 - Eight percent reported *"My district had a net loss before ARRA. ARRA filled all of the budget holes and state and local revenues held steady as a result."* This is down from 10 percent as reported in October 2009.
 - The percentage of districts responding *"My district had neither a net loss nor a net gain before ARRA, and the ARRA dollars were all in addition to state and local revenues"* fell slightly, from nine percent in October 2009 to eight percent.
 - Two percent of districts reported *"My district had a net gain before ARRA, and the ARRA dollars further increased the net gain."* This is down from 4 percent, as reported in October 2009.
 - Six percent of districts reported *"My district had a net gain before ARRA. In light of ARRA, state leaders reassessed the budget situation, cutting our state revenues and using ARRA dollars to offset the cuts."* This holds steady from October 2009 data.

- Further echoing the August 2009 study, AASA members have reported how difficult it can be to implement innovation and reform when funding levels are cut or flat-lined and the stimulus dollars are simply filling budget holes. When asked how their districts are using ARRA funds to bring about education innovation and reform:
 - More than half (53 percent) report *"This does not apply. The ARRA funds simply fill budget cuts and do not represent enough funding for new innovations/reform."* This is up from 47 percent in October 2009 and 31 percent in August 2009.

- Thirty percent reported *“The ARRA funds represented a slight increase in funding levels, with much of the ARRA money simply filling budget cuts. Innovation/reform from the ARRA funds was limited,”* up from 26 percent in October 2009.
- Twelve percent reported *“Most of the ARRA funds represented an increased funding level; very little was needed to fill budget cuts. As such, we were able to implement innovations/reform,”* up slightly from October 2009 levels (11 percent), but still below August 2009 levels (16 percent).
- Three percent reported *“The full amount of our district’s ARRA funds were an increase in funding. We had no budget holes and, as a result, were able to direct all of the ARRA funds toward innovation and reform,”* down from both the October (6 percent) and August (5 percent) 2009 levels.

Part IV: Looking Forward

The last ARRA dollars will be spent in the middle of the 2010-11 school year. President Obama's proposed FY11 budget (school year 2011-12) proposes level funding IDEA and Title I. While the proposed budget represents 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. In this context, 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 grants and formula funding have a role in helping to fund education while providing opportunity and incentive for innovation and reform. When asked to select the statement that most closely represented their personal opinion, most reported an opinion accepting of both funding types:

Findings:

- One percent of respondents selected *“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.”*
- Six percent reported *“Competitive grants have no place in the funding of public schools.”*
- 16 percent reported *“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.”*

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 consistency in their opinion that competitive funds have a role—albeit limited—in federal education funding:

- The large majority of respondents (81 percent) disagreed/strongly disagreed 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.”*
- Recognizing that competitive grants have some role in federal education funding, two thirds of respondents (66 percent) agreed/strongly agreed 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”* and nearly half (46 percent) of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement: *“Competitive grants have no place in the funding of public schools.”*
- Respondents are strongly opposed to competitive grants having a significant role in education funding: 87 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement *“Competitive grants should compose the majority of federal education funding.”* Stated another way, respondents believe competitive grants should have a limited role in federal education funding: three quarters (77 percent) agreed/strongly agreed with the statement *“Competitive grants should compose a small portion of federal education funding.”*

- The proposed funding level for education funding in the FY11 budget puts every new, additional dollar in competitive grants, something respondents do not support: 89 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement *“Increases in federal education funding should be only in competitive grants.”*
- More than one-third of respondents (37 percent) agreed/strongly agreed that *“Increases in federal education funding should split between existing formula programs and competitive grants,”* a statement that almost half (48 percent) of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with.
- Respondents were nearly unanimous in their belief that competitive grants favor some districts over others: 91 percent of respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement *“Competitive grants might unfairly favor states and districts with more capacity to write grant applications.”*
- Nearly all respondents (92 percent) agreed/strongly agreed 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.”*
- Respondents report they will be hard pressed to complete applications for competitive grants: 74 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement *“My district currently has the administrative capacity to complete applications for competitive grants.”* Similarly, 87 percent agreed/strongly agreed that *“My district would incur significant time/administrative costs in completing grant applications.”*
 - Further illustrating this point, 78 percent agreed/strongly agreed that *“My district would need outside resources (grant writers, foundation expertise, etc...) to complete competitive grant applications.”* and 90 percent report *“Completing competitive grants applications requires my district to spend time/resources that would otherwise be directed to student instruction/services.”*
- Many school districts have to pass a balanced budget every year, which has implications for planning and spending: 82 percent agreed/strongly agreed with the statement *“My district is required to pass a balanced budget every year.”*
- When it comes to budgeting and planning, three quarters (75 percent) of respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement *“Formula funding represents a stable, reliable source of funding around which my district can plan long-term innovation and reform.”* Conversely, three quarters (73 percent) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement *“Competitive grants represent a source of funding around which my district would plan long-term innovation and reform.”*
- Competitive grants are incorporated and planned for in a manner different from that of formula dollars, which has implications for long-term innovation and planning: 65 percent of respondents agreed/strongly agreed 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.”* Furthermore, 90 percent agreed/strongly agreed that *“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.”*

Part V: Methodology & Demographics

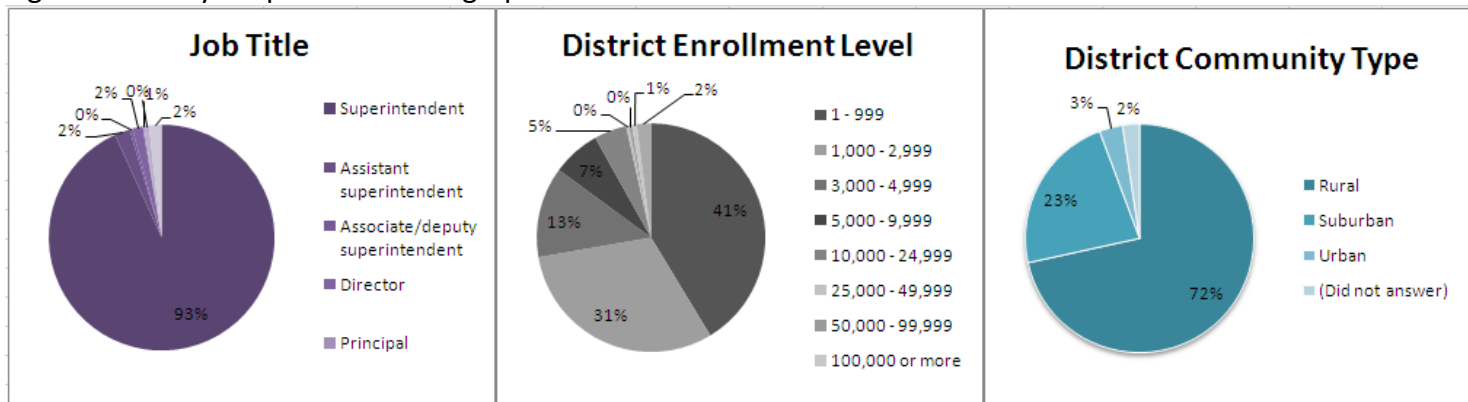
Methodology:

The sample surveyed reflects the membership of the American Association of School Administrators and should not be inferred to represent all public school superintendents. Those responding to the survey came from all but five states (Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Mexico) 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. No state is disproportionately overrepresented, nor does the data 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 and, as reflected below, the March 2010 survey received 453 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 453 administrators from 45 states submitted responses to this survey.
- A large majority of respondents (93 percent) listed their title as superintendent. Two percent listed assistant superintendent or director.
- Almost three quarters (72 percent) of respondents work in districts enrolling less than 3,000 students and 41 percent are in districts with fewer than 1,000 students.
- Less than one quarter (23 percent) of respondents describe their community type as “suburban,” and 72 percent reported “rural.”

Figure 2: Survey Respondent Demographics



Part VI: Conclusion

As AASA has studied the impact of the economic downturn on schools over the past year and a half, a number of policy threats and implications have become apparent. While the institution of public schooling has demonstrated a capacity to sustain many threats, the scope and number of challenges presented by recent developments are unprecedented and threaten to overwhelm even the resilient public school system. Many of the challenges were identified in earlier surveys and continue to be obstacles to America's public schools.

This recession is unprecedented in its duration. The longest recession since the Great Depression, prior to this one, was 16 months over 1981 and 1982. To date, this recession has already lasted more than 24 months, and legislative fiscal officers project the recession will persist well into the second quarter of FY11. Almost all states (except Montana and North Dakota) were reporting projected budget shortfalls for FY10, and the total for budget shortfalls at the state level is \$194 billion in 2010 and an estimated \$180 billion in FY11 and \$120 billion in FY12. Collectively, these statistics illustrate that 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.

Education represents a large share of states' general fund budgets. With state deficits expected to total nearly \$500 billion over FY2010-FY2011, it will be very difficult for states to avoid damaging cuts to education, cuts that will likely deepen as the recession continues. While the \$100 billion included for education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will help states backfill some of their budget cuts, it is clear that ARRA will not enable states and schools to return to the programmatic and personnel capacities they had before the recession. The 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. Schools and students faced the stark reality of fewer academic instructors, support staff and student services staff as they returned to school for the 2009-10 school year. When considered in total, the economic downturn has exacted a heavy toll on communities, families and learning. Recouping that loss may mean both replacing tangible items — a relatively easy task — and rebuilding capacity, a task that is difficult at best.

With full economic recovery still yet to cross the horizon, education leaders and policymakers at the state and local levels are well aware of the common lag that exists between a rebound at the federal level and a rebound at the state and local levels. Put more succinctly, state and local leaders recognize that their local situation will likely continue to worsen, even though the national economy already shows signs of improvement. This awareness has direct implications to the policy and budget decisions school administrators make moving forward. AASA members continue to address the economic downturn with a sense of pragmatism. The persistence of the downturn 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.

One of the engines to economic recovery is schooling. A strong system of schools fuels the workforce development and economic diversity essential to a recovering economy. Reducing investment in schools when capacity is needed to sustain recovery only prolongs the economic downturn. Therefore, it is critical that Congress and the U.S. Department of Education work to ensure schools have the resources they need to fuel economic recovery and growth, along with the flexibility to make the dollars go as far as possible.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Part I: Snapshot of School Economic Climate

How would you describe your district’s current economic situation?

- Inadequately funded
- Adequately funded
- Surplus

Did your district experience a net (2008-09 school year to 2009-10 school year) change in your state and local revenues? Yes, an increase / No, level funding/ Yes, a cut

At this point, will your district experience a change in state and local revenues between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years? Yes, an increase / No, level funding/ Yes, a cut

How significant were the changes to state and local revenues between the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years? 2009-10/2010-11 school years?

- Does not apply. Our state/local revenues grew on their own, without support from ARRA funds.
- Does not apply. Our state/local revenues grew, due to support from ARRA funds.
- Does not apply. Our state/local revenues held steady, without support from ARRA funds.
- Does not apply. Our state/local revenues held steady, due to support from ARRA funds.
- Cut by 10 % or less
- Cut between 11 and 25%
- Cut between 26 and 40%
- Cut between 41 and 55%
- Cut more than 55%

What, if any, changes has your state equalization formula experienced in the past two years?

- The formula has stayed the same, though state funding has fallen.
- The formula has stayed the same and funding has been level.
- The formula has stayed the same and funding has increased.
- The formula was changed through legislative statute.
- The formula was changed through court decision.

Impact on School Community, Families, and Learning: To what extent has your district’s current economic situation affected your schools’ capacity to:

| | Not at All | Somewhat | A Great Deal |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Maintain employment levels (administrative workforce)? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maintain employment levels (teacher workforce)? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maintain employment levels (support staff workforce)? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provide professional development for administrators? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provide professional development for teachers? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Recruit/retain qualified staff? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Improve student achievement? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Close achievement gaps? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maintain focus on student learning/instructional improvement? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Address the learning needs of all students, including disabled? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Meet or exceed state and federal performance assessment levels? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Feeling the Impact: Which of the following actions has your district considered in the budgets for the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 school years as a result of the economic downturn?

| | Implemented for 2008-09 School Year | Implemented for 2009-10 School Year | Considering for 2010-11 School Year | Never Considered |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| PERSONNEL RELATED | | | | |
| Personnel: Furloughing of personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel: Laying-off personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel: Freezing outside professional service contracts | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel: Reducing non-teaching professional support personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel: Reducing outside staff development consultants | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel: Reducing staff-level (non-instructional) hiring | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel: Reducing benefits package (health care) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personnel: Reducing benefits package (pension contributions) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES RELATED | | | | |
| Facilities: Deferring maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Facilities: Altering thermostats for less heating and cooling in buildings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Facilities: Delaying a capital debt (bond) program | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Facilities: Outsourcing custodial/maintenance work | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Facilities: Reducing custodial services | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CURRICULUM RELATED | | | | |
| Curriculum: Increasing class size | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Eliminating/delaying instructional improvement initiatives | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Reducing nonacademic programs (such as after-school and Saturday enrichment programs) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Reducing academic programs (such as academic interventions and Saturday classes) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Strengthening identification/screening of non-resident students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Reducing elective courses not required for graduation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Deferring textbook purchases | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Curriculum: Reducing high cost course offerings (e.g., occupational education classes) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Reducing instructional materials | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curriculum: Eliminating field trips | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OPERATIONS RELATED | | | | |
| Operations: Reducing operations to four-day work week (during summer) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Reducing operations to four-day school week (during school year) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Eliminating summer school programs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Cutting bus transportation routes and availability | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Finding new transportation efficiencies (i.e., tiered pickups) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Reducing Extra-curricular activities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Deferring technology purchases | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Reducing consumable supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Eliminating non-essential travel | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Joining bulk purchasing groups or co-ops | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Operations: Reducing collaborative planning time w/in school day | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | | | |

Part II: The Economic Downturn and School Employment

| | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Has your district had to eliminate positions for the 2009-10 school year in your proposed budget? | | |
| Do you anticipate eliminating positions for the 2010-11 school year? | | |
| How many staffing positions—administrative, teaching, and support—do you currently have in your district? <i>(enter whole number, without commas)</i> | | |
| How many positions were eliminated for the 2009-10 school year? <i>(enter whole number, without commas)</i> | | |
| How many positions are slated for elimination for the 2010-11 school year? <i>(enter whole number, without commas)</i> | | |
| How many positions are being cut due to: <i>(enter whole number, without commas)</i> | 2009 -10 | 2010- 11 |
| Declining enrollment? | | |
| Attrition? | | |
| Staffing cuts? | | |
| Other? | | |

| | Does not apply, no positions are being cut. | 2009-10 | 2010-11 |
|---|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| What types of positions are being eliminated? | | | |
| Core subject classroom teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Art/music/phys ed teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Foreign language teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Special education teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher aides/assistants | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School secretaries | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School librarians | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School nurses | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maintenance/cafeteria/transportation staff | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Central office/administration | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | | |

Part III: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the Economic Downturn

Funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 include roughly \$100 billion for America's public schools, the largest one-time infusion of funds into schools in history.

Referring to the question in Section I, how have ARRA dollars impacted this net change?

- My district had a net loss before ARRA. ARRA dollars filled some, but not all, of the budget holes.
- My district had a net loss before ARRA. ARRA dollars filled all of the budget holes, and state and local revenues held steady as a result.
- My district had a net loss before ARRA. In light of ARRA, state leaders reassessed the budget situation and further cut state revenues. ARRA dollars were used to offset these cuts.
- My district had neither a net loss nor a net gain before ARRA, and the ARRA dollars were all in addition to state and local revenues.
- My district had a net gain before ARRA, and the ARRA dollars further increased the net gain.
- My district had a net gain before ARRA. In light of ARRA, state leaders reassessed the budget situation, cutting our state revenue and using ARRA dollars to offset the cuts.

How would you describe any funding cuts to state education dollars?

- This does not apply. My state did not cut education funding.
- The cuts to education were proportional to the cuts to other state agencies/departments.
- The cuts to education were disproportionate to the cuts to other state agencies/departments; education cuts were **more** severe.
- The cuts to education were disproportionate to the cuts to other state agencies/departments; education cuts were **less** severe.

How is your district using ARRA funds to bring about education innovation/reform?

- This does not apply. The ARRA funds simply fill budget cuts and do not represent enough funding for new innovations/reform.
- The ARRA funds represented a slight increase in funding levels, with much of the ARRA money simply filling budget cuts. Innovation/reform from the ARRA funds was limited.
- Most of the ARRA funds represented an increased funding level; very little was needed to fill budget cuts. As such, we were able to implement innovations/reform.

- The full amount of our district's ARRA funds was an increase in funding. We had no budget holes and, as a result, were able to direct all of the ARRA funds toward innovation and reform.

Part IV: Looking Forward?

Federal Funds and Education: The last ARRA dollars will be spent in the middle of the 2010-11 school year. The President's proposed FY11 budget (school year 2011-12) proposes level funding IDEA and Title I. While the proposed budget represents 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.

How would you describe your opinion of the role of competitive grants in funding America's public schools?

- 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.
- Competitive grants have no place in the funding of public schools.
- I do not have an opinion.
- 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.

Rate your level of agreement with the following statements: Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree

- General
 - 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.
 - Competitive grants have no place in the funding of public schools.
 - 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.
 - Competitive grants should compose the majority of federal education funding.
 - Competitive grants should compose a small portion of federal education funding.
 - Increases in federal education funding should be only in competitive grants.
 - Increases in federal education funding should split between existing formula programs and competitive grants.
 - Competitive grants might unfairly favor states and districts with more capacity to write grant applications.
 - 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.
- In Your District
 - My district currently has the administrative capacity to complete applications for competitive grants.
 - My district would incur significant time/administrative costs in completing grant applications.
 - My district would need outside resources (grant writers, foundation expertise, etc...) to complete competitive grant applications.
 - Completing competitive grants applications requires my district to spend time/resources that would otherwise be directed to student instruction/services.
- Budgeting and Competitive Grants
 - My district is required to pass a balanced budget every year.
 - Formula funding represents a stable, reliable source of funding around which my district can plan long-term innovation and reform.
 - Competitive grants represent a source of funding around which my district would plan long-term innovation and reform.

- 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.
- 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.

Open Response: **What is the impact of overreliance on competitive grants in school budgets?**

Part V: Demographics

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| What is your current position? | |
| Superintendent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Associate/deputy superintendent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Assistant superintendent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Director | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How many students were enrolled in your district as of January 2009? | |
| 1 - 999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1000 - 2999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3000 - 4999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5000 - 9999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10000 - 24999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25000 - 49999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50000 - 99999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 100000 or more | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My school district is best described as: | |
| Rural | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Suburban | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Urban | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In Which state is your school district located? | |

Appendix B: Open-Ended Responses to Competitive Grant/Formula Program Questions

As part of the *Cliff Hanger* survey, respondents were given the opportunity to provide an open-ended statement on the role of competitive grants and formula programs in education funding. The select responses included in this appendix are representative of the entire set, and capture the sentiments expressed in those responses that are not included here.

The opinions expressed here mirror member responses to other survey questions: competitive grants represent budget instability and are unlikely to be considered for the very long-term innovation and reform the Obama Administration is hoping to spur; the application process for competitive grants uses a school's administrative and financial resources to pursue a funding stream that may or may not come to fruition; and financially strapped school districts across the nation do not have the capacity to complete a competitive grant.

Note: In an effort to maintain the integrity of respondent responses, the statements below were not edited for grammar or punctuation.

One time funding sources do not equate to long-term, reliable interventions for students. It is the equivalent of giving our Armed forces ammunition for 1 year and then expecting them to fight a 10 year war--it simply would not work. Additionally, competitive grants coming out of the department of education have traditionally been tied to variables (i.e., high poverty rates, free and reduced lunch, ethnicity or other factors) that many schools simply don't meet. Competitive grants as they appear will be targeted in much the same fashion. Additionally, I'm quite sure the paper work will be significant and that schools will have to march and step to the beat of a different drum.

Competitive Grants COST our District money as we simply do not have the administrative staff support to complete the "paper work." Further, competitive grants cause a "false impression" of funding levels to the public and staff; thereby making it difficult for administration to explain the money is "soft money," and cannot be counted on. New dollars need to be formula driven with a wider range of options to expend those dollars to keep our schools open and functioning. If health care reform is truly a priority, then assistance with federal dollars in providing and paying for quality health care for staff is important. My District just experienced a 49.9% increase in insurance rates for 2010-2011; this follows a 19.5% increase for 2009-2010. Help in this area is more important than competitive grants for IDEA and Title I. If we do not have the money to provide appropriate benefits, we will not be able to employ quality instructional staff; whereby student learning will suffer.

1. No matter how much we communicate to staff and parents that a particular program or innovation is tied to a competitive grant, when the grant goes away it causes turmoil and uncertainty -even when we try to sustain portions of a competitive grant driven program. 2. Overreliance on competitive grants can cause us to become comfortable with budgetary "assumptions" that can cause severe budgetary shortfalls when the funding goes away. 3. When school districts become too over reliant on competitive grants they soon find themselves serving the requirements of the grant more than serving and adjusting to the needs of students and instructional programs.

Students who are enrolled in districts that do not receive grant dollars will suffer to the greatest extent. However, all students will be negatively impacted given the lack of ability to engage in the long term planning that comes through a stable funding source.

As a very small, rural district we do NOT have the capacity to compete for these grants. An overreliance on competitive grants would favor larger districts that have the capacity to research, fund, and write grants. While we would probably bump along I would not be able to implement innovative educational practices if I had to rely upon competitive grants. This is big city thinking, not real world reality. Poor, rural districts suffer as much as inner city districts in terms of generational poverty and student achievement.

We need to get funding levels to an acceptable level before we start to worry about grants. Federal and State funding needs to be adequate before we worry about competitive grants.

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| <p>Competitive grants take tremendous time and energy to complete, track, and monitor. There is a serious concern that the grant will go away (historically true) and thus the program goes away. Also, urban and rural districts tend to receive the bulk of the money, short changing children who live in more suburban or small town areas. Throwing money at urban schools does not solve some of the systemic, cultural, family issues. Money does not solve problems.</p> |
| <p>Our students would suffer as we do not have the staff to write competitive grants. We have the will power to implement change, but we could not compete with districts that are funded better by their locality. We have many great ideas that we would like to implement to improve student learning, teacher effectiveness, evaluation, career and college readiness, but we would be overlooked as we do not have the funding for a grant writer, nor the money from the locality or the state to help. We truly believe we will and can make a difference in the lives our children, and that we can prepare our children to compete in a global economy. We just need a chance and the resources.</p> |
| <p>Competitive grants to fund public education will widen the gap between the "have's" and "have not's"...those that have staff to write and administer grants, those districts that have some characteristic of the grant points (i.e., high poverty, persistently failing, etc.) to gain points in the scoring that may or may not have true impact upon making reform or innovative practices take place in classrooms. Competitive grants make it difficult to implement long-term planning or sustain educational reform. If we really feel a free and equal education is a right of each and every one of our students, why would we make funds available competitive???</p> |
| <p>In short - simply relying on grants is unsure resulting in ebb and flow cycles - may result in a wider divide between "have and have not" districts across the country. Those who have money and structure in place to pursue grants will do so to a higher degree while those of us who do not will not be able to complete for the grants. May I suggest that we work to fund schools equally and adequately in all 50 states and then consider overlaying competitive grants? Let us not do this in reverse order.</p> |
| <p>We cannot afford the time or resources to apply for competitive grants as we are a very small school district with far too many state and federal reporting requirements. Competitive grants are a toxic solution to adequate, equitable, fair, reliable, and legally defensible funding of public education.</p> |
| <p>It punishes schools that are property-poor, have few economic disadvantaged students, and have students who perform well on standardized tests. Those schools face a decline in state revenues, but can't qualify for competitive grants. The federally funded REAP program has provided solid, consistent, "budgetable" money that can be used for student achievement.</p> |
| <p>Competitive grants provide an unreliable source of revenue for school districts and causes some districts to implement programs merely to receive additional funds that may not have a lasting effect on student achievement. It is also difficult for small school districts to compete for these funds due to inadequate numbers of personnel to assist with finding, writing, implementing, and evaluating grants.</p> |
| <p>Competitive grants are only used in our district to fund special programs and/or projects that we might otherwise not be involved in.</p> |
| <p>It is absolutely negative. If state and federal funding was adequate to provide a basic education, competitive grants may be a better source of revenue for innovation. However, because of the paucity of school funding in general the tenuous nature of competitive grants makes it unlikely to positively affect the very programs it is designed to help. Also, the time and effort needed not only to write grant applications but also to manage the grant internally is a greater burden on smaller schools without central office staff able to dedicate their time to such things.</p> |
| <p>Permits a few districts to begin potentially innovative programs that can quickly disappear when the grant money goes away. While my district has been the recipient of grants, it becomes difficult to maintain the innovations without ongoing local and/or state support for the innovation beyond the initial grant program.</p> |
| <p>Feast or famine comes to mind. We have been successful with a few competitive grants, which require the dollars awarded to be spent in very scripted ways. Community and staff members look at this spending and question how we can afford to do those activities when others go starving. They really don't understand or appreciate the difference in general fund spending and grant spending. If competitive grants are not followed with formula funding it is very likely that within a few years the program will either completely disappear or be so diluted it will hardly be recognizable. The point is there should be a formula to the funding to sustain the innovation created.</p> |

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| Great ideas not only need time to take root but also to grow and mature. There is a huge inequity between school districts even those who share common boundaries. While diversity is a strength of our country, it is not a strength to allow some students to suffer academically while their neighbors have more than they can use |
| Often we are planning budgets 18 months in advance of expenditure, we have to provide a balanced budget to the voters. We cannot depend on grant monies to provide programs if we are not assured that the funding will be there, the very nature of the competitive grant process does not allow this. |
| I have personally had to downsize personnel in a school district that had become too reliant upon grant dollars. |
| Makes winners and losers out of school systems and causes systems to exhaust man hours in an effort to get new money. Fully fund IDEA and I will be able to use general fund more creatively rather than plugging holes from Federal requirements and under funding |
| What do you do when the grant money expires? The federal government cannot continue to fund education via competitive grants. The feds are putting more and more pressure on school districts, yet fail miserably when helping to row the boat. Whatever happened to the 10th Amendment and the sovereignty of the state? The grants are also incredibly limiting as to what you can do with them. We need flexibility. Each district's needs are different. There is a major difference between the needs of a large school like Chicago and a rural district like Wapello, IA. |
| Competitive grants can serve a purpose, but should not be relied upon for funding basic school district functions. This needs to be "over and above" money, and not utilized for basic staffing. Unfortunately, we have cut so deeply, that we are looking for any source of funding to restore staffing levels that have been severely compromised by the economic downturn. |
| It is not a way to fund school budgets. One time funds should NOT be used to pay for recurring expenditures. We are not the federal government. We actually have to pay our bills in the future after we start a program. |
| It creates a roller coaster ride for public schools that are already tasked to do too much with too little dollars at their disposal. Competitive grants also give unfair advantages to those units whose capacity will allow for them to spend valuable time writing these grant applications, and once awarded, tracking and jumping through the hoops required of these grants. Although my school unit has benefited from several competitive grants, these are not funds that I "count on" to operate my school system. |
| It can provide for great start up opportunities. We have been proactive in writing competitive grants. Our successes in securing these have had a positive impact on our students. |
| As long as there are federal mandates, there need to be formula funded grants to support the implementation of those mandates. |
| Critical programs including researched based innovations must be funded by dollars that can be sustained over time. Grants, although helpful in the short term, further confound our efforts to increase student achievement over the long term. Ample, stable and predictable funding facilitates long range planning and also recognizes the challenges associated with synchronizing all supporting resources, like staff development, that may take multiple years to accomplish. |
| The impact of overreliance competitive grants is overall insecurity of funding for district programs. The district has no control over student population and increases due to state/federal taxation or unfunded mandates. When one includes the uncertainties of special education, both numbers and state and federal support, the next few years are filled with uncertainties. It is almost as if the government wants us to be reliant upon grants for survival. As long as the emphasis of winning grants is geared/skewed toward larger populations or specialty populations, I fear that small rural districts will always be disadvantaged. |
| Competitive will be the death knell for most rural, isolated small schools. Large districts with the capacity to assign people to grant arena will, in the end, garner most of the competitive grant money. Some competitive funding should be available, then any school can decide to apply or not. |
| The lack of sustainability creates uncertainty and unwillingness to commit for the long term to innovation and school reform initiatives. There is a concurrent lack of buy-in to grant funded initiatives, because we are well aware that once the funding is gone, the programs often have to be cut as well. We are seriously underfunded and struggle to provide mandated programs and services as it is. |

Appendix C: Focus Group: Are States and Districts Changing Their Contributions to Pension Plans?

In response to anecdotal information that school districts and states were beginning to adjust either health care benefits and/or pension contributions as a result of the economic downturn, AASA surveyed its Executive Committee and Governing Board to explore this emerging trend. While *Cliff Hanger* included two survey items related to personnel benefits, this smaller survey allowed AASA to take a more in-depth look at an emerging trend. This survey was completed by members of AASA's Executive Committee and Governing Board in March 2010.

Summary: As the economic downturn continues to impact education budget decisions at the state and district levels, states and districts find themselves having to reconsider contributions to state and local pension plans. In addition to the information included in *Cliff Hanger*, which illustrated that the percentage of respondents reducing benefits packages has skyrocketed, this data shows that the cuts are appearing more often to state-level contributions.

As reported in *Cliff Hanger*, the percentage of respondents reducing benefits packages has skyrocketed: 46 percent of respondents will reduce health care benefits in 2010-11, compared to 12 percent in 2009-10 and 5 percent in 2008-09. Similarly, 20 percent of respondents will reduce pension contributions in 2010-11, compared to 3 percent in 2009-10 and 0.7 percent in 2008-09.

Digging deeper into the cuts to pension contributions, AASA's Executive Committee and Governing Board described the various contributions their districts makes to district- or state-level pension or retirement plans:

- While almost all districts (96 percent) reported contributing to a state pension plan as a personnel benefit, very few (11 percent) reported contributing to a local/district level pension plan.
- More than half (58 percent) of respondents reported that their state contributes to the state's pension plan on behalf of educators. Only 11 percent of responders reported that their state contributed to local/district pension plans.

Respondents were asked to indicate what—if any—changes have been made to pension plan contributions in their state and district.

- Almost three-quarters (71 percent) of respondents reported that their district has not made any changes to pension contributions.
- A very small amount (3 percent) reported that their district has already reduced contributions to the state pension plan.
- Slightly more (5 percent) of respondents reported that the state has reduced its contributions to local/district pension plans.
- Three times as many (17 percent) of respondents reported that the state had reduced its contributions to the state pension plan.
- While states (and districts to a lesser degree) have started to cut contributions to personnel pension plans, both are also increasing qualifications for pension plans, by either requiring more years or service and/or having a higher age requirement. A small group (3 percent) of respondents reported that their district had implemented higher requirements. Nine times as many (27 percent) respondents reported that their state had increased qualifications for pension plans.

This snapshot survey was completed by 66 members of AASA's Executive Committee and Governing Board in March 2010. Respondents hail from 38 different states. More than half (52 percent) of respondents described their district as rural, compared to 32 percent reporting suburban and 15 percent reporting urban. Two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents work in districts enrolling less than 5,000 students.



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