Voices from the Field:  
Special Educators & Specialized Instructional Support Personnel  
Share the Impact of Budget Cuts

On Dec. 3, 2013, The National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education & Related Services (NCPSSERS) released a survey of more than 1,000 special education professionals, including special education teachers, special education administrators, and specialized instructional support personnel from all 50 states, reported that funding cuts have impacted their ability to provide services mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), services that must be provided even when states and school districts face economic difficulties. The following is a collection of quotes from the surveys.

“I am very concerned whether we will be able to provide a free appropriate public education to our students, as they are legally required to receive. The teachers are overwhelmed with increased number of students and no one to help them, including the continued increase of paperwork.” - Special Education Administrator, Utah

“Due to budget cuts and uncertainty, there is an inability to budget for and hire much needed teachers for example for our infants and toddlers with hearing impairments. These children are now being identified through the newborn infant hearing screening which is wonderful, but there hasn’t been funding to hire enough teachers to serve them. We serve them with the teachers we have, so their caseloads are HUGE and it is difficult to provide the amount of service they need.” - Special Education Administrator, California

“Because of funding cuts, I have seen an increase in learning gaps, drop-outs, problems with drug abuse, criminal activities, and an increase in incarcerations.” - Special Education Administrator, Iowa

“Increased caseloads equals increase in the number of students per session which decreases their opportunity to achieve their goals.” - Speech Language Pathologist, Pennsylvania

“Providing a continuum of services is essential to providing students FAPE. With strained resources and large caseloads, special educators cannot meet the needs of all students in the least restrictive environment.” - Special Education Administrator, Maryland
“My district is doing a great job of trying to operate under these circumstances, but if more is cut, my child will be greatly affected. He is profoundly dyslexic and needs the support. I am afraid that he will not get it in the near future.” - Parent, Kentucky

“We have lost experienced, qualified paraprofessionals because of hours cut. This has compromised our effectiveness and efficiency in delivering much needed services. It also has been heartbreaking and frustrating to teachers who have been able to deliver services that make a difference in the past, but now feel due to class sizes and large case loads, that their hands are tied. Consequently, morale is low.” - Special Education Teacher, Utah

“The needs of the children have changed drastically. They are in need of more mental health and behavioral services. These are services that we are lacking and cannot provide without the necessary funds.” - School Psychologist, Maine

“I am a resource teacher. We are expected to deliver the best instruction without the support to meet each student's IEP. I have approximately 10 students at a time in a class without an aide or adequate technology, and still try to reach each student's individual goals and get them on grade level.” - Special Education Teacher, Utah

“More children have challenges as parents' poverty and joblessness increases, while school funding to help kids emotional needs decreases. Kids in crisis can't learn. We keep adding numbers of kids without being able to increase numbers of personnel. Education is a people intensive business.” - Occupational Therapist, Wisconsin

“Special education has never been funded at the levels promised by the federal government under IDEA. We are seeing students with more significant disabilities who impact on workload and resources. Due to high caseloads and less resources, we are seeing more professionals leave the field due to burnout.” – Special Education Administrator, Fort Mill, South Carolina

“We often have unfilled positions for related service providers because of lack of funds. This results in hiring staff that are less qualified for the position to work with children with special needs.” – Special Education Administrator, South Carolina

“Funds are not available to retain and attract school psychologists to a rural area where there is significant travel and service to multiple school districts. Full range of services from inclusion support to self-
contained are not available in schools. Aids are sometimes hired to cover children with challenging behaviors rather than offering a qualified teacher in a classroom to focus on changing behavior so the child can benefit from academic instruction.” – School Psychologist, Indiana

“Our district currently has no instructional aides at the high school level and has not approved our department's continued request for one person to support the needs of students who need more individualized attention.” - Special Education Teacher, Ohio

“We are a small district and have had funding issues for quite some time. This year things are even tighter and we are using more and more less qualified paraprofessionals to get our students served in special education.” – Physical Therapist, Washington

“There has been a delay in students receiving related services and they are receiving reduced services due to lack of staff. Also we are in a pay freeze, which means is no room for negotiating to get more providers or qualified special education teachers. We have substitute teachers and paraprofessionals teaching, even though they do not have the education or experience to serve children with special needs.” – Physical Therapist, Arizona

“Some children need adaptive equipment to enable them to function at their highest potential in school. Currently, they are using equipment that is old, out-of-date, ill-fitting, used in a capacity it was not intended, thereby risking the child’s safety. It is unacceptable that children in America today, regardless of physical abilities, are expected to perform at and above children around the world when they are in classrooms such as these. I am ashamed.” – Physical Therapist, Missouri

“School Counselors that have jobs are responsible for 800+ students on any given day.” – School Counselor, Pennsylvania

“Many students need a small group environment. However, because of budget cuts, additional resource teachers cannot be hired to provide these small groups”. – School Psychologist, Virginia

“The lack of our ability to train support staff who work directly with students leads to less effective educational programming for students with individual needs, very short sighted!” – Elementary School Principal, Massachusetts

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