

Delaware Education Funding Summit

Hosted by Education Equity Delaware Coalition

April 18th, 2018

Overview

Workshop Topic: Political lessons learned in modernizing school funding

Workshop leader: Rebecca Sibilila, Founder and CEO, EdBuild

Workshop leader bio: Rebecca Sibilila launched EdBuild in June of 2014. Prior to starting EdBuild, Rebecca served as the Chief Operating Officer and Vice President for Fiscal Strategy at StudentsFirst. In her fiscal strategy role, she led a team in analyzing per-pupil funding levels and state funding mechanisms that ensure "equity" and "adequacy" considerations. Her team also studied and made recommendations to state and district officials on directed reforms to support more innovative use of resources across the public education spectrum. Prior to her work at StudentsFirst, she served as the Chief Financial Officer for the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, where she oversaw the investment of more than \$1 billion in local, state, and federal student funding and the calculation of per-student funding based on state policy priorities. In prior roles, she created congressionally funded education programs; held state and local education policy roles; and developed venture philanthropy programs to serve low-income students in accessing quality education in appropriate settings. Rebecca holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Clemson University and an honorary fellowship in American Government from the University of South Carolina.

We are here to answer this key question: "What are the political lessons learned from working with state legislatures to change their school finance systems? What are the potential challenges and pitfalls to avoid, and the possible opportunities that come with data modeling?"

Major Takeaways

1. Political lessons learned from working in other states
 - **School funding is scary.** It helps to boil issues down as quickly as possible to most important piece: the student. This moves people.
 - **Winners and losers.** After a new formula is designed, it needs to get through the legislature. They care about whether their legislative district is going to win or lose.
 - **Change is scary.** This can be a ton of disruption so you can design the roll-out of the new formula in a way that helps people feel more at ease, such as a phase-in. In order to build trust with legislators when you meet with them, bring someone that they trust and bring someone their superintendent trusts. Bring a business or community person. Find someone in every school district that the superintendent trusts. It helps to have deputies educated on how the formula will work.
2. Discussion based on attendee questions
 - **Building buy-in from specific stakeholders**
 - o Legislators
 - Every state has a tried a committee for school funding in legislature. They aren't effective. You need a hard and fast proposal with five or six leads to come up to legislators and advocate for it. Legislators won't come up with hard and fast

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numbers. You have to write the bill and create an active community campaign, active business campaign, and active grass tops advocacy plan.

- Strikes and lawsuits are scaring legislators and are effective. Litigation or a ballot initiative are two other methods a state can take. Lawsuits are the real trigger for legislators cause the lawsuit itself is a threat enough. Top down pressure on legislators from courts is more effective than a costly ballot.
 - CT, Washington, KS, NJ, etc.... The courts scare legislators.
 - Adequacy is the worst language to use with legislators (they think of lawsuits). If we can say instead, within the money we have, we can do a better job of distributing the funds for equity and effectiveness, and efficiency.
 - In some cases we might need to make a slight compromise. Don't let perfect get in the way of good.
- Parents and community
 - Community planning required. Ask parents what they are thinking. What is working in your schools? What do you want to see more of?
 - Make promise to parents that they will be involved with decision making on back end
 - Community should help plan how funds are going to be spent, which they can't do unless they understand the system
 - Teachers – What is going to be the different in my classroom with a student-based funding system?
 - You will know how much money each student generates.
 - Teachers and principals have empowered roles in questioning why they don't get the resources they need once they have transparency.
 - In other states, teachers are typically very active advocates for change.
 - School business officials - How do we respond to fear of change, especially among those most familiar with using the current system?
 - Funding now is allocated based on units, or people. A study in CA came out that shows that additional flexibility was granted where districts receive dollars per student, not units, and there was no harm
 - "Hold harmless" clauses: IF any district stands to lose in the new formula, you make sure they can be let down gently. Use a phase in plan, where no one loses money and winners just gain. Or, just do a decrease by small percentage for losers. Phase in helps people do planning. Don't just throw the money at people, they need time for planning how to use it properly.
 - California requires a spending plan for all districts, specifically for high needs students. This has advantages and disadvantages but the legislators liked this, and DE could consider this during a transitional phase.

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- **Technical questions about school finance**

- We have a property tax problem where they have not been reassessed for years. People say if we cannot fix this, than how can we fix the rest? How can we overcome that type of thinking?
 - When updating the funding formula, focus on state funding not local. Connecticut did this.
- IF we had less school districts would it make a difference?
 - It won't make a difference but in some cases you might find some rising costs
 - You could make a grant to encourage districts to take cost-saving measures.
- What is the role of new taxes to bring in more money? (Marijuana, soda taxes?)
 - If we overburden needy communities by requiring they put more money in to schools we are hurting them in the long run. For example, if soda and marijuana are being bought in lower-income communities, then they are the ones paying the taxes (therefore they are disproportionately funding schools). It is not good for them. Studies have shown this is not equitable. An informed analysis needs to be done so we can come up with a balanced proposal that does not burden lower-income communities.

- **Role of a community coalition**

- Moving forward, what is the role of a coalition and community-based organizations who works directly with students, parents, and/or teachers?
 - We need to think about those people on the ground who can talk with parents, civic leaders to dispel myths. Without folks on the ground it costs more money to help people understand change and represent the issue well.
 - Keep teachers in the conversation so you can talk to folks about what this change will affect so teachers can best do their work. You can have teachers talking about how much more money will be in their classroom. Bring stuff down to the nuts and bolts.
 - Parents, students, and teachers are important to include in planning solutions. CBOs must be at the table to inform solutions and changes.
- What are the factors that make a coalition come together and actually work rather than just doing lip service to this?
 - Compromise matters
 - Come up with four tactical principals that everyone agrees hard and fast to
 - E.g. Low-income kids deserve a starting chance (at least 25% more money to close gaps) and develop a formula that does that.
 - What are things that everyone needs to stay in coalition? What are 5 things that make people stay invested? What will get us to our ideal state?

**Notes are meant to summarize workshop in order to inform coalition members, and are not meant to capture direct quotes for attribution.*