

How Much Does a Great School Cost?

Abstract, Chapter Summaries and Endorsements

Abstract

After examining budgets from all kinds of schools, over the past three decades, two key findings emerged: school budgets reflect school values, intentionally or not; and, there are noteworthy ways to reduce the costs of operating schools. This text addresses two ways to gain insight and shed light on the question: *How much does a great school cost?* Sixteen educators were asked about their perceptions of greatness in schools, innovations worthy of pursuit, and barriers to change. This examination unpacks the expenditures and revenue options in existing schools; as well as, costs associated with an envisioned New School. This account addresses both an analysis of what is and what could be, at the same time as revealing innovative ways to save on schooling expenditures, and think differently about schools as potential revenue-generating institutions. Changing mindsets is at the core of school improvement, and while greatness may be defined in different ways, the budget will reflect what matters in an institution. A great school may not cost as much as you might think, but the willingness to re-purpose funds and generate revenue, can help jump start the engines of change.

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| Chapter 1 | Schooling Contexts for Funding – outlines five distinct lenses of schooling – public, charter, independent, international and private. Each diverse school has similarities and diverse operating systems that influence expenditures and revenues within a school budget. |
| Chapter 2 | Defining Greatness – Based on qualitative analysis of 16 educators from different school setting backgrounds, greatness is defined for this work as “inspired learning through responsible actions, within an inclusive culture.” |
| Chapter 3 | Who Minds the Money? – This chapter outlines the key individuals in schools responsible for oversight of finances. Teachers, non-instructional staff, school leaders, university and other expert influencers and school Trustees all play important roles with respect to the school budget. |
| Chapter 4 | Social and Emotional Development – features how schools should fund students classroom courses and school-wide campaigns dedicated to character education, service learning and health education. |
| Chapter 5 | Global Citizenry and World Languages – emphasizes the links between Social Studies and World Languages and how much budgets need to allocate for quality programming about local, national and international studies. |

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| Chapter 6 | English Language Arts and Fine Arts – This chapter outlines innovative approaches to teach reading, writing, speaking, listening and media arts. It also addresses new ideas for using ELA resources in more engaging ways. This chapter also pleads a case for investing more time and funds into the Fine Arts, namely music, visual arts, drama and dance. |
| Chapter 7 | Inquiry and Experimentation in Science & Technology – The rationale for expanding Science and Technology beyond the current reach in schools is examined within this chapter. Exemplar programs are highlighted and costs for STEM materials have been provided to promote more comprehensive inquiry and experiential lab experiences for all students. |
| Chapter 8 | Pure Mathematics – In addition to data management within inquiry courses, and measurement math integrated with physical science courses, this chapter highlights the need for creating a pure math course that focused on whole numbers, part numbers and geometry. Costs for resources, including coding software, chess and other board games are promoted. |
| Chapter 9 | Physical Education – The idea that physical ways of knowing can contribute to one’s overall intelligence, is addressed as an important rationale for staffing schools for daily Physical Education. |
| Chapter 10 | Essential Expectations – It should be clear that fewer more challenging expectations need to be part of progressive curriculum maps. An emphasis on mastery can lead to more students learning, reducing drop-out rates and mental health issues that are compounded by failure. |
| Chapter 11 | Student Evaluation & Assessment – This chapter challenges the reliance on standardized tests and the notion idea that C, D’s and failure are acceptable levels of performance. By recognizing exceptional, excellent and ‘not yet’ qualities of work, students do not get a pass with less than 80% understanding. In this way, there is less need for teachers to invest in repetitive and dis-engaging lessons. The cost of more progressive evaluation and assessment systems depends on the degree to which implementers can accept more progressive ways of measuring growth. More funds can be made available for such innovative practices by not fueling standardized test engines. |
| Chapter 12 | Ideal Classroom Conditions – Instructional choices can build cultures where students belong and engage in authentic 21st century education that includes cooperative, reciprocal, and multi-age learning. This chapter also addresses the need to reduce content and class sizes to enhance critical thinking and deep learning. Classes with fewer students cost more, but the increased opportunity for learning is worth the investment. |
| Chapter 13 | Quality School Programming – involves the recognition of school-wide innovative programs that can include classroom, after school and community-based experiences. A detailed description of peer teaching is highlighted, as well as internships, intersession and co-curricular options. The chapter ends with how semester systems and simplified Monday to Friday schedules can enhance learning and make more room for school-wide programs with few costs involved. |

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| Chapter 14 | Empowering District Programming – School districts can determine certain priorities, but often they must provide oversight of state, provincial or national initiatives. This chapter encourages district leaders to provide services beyond a narrow emphasis on standardized testing. The costs of propelling people to action can vary, but new initiatives require funding for professional development if districts expect new programs to stick. |
| Chapter 15 | Progressive National/State/Provincial Policy – This chapter looks closely at the nature of provincial, state and national educational policies as they pertain to the granting of credits and defining disciplines. As well, the need for creativity is emphasized with highlights of Finland new planned ‘phenomenon-based project approach to learning. While significant funding may be available, it can be difficult for initiatives to be implemented when they arise from top-down developed policies. |
| Chapter 16 | Staffing and Meaningful Roles –The need to dedicate significant care and time to the process of hiring staff is a central focus in this chapter. Schools can change the traditional roles in schools: principals can teach; teachers can be encouraged to become Liberal Arts or STEM specialists. Support for internships can help support teacher development and reduce overall staffing costs. |
| Chapter 17 | Staff Development and Performance Review – This chapter offers a summary of a full range of professional development options including specialized mentoring programs, in-house and off-site PD, curriculum writing, reviewing and teacher-research and teacher-leadership opportunities. The alignment of staff development with a comprehensive performance review process. While the investment in staff development can be costly, it is extremely necessary for quality teaching and learning. |
| Chapter 18 | Learning Facilities – Examples of facilities designed for enhanced learning are shared throughout this chapter. The idea that outdated space allocation formulas need to be adjusted to accommodate the needs of 21 st century learners. A discussion about the possibilities for sharing facilities s is also featured as a cost-saving measure. |
| Chapter 19 | Inspiring Resources – A detailed account of systematic resource purchases can be coordinated with specific curriculum needs for grades or grade groupings. This chapter shares details of specific materials, some more expensive than others. This emphasis also addresses the notion that textbooks are resource, not curriculum. The idea of customizing student Learning Logs is recommended as a low-cost quality alternative to lined notebooks. Finally, the need for technology and software that enhances learning is fundamental in a great school. |
| Chapter 20 | Being Small – This chapter challenges the assumptions about cost savings in larger schools. Arguments that explain the need for small school include research that supports the claim that students perform better academically; graduate at higher levels; are more likely to attend college; earn higher salaries later on in life; participate more in extracurricular activities; have better rates of attendance; report greater positive attitudes toward learning; and, are less likely to face school-related crime and violence. In a similar vein, the gains for teachers in small schools include: greater job satisfaction; sense of succeeding in their work; often more able to identify problems; responding innovatively and effectively; and adapting to change. |

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| Chapter 21 | Voices from Inside – The coordination of qualitative and quantitative data from a small selection of 16 key influences are examined in this chapter to expand the range of ideas of innovations in schools and their perceived barriers. |
| Chapter 22 | School Budgets – Examples of four school budgets from independent and charter schools reveal the variance and similarities among school budgets. This small sample serves to provide some data about school expenditures as well as emerging categories for viewing proportional breakdown of staffing, student-directed expenses, facility needs and administrative costs. |
| Chapter 23 | Saving Money and Generating Revenue – This chapter reveals extensive sources for generating revenue. Detailing of grants are included in the Appendix, but providing time for grant writing is emphasized as a key ingredient in the process. Ways to save money and specific ideas for schools to make money by providing goods and/or services are also highlighted in this section. |
| Chapter 24 | Imagine If... A <i>New School</i> is introduced as a synthesis of many great practices and conditions. By imagining the dimensions of a great school, it is possible to budgets with these notions in mind. |
| Chapter 25 | How Much? – In this final chapter, <i>New School</i> is compared with an example of a traditional costs. The differences are highlighted, as well as detailed expenditures. Is it possible to afford such transformations? Yes, we can. And benefits of re-purposing budgets in alignment with values is well worth the sweat equity of change. |

Endorsements

“In this text Barbara Smith provides an extensive study from her insider’s perspective of the challenges and realities of schools with examples of best practices.” ~ Jacqueline Delong Ph.D, retired Superintendent of Education and Adjunct Professor

‘How much does a great school cost’ is chalk full of novel and inspiring ideas about how schooling could be radically different and would cost less. If you are dissatisfied by current schooling and want to be stimulated to new action that will radically improve learning read this book, and start using some of its ideas” ~ Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto.

“Great schools are a necessity, at any cost. Author Barbara Smith outlines considerations for school communities along with charts to help focus intentional conversations around priorities and outcomes. Budgets need to be inextricably linked to student-focused instruction and social-emotional supports, and not just rolled over from year to year. Question the sacred cows and the “we’ve always done it this way” to make the most of funds available, and explore ways to creatively increase income.” ~ Lisa Gonzales, Ed.D. Assistant Superintendent, Dublin School District; Past President, Association of California School Administrators

“Dr. Smith's challenge to 'grapple with ideas' takes us to the conversation of 'what is a great school and what is its value?’ ~ Dennis Kellison, Former Director, School of Education and Human Development, Shenandoah University

“Amid the growing momentum for education transformation, Barbara Smith's book provides a most valuable tool for school leaders seeking to drive change intentionally and sustainably. School budget management has been a black box for too long. This thorough analysis of the finances of schools - with a view towards innovation - will help many” ~ Maria Langworthy, Director of Worldwide Education Research at Microsoft.

“In this immensely practical book, Dr. Barbara Smith asks the acid test question: Does your budget reflect your values? Her clarion call is for budget integrity at its finest. If you value the arts, fund them. If you value academic extracurricular activities, then insure that they are not the exclusive province of students whose families can bear the cost. Most importantly, if we say that we value excellence in teaching and leadership, then invest in those professionals on whom the performance of schools and students depend. Along with integrity in the budget process, Dr. Smith demands integrity in the allocation of time, the most precious resource for students and teachers. This book is required reading for educational leaders and policymakers, and those who aspire to influence the performance of schools and educational systems.” ~ Douglas Reeves, Researcher and Author, Founder, Creative Leadership Solutions

“This book is for everyone who cares about the future of education – more importantly, the future of students.” ~ Dan Rockwell, Inc. Magazine top 50 Leadership Expert. Author of the Leadership Freak Blog