

Concerns about Proposed State Budget for Public Schools

We believe that the budget proposal currently under consideration lacks courage. Legislators are choosing to inflict the most pain on those who can afford it the least – our children. The proposal hurts North Carolina's ability to compete in the future and takes critical tools away from the very children we hope can one day pay back the national debt. We also believe that the proposed cuts may jeopardize the \$2.65 billion in education funding that North Carolina is slated to receive under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Legislators need to realize that they cannot cut their way out of this financial crisis.

Potential Impact on Parents & Students . . .

- Parents and students can expect to see larger class sizes next year as a result of funding changes that will make classes larger across the board.
- There will be fewer counselors at the same time student enrollment continues to grow.
- Elementary students will have over 4,600 less teacher assistants to work one-on-one with students with learning problems.
- Over 15,000 students and their parents will be without supervised, afterschool programs.
- \$70 million of funding earmarked for special programs for at-risk youngsters is proposed to be cut as are foreign language and long-distance learning programs.
- Morale of teachers and other school employees is likely to be at an all-time low as threatened and real layoffs and cutbacks create a climate of job fear and uncertainty.

Potential Impact on Local Taxes . . .

- Local communities will lose state support for school construction, placing another burden on the backs of local taxpayers.
- Cutbacks to K-12 schools, community colleges and social service programs will force local officials to decide between raising taxes or watching services decline.
- Thousands of state employees will lose their jobs on July 1, increasing demands on local government for services and swelling the ranks of the unemployed.

Potential Impact on the State Economy . . .

- If proposed cuts in state government take place, between 15,000 and 20,000 state employees will be added to the unemployment rolls and further add to declines in income tax revenue that supports government.
- At the same time many unemployed are enrolling in community colleges to gain new skills, community college programs could be cut dramatically and college tuition is slated to increase.
- Long term, drastic cuts to education at all levels threaten to weaken the state's education foundation, making North Carolina more vulnerable to the new global economy.

Potential Impact to Educators . . .

- The current proposed budget would cut over 11,000 school employees from K-12 schools and, in all probability, freeze or cut pay for those who remain. Morale is at an all time low.
- The hardest hit will be new teachers as a result of most systems using a "last hired/first fired" approach to layoffs. Thus, at the same time the state faces tens of thousands baby boomers retiring from teaching in the coming years, the next generation of teachers will be forced to find employment in other fields.
- In similar fashion, the state is facing a massive loss of school principals as nearly half of today's principals are close to or at eligibility for retirement; however, the proposed budget would sharply cut the number of assistant principals, depleting the ranks of a new generation of school leaders.
- In addition to contending with potential layoffs and salary freezes or cuts, staff training funds for teachers are proposed to be cut drastically – this at the same time more and more people are calling for intensive training and retraining of educators.

Summing It Up . . .

- While the national economic stimulus package contains education funds for what is termed "A Race to the Top" initiative, North Carolina is standing on the verge of a "race to the bottom" that will largely erase over twenty years of educational progress.

- Class size increases, employee cuts, elimination of teaching assistants, an end to afterschool programs, backward steps in foreign language and long-distance learning and proposals that will make access to college education more difficult are a prescription for long-term economic failure. As our President said in his inauguration speech, “The countries that out educate us today will out compete us tomorrow.”
- And finally, North Carolina already has the nation’s fourth highest unemployment rate. The proposed budget cuts will add another 15,000 – 20,000 to the unemployment rolls, a move that could push us further into a long-term recession.
- It is time for leadership. North Carolina will not cut its way out of a recession. What is needed is a balance of increased revenue measures and strategic cuts.