
Preface

Too often, the process of budget cutting leaves wounds that take years to heal; idealism withers, hope for a better program dies. In the face of serious challenges, positions harden and philosophies of education become both sword and shield. From this cauldron emerges a book that offers a means of dispassionate, rational decision making based on principles from brain research.

Although the idea of applying brain research to the budget-cutting process may startle, using brain research to improve schools has been around for more than a quarter of a century. The brain research base used in this book is especially well documented. The brainchild of Susan Kovalik & Associates, the ITI model (now referred to as *HET—Highly Effective Teaching*) has developed over the past 25 years based on the experiences of thousands of teachers in countywide, districtwide, schoolwide, team, and individual teacher implementation environments. The model was one of 22 chosen for inclusion in the Comprehensive School Reform Program effort in 1999 and was also selected by Dr. Charles M. Reigeluth, Indiana University, as one of only a handful of models that met his stringent criteria for a curriculum-instruction model (see *Instructional-Design Theories and Models, Volume II: A New Paradigm of Instructional Theory*, edited by Charles M. Reigeluth, Indiana University; also see *Exceeding Expectations: A User's Guide to Implementing Brain Research in the Classroom*, 4th ed., by Susan J. Kovalik and Karen D. Olsen). The outcomes of this brain-based model—improvement in student achievement and personal and social growth—are predictable and well documented.

Given this track record, the author's assumption that brain research can help us with the very difficult process of cutting school budgets is neither pie in the sky nor a "bridge too far." As the reader will soon discover, the very principles from brain research that have helped schools improve their program and student outcomes are precisely the same principles that can be used to analyze where money and time (and time is money) are ineffectively spent and thus can be cut with minimal harm.

The book revolves around the Strategy-Builder Chart in Chapter 1 that identifies where dollars might best be cut, rated on a scale of 1 to 10. This

helps stakeholders formulate a game plan—what to take on, when, and in what order.

But cutting one's budget is only part of story. A basic premise of this book is that simply cutting budget—and suffering through with what's left—is a poor strategy. The author insists that we must *cut more than enough* so that there is money that can be reinvested in those areas that would significantly improve student outcomes—and lift the spirits of staff and parents. Thus, the second part of the Strategy-Builder Chart is a 1–10 rating scale of where small amounts of money can be reinvested to greatest effect.

Chapters 2 through 10 provide a road map for analyzing and making decisions in the areas of instructional tools, organization, and use of time, staffing, professional development, movement, emotion, curriculum, and testing.

Each chapter provides the following:

- **Action Items**—specific steps that will help you think through how to analyze your program for budget-cutting potential and how (and when) to reinvest some of the money. These action items also include tips on group process strategies. Where appropriate, there are separate discussions for those in self-contained environments (usually elementary school) and for those in departmentalized situations (typically middle and high school).
- **Brain Research**—brief summaries of brain research relevant to the decision making needed to cut your budget and to reallocate some monies to the areas most likely to increase student achievement with little cost.
- **Resources**—in addition to recommendations for further study, there are more than 30 analytical charts to aid in gathering needed information.
- **Endnotes**—comments on references identified in the footnotes to give the reader a perspective on the resources mentioned and help with deciding if a book or article should be shared with stakeholders now or in future planning. Also included are anecdotal stories to illustrate important ideas and help participants connect information to their own experiences.
- **Action Summary Checklist**—a summary of all of the Action Items outlined in the chapter.

Budget cutting is a painfully personal process. Throughout this book, the author has chosen to use the first-person voice—to talk in terms of you and me and us. The choice is a deliberate one, chosen because budget cutting is all too often attempted in the third-person “remote” voice—as if the lives of real people aren't being disrupted. But the truth is, when it comes to budget cutting, very real people must make very real decisions that affect very real people and students. So, there is nothing to be gained by attempting to seem impersonal or cloaked in the anonymity of bureaucracy. To do so lacks courage and is dishonest.

A very difficult job awaits. This book is intended to light the way and lighten the load.