



**Economy impacts staffing, family factors
according to 2009 Principals' Partnership Poll**

Lew Armistead and Ron Williamson

Members of The Principals' Partnership are seeing negative aspects to the current economic downturn that are likely to impact the quality of education provide in public high schools. They also would like to see changes in the accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind.

Those were the key findings in the 2009 Principals' Partnership Poll administered to participants in this year's Summer Leadership Institute. Four hundred thirteen principals responded to two questions—

What is the most critical/crucial/important way that the current economic situation has affected education?

What is the one aspect of public education that the Obama administration should change?

Principals see negative impacts on both staff and students due to the economic situation. Many report that staff and programs have been reduced in their schools, and that is having a negative affect on staff morale and collegiality.

More than two-thirds of the respondents say that the staff reductions has led to cuts to programs and course offerings while increasing class size.

"My school is currently in need of more teachers, but ...I am not able to hire anyone," said one Texas principal. "I am currently looking at other ways to meet our student needs by looking at the number of students per classroom and teachers' assigned teaching duties."

A Washington principal is also looking at the impact of reducing staff.

"We are...going to have to cut a number of teaching positions, which will increase class size, have people teaching in new positions, and, in general, make resources for materials and services very tight," the Washington school leader said.

The economy is also having a negative impact on obtaining necessary technology, instructional materials, and professional development for staff.

The economy is likely to test the leadership skills of public high school principals.

“The loss of certificated and classified personnel has created new challenges in course offerings and class size,” reported an Idaho principal. “As a result, we have become even more creative.”

The Partnership principals also see a negative impact on families from the economy which carries into the schools.

They report that more students are applying for free and reduced lunch programs as families are losing income. Coming to school hungry will hamper students’ learning ability.

The principals also are seeing more homeless students in their schools, more students asking for waivers of activity fees, students working longer hours to help support their family, and a greater level of emotional stress with the uncertain future.

While students were clearly experiencing greater stress, few principals reported an increase in behavioral problems as a result of the economic conditions.

Principals in California, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin reported the most significant economic affects in their schools, while those in Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma saw less impact.

In responding to the second question, principals want modifications to No Child Left Behind, but few called for elimination of accountability. They focused on multiple indicators to measure student learning and an accountability model that rewards growth and improvement.

“The NCLB accountability system needs to be changed so that growth of student and school performance is factored into its calculations,” said one California principal.

Funding was also a considerable as almost 25 percent of the respondents called for a more equitable means of funding. Many were concerned about unfunded mandates and the expectation that schools provide programs for students without sufficient resources to do so.

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