The Sixty-Six and Two-Thirds Percent Solution or Dilemma

MASA has received several requests from MASA members to provide a summary of concerns expressed by members. Some of the most frequently mentioned questions, comments or concerns include:

1. Validity
   Where did the so-called 66 2/3% solution come from? Did it originate from an in-depth study of comparative resource needs for classroom instruction and non-classroom items or is it a design created by a few folks who think that K-12 education is over-funded and want to put the squeeze on certain school expenditures? What documentation is there for spending 66 2/3% on classroom instruction as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics? Why not 68% or 62%? Who ordained 66 2/3% and what validity does that number have?

2. Local Control
   Whatever happened to local control? SB287, the new foundation formula law, already mandates that each school district place a minimum of 75% of their state aid into the Teachers Fund. The 66 2/3% solution goes much further in that it would dictate to school districts how they spend their local tax dollars including school districts that receive a relative small percentage of their revenue from the state. School boards have been complaining for years about state and federal policy mandates that leave little decision making to the elected local board of education. This proposal flies directly in the face of local control and seems to overlook the differences from one school district to the next with regard to necessary school costs. Such items as transportation and fuel costs, heating costs, and professional development among others will vary widely from school district to school district with good reasons for the variance. Should one size fit all or should local boards of education determine what is best for their patrons and their students?

3. What’s Important? What Isn’t?
   The definition of what constitutes instruction items in the 66 2/3% expenditure benchmark includes some very important items such as classroom teacher salaries, instructional supplies, teacher aides, field trips for athletics, music, fine arts, and now, library and media services and guidance services. But it excludes costs that are just as vital regarding a child’s education including the salary for the school principal (remember what Ron Edmonds and Effective Schools had to say about the role of the school principal in student learning), transportation costs (how can students learn if they can’t get to school), instructional support for teachers including teacher training and professional development (crucial for keeping teachers up to date on instructional efficacies), curriculum alignment and coordination (how can we meet AYP standards without quality curriculum development), tuition payments (used directly for costs of educating non-resident pupils), and food services (indirectly, I think Maslow said that its harder for a hungry child to learn).
4. **Saving Money**

The 66 2/3% solution or dilemma creates no new monies for the public schools. It simply shifts money from one group of services to another. In order for school districts to save money, some services not included in the definition of classroom instruction would have to be significantly reduced or eliminated. Cutting back on services would be very difficult in a state where salaries across the board and average per pupil expenditures are far below the national average for these categories. It can be argued that shifting spending priorities as required by the 66 2/3% proposal could lead to additional efforts to increase local property taxes to protect needed school services.

5. **Timing**

School districts are, currently, faced with strong budgetary pressures with regard to increased fuel costs, increasing heating costs, increased retirement costs, and increased health insurance premiums among other items. School districts could face greatly expanded transportation costs if a current proposal to mandate shoulder-lap seat belts is enacted by the legislature. Most of the above items would fall directly in the non-instructional category and make it very difficult to lower the percentage of expenditures spent on the non-instructional portion of the budget. This is not a good time to place increased pressure on school districts to reduce expenditures on necessary items classified by definition as non-instructional.

6. **Rural Schools**

Administrative costs as a percentage of school budgets are almost always greater in small schools. The basic infrastructure, personnel, and basic services necessary to operate a school district exist for a school of 350 students as well as a school of 3500 students and some of those basic services such as administration may not have to be duplicated. Certainly, instructional supplies, books, and busses are cheaper by the dozen. And, transportation costs per pupil are considerably more expensive in small, rural schools where the population is sparse than in more densely populated regions of the state. There is little doubt that it will be more difficult for small, rural schools to comply with a 66 2/3% mandate.