



**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

Report of Findings
Impact of the Economic Downturn on Schools

November 2008

Robert S. McCord, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Chair
Noelle M. Ellerson, American Association of School Administrators

Research Team

K. Forbis Jordan (Ret.), Arizona State University
Teresa Jordan, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Richard Lemons, University of Connecticut
T. C. Mattocks, Bridgewater State College
Toby Melver, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Margaret Orr, Bank Street College

Daniel A. Domenech, AASA Executive Director

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Report of Findings.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Economic Conditions Facing Public School Superintendents.....	7
Impact of Economic Conditions on Families and Learning.....	10
Superintendent Decision Making Process.....	11
Policy Threats and Implications.....	12
Respondent Demographics.....	13
References.....	16
Appendix A: Survey Questions.....	17
Appendix B: Survey Response Data.....	22

Abstract

In Fall 2008, in response to the recent economic downturn, as evidenced in state budget shortfalls, federal buy-outs and interventions, and a series of additional events characterizing a slowing, stagnant economy, AASA examined the impact on school districts across the nation. While there are regional differences, the findings of AASA's Economic Impact Survey, presented here, demonstrate that superintendents in every part of the country are subject to the realities of the economic downturn. While this benchmark data cannot predict a trend, it is difficult to deny that superintendents, in increasing numbers, are confronted by the looming financial crisis that threatens the progress schools have obtained and the stability they have enjoyed in the past.

- When superintendents were asked to identify what actions their districts have considered as a result of the economic downturn:
 - Seventy-four percent have either already implemented or plan to implement a reduction in staff-level hiring.
 - Seventy-nine percent have either already implemented or plan to implement a policy of altering thermostats for less heating and cooling in buildings.
 - Eighty percent have either already implemented or plan to implement the elimination of non-essential travel.

The condition of the schools in a community is an excellent barometer for measuring the condition of the community. The economic downturn reported by school administrators is paralleled by more subtle impacts on the community. When schools curtail their spending through measures such as reducing payroll, conserving energy use, reducing fuel consumption, deferring maintenance, and delaying purchases, the local community feels the effect. For many small communities, schools are a major employer as well as a reliable source of revenue, and cuts to school spending mean cuts to community revenue.

- When superintendents were asked about the economic-related problems of the families of students in their district:
 - Eighty-eight percent say mortgage foreclosures have worsened somewhat or a great deal.
 - Ninety-five percent say unemployment has worsened somewhat or a great deal.
 - Ninety-one percent say student mobility has increased somewhat or a great deal.

Given the inelastic nature of school district budgets and the difficult financial times, superintendents have a tough role to play in cutting costs to meet shrinking budgets. Belt tightening measures are already underway and survey responses suggest that the specter of further cuts is inevitable in areas directly influencing instruction and student learning. The survey responses indicate that, in the face of painful choices, superintendents are proactively engaging the community in the decision-making process.

- The three most common methods for reaching expenditure-reducing decisions were:
 - Discussions with the superintendent's cabinet (81 percent of responders);
 - Discussions at open school board meetings (70 percent of responders); and
 - Discussions in school board committees (56 percent of responders).

Access to an adequate education is a fundamental right afforded to all children. This survey documents the very real threat the recent economic downturn poses to fulfilling this educational obligation to the next generation of Americans. While coping with the burden of constrained budgets initially falls on school superintendents, board members, principals, teachers and parents, the realities associated with an economic downturn have far-reaching consequences.

Overall, responses to the Economic Impact Survey reflected a general sense of pragmatism among superintendents and an acceptance of the need to tighten budgets and implement moderate changes. Given that the budget for the 2008-09 school year was passed before the economic downturn, many responders indicated that the adjustments made to the current budget are very moderate when compared to the cuts superintendents expect to see in their upcoming school budget discussions.

Report of Findings

Impact of the Economic Downturn on Schools

Introduction

The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States. AASA members range from chief executive officers, superintendents and senior-level school administrators to cabinet members, professors and aspiring school system leaders. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children.

AASA has actively endeavored to benchmark the challenges facing American public education leaders. Nearly every decade since 1923, AASA and its affiliates have published a study entitled *The State of the American School Superintendency*. The most recent mid-decade iteration of that study (Glass & Franceschini, 2006) highlighted some of the stark realities associated with the superintendency. One of the many elements addressed in the study was the fiscal challenges facing school superintendents. That study was further defined by a subsequent AASA study entitled *2007 State of the Superintendency Mini-Survey: Aspiring to the Superintendency* (McCord, et al., 2008). More than 2,000 sitting superintendents were included in the latter study, which confirmed the top disincentive to assuming the superintendency is a lack of adequate fiscal support to improve student achievement and reduce the achievement gap. In the fall of 2008 this finding, coupled with an economic downturn, prompted AASA to sponsor an additional survey to examine the impact of fiscal challenges on school systems.

In October 2008, AASA conducted the Economic Impact Survey to examine the impact of the recent economic downturn on school superintendent decision-making. The economic downturn was evidenced in projected state budget shortfalls, federal buy-outs and interventions, and a series of additional events characterizing a slowing, stagnant economy. AASA looked to assess how school districts, school administrators, and the decision making process were impacted by the changing economic situation. The results of that survey are summarized herein.

The findings are presented in five major sections:

- I. Economic Conditions Facing Public School Superintendents;
- II. Impact of Economic Conditions on Families and Learning;
- III. Superintendent Decision Making Process;
- IV. Policy Threats and Implications; and
- V. Respondent Demographics.

Methodology

In October 2008, AASA distributed the Economic Impact Survey to 5,686 superintendents across the nation. The online survey was distributed through e-mail. While the sample was not random or scientific, superintendents receiving and completing the survey represented all regions of the country and districts and communities of all types and sizes. A total of 836 superintendents completed the survey during the first two weeks of October 2008, yielding a response rate of roughly 15 percent.¹ *See Section V: Demographics for a breakdown of respondents.*

¹ See Appendix A for the full set of survey questions.

I. Economic Conditions Facing Public School Superintendents²

The Economic Impact Survey found that school districts in every part of the country are subject to the realities of the economic downturn. While this benchmark data cannot predict a trend, it indicates that schools are confronted by a looming financial crisis that threatens the progress they have obtained and the stability they have enjoyed in the past.

- Sixty-seven percent of superintendents described their districts as “inadequately funded,” while only 30 percent described their districts as “adequately funded.” The remaining two percent indicated their districts have surplus funding. (Q1)
- The percentage of superintendents characterizing their district funding as inadequate varied by region. Among those reporting inadequate funding, rates were lower among superintendents in the mid-Atlantic (52 percent) and northeastern states (38 percent). Western states (82 percent) and states in the mountains and south central (76 percent) and south (75 percent) reported fiscal distress in greater numbers. Regardless of the region, those reporting inadequate funding are a significant portion, if not the majority, of respondents. (Q1, Q16) *See Tables 1 and 2.*

Table 1 breaks down, by region, how districts reported their current funding situation. For example: Region 1 represented just over 11 percent of all responders. Roughly eighty-three percent of responders from Region 1 described their current funding levels as inadequate, as compared to 14.1 percent and 3.3 percent reporting adequate and surplus funding, respectively. Table 2 lists the states that make up each region.

Table I – District Economic Situation

	Total		Inadequately Funded		Adequately Funded		Surplus	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Region 1	92	11.1%	76	82.6%	13	14.1%	3	3.3%
Region 2	84	10.1%	64	76.2%	17	20.2%	3	3.6%
Region 3	205	24.7%	154	75.1%	47	22.9%	4	2.0%
Region 4	154	18.5%	100	64.9%	52	33.8%	2	1.3%
Region 5	97	11.7%	73	75.3%	23	23.7%	1	1.0%
Region 6	95	11.4%	50	52.6%	41	43.2%	4	4.2%
Region 7	104	12.5%	40	38.5%	60	57.7%	4	3.8%

² Percentages may not sum to 100%, due to rounding.

Table 2 – States Assigned to Each Region

Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6	Region 7
Western	South Central	Mountains	Central	Southeast	Mid Atlantic	Northeast
AK	AR	IA	IL	AL	DE	ME
AZ	CO	MI	IN	FL	MD	MA
CA	KS	MN	KY	GA	NJ	NH
HI	NM	NE	MO	LA	PA	NY
ID	OK	ND	OH	MS	WV	RI
MT	TX	SD		NC		VT
NV	UT	WI		SC		CT
OR				TN		
WA				VA		
WY						

- Districts of all sizes reported inadequate funding. However, there existed a positive relationship between the enrollment of districts and the likelihood a superintendent reported inadequate funding. (Q1, Q14) See Table 3.

Table 3 details, by school district enrollment, how responders described their current funding situation. For example, school districts enrolling fewer than 1,000 students represented 25.6 percent of all responders. Sixty-nine percent of these small districts reported inadequate funding levels, as opposed to 29.4 percent and 1.4 percent reporting adequate and surplus funding levels, respectively.

Table 3 – District Economic Situation, by District Enrollment

Students	Total		Inadequately Funded		Adequately Funded		Surplus	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1 - 999	211	25.6%	146	69.2%	62	29.4%	3	1.4%
1,000 - 2,999	286	34.7%	183	64.0%	93	32.5%	10	3.5%
3,000 - 4,999	111	13.5%	65	58.6%	41	36.9%	5	4.5%
5,000 - 9,999	110	13.3%	73	66.4%	36	32.7%	1	0.9%
10,000 - 24,999	63	7.6%	47	74.6%	15	23.8%	1	1.6%
25,000 - 49,999	27	3.3%	23	85.2%	4	14.8%	0	0.0%
50,000 - 99,999	11	1.3%	10	90.9%	1	9.1%	0	0.0%
100,000 or More	5	0.6%	4	80.0%	0	0.0%	1	20.0%

- Superintendents in urban and rural school districts (69 percent and 74 percent, respectively) were more likely to describe the current economic situation in their districts as “inadequate” than those in suburban districts (60 percent). This finding is supported by similar responses from superintendents with respect to the capacity of their districts to sell debt (bonds) in the coming year. Sixty-five percent and 63 percent, respectively, of respondents from suburban and urban districts anticipated finding it harder to fund capital projects in the coming year. A slightly smaller number (58 percent) of rural districts expected to face greater difficulty in selling debt. (Q1, Q3, Q15) *See Table 4.*

Table 4 illustrates, by community type, how districts reported their current funding situation. For example, rural schools accounted for roughly 58 percent of all responders. Some 69.5 percent of responders from rural schools described their current funding level as inadequate, as compared to 28.4 percent and 2.1 percent reporting adequate and surplus funding, respectively.

Table 4 - District Economic Situation, by District Type

	Total		Inadequately Funded		Adequately Funded		Surplus	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Rural	482	58.1%	335	69.5%	137	28.4%	10	2.1%
Suburban	262	31.6%	157	59.9%	95	36.3%	10	3.8%
Urban	86	10.4%	64	74.4%	22	25.6%	0	0.0%

II. Impact of Economic Conditions on Families and Learning

The condition of schools in a community is an excellent barometer for measuring the condition of the community. While the inextricable link between child welfare and learning is well documented, responses to this survey indicate that shrinking school budgets put America's school-aged children at risk. With little evidence that society will rely any less upon schools to provide the essential needs of children, these data underscore a stark problem, especially in difficult financial times.

- Eighty-three percent of respondents who characterized their district as inadequately funded reported the level of funding impacts their ability to close achievement gaps, as compared to only 15 percent of respondents describing their district as adequately funded. Apparently, in the minds of superintendents, money does make a difference in accelerating learning among our most needy students. (Q1, Q8)
- Similarly, large percentages of districts reporting inadequate financial support suggest it impacts their capacity to maintain a focus on student learning (87 percent), maintain a focus on instructional improvements (83 percent), address the learning needs of all students (83 percent), and meet or exceed state and federal performance assessments (81 percent). As in the preceding finding, districts with adequate funding reported limited impact in these areas. (Q1, Q8)
- Among those reporting their district as inadequately funded:
 - Ninety-one percent reported mortgage foreclosures have increased. (Q1, Q9)
 - Seventy-two percent reported homelessness has increased. (Q1, Q9)
 - Almost 95 percent reported unemployment has grown. (Q1, Q9)
 - Almost 96 percent reported an increase in the number of students without health insurance. (Q1, Q9)
 - Seventy-eight percent reported increased participation in the free/reduced meal program, as opposed to 69 percent among schools with adequate funding and 61 percent of schools with surplus funding. This finding is another indicator of the stressors facing American families and the schools. Universally, student participation in the free/reduced meal program, which is based on poverty-level income, is increasing dramatically.
- In addition to having an impact on students, cost-saving measures reported by school superintendents have a direct impact on the community. If schools curtail their spending through measures such as reducing payroll, conserving energy use, reducing fuel consumption, deferring maintenance and delaying purchases, the local community is the first to share the effects of that downturn. For many small communities, the schools are a major employer and a regular and reliable source of revenue.

III. Superintendent Decision Making Process³

The inelastic nature of school district budgets combined with difficult financial times makes the decision making role for school superintendents an unenviable role at best. Superintendents are proactively engaging the community to share in making these very difficult decisions. The survey found that belt-tightening measures are already underway and suggests that the specter of further cuts is inevitable in areas directly influencing instruction and student learning. The economic downturn could threaten gains in student achievement and progress in narrowing the achievement gap, which schools have fought so hard to attain, as well as the capacity of schools to deliver essential services.

- Across all respondents, the seven most frequently selected actions taken in response to the economic downturn, reported as ***already implemented***, are listed below. When disaggregated by urban, suburban and rural districts, no significant deviation from the following list was noted.
 - Altering thermostats (62 percent)
 - Eliminating non-essential travel (57 percent)
 - Reducing staff-level hiring (48 percent)
 - Reducing consumable supplies (48 percent)
 - Increasing class size (36 percent)
 - Deferring maintenance (36 percent)
 - Reducing instructional material (35 percent)

- Again across all respondents, while ***not yet implemented*** or on a ***delayed implementation status***, the following three actions were ranked highest by superintendents.
 - Freezing outside professional service contacts (30 percent)
 - Laying off personnel (30 percent)
 - Eliminating outside staff development consultants (30 percent)

- Regardless of whether they represent rural, suburban or urban districts, respondents were unified on the methods they have employed to proactively engage others in the difficult decisions they face in an economic downturn. The top methods are:
 - Discussing potential solutions with the school at an open meeting or at a committee meeting
 - Adjusting the strategic plan or priority goal setting
 - Discussing potential solutions with cabinet members/leadership team
 - Discussing potential solutions with neighboring superintendents

- In the case of urban school districts, there was interest in discussing matters with other city/county governments. This is assumed to occur because a significant number of urban school districts are fiscally dependent (that is, they depend on a city or county government for financial support).

³ The data in this section was analyzed both collectively and in a cross-tabulation that examined the different decision-making models utilized by districts as they selected various actions. Results were almost identical varying by 2% points or less.

IV. Policy Threats and Implications

Access to an adequate education is a fundamental right afforded to all children. According to the findings of this survey, a lack of sufficient funding in schools threatens that promise. Schools cannot fulfill their obligation to the next generation of Americans without adequate funding. Coping with the burden of constrained budgets initially falls on school superintendents, school board members, teachers, principals and parents, but the realities associated with an economic downturn have far-reaching consequences. Some of the policy threats and implications include:

- State and national accountability efforts are interrupted by the economic downturn. The effort to increase student achievement and reduce the achievement gap between subgroups is clearly facing a threat.
- A new round of costly school finance litigation could occur during economic downturns as the quality, equity and adequacy of educational services are called into question.
- Particularly in fiscally dependent school districts (that depend on a city or county government for financial support), competing municipal and city entities vie for shrinking revenues and produce interagency competition that can further disrupt the provision of public financing for schools.
- The loss of a qualified workforce can have a critical impact on school district operations. The fact that almost half of respondents (48 percent) have already reduced staff-level hiring represents not only the loss of valued personnel but also the loss of the significant investment made in their development. Likewise, the fiscal and non-fiscal impact to the immediate community is often overlooked. Most school personnel live in the immediate community and use their resources to support local businesses.
- As budget reductions occur in schools, there is an inclination to label all costs not directly associated with instruction as being non-essential to the quality of schooling. When cuts occur in areas such as deferred maintenance, student health and safety, and extracurricular activities, schools are materially diminished.
- One of the engines to economic recovery is schooling. A strong system of schools fuels the workforce development and economic diversity essential to a recovering economy. Reducing investment in schools when capacity is needed to sustain recovery only prolongs the economic downturn.
- Disruption of schools by an economic downturn serves to further disable families facing the same economic challenges. Families in distress rely on schools to add stability to their plight at home, whether they are dealing with loss of work, foreclosures or escalating prices. Schools offer the haven needed to help families return some normalcy to their children's lives.
- This survey found that superintendents faced with inadequate funding have turned to their senior staff, school boards and local leaders for assistance in shaping solutions. Superintendents are acting thoughtfully and assertively to address the serious challenges facing their districts.

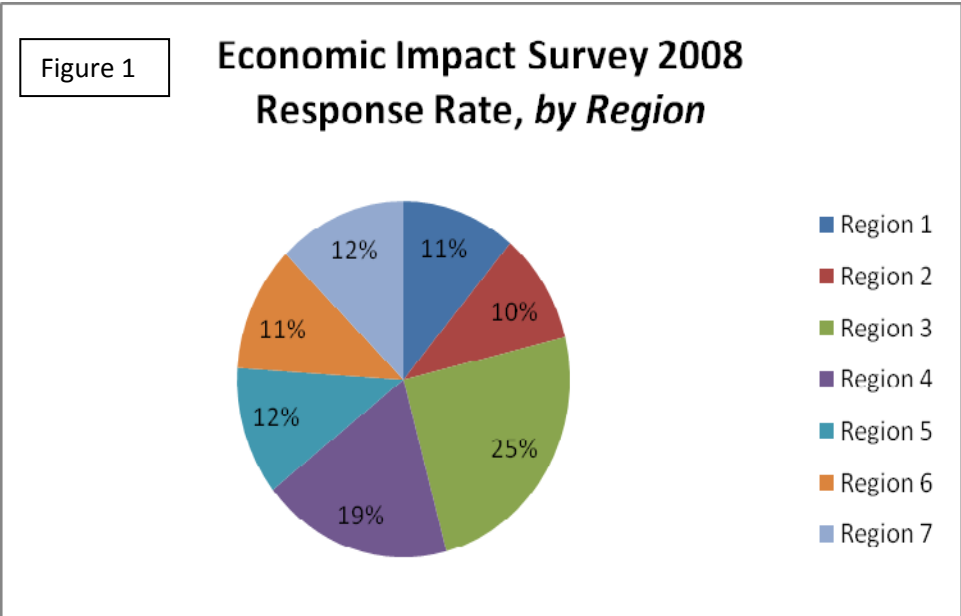
V. Respondent Demographics⁴

Respondent demographics suggest that the data generated by this survey reasonably reflects the makeup of American public education. While no claim is made that the sample was random or scientific, the respondents represented all parts of the country, all district sizes, and designations that approximate the country as a whole. As a benchmark survey, it is hoped that future research on this topic will render greater participation and the trend data necessary to better define the challenges faced by superintendents and schools.

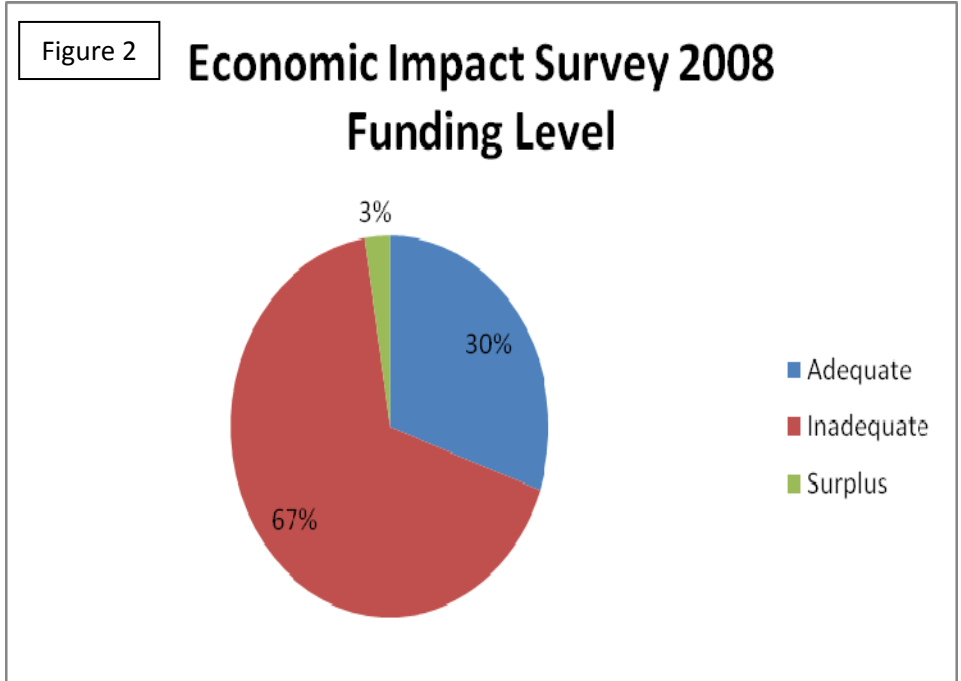
- The Economic Impact Survey was distributed to more than 5,686 superintendents from across the nation during the first two weeks of October 2008. A total of 836 usable responses were received for a return rate of 15 percent. Some 49 states were represented, with the number of responses per state ranging from a low of one to a high of 57.
- Twenty-seven percent of the respondents represented fiscally dependent districts (that is, districts that depend on a municipal and/or county government for financial support), while 73 percent represented fiscally independent districts.
- The longevity of experience as a superintendent reported by respondents was evenly distributed from one year to more than 15 years. Those with three or fewer years of experience comprised 25 percent of those responding.
- Superintendents responding to the survey came from rural (58 percent), suburban (32 percent) and urban districts (10 percent).
- Figures 1 through 4 on the next two pages illustrate the region, funding levels, district size and district type for survey respondents.

⁴ See Appendix B for full demographics.

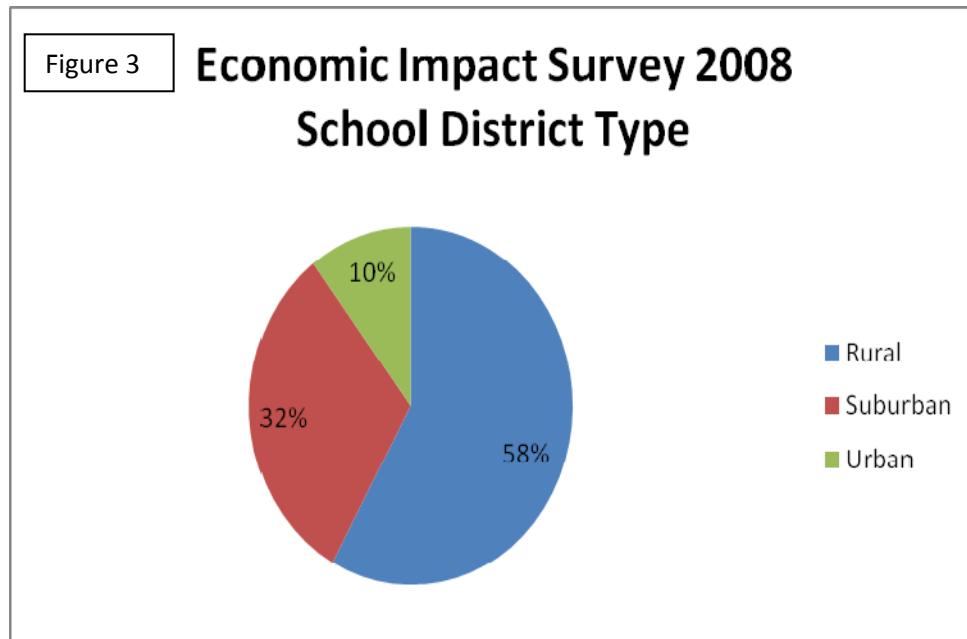
- Figure 1 illustrates the regional break-down of all responses to the 2008 survey. See Table 2, on page 8, for a list of the states assigned to each region.



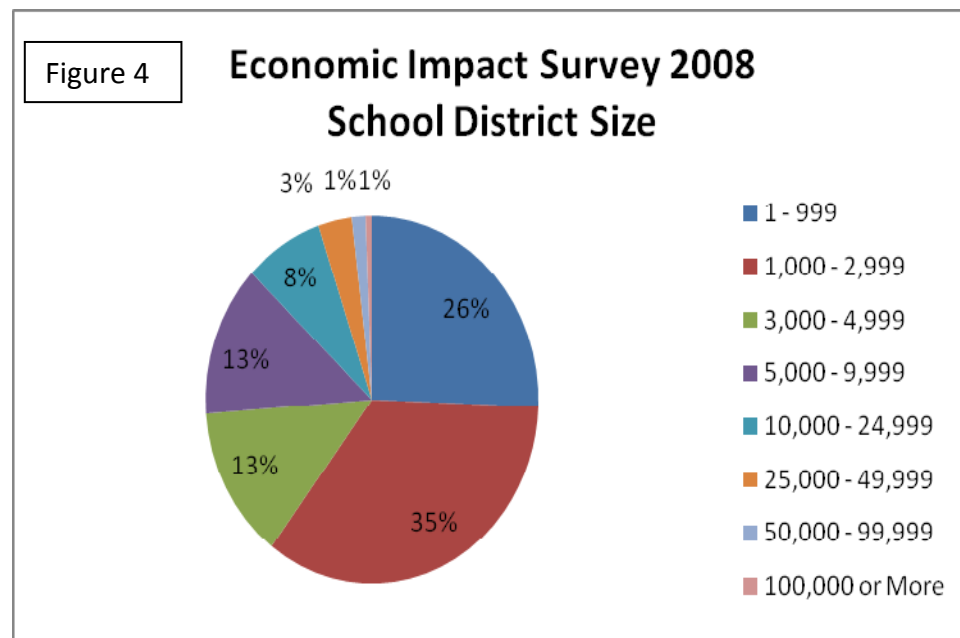
- Figure 2 illustrates how survey responders describe their current funding situation.



- Figure 3 is the breakdown of survey responders by school district type: rural, suburban and urban.



- Figure 4 illustrates the size of school districts, measured by student enrollment, that completed the 2008 Economic Impact Survey.



References:

Glass, G., Franceschini, L.A. (2006). *The State of the American School Superintendency: A Mid-Decade Study*. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.

McCord, R.S., Jordan, K.F., & Jordan, T. (2008). *2007 State of the Superintendency Mini-Survey: Aspiring to the Superintendency*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Appendix A

This is a copy of the Economic Impact Survey. The online survey was distributed through e-mail.

Dear Colleague:

Many school districts are feeling an economic squeeze from the effects of increased expenses coupled with declining revenues. The American Association of School Administrators wants to learn more about the impact the narrowing economy has had on the decisions superintendents face nationwide. In addition, we want to learn how you are able to maintain a focus on instructional improvement during these difficult times.

Please let us know what's happening in your school system by taking this 16-question survey, which should take only 10 minutes to complete. Please complete the survey by Friday, Oct. 17. We will share the results with you in November.

Please note: Your responses will be kept confidential. All results from this survey will be presented in aggregate, so there is no possibility of identifying responses with individuals. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey on this vitally important topic.

Sincerely,
Dan Domenech,
AASA Executive Director

Part 1: Economic Snapshot

1. How would you describe your district's current economic situation?

- Inadequately funded
- Adequately funded
- Surplus

2. Is the recent economic downturn affecting your school district's ability to borrow funds to pay for school projects?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Do not participate.

3. In the coming year, what changes do you think your district will face in its:

...ability to borrow/raise funds?

- Will be easier
- Will be harder
- Will be the same
- Don't Know

...ability to sell bonds?

- Will be easier
- Will be harder
- Will be the same
- Don't Know

4. Is your district fiscally dependent or independent:

- Fiscally Dependent (fiscal operation subject to approval by other local government – e.g., city or county)
- Fiscally Independent (fiscal operation not subject to approval by other local government)

Part 2: Economic Conditions

5. Which of the following actions has your district considered as a result of the economic downturn?
(Check all responses that apply.)

5a.

Personnel Related	Considered & Implemented	Considered & Delayed Implementation	Considered But Rejected	Never Considered
Furlough of personnel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personnel lay-off (RIF)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Froze outside professional service contracts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eliminated non-teaching professional support personnel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eliminated outside staff development consultants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced staff-level hiring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5b.

Buildings & Facilities Related	Considered & Implemented	Considered & Delayed Implementation	Considered But Rejected	Never Considered
Deferred maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Altered thermostats for less heating and cooling in buildings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Closed/Consolidated schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delayed a capital debt (bond) program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5c.

Curriculum Related	Considered & Implemented	Considered & Delayed Implementation	Considered But Rejected	Never Considered
Increased class size	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eliminated/delayed instructional improvement initiatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cut nonacademic programs (such as after-school and Saturday enrichment programs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cut afterschool academic programs (such as academic interventions and Saturday classes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strengthened identification/screening of nonresident students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eliminated elective courses not required for graduation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Deferred textbook purchases	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced high cost course offerings (e.g., vocational education classes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced instructional materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eliminated of field trips	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5d.

Operations Related	Considered & Implemented	Considered & Delayed Implementation	Considered But Rejected	Never Considered
Reduced operations to four-day work week (during summer)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced operations to four-day school week (during school year)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cut bus transportation routes and availability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deferred technology purchases	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced consumable supplies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced custodial services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eliminated non-essential travel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 3: Decision Making and Future Planning Process

6. Which of the following methods did you employ in reaching the decisions identified in question 5? Select all that apply.

- Conducted community forum
- Discussed as agenda item at open school board meeting
- Discussed in school board committee
- Established a citizen's committee
- Established a school-level advisory group
- Consulted with legislators or other elected officials
- Discussed superintendent's cabinet
- Discussed with county/city government entity
- Other (Please Specify) _____

7. To what extent are you using any of the following strategies to track potential economic problems for your district and developing strategies to address these challenges?

Strategies	Not at all	Somewhat	A Great Deal
Discussions with central office staff or leadership team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussions with board of education or school committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reviewing the district strategic plan or other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

priority setting guide			
Hosting community forums to discuss the economic picture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussions with other local or regional governmental officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussions with media, including editorial board	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussions with other superintendents in my area or region	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forming a taskforce to investigate the problems and make recommendations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conducting a formal economic impact study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asking all sectors of my district to propose cuts and cost-savings strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 4: Impact on Families and Learning

8. To what extent does your current district's economic situation affect your schools' capacity to:

	Not at all	Somewhat	A Great Deal
Improve student achievement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Close achievement gaps?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain focus on student learning/instructional improvement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Address the learning needs of all students, including disabled?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meet or exceed state and federal performance assessment levels (e.g., NCLB)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. To what extent have the following economic-related problems of the families of students in your district been worsening over the last year?

Economic Impact on Families and Children	Not at all	Somewhat	A Great Deal
Mortgage foreclosures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homelessness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unemployment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of health insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased Student Mobility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. How would you describe the participation trends in programs and services your district offers to help students?

Programs and Service Trends	Declining Participation	No Change in Participation	Increased Participation	Not offered by District
Free and reduced meal program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health screenings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After school programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School supplies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Basic clothing needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult education programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 5: Demographics:

11. What is your current position? Choose one.

- Superintendent
- Associate/Deputy Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendent
- Director
- Principal
- Other: (please specify) _____

12. If you are a superintendent, how many years have you been a superintendent? (Insert drop down)

13. How many students were enrolled in your district as of January 2008?

- 1 – 999
- 1,000 – 2,999
- 3,000 – 4,999
- 5,000 – 9,999
- 10,000 – 24,000
- 25,000 – 49,999
- 50,000 – 99,999
- 100,000 or more

14. My school district is best described as:

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

15. In which state is your school district located?

(Drop-down menu – All states and the District of Columbia listed)

Appendix B

This is the data set for completed surveys. A total of 836 superintendents completed the survey over a two-week period in October 2008. The responses to each question are reported as both a count and percentage.

1. How would you describe your district's current economic situation?		
Inadequately funded	560	67%
Adequately funded	254	30%
Surplus	21	3%
Total	835	100%

2. Is the recent economic downturn affecting your school district's ability to borrow funds to pay for school projects?		
Yes	179	21%
No	341	41%
Don't Know	166	20%
Do Not Participate	147	18%
Total	833	100%

3. In the coming year, what changes do you think your district will face in its:				
Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Will be easier	Will be harder	Will be the same	Don't Know
...ability to raise funds?	2 0%	737 88%	66 8%	28 3%
...ability to sell bonds?	7 1%	498 61%	125 15%	187 23%

4. Is your district fiscally dependent or independent? (Dependent: Fiscal operation subject to approval by other local government - e.g., city or county Independent: Fiscal operation not subject to approval by other local government)		
Fiscally Dependent	232	28%
Fiscally Independent	601	72%
Total	833	100%

5. Which of the following actions has your district considered as a result of the economic downturn? Check all responses that apply.

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Considered & Implemented	Considered & Delayed Implementation	Considered but Rejected	Never Considered
Furlough of personnel	69 8%	159 20%	63 8%	522 64%
Personnel lay-off (RIF)	160 20%	256 31%	106 13%	298 36%
Frozen outside professional service contracts	145 18%	257 31%	91 11%	323 40%
Eliminated non-teaching professional support personnel	250 30%	232 28%	105 13%	233 28%
Eliminated outside staff development consultants	219 27%	254 31%	94 11%	251 31%
Reduced staff-level hiring	404 49%	205 25%	55 7%	158 19%
Deferred maintenance	340 42%	195 24%	113 14%	170 21%
Altered thermostats for less heating and cooling in the buildings	523 64%	126 15%	38 5%	127 16%
Closed/consolidated schools	77 9%	92 11%	65 8%	581 71%
Delayed a capital debt (bond) program	145 18%	110 14%	85 10%	472 58%
Increased class size	302 37%	189 23%	91 11%	236 29%
Eliminated/delayed instructional improvement initiatives	211 26%	234 29%	99 12%	271 33%
Cut non-academic programs (i.e., afterschool and Saturday enrichment)	144 18%	207 26%	99 12%	354 44%
Cut afterschool academic programs (i.e., academic interventions and Saturday classes)	114 14%	175 22%	108 13%	407 51%
Strengthened identification/screening of nonresident students	291 36%	68 8%	41 5%	405 50%
Eliminated elective courses not required for graduation	110 14%	132 16%	79 10%	491 60%
Deferred textbook purchases	231 28%	150 18%	87 11%	343 42%
Reduced high-cost course offerings (i.e., career and technical education classes)	90 11%	146 18%	99 12%	470 58%
Reduced instructional materials	299 37%	144 18%	71 9%	304 37%
Eliminated field trips	213 26%	288 35%	117 14%	201 25%
Reduced operations to four-day work week (during summer)	157 20%	75 10%	82 10%	470 60%
Reduced operations to four-day school week (during school year)	14 2%	68 8%	112 14%	618 76%
Cut bus transportation routes and availability	257 31%	140 17%	75 9%	344 42%
Deferred technology purchases	279 34%	208 25%	85 10%	244 30%
Reduced consumable supplies	403 49%	176 22%	54 7%	185 23%
Reduced custodial services	201 25%	161 20%	90 11%	358 44%
Eliminated non-essential travel	464 57%	187 23%	49 6%	120 15%

6. Which of the following methods did you employ in reaching the decisions identified in question 5? Select all that apply.

Conducted community forum	129	16%
Discussed as agenda item at open school board meeting	570	70%
Discussed in school board committee	459	56%
Established a citizen's committee	89	11%
Established a school-level advisory group	219	27%
Consulted with legislators or other elected officials	218	27%
Discussed with superintendent's cabinet	663	81%
Discussed with county/city government entity	181	22%
Other, please specify	95	12%

7. To what extent are you using any of the following strategies to tackle potential economic problems for your district and to develop strategies to address these challenges?

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Not At All	Somewhat	A Great Deal
Discussions with central office staff or leadership team	14 2%	133 16%	683 82%
Discussions with board of education or school committee	10 1%	224 27%	590 72%
Reviewing the district strategic plan or other priority setting guide	78 10%	349 43%	394 48%
Hosting community forums to discuss the economic picture	405 50%	333 41%	80 10%
Discussions with other local or regional governmental officials	166 20%	480 59%	168 21%
Discussions with media, including editorial board	408 50%	318 39%	90 11%
Discussions with other superintendents in my area or region	26 3%	248 30%	550 67%
Forming a taskforce to investigate the problems and make recommendations	451 55%	268 33%	95 12%
Conducting a formal economic impact study	585 72%	177 22%	49 6%
Asking all sectors of my district to propose cuts and cost saving strategies	248 31%	341 42%	224 28%

8. To what extent does your current district's economic situation impact your schools' capacity to:			
Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Not At All	Somewhat	A Great Deal
Improve student achievement?	143 17%	454 55%	231 28%
Close achievement gaps?	137 17%	423 51%	267 32%
Maintain focus on student learning/instructional improvement?	169 21%	402 49%	251 31%
Address the learning needs of all students, including the disabled?	155 19%	378 46%	291 35%
Meet or exceed state and federal performance assessment levels (e.g., NCLB)?	127 15%	352 43%	341 42%

9. To what extent have the following economic-related problems of the families of students in your district been worsening over the last year?			
Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Not At All	Somewhat	A Great Deal
Mortgage foreclosures	92 11%	568 69%	158 19%
Homelessness	246 30%	464 57%	104 13%
Unemployment	46 6%	504 62%	266 33%
Lack of health insurance	51 6%	493 61%	270 33%
Increased student mobility	76 9%	460 57%	278 34%

10. How would you describe the participation trends in programs and services your district offers to help students?				
Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Declining Participation	No Change in Participation	Increasing Participation	Not Offered By District
Free and reduced meal program	13 2%	183 22%	625 75%	9 1%
Health screenings	12 1%	392 48%	302 37%	116 14%
After-school programs	57 7%	366 44%	324 39%	77 9%
School supplies	73 9%	330 40%	313 38%	104 13%
Basic clothing needs	35 4%	314 38%	302 37%	167 20%
Adult education programs	53 7%	336 42%	133 17%	284 35%

