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LeanSchools eNews January 2009



PAWLEY LEAN INSTITUTE
LEAN THINKING FOR SCHOOLS™

LeanSchools™ eNews January 2009

Welcome to the LeanSchools™ eNews from the Oakland University Pawley Lean Institute. This is a monthly communiqué of the best in thinking for Lean schools. We invite you to read the information and realize that great strides can be made in the journey when you connect with others.

Educators should be encouraged by inclusion in President-Elect Obama's economic recovery plan, which promises increases to teacher training, building renovation and early childhood programs.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/21/us/21stimulus.html?ref=politics>

However, lingering and deep financial planning problems for school leaders will be faced in 2009. While federal financial assistance is certainly welcomed and needed in the education sector, in spite of this support, it is very possible that school superintendents will still be left with problematic funding situations. These problems are largely rooted in poor economic conditions, diminishing revenue flows and increasing employee and program costs. This combination of problems will likely make balanced budgets a difficult or impossible goal for many local school systems to obtain over the next one to three years.

School leaders are now concerned that traditional cost-cutting strategies are no longer enough to keep their systems financially viable. Given this reality, many districts are aware that state receivership is a realistic possibility in the future. Given that the root cause of financial problems is not mismanagement or unethical behavior but rather that cost-cutting strategies have run their course in current unprecedented economic conditions, the mandate of state receivership is being talked about in school districts. Typically viewed as a poor alternative by both the state and local district, state-based interventions do not have an impressive history. The example in Oakland, California, of leadership turnover and organizational instability are typical dynamics of receivership that prove difficult for turnaround success.

<http://www.berkeleydailyplanet.com/issue/2007-09-18/article/28026?headline=Resignation-Shocks-Oakland-School-District>

It is necessary to consider if there are any viable ideas that could help districts in dire straits.

When new ideas are introduced to struggling organizations, such as the case with the turnaround of the nonprofit Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, formerly under state receivership, innovation dynamics can create a new future state.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_ai_n26962522

What is needed for such a turnaround are new ways of thinking and new tools, a system of organizational improvement founded on best practice.

As traditional strategies, such as cost cutting and privatization, are applied to ailing school budgets, they have the disadvantage of one-time use. Hence, these strategies have limited or no capacity to create the dynamics of continuous improvement, a much needed result for survival. Cost-cutting or privatization strategies, while useful at the time, unfortunately have very limited longevity if they are applied to a current system, often as a crisis move, without the benefit of genuine system improvement. These strategies are often used within familiar and traditional systems, without the new thinking or better tools engaged for analyses or solutions.

The development and application of new thinking and tools to organically improve current systems is a very different way of leading schools from most current management systems in use. Lean thinking and Lean tools, while not a panacea, do give school leaders a venue for continuous improvement and strategic planning, a gradual and sustainable method. Lean ways of thinking provide handy mental models of continuous improvement for daily applications by leaders and stakeholders. Lean tools provide specific means to solve process problems from planning and design to implementation and operation. The Lean system of thinking and doing can produce results that range from enterprise building to instructional delivery improvements to business process change. In the end, intrinsically developed value and the elimination of waste is the goal of Lean systems.

So, not only should educators be encouraged by education's inclusion in economic recovery plans but also in knowing that there are both ways and means of improving the fiscal future of schools through Lean.

Feel free to forward this information by e-mail to a friend as the LeanSchools community is a growing network of improvement champions!

All the best,

Shannon Flumerfelt
Kevin Brockberg

SUMMARY

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