

Federal cuts could hit students most in need

BY LAYLA GARMS
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The federal sequestration, or across the board budget cuts, that went into effect on March 1 will have substantial impact on state and local programs, and the local school system is no exception.

Members of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Board of Education and system officials have already begun working to determine what can be done to alleviate the blow of the sequestration, which a report from Superintendent Don Martin has estimated will equate to a \$2.7 million shortfall.

"We always have cuts that we've got to think about, but this year we're going to have to worry about Washington as well," said School Board member

John Davenport. "...If nothing is done by the fall, we're going to have to make some very tough decisions because it's going to affect us pretty significantly."



Squire

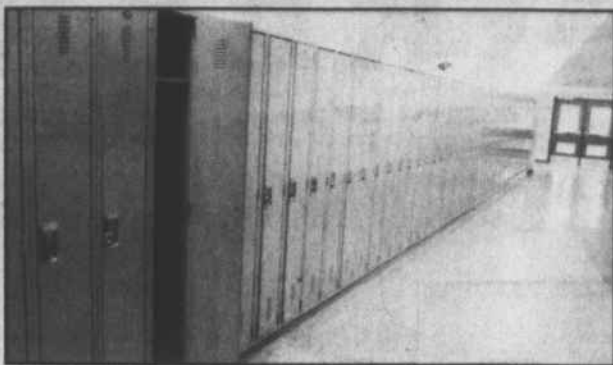


Davenport

Title One schools — low wealth schools that receive additional funding from the federal government for supplemental programs and supplies — will bear the brunt of the cuts because Title One gets the biggest chunk of the school system's federal dollars, Davenport said.

Title One Director Patsy Squire said she anticipates local schools will lose close to \$2 million in Title One funds. Squire said she hopes to learn next month how much WS/FCS will have to shave off of its existing \$15 million budget.

"Hopefully, we'll hear from the federal govern-



ment as to how much funding we'll receive this year," she said. "Because of the sequestration, we're looking at getting around \$13 million, but they may cut that even more."

Though she is not anticipating having to make any cuts in teachers, teacher assistants or staff positions, Squire said Title One students will suffer because of the cuts, which will impact schools' ability to purchase supplies and technology.

"It makes me sick to my stomach," she said of the sequestration. "...I didn't really think the sequestration would go through. I thought surely they would make a decision but that didn't happen, so now I'm

really nervous."

Longtime school board member Victor "Vic" Johnson said he too is concerned about the impact the cuts could have on area students.

"I just can't imagine what's going to happen if that would occur," Johnson said of the sequestration cuts. "If this thing goes through, it will harm us very much."

Despite ominous projections about the effects of sequestration, Johnson said he remains confident that the federal government will stop the sequestration before its ramifications manifest in the local school system.

"I'm not worried yet —

I'm an optimist," Johnson declared. "...I just believe that a lot of this stuff is going to pass over. I think we're going to get that (federal) money. I think Obama is going to get the aid that he needs."

The school system's Exceptional Children Department is also bracing itself for significant cuts because of the sequestration, said Sam Dempsey, who has led the department since 2000. The department receives funding from 27 different revenue streams, but Dempsey said he doesn't anticipate the sequestration cuts, which are expected to be over \$700,000, to be absorbed by other sources.

"It's going to make it harder," Dempsey said of making ends meet. "...It just makes it more and more difficult to do teacher training, to keep up with equipment ... and supplies."

Dempsey thinks the likelihood of national leaders coming to the aid of those impacted by the sequestration is slim.

"I believe that there are some people in the country that sincerely think it's okay to let things go to a crisis (situation)," said the Tennessee native. "I hope that they will step up and back off on the sequestration, but right now I don't see a political will to do that."

Davenport said he remains hopeful that Congress will stop the sequestration's harmful effects before they have a chance to negatively impact local schools, where the cuts will be felt as early as fall 2013 if nothing is done.

"I'm disappointed that Congress has not been able to come up with a more conscientious plan of dealing with the budget than they have," he said. "I understand there has to be cuts, but I don't like cuts that are indiscriminate, and that's what we're dealing with right now. I think there's a better way to do it and I pray that they'll figure out a better way to do it before all of this stuff starts happening."

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