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## SUSTAINING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT Resource Allocation

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# Resource Allocation

Allocating resources is perhaps one of the most challenging tasks that schools face, whether they are in the early stages of reform or years into sustaining improvements. The challenge is less daunting if the prize — student learning — is always out in front. When everyone’s goal is improved student learning, resource decisions are no less difficult, but the choices often are clearer. To sustain improvement, schools must devote sufficient resources to fully implement priority goals before moving on to others. Successful schools know that improvements that are only partially implemented or implemented without the necessary support cannot be sustained. Knowing how to allocate resources effectively can lead to long-term accomplishment of goals rather than short-lived success.

## Key Elements

Facing the challenge of resource allocation begins with knowing the range of resources available. But knowing at one point in time isn’t enough — schools must periodically take stock of their resources. This means regularly revisiting whether financial, human, and time resources are allocated in the most appropriate ways given the school’s particular goals.

### Financial Resources

Schools that have authority over their budgets are better able to sustain school improvement efforts because they can direct money to support priority goals and programs (NCREL, 2000; Odden & Archibald, 2000; Klein, Medrich, & Perez-Ferreiro, 1996). If a school does not have adequate budget authority, it may need to seek funding outside the district or form partnerships to support its priority reform efforts (Klein et al., 1996).

To use financial resources wisely, schools also should understand guidelines for combining various funding streams. In particular, schools should be familiar with federal regulations that allow funds to be combined to support school improvement. For example, schools might use their Title I and Title II funds to support professional development activities that increase teachers’ knowledge and use of research-based strategies for

teaching reading. Combining funds is a good strategy for sustaining improvement because it allows money marked for special programs to be redirected to support the school’s overall academic priorities.

Successful schools also know that they can’t do it alone — they need the financial support of the community, which is more likely to be offered when there is a strong relationship between the school and community. To strengthen school-community relationships, successful schools help community members understand their goals and programs and point out how supporting the school can help businesses and community organizations accomplish their own missions. They also help businesses understand that education is a critical part of the

economic vitality of the community, which means that supporting schools is an investment rather than a donation (Wall & Sellers, 2002).

Successful schools also find ways to connect their students directly with the community. For example, they create opportunities for students to participate in service learning projects that benefit the community and encourage community members to attend student-centered activities such as concerts, plays, and athletic events. When community members see the school as an integral part of the social and economic fabric of the community, they are more likely to offer financial support.

### Finding Financial Resources

- Work with business and community leaders to establish an “Adopt-a-School” program.
- Determine if some aspects of the school’s program are eligible for funds from permanent funding streams in the community (e.g., United Way).
- Advocate for the establishment of a nonprofit foundation through which donations can be solicited and awards can be granted to individual schools.

### Human Resources

Sustaining improvement isn’t just about money. It’s also about people — especially the adults who directly support student learning. There are many ways that schools can reallocate human resources to better

support student learning. For example, to ensure that human resources support academic goals and priorities, schools should consider the ratio of non-instructional staff, such as attendance clerks and crisis counselors, to the number of full-time teaching staff (Walter, 2001). Although this approach might seem counterproductive, some research indicates that specialized needs can be addressed in regular classrooms with full-time instructional staff (NCREL, 2000; Odden & Archibald, 2000). This means that funds and other resources that would normally support pull-out programs can be used to reduce adult-student ratios by adding staff to the regular classroom or by hiring more full-time regular classroom teachers (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1998; NCREL, 2000; Odden & Archibald, 2000).

Schools might also consider assigning staff in ways that limit class size in particular focus areas. For example, if literacy is a high priority for school improvement efforts, the number of students per reading group or in other literacy activities could be reduced, while maintaining larger groupings in other subjects, such as art or physical education (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1998). Larger classes in those areas usually allow one specialist teacher to cover preparation time for several regular teachers (Odden & Archibald, 2000).

Eliminating positions or specialized programs can leave gaps in the school's ability to meet all students' needs. To fill these gaps, schools might train current staff or hire full-time teachers who can serve multiple roles or have skills in particular areas of need (e.g., dual certification in ESL and special education). Making changes in how staff members' time is allocated often raises issues that require special attention. For example, the school might need to obtain waivers from policies or regulations, such as minimum class sizes or the number of hours in a row that a teacher can teach.

### Time and Scheduling

Time is a crucial resource in school improvement for both teachers and students. Teachers need time for collaborative learning, planning, and professional development (NCREL, 2000; Klein et al., 1996).

Students need time to learn important subject matter. Restructuring teachers' and students' schedules is one way to harness time as a resource. For teachers, this could mean scheduling planning periods in conjunction with non-instructional time (e.g., during lunch or before or after school), or instituting early-release days (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1998). Students' schedules also can be altered to provide time for teacher learning. For example, certain times of the day can be designated for students to volunteer in the community, take college courses, or attend study hall (Walter, 2001). Allocating time for collaborative planning and professional development energizes staff around shared goals for improvement and prevents situations in which teachers are donating significant amounts of their personal time to school reform efforts.

Research suggests that allocating longer and varied blocks of time to a given subject area can enhance student achievement by allowing for more flexibility in instructional approaches (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1998). In order to provide more learning time and individualized attention for students, schools should consider how they allocate time to each class period. Methods for "creating" this time include alternating days of courses, having fewer courses per semester/trimester, or allotting more time to core academics than to elective classes (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1998). Managing time in ways that support the school's goals for the long term is an important task that may require new ways of thinking about schedules and about where and how learning can take place.

### What the School Leadership Team Can Do

In terms of financial resources, a primary role for the school leadership team is to allocate resources wisely, integrating funding streams when possible. The team should also build the capacity of staff to pursue funding sources, analyze relevant financial data, and manage money (Trimble, 2002). The success of these tasks involves developing relationships with organizations and individuals in the community who may have resources to support school improvement and assessing whether the services or resources that partnerships

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provide are being used appropriately given the school’s vision. The school leadership team should approach the development of partnerships and the search for new sources of funding as a continuous, long-term process to ensure that sufficient resources are available to sustain improvement efforts.

In terms of human resources, as a school progresses toward long-term sustainability of improvement efforts, the need to change staff allocations may become apparent. Nonetheless, changes in staffing patterns may be difficult to accept; wise school leaders will include all stakeholders in the process of deciding how best to allocate human resources.

Keeping track of the use of time is another key activity for the school leadership team. The team can lead the effort to continually assess whether the structure of the school week, including staffing assignments and class periods, supports the school’s vision for school improvement (Walter, 2001). In addition, school leaders can evaluate how efficiently time is being used to determine if sufficient time is allotted to priority areas and whether too much time is devoted to projects or activities that are not directly connected to learning goals (Walter, 2001).

## What Does Resource Allocation Look Like in Our School?

The following continuum of sustainability strategies can be used to assess the adequacy of the resource allocation process in your building. Schools that take the actions described in the right-hand column are more likely to sustain improvement.

Least Effective	Somewhat Effective	Most Effective
<b>Financial Resources</b>		
The school makes some decisions about how to allocate funds in support of school improvement goals. Staff members seek new sources of funding or other support only as necessary.	The school has control over a portion of its budget. Some funds from different sources are combined and directed in support of the school’s goals. Staff members regularly seek new sources of funding and other support in order to supplement existing resources.	The school has control over the majority of its budget. To the extent possible, all funds from different sources are combined and directed in support of the school’s goals. Staff members actively and systematically seek new funding sources and partnerships with businesses and community organizations. Resources, including current partnerships, are regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure that they are used in an efficient manner.
<b>Human Resources</b>		
Staff positions are a mix of academic, non-instructional, and specialized positions, which may not efficiently support school improvement goals and priorities.	The majority of staff positions are focused on full-time instruction and areas that fall under the school’s academic goals and priorities.	All staff positions are focused on full-time instruction and areas that fall under the school’s academic goals and priorities. Adult-student ratios may change depending on the specific academic area and related goals. Retention strategies are designed to minimize staff turnover.
<b>Time and Scheduling</b>		
Common planning or professional development events are not part of school scheduling. They rarely take place during the school day.	School schedules are arranged to provide some job-embedded, common planning time and time for professional development.	School schedules are arranged to provide appropriate time for job-embedded common planning and professional development. Class length varies to provide students with more time for meaningful instruction in core academics.

## From the Field

### Huntington Elementary School

Lincoln, Nebraska

When members of the Leadership Team at Huntington Elementary School make decisions about allocating resources within their school, they appreciate the support they have from their district office. Schools in Lincoln are allotted points based on a formula that takes into account the number of students, various demographic and risk factors, and program needs. These points then translate into dollars that can be spent on staff and programs according to the needs of each particular school.

Nonetheless, deciding how to allocate resources to best serve students can be a complicated task. Huntington's School Leadership team has approached that task thoughtfully. The team spent the entire 1998–1999 school year studying data and proposing hypotheses about their students' achievement levels. From those data, they concluded that students entering Huntington needed additional readiness skills as well as language enrichment activities in order to be successful in literacy. The team concluded that targeting school resources toward the problem was a critical part of their plan to boost student achievement in this area.

The leadership team designed a resource allocation plan that leveraged funding in different ways. The plan, which incorporated funding reallocated from Title I as well as money from the school's general fund, led to the continuation of an effective full-day kindergarten program, and the hiring of a CSR facilitator, a special education coordinator, and a full-time literacy support person. Because the school also viewed time as a valuable resource, the leadership team initiated curriculum mapping projects to ensure that content and skills were properly differentiated by grade level.

Although grant funding is ending for CO-NECT, the school's CSR program, the leadership team is taking steps to assure the sustainability of their programs. As part of their work with CO-NECT, the leadership team learned how to audit their instruction and programs for effectiveness. These audits will continue, using Huntington's own resources. According to Principal Pam Sedlacek, "Sustainability won't be an issue. This is the way we do business now, and we'll allocate the resources it takes to continue our improvement efforts."

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