

10 LESSONS TO REMEMBER

Putting Strategic Budgeting into Action

Originally published in the *District Management Journal*, v.32, Winter 2023

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Putting Strategic Budgeting into Action

Putting strategic budgeting into action is achievable. By keeping these ten lessons in mind, you can evolve your current practices to leverage this powerful approach to allocating resources effectively and efficiently for maximum impact.

1 Ground yourself in your strategy.

Your district's strategy should be your north star. Keep your strategic priorities front and center, and be sure to articulate these priorities and discuss them to ensure that your stakeholders are aligned and focused. Don't assume everyone is on the same page.

2 Change can't happen without change.

While nearly every public school district in the country has a strategic plan that is revisited and reworked regularly, new strategic plans are rarely accompanied by a significant shift in resource allocation or an update to budgeting processes. Declaring a new strategic plan is unlikely to deliver different results without a concomitant shift in how resources are allocated.

3 Engage key stakeholders to build buy-in.

Allowing stakeholders to learn about the strategic budgeting process and see data being used to determine what works best, for which students, and at what cost helps elevate budgeting discussions and reduce defaulting to gut instinct or the loudest voice in the room.

4 Keep the focus on students.

Staff and stakeholders may feel skeptical and alienated at the mere mention of strategic budgeting and A-ROI, assuming it is all about the bottom line. Focus on how this effort will positively impact students by ensuring resources are directed to those programs that are proven to work best for students.

Emphasize cross-department collaboration.

In many districts, the budget process promotes territorial behavior: departments feel they are battling each other for resources, and superintendents and budget officials are in the difficult position of being the arbiters. Having district leaders work as a team focused on district-level goals facilitates tradeoffs and helps achieve district objectives.

Identify strategic budgeting champions.

Some school and district leaders will take more naturally to this work than others, either because their skillsets are well-suited to it or because they believe in its potential. Recruiting these individuals to your implementation team will result in a more effective implementation and will help to generate more supporters.

Create short-term wins.

Embracing a new system is much easier when staff can see that it works—everyone likes to be on the winning team! Identifying a few programs that are strong targets for A-ROI analysis and demonstrating how nuanced options for taking action can yield better results for students will ensure that strategic budgeting remains a positive force within your district.

There are more options than Keep or Cut.

Far too often, districts are forced during budget season into the false choice of deciding whether to keep or cut initiatives. Analyses using A-ROI create a deeper, more insightful understanding of the efficacy and costs of programs and thereby lead to more nuanced options, such as modifying, expanding, or segmenting programs, which end up being the better choice for students.

Budgeting strategically means multi-year planning.

Just as district strategic plans are multi-year, strategic budgeting requires developing a multi-year budget to support the long-term strategic plan. Particularly given the large influx of federal funds, districts need to obligate the funds in support of long-term objectives.

Remember that strategic budgeting is a process.

Taking a strategic budgeting approach district-wide will take time. For this reason, DMGroup has developed a process for evolving to a strategic budgeting approach that helps districts build capacity, experience the power of A-ROI, and build momentum; then DMGroup has supports for expanding the effort and building greater capacity across the district.