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ABSTRACT

The practical issues of financial, human, and political costs involved in the restructuring efforts undertaken by five Washington State secondary schools, each of which is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, are addressed in this paper. The crux of the restructuring problem is to develop ways to provide staff members with the needed planning time consistent with the existing norms of the teaching profession. Staff resource allocation decisions regarding four key areas--curriculum, pedagogy, learning resources, and administration--determine the cost of restructuring. A conclusion is that schools are only capable of mustering the resources for a limited number of significant innovations. Before beginning a restructuring project, a school or district must consider costs as a function of decisions regarding the four key areas and must consider scaling back its model or not beginning at all. A cost estimate worksheet is included. (8 references) (LMI)

The Resource Costs Involved in Restructuring a Secondary School

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The Resource Costs Involved in Restructuring a Secondary School

America's schools are currently being called upon to pull the nation back from an "economic cliff."[1] To accomplish this task, schools--and especially those at the secondary level--are being challenged to fundamentally restructure themselves in order to build the world's foremost workforce.

This paper analyzes the restructuring efforts of five secondary schools. Each of these schools is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and is in the process of attempting to transform its traditional school structure into one guided by nine common principles outlined by Sizer.[2] The goal of this paper is to address the practical issues of how much additional money, time, and staff energy secondary schools need to implement and sustain substantive change.

Our conclusion is that the financial, human, and political costs involved in fundamentally restructuring a secondary school are enormous and involve almost every aspect of the school's program. Financial costs include salary, supply, and facility expenditures;

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[1] Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, *America's Choice: high skills or low wages!* (Rochester, N.Y.: National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990).

[2] Coalition of Essential Schools, *Prospectus* (Providence, R.I.: Author, 1988), p. 1.

human costs refer to the physical and mental well-being of staff members and the impact of their work on the quality of their personal and professional lives; and political costs involve the influence of restructuring on staff members' careers. While researchers have provided a formidable body of literature on the institutional changes required for school restructuring,[3] they have seriously underestimated (or simply ignored) the resources that secondary schools will need to successfully restructure.

Restructuring a Secondary School

The first chapter of Joyce, Hersh, and McKibbin's widely quoted work, *The Structure of School Improvement*, is titled "School Improvement as a Way of Life." The theme of this book--and numerous similar efforts--is that schools "tend to deteriorate unless they are continuously rejuvenated."[4] After careful review of the

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[3] Richard F. Elmore, *Restructuring Schools: The Next Generation of Educational Reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass); Michael Fullan, *The Meaning of Educational Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991); John I. Goodlad, *The Ecology of School Renewal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Bruce R. Joyce, Richard H. Hersh, and Michael McKibbin, *The Structure of School Improvement* (New York: Longman, 1983); Ann Lieberman, *Rethinking School Improvement: Research, Craft, and Concept* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986); Milbrey W. McLaughlin, "The Rand Change Agent Study Revisited: Macro Perspectives and Micro Realities," *Educational Researcher*, December 1990, pp. 11-16; Ted Sizer, *Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

[4] Bruce R. Joyce, Richard H. Hersh, and Michael McKibbin, *The Structure of School Improvement* (New York: Longman, 1983), p. 4.

restructuring efforts of five secondary schools, we would like to add a caveat to this assertion:

> Before a school begins any rejuvenation effort, it must confront the financial, human, and political costs involved. If the school determines that it will be unable to meet and sustain these costs, it will be better off in the long run not to begin the endeavor. Raising staff and community expectations, and then not being able to afford the costs, often is far more harmful than living with the status quo.

Concepts such as *continuous rejuvenation* assume that school change is either relatively cost-free or that it generates sufficient benefit to justify the costs incurred. Research on the nature of school change does not support such a hypothesis. In the 1970s, the Rand Corporation conducted a series of "change agent" studies, looking at nearly 300 educational innovations funded by the federal government.[5] The goal of the RAND project was to describe how the process of innovation works, and to identify common characteristics of successful (and unsuccessful) innovations.

The studies found that "effective projects were characterized by a process of mutual adaptation rather than uniform implementation, and that local factors . . . dominated project

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[5] Paul Berman and Milbrey McLaughlin, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change* (Santa Monica, Cal.: The Rand Corporation, 1978).

outcomes."[6] Strategies found to be particularly effective included: (1) concrete, teacher-specific, and extended training; (2) teacher observation of similar projects in other classrooms, schools, or districts; (3) regular project meetings that focused on practical problems; (4) teacher participation in project decisions; (5) local development of project materials; and (6) principals' participation in training. Each of these strategies generates tremendous demand for a commodity already in very short supply in a secondary school--staff time.

Sirotnik also emphasizes the connection between meaningful staff involvement and lasting change: "People who live and work in complex organizations like schools need to be thoroughly involved in their own improvement efforts, assuming significant and enduring organizational change is the purpose we have in mind."[7] The staff cannot sustain such "thorough involvement" without the time it requires.

Providing this time in the K-12 environment, however, is not simply a matter of making funds available to provide overtime pay for school staff members. Sarason, in his classic study of the change process in schools, stresses that successful innovation hinges upon

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[6] Milbrey W. McLaughlin, "The Rand Change Agent Study Revisited: Macro Perspectives and Micro Realities," *Educational Researcher*, December 1990, p. 11.

[7] Kenneth A. Sirotnik, "The School as the Center of Change," in *Schooling for Tomorrow: Directing Reforms to Issues that Count*, edited by Thomas J. Sergiovanni and John H. Moore (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989), p. 106.

"coming to grips with the characteristics and traditions of the setting and the ways in which they ordinarily facilitate and frustrate change."[8] Proposals that seek to fundamentally restructure the working environment of teachers must be cognizant of the characteristics and traditions of the teaching profession.

Perhaps the most pertinent of these characteristics for a school seeking to fundamentally restructure itself is that many teachers consciously trade a potentially higher salary in the private sector for the desirability (or necessity) of working in a profession that provides a stable work schedule which allows them time for personal preferences or to be available for family responsibilities. These individuals are likely to be very resistant to any restructuring that violates this implicit contract by requiring them to participate in after-school or Saturday planning sessions. The crux of the restructuring problem in the five schools we studied was how to develop practical and creative ways to provide staff members with needed planning time in a manner consistent with the existing norms of the teaching profession. Generally, this suggests that change must be planned during the scheduled workday.

Financial, Human, and Political Costs of Restructuring

Society cannot expect staff members involved in educational reform efforts to carry their customary work load while they explore

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[8] Seymour B. Sarason, *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), p. 78.

new frontiers and address new demands arising from this exploration. Yet, Coalition schools are expected to operate at "per pupil costs [that do] not exceed by more than ten per cent that of traditional schools."[9] To generate the additional resources needed, staff members in each of these five schools are forced to make decisions on how they can reallocate existing resources from other efforts of the school. Staff decisions regarding four key issues seem to drive these decisions, and therefore determine the cost of each school's restructuring effort: (1) curriculum (e.g., what subjects are of most value?); (2) pedagogy (e.g., what are the best ways to teach groups of students?); (3) learning resources (e.g., what equipment and supplies does the school need in order to improve student achievement?); and (4) administration (e.g., who gives leadership to the restructuring to see that it makes a difference?).

Curriculum

The restructuring efforts of these schools seek to assist teachers to increase their proficiency with course content and to develop more effective teaching methods. The dominant cost in this aspect of restructuring is buying staff time so teachers can be thoroughly involved in core activities such as (1) learning about and/or creating new curriculum materials, (2) cooperating with other

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[9] Coalition of Essential Schools, *Prospectus* (Providence, RI: Author, 1988), p. 2.

teachers in order to team-teach or integrate curriculum, and (3) becoming users of educational technology.

The experiences of these five schools were that teachers began doing these things only when the school districts invested in the effort by buying staff time during the school year. The options for buying staff time used by these schools were:

1. **Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members.** This required the school to over-staff in order to procure additional teacher planning time during the school day.
2. **Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year.** This allowed schools to involve the entire staff, but it required them to pay per diem salary to teachers, and in each case it created a child-care problem in the community (which became a political problem for the schools involved).
3. **Hiring substitutes while the teachers did committee or curriculum work.** If only some of the staff members needed extra planning time, several schools hired substitutes for these occasions. While substitutes were cheaper than paying per diem salary to the staff for extra days worked, principals considered substitutes to be disruptive to the regular routine of the school (especially if there were several on a given day), they were not always available, and teachers who did not get them felt slighted.

4. **Paying the staff for planning during the summer vacation.** The schools that used this approach did not find teacher planning time in August to be cost-effective since teachers found it difficult to individualize instruction before they met their students. These sites found formal staff-development classes to be more efficient use of August days.

There are variations on these themes, but essentially: teachers plan, work on curriculum, or have staff development classes in August (paid by per diem salary); a few teachers have extra time during the year (paid for by substitutes or hiring more teachers); or the schools send all students home for a half or a full day at intervals during the year (paid for by contractual days or per diem salary if extra days). Administrators did not perceive as ideal any of these attempts to buy teacher time. All led to problems with the financial cost, with other faculty members (envy), or parents and community objecting because of child-care needs. Yet, principals in these schools argued that paying the fiscal and political price to invest in their staffs was absolutely necessary if their schools were to be improved. If a school cannot afford the financial, human, and political costs of investing in revised curricula, it will face great difficulty in attempting to restructure itself.

Pedagogy

If teachers are to learn how to teach differently, they need to attend workshops and see models of how to teach; they need time to

overhaul the way they have traditionally taught and graded. Sizer, for example, talks about changing teaching methods to conform to a model of "student as worker, teacher as guide."[10] Such sweeping pedagogical change requires release time for teachers to visit other schools to see good teaching in action, as well as the allocation of time for someone in the building to encourage, sustain, and defend these pedagogical practices. This job usually fell to the principal, sometimes with help from the central office curriculum staff. The financial costs involved in changing curriculum and pedagogy are ongoing and substantial, in large part because the culture of secondary schools necessitate that they occur during the teacher work day.

Learning Resources

A common goal of each of these five schools was to lessen dependence on textbooks and worksheets and instead to teach using methods that actively involved students in their own learning. This generated strong demand for new learning resources, such as classroom sets of novels, library books, and media. The library collection, in particular, required substantial new resources to support a radically restructured curriculum. It was found that if students are to productively spend their time in the library researching, reading, or writing, the librarian must put money and staff time into resources that teachers will commit to using. It

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[10] Ibid.

proved quite expensive for these schools to build class-sized clusters of materials for specific projects, but this was the only way to ensure that the library could fulfill its role and make a real difference in the teaching and learning of students.

In addition to the print collection, libraries in these restructuring schools had a strong need to reallocate funds for the new hardware and media (e.g., computers and networks, VCRs, laserdiscs, camcorders, editing machines), which in turn generated need for more staff management of learning resources. To efficiently use the computers, the school needed additional personnel to instruct, troubleshoot, clean up, organize, and generally make it possible for students to use computers to their maximum. For example, to build a local area network in a school requires someone to maintain it. Whether the school assigns this task to a teacher (paid by stipend or an extra period off) or to an aide, it incurs new personnel expense.

While the introduction of technology is expensive, easy student access to such tools can change the way faculty members and students teach and learn. For example, the current emphasis on writing across the curriculum is greatly facilitated if students have considerable access to word processors--both to learn to type and to use as writing tools.

Administration

The schools studied incurred an additional significant cost from restructuring, as the role of building administrator in these schools

evolved towards instructional leadership. Since many staff members did not have the skills to work in a restructured school, it fell to the principal to model desired pedagogical techniques, show how subject matter could be integrated, and teach group-process skills. The principals in these schools spent hours in the classroom, watching and then working with teachers. To do so, they were required to either work longer days or assign someone else to complete the tasks they were previously doing. Individual schools should base their efforts to restructure on an understanding that they will need additional personnel, either in the form of extra efforts by those currently employed or by hiring additional staff. In the long run, either approach will require additional money.

The principal must also articulate and defend a vision of what the school is trying to become--a process that can extract a high political price from a principal. For example, Coalition schools promote achievement in core academic classes. This gives clear purpose to a school's mission statement, but it also can create division since there is no widespread consensus within most communities, school boards, parent groups, or faculties as to what is and is not core. The principal, as "keeper of the vision," is continually called upon to defend the school's goals.

At some point in the restructuring effort, the school's leadership will have to address the question "Is it worth it?" From the beginning, therefore, the school administration must pay attention to the question of evaluation. Someone should collect data

and be able to know how the new model is working. These processes are expensive in terms of money (salaries, evaluation tools), time, and politics. Teachers, parents, administrators, and school board members make serious decisions about how they will operate a school. Without valid data, they will make these decisions in a vacuum.

The Price of Failure

Any attempt to enumerate the resource costs involved in restructuring a secondary school must consider the possibility of failure. School routines exist because they are comfortable. Efforts by teachers and administrators to change instructional and assessment practices require a great deal of additional time, including increased time devoted to faculty committee work. Faculty members cannot simultaneously teach well (assign written work and grade it), participate in an increased amount of committee work, and address contentious faculty political issues. If they attempt to do so, they can be overworked to the point that it negatively affects their personal lives and their health.

In such an environment, principals who are unable to sustain a restructuring effort beyond its initial stages may face severe damage to their reputations as educational leaders. The derision that is likely to ensue in the faculty room also raises the likelihood that future change proposals will be sabotaged. Calls in the restructuring literature for "continuous rejuvenation" fail to recognize that schools

are only capable of mustering the resources for a limited number of significant innovations. These changes have to succeed or else they will contribute to the callous attitude worn by jaded veterans. If all the time and effort does not result in satisfaction, or if the school cannot sustain the effort, then teachers and administrators become cynical and wary of any change.

Conclusion

Restructuring a school or district will cost more money, time, and staff energy than is currently being spent. An estimate for the costs involved obviously depends on the restructuring model used. In the five schools analyzed for this paper, however, the costs were a function of decisions made with regard to curriculum, pedagogy, learning resources, and administration. Before embarking on a restructuring project, a school or district should consider the following. If the costs seem too high, then a school or district would do well to scale back its model--or not even begin.

Activity	Cost Estimate		
	Financial	Human	Political
Curriculum			
Principal/teacher time to:			
(a) learn about or create new materials 1. Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members. 2. Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year. 3. Hiring substitutes. 4. Paying the staff during the summer vacation.			
(b) cooperate with other teachers to team-teach or integrate curriculum 1. Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members. 2. Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year. 3. Hiring substitutes. 4. Paying the staff during the summer vacation.			

Activity	Cost Estimate		
	Financial	Human	Political
Curriculum (continued)			
Principal/teacher time to:			
(c) become users of educational technology 1. Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members. 2. Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year. 3. Hiring substitutes. 4. Paying the staff during the summer vacation.			
Pedagogy			
Principal/teacher time to:			
(a) attend workshops 1. Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members. 2. Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year. 3. Hiring substitutes. 4. Paying the staff during the summer vacation.			

Activity	Cost Estimate		
	Financial	Human	Political
Pedagogy (continued)			
Principal/teacher time to:			
(b) see models of how to teach 1. Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members. 2. Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year. 3. Hiring substitutes. 4. Paying the staff during the summer vacation.			
(c) revise existing teaching methods 1. Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members. 2. Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year. 3. Hiring substitutes. 4. Paying the staff during the summer vacation.			

Activity	Cost Estimate		
	Financial	Human	Political
Pedagogy (continued)			
Principal/teacher time to:			
(d) encourage, sustain, and defend desired pedagogical practices 1. Providing an extra planning period for some faculty members. 2. Closing the school for a half or a full day periodically during the school year. 3. Hiring substitutes. 4. Paying the staff during the summer vacation.			
Learning resources			
New textbooks and library books			
Staff development			
New media (hardware and software)			
Staff development			
Increased need for management of learning resources			

Activity	Cost Estimate		
	Financial	Human	Political
Administration			
Principal time to develop skills and assume role as instructional leader			
Principal as "keeper of the vision"			
Evaluation of restructuring effort			
Impact of failure on teacher attitude			
Impact of failure on future change efforts			