

Bio Info For : Ines Segert

Age: 49

Family information: married, with two children: a 7th grader at Smithton Middle School and a sophomore at Rockbridge High School

Occupation: Resident Instruction Assistant Professor. MU Psychology Department

Education: M.A., Ph.D. Princeton University, Psychology & Neuroscience;
B.A., summa cum laude Rutgers College. English & Psychology

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Columbia Public Schools is facing a \$10.35 million deficit in the coming school year, partly because the district used reserves to increase salaries and add new positions. Administrators are asking voters to support a 54-cent levy increase to offset some of the shortfalls and fund future operating expenses.

Do you support the levy increase? Why or why not?

At this point, no. CPS has not made it possible for a conscientious voter to make an informed decision. Good decisions are never made in haste, under duress, and with selectively restricted information.

Before I can feel confident about casting a vote for this, I'd like satisfactory answers to the following:

- What is the exact expected deficit? (The number given is \$10.35 million, but is that still the case after the \$5 million in proposed cuts. If not, why is the requested levy 54 cents?)
- How will the money be spent? (What fraction will actually go towards teacher salaries)

I also don't agree with the decisions that produced the current projected deficit. While I believe that increasing teacher salary is important and necessary, most of the deficit comes from the creation of 70 new, primarily auxiliary positions in one year. I feel that most of those positions are inessential and there was no public evidence of a transparent and meaningful cost-benefit analysis for the many non-teaching positions. For example, 14 new positions are for math coaches. These coaches don't work directly with students, to the surprise of parents and students, but seem to be responsible for micromanaging teachers who have to work with manifestly unworkable and unpopular curricula.

Even now, the ongoing decision-making process doesn't seem to consider long term fiscal consequences. The designs for the new elementary and high schools have disregarded modern energy efficiency norms, leading to higher costs down

the road. Bad curricula carry a financial, as well as educational, cost. We are paying good money for programs to micromanage and over-assess our students and teachers.

Should the board spend reserves on operating expenses when reserves exceed the district's target of 16 percent of the operating budget? Why or why not?

No. Using reserves to fund operating expenses creates problems. Since operating expenses (such as salary increases, or new positions) are recurrent expenses, they can't be paid for just in a one-time outlay of reserve funds. If compensations for the cost are not provided by either new revenues or decreased expenditures, the reserves will soon disappear.

We need a more professional, more accurate, and more transparent budget process.

2. Closing the academic achievement gap between low-income black children and their wealthier white peers is one of Columbia Public Schools' top priorities.

Do you think the district is making progress in closing the gap?

No. Further, I'd like to note that the achievement gap is not limited to low-income black students versus wealthy white students. It also includes Hispanic students as well as special education, and low-income white students. And, No, I don't think the district is making satisfactory progress.

What more should be done to boost the academic performance of low-income minorities?

These problems have been quite successfully addressed in a number of states, California being a good example. A lesson learned is that discovery-based, or constructivist, curricula, like that used in CPS, have repeatedly been shown to be the least effective at eliminating achievement gaps. Support programs like MAC scholars or ACT Prep are excellent, but without a good curriculum, we are working uphill.

Here are some details about programs that work. Project Follow-through, a study of over 700,000 disadvantaged and minority children, demonstrated that curricula which focused on promoting positive self-esteem or emphasized the development of "problem-solving" skills actually decreased achievement in math and language skills. Only curricula that focused on acquisition of basic knowledge and skills through direct teacher instruction resulted in significant, positive improvements in achievement in reading, math, spelling, and language. (<http://www.mathematicallycorrect.com/honestft.htm>).

More recently, David Klein has shown that math achievement in schools with very high percentages of poor and minority students can rival that seen in more affluent and predominantly white schools. The districts which were successful in raising minority performance shared the following: all used direct instruction by a teacher, emphasized basic skills, discouraged calculator use, and devote at least an hour per day to math instruction, with repeated exposure to a topic and plenty of review. The texts used were traditional texts like Saxon Math. The results are striking: Bennett– Kew , an elementary school in Inglewood, California where the student body is 51% black, 48% Latino, 77% qualify for free or reduced price lunch, and 29% are not fluent in English is now one of the two highest achieving schools in that district (the other is Kelso, with a similar demographic and program; <http://www.csun.edu/~vcmth00m/brookings.pdf>).

Continuing with our current math curricula is guaranteed to perpetuate the achievement gap. Students whose families have financial or educational resources have access to expensive private tutoring sessions or to parental help at home. This is not available to students with limited means or whose parents may not be able to help with homework due to language or educational constraints.

3. Do you believe the Columbia Board of Education effectively communicates with the public? Why or why not?

Unfortunately, I have to say no. The board often announces final decisions without providing any opportunity for input or public explanation of rationale.

The board needs to be far more assertive in demanding information they need for themselves or for the public. The proposed budget cuts are scheduled to be announced simultaneously to the board and the public on March 10. This is unacceptable to me and I would expect board members to demand and publicize that information well in advance of the vote.

If elected, what would you advocate or change to keep lines of communication open with the community

During my campaign, I started holding open “office hours” Saturdays from 1–3 and I plan to continue this if elected. This has been a great opportunity for two-way dialogue. I have been able to meet many individual constituents and to learn their ideas and concerns.

I would also like to explore the possibility of creating a student representative position on the board.