

Communication PRinciples for Principals

FEBRUARY 2013

PLANNING FOR BUDGETARY UNCERTAINTIES

In the coming months, all DoD entities including DoDEA will confront significant uncertainty regarding the amount of budgetary resources available for the remainder of the fiscal year. In all of our planning, we will offer steps that are reversible in the event that a budget resolution is reached.

This special edition of PR for Principals is devoted to helping you communicate with parents, teachers, commanders and students over the next several weeks in light of budgetary uncertainties affecting the Federal Government. You are encouraged to communicate frequently with these audiences, through letters, e-mails, face to face meetings at your schools, face to face meetings with your commanders, and meetings with teachers, school staff, and students. The more you communicate, the more you will be able to curb rumors, deflect misinformation, and ensure consistency in awareness and understanding.

As the leader of your school, you are the “go-to” person when it comes to education and education news. It’s important that you ensure you are as well informed as possible, not only for those you serve, but for your own personal needs as well. Be reassuring and steady in your approach. Maintaining routine and predictability, wherever possible, will help ease concerns in your school community.

BUDGETARY UNCERTAINTY BACKGROUND

Use the following information to provide context and perspective on the budget situation affecting the Federal Government, Department of Defense (DoD) and DoDEA.



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In the coming months, all DoD entities including DoDEA will confront significant uncertainty regarding the amount of budgetary resources available for the remainder of the fiscal year. In all of our planning, we will offer steps that are reversible in the event that a budget resolution is reached.

There are two sources of budget uncertainties:

The Continuing Resolution (CR)

The Continuing Resolution (CR), which will remain in effect until at least March 27, 2013. The CR holds us to Fiscal Year (FY) 12 spending levels and permits no new program starts this year. Since we were expecting our budget to increase in FY 13, funds will run short at the current rate of expenditure if the CR continues through the end of the FY 13.

Potential Sequestration

The American Taxpayer Relief Act (ATRA) of 2012 signed into law on January 2, 2013, deferred sequestration until March 1, 2013. The act averted much of what has become known as the “fiscal cliff.” Although the bill mostly deals with automatic changes scheduled to take effect for tax rates and programs such as Medicare and unemployment insurance, it also makes several important changes to sequestration that affect the Department of Defense. Specifically, it delays sequestration by two months. This creates significant additional uncertainties for managing our operations.

Background to use in communicating with school staff, commanders, and parents:

DoDEA has taken the following steps to immediately slow down spending:

- » **Stopping all non-mission critical travel.** Mission-critical travel will require a personal presence and is critical to the mission. School-level travel associated with the conduct of athletic, co-curricular or other student events is currently exempt from this requirement and requires no prior approval to continue with normal program operations.
- » **Suspending the Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS) Transfer Program for School Year 2013-2014, except as may be necessary to place excess employees.** We will make every effort to place excess educators, as we do every year. This year we have offered VERA/VSIP to our educators to ensure maximum placement for our excess personnel.
- » **Suspending the Administrator Rotation Program for School Year 2013-2014.** All efforts will be made to ensure all excess employees are placed. We will continue to fill these positions when there are vacancies.
- » **Stopping all training and conferences, unless they are mission-essential.** Mission essential training is training necessary to perform a job (e.g., critical job required certification).



IDEA

In all of our planning, we will offer steps that are reversible in the event that a budget resolution is reached.

Planning for Budgetary Uncertainties

All DoD entities are now developing plans outlining how we might handle a budget shortfall in FY 13 because of CR and potential sequestration budget uncertainties. It is important to note that planning does not assume that any of these unfortunate events will occur, only that we must be ready.

Our plans must generate a cost savings from late April until late September. There are limited areas in our budget from which to generate any savings in the last six months of a budget cycle. Nonetheless, we have to be prepared to accomplish our mission to the best of our ability given the constraints that may affect our school system.

The cost-savings factor in all plans being developed Federal Government-wide is the furlough. The DoD's guidance to all Federal entities mandates that should furloughs become necessary, they will apply universally to all DoD employees, with few exceptions. DoDEA will include furloughs of all personnel – Above-School Level, and School-Level – in its cost savings plan.

Our goal is to take the furlough factor into consideration without risking a full-year of academic credit for our students. To clarify the parameters for school-level employees, this category includes all professional and support employees.

At this time, the Secretary of Defense has exempted the following categories of personnel from the potential furlough:

- » Civilians serving in a combat zone
- » Employees whose job involves safety of life or property (only to the extent needed to protect)
- » Non-appropriated fund (NAF) employees (most NAF employees are not paid from appropriated funds authorized by annual appropriations)
- » Foreign nationals (if required by the Status of Forces Agreements)
- » Employees exempted by law (e.g., Presidential Appointees)

We are all concerned about the impact that a furlough of this magnitude would have on school operations, instructional time, student achievement, educator preparation time, student extra-curricular activities, and summer school.

DoDEA leaders are working with the unions and associations to develop several courses of action that will be submitted to DoD for consideration.

Your ideas on how we can best approach a furlough situation, should it occur, and preserve instruction and learning for our students are always welcome. Please feel free to share your ideas with me. Collaboration and idea sharing can help us better prepare for any situation we might face.

We do not yet know exactly what form a furlough will take with regard to its effect on work schedules, school schedules, extra- and co-curricular activities, transportation, or operations. We are developing plans, the situation is fluid and changes will be made along the way that will influence the outcome and the final plan. Again, ***our priority in planning is to accomplish our mission to the best of our ability given the constraints that may affect our school system without risking a full-year of academic credit for our students.***

Communications Approaches

In dealing with different audiences, it is helpful to tailor the communications vehicle to the audience. In all approaches, it is best to communicate in person with each audience, when possible, and to

follow up frequently using e-mail, school and district websites, and newsletters.

Audience: Parents

Communication Strategies - Consider using the Town Hall meeting as an initial approach to establish connectivity and a climate of concern. Follow up with weekly e-mails, letters, and newsletters as information becomes available. If a significant development occurs, use the Town Hall again if you feel it is necessary.

Talking Points –

- » Our school system is in the planning phase with regard to dealing with Budgetary Uncertainties. Plans will be submitted to the DoD for leadership consideration and decision. No final decisions will be made until March. We will not know the effects of budget proposals or school personnel furloughs until then.
- » Our priority in planning and the final outcome is to accomplish our mission to the best of our ability given the constraints that may affect our school system without risking a full-year of academic credit for our students.
- » We know the value you place on education. Our schools are a stabilizing force in your lives. Mobility, deployments, military training, and being away from extended family puts a unique stress on your lives and the effects of these budget uncertainties may disrupt your lives and the education of your students. We are working diligently to prevent disruptions and mitigate any negative effects they may have.
- » We do not yet know what extent, if any, the plans or final decisions will have on extra- and co-curricular activities, testing, transportation, or school operations. We are working diligently to minimize any negative effects.
- » I will keep you informed every step of the way about any changes, plans, details or decisions.
- » Communication is vital and I welcome hearing from you. My door is always open and I want you to know that your concerns are my concerns. Your children and your families are our number one priority.



IDEA

We know the value our families place on education. Our schools are a stabilizing force in their lives. Mobility, deployments, military training, and being away from extended family puts a unique stress on their lives and the effects of these budget uncertainties may disrupt their lives, our lives, and the education of our students. We must work diligently to prevent disruptions and mitigate any negative effects they may have.

Audience: Teachers and School Staff

Communication Strategies – Consider using frequent staff meetings, electronic and written communiques with staff, and face-to-face small group meetings. Do what you can to ensure you keep morale as high as possible. Special events, pot-luck lunches, or after-school gatherings can help.

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- » I ask your patience and understanding over the next several weeks. Communication is vital and I welcome hearing from you. My door is always open and I want you to know that your concerns are my concerns.
- » Key Guiding Principles for a Furlough Situation
 - Consistency is important. All DoDEA components will take similar actions.
 - We will take all possible steps to mitigate harmful effects associated with budgetary uncertainty.
 - Support for our employees, students, and families is top priority.
 - We will continue to work within a strict culture of savings.
 - We will be transparent and communicate frequently with employees.
 - Planning does not assume that actions will occur, only that we are ready to act.
 - Guidance and FAQs for agencies and employees in the event of furloughs can be found on the OPM website at: <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/furlough-guidance/#url=Administrative-Furlough>



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This is a very fluid situation and changes are frequent. Keeping our audiences informed and prepared to the fullest extent possible is critical. There is no substitute for the comfort of knowing you have the information you need to make the best decisions for yourselves, our school and our students.

- » Furlough Details:
 - Length of Furlough
 - 22 discontinuous workdays
 - Total of 176 hours

- Timing of Furlough

- General Rules: Spread over maximum months and no more than 16 hours per pay period
- Congress must be notified 45 days in advance of written notice to employees
- 30-day furlough proposal notices will be issued to employees with a 7-day response period.
- Special Considerations
 - Impact of furlough must be bargained with unions/ associations.
 - Principals, District Superintendents, Area Directors, DoDEA division heads determine exact days/hours (subject to bargaining for those covered by union contracts)
- » Each and every school employee is a valued contributor to the success of our team, our mission and our students' education. In no way does furlough planning diminish your efforts, accomplishments or importance to our schools. This planning is the unfortunate result of the hard budgetary challenges facing our nation and the DoD. Together we can collaborate and work together to continue the valuable work we do and overcome the challenges these budget uncertainties pose to our mission.
- » This is a very fluid situation and changes are frequent. I will do my best to ensure you are informed and prepared to the fullest extent possible. There is no substitute for the comfort of knowing you have the information you need to make the best decisions for yourselves, our school and our students.
- » Our leadership has not overlooked the personal impact of furlough on all of you —Headquarters, Area, District and School staffs. The financial and emotional effects of a furlough on our DoDEA workforce undoubtedly will be a hardship for many. Our leaders are committed that as they prepare our plans, to take all possible steps to mitigate the harmful effects associated with this action and to maintain a strong and viable school system.
- » Our schools are a great source of strength for our military communities. DoDEA employees, in all roles, personify that strength for our children and their families. No one knows that better than you do. Thank you for all you do.



IDEA

Meet regularly, face-to-face with the commander, both in their offices and in your offices. Invite the commander to a school staff meeting and school community Town Halls. Team up with your commanders to talk with parents and school staff. Keep in mind that they are dealing with the same budgetary uncertainties as you are.

Audience: Commanders

Communication Strategies – Meet regularly, face-to-face with the commander, both in their offices and in your offices. Invite the commander to a school staff meeting and school community Town Halls. Team up with your commanders to talk with parents and school staff. Keep in mind that they are dealing with the same budgetary uncertainties as you are.

Talking Points –

- » Our school system is in the planning phase with regard to dealing with Budgetary Uncertainties. Plans will be submitted to the DoD for leadership consideration and decision. No final decisions will be made until March. We will not know the effects of budget proposals or school personnel furloughs until then.
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- » I ask your patience and understanding over the next several weeks. Communication is vital and I welcome hearing from you. My door is always open and I want you to know that your concerns are my concerns.
- » I appreciate your support and commitment to our school and will continue to partner with you and work closely with you to do whatever we can to support you, your families and your mission, especially during these troubling, uncertain times.