

4-1-2010

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Educational Studies Senior Research Project

Trinity College CT

December 2009

Playing Catch-Up: Hartford Public School Budgeting in 2007-2009.

Introduction

One of the most prominent supporters of education, Horace Mann, once said, "Education...beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of conditions of men - the balance wheel of the social machinery...It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich; it prevents being poor."¹ Is this true? In a perfect society in which every citizen is granted equal access to education, education may truly disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich, and have the ability to prevent poverty outright. That is, if the underprivileged are able to receive the same access to education as the wealthy. Fact of the matter is our society is not perfect, and as a result, education is not the great equalizer of conditions of men in society today. To examine the cause of this incongruence we must address those factors which inhibit our educational system from achieving this goal.

Hartford, CT is one of the lowest achieving cities in the US with a high school graduation rate of 30%; ironically, it is located in one of the richest states in the country. It would be difficult to even begin trying to name all of the problems that directly or indirectly affect the students; moreover, it would be impossible to pick one avenue that the incredibly low achievement could be attributed to. In Hartford, where more money is spent per pupil than more high achieving schools in Connecticut, one must wonder whether money is the greatest factor

¹ "Horace Mann Quotes." *Brainy Quotes*. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/h/horace_mann.html (accessed April 19, 2009).

that plays into the strength of achievement. Any reasonably logical and intelligent human being would agree that money is essential. But the real question remains unresolved: is more money the answer?

Steven J Adamowski, superintendent of Hartford Public Schools, spoke at Trinity College in November of 2009. In his lecture, he stated that although many educational researchers have concluded that the best way to run a school system is more resources and effective budgeting, that only leads to small incremental change. He believes that in order to have fundamental change, we need to have managed instruction, performance empowerment, and charter schools.² Thus, to play the “catch up game” with other school districts, we need to realize that every dollar spent in the system is vital. For this reason we must ask, how are budgeting decisions made in Hartford, and in the big picture, what are the politics of funding?

Past Research

Budgeting in a school system is a hotly debated topic that has been closely researched- many different ways have been employed to improve school systems. The past research that was done is a look a few ways that people have spent money in a school district, as well as researchers’ thoughts on how money should be spent.

Many researchers have tried to answer the question, “does money matter?”; however, no one side has been unanimously agreed upon by the general public. Some have even deemed the idea of money being the main concern a myth.

“Schools have become dominated by the money myth: Inadequate outcomes can be explained by inadequate revenues, and any educational problem requires increased spending. Few people are

²Adamowski, Steven “The Politics of Educational Reform in Hartford Public Schools. Lecture, Trinity College, Hartford, CT, November 10, 2006.

going to look for improving schools in a period of declining revenues. But the link between spending per pupil and outcomes has always been weak”³.

Throughout his article, Grubb makes his point by stating five strategies that schools could use to be more efficient without spending any money, such as understanding the power of “complex resources”. He describes the “complex resources” as being instruction and how the teacher uses his or her time, “their control over instruction...and teachers’ reliance on innovative instruction”, which lead to a higher overall achievement. In order to accomplish this, Grubb suggests more collaboration between principals and teachers to develop a better curriculum for students. Perhaps schools should capitalize on the funds given by cutting back the unnecessary and focus on other more important factors that aren’t necessarily monetary, such as the collaboration between the principals and the teachers, as they are the foundation of the schools. This is one example in which it is clear to see that money cannot be the only problem and solution that exists when it comes to low achieving schools. It is possible that Grubb has the right idea- to utilize the surrounding tools that the districts have that are often forgotten simply because they may not be monetary or obvious.

The argument that more money spent is related to higher achievement has also been refuted by comparisons of school expenditures in different districts. Jefferson claims that there is no immediate correlation between expenditure per pupil, funds from the government, teacher salaries, and educational performance.

“Washington, Iowa, and Wisconsin ranked below the top 10 in each of these measures and yet have achieved the highest average test scores in the nation. Meanwhile, several states including the District of Columbia spend a large amount of resources as measured per pupil and receive

³ Grubb, W. Norton. "Does Money Matter Most?" *Education Week* 28, no. 25 (2009): 32 *Education Full Text*. <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be34259200ec68bec3388b2dc90abca989c90ac0a6750493f16&fmt=P>>. (accessed October 2 2009), 32.

significant support from the federal government yet do not demonstrate high levels of student achievement.”⁴

This passage encompasses the point of view that many hold in regards to student achievement being a function of school expenditure. More money does not necessarily equate to improvement of the education system or higher achievement. “Poor districts get more money and use it for clear needs (facilities, social services, compensatory education), but little of the new money makes it into the regular education program.”⁵ This passage provides support for the assertion that giving a poor education system more money is futile if it is not used in a strategic manner, because districts that receive more money do not necessarily perform better than those who receive less.

Some claim that “funding is neither a sufficient nor a necessary precondition to school improvement.”⁶ Perhaps it is not that there are insufficient funds, as much as it is that funds are just insufficient.

“Determining how much spending on public education is enough is impossible in the absence of a public education system in which funds from all sources can be used flexibly, ineffective activities must be abandoned, and resources can flow to more effective uses. It almost certainly takes more public funding to educate some children than others. However, it also takes less money to run a highly efficient system, where virtually all funds are applied directly to instruction and student services, than an inefficient one, where spending is driven by political and bureaucratic considerations.”⁷

⁴ Jefferson, Anne L. "Student Performance: Is More Money the Answer?" *Journal of Education Finance* 31.2 (2005): 111-24. *Education Full Text*. Web. 21 Sept. 2009. <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be3eba66a5366fcca7ccc430a62c044dcfacce2a0e42edb513d&fmt=H> (Accessed October 2 2009), 119.

⁵ *Ibid*, 119.

⁶ Hill, Paul T. "Spending Money When It Is Not Clear What Works." *Peabody Journal of Education* 83.2 (2008): 238-58. *Education Full Text*. <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be32ee507af281e9c304a2af39d43ac8f82de3dc6f18dab01da&fmt=H> (Accessed October 1 2009). 240.

⁷ Hill, Paul T. "Spending Money When It Is Not Clear What Works." *Peabody Journal of Education* 83.2 (2008): 238-58. *Education Full Text*. <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be32ee507af281e9c304a2af39d43ac8f82de3dc6f18dab01da&fmt=H> (Accessed October 1 2009). 247.

As shown in this quote, many researchers believe that a more efficient system is in order, rather than a wealthier one. Paul Hill explains in his article that determining how much funding is sufficient in a public education system is impossible if the system is inflexible with its' fund allocation- he believes that those that are clearly ineffective should be discarded so that they can be utilized in a more effective way. It is important to consider then, what exactly is "strategic"? And what exactly is "efficient"? If flexibility is still efficiency, then perhaps being systematic is not always the best way to solve the issue of the educational achievement gap.

In 2006, Chambers, et al. did a study on the New York State's school financing system in which they sought to investigate the "adequacy gap". The researchers defined this gap as a way to measure "the need of a district relative to its current condition in the context of the level of resources it employs."⁸ New York City, urban and high need schools, average and low need suburban schools, and small town and rural schools. Within these four categories of schools, they analyzed different economical and political aspects such as teacher markets and geographic cost of education, district administration and maintenance, and public engagement forums. Through this, they constructed an "adequate model" for school budgeting. However, they found that "the additional money required to bring those districts currently spending below adequate levels up to adequacy required anywhere from \$6.21 to \$8.40 billion depending on the stage in the process and assumptions made pertaining to expenditures on certain overhead functions."⁹ This study

⁸ Chambers, Jay G., Jesse D. Levin, and Thomas B. Parrish. "Examining the Relationship Between Educational Outcomes and Gaps in Funding: An Extension of the New York Adequacy Study." *Peabody Journal of Education* 81.2 (2006): 1-32. *Education Full Text*. <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be3c32eaf710aed982b54ee1c2c770774f62e152054915d16ee&fmt=H>> (Accessed October 3 2009), 22.

⁹ Chambers, Jay G., Jesse D. Levin, and Thomas B. Parrish. "Examining the Relationship Between Educational Outcomes and Gaps in Funding: An Extension of the New York Adequacy Study." *Peabody Journal of Education* 81.2 (2006): 1-32. *Education Full Text*. <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be3c32eaf710aed982b54ee1c2c770774f62e152054915d16ee&fmt=H>> (Accessed October 3 2009), 26.

clearly took on a more numerical approach to finding a solution to bring equality to education, and showed that money does matter; it is just an issue of where the money is allocated in order to be sufficient.

While it is crucial to see recent research on the adequacy gap, it is also important to know the public's thoughts about school expenditure as well. In the 2007 Education Next-PEPG survey, they asked the public for their opinion on education spending.

“The results are striking: Americans dramatically underestimate the amount spent on the public schools in their district, even when prompted to consider the full range of uses to which school spending is devoted. They also think that teachers earn, on average, far less than is actually the case. The public's strong preference that more be spent on public schools is based, at least in part, on faulty information.”¹⁰

This passage shows that taxpayers don't necessarily know exactly how much money is going into education. On average, the public underestimated teacher's salaries by 30%. It would be interesting to see whether the public would push to see change and to make school finance more efficient if they knew just how much is actually being spent in the schools. Many people would not even believe that places like Hartford, CT spends more money per pupil than in higher achieving schools. Other studies, such as ones done by Odden, et al., lead to the idea that large sums of money were spent on schools that weren't necessarily essential.

“Though not the largest elements of expenditure at the schools, the schools nevertheless spend considerable, some might say surprisingly high, sums on professional development. Professional development spending averaged almost \$600 per pupil and \$7,758 per teacher.”¹¹

¹⁰ Howell, William G., and Martin R. West. "Is the Price Right?" *Education Next* 8.3 (2008): *Education Full Text*. <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be32ee507af281e9c30e1c022a8bbff55e624a37febe949ba81&fmt=H>> (accessed October 2 2009), 28.

¹¹ Odden, Allan, Margaret Goertz, Michael Goetz, Sarah Archibald, Betheny Gross, Michael Weiss, and Michelle T. Mangan. "The Cost of Instructional Improvement: Resource Allocation in Schools Using Comprehensive Strategies to Change Classroom Practice." *Journal of Education Finance* 33.4 (2008): 381-405. *Education Full Text*. <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be32ee507af281e9c30d6bdd81de83a1?>> (Accessed September 21 2009), 401.

This is a huge amount to be spending on professional development, and whether it is progressive remains unknown. This is also an example of budgeting decisions that need to be made during the process- it seems to be difficult to decide what exactly is essential and what isn't.

In 2006, Roza & McCormick did a case study on school budgets. She found that districts were funding aspects of the district that did not make much sense.

“School budgets look very different when central office services are considered. Schools with inexperienced staff members and principals (often the schools serving disadvantaged children) get measurably less from the central office and therefore have less money spent on them than other schools.”¹²

This passage emphasizes the point that money is not being put in places where it is most needed. It is unproductive to place money in needed areas without plans, because it will simply feed into the vicious cycle of wastefulness unless if it is placed with a purpose. It is also difficult in this case to see where exactly money should or should not be allocated.

Robert Balfanz performed a study on the economic consequences of state public school expenditures in the United States between 1880 and 1940. In his study, he analyzed different aspects of schooling, including attendance rates, teacher-student ratio, and many other factors that play into the success of a school.

“In short, improvements in the infrastructure of elementary schools may have directly and indirectly affected changes in local attitudes towards the value of schooling, the professional autonomy of school teachers, and the availability of organizational tools, including state courses of study, age grading, and daily class schedules. It was these changes, along with more consistent elementary attendance, more habitable classrooms, and an ample supply of free textbooks which increased the cognitive complexity of the schooling elementary students received.”¹³

¹² Roza, Marguerite, & McCormick, M. (2006). Where the money goes: District allocation practices are harming high-poverty school. *School Business Affairs*, <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be34259200ec68bec339b256ace5f8d040ed4913da9502ec03&fmt=H> (accessed September 21 2009), 3.

¹³ Balfanz, Robert. "Where money mattered: organizational and economic consequences of state public school expenditures in the United States: 1880-1940." *Interchange* 28 (1997): 45-69. *Education Full Text*.<<http://>

In these results, Balfanz found that it wasn't necessarily more funding that helped improve the system, as much as it was the rearranging of the infrastructure of the elementary schools. It may take years or even decades to completely re-vamp an education system, but in this case, it seems as though it has been done- and is therefore possible.

Some schools have already begun rearranging the budgeting process. The Oakland Unified School District in California, seems to have changed the way that they fund their school systems.

“During the early 2000s, the district initiated reforms to address disparities in student outcomes and resources between schools located in high-income and low-income neighborhoods by implementing a new system called ‘results-based budgeting.’ ...It has, in conjunction with other reforms, made Oakland Unified the most improved large urban school district in California in the last three years, though its leaders acknowledge it still has a long way to go.”¹⁴

Podesta and Brown cite a case study in which huge improvements were made not just by giving more money, but by reorganizing where the money is going to improve results. Although it would take years to implant a results-based budgeting system, it may be worth it in the long run if it means any improvement in our systems. Other school systems have tried different based budgeting systems.

In 2008, Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools, Steven J Adamowski, implemented a “Student-Based Budgeting” system. This is the idea that funds for each child is calculated solely based on academic level and need. The formula for this system breaks down into the following: (Grade weight + Need weight) x Enrollment = School Budget, with grade weight being the

vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be32e0d50bdea f127129a3fc40304fa1fc2958c3791b2f8512f&fmt=P (accessed October 3 2009), 63.

¹⁴ Podesta, John, and Cynthia G. Brown. "Needed: Federal Action For Fair Funding of High-Poverty Schools." *Education Week* 27.44 (2008): 32+. *Education Full Text*. Web. <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be32ee507af281e9c30942ebe5e3373bde 6e802bae3531c4c2d&fmt=P>> (Accessed September 29 2009), 28.

weights for different grade levels, and need weight being the different programs that a child may need, such as the English Language Learners program or Special Education.¹⁵

“Student-based budgeting addresses the inequity and the lack of flexibility inherent in staffing-based resource allocation. Student-based formulas allocate actual dollars directly to schools on the basis of both the number of students enrolled and weights assigned to various categories of students, such as high-poverty, disabled, gifted, vocational, or bilingual. Matching funding to the specific needs of students provides greater flexibility and equity at the school level.”¹⁶

In this passage, Ucelli et al. clearly believe that the Student Based Budgeting system is effective and accounts for many of the issues within the education system in Hartford. This system is the one that will be studied in this paper.

Although many of the articles state that money is not the only factor in the achievement gap today, it is possible the problem is not how much money is spent, but more of how the money is spent. Jefferson phrases it eloquently:

“Intuitively we say that dollars make a difference. But what has been found is that dollars have the potential to enhance educational opportunities. However, the translation of these opportunities to actual student achievement is less closely linked than one would have assumed. The translation relies more on how available dollars are used than the availability of dollars.”¹⁷

Perhaps we are putting too much emphasis on throwing money around and not enough on where the money is actually being put. It is not enough to simply have heaps of money without using it efficiently and effectively.

¹⁵ Batchelder Elementary School Auditorium, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 9 April 2008, 262.

¹⁶ Ucelli, Marla, Ellen Foley, and Thandi Emdon. First Steps to a Level Playing Field: An Introduction to Student-Based Budgeting (Accessed December 20 2009), 5.

¹⁷ Jefferson, Anne L. "Student Performance: Is More Money the Answer?" *Journal of Education Finance* 31.2 (2005): *Education Full Text*. Web. 21 Sept. 2009. <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be3eba66a5366fcca7ccc430a62c044dcfacce2a0e42edb513d&fnt=H> (Accessed October 2 2009), 122.

Methods

In order to look how budgeting decisions are made at a local level, this study used a qualitative analysis method. It examined the Board of Education meeting minutes on the Hartford Public Schools website¹⁸ from January 2008 until August 2009 from a budget perspective. Meetings were held once a month, with occasional special meetings and workshops. Parents, teachers, students, retirees, and other residents attended the meeting and were allowed to comment during the public hearing sections. The meeting minutes were read and coded into several different sections, which allowed for a more focused look at the debates that came up during the budgeting process. This method was an effective way of seeing exactly what was happening around the time of budget allocation, because it allowed for an evaluation of the dialogue, or lack thereof, at the time.

Thesis

Everyone has an idea of where money should be allocated- and each advocate, whether it be the students, the parents, the teachers, or the retirees, has legitimate reason for wanting more funding; however, budgeting in Hartford, CT is a top-down system that does not systematically incorporate people's ideas, nor is it designed to react to the local realities. It largely neglects the voices of the people who are the most affected by the decisions are; residents feel like they have an expertise that should be utilized in making microdecisions, and rightfully so; however, those microdecisions are not a part of the district's plan at large, and are thusly ignored. This is shown in the lack of communication, job eliminations, other miscellaneous avenues of funding, and the inaccessibility of the budget during the process of determining the allocation of funds.

¹⁸ <http://www.hartfordschools.org/board-of-education/BOE-Meeting-Minutes.php>

Findings

Lack of Communication

Communication is one incredibly valuable tool that can act as a bridge between two or more entities; it is essential in any successful relationship, whether it be romantic, personal, or professional. During Board of Education meetings in Hartford, many parents express their discontent with the lack of communication on both ways of the street. On one hand, some feel that communication is lacking from the parents to the district, because Dr. Adamowski and his staff are not listening. The PTO's Council President, Millie Arciniegas, voices her opinion. "...when parents provide input and take time from work to go to all the meetings, they should be ensure that their input will be taken into consideration...there was no parent input on the principal search for Milner."¹⁹ In this quote, Arciniegas shows her concern for the lack of consideration from the district. Other parents worry that the district does not offer enough time to allow parental input.

"Denise Tillman...stated that the parents' surveys [about report cards] were given at the last minute; some of the surveys were given to parents from the teachers, and they were asked to complete surveys in front of them. She feels that the results are not accurate because parents were put on pressure. She requested that anything that is being asked for parents to complete should be done in a timely manner not at the last minute."²⁰

Tillman clearly feels like the surveys about report cards did not allow the proper assessment from the parents, as they were not given too much pressure and not enough time to adequately answer the questions. Furthermore, Arciniegas supports this idea when she spoke up after Adamowski reported that a large percentage of parents were satisfied with the new report card system. She strongly recommended that Adamowski should look over the reports card surveys

¹⁹ Hartford (CT) Public High School Auditorium, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 19 February, 2008, 226.

²⁰ Hartford (CT) Public High School Auditorium, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 19 February, 2008, 224.

again, because when asked about the ease of understanding, some of the comments that the parents made were about teachers and how they were doing a great job.²¹ Perhaps the district is listening to the wrong information, or just not listening at all. This is clearly lack of communication in another form. If parents are taking the time to write comments and feedback, then the district should take the time to read them carefully and make sure that there was a full understanding of the surveys so that they are not receiving inaccurate information.

The other avenue in which there seems to be lack in communication is from the district to the parents. One parent raised the point about the transportation and zoning changes in 2009 that “most of the parents selected the schools based on transportation eligibility but walking miles have been recently increased...parents should have been asked for input.”²² In this case, it is clear to see that parents were not notified about a major change in transportation, even though their school choice for their children was mainly contingent upon that factor. This change in budgeting seemed to cause much debate between the parents and the administration. The parents are the closest to the children- they should be kept updated and alerted when such a large change is being made, especially since it directly affects them. Without being notified of changes and being listened to, the district is causing the parents to feel a lack of ownership over their own children’s education as well as their daily lifestyles.

Job Eliminations

The elimination of jobs is a hotly debated topic, especially around budgeting time. Some attended to fight for others’ jobs, and others attended to fight for their own job.

²¹ *Ibid*, 226.

²² Sport and Medical Sciences Academy, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 18 August, 2009, 324.

“The educator-in-chief ...arrives with an agenda already in place. He and Mayor Eddie A. Perez, who doubles as school board chairman, warn there will be some pain before a growth in student achievement they are promising takes form.”²³

Superintendent Adamowski and Mayor Perez were not kidding- they certainly had an agenda that caused some pain. A wide variety of employees were in attendance at the end of May: teachers, psychologists, paraprofessionals, secretaries, and maintenance staff. Many of the people who were in attendance had been with the Hartford Public School system for a long time. One representative, Mark Blumenthal, was present to speak for the paraprofessionals, custodians, and food services staff. He asked the Board of Education to reconsider the elimination of these staff, as many of the workers were Hartford residents. ²⁴ This is a great reminder of the fact that every dollar spent is vital because it affects all of the people in the community.

One surprising finding in the minutes about job eliminations was that students actually showed up to fight for jobs that they felt were essential and beneficial for them. From Classical Magnet School, a total of eight students on March 17th, 2009 showed up and each spoke, asking the Board to reconsider the elimination of guidance counselors. One student in particular, told his story of how his guidance counselor had helped him.

“Michael Rush, Classical Magnet Student, stated that thanks to the help of the Guidance Counselor he was accepted to 8 colleges. He read a letter of support for the guidance counselors’ positions that will be eliminated.”²⁵

It is very apparent that students feel that guidance counselors are an essential component to schools- so much that they would attend a Board of Education meeting to advocate for them.

²³ Rachel Gottlieb, and Courant Staff Writer. 2006. Schools Chief Has an Agenda; Adamowski Sees ‘Disparate Initiatives’ In Hartford System: [6 METRO/SPORTS FINAL Edition]. Hartford Courant, November 27, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed December 11, 2009).

²⁴ Hartford (Connecticut) Public High School Library, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 29 May 2008, 307.

²⁵ Theater for Performing Arts- Learning Corridor, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 17 March 2009, 195.

Other students discussed how they felt that the college application process was a difficult one, and how they felt the need for guidance counselors in order to seek help and a push in the right direction.²⁶ Although one would think that eight students fighting for one cause being in attendance was significant, what was even more surprising was Dr. Adamowski's response after all the students had spoken.

“Superintendent Adamowski stated that Classical has the least senior guidance counselor in the entire system. Due to the K-12 Certification in combination with the seniority system for reduction enforce that any reduction in guidance, whether is elementary or secondary will bump out the Classical Guidance.”²⁷

In other words, “that’s just the way it is”, and all is according to a master plan. It is obvious that in budgeting, one must take into account parent and student opinions, the law, as well as what would be best for the school system overall. Everyone has their own idea of how money should be spent, and it would be impossible to please the masses- but perhaps we should be listening to those that are closest to the problem in order to really meet their needs. After all, when it comes to real methods of change within a school system, whose opinion is better to take into consideration than the students themselves, who feel the most impact? It’s not enough to have a high-leveled plan for the people without listening to the people that it is created to serve. It is the district’s job to gather and respect information as a system, from the people within the system—that is the only way to truly look at the problem for what it is, and attack it from the right angle.

Other Miscellaneous Avenues of Funding

It is only natural that when dealing with millions of dollars at hand, many people will have their own opinions of how that money should be spent. One major concern is the money for Special Education.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 195.

²⁷ Theater for Performing Arts- Learning Corridor, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 17 March 2009, 196.

“Lisa Lawson, parent, stated that she is a parent of a special needs child and shared her concerns regarding Special Education for special need children who are presently attending classes with regular students. She expressed her concerns for students with Down syndrome, autisms, with hearing impediment, or a child with ADHD, being place in the same classroom with regular students. The teachers will not have all the tools to teach and accommodate all of the children needs. She stated that she heard about Hartford schools being reform but she has not heard of Special Education being reform which needs to be reform.”²⁸

In this quote, Lawson is explaining that children with special needs are being placed in the same classrooms as regular students- not allowing each student to receive the proper Special Education services needed. Millie Arciniegas was in strong agreement with Lawson, in saying that Special Education was overlooked by the Hartford Board of Education for many years. She also said that the PTO would create a Special Education committee consisting of parents, teachers, social workers, lawyers, and doctors, so that the rights of the special education students were adhered to.²⁹ Special education is clearly an area in which more funding may be necessary.

Another avenue of funding that is debated about is the English Language Learners program. Since Hartford is a very diverse city with many different languages, the ELL program was another program that residents battled for.

“Mr. Rodríguez-Dávila stated that there is not choice in the bilingual program. 60% of the students are Latinos, 30% of them do not speak English. This is a Latino city and therefore special attention is required. Research shows that the best way to teach kids with a native language, it is a bilingual program.”³⁰

In this quote, Rodriguez-Davila, emphasizes that perhaps the best way for kids to learn is to teach them with their native language. Of course, this goes without saying that the district would need to allocate more money towards bilingual teachers. Thus, this is another avenue that money seems to be needed. Rodriguez-Davila, a strong proponent of diversity in students as well as teachers, also argues for the diversity among the teachers as well.

²⁸ Hartford (Connecticut) Public High School Auditorium, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 19 February 2008, 224.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 224.

³⁰ Sport and Medical Sciences Academy, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 18 November 2009, 422.

“Mr. Rodríguez-Dávila asked if there is diversity in the way that the candidates are being selected. Dr. Adamowski stated that there is diversity; Mr. Rodríguez-Dávila asked for the number of candidates that are Hispanic. Dr. Adamowski answered that there are two. Mr. Rodríguez-Dávila stated that diversity is very important and that he has not seen many Hispanic administrators appointed during the past year.”³¹

In response to Rodriguez-Davila, Dr. Adamowski explains that there is a national shortage in principals, and a statewide shortage in Connecticut, thus there are not that many minority principals. Also, it is very difficult to recruit principals from places that have a large Latino population because they would need to be recertified in Connecticut, and the district salaries are not competitive.³² So in order to get more diverse principals, the district would need to increase its’ salaries to make it the job more enticing for candidates.

There are many requests for different additions and improvements in schools, but one of the most interesting ones was from the retirees. Many of them attended the Board of Education meeting on June 16th, 2009. Much of the retirement health costs funding was cut during this time, which resulted in a high insurance premium.³³ This obviously caused uproar from the retirees, who felt disrespected, and that the district was trying to force them to leave the plan.³⁴ This shows one aspect of school funding that people don’t necessarily pay attention to; even those who have left the system want more money and are dissatisfied with their current treatment.

The safety and security of the students in schools is another aspect that has been discussed during the budget meetings. Maria Gomez, parent and PTO Vice President, was concerned with the fact that security officers often “just stand and watch the children fight”, and that in high schools, students will just walk out in front of the security guards without being

³¹ Hartford Public High School Library, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 18 March 2008, 256.

³² *Ibid*, 256.

³³ Sport and Medical Academy, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 16 June 2009, 297.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 297.

stopped. She argues that they should not be let out of school.³⁵ This seems to be a problem that many other parents have been concerned about as well. A month before she spoke up at the Board of Education meeting, Gomez's daughter was found hiding in a bathroom in Bulkeley High School because of a fighting in the school.³⁶ However, Adamowski apparently does not acknowledge the "gang infestation", as many call it, taking place in the schools. In an email sent to school board members and other officials in the end of October, Adamowski stated, "We do not wish to imply that there is no gang activity in the city of Hartford involving students. However, the characterization that gang activity is occurring within schools is inaccurate."³⁷ When a problem arises, rather than ignore the existence of the situation, we should tackle it at its roots. Although it may not be a part of Adamowski and the districts' plan for change, a deviance in microdecisions should be made to address major problems such as safety in schools. Another parent was concerned with the fact that some schools have top of the line safety equipment, while others have broken down safety systems.³⁸ Clearly, stronger security systems would equal more money- money that is not part of the plan, and would take away from the original allotted funds from other categories. This is a problem. The fact that children are hiding in high school bathrooms to hide from the fighting during school, yet the superintendent fails to acknowledge gang activity- is a problem. It shows the inflexibility of the district budgeting, and that the system is not designed to react to problems that arise on a day-to-day basis. The district is stuck

³⁵ Sport and Medical Sciences Academy, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 18 November 2009, 424.

³⁶ Steven Goode, Jeffrey B Cohen, and sgoode@courantcom. 2009. Gang Problems Acknowledged: City Changes Tack. Hartford Courant, October 22, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed December 11, 2009).

³⁷ Steven Goode, Jeffrey B Cohen, and sgoode@courantcom. 2009. Superintendent: Reports are Inaccurate :Gangs in School. Hartford Courant, October 20, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed December 11, 2009).

³⁸ Hartford (Connecticut) Public High School Auditorium, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 19 February 2008, 224.

on a high-leveled plan and doesn't want to divert from the original plan to cater to what the realities of what children have to face in school.

Inaccessibility

One major problem with Hartford Public School budgets aside from the lack of listening on the districts' part is that they are largely inaccessible. I experienced this firsthand when I first attempted to statistically analyze the budgets from 1950 to the present. When I began hunting down Hartford's budget records, I was surprised to find that the main administrative offices had no knowledge of where the past budgets were to be found. I received an email from a "financial guru", that said, "I think I have 10-11 yrs but not since the 60's. Not even sure who would have this."³⁹ So I went to the State to see if I could find anything. I was put in touch with the Chief Financial Officer of the Connecticut State Department of Education.

"At the Connecticut State Department of Education we do not collect budget information from the school districts. The budgets represent a spending plan for a coming fiscal year. We collect actual expenditures after the close of the fiscal year. The expenditures are collected on the End of Year School Report (ED001). If you think you might be interested in expenditure information you can visit the following web site that provides you with a blank ED001 and provides you with the array of expenditure information available. I can tell you that depending on what you are looking for, at best we might have 15 to 20 years of data available."⁴⁰

There is something incredibly unsettling about the idea of millions of dollars being spent on a single system without a bookkeeper of the budget's history. Or, there is a possibility that the records are being kept, but are then sent off or discarded. How is it that even the chief financial officers of both the city and the state do not know where the records of the millions being spent on our education system? Presently, parents seem to have the same problem; some don't even have access to the information after the money has already been budgeted.

"Sam Sailor, parent stated that the budget book was not available. Many parents had not had the opportunity to see and understand the budget. For the first time, there is not adequate city representation. He would like that people have the opportunity to see the book and to discuss and

³⁹ Board of Education Chief Financial Officer, personal email, 21 September 2009.

⁴⁰ Connecticut State Department of Education Chief Financial Officer, personal email, 8 October 2009.

compare with previous budget presentations. He stated that he was exposed to the budget due to his participation in the student-based budget committee and he is interested to see how that fits into the present year budget.”⁴¹

It’s the classic argument that everyone makes. It is the right of the taxpayer to see exactly where his or her hard earned money is going. It is the right of the parent to see if their money is being used effectively in schools. Sailor was persistent in his search for the numbers, because seven months later, on November 18th, 2008, the budget still was not accessible to him, so he once again asked for the budget to be made available.

It is the job of the historian to seek out other avenues to find the data, research it, and create awareness so that history does not repeat itself. Interestingly, when I finally found the dusty, untouched books, my research seemed even more impossible as the format of the records changed approximately every ten years. Between the ‘50s and ‘70s, the district broke down the budgets very simply- by elementary, middle, and high schools; between the ‘70s and ‘80s, the budgets of the three types of schools were put into one big budget. Then, after 1995, the budget was broken down by every school in the city. What’s more, data for the ‘80s was completely missing. Without consistency in record keeping, it is infeasible to try to change or even improve the time in which Hartford went awry in its allocation of funds. Inaccessibility may pose the problem of a lack of accountability. Only with the help of parents and historians, and collaboration with the district, can we even begin to point out the root of the problem and try to solve it. Although it is impossible to change what has already been done in the past, there should be a more aggressive effort to keep the records consistent from now on.

⁴¹ Hartford (Connecticut) Public High School Library, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Education, Meeting of 23 April 2008, 292.

Conclusion

The system is not designed to react to the daily problems that may arise. This is shown in the lack of communication, job eliminations, other miscellaneous avenues of funding, and the inaccessibility of the budget during the process of determining the allocation of funds. Each individual wants to protect the things that they are most affected by- everyone has an opinion on how money should be spent; however, that's not how it works. Budgeting is a top-down process through which, although everyone's need is legitimate, it seems to be based on the politics of funding rather than the real debates about things that are actually happening around the city. It doesn't take into account the local realities; the voices of the people who are the most affected by the decisions are, for the most part, neglected. Residents feel like they have an expertise that should be utilized in making microdecisions, and rightfully so; however, those microdecisions are not a part of the district's plan at large, and are thusly ignored. The district and the superintendent may have incredibly elaborate plans, but they need to have a system to gather and respect the information as a system; no concrete formula will solve all of the Hartford's educational problems. It is important to embrace Hartford for the city that is, take into account local realities, and listen to the voices that experience firsthand the problems that exist; after all, there is no way to improve on a system if the ones that are the most affected by the problem are ignored.