

Keeping Kids First in Tough Times:

**Effective Budgeting Strategies for District Leaders
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Leading the Budget Reduction Process

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Frameworks for Action

The Structural Frame:

Board of Education Agreement/Approval on the Process Leading to Reductions (formal or informal)

- Clear Definition and Communication of the Process to Stakeholders
- Clear Assignment of Roles in the Process and Scope of Involvement
- Clear Definition of the Product Requested of those Involved
- Clear Definition of Decision Making Authority Established
- Clear Timelines Established
- Clear Communication of Above to All

Frameworks for Action (continued)

The Human Relations Frame:

Structure is Important but Feelings Matter

- Don't Make it Personal (Reinforce the Need for Reductions Based on Facts)
- Meet with Labor Groups Potentially Impacted by Reductions (Listen to their fears and concerns and define where/how they can remain informed and involved)
- Define the Criteria, Process, Legal Requirements, etc. for Budget Development
- Provide Legitimate Channels for Receiving Feedback Throughout the Budget Process
- Focus on the Mission of the District: Keeping Kids the #1 Priority

Frameworks for Action (continued)

The Political Frame

Identify Interest Groups and Community Opinion Leaders

- Meet with Them and Explain the Unique Fiscal Dilemma Facing All New York State Schools
- Define the Process, Roles and Decisional Authority
- Ask them to Anticipate Community Reaction (Pro and Con) to Reductions
- Solicit their Ideas on How to Avoid Negative Consequences in Terms of Community Pride
- Outline Recent District Accomplishments
- Focus on the Mission of the District's: Keeping Kids the #1 Priority

Frameworks for Action (continued)

The Symbolic Frame

Actions Speak Louder than Words

- Meet Formally and Informally with Faculty and Community Groups with a Message of Hope Following Your “Gloom and Doom” Stump Speech
- Write to Your Staff and Parents through District and News Media
- Consider an Advisory Group of Key Partners to Provide Feedback throughout the Budget Process
- Ask Your Board to Provide Feedback on the Process at Key Intervals
- Consider a Theme, Phrase or Banner Heading when Communicating About the Budget Process (e.g. “Together We Can” “Equal to the Fiscal Challenge”)
- Focus on the District’s Mission: Keeping Kids the #1 Priority

Selling Your District's Budget:

Caution – Caution – Caution – Caution –Caution

- ✓ Know the Ground-Rules
- ✓ Communicate the Ground-Rules with Potential Offenders
- ✓ Maintain Records of Above
- ✓ Avoid Procedural Errors in Budget Development Requirements

Over the Line or Not: You be the Judge

Example # 1:

1. PTA sends home a flyer with students urging parents to vote.
2. The PTA uses school paper and copy machine to produce flyers.
3. The PTA flyer includes the following language:

A Positive Vote = Quality Programs

Example #2:

1. A district-wide Spring Concert (all performing groups k-12) is held on the evening of the budget vote.
2. The event ends at 8:00 with an announcement reminding parents to vote (in the school gymnasium) before they leave.
3. The announcement informs parents that the budget includes money to replace dilapidated, 40 year-old band instruments.

You Be the Judge (continued)

Example #3

Your Board of Education president writes a letter to the editor urging residents to support the budget.

Example #4

A district produced newsletter includes the following language:

“A favorable budget vote protects the value of your home”

What's at Stake?

1. If the commissioner finds that improper budget advocacy affected the outcome of the vote, he may annul the results of the vote and order a new election (Appeal of Leman)
2. The commissioner may also remove from office school officials who engage in willful violation or neglect their duty to adhere to the court's ruling (Phillips v. Maurer)

Source: **School Law: 32nd Edition** Sections 6:50 – 6:67 Improper Advocacy