

WHAT NOW?

Improving schools within budget constraints

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Drawn from *The Money Myth: School Resources, Outcomes, and Equity*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009.

Revising the Money Myth and the “old” school finance:

The Money Myth: 19th century view that more money is necessary for improved outcomes: “the question of sufficient revenue lies back of most every educational problem (Cubberly, 1905).

Implication: no money, no improvement.

The challenge: replacing the Money Myth with a more complex view of what school *resources* are effective, when money is necessary and when it is not.

What resources might make a difference to outcomes? Which ones are *effective*?

- Simple resources: Adult/pupil ratio (personalization), teacher salary. Other ambiguous examples: spending per pupil on materials, administration, capital outlays . . .
- Compound resources: experience at the high school level; class size reduction??
- Complex resources, complicated to improve: teaching conditions, innovative and “balanced” teaching.
- Abstract resources, affecting abstract dimensions of education: school climate, trust, coherence, stability.

Why consider resources other than simple resources?

Money is necessary for simple resources, but many complex and abstract resources require some money but also vision, leadership, cooperation — they must be *constructed* at the school level, not bought.

Compound, complex, and abstract resources are more unequally distributed than are simple resources.

Why is the relationship between money and outcomes so weak?

- Waste: spending on ineffective resources, or without changing practices, or piecemeal; instability; mis-understanding of compound resources.
- Expensive but ineffective or counter-productive programs: traditional voc ed; other tracking; remedial pedagogy; many interventions.
- Failure to understand the power of complex resources related to instruction: teacher use of time, teacher control; encouraging innovation; use of innovative or “balanced” pedagogy.

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- Failure to recognize abstract resources: school climate, student commitment; trust; coherence of the curriculum' stability.
 - Failure to address achievement gaps affecting students of color; the multiple dimensions of mistreatment.

When money does matter

When resources are effective *and* require additional spending:

- more counselors per student;
- teacher release time for professional development;
- personalizing schools with additional adults;
- increasing teacher salaries to reduce turnover.

Why are outcomes so inequitable?

- General misunderstanding about which resources are effective.
- Greater inequalities of compound, complex, and abstract resources.
- Inattention to the racial/ethnic dimensions of inequality.
- Differences in family background and the need for non-academic support services.

In the meantime:

What schools and districts can do

- Audit and eliminate waste.
- Avoid spending on expensive but ineffective practices, including tracking.
- Improve the quality of teaching = move to more balanced instruction.
- Reorganize schools away from the conventional top-down model with isolated teachers to professional learning communities with distributed leadership.
- Identify and correct problems with abstract resources like school climate, instability, and incoherence.
- Face racial and ethnic differences head on.

In the meantime:

What California can do:

- Audit state waste: poorly-conceived state policies like CSR and II/USP; top-down bureaucratic requirements; annual pink slips; late budgeting.
- Establish a “What Works” function, with a wide range of evidence about effective resources; unbiased evidence; no political interference. Location in a network of universities?

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- Match accountability measures with enhancing capacity: improving instructional quality; strengthening leadership; supporting the full range of effective resources.
 - Move toward a second stage of accountability, less wasteful of school resources, consistent with effective instruction.

Reforming school finance:

Money is *still* necessary if not sufficient

- Simplify funding formulas, eliminating categoricals; weighted student formulas.
- Improve the *stability* of funding: reorganizing California's revenue structure.
- Increase the *adequacy* of funding: a 30-year declines needs a multi-decade improvement.

Can California avoid becoming a failed state
= a state with the 5th-largest economy in
the world but inadequate public services?