



New  
American  
Schools

# District Issues Brief

---

## Freeing School Resources for Learning: The “Missing Piece” in Making Accountability Meaningful

---

By Karen Hawley Miles

---



## District Services

New American Schools partners with school districts and states to provide support and assistance in the implementation of comprehensive school reform designs throughout an entire school system. New American Schools also recognizes that for comprehensive school reform to make a significant difference in public education, it must be widely implemented within systems.

New American Schools has put together a team of experienced educators and leading experts to create a District Services division with staff who serve as consultants to school districts in the areas that are critical to successful implementation of a comprehensive school reform design:

- Leading and managing a focused, comprehensive and coordinated plan for improvement at all levels;
- Identifying and reallocating resources to support the implementation of comprehensive school improvement strategies;
- Enhancing and aligning professional development systems to help build teacher capacity

through design-based assistance and comprehensive school reform;

- Developing parents and the community to build broad-based support and long-term commitment to a continuous improvement process.
- New American Schools is partnering with a number of school districts implementing and interested in implementing comprehensive school reform designs.

For more information contact:

District Services  
New American Schools  
1560 Wilson Boulevard  
Suite 901  
Arlington, Virginia 22209  
(703) 908-9500  
fax: (703) 908-0622  
e-mail: [info@nasdc.org](mailto:info@nasdc.org)  
[www.newamericanschools.org](http://www.newamericanschools.org)

---

# Freeing School Resources for Learning: The “Missing Piece” in Making Accountability Meaningful

---

Nationwide, districts and states seek to place more accountability for student performance with principals and teachers at the school level. Management experts agree and research shows that effective accountability systems have four characteristics.<sup>1</sup> They are

- Performance goals are inspiring, clear, and understandable.
- Teachers believe that their own effective teaching can help to reach them.
- Schools and teachers can change what they are doing if they need to meet these goals.
- Incentives for meeting the goals exist, and consequences follow when expectations are not met.

Districts have begun to improve their definition and measurement of instructional and student performance goals and to link them more closely to incentives. Some are providing schools with the kind of support New American Schools designs offer, including professional development, curriculum, and instructional strategies for improving performance.

But, in many districts, schools have limited ability to change their use of resources to meet higher standards-making school control of resources an important “missing piece” in creating meaningful accountability. Without this control, it is difficult for schools to sustain new strategies, and hard to argue that schools and teachers can ultimately be held accountable for results.

For the past five years, New American Schools has been working intensively with districts that are implementing comprehensive school reform designs in a majority of their schools. This brief describes the kinds of changes schools find they want to make in the use and organization of resources, the typical barriers they confront in doing so, and how districts are responding to give schools the control they need.

We have found that schools implementing comprehensive school designs find they need more control of both the *who* and the *how* of resources. To create effective teams, schools need to be able to control more fully who works in their schools along with the specifics of which staff do what, how time is used, and what other non-personnel dollars purchase.

## Who Works in Schools: Getting and Keeping the Right Team

When schools begin to create more unique organizations to match their improvement strategies and take advantage of the skills and interests of their staff, teachers, and other support staff are no longer “interchangeable parts.” Individual teachers bring different interests and strengths to a team that make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. A strong teacher leader can energize an entire school. And losing a key teacher can destroy precious momentum and waste resources invested in team building and professional development specific to a particular strategy.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a single teacher who refuses to implement a school’s chosen instructional strategy can drain energy and limit progress. Along with more control over existing staff, schools need to be able to hire new teachers who bring the needed skills, attitude, and commitment to implement a school’s approach.

Reformers often label hiring flexibility as a “union” issue. But we have found that district management and organizational problems interact with contractual provisions to frustrate school autonomy. For example:

- Inaccurate projections of the numbers of students that will enroll in schools can combine with contractually defined transfer rules and poorly planned budgets to drive frantic last minute staffing changes in the fall. Switching teachers from schools, grades, and even subjects to accommodate new students disrupts teacher teams that have trained, planned, and worked together to know their students and improve instruction.
- Principal reluctance to give poor evaluations to under-performing teachers provides another



example of how poor management practice combines with the contract to limit school control. When principals urge under-performers to transfer schools instead of giving them “unsatisfactory” ratings, they dilute the quality of the pool of unassigned teachers seeking transfers. This means that too often “senior” translates as ‘unwanted,’ rather than ‘wise.’

- Confusing and delayed timelines can combine with contractually specified deadlines to make it difficult for schools to know when they can commit to hiring promising recruits or excellent junior teachers.

Districts that want to support schools in creating powerful, cohesive teams and in finding teachers that match their needs *will address contractual and management issues at the same time.*

On the management side, four closely related areas need to be addressed. They are:

- Incentives for those working with schools;
- Organization of district support;
- Communication between the district and school regarding staffing, hiring, and use of resources; and
- Timelines for budgeting, planning, and hiring.

The table below provides a framework for thinking about the kinds of changes districts might make to better support school efforts to create high-quality and cohesive teams and use resources in a way that best supports school needs.

District Management Changes Required to Support School Autonomy		
Area	From “Less of”...	To “More of”...
Incentives	District managers encouraged to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Enforce compliance with procedures and regulations</li> <li>■ Minimize potential risk of conflict with union or regulators</li> </ul>	District managers rewarded based on how well they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support schools in meeting new challenges</li> <li>■ Work together to find ways to say “yes”</li> </ul>
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Independent managers unaware of individual school goals</li> <li>■ Anyone can say no</li> <li>■ No options for individual schools to vary from procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Concerted effort to support individual school goals and needs</li> <li>■ “No” is last resort</li> <li>■ Group that helps to problem solve for individual situations</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rigid or vague district response to requests for flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Problem solving approach to existing barriers to flexibility</li> </ul>
Timelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Confusing, uncoordinated, unstated</li> <li>■ Often missed due to need to place senior staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Clear descriptions</li> <li>■ Integrated timelines and review process</li> </ul>



---

In many districts, the central office *incentives* and structure foster a culture of compliance and cost savings rather than school support. Too often, district manager roles relate indirectly, if at all, to improving instruction or supporting schools. Some examples follow below.

- Departments, like Title I, special education, and bilingual came into existence to ensure compliance with legal requirements and the regulations surrounding new funding streams.
- Weary from legal challenges and last minute staffing scrambles, human resources departments can find themselves working more to make sure the rules and procedures have been followed than to help schools find the best person for their needs.
- In some districts, the legal department, whose goal is to minimize conflict, often gets the last word on changes in the use of staff.
- Similarly, the budget department often acts as gatekeeper on innovative uses of staff and budget. Since the budget department typically is charged with balancing the budget and ensuring regulatory compliance, it may have little incentive or interest in working toward novel solutions.
- The purchasing department may be measured by the size of the volume discounts it obtains, rather than by how well it meets individual school needs.

District managers need to learn how to meet individual school needs *and* fulfill other organizational priorities at the same time. They also need to be clear when the rules and regulations inescapably conflict with what is best for children, and to be willing to document and work to change these situations. Once a district manager shifts his or her orientation to provide service to schools, opportunities may exist for adjusting standard practice.

In each of the above cases, those with the power to deny a school's request have a different incentive than to help schools. To help link central office incentives more with improving instruction in schools, districts are creating new measures of department performance. As in Edmonton, Canada, and Seattle, Washington, these measures can include results from "customer" surveys. Decentralizing district services and allowing a school system to choose whether to use district services can be a more direct way of ensuring that these services support schools.

Creating *integrated organizations* where managers from different departments work together in teams to support school goals is a critical part of freeing schools from unproductive constraints. Often, it takes creative problem solving across departments to meet regulations and requirements while still supporting the school. A number of districts working with New American Schools have created teams that combine people across functions to help schools transform. In addition to helping schools with their immediate needs, these cross-functional teams help district leaders more clearly understand when district practices need to change.

For example, Cincinnati created a joint union-management problem-solving team to support its newly created "team-based" schools. The management team met biweekly with all of the principals and the teacher leaders to discuss common issues and problems. In September of 1998, a shortfall in the number of students enrolled versus projections threatened to disrupt teaching teams because district staffing rules required the transfer of important teacher leaders to schools with more students. But, in order to support the creation of stable teaching teams, the management team agreed to spend reserve dollars to allow teaching teams to remain intact. To avoid a similar problem the next year, the district increased school-level flexibility in using resources so that schools would have more stake in accurately projecting enrollment and would be able to make their own trade-offs to keep teaching teams together should enrollment projections miss.

Districts also are dismantling departments like Title I, bilingual, and special education to create cross-functional support teams that work more closely with schools. For example, Atlanta, a New American Schools partner district, has created "School Reform Teams" composed of experts in subject and program areas who formerly worked for district departments. These experts now work together to support a small number of schools in analyzing student performance and implementing changes to improve it. Similarly, Albuquerque Public Schools eliminated its Title I department and moved those resources to either the schools or school support teams.

As districts address management and process issues, they also will need to be clear about those union contract provisions that do not support schools in creating and keeping cohesive, high-quality teaching



---

teams. This means looking closely at the contract rules and regulations surrounding teacher hiring and evaluation. In order to support quality schools, teaching contracts must balance seniority protection with school needs to maintain consistent teams, and hire individuals who fit the needs in attitude and skill mix. Many teacher contracts require schools to select new staff from a short list of the most senior candidates, regardless of a teacher's specific qualifications. For example, a teacher might qualify technically for a position if he/she held certification in the subject even though he/she actually may not have taught the subject or be familiar with the school's instructional methods and design. Most teacher contracts make it difficult to remove a senior teacher who is not participating in the school improvement effort or who disrupts the teacher team. In some cases, senior teachers may "bump" a junior teacher out of a school in his/her first three years regardless of a school's choice.<sup>3,4</sup>

Job guarantees can make it prohibitively expensive for school districts to give schools complete flexibility in hiring and staffing. Most contracts grant tenure to teachers after three to five years of teaching experience. Once a teacher receives tenure, most districts guarantee employment indefinitely unless there are no openings for which the teacher is technically qualified or the teacher receives consistent unsatisfactory ratings. This makes it difficult for a school that wants to trade a satisfactory or mediocre teacher for an excellent one. Even if the school were able to persuade the mediocre teacher to leave, the district still would be obligated to employ the teacher.

While providing job security can limit school-level flexibility, a district's ability to offer it should be a source of competitive advantage in recruitment compared to independent schools. Districts working to raise the overall level of teaching quality and help schools create coherent teams are working on three kinds of solutions.

First, they are looking to revise teacher evaluation, compensation, and career progression so that only highly proficient teachers receive job security. Second, they are making changes to the union contract that give site-based teams authority to balance seniority with commitment, specific job proficiency, and fit. For example, in Memphis, when school designs were implemented initially, the union contract stated that after six months either the teacher or principal could request a transfer if the teacher chose not to commit to the school's design. In Cincinnati, school-based teacher teams select new hires from a list of candidates, without regard to seniority. If they do not find a teacher who meets their needs, they may continue to interview teachers. At the same time, districts are adding clauses that limit how long a teacher is guaranteed employment without finding a placement. Third, these districts are developing more sophisticated systems for matching teachers to open positions based on qualifications, interests, and school design or philosophy.



---

## How Resources are Used: Freedom to Reorganize Staff Time and Dollars

In addition to giving schools more control over *who* teaches, schools need more freedom to organize staff, time, and dollars to support their improvement strategies. We have documented the kinds of changes in the use of resources that schools implementing comprehensive school reform designs and new instructional strategies are making. These are detailed in another “District Issues Brief” that focuses on rethinking school-level resources.<sup>5</sup> Schools implementing new designs and instructional strategies are making six kinds of changes in the use of time and staff. They are changing:

1. The use of time and the length of the school day;
2. The structure of the teacher work day to create more time for teachers to plan and participate in professional development together;
3. The use of teachers from special programs like special education, bilingual, and Title I in order to create smaller groups for academic subjects and provide more individual attention when needed;
4. Class sizes in student groupings throughout the day and year to create small group sizes where it matters and focus more resources on academics;
5. Job definitions for both teachers and support professionals like librarians and guidance counselors; and
6. The use of part-time staff and outside contractors to maximize resources in academic subjects and bring other skills into the school.

District practices, contract provisions, the interpretation of court orders and other regulations combine to frustrate schools in implementing many of these strategies in most districts. Examples follow.<sup>6</sup>

- Using teaching staff from bilingual, special education, and Title I programs to support an integrated reading strategy can be educationally superior and can be structured in ways that comply with funding regulations. But schools need support negotiating the complex requirements surrounding the use of these staff.
- Teacher contracts that strictly define the starting and ending times of the teacher work day and the scheduling of periods over the day can limit the reorganization of time to better support teacher and student needs.
- District policies and contractual provisions can make it difficult for schools to hire part-time staff or contract with outside providers.



---

## Steps to Creating more School Autonomy

As a start to untangling these complicated barriers to school autonomy districts need to:

1. understand and document the current status of school control of resources and the barriers to it;
2. move toward allocating dollars, not staff positions; and
3. create accountability for effective use of resources.

### 1) Understanding who controls which resources

There are two pieces to understanding who controls district and school resources. The first traces all of the dollars spent, to determine who controls what is purchased. The second step unravels the barriers to schools changing how they use the resources they appear to “control.”

In an audit of its 10 member districts, the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform finds that the percent of the budget allocated to the school site varies from a low of 46 percent in Baltimore to a high of 80 percent in Philadelphia. Allan Odden and Carolyn Busch, in their book, *Financing Schools for High Performance*<sup>7</sup> provide a framework for thinking about each central office function and who should control them. We have created an adapted version of this framework for districts to use as they track their own spending for each function to see how much is controlled at the district level. This tool can be found in Appendix 1.

Understanding how much budget flexibility schools have requires going deeper to consider the procedures and practices surrounding resource allocation and use. The table on the following page provides a framework for thinking about how much flexibility currently exists. Management teams have used this framework to assess their current level of flexibility and to gauge how much they actually know about whether schools have flexibility. District leaders often are surprised to find they do not share the same views of how much control schools have. They also learn how their departments unwittingly combine to limit school options. When school leaders are included with district leaders in the assessment, they frequently are taken aback to find that district leaders believe they have more control over resources than

they actually experience.

Though districts may think that schools have budget control, their actual flexibility often is often defined so narrowly that schools have few options. Over 85 percent of a school budget pays for staff. Even in districts that have implemented versions of “school based budgeting,” schools often have limited ability to make changes in staff. Instead, a district might give schools “control” over their substitute dollars, instructional supplies, and equipment. Worse, the purported “control” frequently comes with specified governance structures or approval processes that drain valuable group time and energy debating marginal changes having little to do with instruction. This is why so many reformers argue that districts need to move to more complete solutions, such as student-based budgeting, described in the next section.

To help district leaders get beyond superficial or cosmetic changes in flexibility, we have created a second assessment tool that asks questions about each budget line item that are designed to uncover whether schools have real flexibility in their use. For example, we ask whether schools may convert staff positions to dollars, or keep unused funds. This tool can be found in Appendix 2.

### 2) Moving toward allocating dollars not staff positions

As schools begin to change the way they use staff to support their unique designs, districts will find they need to move toward giving schools dollars based on the number of students in their school instead of allocating specific staff positions. This change is important for management and equity reasons. Logistically, as more schools want to change the way they use staff, it becomes confusing to keep track of all the trading in and converting of staff. Trying to free up only certain funds for flexible solutions can create further complication and raises troubling equity issues. For example, one district decided to allow schools to trade their Assistant Principal position for dollars. The newly-available \$70,000 created exciting possibilities for some schools. But the district only allocated assistant principal positions to schools with 400 or more students. Suddenly, the inequity in resources between schools with 375 students and no assistant principal and the schools at the trigger threshold of 400 became abundantly clear.



<b>How Much School Autonomy?</b>		
	<b>Attributes of a Traditional System</b>	<b>Attributes of a School-Focused District</b>
<b>Teacher Time</b>	The teacher work-day and calendar are tightly specified by contract and district policy.	Schools have the opportunity to restructure teacher time over the day, week, and year to support its design.
<b>Instructional Time</b>	There is a standard student schedule for all schools in the district.	Schools have the opportunity to organize the student schedule to support the design and focus on academic needs.
<b>Organization</b>	District provides schools with different types of staff according to a district-wide formula. Schools use staff as assigned.	Schools can specify roles and responsibilities for each staff position. Schools also can shift dollars from staff to other expenses, such as professional development or materials (and vice versa).
<b>Hiring</b>	Personnel decisions are made according to the union contract and the district.	Schools have substantial power to define positions, hire, and use staff to support their instructional design. Union contracts and personnel practices support this arrangement.
<b>Professional Development Spending</b>	District controls spending and provides most of professional development.	Districts require base level of spending on professional development. Schools control a significant portion of professional development funds and target to support their instructional strategies and design needs.
<b>Special Program Spending</b>	Dollars from special programs and grants (such as Title I, Eisenhower) are allocated by district, each subject to separate rules and regulations.	Dollars from special programs can be combined at school level to support school redesign and transformation. District encourages and supports schools in doing this.
<b>Technology</b>	District has responsibility for developing both the technology infrastructure and each site's technology system.	District creates system-wide technology infrastructure, and each school site has the flexibility and resources to create a technology program that supports its New American Schools design.
<b>Instructional Material</b>	District has an approved textbook list; these resources cannot be applied toward school designs or other texts.	Schools are able to purchase appropriate materials that support implementation of a school design.
<b>Other Non-staff Spending</b>	Non-staff dollars allocated by functions specified by central.	Schools may allocate these dollars across functions to best support their instructional design.

Source: *New American Schools: Comprehensive School Reform Readiness Assessment Tools*



---

Edmonton Public Schools, Canada, has allocated dollars to schools rather than staff since the 1980s. They use a weighted formula that increases the per-pupil amount based on student needs such as special education, bilingual, or poverty. Seattle Public Schools moved to a similar system in 1996. Cincinnati Public Schools moved to “student-based budgeting” in a portion of its schools in 1999 and rolled it out to all schools by the end of 2001. Allocating dollars rather than staff positions only addresses “how much” schools get, not whether schools have the flexibility to change how they use resources. Nevertheless, it establishes the infrastructure needed to facilitate flexibility and, at the same time, ensure the equitable distribution of resources.

### 3) Creating Accountability and Support

Giving schools more autonomy does not guarantee improved achievement automatically. Without incentives to improve school performance and an understanding of alternative possibilities for organizing resources, increasing school-level control over resources usually results in limited change.<sup>8</sup> Worse, the first changes schools make in the use of resources can have very little to do with improving achievement and more to do with adult needs. For example, in one district implementing school-based budgeting, the first major change many schools made was to convert teaching positions to instructional aides. This strategy improved the quality of life for teachers. But research suggests that the use of instructional aides does not typically support improved achievement.<sup>9</sup>

Cincinnati and Boston Public Schools have organized training and support to schools to help them avoid these kinds of mistakes. These districts introduced school leaders to new possibilities for reorganization and helped schools develop their budgets and create new schedules and organization structures. They used one-on-one school planning review sessions as well as in scheduled group sessions where principals and instructional leaders discussed their concerns with district leaders. In Cincinnati, schools also are

required to select a comprehensive school reform design. Design teams from Success For All, Co-nect, America’s Choice and Expeditionary Learning also helped to integrate school-level resources around a coherent school-wide plan.<sup>10</sup>

As they move to create flexibility in the use of resources, districts still will need to ensure that schools meet legal and funding requirements. For example, the district may encourage schools to combine staffing resources from special programs such as bilingual, special education, and Title I to create more integrated, individualized instruction for every student. In order to support more comprehensive programs and still ensure that schools meet the specific needs of special education students, the district needs to create its own integrated accountability system. Margaret Coleman, the former finance director in Memphis, Tennessee, met individually with each principal to review allocation of resources for alignment with the school’s comprehensive improvement plans. Now in Atlanta, Coleman continues to conduct individual reviews supported by “School Reform Teams” composed of support staff across functions.

Finally, schools will need proactive district action and guidance to make many of the more significant changes in resources and organization. In some cases, dramatic improvement in achievement will require schools to make difficult or large-scale personnel changes. Gradual changes in staff due to attrition may not help a school implement new strategies quickly enough to see results and improvements. A school may need to change the mix of teaching staff to hire more academic teachers and fewer non-academic teachers and support staff. Or the school may decide to eliminate instructional aides and invest the dollars in professional development or certified reading instructors instead.<sup>11</sup> On its own, a school cannot change dramatically the composition of its staff. And it is extremely unlikely that a group of teachers will recommend changes that result in lost jobs without district directives and support.



---

## Freeing Resources for Learning

As long as district practices combine with union contracts to frustrate school-level efforts to create high-quality, stable, and cost-effective teaching organizations, districts will find it hard to insist that schools shoulder the accountability for improving instruction. At the same time, the examples in this brief show that freeing resources is not a simple process. To create the kind of flexibility that has improved instruction at its heart, districts and schools need to:

- help schools see new possibilities for organizing improved instruction and, engage partners to support them where appropriate;
- find ways to give schools more control over both *who* works in the building and *how* they work;
- systematically analyze who controls which resources and the barriers to more flexible use;

- address contractual and management barriers to school-level flexibility at the same time;
- create cross-functional working groups that solve problems for schools as they arise;
- move toward allocating dollars, not staff positions; and
- create accountability and support for planned, integrated organization and use of resources based on research.

By itself, autonomy in the use of resources is no guarantee of improvement. But along with standards, commitment, high-quality teaching, and incentives, the power to organize and use resources to create responsive, coherent school organizations makes accountability for improvement possible.



## Appendix 1

Where are Resources Controlled?		
Traditional District Functions	\$ Controlled by District	\$ at School Site
<i>Mandatory Core District Functions</i>		
1. Building Construction		●
2. Technology Infrastructure, cap ex.		●
3. Capital Financing		●
4. Board of Education		●
5. Office of the Superintendent		●
6. Information Services		●
7. Accountability System		●
8. Monitoring of Special Education		●
9. Monitoring of Categorical Programs		●
<i>Optional Programs That May Stay at District Level:</i>		
1. Transportation to and from School		
2. Food Services		
3. Legal Services		
4. Insurance and Workers Compensation		
5. District-wide Education Initiatives		
6. Federal Program Services Not School-Based		
7. Business Support Services: Financial, Accounting, Payroll		
8. Business Support Services: Personnel Records and Administration		
9. Business Support Services: Purchasing, Invoicing, Auditing		
10. Instructional Administration of Categorical Programs (not implementation)		
11. Services for the Severely Disabled		
12. Community Services		
13. Instructional Support for Curriculum Development and Supervision		
14. Instructional Support for Professional Development for Teachers		
15. Instructional Support for Technological Media		
16. Major Facilities Renovation		
17. Minor Facilities Renovation		



## Where are Resources Controlled?

<b>Traditional District Functions</b>	<b>\$ Controlled by District</b>	<b>\$ at School Site</b>
<i>Optional Functions Probably to Put at School Level</i>		
1. Itinerant Subject Specialist Staff (art, music, physical education)		
2. Substitute Teachers		
3. Pupil Support Services: Counseling, Psychologists, Social Workers, Attendance, Security		
4. Pupil Support Services: Health Services, Nurses		
4. School Operations Costs		
5. School Maintenance Costs		
6. Extra Curricular Activities and Sports		

<b>School Site Functions</b>	<b>\$ Controlled by District</b>	<b>\$ at School Site</b>
1. School Administration		
2. Regular Instruction		
3. Categorical Program Teaching		
4. Instructional Aides from all Funds		
5. Curriculum Development and Supervision		
6. Teacher Evaluation and Supervision		
7. Instructional Materials		
8. Professional Development		
9. Technology		
10. Guidance Counselors, Social Workers, and Psychologists		
11. Clerical and other Administrative Staff		
12. Staff Travel and Professional Development		
13. Transportation for School Activities		
14. School Improvement Planning and Implementation		



## Appendix 2

### Test Questions on School Flexibility

**Directions:** Consider each of the following line items which are typical of school budgets. For those that exist in your district, mark whether they are controlled by the school, district, union contract, courts, or state regulations or practices. In your answers, pay attention to the test questions listed for each overall category of expenses and selected line items. If there are other important line items that appear on your budgets, please add them in the blank sections.

#### Non-Personnel Allocation

- Can school convert money or dollars to staff?
- If school doesn't use all of its money, can it keep the surplus?

Typical Budget Line Item	Where Controlled?					Test Questions
	School	District	Contract	State	Courts	
Per Diem Substitutes						
Overtime and Stipend						Are there separate line items for different types of staff or teachers (e.g. bilingual, special ed)?
Instructional Supply/Equipment						Are there mandated texts and supplies schools must purchase with budget?
Non-Instructional Supplies						
Computer Equipment and Software						
Media Services						Is there a central department from which schools must purchase services?
Staff Development						



## Non-Teaching Positions

- Can a school elect to convert assigned positions to other staff?
- Can a school convert assigned position to dollars?

Typical Budget Line Item	Where Controlled?					Test Questions
	School	District	Contract	State	Courts	
Principal						
Assistant Principal						
Guidance Counselors						
Nurse						
Psychologist						
Social Worker or Community Liaison						
Secretary/Clerk						
Special Education Coordinators/Clerical						
Security						
Custodian						
Cafeteria Staff						
Lunch Monitors						
Librarian						
Library Aides						
Special Education Aide						Can these aides also serve students who do not fit program classification?
Bilingual Aide						Can these aides also serve students who do not fit program classification?



## Teaching Positions

- Can a school convert staff to dollars?
- Can a school use staff positions in different ways?
- If a school eliminates a position, must it wait until the teacher has found a new position to use the resources?
- Can a school define a completely new position with different job qualifications and responsibilities?

Typical Budget Line Item	Where Controlled?					Test Questions
	School	District	Contract	State	Courts	
Regular Education Classroom Teachers						
Subject Specialists: e.g. Physical Education, Art, Music, etc.						
“Intervention” resource teachers for under-performing students						
Secondary Subject Area Teachers						
Title I						Do these resources come to schools as staff positions or dollars? Are all of the Title I resources a school receives reflected on the school site budget?
Bilingual						
Gifted						
Speech Pathologist						
Special Education						
Vocational Education						
Athletic Coaches						



---

## Endnotes

1. Abelmann, Charles, Elmore, Dick. "When Accountability Knocks, Will Anybody Answer?" Consortium for Policy Research in Education Research Report Series, RR-42. University of Pennsylvania: 1999.
2. New American Schools evaluation studies point to loss of key staff as a critical reason for failure to sustain new designs. See Bodilly, Susan, J. *Lessons From New American Schools' Scale-Up Phase*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND , 1998. Michael Fullan describes the importance of staff stability and cohesion in *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).
3. See Dale Ballou article for a detailed description of these issues in New York City [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net) and "Getting and Keeping the Right Team," Issue Paper #1, Boston Plan for Excellence, 2000, [www.bpe.org](http://www.bpe.org).
4. STAR results reported in "The Tennessee Study of Class Size in the Early School Grades," *Critical Issues for Children and Youths*, vol. 5 no. 2 Summer/Fall and Eric A. Hanushek, *Making Schools Work: Improving Performance and Controlling Costs*. Washington: DC: Brookings Institute.
5. Miles, Karen, " Rethinking School Level Resources" New American Schools District Issues Brief, see [www.newamericanschools.org](http://www.newamericanschools.org).
6. For more details on common barriers, see Miles and Darling Hammond Paper 1998.
7. Odden, Allan and Carolyn Busch, 1998, *Financing Schools for High Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
8. Wohlstetter, P. (1995), "Getting school-based management right: What works and what doesn't." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(1), 22-26.
9. See STAR results cited above.
10. For a complete description of the training and support provided in Cincinnati, please see Miles, Karen Hawley, "Supporting Schools in Rethinking Resources to Improve Student Performance" paper presented at American Education Finance Association, March 2000.
11. An excellent resource describing the kinds of changes schools might make based on research is Allington, Richard L. and Patricia M. Cunningham, 1996 *Schools that Work: Where all Children Read and Write*. New York: Harper Collins College.



---

## About the Author

Dr. Karen Hawley Miles, of Education Resource Management Strategies in Dallas, Texas, specializes in strategic planning in public schools and district and school resource allocation. She works with school districts nationwide to rethink the use of resources and the organization of districts and schools. She has worked to design school improvement and planning processes in several districts. Working at the intersection of research and practice, she has also coordinated national research projects of school district and school level resource allocation. She has focused especially on how districts and schools can find the necessary resources and time to invest in building teacher capacity. She co-directed the study by the Economic Policy Institute, “Where Has the Money Gone?,” which traced the growth in school spending since 1967. She recently concluded a study for the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) on resource allocation in high performing schools. Prior to this, she worked at Bain & Company as a strategy and management consultant for hospitals and corporations. She has a B.A. in economics from Yale University and a doctorate in Education from Harvard University, specializing in school organization, change, and finance.



---

# New American Schools District Support in Resource Reallocation

Redesigning schools to generate higher student performance requires districts to rethink their use and allocation of resources. Districts need to adjust spending priorities to fund the initial transformation of schools to new designs. To do this, New American Schools has found that districts typically need to:

- Re-align spending to better support its comprehensive school reform strategy and academic priorities;
- Implement an initiative to encourage schools to rethink resources;
- Redesign practices surrounding the allocation and control of resources so schools can reorganize staff and dollars for new designs.

New American Schools offers services including analysis, introductory presentations, self-analysis and reference tools, and ongoing consulting and training to help districts. Though districts face similar issues, each confronts the need to reorganize resources. Whatever actions a district takes to change its spending and allocation of resources need to fit with and build on initiatives underway. Our goal is to share what we are learning from our work with other districts in a way that builds leadership capacity in the district. There are three major areas of district work in resource reallocation.

## 1) District Spending Levels and Strategy

Supporting comprehensive school reform requires two changes in district spending. First, districts need to invest in buying the new curriculum, assessments, computer equipment, and professional development to support the new designs. Typically, districts need to pull together a multi-year investment fund. Second, most districts find that they need to change the way they spend their dollars to focus more on academic priorities and building teacher capacity. Services and tools include:

- Introductory presentations and reading materials outlining the issues and experience from other districts;
- District Issues Brief: “Matching Spending with Strategy: Aligning District Spending to Support a Strategy of Comprehensive School Reform;”
- District Issues Brief: “Money Matters: Rethinking School and District Spending to Support Comprehensive School Reform;”
- District Issues Brief: “Reinvesting in Teachers: Aligning District Professional Development Spending to Support a Comprehensive School Reform Strategy;”
- Ongoing updates of funding sources available to support comprehensive school reform investment funds; and
- Analysis framework and tool kit for understanding spending on professional development and instructional and school support.

## 2) Rethinking School Resources

Tools here aim at providing support to schools in re-examining and redesigning their use of resources to support new designs. For example, all of the designs call for significantly more planning time for teachers than most districts provide, and most urge the creation of smaller learning environments. Tools and services include:

- Presentations and reading materials for schools;
- District Issues Brief: “Rethinking School Spending: Organizing Schools to Support Comprehensive School Designs;”
- District Issues Brief: “Many Programs, One Investment: Combining Federal Funds to Support Comprehensive School Reform;”
- Training staff to support resource reallocation;
- A tested calendar and process for training and supporting school efforts;
- A “Resource Review Guide” that supports schools in systematically reviewing their existing staff and dollars and aims at helping them prioritize areas where they need to make or investigate changes;
- Case studies of schools that have significantly reorganized to support improved student performance and new designs; and
- Ongoing consulting.

## 3) District Practices and Procedures

Tools aim at helping district leaders identify how practices and procedures need to change to enable schools to align their resources to better support instructional priorities, strategies, and design. Services and tools include:

- Introductory presentations and reading materials;
  - District Issues Brief: “Freeing School Resources for Learning;”
  - Self-analysis tool: “District Practices and Procedures” for districts to identify which policies, practices, and procedures need to change to support more autonomy in the use of school resources; and
  - Consulting services.
-



New American Schools  
1560 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 901  
Arlington, Virginia 22209  
(703) 908-9500  
fax: (703) 908-0622  
[www.newamericanschools.org](http://www.newamericanschools.org)



