



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 9, 2010

Federal Stimulus Almost Gone: Education Budget Woes

Sam Dillon of the New York Times reports that the depletion of federal stimulus money will result in schools approaching "a funding cliff." Dillon claims that the federal stimulus has managed to stave off drastic cuts at public schools in most parts of the nation thus far, but that the period of sustenance will soon end.



The 2009 federal stimulus package was the "largest one-time infusion of federal education dollars to states and districts in the nation's history," writes Dillon. Approximately \$100 billion dollars was earmarked for education to help diminish the impact of the recession on the nation's public school system. The remaining amount is estimated to run out by the end of this school year, forcing school districts to institute further layoffs or turn to alternative revenues.

The numerous warnings from Education Secretary Arne Duncan to avoid spending the stimulus dollars in ways that would be affected when the money ran out went unheeded by most school districts. The majority used the money to save or create 250,000 education jobs. Studies based on data provided to the federal Department of Education indicated that most states either used 100 percent of the federal funds at once, or spent the majority of the federal funds, leaving only a small allotment for the 2010-2011 school year.

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Of the \$100 billion in federal stimulus funds, \$65 billion was allocated to states for stabilization funds, Title I students, and for students with disabilities, \$39.5 billion, \$13 billion, and \$12.2 billion respectively. Only a portion of that money was sensibly spent — the portion going to students with disabilities. One study conducted by Professor Michael Rebell of Teachers College examined how the districts spent the money assigned for students with disabilities. A large majority utilized the money for lift buses, handicap accessible vans, and renovated bathrooms, investments that will last for years. Other districts were less sensible and used the funds to maintain or create jobs that cannot be maintained when the stimulus money dissipates.

The remaining portion of the \$100 billion is being used for smaller projects, most notably school-improvement programs like Obama's Race to the Top initiative, which designates grant money to schools based on their standardized test scores, a point of contention amongst most teachers who feel that their ability to maintain high standardized test scores are inhibited by a lack of parental and administrative support, as well as student effort.

While spending money to maintain jobs seems reasonable, student success is not guaranteed by merely



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having a body at the front of the classroom, but through the presence of a quality educator. Contrary to this, many teachers' unions have made it difficult for districts to terminate teachers' contracts, despite a teacher's ineptness in the classroom. One prime example is the New York State Union of Teachers. In a 2008 article written by Erin Einhorn of the *Daily News*, it becomes clear that quality of teachers is less important to unions than quantity. New York City's use of "Rubber Rooms" for teachers accused of wrongdoings is bleeding the city dry, costing taxpayers \$65 million a year. In these temporary reassignment centers, teachers accused of sexual abuse and classroom misconduct spend seven hours a day doing puzzles, reading magazines, and sleeping, all while receiving a full-time salary. The detention can last well over a year, in many cases, more than two. The population of the so-called "Rubber Rooms" has doubled in recent years.

Mismanagement of school funds is not limited to New York. In 2007, Florida's Pasco County school district adopted a new method of teaching called "Learning Focused Strategies" (LFS) which cost the district \$4.5 million. At closer inspection, it became evident that LFS was plagiarized from CRISS (Creating Independence Through Student-owned Strategies) and many other District trainings that Pasco County School teachers previously underwent. LFS overall was a waste of money.

The bottom line is that if the Education Department intends to improve student achievement, money is not necessarily the answer. Additionally, state education departments may be in dire financial straits, but upon careful inspection may find that they could have been saving money all along by shedding dead weight.



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