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Survey Says: Superintendents Weigh in on Sequestration

In March 2012, AASA released *Weathering the Storm: How the Economic Recession Continues to Impact Schools*, the twelfth in a series of studies by AASA examining the impact of the economic recession on the nation’s schools. In addition to the usual assessment of economic impacts, this survey asked administrators to weigh in on administration. The analysis of those results is excerpted here.

The failure of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (Super Committee) to produce a plan identifying budgetary savings of at least $1.2 trillion over ten years has triggered an automatic spending reduction process (called sequestration) that takes effect on January 2, 2013. For FY13, these cuts will be applied to most programs, including all discretionary education programs except Federal Pell Grants. The depth of the cuts is estimated to be between 7.8% and 9.1%, which would reduce funding for the US Education department by $3.5 billion to $4.1 billion, affecting millions of students and leading to potentially significant job losses and program eliminations for the nation’s schools, the educators who run them, and the students they educate.

Sequestration Findings:

- When asked if their state or local budget had the capacity to soften the impact of federal cuts (like those of sequestration), nearly all replied ‘no’ (79.4 percent for state capacity and 83.9 percent for local capacity). (Q20)
- Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a handful of statements related to sequestration. Responses were listed on a five point Likert Scale (strongly agree/agree/neutral/disagree/strongly disagree): (Q21)
  - A strong majority (83.2 percent) agree/strongly agree with Sequestration impacts all funding programs without considering the scope or effectiveness of the programs being cut.
  - Eighty-two percent agree/strongly agree with Congress should pick up the work of the Super Committee and work to identify the necessary cuts in a manner that impacts both mandatory and discretionary programs and considers program effectiveness.
  - Roughly half (48.9 percent) agree/strongly agree with Across-the-board cuts should be truly across the board. Congress should not provide for—and the President should veto—any efforts to exempt some portions of the budget from the cuts. One quarter (28.6 percent) disagree/strongly disagree with the statement.
  - Three-quarters (78.6 percent) agree/strongly agree with 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.
  - Nearly half (47.9 percent) agree/strongly agree with I have reached out to my Congressional delegation (Representative and Senators) to talk about the importance of avoiding sequestration and its impact on education.
Less than one-fifth (17.6 percent) agree/strongly agree with I think the administration has done a good job talking about how detrimental sequestration would be to their education agenda.

Very few (7.4 percent) agree/strongly agree with I think the leadership of the House/Senate Education Committees and Funding Subcommittees have done a good job talking about how detrimental sequestration would be to funding the nation’s schools.

More than three-quarters (86.4 percent) agree/strongly agree with Secretary Duncan, as the cabinet member advocating for education, should be advocating to minimize the impact of sequestration on the education budget.

More than three-quarters (87.1 percent) agree/strongly agree with The leadership of the House and Senate education committees should be advocating to minimize the impact of sequestration on the education budget.

This survey was completed by 528 school administrators in 48 states in February 2012.

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