

Budget To Include \$300 Million Discretionary Cut!

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The North Carolina Association of School Administrators learned today that budget negotiators are considering forcing school districts to absorb a **discretionary reduction of approximately \$300 million** in lieu of state mandates to increase class size and cut the third-grade allotment for teacher assistants.

It is not clear at this point how this discretionary reduction would be worded, but it appears that it would allow school districts to increase class size at the local level as well as cutting teacher and teacher assistant positions, among other items, in managing their portion of the massive cut.

NCASA Executive Director Bill McNeal said a discretionary reduction of this magnitude will be devastating for public schools.

“This is merely passing the buck on a very difficult decision,” McNeal said. “All this will do is make the local board of education and the superintendent become the bad guys in deciding which jobs to cut. A discretionary reduction is not likely to save any of the jobs previously targeted for elimination, because school districts simply have few other options for finding this large amount of money. Non-renewal notices have already gone out, and those teachers and teacher assistants who received them are not likely to be called back as a result of this shift from a state decision to a local one. It’s simply the wrong way to handle the obvious inadequacy of funding that is needed to protect our public schools, and we urge the General Assembly not to go this route.”

McNeal said NCASA also has told lawmakers and other state leaders that if the state cannot adequately fund public schools, then the General Assembly should decide which line item cuts should be made, including the issue of class size.

Education negotiators on Thursday told NCASA that had been making progress on the issues of class size and the discretionary reduction and were trying to prevent the two from becoming competing interests. According to reports that the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) sent its members on Thursday, House negotiators were proposing increasing class size by two students only in Grades 7-12 and maintaining class size at the 2008-09 levels for Grades K-6. This would result in the loss of roughly 3,000 teaching positions, which may be mostly absorbed through attrition and the expiration of a law that now allows retired teachers to be rehired exempt from an earnings cap. The latter has accounted for approximately 2,000 teachers statewide in recent years.

However, today lawmakers have been telling NCASA members they have no choice except to require school districts to face the discretionary cut of \$300 million.

Since the key issues of class size, a discretionary reduction and other public school funding levels are potentially in the final discussion stage today and over the weekend, it is imperative that NCASA members contact budget conferees and other lawmakers to urge them to oppose any discretionary reduction for public schools!

Contact information for budget conferees, charts and other information highlighting education budgets approved by the House and Senate, talking points about budget priorities for public schools, and other information is at <http://www.ncasa.net/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=199>. Contact information for all members of the General Assembly is available on NCASA’s website at <http://www.ncasa.net/displaycommon.cfm?an=3>.