Talking About Transportation

Alternative Fuels for School Buses
School Bus Accidents: Reducing Incidents and Injuries
Privatizing District Transportation

ALSO: Service: A Perpetual Return on Investment
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For the *if* in *life*
Focus on the positive, acknowledge the negative, and move ahead.

Don’t Forget to Celebrate the Successes!

By Angela D. Peterman, RSBS

During times of great stress and upheaval, we sometimes forget to acknowledge our accomplishments and celebrate our successes. And, we lose sight of the value and importance of those around us.

These are such times. Everyone is working harder, longer, and under far from perfect circumstances. We watch our friends and colleagues being laid off. We see programs that we consider vital to our students reduced or eliminated due to budget reductions and scarce resources. All the while, we continue to do our best to provide quality programs and services to the children we serve.

Philosopher and psychologist William James said, “The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated.” It’s amazing how far a little “well done” or “way to go” will carry your staff during these difficult times. I’m a firm believer in the “accentuate the positive” rather than “hammer them until they drop” philosophy.

My granny always told me I could attract more flies with honey than with vinegar and I’ve certainly found that to be true. Granted, we can’t spend a lot of time or money focused on identifying every success, and some may seem small and insignificant right now. But, our successes don’t have to be worthy of front-page, above-the-fold newspaper coverage to be acknowledged. They exist, and it is our responsibility to identify them, acknowledge them, and celebrate them periodically.

We often think our greatest potential for growth lies in our areas of weaknesses. I believe our greatest potential for growth lies in the areas of our strengths. I recently participated in a session at the Pennsylvania ASBO affiliate meeting in Philadelphia where Mark Adams, president of Enthsiadams, Inc., and college basketball analyst for ESPN, shared his thoughts about the need to focus on our strengths and talents. During his presentation, Adams defined “potential” as “talent void of the right attitude.” How many of us have staff members who have great potential but who may lack a bit with regard to the “right attitude”?

British statesman Benjamin Disraeli said: “The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own.” To endure during these turbulent times, we must help our colleagues focus on their strengths and the positive things we’re all doing. Consider what you can do to celebrate the value of those with whom you work. How can you communicate their importance and help them to gain greater worth both personally and professionally?

Focus on the positive, acknowledge the negative, and move ahead—there is great work to be done.

ASBO International has much to offer in the way of personal and professional development. I hope you are a regular visitor to www.asbointl.org and that you are taking advantage of the continually expanding resources available to help you through these tough economic times. We are here to support you!

Feel free to share your thoughts with me. Email me at angie.peterman@comcast.net

Angela Peterman
President, ASBO International
Executive Director, Oregon Association of School Business Officials
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ALPHABET SOUP, HUH?
Here at ASBO International headquarters we’re guilty of being extremely acronym happy! A visitor to our office may quite easily get lost in the alphabet soup we use in our conversations every day. And sometimes there is a little confusion… A program that focuses on excellence in school budget presentation is affectionately known as the MBA—but to us, that means Meritorious Budget Award Program, not Master of Business Administration.

There’s the general association lingo, like PD for professional development and SBA for School Business Affairs. The meetings are not spared, either. We have our AM (Annual Meeting), LC (Leadership Conference) and of course the AMR (Annual Meeting Reporter), which became the AMD (Annual Meeting Daily) and is now going to be the e-AMD (electronic Annual Meeting Daily).

Recently, we added a new acronym around the office: AREF. That’s our shorthand for ASBO’s Research and Education Fund.

In 2008, the ASBO International Board of Directors embraced the idea of creating a fund within the association to work in a manner similar to a foundation. Every day, school business officials foster a learning environment where education can flourish. This fund allows ASBO to cultivate an environment that serves the specific purpose of promoting research and education initiatives to support the profession and lead to the more efficient use of educational resources.

This fund was created to champion the essential behind-the-scenes work of school business professionals by sponsoring and advancing education and research initiatives to help them better serve students. In light of today’s economic crisis, the behind-the-scenes work of the school business official is now front and center. As the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act pours $100 billion into education, more and more attention is being shed on the experts in the area of school finance.

From research projects that explore how to best help students despite limited resources, to initiatives that address the schools’ role in the local and global community, this fund will advance the effective management of education resources. Together, we can make a difference for the profession and for our students.

We encourage you to learn more about and support the AREF.

Oh, and I do hope you know that if you are worried about your IAQ (Indoor Air Quality) you have access to ASBO’s RP (Resident Practitioner) through our IEQ (Indoor Environmental Quality) program, thanks to a grant from the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). LOL.

—Siobhan McMahon, Managing Editor

Colophon: Siobhan enjoyed watching the cherry blossom’s bloom in her front yard and started reading The Pillars of the Earth by Ken Follett, Lauren celebrated her Grandfather’s 80th birthday and Easter with her family, and Pat cheered for her son’s rugby team as they began their spring season.
For someone who typically doesn’t like to watch television, I was shocked when I found myself channel surfing one Sunday afternoon. I quickly realized that I was looking for one of those programs that didn’t demand that I think: one that had no plot, no story line, no crime, no violence, and no news!

I landed on a program that made absolutely no sense at all yet made me laugh for an entire hour. For all appearances, it had no value. It offered no research, nothing of learning value, and nothing worthwhile that I could pass on as I write my monthly articles for *School Business Affairs*. Yet, at the end of the program, I felt full of energy, renewed, and eager to do something fun.

While the program was a senseless comedy and at first glance a non-value-added activity, it did offer me one thing: the opportunity to escape from the negative news we hear every night, full of senseless killings, skyrocketing numbers of foreclosures, rampant unemployment, homelessness, and anything else the media can find that has a negative flavor.

At a time when we face global crises such as pollution, economic failures, global warming, and in some areas starvation, war, and diseases that would be curable with adequate medical care, we tend to forget the important things, such as kindness—kindness toward each other, toward those in need, toward our environment, toward other countries.

That simple comedy show that had no purpose or story line brought me to a conclusion: Of all the things that we do every day in our communities and workplaces, showing kindness may be the most important of all.

As we attempt to solve the complex issues of today, we must also become more aware of the social responsibility we all have. Social responsibility is a simple concept; it’s all about doing unto others what you would have them do unto you. It’s also a concept of carrying out acts of kindness without expectation of reciprocity. You do it because it’s the right thing to do, not because you want a favor in return. It’s about paying it forward.

Each of us can make a difference. Practicing social responsibility and performing random acts of kindness are some of the simplest things we can do. It can be anything from giving up your seat on the bus to an elderly person, to giving your parking spot to a mother with young children, to letting someone go ahead of you at the grocery store, to just smiling.

As we move forward to solve some of the most complex problems our world has ever faced, we should never underestimate the impact of one single act of kindness. I love the quote by A. Neilen, “If you have not often felt the joy of doing a kind act, you have neglected much, and most of all yourself.”

At ASBO International, we recognize our obligation to practice and promote social responsibility. Therefore, we will begin including social responsibility activities as part of our professional development offerings. For example, one of our annual meeting general session speakers in October will focus on social responsibility. And, we will feature a Pre-Annual Meeting Workshop that will give participants a chance to help beautify a local school.

William Penn said it best: “I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”
The Energy Management Institute (2009) warns that by as early as the second half of 2009, the price of all energy instruments will be higher than they were in the closing days of 2008. Last summer, the price of diesel fuel approached or exceeded $5 per gallon in many regions of the United States. The price of diesel fuel recently dropped to less than $2 per gallon and then began to rise again because of the manipulation of production levels for crude oil and the tightening of production levels by U.S. refineries. Although no one can predict the future with 100% accuracy, it is a disturbing trend.

The United States now imports 70% of its crude oil demand, with that percentage expected to increase in the foreseeable future. During the past six months, the price of a barrel of crude oil has fluctuated from $150 per barrel to under $40 per barrel. Because of our country’s dependence on foreign oil, we may have created a situa-
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Compressed Natural Gas

Compressed natural gas is a fossil fuel mostly composed of methane. Drilling for CNG occurs both on land and offshore. The majority of the natural gas used in the United States is from domestic sources. Although CNG consumption has increased, it is still a minuscule amount when compared with the demand for gasoline. Federal laws and executive orders have been passed with the primary goal of increasing the ability of the federal government to encourage growth in the use of CNG as an alternative source of fuel.

Fuel efficiency must be considered when analyzing and comparing the cost of an alternative fuel to another source.

Using CNG buses has significant environmental benefits. CNG engines can reduce harmful emissions by as much as 90% over diesel-powered vehicles (Yacobucci 2005). CNG is a light fossil fuel—it rises from the ground when released. It differs from diesel and other fossil fuels that are heavier than air and therefore create more toxic inhalation hazards, particularly to children whose lungs are developing (Solomon and others 2001). According to Brent Yacobucci (2005), a specialist in energy policy, natural gas is safer than gasoline: it is nontoxic, less ignitable, and dissipates into the air more quickly when released.

Although the benefits of CNG are enormous, it does have drawbacks. The initial cost for CNG school buses is greater than the cost of diesel buses. Blue Bird Corporation, an original manufacturer of school buses, sells a new CNG bus for approximately $17,000 more than its diesel equivalent (conversation with sales manager, January 28, 2009).

Another drawback to using a lighter gas such as CNG is that it requires infrastructure adaptations. Storage structures for vehicles can potentially trap the CNG and cause a combustion danger. Ventilation of the garage is necessary to reduce this risk.

The issue of refueling CNG buses must be analyzed. The refueling network for CNG buses is limited in the United States. A refueling infrastructure can be costly, with a starting price of $250,000. In addition, fuel costs on an energy-equivalent basis are lower for CNG than for diesel and LPG. CNG Converted buses will on average operate at a fuel efficiency level of 75% or 5 miles per gallon compared with diesel at 6.6 miles per gallon (Laughlin 2004).

According to the U.S. Department of Energy (2008), CNG was $1.42 less than standard diesel on an energy-equivalent basis. LPG was $1.56 more, and biodiesel (B20) was $0.46 more than standard diesel on an energy-equivalent basis.

Fuel efficiency must be considered when analyzing and comparing the cost of an alternative fuel to another source, such as standard diesel. Although CNG appears significantly less expensive than diesel, the overall loss in efficiency cuts into the cost benefits.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Liquefied petroleum gas is a fossil fuel also known as propane. It is used around the world more frequently than any other alternative fuel. The environmental benefits of using LPG are not as significant as those of compressed natural gas; however, they are still quite substantial compared with diesel fuels. LPG is a product of petroleum refining, and its use can reduce carbon emissions by up to 60% over diesel-fueled vehicles.

The storage of liquefied petroleum gas is similar to compressed natural gas. It is stored in pressurized containers that have been tested under rigorous conditions. Similarly, both CNG and LPG are odorless; therefore, an odorant is added to ensure recognition of leaks.

The cost of a new LPG Blue Bird bus is approximately $14,000 more than the new diesel equivalent (conversation with sales manager, January 28, 2009). In fact, the retrofit uses a gasoline engine converted for LPG fuel. LPG converted buses will on average operate at a fuel efficiency level of 75% or 5 miles per gallon compared with diesel at 6.6 miles per gallon (Laughlin 2004).

On average, the cost of LPG exceeds the cost of standard diesel on an energy-equivalent basis. Fueling infrastructure for LPG is less expensive than CNG stations. Note that propane gas is the same type of gas piped into homes across the nation for heating and cooking. A large infrastructure for the delivery of LPG fuel already exists in the United States.

Biodiesel (B20)

Biodiesel is a synthetic fuel produced from fatty oils. It is made by combining standard diesel with a biodiesel most commonly in a ratio of 80% regular diesel and
20% biodiesel. The primary benefit of biodiesel fuel is that it can generally be used in vehicles without requiring any engine modifications.

**The federal government must be a leader in the development of alternative fuels.**

The cost of biodiesel is comparable or slightly more than standard diesel fuel. The use of biodiesel reduces emissions of carbon monoxide and particulate matter and increases nitrogen oxides. Using biodiesel improves the quality of air for students and others while the bus engine is running.

**Grants and Tax Incentives**
The use of alternative fuel is an issue being debated in the public policy arena. The consensus is that the federal government must be a leader in the development of alternative fuels.

Funding is available to replace or retrofit buses in order to protect the environment. In 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency’s program Clean School Bus USA received $49.2 million to fund projects across the country. Certain types of dedicated alternative-fuel vehicles are eligible for federal credit. The Clean Cities program and Clean School Bus USA advocate for alternative fuels and are useful sources of information about grants and addition funding.

Tax incentives are available on the federal level in the form of tax credits. An example is a $9,760 tax credit for the model year 2007 Blue Bird Corp. LPG bus (IRS 2009). In addition, states across the nation offer tax incentives. For example, in 2008, the Missouri legislature passed a tax relief statute that gives tax credit to eligible applicants who install and operate a qualified alternative-fuel refueling property. The credit enables the applicant to receive $20,000 or 20% of the total cost, whichever is less. There is also an incentive related to fuel purchases. The Missouri motor fuel tax statute (2008) states that there will be no state motor fuel tax on alternative fuel used for school buses; instead, a nominal decal fee is charged for each bus.

**Looking to the Future**
America’s annual oil consumption continues to increase and is projected to continue the upward spiral into the foreseeable future. Alternative-fuel options are available that are not only cheaper in some cases on an energy-equivalent basis but are also more environmentally friendly. Education leaders need to be concerned with both these facts. Incentives are necessary from federal and state governments to stimulate the move to alternative fuels to mitigate costs related to fuel systems and infrastructure requirements.

The question children invariably ask on long car rides, “Are we there yet?” could be asked concerning the journey to cleaner air. A reflective answer apparently is, “Not yet.” We still have a way to go.

**References**


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School Bus Accidents: Reducing Incidents and Injuries

By Daniel Mahoney, CIH, CSP

The number of children injured in nonfatal school bus accidents annually is more than double the number previously estimated. In Ohio alone, approximately 20,800 children younger than 18 were occupants of school buses that were involved in crashes in 2003 and 2004 (McGeehan 2007). Among those children, most had minor or no injuries. However, there were two skull fractures, one incident of intracranial bleeding, one broken back, one serious injury to the spleen, and 28 head injuries, including concussions (McGeehan 2007).

How can school districts lower the risk of both accident and injury? Here are some suggestions:

- Schools should have a second adult on each bus to supervise the students and thus allow the driver to concentrate solely on the driving task.
- Each school district should have a written student rider discipline policy in place that includes a statement that identifies the school bus as an extension of the school; defines responsibilities for student riders, drivers, parents, and school administrators; clarifies that riding a bus is a privilege, not a right; defines acceptable student behavior for riding and boarding a bus; and outlines a disciplinary procedure that is consistently enforced and backed by the school administration.
- Bus driver training in student rider discipline should be provided that addresses professional responsibilities, student relationship building, public relations, student-driver interactions, student discipline, student age-appropriate behaviors, hints for controlling behaviors, and working with school authorities.
- Bus loading and unloading zones are often the sites of vehicle and pedestrian accidents. Each school district should have the ability and authority to evaluate each school for traffic flow patterns and vehicle separation in relation to bus loading/unloading zones, evaluate the configuration of each bus stop for physical conditions and traffic hazards, evaluate the bus loading procedures at each school, change the design and/or location of the stops and/or school traffic patterns, and monitor changing conditions and respond to observations and driver feedback regarding bus loading/unloading zone safety.
- Bus design and maintenance play a role in reducing the potential for and severity of accidents. Each school should have policies and procedures in place for selecting buses with design features appropriate for the intended use, replacing buses before experiencing significant maintenance problems, having buses inspected daily by the drivers and on a scheduled basis by the mechanics, and reporting and repairing defects in the bus and related equipment.
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The number of children injured in nonfatal school bus accidents annually is more than double previous estimates.

Should a bus accident occur, the bus driver should be aware of the subsequent actions to take immediately. The following measures for drivers are intended to enhance the safety of the students and facilitate a rapid response by authorities to assist at the accident scene:

- **Do not leave the accident scene until directed by the district transportation manager.** If a noncollision incident occurs, such as an injury to a student on the bus while the bus is moving, pull the bus over at the first safe location and contact base.
- **Do not move the bus following an accident unless absolutely necessary.** Documenting the final positions of vehicles involved in a collision is important. You can use a Vehicle Accident Report form to document the accident details. Unless directed by the police or your supervisor, do not move the bus. Move it only if there is danger of another collision. Note exactly where the bus was stopped after the collision.
- **Remain calm so you can assess the situation immediately after the accident.** Do there appear to be student injuries? Is there danger of fire, downed wires, or another collision? Are your students safer on the bus or should you evacuate? What is your exact location?
- **Take a moment to reassure students.** Remaining calm can have an enormous effect on your students, especially young children or children with special needs. The children are your first priority after an accident.
- **Use your school district or company emergency or accident code, if any.** If there are no prearranged codes in your operation, make it clear that your message is urgent. State the bus number since it allows the dispatcher to locate where your vehicle should be, even if no other information is forthcoming.
- **Protect the scene after determining that there are no serious injuries to students.** Place reflectors far enough back to protect the bus from another collision. Activate four-way flashers. If the children have been evacuated, ensure that they are located in a safe place and remain in the area.
- **Initiate first aid if necessary, but do not exceed the limits of your first-aid training.** Attend to life-threatening injuries, such as severe bleeding, inability to breathe, and shock. Follow universal precautions; use rubber gloves. Do not move an injured student unless absolutely necessary.
- **Make an accurate passenger list.** Document the exact seat location of each passenger (students, bus attendant, etc.) at the time of the accident. Note whether seat belts were worn. Be prepared to provide emergency responders with the precise number of passengers on board. Be prepared to notify emergency responders of children with special needs and the nature of those special needs. Ensure that all children are accounted for.
- **Ask witnesses to wait for the police to arrive.** Jot down license plate numbers of vehicles at the scene and the names of witnesses who are leaving before the police arrive. If no witnesses are available, identify the first people who arrived at the scene.
- **Keep students at the scene until authorities arrive.** Do not release students to Good Samaritans or neighbors or allow any students to walk home on their own, even in minor accidents. Keep students at the scene until authorities arrive. If parents arrive at the scene, ask them to remain with their children until authorities arrive. If a parent insists on taking a child from the scene, ask the parent to leave a signed note.
- **When emergency personnel arrive, they will take over.** Let them do their job.
- **Be professional and polite, but admit nothing, promise nothing, and don’t argue with the other motorist.** Do not discuss the accident with anyone other than law enforcement, your supervisors, your school district, or company lawyer.
- **Ask reporters to talk to your supervisor.** If approached by the news media, politely explain that district/company policy does not allow drivers to comment at the scene. These few simple strategies can go a long way toward reducing the risk of injury in the event of a school bus accident.

**Reference**


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Not all chocolate milk tastes the same. Especially if over time, tight budgets have impacted the quality of your school’s milk. There can be a big difference between the chocolate milk sold in stores and what many students are drinking in schools today.

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Now taste for yourself. Sample what your school district is buying, compare it to the chocolate milk on store shelves. Then put your money where your chocolate milk mustache is.

Talk to your local milk processor about better-tasting flavored milk for your school.
Million Dollar Busing: Saving Money Through Privatization

By Cheryl Crates, Ed.D.

The newspaper headlines no longer faze us: “School District Cuts Pay for Teachers” or “High School Prepares for Year Without Athletics Funding.” The economic crisis has had—and will continue to have—a dramatic effect on tax revenue and education spending throughout the United States and beyond. Yet children still show up for school every day in need of an education. In times like these, educators and school business managers must be as committed as ever to providing it.

Surveys show that school administrators can spend up to a third of their time managing an in-house transportation program.
The economic pressures are all too familiar to District 300, one of Illinois’s largest public school districts, located northwest of Chicago. Just three years ago, our transportation fund was operating more than $2 million in the red. Excessive absenteeism and an increase in worker’s compensation claims among bus drivers and other transportation employees plagued the district. Bus routes had not been reviewed for inefficiencies in more than five years. An outside evaluation of the system showed the second worst student transportation system the evaluators had ever seen.

Privatizing school bus transportation became a hot topic among school administrators and parents, in the board room and in the supermarket. If we contract, won’t we pay more? Won’t our drivers lose their jobs? Won’t we lose control of our transportation system? District 300 researched these common myths about privatization and discovered that many of these concerns stemmed from misinformation about outsourcing school bus transportation.

Surveys show that school administrators can spend up to a third of their time managing an in-house transportation program, and our experience was no different. Outsourcing is a proven solution for more than 30% of the nation’s school districts, giving schools the opportunity to free up their time and energy for their primary responsibility—providing the highest-quality education for students.

With these considerations in mind, District 300 took the step that promises to save us millions of dollars: we went out to bid. We eventually awarded a three-year contract beginning in 2007. It was—and it remains—the right choice for our school district.

Myths, Rumors, and Misinformation

When a school district considers contracting its transportation services, questions arise. We had many.

How can a private company offer low prices yet still make a profit? The public sector operates as a monopoly, whereas the private sector functions in a more dynamic, competitive environment. In other words, a private company has competition; a school district has no one to compete with but itself. Healthy competition drives innovation and service improvements in most industries, and school transportation is no different.

Private company managers are constantly faced with the challenge of improving the quality of service while providing the most competitive prices possible. With a private company, compensation and benefits programs are directly tied to an efficient, safe, and cost-effective operation. On the other hand, publicly operated fleets often do not have an incentive to benchmark their performance against competitors, or they find that their accounting policies and performance standards make comparisons difficult. Cost savings, service improvements, and efficiency are not necessarily issues of public versus private, but rather are the result of virtuous competition in the marketplace.

In addition, a private company’s managers—the people responsible for operating a busing program on a day-to-day basis—are backed by a corporate staff of individuals with expertise in each area of the school bus operation, including safety, training, maintenance, operations, and cost control. When managers are confronted with new or unusual problems, they do not “reinvent the wheel” to find the solution.

No matter how good your in-house transportation management personnel are, they cannot be experts in all areas, and there is always room for improvement. A single school district—even a large one like ours—is not likely to have the scope or scale of resources that a private company provides to its field management staff.

Finally, capital costs, such as buses and equipment, are spread over the entire useful life of the equipment. Therefore, the district pays only a proportional share on an annual basis, rather than the total cost for replacement. This leveling of equipment costs plus accelerated tax deductions available to the private sector create lower total operational costs for the school district.

If a district contracts, won’t all drivers, staff, and mechanics lose their jobs? Existing drivers and other staff bring tremendous knowledge and experience to school transportation systems. They know the routes, the
schools, the parents, and children, and can often provide a high level of customer service. The company we hire was committed to our goal of retaining drivers and staff—just days after our contract was signed, company officials began the interview process and met with hundreds of employees to discuss their needs and future benefits.

**And won't wages be cut?** While wage reductions are possible where district wages are significantly higher than market, the more likely scenario is that existing wage levels are maintained—or even increased.

**Will my district lose control of its transportation system?** Some school districts, like ours, find that they have more control following the transition to a privatized school transportation system. We continue to determine the policies and set the standards for walking distances, bell times, safety levels, insurance, and maintenance. Yet, we have a trusted and experienced partner to help guide our decisions.

**Aren't contractors more concerned with money than safety?** Safety, above anything else, is rightfully the first priority for any school transportation system, public or private. Our company provides extensive safety training for its drivers, employees, and students. The company’s student-management training is designed to create an environment where distractions for the driver are minimized, and students behave during their trip.

For them, the standard national and state specifications, which ensure that the school bus has exceptional features for passenger safety, are just a starting point. The company complements these with added components that exceed national and state requirements. The result is that District 300’s fleet now goes beyond the norm to ensure the safety of our students.

**Safety, above anything else, is rightfully the first priority for any school transportation system, public or private.**

**Will the money we spend on contracting services remain in the community?** Our drivers, managers, and mechanics work in or near the communities in which they live. Wages are paid to local employees who usually spend locally. The majority of District 300’s supplies and services are still purchased locally. Local sales, realty, and business taxes also contribute to the economic vitality of our community.

**A Process Toward Savings**

Under Illinois labor law, we negotiated in good faith with our bargaining association for several months before developing a bid document and financial models to compare proposals. Our calculations—and the method we used in order to determine them, agreed upon by the union—showed we could save more than $2 million annually by outsourcing. Upon board approval, we began our bid process with the help from an area transportation director whose district recently outsourced.

Our bid specified that we would maintain our existing fleet and facilities, but outsource the management, employee salaries, and all benefits. The bid also stated certain non-exclusive items that the district deemed significant in considering the contract award. Ultimately, our decision was based on two overarching goals: ensuring financial responsibility for District 300, and choosing a school transportation provider with a proven ability to perform.

We accomplished both of these crucial goals by partnering with a private company. District 300 paid off $1 million of its transportation deficit last year and the remainder will be paid by the end of the 2009–2010 school year. Another $700,000 has been saved because the district is no longer responsible for paying benefits, including Social Security and retirement costs. In addition, the company brings an impressive safety record, frequent training for our drivers, and decades of experience running efficient bus routes.

School districts have many choices when deciding how to operate a transportation system, and in this economic climate it is imperative that administrators efficiently run their schools and manage their budgets. District 300 has realized the benefits of an efficient transportation system, which frees up the time and resources to deliver the best possible education for our future generations.

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A story problem with a happy ending.

A school district* has 300 buses. Driver A tracks time on a timesheet. Driver B uses Synovia’s Driver Time Management solution. How much savings will the district see for Driver B? (ANSWER: an average of $33 per bus/week, $1200 per bus/year or $360,000/year). Transportation Director A in the same district thinks his drivers may have significant idle time. He uses Synovia’s DTM solution and reduces overall idling from 82 minutes per bus/week to 38 minutes per bus/week. How much time and money will he save? (ANSWER: an average of 44 minutes per bus/week and approximately $100 per bus/year or $30,000/year). Synovia GPS does that.

* actual Synovia school district
Matt and Brandon were neighbors and shared a common school bus stop. Although it started as a normal winter school day, things soon took a turn for the worse. Matt had argued with his mom at breakfast and carried his frustrations with him to the bus stop. Brandon was a little smaller than Matt and made for an easy target. Within minutes, Matt was pummelling Brandon with snowballs and pushing him into snowbanks and slush.

When the bus pulled up to the stop, the boys got on. As always, they shared a seat. During the ride to school, Matt quietly teased Brandon and punched him in the arm repeatedly. No one else, including the driver, seemed to notice. Once at school, the boys separated and the day passed. On the ride home, Brandon sat by himself in an empty seat.

That night, Brandon told his mom about the trouble at the bus stop that day and she called the school principal to report the incident. The next day, the principal spoke with the bus driver and learned that she had not seen any of what Brandon described.

Brandon’s mom alleged that this was not the first bullying incident, so the principal decided to request the installation of a surveillance camera on the bus. Before installation, the principal sent a letter to the parents of all the students on the bus advising them of the need to use the camera to monitor activity.

The camera was installed within a few days, and a week passed with no evidence of bullying. Eventually, Matt resumed his pattern of poor behavior. After reviewing film of activity on the bus, the principal determined...
that Matt was indeed teasing, bullying, and bothering Brandon on a regular basis.

The principal met with Matt’s parents, suspended Matt from school for two days, and required that the boys be separated while riding on the bus. After two weeks, the camera was removed from the bus and the bullying situation was resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

**Video Cameras 101**

Many school districts in North America have adopted policies to permit cameras on their properties and, when needed, on buses used to transport students. With regard to school buses, the camera is typically a tool for gathering information to monitor behavior or to help investigate a complaint about behavior. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a video showing what happened during the time of an alleged incident on a school bus is a full dictionary.

In most cases, the principal initiates and oversees the process, which includes the initial request, followed by camera placement, film collection, and completion of the investigation.

The fictitious example involving Brandon and Matt captures many of the elements involved in using a surveillance camera as an administrative tool. In some ways, though, the outcome of this investigation was almost too good to be true.

Often, images may not clearly capture an incident and it could take an extended period of use to actually record helpful information. There is also an ever-present risk that someone, whether a student’s family or the bus driver, may take offense to the filming. Why would they be concerned? Perhaps they feel their privacy is being infringed on or they just don’t trust those in charge to use the medium in a fair and confidential manner. These sorts of challenges may undermine and possibly threaten the district’s approach to using cameras as an administrative tool.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

A key consideration in defending the school district’s position to use cameras on buses is effective control over recorded film. Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities must be established through policies and procedures that, in turn, are widely communicated and thoroughly understood.

The school principal has a central role, followed by transportation department personnel and management at the bus company if it is separate from the district’s transportation department. Whether or not a bus driver is part of the reason for the investigation, it is inappropriate for the driver to control or view recordings. In addition, parents of the children involved should not be permitted to view the videotape, as that would infringe on the privacy of other students. Limiting viewing and access to those who are responsible for investigating and acting on complaints is an obvious requirement for protecting privacy.

Like all other data gathered by school districts, videotape is subject to governing privacy legislation. School district policy must reference its source of authority for gathering data. Electing to use a camera on a school bus is a big step aimed at helping ensure safe and secure transport of passengers who are most often minors. Cameras should be tools of last resort, and recorded information should be treated as confidential and with the utmost respect.

**Benefits of Surveillance**

Principal and transportation staff who use cameras on buses consider them helpful in dealing with issues in a timely and effective manner. Actual footage of an incident provides clear evidence of who is responsible and who did what on the bus. Without a camera, the principal would need to interview many students to try to get a picture of what may have happened on the bus. That would take a great deal of time and might yield inconclusive results. By and large, the use of cameras avoids extra work associated with traditional investigation and information collection.

Bus drivers may be willing parties to the process but they may be reluctant at times, worried that the recording is intended to monitor them and their driving habits rather than deal with other issues.

Depending on the vantage point of students and their parents (i.e., the complainant, the defendant, or neutral party), they may support camera use, dislike it, or have no opinion at all. To date, concerns regarding camera use have been limited and have been handled by district and transportation staff by explaining district policies. However, as society evolves and privacy concerns become more widespread, questions may arise on a more regular basis, and districts will be taken to task over their use of recording devices on school buses.

**What’s Next?**

From traditional, single-tape video cameras to cutting-edge digital recording units, there are many options for school districts to consider. With the newest units, it is possible to have multiple cameras recording to a single computer unit and providing views of the driver, the interior front, and interior back of the bus, as well as the stop arm and side of the bus (to film drivers who illegally pass a stopped or loading/unloading school bus). The only limiting factors for new camera technology are vendor imagination and district purchasing budgets.

School districts must carefully consider the level of financial commitment needed to support camera use. A basic, single-camera system could cost $1,000 or more, whereas a deluxe digital system may run close to $3,000.
per unit. Higher-cost units provide better-quality recordings, which, in turn, contribute to more effective investigation of incidents. Outfitting a fleet of 100 buses may not be possible; using a few rotating units may be a better option for those who are cash strapped. The bottom line is what do you need and what can you afford?

Does the school district have the right to videotape students riding on school buses? For school districts that enact appropriate policies, the answer is yes. For families of individuals who may wish to question use of cameras, the perceived answer may be no. As time marches on and as society evolves, a common answer to the question may emerge.

In the meantime, districts and their agents will continue to use cameras as a tool to support the provision of safe environments on school buses. In doing so, districts will err on the side of caution in protecting the precious cargo riding on our school buses.

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Transforming White Light into Rainbows: Segmentation Strategies for Successful School Tax Elections

By J. Bradford Senden, Ph.D., and Don E. Lifto, Ph.D.

In the late 1600s, British physicist Sir Isaac Newton first demonstrated refraction and dispersion in a triangular prism. He discovered that a prism could decompose white light into a spectrum. Translation? Hold a prism up to the light at the correct angle and white light magically splits into vivid colors of the rainbow!

So what do prisms and rainbows have to do with winning school tax elections? More than you think.

The science of preparing for a school tax election begins with the development of an annotated voter file, which is the raw material that serves as the campaign’s foundation. In the context of elections, the individual registered voter is the white light of Newton’s experiment. File annotation is the process of merging other public and purchased databases and electronically “marking” segments or characteristics of the underlying registered voter file. Once this process has been completed, the full complement of annotations serves as an electoral prism, allowing the campaign to achieve a rainbow of segmentation coding.

In a well-planned and executed tax election, these resulting data are the campaign’s most important resource in voter surveys, canvassing, communications, and get-out-the-vote efforts. How far to probe the colors of the rainbow in segmentation coding and microtargeting is a strategy decision with cost and precision implications.

Colors of the Rainbow

The amount of information in a voter file varies significantly from state to state. At a minimum, a voter file includes the name and residential address of the voters in the school district, as well as some information about how often each has voted in the past. In most states, the voter file also includes information about voters’ ages and when they first registered to vote.

Building on this foundation, we identify gender according to the first name of each voter (which works well except for gender-neutral names like Pat) and ethnicity, if relevant, based on his or her last name. Finally, in most school referenda, the name and residential address are matched with school district data to identify parents.

Residential addresses can also be used to gather a great deal more information for the voter file by matching addresses in the registered voter file with commercially available databases. These can include homeowner status (renters vs. owners), length at residence, individual and household income, and education level. Depending on the ballot issue, files can be annotated according to characteristics, such as hunting or fishing licenses, donation history, or membership in community groups.
The most sophisticated level of final annotation is the coding of each household by its demographic and lifestyle characteristics. A number of these file segmentation systems are available. The one we have applied to the art and science of winning school finance elections assigns each household to 1 of 66 different demographic groups. It allows us to code a file so that voters can be assigned to 1 of 14 social groups and to 1 of 11 life stage groups.

All this may sound Orwellian, but it serves a very simple purpose as a school district prepares for an operating or facility referendum. When combined with the results of a scientific random sample survey, all the annotations added to a voter file allow for the development of more sophisticated data analyses with regard to measuring public opinion of subgroups and more precise targeting within the voting population.

More importantly, microtargets can be developed within those voter target groups, allowing for very focused communications and voter contact in support of the ballot proposal.

**A Case Study**

An example will help illustrate how we can apply these tools. Recently, one of our school district clients was preparing to place a general obligation bond on the ballot. Because it was a California client, the proposal had to win at least a 55% majority on election day.

The district presented two specific challenges: (1) it was a large district with a voting population of 88,000 and (2) it was a high school district, serving only the families of students in grades 9 through 12. As such, it had no way to identify elementary and middle school parents in the voter file even though those parents would vote in the referendum.

To address these challenges, we had the file annotated with consumer information and information from the file segmentation system. As part of the effort to develop an initial target structure for a bond campaign, we also had the voter files of three other districts fully annotated. Those districts had been on the ballot previously. Each had won voter approval for a general obligation bond. For each, the results of an extensive telephone canvass of the voting population by the citizens’ campaign launched in support of the district’s proposal were available, as was information concerning who actually participated in the election.

Each of those previous elections allowed us to drill down into the annotations added to the file to identify the demographic characteristics that most successfully predicted participation and support for the school proposal on election day. Within the file segmentation system annotation, we were able to identify three very important groups: (1) the parent population, (2) the population of voters whose children had all graduated but were still apparently very willing to support a school tax proposal, and, most importantly, (3) the segment of
this population that seemed unwilling to support any proposal the district might place on the ballot.

By deconstructing these earlier elections, the citizens’ committee could build a target structure for the high school district’s bond campaign. Using the results of two scientific surveys, these targets were tested and refined.

Finally, the citizens campaigning in support of the bond were ready to send out their first piece of direct mail. Instead of facing the prospect of a mailing to 88,000 voters, they prepared to contact 27,000 targeted households. After this mailing, they began a telephone canvass of these voters. The results of the first two nights of calling allowed us to use the commercial annotations in the file to further refine the target population and reduce the size and cost of campaign mailings. The end result? A resounding 68% win.

Research to Practice

The opening stanza in Lagaya Evans’s poem “The Rainbow” is,

The rainbow of colors
So merry and bright
Each color has a purpose
Even black and white.

It is the third line—“Each color has a purpose”—that reinforces the vital importance of effective voter file development at the foundation of school tax election planning.

In the context of school tax elections, having a purpose is manifested through the process of expanding and annotating the registered voter file. The data can later be separated into a rainbow of segmentation coding to support the key functions of the campaign: surveying, canvassing, communicating, and getting out the vote.

Going forward, conducting these campaign activities at a high level will be essential as baby boomers get older and the percentage of registered voters with school-age children continues to shrink.

Like Sir Isaac Newton, school leaders will need to use campaign prisms to separate voters into demographic groups. Once that has been accomplished, support for the proposal can be measured and the likelihood of different demographic groups participating in the referendum can be determined. These essential steps provide the foundation for effective microtargeting, communications, getting out the vote, and a winning campaign.

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They are the authors of School Finance Elections, a Comprehensive Planning Model for Success.

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Many of us were relieved to bid farewell to 2008, a year that will be remembered for unprecedented economic woes that rippled from Wall Street to Main Street and around the globe.

The world’s financial problems will not be resolved overnight, and in this fragile economy, school district budget cuts are likely the norm. Is there anything school business officials can do to start moving in a positive direction?

As a matter of fact, there is.

Give more. Yes, give—but not your money. Volunteering your time and expertise is far more valuable to your community during times like these, and if the saying “What goes around, comes around” holds true, stepping up to fulfill your social responsibilities can be both personally and professionally rewarding. Think of it as a perpetual return on investment.

Everything Old Is New Again

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was sworn into office in 1933, one of his top priorities was to launch programs that would offer immediate relief for rampant unemployment in the United States. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a work relief program for young men from unemployed families, was established on March 21, 1933, and became one of the most popular New Deal programs. Although the CCC closed in 1942, it was the model for volunteer agencies that were initiated for decades to come.
Chicago Cares is one such organization. Founded in 1991 by two women seeking to create a way for people to give back to their communities, Chicago Cares’ main focus is to build stronger communities within the city. Since the group’s inception, volunteers have carried out nearly one million hours of community service. Committing only to the amount of time they wish to dedicate, volunteers are recruited primarily through word-of-mouth and run the gamut from school-age children to retirees.

Kristine Williams, manager of marketing and community involvement at Chicago Cares, explains that the organization works with community leaders to identify areas with critical needs. “There are six areas of concern that we focus on: children’s education, adult education, senior services, the environment, hunger, and health and wellness,” says Williams, who notes that Chicago Cares has partnered with more than 200 different Chicago-based organizations, from schools and parks to housing authorities and social service agencies. One of more than 200 service projects on the roster last November involved physical improvements to Canter Middle School.

**Participating in a Transformation**

With a student population of about 250, Canter Middle School is one of just 18 Chicago Public Schools serving only 7th and 8th graders, the majority of whom are African-American and 65% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Canter’s main building was constructed in 1902, followed by an annex in 1936.

After serving as assistant principal for five years at a neighboring high school, Colleen Conlan became Canter’s principal at the beginning of the 2007–2008 school year and quickly witnessed the effects of smaller budgets on schools with fewer students. “Paint on the walls was peeling, and things were in bad shape,” she says.

The school’s physical condition made it difficult for Conlan to launch her ambitious goals at Canter, such as...
instilling in students an unwavering belief in the school’s academic slogan, “Think Big, Think College.” To help promote this mindset, Conlan says, students must have strong feelings of self-worth, and one way of increasing those feelings is to get students to take pride in their school and themselves. But because Canter must share an engineer with four other area schools, maintaining the building was difficult and beautification efforts remained out of reach—until Conlan connected with Chicago Cares.

**With so much attention being paid to getting youth to buy into the idea of service, don’t we have the responsibility to set the example?**

Conlan called the organization shortly after she arrived at Canter, and an initial improvement project was held in October 2007. To prepare for their Hands-On School Initiative last fall, planning began early in the school year. It started with a community design event, which brought together more than 60 people (current students, teachers, parents, community leaders, and Chicago Cares representatives) to brainstorm ideas about what the school needed. That was followed by a subsequent meeting between Chicago Cares and a committee of approximately 20 Canter students and several teachers who wanted to lead the effort.

The project began on October 1 and entailed painting the school’s first floor and four classrooms, as well as installing tile mosaics in each classroom and hanging canvas murals throughout the building. On November 22, the project was bolstered by the efforts of 173 volunteers, including local school business officials and Maureen Thompson, ASBO International’s events director.

The volunteers installed a mosaic “tree of knowledge” on the wall just inside Canter’s main entrance, where it will greet all school visitors and brighten the hallway. They also created six murals, mounted mosaics on two teacher podiums, painted two stairwells and eight classrooms, and transformed the library by making over the entire space—adding new furniture and lighting, as well as creating a brand new reading space for students.

Marilyn Roland, payroll and human resources supervisor for Lake Bluff District 65, was one of the local school business officials who volunteered for the project. “When you are asked to participate in a project like this, you’re never sure what you will be asked to do and if you have qualifications that will make an impact,” says Roland, adding, “Chicago Cares was great at assuring everyone that their time and talents would be used, useful, and greatly appreciated.”

Roland was among the volunteers slated to work in the library. Although the group thought this would be one of the more mundane tasks, they turned it into an event in which others wanted to participate. “Part of the [library] task included throwing old, unusable textbooks out a window into a recycling bin three floors below. What fun!” says Roland. Working with her was Mary Ann Brown, financial analyst for Rockford SD 205, who adds, “It was such a great stress relief. We ended up having a small competition to see how many books we could drop at once compared to how many ended up in the bin. It was also a great way to show physics at work to our student helpers.”

Grateful for the physical changes to the building, Conlan and her staff are even more excited about the transformation in Canter student attitudes, which they witness just as clearly as any aesthetic improvement made to the school.

**Integrating Service Into Learning**

Eleven months before he was elected into office, Barack Obama issued a “Call to Serve,” detailing his commitment to making national service an important cause of his presidency. He discussed his personal experience in public service and his plan to call on all Americans to serve and create an infrastructure focusing their service on achieving national goals. Included in Obama’s suggestions were the following:

- Create a national online network (similar to Craigslist) to connect volunteers with service and donation opportunities.
- Set a goal of middle and high school students contributing at least 50 hours a year to community service.
- Connect disadvantaged youth to service opportunities through the creation of Green Job Corps and the expansion of YouthBuild.
- Create a new American Opportunity Tax Credit worth $4,000 toward college tuition each year in exchange for 100 hours of annual public service.
- With so much attention being paid to getting youth to buy into the idea of service, don’t we have the responsibility to set the example? Participating in a single community service project can change a mindset forever.

“The Chicago Cares event at Canter Middle School opened my eyes to the need that exists in the wider community,” says Doug Heurich, facilities director at Northbrook SD 27. “Given the very positive experience that I had, the excellent organization of the event, and the wonderful outcome of the work completed, I would not hesitate to participate in an event of this type again!”
Get on Board in October

As part of ASBO International’s initiative to leave a positive “footprint,” on Friday, October 23, you can be part of a driving force that will positively impact students at a public school in Chicago, site of the 2009 ASBO International Annual Meeting.

This full-day pre-conference workshop will be a win-win situation for all involved. By dedicating your time to beautify a school in need, you’ll help students take pride in themselves and their school and accomplish tasks that likely would never be attempted otherwise. No matter what your area of expertise, there will be something for you to do that will make a lasting difference—for the school, you, and ultimately even your own district.

ASBO International members who participate will know the satisfaction of playing an active role in a meaningful service learning project, earn .7 CEUs and 8 CPEs, and take home resources that will allow them to replicate the endeavor in their own communities.

Roland sums up perfectly this wonderful opportunity to set in motion a perpetual return on investment: “Just looking around Canter and seeing all that was accomplished in this very old building with very few resources—you can’t help but want to do more. My hope is that we are ‘paying it forward’—that the students not only at Canter but in our home districts will hear about and see individuals doing something tangible for others in need instead of just throwing money at a problem. I believe this is the best example we can show our children.”

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Public education is the cornerstone of a working, progressive, democratic society. Therefore, it matters where education dollars are spent. Budgeting decisions take on added significance in light of fulfilling the objectives of the No Child Left Behind Act, which is characterized as the most far-reaching piece of education legislation in decades.

In NCLB’s wake, much of the debate has focused on the instructional practices that will enable all students to meet the proficiency requirements by 2014. However, if this goal is to be realized, school districts must focus on ensuring that appropriate resources (inputs) are available to fund proven instructional strategies that produce results (outputs). This is particularly important now, when resources are dwindling due to the economic downturn. The pressure to produce better results with fewer resources has become even more acute.

Today, school districts are moving away from traditional line-item, incremental budgeting toward other, more results-oriented methods.
In 2008, I undertook a case study of chief business officials from school districts in the Hampton Roads, Virginia, area to examine the current state of budget practices and determine whether those processes have become more performance based since the inception of NCLB. In addition, I assessed how performance-based budgeting correlates with differences in student achievement. The school systems in this area range in size from as few as 1,000 students to as many as 75,000 students and are a mix of urban and rural locales. These school systems all have significant numbers of students who receive free and reduced-price lunches, with an average of approximately 40%.

New Trends in Budgeting
The No Child Left Behind Act calls for radical transformation of the education system whereby school districts, schools, and teachers are held accountable for certain outputs of student learning. As NCLB focuses on increased performance results, it seems counterintuitive that school districts would continue to employ an incremental or line-item approach to budgeting in which budgets are never reviewed as a whole and the existing budget base is the starting point for building the next budget.

Today, school districts are moving away from traditional line-item, incremental budgeting toward other, more results-oriented methods. School districts are more performance based in their budgeting processes.

For example, districts are more likely to conduct evaluations and have established performance baselines and targets. They are placing more emphasis on strategic planning, stepping up their efforts to increase stakeholder involvement, considering alternative service delivery, increasing evaluation efforts, and attempting to link budget allocations to specific outcomes or results.

In performance-based budgeting,
- Strategic plans and related goals and priorities are formalized and used.
- The budget process is open and transparent and includes stakeholder involvement.
- The budget process includes consideration of alternative service delivery methods.
- Performance goals are established and resources are linked to those goals.
- Budget decisions are data informed, including the development and reporting performance indicators that are in line with the strategic goals of the district.
- The process encourages active “program” evaluation and links these evaluations back to previous budget discussions.
- The budget process results in a reallocation (reprogramming) of funds (shifting resources to more effective activities).
- The district actively seeks to link resources (inputs) to specific results (outputs and/or outcomes).

Performance-based budgeting implies that resources will be directed or redirected toward programs and activities that have proved effective and that are tied to specific performance outcomes.

Budgets and Student Achievement
School districts’ move toward performance-based budgeting supports the idea that school systems are less focused on what they have done in the past and are more deliberative in allocating funds. This may result in better budgeting, which allows for improved educational programming.

School district officials see a positive relationship between budgeting and increased student achievement, as evidenced by the following comment from a school district business official who participated in my case study:

I think we would be fooling ourselves if we didn’t realize that as the business officers of school divisions we impact student achievement. The resources have to be present. Now we know, research tells us the number one factor that influences student achievement is the
quality of instruction. Well, how do you get that quality of instruction into the classroom if you are unable to pay a competitive salary; how do you get that quality of teacher? What if you are unable to have an adequate facility (we know what the research says about facilities and how they affect student achievement)? So . . . it’s all back to making sure that you get the right resources, get them where they are needed, and get them into the appropriate areas. And it has to be a focused effort. . . . I think the focus of the budget and the process in and of itself is becoming more and more important and it is absolutely linked in some way to student achievement. You cannot deny it.

This connection between budgeting and student achievement is most obvious in the fact that the budget provides needed programs to increase student achievement and in the absence of said funding, these improvements cannot occur.

A quantitative analysis of data on the relationship of performance-based budgeting and student achievement reveals that performance-based budgeting has a positive correlation to student achievement. Although this correlation is not considered statistically significant, when one explores the statistical results, one finds a linear relationship in which approximately 23% of the variance of Virginia Standards of Learning pass rates is accounted for by its linear relationship with performance-based budgeting.

Although further study is needed to confirm this correlation, the fact that the data reveal a possible positive correlation between performance-based budgeting practices and student achievement is an important finding.

A Center on Educational Policy report confirmed that student achievement has increased (and the achievement gap has decreased) since the enactment of NCLB and because of many interconnected policies and programs (Kober, Chudowsky, and Chudowsky 2008). One of these organizational processes appears to be more focused budgeting methods and practices that aim to increase achievement rather than focus on historical allocations, which has been the case in school districts’ use of traditional budgeting methods.

In other words, school districts should continue down the path of budgeting for improved results with an emphasis on the performance-based budgeting components of transparency and stakeholder involvement, data-driven decision making, a focus on teaching and learning, and reallocation of resources to activities that truly support the mission of the school district.

Transparency and stakeholder involvement are often accomplished by having an active, meaningful budget development committee. Data-driven decision making in budgeting implies that budget decisions are based on reliable data (e.g., performance indicators, scholarly research, efficiency measures). Focusing on teaching and learning means that in all budget considerations, improved teaching and learning are the paramount concerns in making decisions. This implies that the budget does not drive the educational program but that the educational program drives the budget.

The idea of resource reallocation is that funds within a budget must be directed to only those activities that are truly effective (as supported by data) and necessary to support the mission of the school district. Funds that do not meet these criteria are moved to those activities that do.

In current economic times, it will be increasingly important that school districts ensure this connection in their budgeting practices to student achievement as we as school district officials will be called on to do more with less as never before in recent history. We are up to the challenge and responsibility. As this research suggests, we can effect the necessary change to ensure greater student achievement.

References


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The Eagle Award is the highest tribute ASBO International bestows on members, a lifetime achievement award. For more than 15 years, the Eagle Awards have honored school business officials who, throughout their careers, have demonstrated excellence, exceptional leadership qualities, and dedication to education.

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If a tree falls in the woods and there’s no one to hear it, does it make a sound? If you’re a school business administrator, the answer is no. If you speak, write, or otherwise communicate with an audience that doesn’t hear, read, or understand, it’s as if you didn’t communicate at all. Worse, members of the audience might take away a message that you never intended.

Using the classic questions who, what, why, when, where, and how, administrators can test a communication to ensure that its “bones” are good and that the message will likely be accurately received.

Who = Know Your Audience
One of the most important rules in communication is to know your audience and ensure that your message is one they are equipped to comprehend. As is the case in the classroom, you must teach to the learner’s style. Your audiences range from your immediate staff to the public, so you must fashion your message to match your listeners’ or readers’ knowledge base.

For example, your school board should have a basic understanding of your mission and accurate financial and operation information. That doesn’t mean, however, that board members need to know every detail—especially during a public meeting. School boards should not be expected to wade through column after column of numbers to determine an overall position.

On the other hand, your staff must have all the necessary information to do their jobs well, including detailed data, time frames, foreseeable complications, and expected outcomes. Details are important for this group, as is the opportunity to return to you for clarification and support when needed.

What = Send a Clear Message
When you begin to write a report or plan a presentation, prepare an outline so you can clarify for yourself exactly
what message you want to deliver. Start with a topic sentence, list content points, and summarize with a closing statement. You’ll add, delete, amend, and embellish from there.

For example, when you’re preparing a financial report for a group of administrators in your district, you know they’re primarily interested in their own school or department, but you may want to give them an overall picture of the district’s balance sheet before getting into details. Start with the overview and end by pulling individual issues back together to a conclusion.

You may also be aware of an unspoken agenda they bring to the table. Address that agenda as best you can to avoid confusion and the shuttle of inform-question-answer-reply that can derail a message’s main point.

Why = Determine Your Purpose
Are you trying to inform, update, persuade, summarize, or explain information to your audience? For example, one of your schools suffers a boiler failure. You’ll probably use all these purposes of communication in the course of solving the problem.

First, you’ll need to inform students and parents of a school closing. This may be accomplished through a combination of public media messages and phone chains. While you’re dealing with the emergency repairs, you’ll need to keep your superintendent, school board, and building staff updated on what’s happening. You may be in a position to persuade your board to invest in a new boiler and thus must provide them with sufficient information to make a decision on how to fund it.

Finally, you’ll have to summarize the problem, how it was resolved, and how it affected the school and the overall district’s financial operation. You’ll likely use every communications medium at your disposal.

When = Watch Your Timing
Timing is key. What is the likelihood of passing an operating budget override immediately after the April 15 federal income tax deadline, when taxpayers are achingly aware of how much tax they’ve just paid? The same is true of the annual publication of the salaries of the top 25 or 50 municipal and school employees—would you choose that moment to announce a fee increase? For major finance announcements issues, carefully calculate the context in which your message will be heard.

Sometimes you won’t have the option of choosing the timing of a statement. But as the business administrator, don’t answer until you get the facts; then answer quickly, clearly, and confidently. Ensure that your superintendent, school board, and other stakeholders have the information they need as soon as you have it.

Where = Use the Best Medium
Sadly, most residents know little about the intricacies of public education and are likely to rely on snippets of information from their children, neighbors, or friends. Yes, people read the papers (a diminishing source of information in this cyber-age) and watch or listen to broadcast news. But those sources are often less powerful than individual contacts. Therefore, you want your public messages to go as directly as possible to the parents and citizens.

Make good use of your school’s Website and email systems to reach educators, students, and parents. Be available to members of the business community and other municipal personnel. And be creative in getting correct and informative “sound bites” out to the public.

When you make a presentation, your audience may better comprehend the numbers you share if you present them visually. When conveying financial information, business administrators should rely on a combination of media:

• A written document that includes tables
• An oral presentation that includes handouts with charts or PowerPoint graphics and
• The support of invested audience members who can provide examples and details.

If a member of the press is present, it’s certainly worthwhile to speak with that individual personally to summarize your most important points and offer to answer follow-up questions.

How = Using the Tools
As a school business official, you fill many roles:

• Accounting expert
• Construction specialist
• Nutritionist and retail food service operator
• Public speaker
• Public relations specialist
• Employee
• Employer

If you’ve got the numbers down pat, the bus routes in place, school lunch prices covering food service costs, all buildings up to code and operating efficiently, and every classroom fully equipped with teachers, materials, and supplies, you still have to tell everyone about these accomplishments. Otherwise, your office is invisible.

Knowing and using the tools of communication effectively, will help you keep yourself and your district credible, respected, and responsive to the ever-changing environment that is public education.

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Double Exposure: The Supreme Court and Sex Discrimination Claims

By Charles J. Russo, J.D., Ed.D., and William E. Thro, J.D., M.A.

The Supreme Court’s recent decision in Fitzgerald v. Barnstable School Committee (2009) expands the opportunities for students and their parents to sue school boards for alleged sex discrimination. Even so, as discussed below, Fitzgerald should have little effect on the day-to-day operations of school systems.

This column briefly reviews the background of Title IX and sexual discrimination in schools and then reviews Fitzgerald’s facts and holding. It concludes by reflecting on Fitzgerald’s significance and practical effect while offering recommendations for school business officials and other education leaders in developing policies aimed at eliminating sexual discrimination.

Background of Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in school systems that receive federal funds, is regarded as a revolutionary law that, at a minimum, served as the catalyst for the development of interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics for women.

Title IX has also been used to fight the long-term problem associated with sexual harassment of students by teachers and peers. According to Title IX, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. . . .”

In practice, Title IX codifies many of the existing constitutional guarantees against sex discrimination. In other words, even if Title IX did not exist, the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment would prevent school boards from denying equal educational opportunities, including in athletics, to women.

The similarities between Title IX and the equal protection clause led some courts to agree that the implied private right of action to enforce Title IX limited plaintiffs to filing suits under the Civil Rights Act of 1871—more commonly known as 42 U.S.C. § 1983—to prevent public officials from denying them their constitutionally protected rights. In other words, these courts concurred that individuals who alleged sex discrimination could file suit under Title IX but not pursuant to Section 1983. Other courts, acknowledging the differences between the Fourteenth Amendment and Title IX, allowed plaintiffs to bring both claims. Further complicating the issue was the fact that Congress never explicitly declared that private parties could sue to enforce Title IX. In Fitzgerald, the Supreme Court resolved this difference.

Although Title IX speaks only of enforcement by the federal government, the Supreme Court’s 1979 judgment in Cannon v. University of Chicago expanded its reach in holding that private parties could sue on their own. Ruling in favor of an applicant who was denied admission to two private medical schools, the Court reasoned that since the applicant was a member of the class that Title IX was designed to protect and its legislative history revealed an intent to permit a private cause of action, she could file suit because her ability to do so was consistent with the law’s approach insofar as the federal government was concerned with eliminating discrimination due to sex.

Since Cannon, the Supreme Court has resolved four cases dealing with sexual harassment of students while lower federal and state courts continue to review many such cases.
The Supreme Court first recognized the right of students to sue school boards for sexual harassment by teachers under Title IX in *Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools* (1992). The Court subsequently narrowed the circumstances under which boards could be liable for teacher harassment in *Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District* (1998). The Court explained that boards could not be liable under Title IX for teacher sexual misconduct unless officials who, at a minimum, had the authority to institute corrective measures had actual notice of and were deliberately indifferent to the misbehavior.

*Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* (1999) addressed peer-to-peer harassment. The Supreme Court specified that the ability of plaintiffs to recover damages under Title IX was limited “. . . to circumstances wherein the recipient exercises substantial control over both the harasser and the context in which the known harassment occurs” (p. 646).

The Court added that, as recipients of federal financial assistance, school boards “. . . are properly held liable in damages only when they are deliberately indifferent to sexual harassment, of which they have actual knowledge, that is so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it can be said to deprive the victims of access to the educational opportunities or benefits provided by the school” (p. 650).

**Fitzgerald v. Barnstable School Committee**

The facts in *Fitzgerald* are straightforward. A female kindergarten student informed her parents that whenever she wore a dress to school, usually two to three times a week, an older male student on her school bus bullied her into lifting it up. The mother immediately called the principal to report the allegations.

In an attempt to resolve such issues when they arose, the school committee employed a prevention specialist whose duties included responding to reports of inappropriate student behavior and instituting appropriate disciplinary measures. The principal and specialist met with the girl later on the day that her mother called. Because officials were unable to identify the alleged perpetrator based on the child’s account, they arranged for her to observe students as they left the school bus over the next two days. The girl identified a third-grade boy as her harasser. Later that day, the principal and specialist questioned the boy, but he denied the allegations. The specialist also interviewed the bus driver and a majority of the children who regularly rode the bus but was unable to corroborate the girl’s version of the events.

Not long thereafter, the parents called the principal and informed him that their daughter provided additional details about the harassment. The child reported that, in addition to pressing her to lift her dress, the boy bullied her into pulling down her underpants and spreading her legs. The principal immediately scheduled a meeting with the parents for later in the day to discuss these charges.

By this time, at the request of the parents, the local police department launched its own investigation. A detective who specialized in juvenile matters questioned, among others, both the girl and boy. The detective found that the boy’s version of events was credible, so the police department ultimately decided that there was insufficient evidence to proceed criminally against him. Relying in part on this decision and in part on the results of the school’s own belated investigation, the principal reached a similar outcome and refused to discipline the boy any further.

As events unfolded, the parents drove their daughter to and from school. About a month after the child made her initial allegation, the principal offered to place her on a different bus or, alternatively, to leave rows of empty seats between the kindergarten students and the older children on the bus. The parents rejected these offers, maintaining that the principal’s primary suggestion to switch school buses punished their daughter rather than the boy (who continued to ride the bus).

The parents countered with their own alternatives, such as placing a
Court emphasized that Title IX and Section 1983 charges. At the outset, the action to enforce Title IX did not favor of the parents, ruled that the Supreme Court, reversing in Barnstable School Committee On further review in Fitzgerald (2007) agreed that school officials did not act with deliberate indifference in any of which were casual encounters in the hallways. The worst encounter, she claimed, was during a mixed-grade gym class when the teacher randomly required her to give him a “high five.”

As soon as these reports were made, the principal documented that they occurred and that he looked into them. Yet, the girl soon discontinued participating in gym class and began to miss school regularly. The parents then unsuccessfully filed suit as both to a different bus. In conjunction with the principal, the school superintendent refused to make these changes in light of their investigation.

monitor on the bus or transferring

claims are precluded only when Congress intended for enforcement of other statutes to be the exclusive means of pursuing specific claims, a situation that was not present in Fitzgerald. In the constitutional con-

institutions and does not extend to those against individuals. Similarly, Title IX explicitly exempts some activities, such as gender-based discrimination in admissions that are arguably unconstitutional when practiced by public officials. Further, in some instances, the standard for establishing liability under Title IX is significantly less than what is required for constitutional violations under Section 1983.

In concluding on a note of hope for school boards, the Supreme Court pointed out that it had not addressed the merits of the claim or even the sufficiency of the pleadings that initiated Fitzgerald. That is, Fitzgerald was limited to resolving the dispute over whether injured parties could file suit under both Title IX and Section 1983, not the child’s underlying allegations.

Advocates for gender equality have long asserted that Title IX exceeds the scope of the equal protection clause.

Throughout the remainder of the school year, there were no further incidents on the school bus. Even so, the girl alleged that she had unsettling encounters with the boy, some of which were casual encounters in the hallways. The worst encounter, she claimed, was during a mixed-grade gym class when the teacher randomly required her to give him a “high five.”

As soon as these reports were made, the principal documented that they occurred and that he looked into them. Yet, the girl soon discontinued participating in gym class and began to miss school regularly. The parents then unsuccessfully filed suit as both

text, the Court noted that congressional intent might be inferred by comparing statutory rights and the protections with those in the Constitution.

Applying this standard to Title IX, the Supreme Court refused to interpret congressional intent as precluding Section 1983 constitutional claims for harassment. Since Title IX’s enforcement mechanism is limited to administrative enforcement and an implied private right of action, the Court opined that there was no comprehensive remedial scheme. Indeed, the Court thought that the lack of an explicit private cause of action for Title IX suggested that Congress did not intend to preclude the constitutional claims.

More significantly, the Supreme Court emphasized that Title IX and the equal protection clause are not coextensive since in some instances the statute is broader. While the Fourteenth Amendment is limited to public schools and universities, the Court concluded that Title IX reaches any educational institution that receives federal funds. Further, Title IX’s standards, especially in the context of interscholastic athletics, appear to require more than the Fourteenth Amendment.

At the same time, the Supreme Court indicated that Title IX is narrower than the equal protection clause in many instances since it is limited to claims against education

JUDICIAL RATIONALE

On further review in Fitzgerald v. Barnstable School Committee (2009), the Supreme Court, reversing in favor of the parents, ruled that the plaintiffs’ implied private rights of action to enforce Title IX did not prevent them from also filing Section 1983 charges. At the outset, the Court emphasized that Section 1983
School business officials and other education leaders should work with their boards to remain vigilant to ensure that their employees do not engage in sex discrimination. School business officials can assist their boards in remaining vigilant by helping develop written policies that:

- are aligned with other policies, such as codes of conduct for staff and volunteers, personnel guidelines, and student handbooks;
- prohibit sexual discrimination, such as inappropriate sexual conduct, whether verbal, physical, or any other methods, such as messages on the Internet between and among students, faculty, staff, and volunteers;
- specify that everyone associated with schools be protected by the policies, whether students, full- or part-time staff, or volunteers;
- outline sanctions for offenders up to and including expulsion or dismissal with provisions for progressive sanctions depending on the nature of the offenses;
- develop effective and well-publicized procedures by which students, faculty, staff, and volunteers can resolve sexual discrimination complaints;
- ensure that administrative action resolves complaints in a timely manner that respects both the seriousness of complaints and the due process rights of all parties;
- are included in student, faculty, staff, and volunteer handbooks so that all members of school communities are aware of their responsibilities; and
- are reviewed annually to ensure that they are up-to-date with the latest developments in federal and state law.

**Conclusion**

*Fitzgerald* appears to open school boards to double exposure to the extent that students and their parents can file suit for sexual discrimination under both Title IX and Section 1983. However, if school business officials and other education leaders remain vigilant in the fight to eliminate sexual discrimination, they are unlikely to face added risk of liability in schools.

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School Bus Transportation

Consider this: According to *School Transportation News* (www.stnonline.com), more than 490,000 school buses travel U.S. roads carrying about 26,000,000 children to and from school every day—that’s more than 50% of the K–12 population. Each year, the school bus industry spends more than $15 billion, mostly in reimbursements to school districts for state-supported transportation costs. In 1936, *School Business Affairs* featured an article by Lloyd M. Theurer, clerk of the board of education in Logan, Utah, in which he raises the question of control of costs of bus transportation given the rapid growth of the industry. Below is an excerpt.

The school transportation business of the United States has experienced in the last decade a tremendous growth in volume. With this growth has been a marked improvement in type of equipment operated. It has grown from a system of “Get to school if and as best you can,” whether it be by pony, horse-drawn wagon or sleigh, or by improvised motor truck with homemade body contraption to a system of comfortable transportation from door to school in modern specially designed buses which incorporate the last word in safety, durability, comfort, and a possibility of low operating costs. . . .

According to a report in the February issue of *Bus Transportation* magazine, school bus manufacturers have just completed an all-time record year. During 1935, they sold 9,403 school buses—around $23,000,000 worth of business. This more than doubles the number in the previous peak year of 4,582 school buses and is almost four times as many as were sold in 1933, when only 2,420 sales were made.

Another view of the magnitude of this business might be had by citing other figures contained in the report of this same survey, wherein it shows that in 1935, 28,231 school districts in America operated 77,825 school buses transporting 2,918,657 school children over 924,597 miles of route at an aggregate cost of service in the amount of $2,621,881, and that of this amount, it is estimated that close to $14 million was expended for gas and oil and over $6,600,000 for maintenance. . . .

For a number of years, Utah school districts have expended a sufficient amount for transportation to place the Auxiliary Agencies Department of the school budget third from the top in the total cost of operating and maintaining schools in Utah, there being $526,751.20 charged to this account in 1935, ranging from no expense at all on the part of some districts to an expenditure of over $53,000 in the cases of Box Elder and Cache.

This total figure for the state of Utah represents slightly less than 7% of the total operating costs. In other words, practically seven cents of every dollar spent for operation of Utah schools goes into this part of the budget and again this varies from nothing in some districts to as much as 18.5 cents out of every dollar spent for operation in the cases of Cache and Uintah.

It presents itself, therefore, as a business problem large enough in scope to merit and even demand the careful attention of school administrators. It is, in my opinion, a problem which has received to little study and attention by boards of education and especially by clerks and business managers in their accounting practices and business procedure. So far as I can determine, there is no definitely recommended system of control or accounting for the costs and statistics incident to and necessary for a more careful study and operation of the problem of transportation.
With news of the impact of the economic downturn taking a different turn every day, the corresponding impact on the K–12 market is anyone’s guess. With school districts needing to slash budgets in historical fashion in accordance with decimated tax revenues, it would make sense that the sales environment with school districts would be correspondingly grim.

But, it’s not.

“Obviously with funds not available, procurement rates have slackened, but not at the levels some had anticipated and certainly not in all markets,” according to Bruce Reinhart, national education sales manager for the HON Company. In this environment, school districts certainly are not going to have the same levels of discretionary spending available; however, rather than focusing on price, they appear to be focusing on value, according to Reinhart.

Ken Schmidt, president of Steel in the Air, Inc., suggests that sales within his portion of the market are more robust than ever. “We are seeing an inverse relationship to what we saw just three years ago when school districts were flush with capital from increasing property tax revenue,” he says. “Back then, it was more difficult to convince school districts to consider the placement of a cell tower on district property. Contrast that with today, when we are seeing an increased number of both solicitations by wireless carriers to school districts and RFPs/RFQs by school districts for cell site leases due to budgetary constraints.”

Reinhart reports similar experiences within the K–12 market, with many school systems actually less sensitive to price than they once were. “Instead of worrying as much about cost,” he says, “they are focusing on better quality, understanding that what costs more initially will have a higher durability and a longer life in the facility.”

How does that translate into the actual sales process? “With reduced support staffs, districts are looking to simplify the procurement process, eschewing costly and complex bid processes to purchase more products from a single vendor/dealer using an established, competitively bid instrument,” Reinhart says. Obviously, then, it behooves those providing products and services to this community to do what they can to align their own processes with the changing dynamics.

School systems aren’t sitting pat, waiting for the economy to turn around. “They are looking at innovative ways of increasing their operating budgets without relying upon new tax initiatives,” Schmidt says. “They are also being more sensitive to up-front costs for services.”

Still, even if the situation might not be as dire as first anticipated, it nonetheless requires a sales approach that acknowledges the changed market dynamics. “The best strategy is to continue to deliver a good value for your dealers and end users,” Reinhart says.

Such innovative approaches can include entirely new cost/revenue models for clients. “We have had some good success marketing our services by passing on our costs to the wireless companies that lease the school district properties instead of billing the district directly,” Schmidt explains. “We have also focused our marketing on other benefits of our services. The key is that we found success in figuring out what our clients really needed.”

What do vendors anticipate for the months that lie ahead for the K–12 market? Schmidt is optimistic of a turnaround in the fourth quarter of 2009. “Capital is starting to flow and governmental initiatives are starting to trickle down.”

So, with both sets of fingers crossed, the mood remains something better than cautiously optimistic.
Spotlight on Nansi Crom: 
Driving Home the Importance of Transportation

When asked about the important elements of education, the average Joe may not mention transportation. But Nansi Crom, director of transportation at the Thompson School District in Loveland, Colorado, can highlight the critical role it plays for students.

Nansi explains that in the 1980s, a nationwide inception of the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program, an unfunded mandate, presented a serious financial burden on all school districts. “In Colorado, the state pupil transportation association and state department of education joined forces to offer guidance to districts for integrating this new federal requirement into district training programs,” Nansi says. She notes that while many districts share trainers and testers to help reduce costs, ongoing revisions in CDL testing requirements continue to strain department budgets.

In addition, last year’s staggering fuel costs nearly crippled many districts, leading them to implement strategies to decrease fuel consumption.

And, after more than 30 years, the debate about school bus seat belts has come to an end in Colorado. “Starting in 2010, districts can anticipate higher costs for new buses that will be equipped with three-point restraint systems,” Nansi says. “These higher equipment costs may ultimately result in fewer bus replacements and a higher average age of bus fleets nationwide.”

Since the 1980s, Nansi has assisted the Colorado Department of Education as a driver trainer instructor and presenter; she also is a member of Colorado’s Operational Rules Revision committee. “These activities have given me a deep sense of satisfaction—knowing that I have played a part in increasing student safety for bus riders,” Nansi says. She is eagerly anticipating the completion of a new district transportation operations center and fleet maintenance facility, a project that she has discussed, promoted, and planned for more than a decade.

Nansi is grateful to be able to connect with school business officials in the United States and abroad. “I have learned so much about controlling costs, developing agreements, and the legal aspects of operations management,” she says.

Nansi keeps the basics in plain sight. “Maintain contact with students—they are the most important element in your job,” she notes, adding, “Listen to your employees. They are on the front line with students and a great connection to parents and the community. Work closely with contacts in your state department of education, and don’t hesitate to brainstorm and ask questions. And of course, network routinely with peers in neighboring districts—they can be an invaluable source of ideas and support.”
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