
Defense Report

AUSA



Educating the Children of Military Families — Squarely a Federal Responsibility

Since 1950, the Federal Impact Aid Program has provided financial assistance to school districts which educate the children of federal civilian employees, military personnel and others who live on government-owned enclaves which do not contribute to the community tax base. This aid has been immensely important to local school districts. However, recent changes to the program resulting in inadequate funding have strained relations between Army communities and adjoining school districts across the country.

Between 1980 and 1983, these actions reduced the program's annual authorizations by about 35 percent — from \$707 million to \$455 million. Faced with serious losses in planned revenue, many school districts have been forced to drastically increase local taxes, or else propose economies which could degrade the quality of education for all children.

Although the downward trend was slightly reversed in the 1984 budget which authorized \$565 million each year through 1989, affected school districts are experiencing unreimbursed costs of over \$2,000 per student. In the Omnibus Defense Authorization Act, 45 Senators have sponsored an amendment which increases the program to \$700 million each year. Even with this increase the program would remain below its 1980 funding level, particularly when the effects of inflation are considered. While the amendment does not restore revenues already lost by thousands of school districts, it does help insure that federally impacted districts in the future will be more fairly compensated for the cost of educating children of our military families.

The federal government has an obligation to reimburse school districts for these costs. Without adequate funding there are a host of school districts throughout the country that do not have sufficient revenue to cover the additional costs of educating federally-connected children. In the long run everyone suffers — the military, the civilian communities and all their children. Approval of the Senate amendment's higher level will be an essential investment in our nation's future.