



District
Management
Group

10 MISTAKES TO AVOID

Making Difficult Resource Allocation Decisions

Originally published in *District Management Journal*, v.12, Fall 2012

Thoughtfully managing the budget decision-making process can build support for good ideas, minimize pushback, and put limited resources to their best use.

10 Mistakes to Avoid

Making Difficult Resource Allocation Decisions

Managing the budget during tight times is never easy and making bold, student-centered resource allocation decisions can be even more challenging. Thoughtfully managing the decision-making process can build support for good ideas, minimize pushback, and put limited resources to their best use.

1 Don't make tough decisions alone.

Tough, student-centered decisions require the support of many stakeholders. When only a small group of leaders make decisions, those who were not involved often fail to support the decision.

2 Don't ignore unstated values.

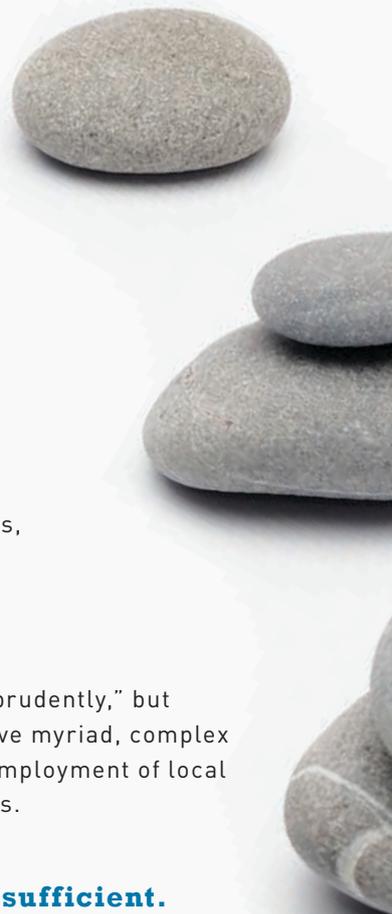
Everyone professes to put “children first” and “to spend money prudently,” but key stakeholders like principals and central office staff often have myriad, complex values and allegiances. Loyalty to their staffs or departments, employment of local residents, and appreciation for seniority can be competing values.

3 Don't forget that making the wise choice isn't sufficient.

Resource allocation isn't just a technical exercise of making good decisions. How decisions are made matters as much as the decision itself. Be sure to involve deep influencers in the decision-making process.

4 Don't assume others know the facts.

Leaders often have information that drives their decisions, such as a program's disappointing results or the high-cost per student served. Other key stakeholders may be unaware of this information. Joint fact-finding can change perceptions and garner support.





5 Don't frame choices as "good" or "bad."

Resource allocation is all about trade-offs, but positioning one option as good and another as bad personalizes the decisions and encourages strong pushback. Decisions framed as aligned (or not) with a strategic vision are easier for many of those affected to accept.

6 Don't forget to involve the principals.

Building administrators often feel the brunt of resource decisions, and they are a key informal communication channel with teachers and parents. Failing to involve them in the decision-making process can lead to limited support from parents and teachers.

7 Don't advocate for half measures.

In the political tussle of making tough decisions, it can be tempting to water down a good idea to minimize the pushback. Be careful not to undermine the integrity of the proposal. Half measures will cause support to dissipate.

8 Don't be stubborn.

There is a difference between watering down a good idea to the point of undermining an initiative and being willing to incorporate feedback and bend to ensure support and success. It's important to know the difference.

9 Don't assume central office support.

Even your trusted staff at central office has many conflicting loyalties. Be sure to understand their values, involve them in the process, and let them wrestle with the tough tradeoffs. Building a team that puts the good of the district ahead of individual departments creates much needed support for difficult decisions.

10 Don't despair.

Managing declining budgets isn't easy, but it can be done if you address not only "technical" changes—solutions to a problem, but also focus on making adaptive changes—shifting thinking and perspectives.