

Improving Student Learning When Budgets Are Tight

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Sources:

- Allan Odden, *Improving Student Learning When Budgets Are Tight*, Corwin Press, Feb 2012
- Allan Odden, *Ten Strategies for Doubling Student Performance*. Corwin Press, 2011.
- Allan Odden and Sarah Archibald, *Doubling Student Performance ... and finding the resources to do it*. Corwin Press, 2011.
- Allan Odden and Larry Picus, *School Finance: A Policy Perspective, 4th Edition*, McGraw Hill, 2008.

3 Parts of the Presentation

- 1. Background comments**
- 2. Aligning resources to instruction**
- 3. Cutting back when resources are tight**

1. Background Comments

Education Resources Today

- **Have spent most of my professional life getting more money for schools – school finance equity and adequacy**
- **Don't like cutting budgets**
- **Don't like not providing compensation increases**
- **Upset that some states are cutting education budgets by hundreds of dollars per pupil – far beyond just not covering inflation**
- **Current fiscal context for schools is bleak**

Education Resources Today

- **But it is what it is; can't change reality**
- **Optimistic scenario is for education dollars to stay even**
- **Realistic scenario is that education dollars will be eroded by inflation if not cut in absolute terms and**
 - **We will lose stimulus dollars this year**
 - **And we won't get any more in the near future**

Must Move Forward Despite the Dour Fiscal Context

- **Improve student learning**
- **Even when budgets are tight**

- **Mindless, across the board, non-strategic budget cutting will make things worse**
- **Must get into a strategic budgeting process of aligning resources that exist to strategies that will boost student learning**

Step 1: Resist the Cost Pressures that Eat Up School Budgets

- 1. Lower class sizes**
- 2. Multiplicity of electives**
 - Neither boosts learning in core content areas very much
- 3. Automatic pay increases from salary schedule steps and lanes**
→ Eat up budgets with no positive impact on student learning

2. Align Resources to Instruction

Back to Educational Basics

- Why are we in education in the first place?
- What can be done with no more money?
- Are there ways to use money more effectively (which means we'd also identify ways we now use money that is not so effective)?
- Can we engage in some resource reallocation?
 - Yes – most education dollars are spent on labor so it is using labor better that constitutes reallocation

Why Are We in Education?

- To have children learn – to have *all* children learn
- To organize schools and ourselves to deliver instruction that is effective in having students achieve, and in today's context, also to reduce the achievement gaps linked to poverty and ethnicity

Why Are We in Education?

- **What makes us feel good?**
 - **Having our instructional practice get better**
 - **Seeing our students learn more**
 - **And having all this happen in collaborative settings, in which we all are engaged, working together to improve instruction, boost student learning and chip away at the achievement gaps linked to poverty and ethnicity**

Improving Schools

- **Do we know how to improve student Learning?**
 - **YES**
- **Does it take a lot of money to do so?**
 - **NO, not for the main tasks**
- **What do we need to work on?**
 - Improving curriculum and instruction
 - Figuring out what best instructional practices are
 - Getting effective instruction into all classrooms

Current Situation

- **“Teacher effects” research:**
 - **Instructional impacts vary widely across teachers**
 - **Some (10-20%) teachers have spectacular impacts on student learning gains**
 - **Some (10-20%) teachers have unimpressive impacts – kids lose ground over the school year**
 - **Most (60-80%) teachers have modest impacts**
 - **Reason for differential effects:**
 - **Differential instructional practices**

The “Problem” to Address

• Culture of autonomy that characterizes schools (Raudenbush, Ed Researcher, 4/09)

- Privatized, idiosyncratic view of instruction (teachers work alone) that leads to widespread variation in instructional practice & student learning

versus

- Collective, systemic view of instruction (teachers work together) that emphasizes teacher collaboration and schoolwide accountability, and produces more widespread effective instruction and better student learning

Examples of the Latter

- **There are many, including rural and urban districts – see Odden, Odden and Archibald,**
- **Core of their success in changing culture**
 - **Focus on instructional practice**
 - **Articulate what effective instructional practice is in reading/writing, math, science, and so on**
 - **Work collaboratively to get that effective instructional practice into all classrooms**

How to Change School Culture

1. Organize teachers into collaborative work groups

- Grade level teachers in elementary schools
- Content (e.g., math, history) teachers in middle schools
- Course (e.g., algebra, biology) teachers in high schools

How to Change School Culture

2. Provide each group materials

- Micro-content standards, one concept for every 2-4 weeks of instruction
- Rigorous curriculum
- Short cycle assessments – given at the beginning of each 2-3 week curriculum unit -- **\$15-25/pupil**
- End-of-unit common assessments
- Perhaps “benchmark,” quarterly assessments
- Work team leader – maybe **\$**
- Time of an instructional coach -- **\$\$**

How to Change School Culture

- 3. Provide each group with time to meet during the school day**
- A period a day at least 3 times a week
 - (Need some elective teachers – art, music, PE, etc. -- \$\$)
 - Sometimes back this period up to lunch, time before school starts and/or time after school lets out
 - Key principal role in designing school schedule – can be done

How to Change School Culture

4. Provide ongoing professional development

- Find and train instructional coaches
- Train PLC leaders with appropriate skills
- Provide schools with:
 - Pupil free days for teachers
 - Funds for trainers (central office or consultants)
- Focus professional development on:
 - Curriculum linked training – directly relevant
 - Developing/honing 2-3 week curriculum units
 - Emergent view of effective instructional practice
 - Systemic, school wide, not individual plans

How to Change School Culture

5. Shift work life of teacher to collaborative work in these teams:

- a. Collaboratively review formative data to plan instruction/ lesson plans *before* teaching each curriculum unit
- b. Teach the unit simultaneously
- c. Give the common end-of-unit assessment
- d. Collectively review results *after* teaching for:
 - All students/classrooms
 - Teachers who had spectacular results
 - Teachers who had below par results
 - Good, bad and average is made public

How to Change School Culture

5. Shift work life of teacher to collaborative work in these teams:

- e. If overall performance not acceptable, redesign unit
- f. Identify instructional strategies of the most effective teachers – incorporate them into system
- g. Provide assistance to teachers with below par impacts, and if performance does not improve, counsel out
- h. Over time, create a view of effective instructional practice that works for that school/district/content area
- i. Goal: get that instructional practice into all classrooms through this “cycle of continuous instructional improvement”

Results of This Work

- **Wider distribution of highly effective instructional practice in classrooms**
- **Dramatic improvements in student learning**
- **Dramatic reductions in the achievement gaps linked to poverty and ethnicity**
- **Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy**
- **Students with a strong sense of efficacy**

Results of This Work

- When this happens, school people feel good, know they are working hard, but working together, and getting better at teaching and seeing student learning rise
- And in these tough fiscal times, we need to focus on what makes educators feel good

Other Strategies if Affordable

- 1. Teacher tutors for struggling students**
- 2. Academically focused summer school**
- 3. Extended day programming with a strong homework and tutoring elements**

Each and everyone of these expand learning time while holding expectations constant for performance

What Resources are Needed?

- **Collaborative work time, so need some elective teachers**
- **Battery of formative/short cycle, end-of-unit assessments, benchmark assessments**
- **Instructional Coaches**
- **Training dollars**
- **Tutors**

3. Strategically Cutting Resources

While maintaining the focus on improving instruction and reallocating some resources to the previous strategies

Scrutinizing the Use of Dollars

- **Be flexible about class size**
- **Resources for electives v. core subjects**
- **Periods in the day**
- **Paraprofessionals**
- **Structure of professional development**
- **Use of Title 1 and state poverty linked dollars and some special education funding**
- **Technology**
- **Automatic pay increases**

Class Size

- **Be very flexible about class size**
 - **Increase class size to get collaborative time, instructional coaches and teacher tutors**
- **Fund small class sizes only when ALL other resources are funded**

Don't Over Fund Electives

- **Need elective classes, but**
- **Research (Roza) shows in many cases \$/pupil for electives are 2-3+ times that for core subjects**
 - Small student numbers
 - Senior teachers
- **Shift resources from electives**
 - Reduce electives by moving to a 6 period day
 - Make class sizes the same or even larger
 - Distribute teacher talent more equitably

Number of Class Periods Matter

- **6 versus 7 or 8 period days**
- **In a 6 period day, teachers teach for five periods and an elective teacher covers the additional period – every core teacher needs an additional 20% of elective teachers**
- **In a 7 or 8 period day, teachers still teach 5 periods, so need even more teachers – an additional 40% for 7 periods and additional 60% for 8 periods, and both also reduce instructional minutes**
- **Huge shift in past three decades to 7 and 8 period days in secondary schools – more expensive and less time for instruction in core subjects**

Shift from 7 to 6 Period day

- **School with 500 students and 25 students in a class and a 7 period day**
 - 20 core teachers
 - 40% more for electives or 8 elective teachers
- **Shift to a 6 period day so need:**
 - 20 core teachers
 - 20% more for electives or 4 elective teachers
 - 4 reallocated positions:
 - Use 2 for instructional coaches and 2 for tutors

Rethink Use of Paraprofessionals

- **Many paraprofessionals provide the first extra help for struggling students, but**
- **Students in the bottom quartile need trained, teacher tutors**
- **Replace 2 paraprofessionals with 1 teacher tutor**
- **Paraprofessionals better used for extra help for struggling students in the middle ranges**

Rethink Professional Development

- Too little professional development addresses core content – reading, writing, math, science
- “Audit” professional development to target resources to core content issues
 - Many urban districts already spend \$4000 to \$8000 per teacher on PD
- Rethink “program improvement” staff in central offices (larger districts) – turn into professional development – trainers, teacher days, school-based instructional coaches – Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia
- “Capture” all pupil-free days – use for systemic professional development

Rethink Federal/State Categorical \$

- **Focus use of categorical dollars, particularly central office program improvement staff, on:**
 - **Instructional coaches**
 - **Teacher tutors**
 - **Some extended day programming**
 - **Professional development pupil free days**
 - **Training**

Squeeze Textbook Funds

- **Use to purchase/develop:**
 - **Clear curriculum/content standards**
 - **Formative assessments**
 - **End-of-curriculum unit assessments**
 - **Common end-of-course tests**
 - **Benchmark assessments (on line like Renaissance Learning STAR, NWEA, AIMSWEB)**
 - **Costs: \$25 per pupil**

Use Technology

- **Offer online courses, especially in high school**
 - **Cost \$500 to \$600 per student per course**
 - **Lower cost than any course in a typical public school**
- **Seriously consider “blended instruction” programs like Rocketship Elementary – taps technology, reduces cost and increases achievement**

Don't Automatically Increase Salaries Each Year

- **Have a salary schedule – I'd recommend a base pay schedule on knowledge and skills (multiple measures of effectiveness) and bonuses for student growth**
- **Decide each year how much can be added to salaries**
- **Fund increases as budget allows (no automatic step and lane rises)**

Contact Information

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