

CEC Calls On Congress to Preserve Special Education Funding; Survey Finds Special Education Impacted by Poor Economy

A survey conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) – the largest international organization of professionals who work on behalf of children and youth with disabilities and gifts and talents – in collaboration with the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), a division of CEC, reveals the poor economy is negatively impacting special education.

- **92% of respondents state there is – or is anticipated in the near future – an increased strain on the availability of services for students with disabilities**, meaning that the poor economy is making it increasingly difficult to provide services and supports to students with disabilities.
- **91% of respondents state they have had – or anticipate in the near future – an increase in caseload**, meaning that special educators are serving more students with disabilities, each of whom has complex needs.
- **91% of respondents report an increase in class size** as having already occurred or anticipated in the near future in their school district.
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- **90% of respondents report cuts to education programs** as having already occurred or anticipated in the near future in their school district.
- **94% of respondents report funding cuts for the purchase of resources, such as technology**, as having already occurred or anticipated in the near future in their school district.

Nationally, there are currently 6 million children and youth with disabilities who receive a variety of legally mandated services afforded by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These services – which are determined after a comprehensive evaluation by an Individualized Education Program Team that includes adults who know the child best, including parents – must be provided, even when states and school districts face economic hardships. However, these survey results demonstrate that school districts across the nation are struggling to meet the needs of

Voices from the Field

“Special education teachers are having to carry the maximum caseload and are not being able to provide the best services so students can continue [to learn] in the least restrictive environment.”

- *Local Special Education Supervisor,
Arkansas*

“We have had to cut back on services such as behavioral consultants, assistive technology consultants, and autism consultants who provided direct instruction and help to teachers with providing services to these students.”

- *Local Director of Student Support Services,
Arizona*

“With local revenues decreasing and state budgets cutting education funding, student services are dramatically impacted. Our county is currently addressing a \$9 million shortfall for next year. That does not consider the possible federal budget cuts.”

- *Local Director of Special Education, Georgia*

“Depending on the students needs, which have been a high cost to our district this year, there may be additional cutbacks in personnel, especially paraprofessionals and teacher caseloads will increase.”

- *Director of Special Education, Kentucky*

“Students with disabilities have to travel farther on buses because districts are either eliminating or reducing services in their schools.”

- *Director of Special Education, Michigan*

students with disabilities while confronting very difficult economic times.

Furthermore, students with disabilities require the expertise from a wide cadre of professionals to succeed academically, developmentally, and socially. Unfortunately, the survey results indicate that despite the direct contributions special education professionals have on the achievement of students with disabilities, the poor economy is prompting layoffs, hiring freezes, and furloughs in school districts across the country.

- **81% of respondents report layoffs** of special education teachers, special education administrators, paraprofessionals, or related service personnel as having already occurred or anticipated in the near future in their school district.
- **79% of respondents work in school districts that have issued a hiring freeze** for special education teachers, special education administrators, paraprofessionals, or related service personnel, reporting this freeze as having already occurred or anticipated in the near future.
- **69% of respondents report unfilled vacancies** for special education teachers, special education administrators, paraprofessionals, and related service personnel, reporting this freeze as having already occurred or anticipated in the near future.
- **44% of respondents work in school districts that have already implemented furloughs, or are planning to do so in the near future.**

Economic Stimulus Funds Have Kept Special Education Services Afloat

Although the survey did not directly ask about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's impact on school districts, or what the expected impact is now that this funding stream will no longer be available after the end of this school year, numerous respondents provided narrative comments relating to the direct positive impact ARRA monies has had on special education, including preserving services, staving off job layoffs, and purchasing necessary instructional equipment.

Cuts to Special Education Impact the Labor Market and Local Economies

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Labor states there are 473,000 special education teachers across the country (this figure does not include special education administrators or related service personnel) whose purchasing power as consumers of the economy is becoming increasingly limited due to the economic conditions that are leading to layoffs, furloughs, and unfilled vacancies.

Cutting Education Funding to Pay for the Federal Deficit is a Fool's Errand

The U.S. Department of Education receives 1.32% of the total federal budget; it is not responsible for the federal deficit and even its total elimination would not make any meaningful impact on paying down the deficit. According to top economists, cutting education programs is shortsighted at a time when an investment in our future workforce is critical to advancing the nation's goals. Furthermore, the American public has indicated their opposition to cutting education funding in numbers polls.

Congressional Proposals to Cut Special Education Funding Threatens Success of Students with Disabilities

Now, as Congress considers funding levels for Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012, proposals to slash special education funding by more than \$500 million threaten the availability and delivery of special education services, further exacerbating the

findings of CEC's survey. While this proposed cut was averted, its mere consideration reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the impact the economy is having on students with disabilities. More than 35 years ago, Congress pledged to assist states and school districts in paying for the education of students with disabilities by agreeing to pay 40% of the average per-pupil expenditure. Unfortunately, Congress provided only 17.2% in 2010. These recent threats to cut special education would shift even more of the cost to local communities, which are still reeling from the effects of the worst recession in modern history, and make it impossible for schools to provide quality services for each eligible child.

CEC continues to call on Congress to reject any legislation that threatens the availability and delivery of services for children and youth with disabilities.

Appendix

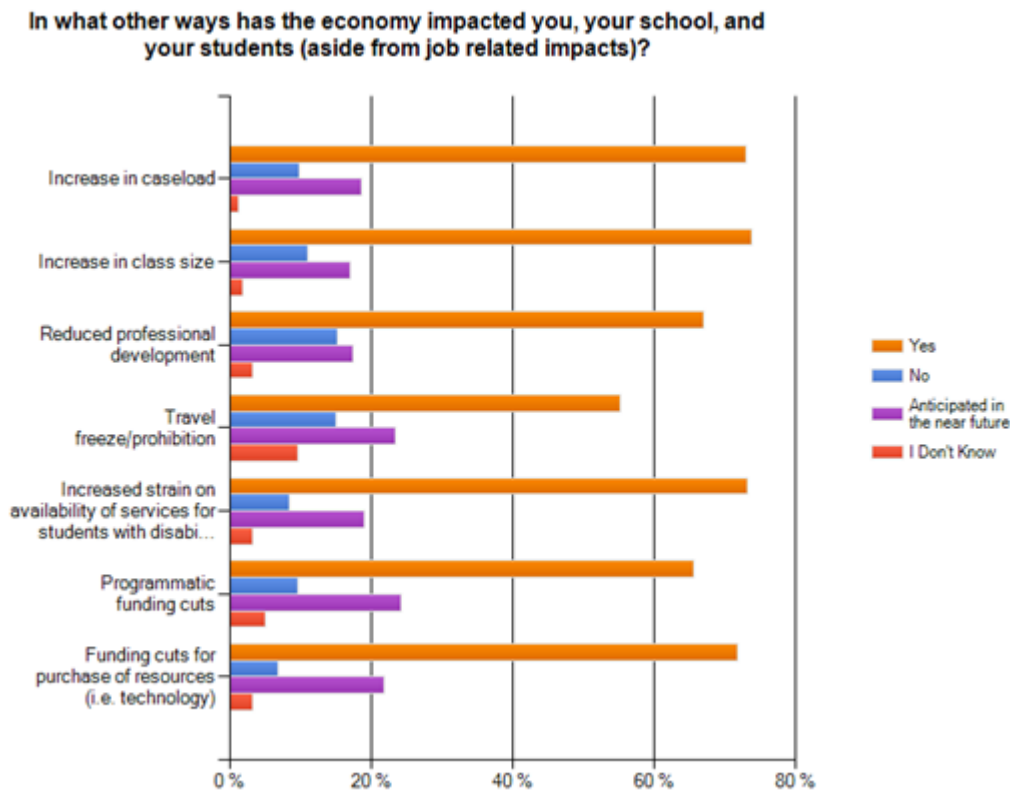
Information Summary

Number of Respondents: 701/3401

Percentage Responded: 20.6%

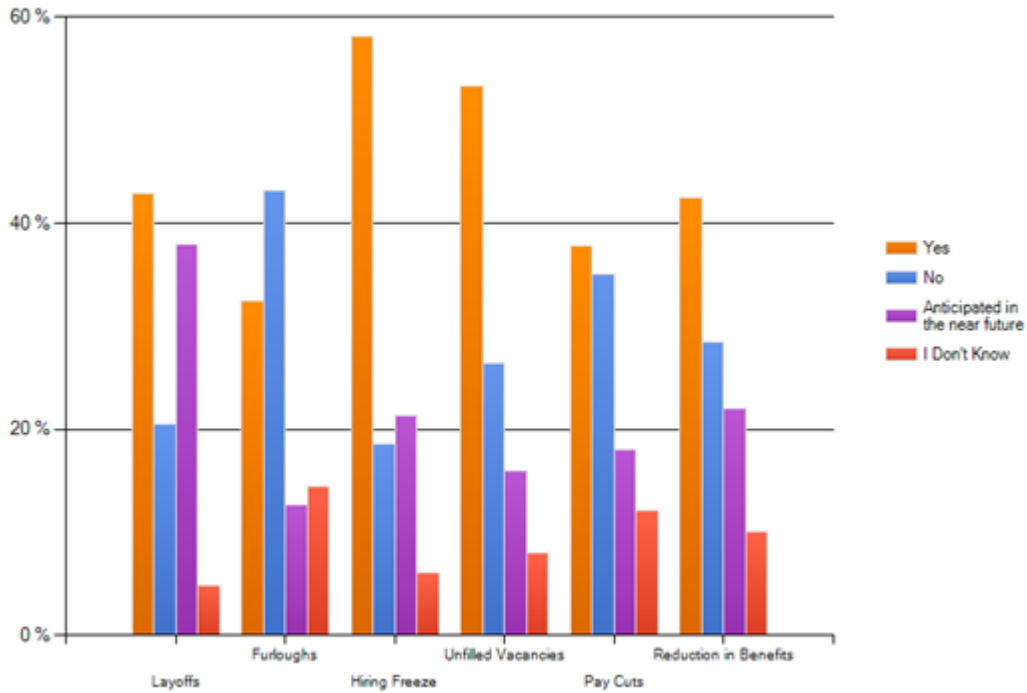
Number of States Represented: 45

Survey Respondents: Members of the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), a division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)



- 91% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” for an increase in caseload
- 91% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” for an increase in class size
- 84% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” for reduced professional development
- 78% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” for travel freeze/prohibition
- 92% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to an increased strain on availability of services for students with disabilities
- 90% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to programmatic cuts
- 94% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to funding cuts for purchase of resources (i.e., technology)

How has the economy impacted special education jobs (teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, related service personnel) in your school district?



- 81% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to layoffs
- 46% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to furloughs
- 79% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to a hiring freeze
- 69% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to unfilled vacancies
- 56% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to pay cuts
- 65% of respondents answered “yes” or “anticipated in the near future” to a reduction in benefits