Chapter 5
Budget Woes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A small group of technology application teachers and campus IT specialists exchanged ideas about how the latest round of budget cuts might impact their jobs and technology on campus in general. Issues brought up included how schools "can do it all cheaper" if more online courses are added, how dual credit courses–that count both for high school graduation requirements and college credits–are becoming popular among families with much smaller tuition budgets, how teachers have to wait for 6-8 years for new computers instead of 4-5, how campus Web sites are out-dated due to lack of maintenance fees, and how campus instructional technologists are too busy fixing obsolete computers and equipment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

We have been hearing so much about budget cuts to public education in the news lately. For some states, revenue numbers are showing a steady decline in tax collections. Several governors announced that the state budgets were under water by millions of dollars.

In the United States, K-12 as well as higher education are suffering huge budget cuts from the government. K-12 programs are being affected in many of the following ways: Losing licensed teachers, reduction in programs such as art, music, and sports programs, elimination of special education for children with additional

needs, increased class sizes, loss of teaching assistant positions, increased teacher workload, elimination of needed programs and activities, reduction in administrative positions such as assistant principal.

Educators and communities are beginning to see how billions of dollars have been invested with little appreciable return in the form of improved instruction and better educated students.

And reductions in school funding will only guarantee further declines in the technology applications of public education in America. Without new technology initiatives and projects, technology administration positions in district central offices are being reduced or eliminated. Distance courses are expanded to avoid hiring more teachers and to save on other costs. Instead of helping teachers with curriculum design, campus technical support personnel have to spend most of their time fixing old computers and defective parts. School Web sites are not updated, software subscription fees not paid, and campus hardware and software are not upgraded. These are just some measures being forced upon schools in the midst of budget woes.

Everyone wants quality public education, but no one seems to be able to afford it.

THE CASE

After attending a trade show, a small group of technology application teachers and campus IT specialists from several school districts gathered and discussed the impacts of the latest round of budget cuts affecting their jobs and technology on campus in general.

Melinda: I have seen districts having to adjust faculty and staff salaries, cut maintenance spending, and implement department and campus cutbacks. When students return to campus this fall, they'll find crowded classrooms, less access to faculty and counselors, fewer campus services, and more difficulty getting classes they need to graduate. The schools have responded by asking parents to pay more fees while at the same time expanding class sizes, eliminating programs, laying off staff, and furloughing teachers and other employees. It is likely that we will continue to see these cascading effects from budget cuts across the board.

Barry: These funding/spending changes have already drastically hindered the ability of schools to make "bonus" additions of technology implementations on all levels.

Mark: What worries me about these budget cuts is that I have heard a few people up in the hierarchy claim that they "can do it all cheaper" if we add more online courses. While I don't yet think this can be considered a trend like the one in online higher education, I worry that online courses may be increasingly viewed by the state and administrators as the equivalent to industrialized farms: do it quicker, cheaper, faster.

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