Financial Transparency: What do school boards need to know?

July 10, 2019 edited to only include school board training details
Agenda

1. Training! (with an eye toward school boards)
   • What we’ve heard board members say
   • What training they get on finance
   • Guest: Carrie Stewart
Who decides how to spend all the money we have for public education?
School Boards DO!
Interviews with school board members about new financial reporting

Re Transparency: We are already transparent – we put all our financial files online.

Re Equity: Our equity initiative has funded counselors, reading programs and social workers.

Re Financial Strategy: Every year we take a close look at what our schools need and do our best to get them those resources.
Per-Pupil Spending Varies Across LPS Elementary Schools

- Second highest poverty school
- Highest poverty school

Difference between high and low PPEs = $3,165 pp
After seeing spending by school:

Why is this the first time I’m seeing these numbers?

What’s driving spending differences across schools?

We don’t want to punish schools that are more successful at attracting & retaining senior teachers even if that means they cost more.
Does your state require school board members?

State requires that school board members receive some financial training.
Four things board members should know (but probably don’t)

1. The potential **value** of these data (especially alongside other contextual data (e.g. outcomes, demographics))

2. Equitable is not equal in school-level spending.

3. The data have relevance for the budget process.

4. The data is a starting point for inquiry – the board has the power to foster a healthy, honest dialogue rather than witch hunt.
What does this mean for SEAs?

- Start with the school board member association.
- Create a training plan.
- Think about engagement of Superintendents as one of several avenues to board members.
- Be thoughtful on communications. Give district board members & superintendents fair warning on timing of data release and what that data will look like.
When THIS happens:  Here’s what board members can say:

1. **YIKES! (District feels defensive.)**
   
   1. Looking at the district’s expenses from the school lens is new for us and reveals some noteworthy patterns. We’re eager to engage with our principals/community to explore how to best deploy our limited funds to do the most for all the district’s students.

2. **Seniority drives up $ at some schools.**
   
   2. We use a salary scale based on experience so we spend more on schools that attract senior teachers. That leaves fewer dollars for schools w/ junior teachers. We’re eager to engage with our principals/teachers/community about options that might both retain our teachers and work better for all our students.

3. **Special programs (magnets) are costly.**
   
   3. The extra funds we’ve been applying to our magnet programs do leave fewer dollars for other schools. This is good time to explore whether there are ways to protect our best programs without drawing funds from other schools and students.
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Central expenses feel high. 4. We’ve prepared a breakdown of central expenses, which include $xx pp in transportation and $xx in food services. We invite principals/community to weigh in on how to better deploy those dollars to do the most for students.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Lower needs schools get less money 5. Our approach to equity means spending at different schools driven by the unique needs of each student. Going forward, we’ll try to make that clear by clarifying allocations by student type.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>School size is a factor --or-- Schools with declining enrollment have high costs. 6. The district does deploy more dollars to its smaller (or under-enrolled) schools, leaving fewer dollars for all other schools. Given the limited district resources, it may be time to explore how we can construct a budget that better serves all our students where they are.</td>
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When THIS happens (cont.) Here’s what board members can say:
Our data hub provides a gateway to explore each state’s school-by-school spending data. Click on any blue-shaded state to find out what you can learn from that state’s report card about per-pupil expenditures—and how to find information the report card may not provide. We will add other states as data are published.

Check back often. We will be adding analyses, press coverage from across the country, and resources to help principals, district leaders, advocates, journalists, and others engage with the data to understand who gets what money and why.

Questions or want us to know when new state data comes online? Email: Deb Britt at edunomicslab@georgetown.edu