

Close the "Fixed Cost Gap"

There is a gap between State funding and the cost needed to fund basic needs of public education, including utilities, insurance, transportation costs, special education, and co/extra curricular programs. While some may not consider these services basic education, they are indeed "basic" and fundamental to keeping the doors of the school house open. The schools must pay for utilities which steadily escalate. We need to provide fuel for buses and provide up-to-date buses which are safe to transport students. Insurance costs have been steadily rising, as have the costs of textbooks, instructional materials, and even paper. Special education costs around the State and country have been escalating because of increased health needs of children; co-curricular costs rise with increased insurance and transportation costs involved. Yet a school/school district would be irresponsible, and in many cases breaking the law, to not fund these fixed requirements.

The "Fixed Costs Gap" not only exists, but is widening because of a number of factors. As indicated above, these fixed/required costs escalate for schools as they do for other businesses, as well as the general public. This escalation happens at the very time that schools are provided with increased expectations associated with Standards Based Education, both at the State (WASL) and national (NCLB) levels. These increased expectations require more remediation through additional learning time for students in need and additional costs for specialists and tutors to provide this instruction. New and/or different curricula and materials must be purchased to match the students' needs and professional development needs to be provided to all teachers to meet these new and higher requirements. Funding for these new standards-based expectations has not increased sufficiently to cover costs. Consequently, schools are left with pathetically little discretion. Since these "fixed costs" actually increase yearly and often at a significantly rapid rate, proportionally less discretionary money is available to meet the increasingly diverse and high-stake learning needs of students. Districts do the best they can to balance the budget by reducing cash reserves to a dangerously low level, yearly "bleeding" money from all programs, closing schools to cut administrative costs, and reducing enrichment programs and activities often for the students most in need.

It is critical that this "Fixed Cost Gap" be bridged in order to direct more money to student learning. Providing schools with more money for these fixed costs is neither glamorous nor "sexy," but is critical to not "rob" from the children's needs to "pay" for requirements that are ethically and legally needed simply to keep schools open.