

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

How to Survive Budget Cuts without Sacrificing Student Learning

There is nowhere in today's economy that hasn't been affected by budget cuts. Employees are asked to do the same or even more with less funding and teachers are not excluded. Although some call for even more cuts, the vast majority of parents, other members of individual communities, and charitable organizations understand the importance of education and are willing to do what they can to help. With that support in mind, we can do much to maintain quality student learning in this era of fiscal constraint.

Parents, community members, and our nation depend on schools as a significant means of producing tomorrow's citizens and leaders. On that point no one can disagree. Therefore, students can still be given materials necessary for learning through local resources and the use of online sites offering free and inexpensive materials. There are also many opportunities both locally and beyond for acquiring grants to support teaching and learning

In the past, teachers could often create a list of needed instructional items, complete an official request, and submit it with the expectation it would be at least partially filled. Today that often isn't possible so, before you think about what you need to buy, do a quick inventory of what you have. Here are a few strategies teachers might consider:

1. **Align Outcomes and Resources** - Think about how you can utilize what you have in terms of the unit outcomes and components you are required to teach. That can be done by effectively using the CLI's Instructional Planning Resource.
2. **Ask Student Families for Assistance** - Send a note and a list of the needed items home with students. Parents are often happy to share what they have on hand at home. Be certain to review such a list with your building administrator to ensure it is reasonable and that he or she will be able to respond should anyone call about that request.
3. **Ask Local Stores and Businesses** - Another option is to ask local retail stores or businesses if they would like to donate some things. They may even provide a gift card with a predetermined balance which can be used to make purchases at their store. Again, review that action with your building administrator beforehand.
4. **Ask Parent Organizations** - The local parent and teachers' organization is another source of help. Teachers often can make a request for items or for an amount of money to be used on classroom supplies. Those requests are sometimes more effective if they come from your building leadership team or other advisory committee. Such a group can ensure that the donor organization isn't

besieged with hundreds of individual requests from teachers, as it can consolidate lists and even prioritize them when necessary.

Teachers often buy their own classroom supplies and shopping for the best bargain should be a priority. The Internet has helped make this once time-consuming process faster. Again, here are some actions teachers can take:

1. **Use Yard and Garage Sales** - Visit neighborhood yard sales as they can provide unexpected treasures to enhance classroom learning at a fraction of the original cost. Puzzles, learning games, and toys can help develop problem solving and critical thinking skills.
2. **Organize a Swap Day Within Your Building** - Utilize school-wide email to let others know what you need and what you can share with them. Usually, items transferred between teachers cost little or nothing.
3. **Use the Internet** - Complete a search online to learn about black-line masters and other media available through a textbook publisher. Vocabulary terms, quizzes, reading support pages and hands-on activities are usually free to download. Some sites provide free lesson plans that include teacher-developed support materials. A couple of websites to bookmark are www.eduplace.com and www.edhelper.com. You can also research the purchase agreement between the district and the textbook company. There may be online textbooks available as part of the agreement that would allow free access through use of a code. If that isn't an option, used textbooks can be purchased at a reduced rate through such sites as Ebay, www.half.com, www.textbooks.com, and www.amazon.com. Anything you do should be approved through the proper channels first, especially if you arrange through an Internet-based company to buy used texts if they weren't originally purchased by the district. This may generate money to expand your limited budget!

It isn't always possible for everything you need in your classroom to be provided free or given to you at a reduced cost. Big ticket items can exhaust an instructional budget so teachers may need to turn to other sources to supplement their funds. Grants do not need to be repaid and can be found locally, statewide and nationally. Start by checking into local sources for support. Here are some to investigate:

1. **Local Endowment Funds and Foundations** - Some districts have an endowment fund to support teacher efforts in the classroom and all that is needed to get that funding is a basic application.
2. **Departments of Education** - State departments also offer opportunities to support learning. These applications are more detailed but can be monetarily larger.
3. **Foundations and Charitable Organizations** - Many large national organizations and corporations are looking for ways to promote education through grant opportunities. Browse these sites for options: www.ed.gov, www.grants.gov, www.grantsalert.com, and www.free.ed.gov. Involve other teachers in your building or district to speed up the time it takes to explore the possibilities. In some cases using students for that activity might be appropriate. Again, be sure to review any such strategy with the building administration.

In education there doesn't seem to be extra time or money to do more with less. However, making that extra effort individually or collectively can make a big difference in the quality of student learning.