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Final Paper

The class discussions and learning activities associated with the Superintendent Finance class have become the cornerstone that my superintendent career will be built upon. It is difficult to express the magnitude of my learning in the area of school district finances this semester, so I will sum it up by saying that I have leave the class with confidence, and the specific knowledge, vocabulary, and conceptual understanding of key elements associated with building and managing a school district budget. Additionally, the conversations I have had with my business manager throughout the semester have helped to lay the foundation of a strong and productive, collaborative working relationship that we can build upon over the years, as inevitably we will deal with declining revenue and the budget challenges that come from managing a system with so many constantly moving parts.

According to Schilling and Tomal (2013), “accounting, budgeting, and reporting are all key components of safeguarding public funds” (p. 91), and the activities associated with the Superintendent Finance class have greatly helped to prepare me for my role in ensuring transparency throughout all aspects of the process, as well as develop strategies to actively involve stakeholders. One way that I have applied these concepts to my position as Superintendent of the Sitka School District is through the development of a Budget Process website that is associated with the district’s web resources [<http://sitkaschools.org/domain/532>]. This website started as a response to one of the first assignments in the class; however, it turned into something that was far beyond any assignment, and models my fundamental belief that transparency and active involvement are key components that allow me to ensure that our accounting, budgeting, and reporting elements do in fact safeguard public funds. The Budget Process website includes reference to school board goals regarding the budget, at least 10-years of historical data related to our enrollment, revenues, and expenditures, budget blogs that I write to demystify basic understanding that is needed to interact with a school district’s budget, information that will help promote active involvement in the process, and ways to add comments and ask questions.

In our class readings we discussed the concepts of Adequacy, Equity, and Equality. When it comes to adequate funding, there seems to be a case to be made when advocating for funding that the current political focus on limiting funding for public schools until student outcomes improve is a flawed logic model. Student Outcomes are a factor in determining Adequacy (Schilling & Tomal, 2013); however, the fact that schools across the country are failing to the point that waivers are needed to avoid having virtually all schools in the United States be labeled as “failing” under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation only proves the point that current funding is inadequate. It is not an isolated school district or state, but rather a pervasive problem that school districts are not able to achieve the stated student outcomes with the current funding provided, even though student outcomes have varied from state to state. The only commonality from state to state is the lack of adequate funding. Something must be done to increase the adequacy of funding to public schools if student outcomes are to be considered a viable measure of school and district success. As someone who is skilled at advocating at the federal level for funding for educational technology initiatives, I look forward to applying the lessons I have learned as I advocate for public school funding with Alaska’s legislature.

Speaking of advocacy.... A significant portion of funding for the Sitka School District comes from local revenue; however, the federal and state governments continually pass legislation that limits local control over the activities of a school district. To make matters worse, a clear majority of the federal and state requirements come by way of unfunded or inadequately funded mandates. Consequently, every superintendent and school board member must be an active advocate for students not only for her/his school district but also for all students in public schools in Alaska and throughout the nation. As part of a learning cohort of future superintendent colleagues and as part of a statewide network of superintendent colleagues, I now possess the ability to be a valuable member of the larger community because I understand a basic aspect of the job of being a superintendent, which is ensuring transparency, effective management, and accountability in the school district’s use of public funds.

Another significant learning from the Superintendent Finance class revolves around the concept of Key Communicators. According to the Oregon School Boards Association (N.D.), Key Communicator networks allow local opinion leaders to understand school district processes, such as the budget, so two-way communication can occur regarding the budget development while also modeling an open, efficient, and accountable budget process. In addition to the Budget Process website addressed previously, as superintendent I am gathering a group of strategically selected stakeholders to help inform me regarding district initiatives including the budget development process, and also so they can take information back to their constituents to correct misunderstandings circulating in the community.

Specifically, I have grown as a leader because I am now able to interact with local, state, and national policy-makers regarding my school district's budget in a way that lends credibility to my role as superintendent. Additionally, because I now understand at least the components and complexities of a district budget's development and management processes, I can be creative in working with my business manager, key stakeholders both within and without the school district, and most importantly with my school board to find solutions to our budget shortfalls in a manner that limits the negative impact to our students. Armed with knowledge, I am ready to advocate for adequate funding for our students, and to work to transparently develop, implement, and manage the school district's budget.

References:

- Oregon School Boards Association. (N.D.). The budget process: Getting the community involved in creating your budget. Salem, OR: Oregon School Boards Association.
- Schilling, C. A., & Tomal, D. R. (2013). *Resource management for school administrators: Optimizing fiscal, facility, and human resources*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education.