

Note: This PDF is an excerpt from a longer report issued by the District Management Council. It is being provided to the Arlington School Board and APS division leadership as a resource for a budget-oriented retreat on July 23, 2024. It is intended to provide food for thought about how other school divisions are maximizing what they are able to do with their operating funds. - M. Kadera

SPENDING MONEY WISELY

GETTING THE MOST FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGETS



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OPPORTUNITY BRIEF

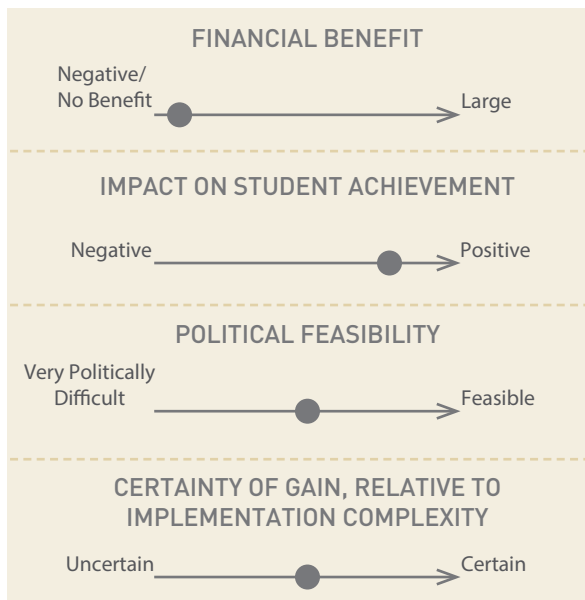
TARGETING NEW INVESTMENTS: Funding a Better Future, Despite Declining Resources



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As K-12 budgets shrink, it is not uncommon for district leaders to subtly and perhaps subconsciously shift to a defensive posture – trying to preserve as much as possible and minimize the impacts of budget cuts, given the weak hand they have been dealt. This is an understandable reaction to budget shortfalls and a very reasonable way to ride out a temporary budget crunch.

The recent pressures on district budgets are different, and require a different reaction. A recent *New Yorker* cartoon showed a caveman having a talk with his son. The caption read, “When I was your age, everything was exactly the same.” Nothing could be further from reality for today’s district leaders. A superintendent in 2013 talking to a superintendent from 2007 about school budgets could honestly say, “Practically nothing is the same!”



A seismic shift has taken place – many districts today are facing sustained, multi-year funding gaps. In the past, tough times came, and then a few years later, spending levels typically returned to normal. As Secretary Duncan aptly noted, school districts are now facing a “new normal.”

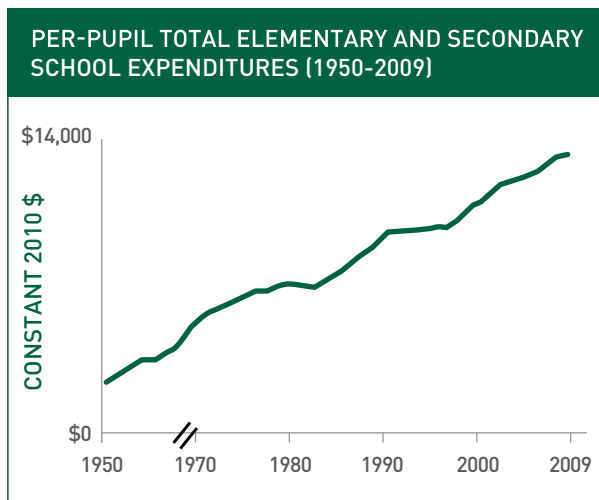
Sustained Unsustainability

What is different? The traditional budgeting process in many districts in years past started by “rolling everyone forward.” Sometimes called the “everyone comes back” budget, the CFO built the first draft of next year’s budget by advancing each existing staff member one step in the salary schedule, adding for any known lane

movements, factoring in anticipated increases for health insurance, and finally topping it off with a cost of living increase. It is common for these standard increases to represent a 2%-6% increase over the prior year.

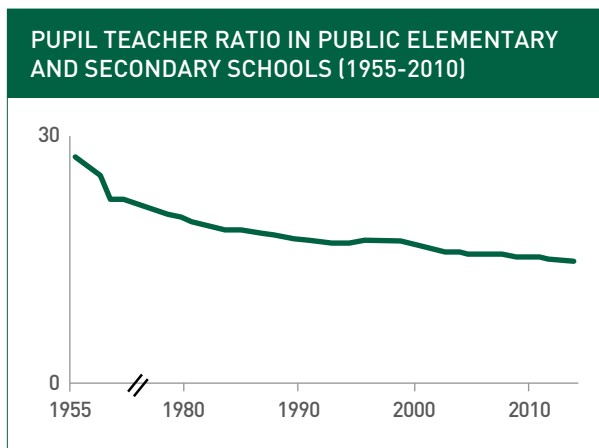
In the past, K-12 funding allowed districts to bring everyone back as well as add some new staff each year. In fact, per-pupil spending has increased every year in the past hundred years, with the exception of brief periods during the Great Depression and World War II (Exhibit 1).¹ The last five decades have also been marked by a constant increase in the number of adults working in schools, even when adjusted for increases in enrollment (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 1



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2011

Exhibit 2



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2011

Short-term factors like the 2008 financial meltdown threw most districts into the position of not having the funding needed to maintain the status quo levels of staffing and services. Districts had seen this before, and employed past strategies of protecting the classroom, hunkering down, and riding out the storm. These budget gaps were often managed through short-term fixes, such as delaying textbook and technology purchases, deferring maintenance, reducing professional development, and cutting back on coaching.

Now, however, a number of long-term trends will shape district finances for years to come, and the familiar short-term solutions will not suffice. Many economists believe that the cost of health insurance and unfunded pension liabilities will strain future district budgets. They will also strain the budgets of city, state, and federal governments, which provide the lion's share of funds to many urban districts. Funding problems will be compounded as the federal government wrestles with a mounting deficit. It is unlikely that many school districts will, year after year, have enough money from these sources to maintain the status quo, let alone fund new efforts to raise student achievement, implement the Common Core, increase the use of technology, pay for longer school days, and implement other reform efforts.

Revenue from new tax increases is unlikely to be available to address the budget gap. In many communities, it is increasingly difficult to raise taxes; any new tax dollars are split between health and pension costs as well as deficit reduction, and are not just for K-12 staff and programs. For example, during the good years, from 2000 to 2007, the Massachusetts legislature raised taxes and increased K-12 spending by 13.6% each year, but rather than being used to supercharge educational improvement, fully 30% of the increase was needed to cover increased teacher benefit costs.² These external, macro-economic forces suggest that many districts will experience tight budgets for many years to come.

Years of tight budgets are not only a headache for district leaders, but can dramatically slow the pace of school improvement.

Investing While Cutting

“If things are to change, some things must change” is a simple but profound truism. If student achievement is to rise (or increase more quickly), then some things must change in our schools and classrooms. Historically, many school districts have linked new improvements to having new funds. Often a new grant kickstarts a new reading initiative or a tax increase supports large-scale technology purchases. Longer school days or intensive teacher coaching is often contingent upon larger than usual budget increases. In a world of costs rising faster than revenue, this approach to education reform can no longer be the norm. The new normal will require school

districts to fund improvement efforts, while also cutting the budget, programs and/or staff.

It can feel wrong to add new programs or invest in new staff while also cutting the budget, but this juggling act is fast becoming a key aspect of district leadership. For students not yet ready for college and career, it is a moral imperative to invest and improve.

The downside for staff is clear: lost jobs, more work, and much change. The upside for staff of investing while cutting is less obvious, but real. If a district simply struggles to minimize the pain of cuts, morale can drop because the budget becomes more about survival than mission. Being able to highlight steps that move the district forward can buoy the energy and commitment in the district. For example, one district, faced with the unpleasant task of closing schools, found the mood turned from one of defeatism to resolve and even optimism that some of the funds freed up from having fewer schools would go towards adding needed services to the remaining schools. The pain was paired with a gain.

One midsized urban school district in Pennsylvania exemplified the “investing while cutting” mindset. A visionary superintendent and school board embarked on a strategic planning process. They honestly assessed their strengths and needs and found they were wanting in a few critical areas. For example, they lacked a robust reading program at the secondary level and needed a more significant summer program to help reduce the number of students dropping out. This is not an uncommon list. What was atypical was that they made the list at all. In a state with a 15% decrease in funding for districts over a four-year period, the district had just experienced large-scale layoffs. The next year, the budget was forecasted to drop another 5%.

Declining funding did not change the fact that the district needed reading teachers at their middle and high schools and more staff during the summer. Rather than delay, water down, or abandon these efforts, the district leaders reminded stakeholders that the strategic plan clearly prioritized these efforts. By definition, most other spending was less important – not unimportant, but not the top priority.

As the following year’s budget was built, new reading teachers and summer school were budgeted first, and deeper cuts were made elsewhere. The results were good for both students and staff. More students learned to read and comprehend, and

more students stayed in high school. Despite more layoffs, many staff were energized by the decision to invest in critical areas of need. A few years of deep cuts had started to create a sense that things would be going from bad to worse in the district. These high profile investments and subsequent positive outcomes showed that while the budget was “bad, and maybe getting worse,” the district and its students were getting better.

A Few Guiding Principles

Staying focused on improving student achievement while budgets are shrinking can be challenging. Starting or expanding new efforts while others are being cut can be particularly difficult to justify and to implement. A few ideas can help ease the way.

1 Believe doing more with less is possible

It is difficult to support and fight for a losing proposition. If leaders believe that higher student achievement requires higher spending, then it is unlikely that there will be much support for the hard work ahead. Fortunately, district leaders have a few tools beyond personal salesmanship to turn naysayers into believers. Performance measurement and benchmarking are two effective ways of persuading others that doing more with less is not just propaganda, but a 21st century reality.

Performance measurement is a rigorous process of tracking the effectiveness of current spending. If leaders know for certain, for example, that a particular dropout prevention effort was not reducing the number of dropouts, or that a costly summer school program did not stem summer learning loss, then cutting these programs and investing the funds saved into new efforts or expanding effective programs will not feel like a terrible loss.

Benchmarking is the process of comparing one system to other best-practice organizations. The power of benchmarking is that it helps highlight what is possible. Human nature can make the familiar seem inevitable. If a district for decades did or had X, people might over time start to believe that X is absolutely required, and its loss would lead to worse outcomes for students. All the while, many higher-performing, like-districts do not do X at all.

The Xerox Corporation might have been the first to

Targeting New Investments

Guiding Principles

1
Believe doing more with less is possible

2
Say you believe

3
Normalize strategic abandonment and invest in the budget development cycle

4
Don't ignore the power of away-from-classroom investments

formalize benchmarking in 1976. At that time, the company was the largest manufacturer of copiers in the world. They were flourishing, and it was believed that everything they did contributed to their success. Big opportunities for improvement were not obvious, and cuts would likely jeopardize their winning formula. Then, their world changed. A small number of Japanese companies seemed to make better copiers at a much lower cost. Still, it did not seem possible to cut costs and maintain, let alone improve, quality. Benchmarking changed these beliefs. Through detailed benchmarking, they learned that Xerox, as compared to best-practice companies, had twice as many supervisory and support staff, ten times more rejects during production, and shipped machines with seven times more defects.³

Imagine, before the benchmarking study, a leader's suggesting that Xerox cut supervisory and support staff by half, reduce prices, and dramatically improve quality. Many would have felt it was a fool's effort. Few would have backed such a reform effort. However, fortified by the benchmarking data, the company was energized to do more with less; quality improved, costs came down, and they continued to flourish.

Over time, benchmarking has expanded to government agencies and municipalities and, to a smaller degree, public schools. As districts seek to cut in one area in order to free up funds to invest elsewhere, they can increase support for such a plan if it is clear that other high-performing similar districts have already experienced success with this as well.

Benchmarking can be helpful in aspects of district management, including operations like custodial, maintenance, and food service, as well as for leadership staffing such as assistant principals and central office, and for workload and teaching load for special education, ELL, Title I, and reading teachers.

2 Say you believe

Simply believing that a district can raise achievement and should invest scarce dollars in new efforts despite tight budgets is not enough. District leaders need to help win support for these initiatives by publicly and privately voicing their beliefs.

The challenge is that leaders often say just the opposite, for understandable reasons. As districts jostle for funding from city leaders or taxpayers, they sometimes paint a picture of impending doom if more funds are not provided. It is not uncommon to hear district leaders declare proposed funding cuts to be devastating if not reversed.

Advocating for funding is an important part of leadership, but staff also listens to the debate. While lobbying for more, district leaders are also messaging to staff that children will suffer and learning will decline. When the cuts are not restored, staff could reasonably believe that improvement is not likely and that lackluster results are inevitable.

It might be more productive when advocating for needed funds to describe the alternative as requiring hard choices and new approaches, rather than disaster. Even the most compelling benchmarking data and a passionate vision of higher achievement despite fewer funds cannot be very persuasive after months of voicing the opposite.

In one district, the superintendent's cabinet read as a team-building exercise the story of Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition. They learned how the crew came together to survive their boat's becoming frozen and subsequently destroyed by polar ice flows. It is a great example of people coming together in adversity. It is also a powerful example of effective leadership during tough times. Shackleton gave his

crew hope; he believed and communicated that all would end well.

The importance of a leader's sustaining a positive attitude within the organization is a lesson worth emulating. Superintendents can certainly regret having to make cuts, and should empathize with those impacted by reductions, but superintendents must also energize the vast majority of staff who remain serving students. Providing targeted investments and new ways to meet old demands can help staff believe that improving student outcomes is possible, despite limited resources.

3 Normalize strategic abandonment and invest in the budget development cycle

Often, when building the following year's budget, the first step is, as mentioned earlier, to build the "everyone comes back" budget that rolls forward all programs and people. Then, the painful process of cutting begins. Each potential cut is debated as advocates try to save the existing program and staff, and push to cut elsewhere. Implicit in this approach is the idea that every program and strategy should be continued and cuts are only being made because sufficient funds are not available.

Student and taxpayers would be better served if, before the first draft budget is built, district leaders spent time

Each year, if districts methodically discuss what not to do before they start building a budget, it can create space to discuss what to add.

examining what is helping children and what is not. District leaders should take a fresh look to determine what is aligned with the strategic plan and what is no longer in sync with district strategy and should be abandoned.

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, has long advocated that what you stop doing matters as much as what you do. He suggests, “You should create a ‘stop doing’ list to complement your ‘to do’ list. Set aside time to explicitly discuss with your managers what to stop doing. The world is full of smart executives who take decisive action. It is woefully short of wise executives who take decisive inaction.”⁴ In some districts, when these kinds of “stop doing” conversations do occur, they tend to focus on what *other* departments or more senior leaders could/should abandon. Often, the process is not self-reflective or grounded in data.

Each year, if districts methodically discuss what not to do before they start building a budget, it can create space to discuss what to add, even when the overall budget is shrinking. There are a number of side benefits to formalizing abandonment as a part of building a budget. It creates an expectation that programs, strategies, and efforts must be effective if they are to continue. It also heightens the need to create systems to measure effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. Imagine if a program were deemed “ineffective” unless data proved otherwise. Raising the burden of proof could squarely keep the focus on results. Lastly, by pairing abandonment with investment, district leaders may challenge old spending with the confidence that cuts to ineffective programs make possible new spending on programs expected to have higher efficacy.

Don't ignore the power of away-from-classroom investments

When confronting a budget gap, there can be a strong desire to preserve what we have. It is hard to consider adding new programs or investments, while budgets and even some staff are being cut. This locks in the status quo, at best. When cuts cannot be avoided, an equally strong desire can be “to protect the classroom.” At one superintendents’ conference devoted to balancing budgets, speaker after speaker exhorted the need to keep the cuts away from the classroom. A generous interpretation of this advice is that students come first, and the budget should also put their needs first. This focus on the classroom, however, can undermine the importance of leadership, management, and expertise which is also critical to helping students learn.

Relatively small investments away from the classroom can magnify the impact teachers have on student learning. For example, clerical support for principals can allow building leaders to spend more time in classrooms; adding data analysts can allow districts to pinpoint what is working and what is not; instructional coaches can improve teacher effectiveness; and,

a skilled purchasing manager can save millions, thus freeing up funds for students.

Paying for expertise can also be a fruitful investment. School reform efforts depend on school leaders assuming prominent roles as instructional leaders, yet few districts have found cost-effective ways to free up principals’ time and energy to devote more attention to supporting instructional excellence. One small urban district of 14,000 students in Massachusetts accomplished just that by investing \$200,000 to employ two lawyers to work directly with principals and assistant principals in matters related to student discipline hearings, student records, parental rights, Section 504 on handicapping conditions, civil rights, and special education. Each of the district’s 29 school leaders and their assistants can call the district lawyers at nearly any hour of the day or night. The administrators have an expert to provide advice and support, especially in high-stress situations. Additionally, the lawyers collaborate to spot trends so that procedures can be updated and relevant.

Principals report that the legal support has helped them free up time to play more active roles in educator evaluation and other instructional leadership efforts. Just as importantly, district leaders point to the following gains: more consistent implementation of district policies and new state mandates related to student services; an improved reputation of the district with special education advocates, local police and county courts; and a \$200,000 net savings in virtually every year of the ten years the staff counsel positions have been in place.

Away-from-classroom expenditures like these can seem frivolous during declining budgets. In fact, they are equally important in tight or flush times and ultimately benefit students.

Rebirth, not Destruction

Cutting a budget will always be hard. Good people may be let go or moved, and cherished programs may end, but this is also the beginning of new, hopefully more effective, initiatives. Just as a forest fire can cause much damage, it also is a needed step in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. The ash nourishes new growth, and a healthier forest emerges. Districts that create a culture of cutting and adding even as budgets shrink will also see a better future.

¹ James W. Guthrie and Arthur Peng, “A Warning for All Who Would Listen – America’s Public Schools Face a Forthcoming Fiscal Tsunami,” from *Stretching the School Dollar: How Schools and Districts Can Save Money While Serving Students Best*, edited by Frederick M. Hess and Eric Osberg, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2011).

² Edward Moscovitch, *School Funding Reality: A Bargain Not Kept*. (Boston: Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), 2010).

³ Joseph Blakeman, “Benchmarking: Definitions and Overview,” Center for Urban Transportation Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2002, <http://www4.uwm.edu/cuts/bench/bm-desc.htm#history> (accessed August 8, 2013).

⁴ Jim Collins, “Pulling the Plug,” 1997, http://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/pulling-the-plug.html, (accessed August 8, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

To identify the top ten opportunities for resource realignment in public school districts, we began by casting a wide net. We drew upon the experience and expertise of education leaders and thinkers from around the country – including current and former superintendents, policymakers, and researchers – to brainstorm a list of possibilities. This comprehensive list of 71 opportunities for resource realignment represents the collective wisdom of centuries of experience.

Some of the ideas may raise academic achievement and create significant cost savings, but are extremely difficult to achieve. Other ideas of similar impact seem to be much easier to implement politically and operationally. Practical realities often limit the range of options, and can determine whether or not an opportunity will, in reality, make meaningful change for students.

We therefore sought to narrow our list to the few opportunities that raise student achievement and have a significant financial impact while still being feasible and practical for most districts. We methodically and rigorously assessed each option. The screening and analysis focused on the benefit to urban districts, and much of the analysis was based on a typical urban district of 50,000. However, many of the opportunities apply to districts of all sizes, contexts, and student demographics. Each of the 71 opportunities was analyzed based on financial benefit, impact on student achievement, political feasibility, and certainty of gain relative to the complexity of implementation:

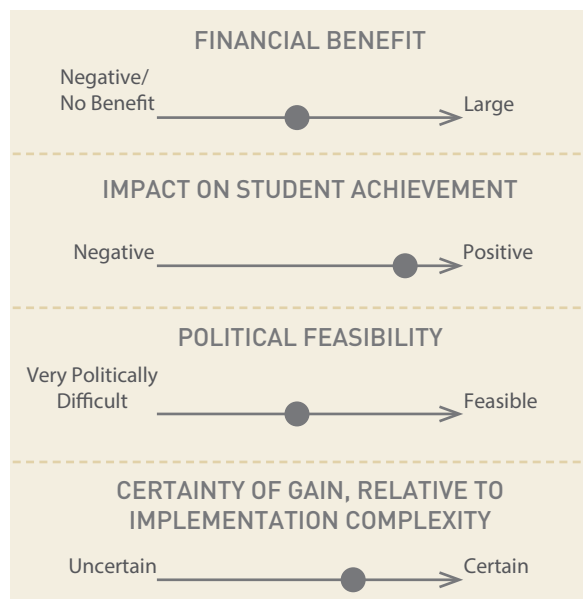
- 1. Financial benefit:** Using a large sample of real district budgets and a database of staffing levels from districts around the country, we estimated the cost savings of each opportunity for a typical district of 50,000 students.
- 2. Impact on student achievement:** Based on existing research, we weighed each opportunity’s potential impact on student achievement.
- 3. Political feasibility:** Based on The District Management Council’s experience with districts around the country and feedback from superintendents, we assessed each opportunity’s political feasibility. All resource reallocations encounter pushback, so the assessment was made on a relative scale.

4. Certainty of gain, relative to the complexity of implementation:

The quality of implementation often determines the success of district programs and initiatives. For some opportunities, gains are nearly assured, analogous to installing energy-efficient lighting. For others, gains require deep implementation that can be difficult to achieve. We assessed each opportunity based on the relative difficulty to implement in a manner that would bring about the intended academic and/or financial gains.

While not a perfect science, our assessment of each opportunity across these four factors led us to narrow the list of 71 opportunities to 21 high-impact and feasible opportunities. (The lists of 71 and 21 opportunities are included as Appendix I and II.) Finally, we again sought the input of district leaders and leading thinkers from around the country in order to narrow the list of 21 to the top ten opportunities. We prioritized opportunities that could be implemented – and have an impact – over a two to three-year timeframe. On the first page of each Opportunity Brief, we have included a simplified representation of our assessment across these four factors (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1



APPENDIX I

Original list of 71 opportunities for resource realignment

1. Achieve economies of scale and/or provide higher quality of services by partnering with other school districts or local/county governments (e.g., shared staff, departments and/or facilities)
2. Adopt fixed-costs benefits (could include greater flexibility in benefits selection)
3. Adopt in-house alternatives to outside vendors for professional development
4. Adopt lower cost, more effective service delivery models
5. Adopt market-based benefits package
6. Adopt school-day, school-year professional development and common planning time in place of out-of-school professional development time
7. Build new schools more cost-effectively
8. Carefully manage the location and staffing of substantially separate / self-contained classrooms based on shifting student needs
9. Consider and align all funding sources (local, state, federal, and private) when developing and managing the district budget
10. Contract with community colleges to provide some high school courses
11. Contract with private or non-profit sectors to provide enrichment or remediation services
12. Create incentives for principals and central office staff to determine cost-effectiveness of past spending on school academic support services and programs to make decisions about which investments to increase, preserve, or abandon
13. Determine cost-effectiveness of past spending on district academic support services and programs to make decisions about which investments to increase, preserve, or abandon
14. Differentiate benefits packages based on bargaining units or employee status
15. Differentiate class size (and compensation) based on teacher effectiveness
16. Differentiate pay based on market demand
17. Establish minimum enrollment in all courses
18. Expand the use of teacher-leaders
19. Identify and take advantage of the flexibility in allowable uses of federal funding (e.g., Title I, Title II, Title III) in order to more effectively integrate and align their use with each other and local funds
20. Identify the full costs of programs and services by including all related costs and all funding sources, and disaggregating broad spending categories by program or service to link spending to specific programs and services
21. Improve and strengthen general education reading instruction to reduce both special education and remediation and intervention costs
22. Improve cost-effective service delivery for English Language Learners (ELL)
23. Improve cost-effective service delivery for other remediation and intervention efforts
24. Improve management of special education costs by integrating special education and general education budgeting processes and including related grants

25. Improving tracking and reporting of enrollment
26. Incentivize opting-out of district-provided benefits (e.g., sick leave buy-back, health insurance)
27. Incentivize placement of most effective personnel in schools and classrooms with the greatest need
28. Increase class size in core classes
29. Increase class size in non-core classes
30. Increase class size while maintaining or reducing student load
31. Increase in-district options for educating students with severe disabilities
32. Increase number of periods taught in exchange for higher compensation
33. Invest in and/or reallocate resources for instructional coaching
34. Invest in improved technology and tools to more tightly match staffing to enrollment and student needs
35. Link compensation to teacher effectiveness rather than seniority and degrees
36. Link compensation to teaching load rather than seniority and graduate degrees
37. Maintain regular maintenance schedule for preventative maintenance in order to reduce high-cost repair or replacement costs
38. Make general education transportation routing more efficient
39. Make special education transportation routing more efficient and coordinated
40. Manage allocation and scheduling of special education staff more effectively
41. Manage the effectiveness of professional development provided by understanding its costs and benefits
42. Manage the staffing and programs of alternative schools to ensure cost-effective operations
43. Outsource operational components (e.g., food services, custodial services, and/or maintenance)
44. Outsource related services and paraprofessional services (e.g., collaboratives, private providers)
45. Provide students with social, mental health, and health services through partnerships with non-profits, universities, local agencies, and/or for-profits
46. Redesign processes to maximize cost-effectiveness of purchasing and contracting by professionalizing their function and modifying "use it or lose it" policy
47. Redesign processes to maximize district benefits in purchasing and contracting, including outsourcing, by increased cost-benefit analyses
48. Reduce cost of common planning time and paid professional development time through scheduling and staffing innovation
49. Reduce costs and increase staff effectiveness through automation of administrative and clerical duties (e.g., recording absences, parent notification, IEP processing)
50. Reduce hardware/software expenditures through a more rigorous analysis of learning impact and likely usage
51. Reduce overall compensation through multi-tiered wage scales
52. Reduce overall compensation through wage cuts
53. Reduce over-identification of students with special needs through more objective IEP eligibility and exit criteria
54. Reduce the number of school buildings as enrollment declines (with appropriate reductions in staff)
55. Reduce the number of students served in substantially separate / self-contained classes by

refining eligibility criteria

56. Reduce total benefits cost by managing part-time and full-time status
57. Rent facilities for community, non-profits and/or private use
58. Replace paraprofessional support with certified reading specialists by revising the roles and/or schedules of special education paraprofessionals
59. Revise the hiring process to ensure that principals are hired based on their demonstrated ability to improve teaching effectiveness
60. Secure all possible Medicaid reimbursements
61. Shift to lower cost, non-certified staff
62. Small investments or reallocation of resources to free up principals to spend more time in classes and/or coaching and support for providing effective feedback
63. Staff to enrollment (e.g., secondary teachers, elementary specialists, specialized roles) and eliminate one-per-school staffing guidelines
64. Staggered start times for lower cost extended day
65. Tightly manage and monitor overtime for custodial, janitorial, and maintenance services
66. Tightly manage staffing to projected enrollment and existing class size targets
67. Use college-style classes at the high school level
68. Use part-time positions for non-core staff when the need is less than full-time
69. Utilize benchmarking data to improve staffing and other budget-related decisions
70. Utilize blended learning and/or personalized technology systems to offer courses at a lower per-pupil cost and/or with greater academic return on investment
71. Vary class size based on differentiated student needs

APPENDIX II

Intermediate list of 21 opportunities for resource realignment

Blended Learning

1. Utilize blended learning and/or personalized technology systems to offer courses at a lower per-pupil cost and with greater academic return on investment

Class size and teaching load

2. Differentiate class size (and compensation) based on teacher effectiveness
3. Increase class size in core classes
4. Increase class size in non-core classes
5. Increase number of periods taught in exchange for higher compensation, which could be offered based on teacher effectiveness
6. Staff to enrollment and student needs based on existing class size targets and contractual work load requirements

Academic intervention and remediation

7. Carefully manage the location and staffing of substantially separate / self-contained special education classrooms based on shifting student needs
8. Identify the full costs and determine cost-effectiveness of programs and academic support services in order to adopt lower cost, more effective service delivery models
9. Improve management of intervention and remediation by integrating special education and general education budgeting processes and taking advantage of flexibility in allowable uses of federal funding (e.g., IDEA, Title I, Title III)
10. Manage allocation and scheduling of remediation and intervention staff more effectively
11. Replace paraprofessional support with certified reading specialists in order to improve and strengthen general education reading instruction to reduce both special education and remediation and intervention costs

Extended school day

12. Stagger start times for lower-cost extended day

Business operations

13. Outsource operational functions (e.g., food services, custodial services, and/or maintenance)
14. Outsource related services and paraprofessional services
15. Redesign purchasing and contracting by professionalizing the function and modifying "use it or lose it" policies

Professional development

16. Understand the costs and benefits of professional development and shift to more cost-effective options such as adopting in-house, school-day, school-year professional development and common planning time in place of vendor-provided, or afterschool professional development

Partnerships

17. Provide students with social, mental health, and health services through partnerships with non-profits, universities, local agencies, or for-profits

School closures

18. Reduce the number of school buildings as enrollment declines (with appropriate reductions in staff) or rent excess facilities for community, non-profits or private use

Targeted investments

19. Improve tracking, reporting, and managing of enrollment and attendance for both students and teachers
20. Invest in or reallocate resources for instructional coaching
21. Small investments or reallocation of resources to free up principals to spend more time in classes and provide effective feedback