THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

Report of Findings:

Education Cuts Have Yet to Heal: How the Economic Recession Continues To Impact Our Nation's Schools

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ABSTRACT

This survey is the 16th in a series conducted by AASA, The School Superintendents Association, on the impact of the economic recession and related fiscal policies (like sequestration) on the nation's schools. The series was launched in 2008 in response to state budget shortfalls, federal aid 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. Though the recession is over, fiscal cuts at the state, local and federal levels have yet to fully rebound. This series continues to document the impact of chronic fiscal cuts and restraint on the nation's schools and the students they serve. The previous studies in the AASA Economic Impact Study Series (http://www.aasa.org/research.aspx*) include:*

- "Unequal Pain: Federal Public Education Revenues, Federal Education Cuts & the Impact on Public Schools" (Nov. 2013)
- "AASA Members Detail Draconian Impact of Sequester's Cuts" (Feb. 2013)
- "Cut Deep: How the Sequester Will Impact Our Nation's Schools" (July 2012)
- "Weathering the Storm" (March 2012)
- "Projection of National Education Job Cuts for the 2011-12 School Year" (May 24, 2011)
- "Surviving a Thousand Cuts: America's Public Schools and the Recession" (Dec. 16, 2010)
- "Impact of Preventing Projected Educator Layoffs for 2010-11 School Year" (June 22, 2010)
- "Projection of National Education Job Cuts for the 2010-11 School Year" (May 4, 2010)
- "A Cliff Hanger: How America's Public Schools Continue to Feel the Impact of the Economic Downturn" (April 8, 2010)
- "One Year Later: How the Economic Impact Continues to Impact School Districts" (Oct. 27, 2009)
- "Schools and the Stimulus: How America's Public School Districts Are Using ARRA Funds"(Aug. 25, 2009)
- "Looking Back, Looking Forward: How the Economic Downturn Continues to Impact School Districts" (March 25, 2009)
- "AASA Impact of the Economic Downturn on School Jobs Snapshot Survey" (Jan. 16, 2009)
- "AASA Opportunity for Federal Education Funding Survey" (Dec. 15, 2008)
- "AASA Study of the Impact of the Economic Downturn on Schools" (Nov. 12, 2008)

ABOUT THIS STUDY

"Education Cuts Have Yet to Heal" is based on a survey of school administrators conducted in September/October 2015. A total of 165 school administrators from 37 states completed the survey. Many of the questions in this survey are repeated from earlier surveys and reinforce AASA's ability to collect and analyze long-term data. The surveyed sample reflects the membership of the AASA, The School Superintendents Association and should not be inferred to represent all public school superintendents. 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 states. The data do not suggest favoritism to any one region of the country. No claim is made that the same individuals responded to each of the survey efforts although the population surveyed was with very few exceptions drawn from the same AASA membership listing. All surveys in the *AASA Economic Impact Series* were distributed electronically using traditional survey software with analysis limited to measures of central tendency.

REPORT OF FINDINGS

SNAPSHOT OF SCHOOL ECONOMIC CLIMATE: This latest survey, *Education Cuts Have Yet to Heal,* is based on a survey of school administrators conducted in September and October, 2015. This survey asked many of the same questions as previous surveys in the AASA Economic Impact Series. As such, it is possible to compare and contrast responses, detail new and persistent trends, and analyze key findings for a timeframe spanning the duration of the recession and beyond.

Seven years after AASA's initial report on the impact of the economic downturn on school districts, the impact of the recession continues to have an impact on school districts. Economic stability, though, remains elusive at the state and local levels, with nearly two-thirds of states (31) providing less state funding in the 2013-14 school year than they did in 2008, the year before the recession started (Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015). Generally speaking, economic recovery at the state and local level lags that of federal recovery by 12-18 months. State and local recovery from this recession, however, given its unprecedented depth and duration, is proving to take much longer, lagging years behind that at the federal level.

The dynamic between state and district budgets is crystallized in the process of economic recovery: School districts typically adopt local budgets based on state budgets, meaning state budgets are adopted before school district budgets. While school districts were not immune to the economic recession, they were somewhat insulated from the initial impact, given that districts were operating under budgets adopted under more stable times. As the AASA surveys have documented, when the economic recession picked up in 2008, districts were operating on already-adopted budgets and made relatively mild cuts and changes in 2008-09. As the recession wore on, the 2009-10 and 2010-11 cuts became illustrative of the full impact of the recession. As 2012-13 and 2013-14 unfolded, the recession ended and fiscal pressures were compounded with sequester. This is the current reality: Even as the recession ended, federal, state and local education budgets have yet to return to pre-recession levels, meaning school districts continue to operate on leaner budgets passed/adopted in a tight economy.

Findings:

- 83 percent of respondents described their district's **current economic situation** as 'inadequately funded'. This is up from 67 percent in October 2008 and holding steady from 81 percent in March 2012. (Q1)
- Respondents were asked to describe **changes their district has experienced in state and local revenues**.
    - When asked if their district had experienced a change in state and local revenues between the 2007-08 and 2015-16 school years, 69 percent of respondents replied 'Yes, a cut.', meaning that more than two thirds of the nation's school districts are operating at pre-recession funding levels. (Q2)
    - When comparing more recent years, respondents were more split: One-third (37 percent) of respondents indicated they experiences an increase in state and local revenues between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years, which is slightly less than the 44 percent reporting they experienced a cut in the same time frame. (Q3)
    - Nearly half (44 percent) anticipate a cut in state and local revenues between the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, with 18 percent expecting an increase and 15 percent expecting level funding. (Q4)

        - Respondents were asked to consider the 2007-08, 2012-13 and 2015-16 school years, to help benchmark trends from the start to the end of the recession, the end of the recession until now, and the start of the recession until now. In describing trends related to state and local revenues, the emerging trend was that the significant driver of cuts that are in place today are not new, but carry over from early recession cuts. Giving life to the concept of 'education cuts don't heal', this data trend demonstrates that while the cuts of early session are no longer compounded by new additional cuts, the original cuts persist and leave schools operating in a chronically underfunded environment. (Q5)
- When asked to describe **funding cuts to state education dollars**: (Q6)
    - Nearly half (47 percent) of respondents replied, "The cuts to education were disproportionate to the cuts to other state agencies/departments; education cuts were more severe.", up from 38 percent in 2010-11.
    - Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of respondents replied, "The cuts to education were proportional to the cuts to other state agencies/departments.", roughly equal to the 28 percent response in 2010-11.
    - 13 percent of respondents replied "This does not apply. My state did not cut education funding.", roughly equal to the 15 percent reporting in 2010-11.
    - 14 percent of respondents replied "The cuts to education were disproportionate to the cuts to other state agencies/departments; education cuts were less severe." identical to the rate reported in 2010-11.
- More than one-third (39 percent) of respondents **reported an increase in enrollment between the 2007-08 and 2015-16 school years**, compared to 49 percent reporting a decrease and 12 percent reporting no change. (Q7)
- By a large number, respondents indicated **growth in free/reduced price lunch (FRPL) eligibility rates**. Respondents were asked to consider the 2007-08, 2012-13 and 2015-16 school years to help benchmark trends from the start to the end of the recession, the end of the recession until now, and the start of the recession until now. (Q9)
- Three-quarters (75 percent) of respondents reported an **increased FRPL** between the 2007/08 and 2012-13 school years; two-thirds reported an increase between 2012/13 and 2015/16; and three-quarters (73 percent) reported an increase between 2007/08 and 2015/16.

To more thoroughly detail districts' current fiscal reality, respondents were asked "Which of the following actions has your district considered in the budgets for the school years between the 2007-08 and 2015-16 school years as a result of the economic downturn?" Budget cuts were grouped into four general categories: personnel-related, operations-related, facilities-related and curriculum-related. Respondents were asked to report the type and timing of their budget cuts, and this analysis refers to 2011-12 data from *Weathering the Storm*, the March 2012 installation of the AASA Economic Impact Survey Series.

Before reviewing the four broad categories, this analysis, unlike previous ones, looked at which cuts were most and least common among respondents. This survey, like the ones before it, demonstrates that school administrators across the nation remain committed to providing the best educational opportunities they can with their limited available resources. Superintendents make pragmatic decisions and implement first the cuts that least-directly impact student achievement, including altering thermostats and reducing consumable supplies. When additional cuts become necessary, superintendents find themselves having to make cuts that increasingly impact student achievement, including increasing class size, delaying instructional improvement strategies and laying off instructional personnel. A first-time analysis reported cuts and found those most and least likely to be implemented, considered, or avoided: (Q10/11)

- Top Ten Items *Implemented Before 2015-16*
    - Joining bulk purchasing groups/coops (61 percent)
    - Reducing consumable supplies (57 percent)
    - Eliminating non-essential travel (57 percent)
    - Altering thermostats for less heating and cooling in buildings (56 percent)
    - Deferring maintenance (55 percent)
    - Reducing staff-level (non-instructional) hiring (54 percent)
    - Deferring textbook purchases (54 percent)
    - Reducing non-teaching professional support personnel (53 percent)
    - Reducing outside staff development consultants (52 percent)
    - Increasing class size (student/teacher ratio) (51 percent)
- Bottom Ten Items *Implemented Before 2015-16*
    - Closing/consolidating schools (22 percent)
    - Delaying a capital debt (Bond) program (21 percent)
    - Eliminating summer school programs (21 percent)
    - Cuts to school lunch program/struggle complying with new meal pattern and standards (18 percent)
    - Furloughing of personnel (16 percent)
    - Reducing Collaborative planning time within school day (15 percent)
    - Increasing student walking distance (13 percent)
    - Reducing benefits package (pension contributions) (9 percent)
    - Outsourcing custodial maintenance work (7 percent)
    - Reducing operations to four-day school week (during school year) (5 percent)
- Top Five *Implemented Between 2008 and 2015, Currently Restored to Pre-Recession Levels*
    - Deferring Maintenance (21 percent)
    - Reducing non-teaching professional support personnel (19 percent)
    - Laying off personnel (18 percent)
    - Reducing consumable supplies (17 percent)
    - Reducing staff level (non-instructional) hiring (17 percent)
- Top Five Items *NEVER CONSIDERED*
    - Reducing benefits package (pension contributions) (65 percent)
    - Reducing operations to 4-day school week (during school year (61 percent)
    - Reducing collaborative planning time within school day (56 percent)
    - Cuts to school lunch program/struggle complying with new meal pattern and standards (55 percent)
    - Increasing student walking distance (54 percent)

<u>Personnel Related Cuts</u>**:** Personnel costs are commonly understood to represent more than 80 percent of most school districts' budgets, and as such, economic climate personnel reductions were inevitable. (Q10)

- When asked which years their district had eliminated positions, respondents replied 2007-08 (23 percent); 2008-09 (35 percent); 2009-10 (46 percent); 2010-11 (46 percent); 2011-12 (42 percent); 2012-13 (39 percent); 2013-14 (34 percent); and 2014-15 (29 percent)
- One quarter (22 percent) of respondents indicated they had eliminated positions in each of the school years between 2007-08 and 2014-15. Only nine percent indicated they had not many any layoffs in a similar timeframe.
- 4 percent *furloughed personnel* in the 2015-16 school year, compared to 21 percent in 2011-12. 20 percent considered but never implemented and 46 percent never considered, personnel furloughs.

- Nearly half (42 percent) laid off personnel prior to the 2015-16 school year, 12 percent planned to do so in the 2015-16 school year, 18 percent report that they implemented layoffs between 2008 and 2015 but are now back to pre-recession levels and 17 percent report they never considered layoffs.
- 12 percent *froze outside professional service contracts* in the 2015-16 school year, compared to 35 percent doing so prior to 2015-16 and 31 percent in 2011-12. 17 percent considered but never implemented and 19 percent never considered freezing outside professional service contracts.
- One-quarter (24 percent) *reduced non-teaching professional support personnel* for the 2015-16 school year, compared to more than half (53 percent) doing so prior to the 2015-16 school year and 59 percent in 2011-12. Six percent considered but never implemented, seven percent never considered and 19 percent implemented between 2008 and 2015 but are now back to pre-recession levels, reducing non-teaching professional support personnel.
- One-fifth (19 percent) *reduced outside staff development consultants* in 2015-16, compared to 53 percent prior to 2015-16 and 49 percent in 2011-12. Eight percent considered but never implemented, 13 percent never considered and 15 percent considered but are now back to prerecession levels, reducing outside staff development contracts.
- One-fifth (21 percent) *reduced staff-level (non-instructional) hiring* in 2015-16, compared to 54 percent prior to 2015-16 and 57 percent in 2011-12. Eight percent considered but never implemented, seven percent never considered and 17 percent implemented but are now back to pre-recession levels, reducing staff-level (non-instructional) hiring.
- 13 percent *reduced professional development offerings* in 2015-16, compared to 45 percent prior to 2015-16. Thirteen percent considered but never implemented, thirteen percent never considered and 16 percent implemented but are now back to pre-recession levels.
- Less than one-fifth (14 percent) *reduced benefits packages (health care)* in 2015-16, compared to 22 percent prior to 2015-16 and 23 percent in 2011-12. Thirteen percent considered but never implemented, 47 percent never considered and six percent implemented but are now back to pre-recession levels of benefits (health care).
- Seven percent *reduced benefits package (pensions)* in 2015-16, compared to nine percent prior to 2015-16 and 11 percent in 2011-12. Three percent considered but never implemented, 66 percent never considered and four percent implemented but are now back to pre-recession levels, reduced benefits package (pensions).

<u>Operations Related Cuts</u>**:** 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 recession. 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 recession (Q10).

- Ten percent *reduced operations to four-day week (during the summer)* in 2015-16, compared to 26 percent prior to 2015-16 and 27 percent in 2011-12. 16 percent considered but never implemented, 44 percent never implemented, and seven percent implemented but are now back to pre-recession levels, reduced operations to four-day week (during the summer).
- One percent *reduced operations to four-day week (during the school year)* in 2015-16, compared to five percent prior to 2015-16 and 4 percent in 2011-12. 20 percent considered but never implemented, 61 percent never considered and five percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels reduced four day school week (during school year).

- Seven percent *eliminated summer school programs* in 2015-16, compared to 21 percent prior to 2015-16 and 22 percent in 2011-12. 21 percent considered but never implemented, 39 percent never considered and 10 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, eliminating summer school programs.
- Twelve percent *cut bus transportation routes and availability* in 2015-16, compared to 29 percent prior to 2015-16 and 29 percent in 2011-12. 24 percent considered and never implemented, 32 percent never considered and six percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, cutting bus transportation routes and availability.
- 16 percent *found new transportation efficiencies (i.e., tiered pick ups)* in 2015-16, compared to 30 percent prior to 2015-16 and 27 percent in 2011-12. 18 percent considered but never implemented, 29 percent never considered and eight percent implemented but are back to prerecession levels, finding transportation efficiencies (i.e., tiered pickups).
- Ten percent *reduced extracurricular activities* in 2015-16, compared to 23 percent prior to 2015-16, and 29 percent in 2011-12. 28 percent considered but never implemented, 29 percent never considered and nine percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, reduced extracurricular activities.
- 12 percent *shifted funding for extracurricular activities to families/community/boosters*, compared to 24 percent prior to 2015-16 and 40 percent never considering the option.
- 16 percent *deferred technology purchases* in 2015-16, compared to 42 percent prior to 2015-16 and 46 percent in 2011-12. 20 percent never considered the option.
- One-quarter (25 percent) *reduced consumable supplies* in 2015-16, compared to 57 percent prior to 2015-16 and 54 percent in 2011-12. Six percent considered but never implemented, nine percent never considered, and 17 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, reducing consumable supplies.
- One-quarter (23 percent) *eliminated non-essential travel* in 2015-16, compared to 57 percent prior to 2015-16 and 62 percent in 2011-12. Seven percent considered but never implemented, nine percent never considered, and 16 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, eliminating non-essential travel.
- One-quarter (23 percent) *joined bulk purchasing groups or co-ops* in 2015-16, compared to 61 percent prior to 2015-16 and 55 percent in 2011-12. Six percent considered but didn't implement, nine percent never considered and 12 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, joined bulk purchasing groups.
- Six percent *reduced collaborative planning time within school day* in 2015-16, compared to 15 percent prior to 2015-16 and 14 percent in 2011-12. 12 percent considered and never implemented, 56 percent never considered and seven percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, reducing collaborative planning time within the school day.
- 12 percent *closed/consolidated schools* in 2015-16, compared to 22 percent prior to 2015-16 and 7 percent in 2011-12. 13 percent considered and never implemented, 53 percent never considered and four percent implemented and are back to prerecession levels, closing/consolidating schools.
- 12 percent implemented *cuts to school lunch programs/struggle to comply with new meal pattern standards* in 2015-16, compared to 18 percent prior to 2015-16. More than half (55 percent) never considered cuts to school lunch programs.

<u>Buildings and Facilities Related Cuts</u>**:** A common topic of discussion for 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 was 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 (Q11).

- One-fifth (20 percent) *deferred maintenance* in 2015-16, compared to 55 percent prior to 2015-16 and 51 percent in 2011-12. Eight percent considered but didn't implement, 12 percent never considered and 21 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, deferred maintenance.
- One-fifth (19 percent) *altered thermostats for less heating/cooling* in 2015-16, compared to 56 percent prior to 2015-16 and 56 percent in 2011-12. Eight percent considered but didn't implement, 12 percent never considered and 15 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels.
- Three percent *delayed a capital debt (bond) program* in 2015-16, compared to 21 percent prior to 2015-16 and 15 percent in 2011-12. Nine percent considered but never implemented, 52 percent never considered and seven percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, delaying a capital debt (bond) program.
- Two percent *outsourced custodial/maintenance work* in 2015-16, compared to seven percent prior to 2015-16 and 10 percent in 2011-12. One-third (36 percent) reduced custodial services in 2011-12. 30 percent considered but never implemented, 51 percent never considered and two percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, outsourcing custodial/maintenance work.

Curriculum Related Cuts**:** While the impact of class size on achievement is an issue of endless point-counterpoint discussion, it is undeniable that the increase in class size produced by the economic recession will significantly impact the quality of interaction between teacher and student and likely subsequently negatively influence the attainment of students. The data paint 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 (Q11).

- One-fifth (19 percent) *increased class size (student/teacher ratio)* in 2015-16, compared to 51 percent doing so prior to 2015-16 and 54 percent in 2011-12. 13 percent considered but never implemented, 15 percent never considered and ten percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, increasing class size (student/teacher ratio).
- One-tenth (11 percent) *eliminated/delayed instructional improvement initiatives* in 2015-16, comparted to 33 percent prior to 2015-16 and 40 percent in 2011-12. 19 percent considered but never implemented, 28 percent never considered and eight percent implemented but are back to prerecession levels, eliminating/delaying instructional improvement initiatives.
- Ten percent *reduced nonacademic programs (such as afterschool and enrichment programs)* in 2015-16, compared to 35 percent prior to 2015-16 and 35 percent in 2011-12. Nine percent considered but never implemented, 30 percent never considered and six percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels reducing nonacademic programs (such as afterschool and enrichment programs).
- Five percent *reduced academic programs (such as academic interventions and Saturday classes)* in 2015-16, compared to 27 percent prior to 2015-16 and 32 percent in 2011-12. 18 percent considered but never implemented, 42 percent never considered and six percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, reducing academic programs (such as academic interventions and Saturday classes).

- Nine percent *reduced elective courses not required for graduation* in 2015-16, compared to 33 percent prior to 2015-16 and 31 percent in 2011-12. 16 percent considered but never implemented, 34 percent never considered, and nine percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, reducing elective courses not required for graduation.
- 18 percent *deferred textbook purchases* in 2015-16, compared to 54 percent prior to 2015-16 and 51 percent in 2011-12. Seven percent considered but never implemented, 16 percent never considered, and 16 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, deferring textbook purchases.
- Seven percent *reduced high-cost offerings (i.e. occupational classes)* in 2015-16, compared to 26 percent prior to 2015-16, and 19 percent in 2011-12. Eight percent considered but never implemented, 44 percent never considered and seven percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels reducing high-cost course offerings (i.e. occupational classes).
- 13 percent *reduced instructional materials* in 2015-16, compared to 44 percent prior to 2015-16 and 49 percent in 2011-12. Ten percent considered and never implemented, 27 percent never considered and 12 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, reducing instructional materials.
- Ten percent *eliminated field trips* in 2015-16, compared to 34 percent prior to 2015-16, and 30 percent in 2011-12. 20 percent considered but never implemented, 26 percent never considered, and 12 percent implemented but are back to pre-recession levels, eliminating field trips.

Federal Policy and Congressional Priority Findings: AASA is a national professional organization representing more than 13,000 school administrators across the nation. One focus of the organization is its federal advocacy on a host of education-related issues reaching from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to federal funding and child nutrition, among others. The official positions taken by AASA are reflected in an annual legislative agenda determined by AASA members. As the 114th Congress carries forward, AASA asked members which education policies they think Congress should focus on and consider as they move forward with their education agenda. Ranked in descending order, respondents reported a host of legislative and policy priorities:

- Respondents were asked to identify the top five education policies Congress should focus on as they move their education agenda forward. Replies were: (Q20)
  - Full funding of IDEA (86 percent)
  - Reauthorize ESEA (79 percent)
  - Oppose federal funding to non-public schools (vouchers) (70 percent)
  - Resolve sequester (64 percent)
  - Provide maintenance of effort relief in IDEA (59 percent)
  - School nutrition reauthorization that gives schools increased flexibility (59 percent)
  - NOT in the Top Responses (descending levels of support)
    - Targeting/distributing ESEA funds base d on concentration of poverty
    - Student data and privacy
    - Supporting charter schools that are subject to the same accountability measures as regular public schools
    - Requiring school districts to base teacher and principal evaluations primarily on quantitative measures of student outcomes

Federal and state policy impacts local implementation. Fiscal policy is no exception to this rule, and the health of local education agencies is impacted and shaped by decision makers at both the state and federal levels. Sometimes federal policies are work seamlessly with local policy. In other instances, as is proving the case with fiscal policy, federal policies can tie the hands local school districts, forcing them to cover federal shortfalls and cuts.

- One-third of respondents (34 percent) indicated that their state has the ability within its budget to soften the impact of federal education funding cuts. (Q17)
- Only 14 percent of respondents indicated that their district has the ability within its budget to soften the impact of federal education funding cuts. (Q18)
- Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with a handful of statements. Their responses are as follow: (Q19)
  - Sequestration impacts all funding programs without considering the effectiveness or scope of programs being cut. (73 percent strongly agree; 20 percent agree)
  - Congress should pick up the work of the failed Super Committee and work to identify the necessary cuts in a manner that impacts both mandatory and discretionary programs and considers program effectiveness. (57 percent strongly agree, 29 percent agree)
  - Given that the cuts have to happen, as required by law, Congress should take control of the process and proactively identify a nuanced combination of the spending cuts and revenue increases necessary to avoid the blunt cuts of sequestration. (59 percent strongly agree, 27 percent agree)
  - I have reached out to my Congressional delegation (Representatives and Senators) to talk about the importance of avoiding sequestration (impact of sequestration on education?). (33 percent strongly agree, 31 percent agree, 19 percent neutral, 11 percent disagree)
  - I think the administration has done a good job talking about how detrimental sequestration would be to their education agenda. (13 percent strongly agree, 23 percent agree, 27 percent neutral, 23 percent disagree, 10 percent strongly disagree)
  - Secretary Duncan, as the cabinet member advocating for education, should be advocating to minimize the impact of sequestration on the education budget. (77 percent strongly agree, 16 percent agree, 6 percent neutral)
  - The leadership of the House and Senate Education committees should be advocating to minimize the impact of sequestration on the education budget. (79 percent strongly agree, 14 percent agree)
  - I believe Congress will be able to resolve/replace the threat of sequester for FY16 (this year). (9 percent strongly agree, 12 percent agree, 19 percent neutral, 33 percent agree, 24 percent strongly disagree)

Demographics:
- 165 school administrators from 37 states submitted responses to the survey in September/October 2015.
- Virtually all (89 percent) respondents reported their title as ‘Superintendent’. (Q30)
- Three-quarters (72 percent) of respondents described their district as rural, compared to 21 percent reporting suburban and 6 percent reporting urban. (Q32)
- Enrollment: (Q31)
  - Three-quarters (75 percent) of respondents work in school districts enrolling less than 5,000 students: 33 percent are in districts enrolling less than 1,000 students; 28 percent are in districts enrolling between 1,000 and 2,999 students and 14 percent are in districts enrolling between 3,000 and 4,999.

Conclusion: AASA’s *Economic Impact Survey Series* has, over seven years, documented both the continued erosion of revenue for state and local school budgets stemming from the recession and its continuing impact on the nation’s public schools. The nation’s schools, the educators who staff them and the students they serve have survived round after round of budget cuts, program eliminations and job cuts. As the recession came to a close, its cuts and related fiscal restraint carried on, and education funding continues to face threats from federal policies and (in)action, impacting even the most resilient of schools and undermining whatever weak economic stability state and local economies may be experiencing.

The results from this survey detail that it is not the new cuts that are most problematic. Rather, it is the inability of states and local school districts to make their budgets 'whole', to return them to pre-recession levels. Now, more than seven years since the start of the recession, our nation's K-7 graders have spent the entirety of their K-12 experience, to date, in a post-recession funding climate. There are many who like to downplay the impact that more money can have on educational opportunity, and AASA agrees that funding alone is not the silver bullet. We cannot, however, when armed with data like this, turn a blind eye to the stark reality that the fiscal pressure of these sustained cuts continues to deny schools and the students they serve of critical resources.

In the time between when this survey data was collected and its analysis reported, Congress completed reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. AASA looks forward to a time when the latest iteration of the Economic Impact Survey Series reports equally positive news, focusing on economic stability and growing investment in education, rather than cuts and stagnation.

References

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A full list of AASA's research and white papers is available online: http://www.aasa.org/research.aspx