



Leadership in Times of Scarcity

by Shari Prest, Ark Associates

Minnesota's school administrators believe they have a responsibility to lead their communities through crisis and toward more effective and efficient schools.

The majority of respondents to a recent survey of school administrators believe their communities are willing or very willing to support local schools. Survey results also indicate that the leadership required for anticipating and addressing the monumental challenges facing public schools has not yet been defined. Most survey respondents write about what they *will* do as opposed to what they *are* doing. Some respondents are more weighed down by the difficulty of moving their staffs, communities and lawmakers toward significant change than they are propelled by the need for change.

The following is a model for school and/or community conversations about the current environment in which schools exist, and for creating the best possible outcomes for schools in the future.

Frame the conversation

- Affirm that your school/district is committed to providing a quality education for kids regardless of changing circumstances.
- Explain that achieving this goal in the current environment will require that schools and communities do things differently.
- Stress that the challenges are not just the “same old,” but are more significant and dynamic, and small changes may not adequately prepare schools to meet the large challenges.
 - \$5.7 billion state deficit is projected for the next biennium (if interest is added the number is increased to \$7.5 billion).
 - Recent shifts in state funding to schools have made it necessary for many districts to borrow money.

Provide current quality data

- Test scores and AYP trends in your district with explanations for each
- Measures of collaboration, communication, problem solving, etc.
- National/international comparisons in investment and outcomes
- School/district academic goals

Provide current funding facts

- Clearly formatted school/district budget strengths (include information like the percent of the district budget that is administration, transportation, food services, personnel, various mandates, etc.)
- Minnesota's budget deficit and its anticipated impact on your schools
- Explanation and outcomes of shifts in state funding to schools

Ask questions that encourage innovative thinking

- How do you define *quality* when referring to our schools?
- Beyond traditional budget cuts and referenda, what innovative ideas do you have for reconciling lower revenues with higher quality?
- How would you change schools to anticipate 10% fewer resources while producing 10% higher quality?
- Can you develop a picture in your minds of schools that are different structurally and have even better outcomes? What does that picture look like?

Compile and utilize and report on meeting results

- Frame the information carefully; this is one step in a process.
- Report accurately.
- Communicate broadly.

Prepare a plan

- Require creative thinking and responsible risk taking.
- Utilize a diverse team for planning innovation.
- Engage the school board and administration from the district/school to review and improve the plan.
- Record the plan.
- Test the plan among advocates and critics.

Promote the plan

- Work to ensure the school/district administration and the school board are behind the plan and prepared to promote it in front of the community.
- Be bold in presenting the problem, the process and the plan.
- Invite people to be a part of the success of the plan and therefore the schools.

Materials provided by:



The Minnesota Association of School Administrators
The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals
The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association