

## Press Release

### Budget Cuts Create Problems in Schools According to Texas Principals

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As the public schools of Texas prepare for a \$4 billion reduction in state aid, school principals in the state report that previous cuts have had a severe impact on staffing, class size, and other matters according to a recent survey by the Texas Educational Excellent Project at Texas A&M University. Fully 74% of Texas principals reported that their school had suffered budget cuts after the start of the 2008 recession. Because such a large portion of school budgets go to pay teachers and staff, budget cuts frequently lead to layoffs for staff and teachers. Two of every five principals reported that their school needed to layoff teachers and almost half reported staff layoffs in response to these cuts. This is significant given the importance of teachers as mentors and positive role models for students. Teachers play an integral role in college prep, specialized guidance, and overall academic achievement. Decreasing their influence may have vast consequences that extend far beyond the classroom. According to Dr. Meredith Walker, the study director, “The current budget cuts are coming after a series of very tight years. Cuts of this magnitude will generate lower test scores and generally decrease the quality of education in Texas Schools.”

Budget cuts not only negatively affect staffing, but the quality of education and curriculum offered to students. 54% percent of Texas principals indicated that budget cuts led to increased class sizes. This is extremely detrimental for schools, especially to secondary students, where there is limited regulation on class size. Even more alarming is the finding that two out of every five principals reported that budgets cuts have led to a reduction in the number of courses offered outside the core curriculum. More specifically, nearly 40 percent reported that they have had to cut fine arts courses in response to cuts. This follows a harmful, yet growing trend where schools are sacrificing fine arts, yet; studies often show that such courses are very beneficial for academic achievement. Additionally, college readiness indicators, such as gifted courses have also suffered. Fully 33 percent of principals indicated that these budget cuts have led to a decreased number of gifted courses, activities and organizations.

Principals also report that other school structures such as scheduling and extracurricular activities are affected by budget cuts as well. Such activities are critical to producing well rounded students. These activities are not only beneficial for college preparation, but they may also deter juvenile crime as students are provided meaningful, after-school activities. Thirty -five percent of principals indicated the cuts have led to reductions in extracurricular activities. Finally, nearly half of the principals indicated that budget cuts have affected scheduling patterns for students as well.

With the recent budgetary cuts to education in the state legislature, it is evident that schools will have substantial changes to their structure and staff. These cuts will especially hurt districts that rely heavily on state aid—poorer schools with many at-risk, low income students; yet, these students often need the most financial investment. Such students are often in dilapidated schools that lack the resources to provide a sound educational environment. Given the deleterious effects of budgets to schools, policymakers should be aware of the impact that such a monumental change in educational spending will have on students. If the responses to this survey of Texas principals are any indicator of the future, Texas schools are in dire trouble. According to Ken Meier, director of the Texas Educational Excellent Project, “The basic problem is that the governor and the legislature have not honored their commitments to public education. They have systematically reduced the state share

of funding, resulting in more inequalities based on local property tax wealth. The result is both a cumbersome school finance system and a finance system that is inadequate for the state of Texas. Although Texas school administrators and teachers have done excellent work in overcoming prior budget cuts, there is almost no slack left in the system. The current cuts will directly affect the school children of Texas.”

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The 2011 Texas Principal Management Survey was administered across five waves between February 22, 2011 and May 4, 2011 with 1,509 total responses.

The Texas Educational Excellence Project seeks to apply scholarly research to educational policy issues in order to make recommendations for greater quality and equity in Texas school systems. TEEP is a program of Texas A&M's Department of Political Science and its Project for Equity, Representation, and Governance, with research associates at the University of Texas - Pan American, University of Texas at Dallas, University of Kansas, University of Oklahoma, and the University of Iowa.