

Reinventing School Finance: Falling Forward
By Lawrence O. Picus and Allen R. Odden

The above article addressed the issues of new school finance. It is no longer business as usual as school districts try to find creative ways to finance their budgets and produce results within those confines.

Historically the total funding levels have been driven by the state thereby, out of the control of the districts. Since the budget shortfalls have steadily increased with each passing year, districts have been faced with ways that rely more on the spending side than the revenue side as the revenue side is not within their control.

Of the numerous options that the authors have proposed to curtail spending, a couple stood out as more logical to me. Although I understand the need for salary freezes, I am not a supporter of such; however I think graduated increases are acceptable with perhaps a tentative salary cap. More logical is the suggestion of class size. I agree that districts should review and potentially change all class size policies. I also agree that AP courses can increase in sizes as the AP students are highly motivated and will be successful in a class of 15 or 25 or taking the class on-line, which was also suggested. It makes more sense to increase the AP class sizes, condensing the work force allowing those available teachers to teach the middle and lower end students who are the ones who need more support to begin with.

Regarding the electives, I believe that electives should be offered but perhaps the choice should be reduced and offered only after the core classes have been mastered. If the goal of most high schools is to advance students to college, colleges do not allow for electives until the core

courses are out of the way, so why not replicate that model on the secondary level? Many of the courses have proven to be a tremendous drain on human capital as well as financial.

Revamping of the school schedule is a wonderful idea. Why districts added periods, thereby reducing the minutes per period, is beyond me. I firmly believe that the basics need to be taught and taught well and restructuring the day would not only allow an academic advantage but would financially be smarter. It's a win-win in my opinion.

I am in full agreement with "cutbacks on the basis of effectiveness and not seniority". I am an advocate of not renewing a contract or agreement with a faculty member if they are not able to perform their job at a satisfactory level. If that faculty member has been teaching for 25 years and s/he is no longer effective and is not willing to learn new technology or grasp the concepts necessary to teach to our students in a global learning environment, then it is time for them to move on. Complacency is not healthy and it is generally the newer teachers who are willing to learn and give back. Why should it be, then, that the faculty member who has taught for 25 years has total immunity to non-renewal?

At a time when many believe our educational system is failing and costs have skyrocketed, as the authors point out, schools districts must find ways to identify options as the first step to making substantial improvements in student learning in a fiscal environment where additional revenues are unlikely to provide a path to school improvement.