

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Missouri School Budget Survey

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
August 2010

An electronic survey of school administrators was conducted by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in August, 2010, to learn about the impact of state and local budget cuts for the 2010-11 school year. The department received 319 responses to the anonymous survey – 83% self-identified their school district's setting as rural; 13% suburban; and 4% urban.

Budget Reduction

Seven out of eight school districts (87.5%) indicated their budgets this school year had been reduced from previous year levels. Nearly half of all responding school districts, 45%, indicated their annual budget was reduced by 6-10% overall. About 42% of school districts reduced their budgets by up to 5%, and more than 13% of schools reduced their budgets by more than 11%.

The majority of rural and urban school districts reduced their budgets by 6-10%; the majority of suburban school districts indicated their budgets had been reduced by 1-5%. Of the 10 school districts reporting reductions of greater than 15%, 6 were rural, 2 urban, and 2 suburban.

Forty of the 319 school districts indicated no budget reductions were made this year, however, the majority of them are maintaining services by tapping financial reserves. Other than the 17 school districts that indicated successful tax levy elections this year, few school administrators said they had the benefit of any new local tax revenues.

Of the 40 school districts that reported no budget reductions were made this school year, the majority are tapping reserves and containing costs to cover deficits. Few school administrators said they were fortunate to have new local tax revenues.

Staff Reduction

More than 83% of responding school districts indicated they have reduced their staff this year. Of those, 91% reduced instructional staff and 82% reduced support staff. Overall, school districts reduced instructional staff across all grade levels in both core and elective content areas. The most commonly reduced support staff positions reduced were custodial, paraprofessionals, teacher aides, cafeteria, transportation, health services, and secretaries; some counselors and special education support were cut; and several schools reduced hours worked by certain support staff.

Most Likely to Be Cut Next, if More Budget Cuts

School administrators were asked what areas their district will most likely consider if another round of cost savings has to be made next year. Options ranged from “will have to consider,” “might consider” and “will not consider.”

Rural

The majority of rural schools said they would have to next consider cutting summer school (72%), professional development (61%), support staff (60%), classroom teachers (56%), extra-curricular activities (53%), and afterschool programs (50%). Many rural schools indicated that the following areas might be considered for any future cuts: curriculum-based programs (50%), administration (38%), library/media (37%) and student health services (37%). Most rural schools indicated they would not consider reorganization (57%) or cutting school security (51%). Comments included transportation, parents as teachers, pre-school programs. More than one rural administrator commented that everything is on the table for consideration.

Suburban

Of the 39 suburban school administrators responding to the survey, slightly different priorities surfaced. Nearly 80% of suburban administrators said the next area for cuts would be classroom teachers and support

staff. Other areas that would be considered for cuts first included: professional development (72%), summer school (67%), administration and extra-curricular activities (62% each), afterschool programs (59%), library/media (56%), curriculum-based programs (53%), and guidance and counseling (51%). Nearly 45% of suburban schools indicated they might consider cutting security, while 32% said they would have to consider it. The area least likely to be considered by suburban schools is reorganization, with 47% saying it will not be considered, 24% saying it might, and 29% saying it will be considered.

Urban

Of the 13 urban school administrators responding to the survey, nearly all indicated that everything was on the table for consideration if future cuts had to be made. The areas where the majority of administrators said would have to be considered for if future cuts had to be made were: support staff (67%), and classroom teachers, administrators, and professional development (58% each). The majority of administrators might consider school reorganization (70%), student health services (60%), afterschool programs (58%), and extracurricular activities, summer school, guidance and counseling (55% each) and curriculum-based programs (50%).

Statewide Area of Strong Agreement

While current and future reduction areas may vary greatly from district to district, an area receiving a high level of agreement (75% of all respondents) was that further reductions to the Foundation Formula would be least acceptable. The Foundation Formula is the primary mechanism for distribution of education funds to Missouri public K-12 school districts and is viewed as a vitally important revenue stream for the funding of educational programs.

Local Revenue Enhancement

The majority of school districts, 65%, indicated their school district has discussed the need to increase local revenue streams – 22% have discussed formally and 43% have discussed informally. About 15% of responding school districts indicated they have not had such a discussion, but probably will; 20.3% said they will not discuss. Only 21 school districts (18 rural, 2 urban, 1 suburban) indicated their community voted on a tax levy increase during 2010. Of those, 17 passed and 4 failed. Those that failed were in rural districts.

Comments

Here is a sampling from the thousands of comments received about how schools were reducing costs in response to reduced revenues.

- We are cut to the bone and the only area to really make a financial difference is cutting staff.
- This is the first year in well over 15-20 years that this district had no summer school. We are not yet sure what the effects of this will be. This is also the first year that we did not make AYP. We had to eliminate one full-time position for PAT which is a beneficial and educational program for many of the families in the district.
- We will not buy buses.
- Did not replace an elementary classroom teacher and a business teacher. Using one core teacher to cover two elementary grades. Reduced course offerings at secondary level.
- Part-time principal, part-time counselor, part-time PE, Art, Music, made English 7-12 position instead of 9-12, part-time social studies with part-time principal, combination classrooms 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6.
- Decreased PDC budget; increased retirements due to incentives to reduce overall costs.
- Absorbed 8th grade into high school schedule.
- Virtually all grade levels and subject matter.
- Science teacher, social studies teacher, two elementary education teachers.
- We have raised our tax levy, but still fall short of last year's revenues.
- Not adding new programs or staff.
- We had to adopt a deficit budget but will have to consider cuts in future years if the funding level continues at its current rate or decreases.
- We reduced some services because of reduced levels of state funding, but the growth in our district makes the overall impact something other than a budget reduction. We simply aren't adding staff, etc., at the same rate we would with full funding.
- With 75% and more of the budget being personnel, the only area to cut would be personnel and programs.