

## AASA Members Detail Draconian Impact of Sequester's Cuts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Alexandria, Va., Feb. 26, 2013.** School superintendents across the nation are bracing for the deep cuts of sequestration, the federal policy consequence for continued Congressional inaction. In response to a call to action issued during AASA's National Conference on Education last week, hundreds of districts across the nation provided details describing what the cuts would look like in their district, reporting jobs cut, programs eliminated, and other negative impacts.

"If we will be judged by how we treat our children, this move [sequestration]... indicate[s] that we do not prioritize the quality education for all students, who represent the future of our nation." **New York**

Nearly 400 responses from 42 states paint a dreary picture as it relates to the nation's public schools and sequestration. "The blind cuts of sequestration, made regardless of program demand or effectiveness, represent poor, short-sighted policy..." said AASA Executive Director Daniel Domenech. "The cuts represent billions of lost dollars for the Department of education and will affect millions of students, classrooms and teachers by increasing class sizes, reducing programs and eliminating educator jobs."

School districts are finalizing their budgets for the 2013-14 school year; this is the school year in which federal FY13 funding and policy (including sequestration) would play out in schools. This means school superintendents are bracing for the cuts by building the cuts in to their budgets. When asked how they were preparing for sequestration last summer, more than half indicated they would build the cuts in to their budget.<sup>1</sup> With that budget now being finalized, this latest call to action asked AASA members to detail what the cuts look like:

- More than three quarters of respondents (77.9%) indicated their district would have to eliminate jobs as a result of sequestration.
- School districts will, on average, eliminate between 3.7 and 4.8 instructional positions as a result of sequestration. AASA analyzed the job cuts at two levels, averaging across all respondents (including those indicating they would NOT be eliminating positions) and averaging across only those respondents who will be making cuts due to sequestration. The numbers remain high. When including all respondents, the average district will lose 3.7 instructional positions. When limiting the cuts to only those districts that will eliminate jobs, that number jumps to 4.8 instructional positions.<sup>2</sup>
- Elimination of school/instructional personnel will have impacts reaching beyond school walls. As cited in earlier AASA analysis<sup>3</sup>, every 100,000 education jobs lost will result in an additional 30,000 jobs lost in other sectors due to lost spending and those laid off.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellerson, N. (2012). [Cut Deep: How the Sequester Will Impact Our Nation's Schools](#). AASA: Alexandria, VA.

<sup>2</sup> The results of the AASA data are subject to change. Data continue to pour in. The analysis of this memo was based on responses collected prior to February 25, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Ellerson, N. (2011). [Projection of National Education Job Cuts for the 2011-12 School Year](#). AASA: Arlington, VA.

- Using the modest estimate of 10,000 school districts in the nation and the lower average job cut (3.7 instructional positions/district), the single action of sequestration would result in at least 37,000 education jobs, which would result in an additional 13,690 non-education jobs.
- While these numbers seem lower than previously reported education job cuts, there is an important distinction to be made:
  - These cuts cannot be considered in isolation. Education (and non-defense discretionary funding) will not be disproportionately impacted by sequestration.
  - Excluding sequestration, non-defense discretionary spending—including education—absorbed a significant and disproportionate cut in federal funding stemming from the recession. In fact, between the FY11 and FY12 annual appropriations process, education funding was reduced by \$1.48 billion. Since 2010, more than 50 education programs have been eliminated, a funding reduction exceeding \$1.2 billion. As the recession dragged on over nearly four years, the effect of these cuts in federal funding were further compounded by cuts at the state and local level, and their collective impact on the nation’s schools became increasingly more obvious and damaging.
  - Unlike the recession, sequestration cuts will be across the board. This means areas of the economy that were less impacted during the recession will feel the same pain as education. This is perhaps best exemplified on military bases where military families stand to lose a significant amount. Military parents face layoffs and/or pay cuts. Their children likely attend schools that have a significantly higher portion of their overall budget composed of federal dollars (including Impact Aid); this means that the across-the-board, 5% cut of sequestration will be applied to a much larger share of the budget, tying the hands of the school and further impacting that military community.
  - More succinctly, the education job cuts will be deep, will be far-reaching and will have ripple effects on the economy. Those ripples, however, will be significantly more noticeable as other job sectors also eliminate jobs and further compound a dire job and economic situation.

Responding to an open-ended item asking about the impact of sequestration, AASA members delivered a very clear message: the cuts will be to areas that most directly impact student learning. The findings are alarmingly consistent with those of [AASA’s Economic Impact Survey Series](#) (which examined the impact of the recession on the nation’s schools) and indicate the cuts will be to areas in the budget that directly impact student learning: reducing academic programs, personnel layoffs, increased class size, reducing professional development and deferring technology purchases.

“The bottom line is that kids and society pay the price.” **Alabama**

The results of this AASA data collection reflected a new harsh reality: for the first time in the four years and 14 surveys AASA has administered relating to the impact of the recession on the nation’s schools, there was a significant increase in the percentage of respondents indicating that special education funding will take a hit. Funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Act has historically represented an unfunded mandate for local education agencies, with school districts left to cover the federal shortfall stemming from Congress’ perpetual failure to meet its statutory funding commitment. School districts use local budget funds to cover this shortfall, sacrificing local budget authority and priorities. Statutory requirements related to maintenance of effort meant that the cuts of the recession were concentrated on non-IDEA dollars.

The deep reduction in federal IDEA funding attributable to sequestration, however, represents an obstacle local school districts cannot overcome. “School districts remain severely underfunded when it comes to IDEA. They have yet to receive the full support in federal education dollars for special education students that was promised

many years ago...” said Bruce Hunter, AASA Associate Executive Director for Advocacy & Communications. “The cuts of sequestration border on hypocrisy: As the federal government habitually underfunds and considers cuts to IDEA, local school districts are left not only without flexibility to adjust their budgets to changing local fiscal realities, but are also ‘on the hook’ to cover a significantly larger federal shortfall.”

For a deeper look at the potential impact of sequestration on the nation’s public schools, refer to [AASA’s Fiscal Cliff Toolkit](#), a comprehensive set of resources that gives educators and community leaders everything they need to urge Congress to action, including background information on sequestration, a state-by-state analysis of the impact of sequestration, a sample letter to the editor, a draft opinion/editorial piece, and template letters for communicating Congress.

“AASA members pass balanced budgets in a timely manner every year. It is time for Congress to meet one of its fundamental responsibilities—the federal government’s funding and appropriations—in a way that avoids sequestration and puts the nation on track to fiscal growth and stability...” said Domenech. “Now is the time for leadership, now is the time to perform the jobs to which they were elected. It is time for Congress to set aside political posturing and to find common ground in a responsible approach that doesn’t disproportionately impact schools by derailing our national investment in education and long-term fiscal health and competitiveness. Education cuts don’t heal.”

In response to an open-ended item asking about the impact of sequestration, respondents delivered a clear message: sequestration will result in severely negative budget cuts that undermine schools’ academic growth and progress. The responses below are a small sample that represent the broad concerns school superintendents have when it comes to sequestration:

“We continue to systematically reduced our ability to meet the needs of students and provide training for staff. You cannot continue to demand and expect excellence if you do not support the work. At some point you need to stop the rhetoric and fund to the level of expectations.”

**Washington**

“The sequester will negatively impact the student sub-groups who need additional assistance and interventions the most- students from low income families and special education.”

**Maryland**

“It's not just the sequester, it's the whole instability of the system and the constant brinksmanship that affects our educational system and the educators who support our students.” **Illinois**

“It baffles me that supposedly intelligent people can't get together and make fundamental decisions that will impact millions of K-12 students. ” **Maine**

“We must not forget the qualitative effect the sequester has on staff morale. No one seems to know for sure how deep or for how long the reductions will occur. It's hard to motivate, challenge, and encourage at-risk students, when you are worried about your current employment or already started to look out of uncertainty in the future.” **Kentucky**

(Referring to cuts to special education) “Because students already have IEP's in place that specify services, those services must, by law, be provided. What this means to the district is that monies will need to be diverted from another source to cover the costs of programs already in place. This reduces the amount of basic education that can be provided.” **Washington**

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We can invest in our students now or we can pay to house our inmates later. We, in our system, would prefer to invest in our students now.”

**Tennessee**

“It is unlikely that the local tax payers will be able to pick up the bill for these cuts, and the ultimate impact will be felt with our students receiving less support and services to meet their increasing academic demands.” **Vermont**

“Making informed decisions about how best to allocate financial resources is always better than arbitrary across-the-board mandatory cuts. Elected officials should make the tough choices they were elected to make.” **Virginia**

“At a time where society demands more from schools and student learning this action would put all schools in direct sight for those that already discount schools and their efforts. We have a great opportunity to make the changes for student improved learning and ...now we could face a huge stoppage of effort.” **Wyoming**

#### About AASA

The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. The mission of AASA is to advocate for the highest quality public education for all students, and develop and support school system leaders. For more information, visit [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org). Follow AASA on twitter: @AASAhq, @Noellerson and @SPudelski. Become a fan of the AASA Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/AASApge](http://www.facebook.com/AASApge).

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