



# Steps

## TO HELP SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS INVEST IN THEIR PRIORITIES

Schools face volatility from external pressures that aren't always predictable. For example, the elimination of COVID-era ESSER Funds has many districts facing a revenue cliff. Student service needs are expanding as we better understand the need for mental health and academic interventions; policy changes at the state and federal level happen rapidly and with short implementation windows; and more states are capping property taxes, expanding vouchers, and expanding educational spending accounts [ESAs]. This is a time for finance and budget professionals to ask questions and lead conversations for change.

Although this Top 10 is in the language of schools and education, there are lessons here for any form of government.

**1 Analyze staffing needs.** Look at fully-costed personnel FTEs (full-time equivalents) not just by school site, but also by program, including where employees' time and efforts are being utilized.

**2 Develop good methodologies on student project numbers and the types of students [diversity of needs, ESL, other].**

Districts that combine public delivery options (traditional and charter), along with expansion of vouchers and ESAs (which move dollars out of the public sphere into private institutions), make student yield rates localized and complicated.

**3 Develop multiple revenue assumption scenarios analyzed over five to ten years through a long-term financial plan.**

Many states and jurisdictions have property tax caps that require voter referendums, and voter referendums take time and planning. Federal funding formulas and programs are also in flux.

**4 Know the costs involved in providing a program (such as labor, facility, and materials) and how many students the program serves.** Knowing the cost is good, but knowing how many students for what dosage (hours per day/week/month) is optimal.

**5 Evaluate your investment in achieving outcomes and the incremental return on the investment.** This can provide insights into focusing or moving resources to places and programs that are yielding strong returns.

**6 Evaluate and prioritize expenditures.** Districts can only make the case for moving resources if they understand where resources are being spent and harness the ability to measure the incremental return.

**7 Determine whether it's a priority.** If it isn't, why are you doing it?

**8 Identify resources to pay for instructional priorities and weigh trade-offs.** In a resource-constrained environment, deciding what a district is going to stop doing is often the first step to freeing up and identifying resources.

**9 Respect the rules, but overcome constraints.** Look into the ways resources can be moved and allocated to simultaneously follow the law and satisfy needs in schools and classrooms.

**10 Evaluate.** There is a powerful vulnerability in asking the questions "did we do the right thing?" and "did our decisions work?" Those answers give you the opportunity to learn and change.