Title: Calculating the Cost of a “Sound Basic Education”

Background: As school districts throughout the U.S. struggle with funding issues, more and more people with the financial means to send their children to private schools are choosing this option, particularly in major urban school districts where the property tax base does not offer sufficient revenue to fund the needs of the district adequately. This is causing many schools to become segregated based on their financial status. When looking at what urban neighborhoods who have a low socio-economic status can offer students and comparing it to what suburban school districts have in terms of resources, it is evident that the educational opportunities provided by the schools are not equal. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity is a group of concerned citizens who have organized, filed lawsuits, and worked to equalize the educational opportunities provided to students in New York City and across the state. Changes in the way schools are funded have resulted in the argument that all students should be provided a “sound basic education”. While many districts across the country have similar problems, by calling attention to the New York City public schools and what people have done to make changes in the way education is funded, students can see the cost of public schools, understand the struggles schools face to provide “sound basic education”, and gain understanding and appreciation for what the educational system in the U.S. is responsible for providing to students.

Grade Levels: Grades 6-12

Subject Areas: Math, Social Studies, Civics, Language Arts

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

1. State their opinions about school funding and the use of monetary resources by school districts and use reasons, facts, and examples to support their ideas.
2. Participate in a variety of class discussion and questioning activities related to school funding.
3. Use notetaking skills to gather facts and information about school funding issues from film and Internet resources.
4. Compare sets of data related to school funding and draw conclusions based on these comparisons.
5. Participate in group brainstorming activities about what is needed for a “sound basic education”.
6. Complete a number of real-world math problems when developing a realistic budget for what it costs schools to provide a “sound basic education” using a variety of basic computation skills (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division).
7. Present to classmates statistical data and percentages related to the cost of providing a “sound basic education” based upon their calculations.
8. Use higher order thinking skills and analysis of information and facts to create an essay in response to what they learned about the cost of education and types of educational opportunities available to students based upon school funding.

Relevant National Standards:

This lesson correlates to the national McREL standards located online at http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks

Math

Standard 2: Understands and applies basic and advanced properties of the concepts of numbers

Standard 3: Uses basic and advanced procedures while performing the processes of computation

Standard 6: Understands and applies basic and advanced concepts of statistics and data analysis

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Language Arts
Writing
Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Reading
Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Listening and Speaking
Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Viewing
Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Thinking and Reasoning
Standard 1: Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument
Standard 5: Applies basic trouble-shooting and problem-solving techniques
Standard 6: Applies decision making techniques

Working with Others
Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of a group
Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills

Estimated Time:
Students will need 3-4 forty-five minute class periods to complete all three parts of the lesson plan.

Materials Needed:
- What Does It Cost to Educate a Child Worksheet (provided with plan)
- television and vcr for viewing the film
- computers with Internet access or other library resource materials
  OR
- Expert Panel Members—contacted in advance and given specific information about the content of the lesson, the types of questions students will be asking, and the type of information and data they should have ready to supply to students.

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NOTE: If bringing a “Panel of Experts” into the classroom is not feasible, teachers should gather the appropriate data from the appropriate sources and organize this data into some sort of printed packet of information that students can use as a research source. If opting for this type of plan, please modify the procedures for Part 2 Steps 8-9 and Part 3 Steps 10-13 to reflect use of the resource document rather than the presence of the “Panel of Experts” in the classroom.
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Procedures:

Part 1: Learning about School Funding

1. Create student interest in school funding by writing the following on the board/overhead:
   - Who paid for you to be here today? Without discussion, ask students to think about this question for one minute.
   - Have them use scratch paper to create a list of “who paid”.

2. Once lists have been created, have students share their answers as you record their responses on the board/overhead. Ask students to explain and back up their answers when needed.

3. Watch the section from “Beyond Brown” from 24:30 to 33:30. This portion of the film documents funding issues within the New York City public school system and how lack of funding and poor quality schools is causing people to move to other school districts or attend private schools if they can afford to in order to receive a quality education. Follow up viewing with a brief discussion addressing questions such as:
   - How does school funding, or lack of it, segregate schools? What examples did you see in the film?
   - Should wealthy school districts help pay the costs of poor school districts in order to make educational opportunities for students more equal? Why or why not?
   - What were some of the examples of ways that underfunded schools differed from those with adequate or above average funding? Give examples you saw from the film.
   - How does the quality of your school compare with the two extremes you saw in the film? Give examples to support your opinion.

Follow up on this discussion by referring students to the Beyond Brown web site’s “It’s All About the Money” and Educator sections to view graphs and statistics related to the funding of U.S. schools as well as see virtual comparisons of New York school facilities.

4. Using research data provided from sources such as the National Center for Educational Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/quickfacts.asp, use the Common Core of Data to present to students the number of students in their state currently enrolled in public schools, the total amount of money spent on education, the sources of this funding, and the cost spent per pupil in the state. Using data provided by the school district, if available, show students the amount of money spent per pupil in the district. Compare these sets of data to the national average of $7,548.00 spent per pupil. After comparing the amounts spent per pupil, revisit the questions below to see if students’ ideas about funding have changed now that they know about the average spending per pupil and how their school ranks.
   - How does the quality of your school compare with the two extremes you saw in the film?
   - Should wealthy school districts help pay the costs of poor school districts in order to make educational opportunities for students more equal? Why or why not?

5. Using the Campaign for Fiscal Equity web site at http://www.cfequity.org/ as a resource, discuss what the state of New York has done to try to create more equal educational opportunities for all students. By click on the FAQ section of the web site, teachers and students can get an overview about the issues and court decisions that have resulted from the efforts of the CFE. As a way to discuss and summarize the contents of the web site, use questions such as:
   - How do some schools currently restrict students’ opportunity to learn?
   - What is the definition of a “sound basic education”?
   - How can more funding for schools improve the quality of schools and educational experiences?
Title: Calculating the Cost of a “Sound Basic Education”

6. As an in-class or homework assignment, have students complete the following activity.
   • Create a list of all of the things your school must provide in order for you to receive a “sound basic education”. Anything that costs money should be on this list. Be prepared to share your ideas with classmates.

Part 2: What does it cost to educate a child?

7. As class begins, have all students take out the assignment from step 6 above. Assign students to small work groups (3-4 students) and have them share all of the ideas they have about what schools must provide in order to give students a “sound basic education”. Each group should complete a What Does It Cost to Educate a Child Worksheet, column 1 only, as they share their ideas. One member of the group should file the worksheet for use later in Part 3.

8. Explain to students that in order to complete the second part of the activity, they must develop a list of questions for expert panel members. These questions should address things such as
   • where the school district gets its funding
   • how money is budgeted to be spent in the schools
   • who decides how much money each district and each school receive each year
   • who decides which programs (sports, music, art, etc.) are funded and which are not?
   • how much money does it cost to provide each of the items you said were necessary for a “sound basic education”?

9. Once each group completes their list of questions, the questions should be submitted to the teacher and photocopied for each student in the group. This way the sheets can be used for notetaking in Part 3 of the lesson.

Part 3: Creating a Realistic Budget

10. Begin class by redistributing the list of questions developed in Step 8 above. Next, introduce students to the “Panel of Experts” that you have assembled for the classroom question and answer session. Finally, review the rules you have for asking questions of panel members.

11. Before the first question is presented, direct students to take out their list of questions so they can use them for asking questions as well as for recording the answers to questions and other factual information from the panel members. Using notetaking skills will be extremely important for this activity.

12. Allow students 20-30 minutes to question expert panel members. When questioning is complete, thank panel members and direct students back to their small work groups.

13. Using what they learned from the panel discussion, have students complete the remainder of the What Does It Cost to Educate a Child Worksheet as a group. Allow 15-20 minutes for this activity. Encourage students to complete all math activities accurately and to double check their answers.

14. To close the activity, have each group elect a representative to share their findings with the class. This speaker should clearly summarize the results their group had for the “Overall Statistics” section of the worksheet. Collect the worksheets from each group to evaluate the accuracy of the math problems.

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15. Using their experiences and what they have learned about the realistic costs of educating students in American schools, have students write a 1-page essay that addresses the topics:
   - Who is paying for your education?
   - In your opinion, what steps should be taken to ensure that all schools have the necessary resources to provide each student with a “solid basic education”?
   - How has completing the project affected your opinion about the type and quality of education you are receiving?
   - Do you believe you are getting a “solid basic education”? Why?
   - Has your work on this assignment affected your appreciation for the educational opportunities that are available to you? Why?

Evaluation Ideas:
1. Students could receive participation grades for involvement in class discussions and questioning activities and group work.

2. All group members should receive completion grades for their work on the What Does it Cost to Educate a Child Worksheet and the presentation of the group data.

3. Students should receive individual scores for completion of the 1-page essay. Teachers could use a scoring guide or peer or self-evaluation forms to score essays as well.

Extension Activities:
1. Encourage students to share their opinions about school funding through lobbying local, state, and national lawmakers about their opinions on school funding. This could be done through email or letter writing campaigns or by sending letters to the editor of the school or local newspaper stating their ideas about the topic.

Online Resources:
National Center for Educational Statistics
Find facts and figures about education spending, school enrollment, and revenue generated for education in the Common Core of Data at http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/quickfacts.asp

Campaign for Fiscal Equity
Learn the definition of “sound basic education” and get information about the movement and lawsuits intended to equalize educational opportunities for all students by visiting the web site: http://www.cfequity.org/. See the FAQ section for specific data and facts.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise
Visit the “It’s All About the Money” section of the site at http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/legacy/money_summary.html to learn facts about funding for public schools and see statistics about current inequities among school districts. Go to the video portion of this section to see a comparison between the schools in two different New York neighborhoods.
Review public opinion graphs related to school funding and racial disparities in education today and take an interactive tour comparing facilities available in two New York schools by accessing the “For Educators” section at http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/foreducators/.

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About the Author:
Lisa Prososki is an independent educational consultant who taught middle school and high school English, social studies, reading, and technology courses for twelve years. Prososki has worked extensively with PBS authoring and editing many lesson plans for various PBS programs and Teacher-Source. In addition to conducting workshops for teachers at various state and national meetings, Prososki also works with many corporate clients creating training programs and materials, facilitating leadership and operations workshops, and providing instructional support for new program rollouts. Prososki has authored one book and also serves as an editor for other writers of instructional materials.

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What Does It Cost to Educate a Child Worksheet

Directions: Complete column 1 by providing a list of all of the things a school district must provide in order for students to receive a “sound basic education”. Anything that costs money should be placed on this list. In addition, complete questions 1 and 2 at the bottom of the page.

After collecting data from research sources and/or members of an “Expert Panel”, fill in the Total Estimated Cost Per Year column based on the data you have available. Next, calculate the Total Cost Per Student Per Year using basic computation skills. Finally, complete the Percentage of Annual Cost column using basic computation skills. Be sure to check all math answers for accuracy.

Finally, answer the Overall Statistics Questions on the back of the page by working as a group to analyze the information and data that is available to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items Necessary for a “sound basic education”</th>
<th>Total Estimated Cost/Year</th>
<th>Total Cost/Student/Year</th>
<th>% of Annual Budget</th>
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1. What is the annual budget for the school district?
2. Where does the revenue (funding) come from? List sources and approximate amounts.
Title: Calculating the Cost of a “Sound Basic Education”

Overall Statistics Questions

1. What three items are the greatest expenses the school district has in order to provide you with a “sound basic education”?
   1.
   2.
   3.

2. Looking at the sources of funding for the school district, calculate the percentage of the total represented by each revenue source. Write the revenue source and the percentage below.

3. If you were forced to cut something from the budget above, what would it be, and why would you cut this item first?

4. If you were able to add two budget items to the list above, what would you add, and why would you add these items?

5. Based on the national average of $7,548.00 spent per child per year for education, how does your school district rank? Check one:
   _____Above Average  _____Below Average

   By what percent is your district above or below the average? _________________________

   Thinking about the population of your school district, discuss why you believe your district is above or below the national average for spending.

6. Based on what you have learned about school funding and how your school district ranks compared to others, do you think changes should be made in the ways schools are funded in order to provide a “sound basic education” to all students? Explain your answer.

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