



Funding Cuts Force School Districts to Reduce Learning Opportunities for Students

Follow-up survey confirms impact of enacted cuts to basic education funding and loss of federal stimulus programs

HARRISBURG, PA—With the new school year underway, students across the state have returned to schools that look differently, according to a new report by two statewide education organizations. The results of state budget cuts and the elimination of federal stimulus programs this year have caused school districts to increase the number of students per classroom, reduce teachers and other school staff, shrink course offerings, impose additional fees for extra-curricular activities, and place restrictions on field trips.

Data from the survey, conducted by the PA Association of School Administrators (PASA) and the PA Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), indicates that schools have laid-off school employees or left vacant positions unfilled to reduce expenses. Respondents to the survey (almost 60% of the Commonwealth's school districts) indicated a reduction of 8,365 instructional and non-instructional positions, or a total of 14,178 positions statewide. Other districts avoided lay-offs by implementing salary freezes for 2011-12.

“Districts had no choice in cutting programs that directly impact student learning. The severity of the state and federal funding cuts will put student achievement gains at risk,” said PASA Executive Director Jim Buckheit.

The report also indicates more than 7 in 10 districts will rely on reserve funds to balance their budgets this year. More than a third of the districts in the survey indicated they did not increase property taxes this year.

“We have not seen personnel and program reductions of this magnitude in education for decades,” said PASBO Executive Director Jay Himes. “This is not a one year problem. The disinvestment in education combined with increasing pension costs next year means there will be more painful decisions for schools when the 2012-13 budget process starts later this fall,” he added.

The PASBO/PASA survey was conducted of all 500 school districts in August 2011 to obtain the data included in this report. Responses were received from 294 districts across the state (59 percent of all districts).

For a copy of the survey report, go to: <http://www.pasbo.org> or <http://www.pasa-net.org>

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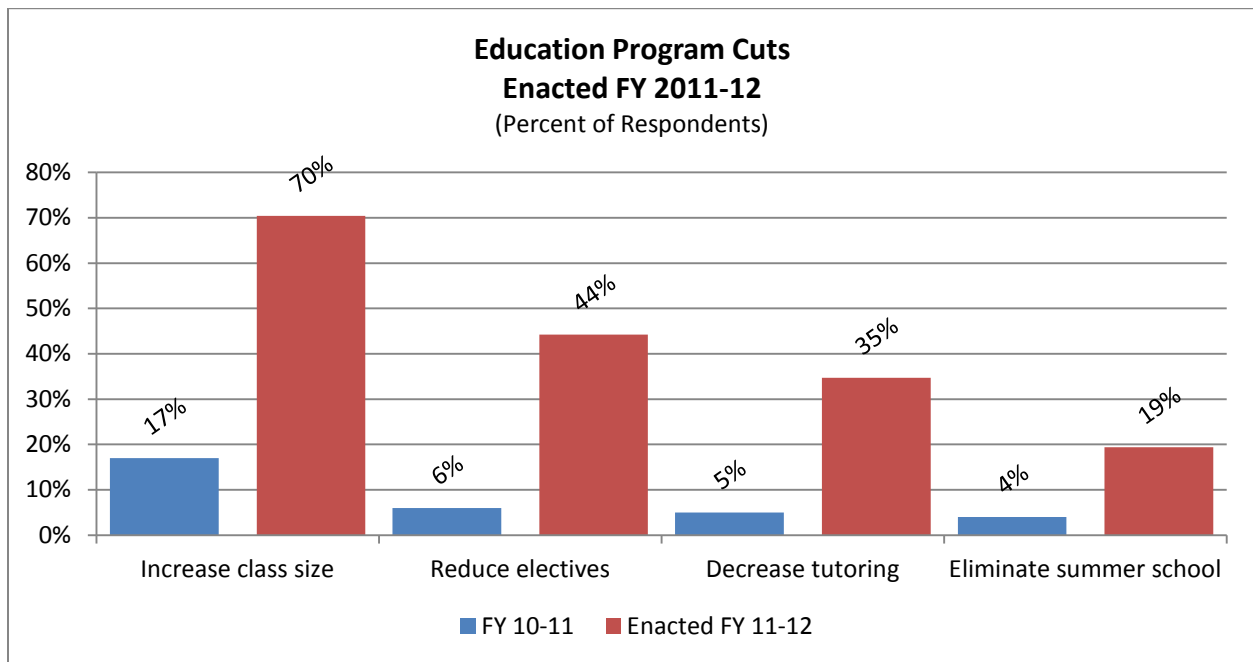
New School Year Begins with Reduced Learning Opportunities for Students

September 13, 2011

A survey conducted in August 2011, to which 294 of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts responded, revealed that, as children have returned to their classrooms to start the new school year, they are likely to find fewer teachers and school staff, larger class sizes, reduced course offerings, outdated textbooks, reduced opportunities for extra help and cuts to and fees charged for extracurricular activities.

According to the survey, state budget cuts of nearly \$930 million, elimination of federal stimulus funds and other factors have resulted in significant cuts to educational programs and services that limit learning opportunities for children across the state. For example, children in several school districts will not have the opportunity to participate in pre-kindergarten or full-day kindergarten programs this year.

Half of the responding districts indicated they have cut instructional programming in the 2011-12 school year. During the past few years, school districts have instituted the relatively easy cuts available to them, which had little effect on student learning.



With those opportunities already utilized, in the 2011-12 school year districts have had little choice but to cut programs that directly impact student learning, thereby placing the academic gains students have made in recent years at risk:

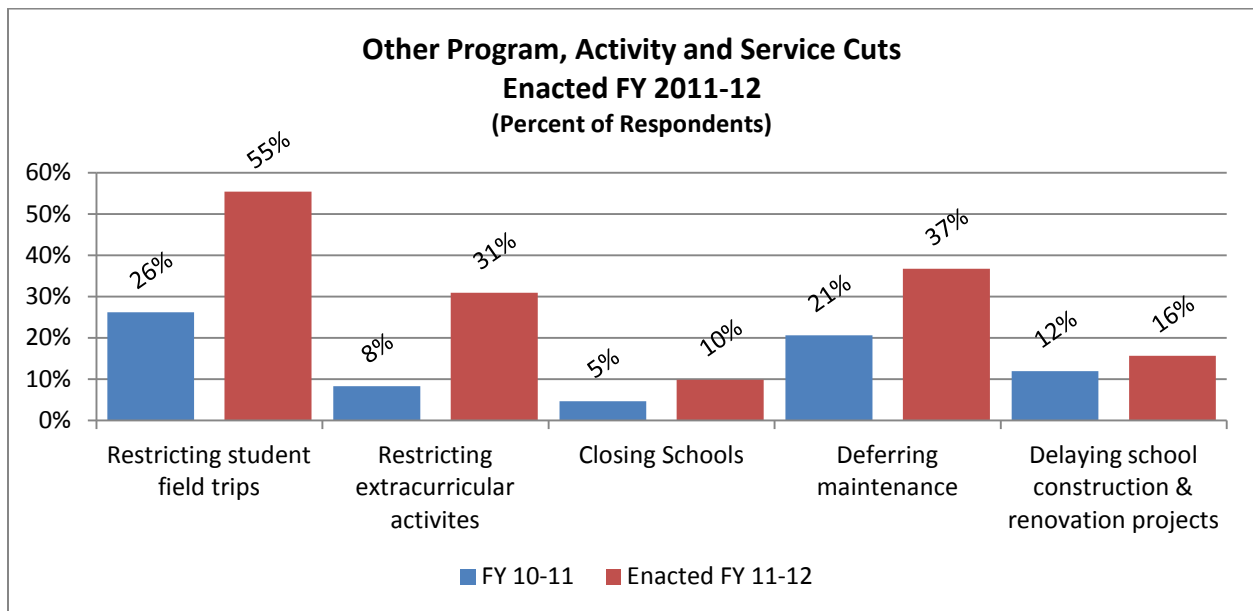
- Seventy percent of school districts have increased class sizes above what they were during the 2010-11 school year.

- Forty-four percent have reduced elective course offerings that are not required for graduation, such as those in foreign languages, arts, music, physical education and even some of the core subjects of math, English, sciences and social studies.
- Nearly thirty-five percent of school districts have reduced or eliminated programs that provide extra help or tutoring for struggling students.
- Almost twenty percent of school districts have eliminated their summer school programs where students can make up the necessary credits to allow them to graduate on time.
- Forty-one percent of districts have delayed the purchase of new textbooks.
- Fifty-eight percent have delayed purchases of technology such as computers.

Four school districts that responded to the survey have eliminated full-day kindergarten, and nine districts have reduced their full-day kindergarten programs. Seven school districts have eliminated and eleven have reduced their pre-kindergarten programs.

In addition to these cuts to programs that directly impact student learning, districts are also cutting programs, activities and services that either supplement student learning or serve the larger community:

- Fifty-five percent of districts indicated they have reduced or eliminated student field trips.
- Nearly one-third indicated they have reduced or eliminated extracurricular activities for students, including sports programs.
- Thirty-one percent have established or increased fees charged for participation in extracurricular activities.
- Nearly twenty-six percent have increased the fees they charge to community groups to use school facilities for sports, recreation and other community sponsored activities.



The simultaneous decline of state and local school funding sources, combined with the elimination at the federal level of both the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and Ed Jobs Program, created the most significant budget challenge for public schools in decades.

While federal funding helped to delay deeper program and personnel cuts the schools now are experiencing, the one-time availability of these funds created an abrupt end to the programs they supported. As a result, school districts across the state needed to reduce expenditures, raise local revenues or both in order to balance their budgets in 2011-12.

With personnel costs consuming about two-thirds of school district expenditures, reductions in positions across-the-board were required. Schools used both savings from not filling vacancies created by retirements and resignations (3,259 eliminated positions) and the more drastic option of layoffs (5,106 eliminated positions). Statewide, this would mean school district respondents (59 percent of all school districts) eliminated or left vacant nearly 14,159 positions in 2011-12. More personnel reductions may be required again next year when a new round of cuts in school budgets is anticipated.

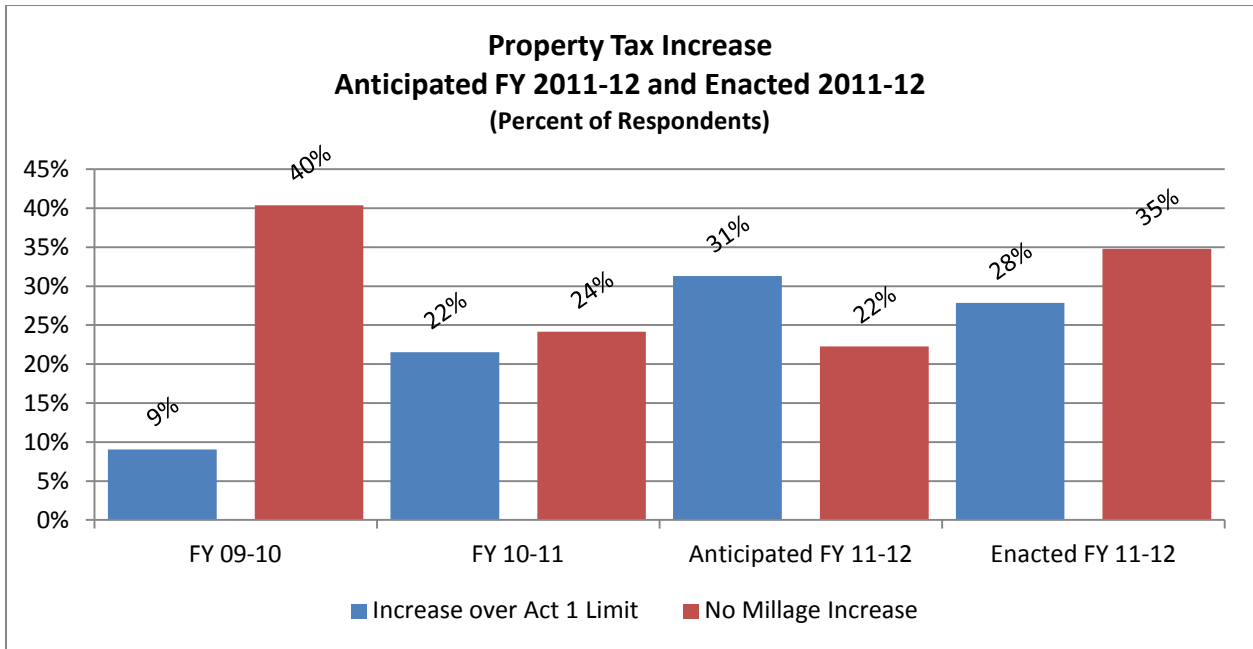
**School Personnel Actions: Vacancies and Furloughs
Enacted FY 2011-12**

Category	No. of Vacancies Unfilled	No. of Positions Furloughed	Total
Teachers	1,870	1,686	3,556
Central Office Administrators	195	444	639
Building-Level Administrators	76	94	170
Other Certified Professional Employees	81	278	359
Other Employees	1,037	2,604	3,641

8,365
Positions eliminated by survey respondents

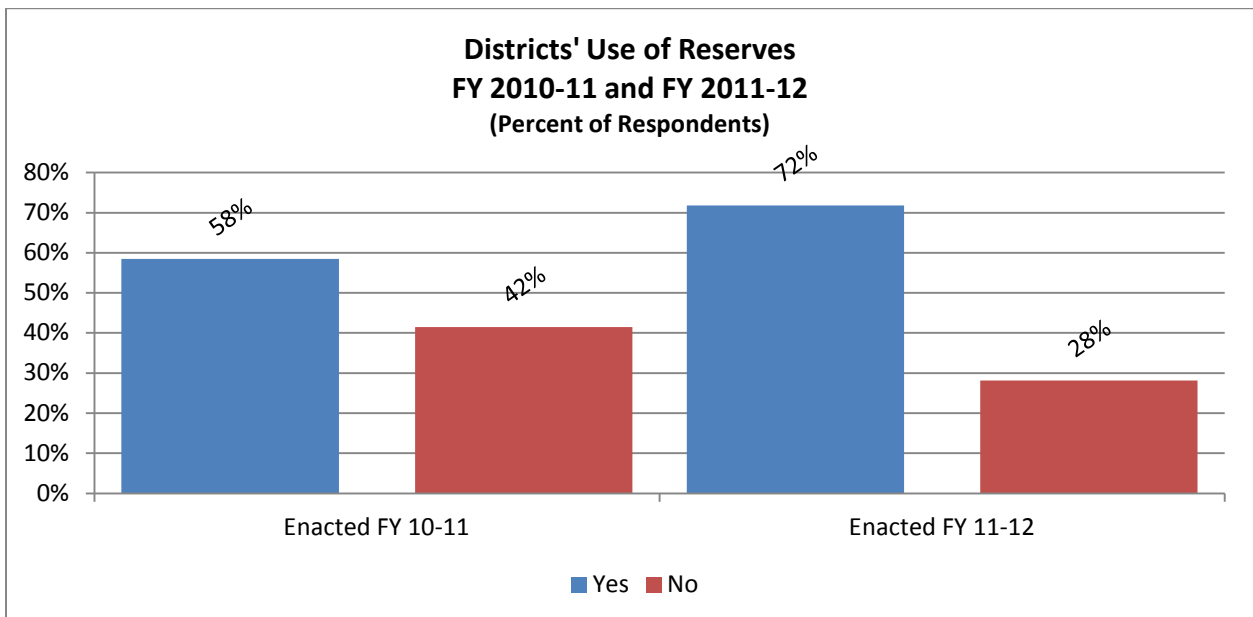
28.45
Average per school district responding

School districts this year faced the lowest property tax cap since the adoption of Act 1 in 2006. At 1.4 percent, the Act 1 Index plunged almost 50 percent from 2010-11. As a result, property tax increases alone were not the solution to school district financial woes. The continued stagnant economy forced districts to seek other budget balancing solutions as the option of increasing real estate taxes was inadequate to produce a balanced budget.



The survey shows that more than one-third (34.6 percent) of schools had no property tax increases, with another 30 percent increasing property taxes within the index. Despite the need to address significant revenue gaps, 28 percent of the districts in the survey raised property taxes above the Act 1 Index (see table below.) Schools also turned to existing reserve funds to balance budgets.

More than seven in ten responding districts indicated reserve funds were used to balance their 2011-12 budgets. These reserves are like family savings accounts; they set funds aside to pay for planned major expenses such as a school construction project or increased state pension costs or to address emergencies like replacing a broken boiler or repairing a leaking roof.



The survey results show that the average school district is using more than half a million dollars in fund balance to balance its budget in the 2011-12 school year. Many districts will not have any reserve funds available to balance their budgets after this year, which will result in even more difficult and painful personnel and program cuts in future years.

This report is based on a recent survey of school districts that was conducted by the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). The PASBO/PASA survey was conducted of all 500 school districts in August 2011 to obtain the data included in this report. Responses were received from 294 districts across the state (59 percent of all districts), which constituted a majority of the state's 500 school districts, including the School District of Philadelphia.

The Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) is a statewide association with 3,000 members, two-thirds of whom are non-instructional administrators below the rank of superintendent. PASBO members provide a myriad of services for K-12 education that support classroom learning and student achievement. They are engaged in school finance, accounting, facilities, transportation, technology, human resources, food service, purchasing, communications, safety and other operational services in schools.

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) represents school superintendents and other school leaders from across the Commonwealth. PASA's mission is to promote high quality public education for all learners through its support and development of professional leadership.



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