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OVERVIEW

DOES "LESS IS MORE" APPLY TO FUNDING?

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Just as the restructuring movement is beginning to pick up steam, the engine is running low on coal. In state after state, governors and legislators are declaring their treasures bare and telling schools they've got to get by with less.

I talked about that with Michael Cohen (p. 54), former staff member of the National Governors Association and now director of a new restructuring alliance. Based on his work with the governors, Cohen thinks that most states will not increase their budgets for K-12 education in the next few years because, he maintains, schools already got their increases in the '80s.

True, many states did increase school funding in the last decade. But they did it only because officials and the public were convinced that we had become "a nation at risk" by our neglect of education. To become *A Nation Prepared*,¹ America needed to raise teacher salaries, install career ladders, and change working conditions so that teaching would be a more rewarding profession. That's what was meant when educators and political leaders began talking about restructuring just five years ago.

Everyone now seems to agree that spending more money will not necessarily reform education. That is not to say, however, that reform can be achieved without spending more money.

We had a remarkable demonstration in the recent Gulf War of what funding can accomplish. The impressive performance of the United States military was made possible by the huge amounts our country invested throughout the 1980s in sophisticated equipment and excellent training.

That's, of course, one point of view. Lee Iacocca bluntly posed a business point of view at the recent ASCD Annual Conference. He said he and other customers are dissatisfied with the inferior "product" schools are producing. He conceded that educators are trying hard to solve their problems, but customers don't care about that, he said; they just want a better product. And you can't raise prices so as to improve your product; you have to improve the product *first*.

A similar theme was sounded by James Renier, Chief Executive Officer of the Honeywell Corporation,² in an otherwise sympathetic talk to urban educators:

In business, restructuring means increasing productivity, improving quality, and reducing costs, especially people costs, dramati-

cally. To educators . . . restructuring means expanding school services to fill the unmet social needs of children, trying to be more efficient, improving the product of the educational system, and generally increasing school budgets and spending. There is *not* a lot of thought about being able to do the job with 20 percent budget cuts and 20 percent higher output. . . . I submit there is quite a gap in our use of the word "restructuring."

Indeed there is—and both sides need to work at understanding one another. Educators must recognize that more and more people are distressed about the quality of education and unwilling to keep on supporting the present structure. But business and political leaders need to understand that changing schools is hard enough when you have some financial flexibility; it's next to impossible when you don't.

Several of this month's authors explain what restructuring is like from the inside. Tim Westerberg and Dan Brickley (p. 23) give a progress report on their ambitious efforts to reform their Colorado high school. "Restructuring takes time, particularly teacher time," they write, "and time costs money." Dennis Evans (p. 16), principal of a high school in Newport Beach, California, shows why change takes teacher time in his account of the way his staff decided to discard a "thoroughly entrenched" tracking system. Carlene Murphy (p. 63), director of staff development for the Richmond County, Georgia, Schools, has presided for the last four years over a project that she now realizes she didn't fully understand at first. Her thoughtful observations about the unexpected ramifications of what was supposed to be a straightforward teacher training project will ring true for others involved in educational change.

These authors, and many other educators in the U.S. and the world, are determined to change their schools. To do it, they need resources and support, because it's a lot more difficult and complicated than even they imagined. But it's worth the price. As Ted Sizer (p. 32) reminds us, "No Pain, No Gain." □

¹Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. (1986). *A Nation Prepared. Teachers for the 21st Century*. (New York: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy).

²J. Renier, (November 10, 1990), "Business Helping Schools, Schools Helping Business," speech to Conference of The Council of The Great City Schools, Boston, Mass.

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