

Schools Feel Pinch From Economic Woes

Officials look for the least painful trims, but many worry about their ability to close achievement gaps

BY STACY TEICHER KHADAROO
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THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
School districts across the United States are tightening their belts in anticipation of a meager fiscal diet that could carry into 2011.

As state and local revenue declines, officials are looking for the trims least likely to harm the quality of education. Although some districts have rainy-day funds to tap, concern is growing that students, particularly those who are struggling to learn or who are homeless, are going to feel the pinch.

Just over a third of superintendents in a recent national survey said they've already increased the size of classes because of the downturn, according to the American Association of School Administrators, an organization in Arlington, Va., that supports high standards for public education. Thirty percent of superintendents are considering layoffs. Of the two-thirds who said their districts are inadequately funded, 83 percent think it's detrimental to their ability to close achievement gaps for minority groups.

If the dry spell lasts through multiple school years, "that's when real noticeable things start to happen," says Michael Griffith, an analyst at the Education Commission of the States, a policy group in Denver. Delaying purchases leads to book shortages, while school technology and infrastructure fray. The ax often comes down on after-school and summer-school programs for struggling students.

"The people who are hurt the most are those who need the most assistance," Griffith says.

With 41 states confronting revenue shortfalls this year or next, a number are likely to include education in their cuts, he says. In California and New York, which had deficit woes even before this fall's financial crisis, proposals to cut education funds midway through the school year are meeting resistance. New York Gov. David Paterson (D) called for pulling back \$840 million of this year's school budget - up to 10 percent for some districts - but the proposal has been shelved until January. California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) wants about \$2.5 billion in cuts to schools and community colleges.

Once schools have signed contracts, if the state withholds promised aid, it would be like "dropping a bomb in the middle of the school year," says Timothy Kremer, executive director of the New York State School Boards Association. "It only happened once before in New York, in the early '90s," he says. "Many districts had to ... really dig into the bone of their programs, and many of them have told me they never fully recovered."

Ideally, financial crises would be an opportunity for states and local districts to shed less productive initiatives, but it seems to rarely work that way, says Eric Hanushek, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution in California. Often, a simple band-aid measure is the response, he says, such as laying off new teachers. Overall, he says, the challenge is the instability in funding: When "one year you pour a lot of money out to the schools and the next year you squeeze back, it doesn't allow for a lot of rational planning."

Meanwhile, Georgia since 2003 has been sending less money to schools than the state

formula calls for, says Herbert Garrett, executive director of the Georgia School Superintendents Association. This year the schools may face a 2 percent shortfall and next year another 3 percent, which would bring the total shortfall since 2003 to nearly \$2 billion, Garrett says. It appears that state limits on class sizes and initiatives such as one that places a "graduation coach" in each high school are in jeopardy, he says. In his 40 years in education, this economic situation "ranks among the worst," he says.

When states decrease funding, local districts have often found ways to increase theirs - sometimes through higher taxes. "Per-student spending during the downturns of the early '80s and '90s continued to increase," Griffith says.

Now, however, it's not clear how possible that will be in any but the wealthiest districts. "In previous times, school districts have turned to the business community, the parent community for support ... but now the well is dry everywhere you look," says Dan Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators.

Schools are feeling the squeeze just as there's a surging need for the safety net they provide. Hundreds of districts are reporting that in the first few months of school, they've served nearly as many homeless students as in the entire previous year. Las Vegas saw an 82 percent increase in the first two weeks.

Districts are each required to have a liaison to help homeless children stay on track in school. "Some of the liaisons say they can't get through their stack of referrals," says Barbara Duffield, the Washington-based policy director for the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

Cincinnati Public Schools have seen a 28 percent increase - 266 more kids than last year, says Karen Fessler, manager of the district's Project Connect for homeless students. Her program is short-staffed, and a local nonprofit that supports schoolchildren's immediate needs is hitting hard times, too. "You hear about the bailout," Fessler says, "and you wonder, when is this actually going to trickle down to the

individual families we're serving?"

Mild Fall Makes For Fat Deer In E. Ore.

BAKER CITY, Ore. (AP) - It's fat city in the countryside of Eastern Oregon's Baker County.

A moist and mild fall has turned the meadows green and the mule deer plump.

That's a good sign for the deer and for the two-legged shooters who prey on them.

"It's a phenomenal green-up," said Brian Ratliff, a wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Baker City office. "The deer are set for a good winter."

Once the snow comes, the deer not only expend more energy getting through the drifts, but also burn extra calories just to stay warm, he said.

When wintry weather fades into spring, every pound a deer adds during the fall means extra survival time.

Ratliff said he and district wildlife biologist Nick Myatt looked at dozens of deer that hunters killed during last month's season.

Almost all the deer had ample fat reserves, Ratliff said.

The weather has been so benign, that many deer have yet to descend to winter range, where even during hard winters the snow doesn't get too deep and the temperatures are at least slightly warmer than in the animals' summer range high in the mountains.

"If they haven't moved down yet, that means they're finding what they need higher up," Ratliff said.

That, too, is abnormal for Baker County.

Most years, snow has driven deer down to their winter range by the middle of November.

The bountiful forage is especially vital for deer because they are more vulnerable to harsh winters than are elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goats, Ratliff said.

But, Ratliff said, other species such as chukars and other upland game birds are also fattening up during the benevolent weather and abundant grass.

Gustaf - Hann United



Mr. and Mrs. Brent Gustaf

Katie L. Hann and Brent C. Gustaf were united in marriage on August 23, 2008, at The Lodge at Blue Ridge Summit, Pa. The outdoor ceremony was performed by Rev. William C. Swope. Cathy Richards, pianist, and soloist Chelsea Chesnut, cousin of the bride, provided music for the ceremony.

The bride is the daughter of Michele and Byron Hann of McConnellsburg. She is a 2004 graduate of McConnellsburg High School and a 2008 graduate of the radiology program at Hagerstown Community College. She is employed as a Radiologic Technologist at Waynesboro Hospital and Parkway Surgery Center in Hagerstown, Md.

The groom is the son of Donna and Joseph Gustaf and Darlene and Larry Deshong. He is a 2001 graduate of McConnellsburg High School and received his Bachelor of Science degree in 2005 at Shippensburg University. He is employed as a

manufacturing supervisor at Good Humor Breyers of Hagerstown, Md.

McKenzie Hann, sister of the bride, served as maid of honor. Bridesmaids were Megan Ramsey, Heidi Swope, Danielle Houck, Ashley Rauth and Brandi Leedy. Serving as the groom's best man was Paul Wilson. Groomsmen were Joe Gustaf, Steven Deshong, Josh Gustaf, Dane Pollock and Mike Hill.

The wedding reception following the ceremony was held indoors at The Lodge at Blue Ridge Summit. The bride's bouquet was filled with sunflowers accented with white and yellow roses. The flowers were provided by Summer Thyme Floral of McConnellsburg and the three-tiered wedding cake was done by Rhoda Custer of Waynesboro. Photographer for the ceremony was Melody Bussard of Greencastle.

The couple honeymooned in Ocho Rios, Jamaica. They reside in Greencastle.

Holiday Decorations Don't Need To Be Red And Green

By Bridget Nash
ENID NEWS & EAGLE

ENID, Okla. (AP) - Decking the halls isn't just red and green and holly and ivy anymore.

Now you can decorate for Christmas in any color of the rainbow. Whether you prefer the traditional Santa, reindeer and snowmen decorations or you have a unique taste, there are Christmas decorations for everyone.

Even pink has become a theme color for Christmas, said Linda Anderson, co-manager of Hobby Lobby. So if red and green aren't your favorites, you can opt for pink, purple, blue, yellow, silver, gold or any other color scheme.

Anderson also said popular Christmas ornament trends this year are leaning away from the typical Christmas characters, and people are buying ornaments that reflect their character, job, hobbies and style.

"More personalized ornaments," Anderson said. "Initials, letters ... Theme ornaments are popular: jobs, hobbies and military ornaments."

Now there are ornaments for nurses, doctors, lawyers, teachers, ball players, motorcycle riders, fisherman, dog lovers and many more.

While the Victorian Christmas became popular once again in the past few years, the early 20th century themes are fading away and being replaced by other specific themes, Anderson said.

"Night at the opera," is one theme Anderson pointed out. Ornaments in that category revolve around jewel tones countered with black feathers and silver trim.

Linda Jackson, an interior decorator at Serendipity Home Decor, has seen another popular trend that might fit in with the "night at the opera theme."

"Top hats," Jackson said. Serendipity quickly sold out of its inventory of black top hats, which can be used as tree toppers or as centerpieces. The decorative top hat also is versatile. It can go with the formal, fancy Christmas themes, or it can fit right in with the traditional themes as a snowman's hat.

Both Anderson and Jackson said another new trend this holiday season is natural colors.

"Woodland, natural themes," Anderson said.

"I think that a lot of people are doing things in brown and gold," Jackson said, "and bronze and brown tones."

Wooden ornaments, neutral floral decor and leaves, stems and berries are becoming popular, all with a little sparkle added. "There is lots of glitter going on this year," Jackson said.

Jackson also said ribbon is remaining popular in holiday decorations.

Hobby Lobby employees are glad to help a customer find a certain color or theme, but when it comes to making suggestions, Anderson is hesitant because she cannot actually see the home and therefore does not feel she can make the correct suggestion.

That's where the employees at Serendipity come in. They will come to anyone's home and make suggestions, or they can do the actual decorating. Serendipity also will make holiday arrangements out of ornaments brought in or out of supplies they have.

"Anything I can do to be of help," Jackson said.

In the Christmas frenzy, don't forget your friends and family who may be in nursing homes, hospitals or constantly at their desk.

"A mini tree is ideal for them," Anderson said. "We have all the themes in our mini tree ornaments."

Foster Care Sought For Rescued Huskies

BUTTE, Mont. (AP) - More than 40 of the 100-plus dogs found malnourished and covered in feces in a broken-down school bus at a Rocker truck stop in early October have found foster homes in the Butte area.

The dogs cannot be adopted because of an animal cruelty case pending against Phillip Brode.

Those interested in fostering a dog must fill out an application with the Butte-Silver Bow Animal Services. Those who already have dogs must bring their current pets to meet the prospective foster dogs to make sure they'll get along.

Phyllis Ruana, director of animal services, says people who foster dogs will have the first chance to adopt them if that becomes an option.

Brode has pleaded not guilty to felony animal cruelty charges. Court records say Brode was on his way to Alaska with the dogs, which are huskies and husky mixes.

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