

Article critique: american school board journal

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American School Board Journal (2008, September). News analysis: soaring costs, cutting budgets. Retrieved from <http://www.asbj.com/MainMenuCategory/Archive/2008/September/September2008UpFront.html>

Introduction The American way of life is based on democratic principles and one of its principles is the availability of free education in its public school system. This had made America great in the past because majority of its citizens got educated at little or no cost at all to their students. It has been copied in other countries as well but this tenet of free universal education has been under a siege of sorts, due to economic constraints caused by financial crisis of the sub-prime mortgage lending from the housing price bubble. As a result, the economy has tanked in most states and it has put them under great pressure to find ways to cut costs without reducing the level of service. Cost-cutting measures have created some sort of a public relations problem for school boards as they struggled to balance the needs of their students with the harsh financial realities they are in.

Discussion The news article which serves as the basis for this paper discussion was the recent news about a sudden rise or spike in gas prices. This had a profound effect on the busing requirements of school districts as public education entails free bus rides for students from home to school and back; this mode of transportation has been the preferred transport of most poor students. In fact, gas prices were up about 40% already at a time when the recession had already set in back in September 2008 and most school districts are now operating in the red (budget deficits). The article described how some school districts implemented various ways to cut down on costs, and one of the favored ways was to reduce the number of bus routes or eliminate some of those routes entirely. Some districts decided to bus only

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students who live more than a mile from school, while others experimented with a four-day school week. The measures were often quite unprecedented (implemented only for the very first time) while in other instances, parents must now pay up or provide their own transportation for sports and all extra-curricular activities. These moves raised some safety concerns from parents and potentially increased absenteeism. In the article, it was pointed out that bus transportation for students is the safest mode of transport, so cutting down on bus routes had raised valid concerns as other modes are accident prone. But the prevailing view was that school districts have no other choice if they are to stay solvent. The article made mention of how desperate times call for desperate measures, but in a realistic way of thinking, having a four-day school week is not entirely new; it had been adopted since the first fuel crisis some three decades earlier but the idea has been revived and had gained some measure of popularity or favor. In fact, some 100 school districts in sixteen states had been doing four-day school weeks, by adding some eighty minutes of additional instruction time so as to compensate for the lost Friday of each school week. Cutting off one school day each week is not so bad after all, as the Center for Public Education of the National School Board Association (NSBA) had pointed out some unexpected benefits like increased school attendance or improved student performance in addition to greater staff collaboration and higher morale. It is perhaps a matter of just having a new way of looking at things, the so-called paradigm shift. All the cost-cutting moves make sense as the priority is for school districts to be afloat; the other alternatives are not so palatable, such as closing some schools and combining the said school with other nearby schools or laying off some staff and faculty, which will result in a far worse situation, a likely

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deterioration in the quality of public education. Cutting the number of bus routes is not so drastic as only some 15% of students ride on those buses as in the case of the state of California, so the effect is minimized while savings are substantial (ASBJ, 2008, p. 1). Conclusion The said article raised a number of valid issues but the fact is that there are really no easy choices left but to implement these drastic measures although on deeper consideration, the benefits derived are not so apparent. What is required is an alternative way of thinking about the entire universal public school system in America which requires compulsory education for all. A school district board may have to hold urgent meetings with parents and maybe emphasize some unforeseen or unintended benefits the cost-cutting measures may achieve. An example is a four-day school week which improved students' attendance and performance while generating those substantial cost savings. An extra day for the weekend is a great time for parents and students to bond with each other, have more time for doing the assigned homework or required readings, students get to rest longer (which explains their improved attendance and performance while in school) and even the school staff and faculty also gets higher morale if they are not laid off at all so not all is bleak. One just has to look at the brighter side in the face of these challenges. Reference American School Board Journal (2008, September). News analysis: soaring costs, cutting budgets. Retrieved from <http://www.asbj.com/MainMenuCategory/Archive/2008/September/September2008UpFront.html>