

After reading Sorenson and Goldsmith's *The Principal's Guide to School Budgeting*, I realized there are many facets that come together for the job of a leader and administrator. This text demonstrates the profession's complexities; "the budgeting process enables school leaders to develop an understanding of the need for strong organizational skills, technical competence, and the collaborative process so essential to ensuring organizational trust and development," (2012, p. 155). The three major points on budgeting that I thought were consistently highlighted throughout the text were: aligning your school's budget with its vision, establishing a team of stakeholders and making data-driven decisions.

The alignment of a school's budget and vision is a vital relationship in any business, but the process of budgeting for a school cannot just be checks and balances. "School budgeting must not be thought of as merely an accounting responsibility," (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2012, p. 30). Administrators must create a shared vision that aligns with their school's budget; always keeping students' academic success on the forefront. To ensure this budgeting process aligns with the school's shared vision, additional individuals are brought together to form a budgeting committee.

Sorenson and Goldsmith continually stress the importance of establishing a team of stakeholders. This can be seen in the "Sorenson-Goldsmith Integrated Budget Model," (2012, p. 123). The stakeholders are defined and selected by the leader and are an asset to the budgeting process as they bring different viewpoints. Leaders need to make sure they are transparent and consistently communicating with their stakeholders to collaborate and equally share their perspectives. "By involving as many stakeholders as possible, a school leader can more effectively ensure ultimate buy-in as related to the school budget and funded programs

and initiatives,” (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2012, p. 184). When leaders are creating their community of stakeholders, they need to take into consideration many important aspects of their committee. Some of these include size, structure, diversity and training of their budgeting team members. The amount of people along with the cultural and professional backgrounds of your stakeholders can greatly influence the effectiveness of your committee. When this team meets to make decisions, they need to ensure they are subjective, aligned with the vision and aimed towards students’ academic success.

To guarantee that these budgeting decisions are valid, data is gathered, collected and analyzed. Data-driven decision making increases the stakeholder’s responsibility in choosing where to allot money and holds them accountable for their reasoning as to why; this way decisions are more clear-cut and backed by evidence. There are many different components that need to be taken into consideration when budgeting for a school, consequently, there are many ways to gather data to support decision-making. After gathering data, it needs to be analyzed and managed by the appropriate personnel to evaluate priorities for budgeting.

For my interview, I chose to meet with my school’s principal to discuss my questions about budgeting. My three major points that I discussed from the text were aligning your school’s budget with its vision, establishing a team of stakeholders and making data-driven decisions. I chose to focus on those ideas when creating most of my questions.

Since I belong to a school in a larger district, our administrators are expected to do a much smaller amount of budgeting than other schools. The district initially sets an annual budget for every school based on their projected number of students. Some of the main components of our district’s budget (outside of salaries) are additional supplies, professional

development and furniture. Several schools in our district, including my own, receive Title 1 aid, which has a separate budget. A figure from National Center for Education Statistics says that as of 2016 Title 1 is largest of the block grant program, which reaches 25 million disadvantaged students (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2012).

When setting a budget, one of the most difficult parts we discussed was making cuts. Explaining to colleagues that the decision was made as objectively as possibly using data and a list of priorities based on evidence. My principal said the best advice she would pass onto someone creating a school budget was to keep a running priority list. This would help to expedite the process when meeting with your committee for the budgeting process. Although, the professional diversity of our district's stakeholders seemed to be limited to only those with a background in education. I think this is due to most of the budget already being set by the district, but we can request additional items.

I had the opportunity to be at the forefront of the most recent data-based decision in our district. Our district noticed that the current curriculum standards were not aligned with the standards tested by our state test; therefore, students were not showing growth. I was offered the chance to pilot a new online program and curriculum on the basis to collect data that would be analyzed to see if this was a viable curriculum to budget for district wide. This would be an example of a performance objective that is discussed in the text, "(1) A data source for the assessment; (2) a specific improvement is expected; and (3) it adds accountability," (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2012, p. 134). The district used the standardized state assessment as a data source, collected data on students receiving the new curriculum and used that data as evidence.

Overall, I gained a lot of insight about school budgeting. I found relief in knowing that the plethora of information that came with this text is not expected to be memorized, moreover, it is to allow us the opportunity to reflect on the topics we see fit on our way to becoming leaders. This is a text that I will reflect on and reread the closer I get to becoming an administrator.

References:

Sorenson, R. D. & Goldsmith, L. M (2012). *The principal's guide to school budgeting* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.