

Sample Critical Annotation



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School of Finance:

Achieving High Standards with Equity and Efficiency

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King, R.A., Swanson, A.D., & Sweetland, S.R. (2003). *School finance: Achieving high standards with equity and efficiency* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Purpose of the Book

A textbook for graduate courses in school finance, the authors of *School Finance: Achieving High Standards with Equity and Efficiency* emphasize the importance of understanding contemporary education issues in the context of traditional economic and political frameworks and models. King, Swanson, and Sweetland (2003) help school leaders understand that it is often necessary to challenge the status quo and to consider revising organizational structures in order to maintain fiscal efficiency. Additionally, the book serves as a general reference for analysts of education policy, school district administrators, and school principals who deliberate financial issues with constituents and oversee allocations of funds. With activities and computer simulations included in many of the chapters, readers may apply and extend the ideas presented within the text by actually working with data and solidifying their understanding of concepts.

Authors' Credentials

Richard A. King is Professor Emeritus of educational leadership from the University of South Florida at Sarasota-Manatee. A Fulbright Scholar at the National Chengchi University in Taiwan in 2004-05, Dr. King earned a Ph.D. in educational leadership from State University of New York at Buffalo in 1976. Dr. King has published articles in the *Journal of Education Finance and Educational Considerations*, a peer reviewed journal published at the College of Education at the University of Kansas.

Austin D. Swanson earned his Ed.D. from the Teachers College of Columbia University in 1960. Dr. Swanson is Professor Emeritus from the State University of New York at Buffalo, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, which he chaired for many years. He has published widely in education finance and policy and co-authored *Fundamental Concepts of Educational Leadership and Management* (3rd edition) in 2009 with Taher A. Razik.

Holding a Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Buffalo, Scott R. Sweetland is associate professor in the Department of Educational Studies at The Ohio State University. Dr. Sweetland has published finance and business research in the *Journal of Education Finance*, *Education Leadership Review*, *The Clearing House*, and *The Journal of School Business Management*.

Summary of Major Points

After discussing the basics of school finance policy, types of funding for schools, and the allocation of state and federal funds for schools, King, Swanson, and Sweetland (2003) presented the importance of rethinking school finance to attain high learning standards. They discussed technical efficiency, a term that is typically used by economists to uncover research revealing which combination of inputs has the most favorable effect on outcomes, student performance in this instance. For example, which class size coupled with what level of certificated teacher yields the highest level of student learning? Analysts studying technical efficiency do not consider the financial costs of inputs. Rather, they simply contemplate the effectiveness of the inputs. For example, when analysts study the effects of class size on student learning they are not considering resource requirements for physical space, human resources, or supplies. They simply want to know how class size affects student learning.

Through Odden & Webb's (as cited by King, Swanson, and Sweetland, 2003) effective-schools research, it is evident that effective classroom teaching practices include high expectations, good classroom management techniques, and high levels of time-on-task. Effective schools also have strong leadership, particularly in the position of the principal, who coordinates the instructional program at the building level in a manner that is highly structured, but not bureaucratic. According to Odden & Webb (as cited in King, Swanson, & Sweetland, 2003), the highly effective principal also establishes a community-oriented school culture with shared goals, high expectations for student performance, mechanisms to sustain motivation and commitment, collegiality among staff and students, and a school-wide focus on improvement.

Through evaluation studies, information is available about ideal class sizes, length of school year, and special programming (King, Swanson, & Sweetland, 2003). According to research in the Tennessee Project Star (1999) study of the relationship between class size and pupil achievement, students in small classes (13-17 students) display higher academic achievement than students in larger classes (22-26 students). The impact of class size is more significant for minority students and students attending inner-city schools. Researchers concluded that small classes are superior not because they encourage new approaches to instruction but because teachers in small classes are able to engage in enough of the basic strategies they have been using all along. Based on another study in the Baltimore Public Schools (2001), researchers recommend preschool, full-day kindergarten, and extended-year programs for all low socio-economic students. In yet another evaluation study, Reynolds and Wolfe (as cited in King, Swanson, & Sweetland, 2003) studied the effects on children's achievement of placement in special education during the elementary school years. They found that special education programming seems to add in a significant way to achievement in reading

in math, but only in the earlier grades and only for children with learning disabilities as opposed to hearing, sight, or physical handicaps.

According to King, Swanson, & Sweetland (2003), analysts studied economic and technical efficiency have presented conflicting results. Considering researchers' revelations about improving student learning, it appears that many schools are using the resources allocated to them inefficiently. Schools in general are not using what educators know to be best practice. In typical schools, large numbers of specialized teachers are working outside regular classrooms; teachers have short, segmented periods of planning time during the school day; little school-level consideration is given to grouping students for instruction; and secondary school teachers instruct five completely different groups of students for less than an hour each day. For schools to be more effective, leaders must restructure how resources are spent.

Miles and Darling-Hammond (as cited in King, Swanson, & Sweetland, 2003) note six resource reallocation strategies used by high-performing schools to improve achievement with current resources. They suggest reducing specialized programs, providing more flexible student grouping by school-level professionals, creating more personalized environments, offering longer and varied blocks of instructional time, requiring more common planning time for staff, and creatively defining staff roles and schedules. Additionally, King, Swanson, and Sweetland (2003) recommend that teachers receive salary increases as they earn additional certifications to enable schools with more flexibility in providing services to students. This flexibility allows schools to maximize resources, as multiple professionals are able to provide numerous services. For example, if a speech pathologist is also certified in guidance, the students' social-emotional needs could be addressed within a speech therapy session. While research provides information about how to improve educational efficiency; many districts are not using their resources to full

advantage (King, Swanson, and Sweetland, 2003). Today's school leaders have the challenge of breaking through tradition and changing school structures in order to maximize resources.

Evaluation of the Usefulness of the Text

School Finance: Achieving High Standards with Equity and Efficiency provides aspiring and currently practicing school leaders with thought-provoking information that challenges the historical structures of schools. The text is useful in helping leaders think about the purposes of school spending and how to spend more wisely. While it is sometimes tempting for school leaders to stay with the status quo of school structures and spending traditions, it takes a true visionary to realize the unlocked potential that requires a restructuring of, but not necessarily more, financial resources.

RESEARCH PROSPECT