



# INFORMATION CAPSULE

## Research Services

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## Size of District Administration

### At a Glance

*This Information Capsule addresses the contention that educational or central office administration is too large, costly, and takes money away from instructional activities implemented at schools. This idea is repudiated by examining the available research literature that addresses size and scope of administrative services in public school districts. Local data are also analyzed that indicate the funds expended for M-DCPS central administration has been consistently low (less than 1%) over the past ten years.*

Numerous articles, interviews, and editorials have been published that discuss the “bloated” bureaucracy in education. Several experts trace this notion back twenty years to then U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett when he referred to educational administration as a “blob” (Forsyth 2004; Protheroe 1998). This perception has been questioned numerous times by researchers that have actually evaluated the data rather than making pronouncements based on perceptions.

Approximately eight years ago, Research Services distributed an Information Capsule entitled *Rebuttal to Recent Attacks on the Size and Expense of School Administration*. This report provided information supporting the notion that the public’s perception of educational administration as “bloated” and responsible for diverting badly needed funds away from schools was false. Revisiting this issue might prove beneficial given the contemporary economic climate.

One of the sources of data used in the earlier capsule came from the report, *School Administration Under Attack: What are the Facts?* (Protheroe 1998). Protheroe reported that on average only 4.5 percent of district funds were spent on administration among school districts throughout the nation. In fact, this constituted a decrease from the 4.7 percent calculated only a few years earlier. Although the goals and demands placed upon education have expanded dramatically over the years, the proportion of district funds allocated to administration has actually decreased. Protheroe also indicated that if all central-office administrative staff were eliminated at the typical school district, teachers salaries would increase by only 5 percent. Additionally, if all of the administrative salaries were used to hire more teaching staff, this extreme action was estimated to reduce class size by only one student per class.

In the second edition of her book (*Answering the Critics of School Administration: What Are the Facts?*) published in 2008, Protheroe provided data pertaining to six perceptions concerning educational administration. Information about four of those perceptions are addressed in this Information Capsule. Protheroe took her data from authoritative sources in all cases. Although not

cited here, these sources included the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, etc. The interested reader is referred to the primary source (Protheroe 2008) for additional information about this source material.

Table 1 depicts four perceptions concerning educational administration typically maintained by the public, the media, and by some professionals. Adjacent to each are updated research findings or “facts” Protheroe associated with these commonly held perceptions.

**Table 1**

**Common Perceptions About Educational Administration and Associated National Research Findings**

Public Perception	Research Fact	Conclusion
There are too many administrators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2005-06, only 1.1% of all school district employees were central office administrators.</li> <li>• 2.8% of all employees were employed as principals and assistant principals.</li> <li>• Ratio of employees to administrators is higher in schools (15.2 to 1) than in any other industry studied (3.6 to 1 in publishing, 5.6 to 1 in manufacturing, 7.0 to 1 in construction, and 11.7 to 1 in health care).</li> </ul>	Educational administration is not “top-heavy.”
The number of central administrators is increasing and in so doing detracts from instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although responsibilities have expanded, there was no significant increase in central office administration from 1995-96 to 2005-06.</li> </ul>	Central administration is not “bloated” and, in fact, the question is being asked if there are enough administrators to operate effectively. Have too many administrative tasks been shifted to principals who now have less time to function as effective instructional leaders?
School districts are spending more on administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The share of funds allocated to administration and instruction nationwide has been stable over the past 10 years. Instruction accounts for approximately two-thirds of district expenditures while general administration accounts for approximately 2.1%.</li> </ul>	The share of budgeted funds devoted to central administration has not increased and actually decreased slightly in the past ten years (from 2.4% to 2.1%).
Large sums of money are being diverted away from the classroom to pay for unnecessary central administrative functions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is so little being spent on central administration in most school districts (2.1%) there is minimal funds to be reallocated.</li> <li>• The 5-year study by the Finance Center of CPRE concluded the functions performed by central office administrators are in fact necessary and would have to be carried out by some staff and paid for even if the central office was eliminated.</li> </ul>	There is little empirical research to support the notion of an administrative “blob” and large sums of money going to pay for unnecessarily large central administrations.

## Local Administrative Costs

Examining M-DCPS data provides additional information contrary to a “bloated administration.” Table 2 shows the proportion of M-DCPS funds allocated to various expenditure categories over the past ten years. In 2008-09, services to students accounted for approximately three-quarters or 73 percent of the district’s budget compared to less than 1 percent for central administration. The consistency of these proportions across the budget categories from year to year is remarkable.

**Table 2**  
**Where Does the Money Go?**

School Year	Direct Services to Students	Other School Services	Curriculum & Staff Development	Business Services	Central Administration*
2009-10**	72.5%	22.3%	2.1%	2.5%	0.5%
2008-09***	72.4	22.2	2.2	2.5	0.6
2007-08	71.4	22.2	2.9	2.9	0.6
2006-07	73.7	21.0	1.6	3.0	0.7
2005-06	75.8	19.8	1.1	2.7	0.6
2004-05	72.0	20.7	1.7	4.9	0.7
2003-04	74.9	19.7	1.1	3.7	0.6
2002-03	74.2	19.9	1.1	4.3	0.5
2001-02	74.3	19.6	1.2	4.4	0.5
2000-01	74.5	19.5	1.3	4.1	0.6

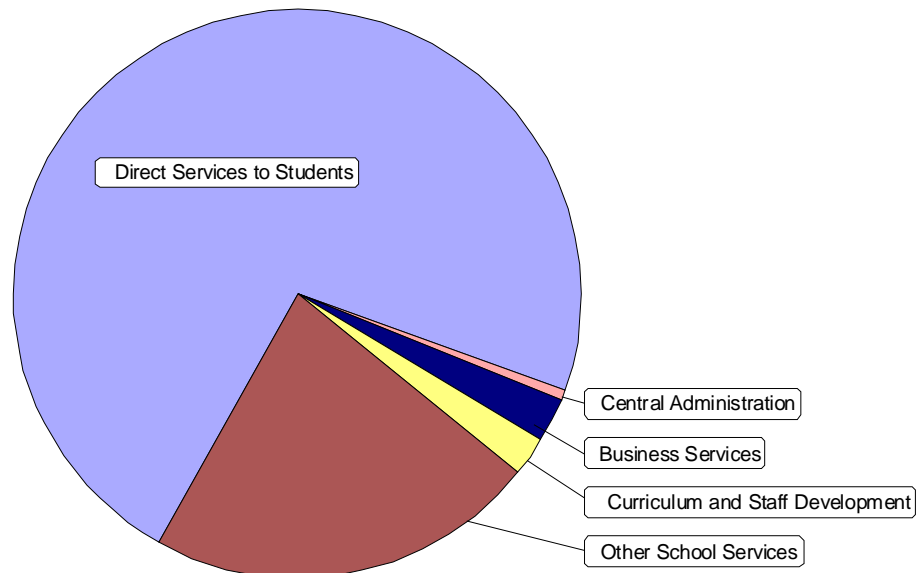
\* Includes budget categories: Board of Education, General Administration, and General Support.

\*\* Represents data from the 2009-10 Tentative Budget (July 7, 2009 Budget Workshop).

\*\*\* Represents amended 2008-09 budget.

Sources: M-DCPS Statistical Highlights "Where Does the Money Go", 2000-01 to 2007-08. Data supplied by the Office of Budget Management.

**Where Does the Money Go?**  
**2009-10 Tentative Budget**



## Conclusion

In conclusion, this topic is worthy of examination given the importance of public opinion to the funding of our schools. As evidenced by the national literature and local data reviewed in this capsule, there does not appear to be an over abundance of educational administrators. Rather, the field of education functions with far fewer managers than the vast majority of private business enterprises. Misconceptions and purposeful smear campaigns similar to the administrative “blob” proposed decades ago should be examined and cleared up as soon as they are proposed. They should not be allowed to fester in public forums for twenty years before they are empirically tested.

### Cautionary Note:

Administrative costs can be legitimately defined in various ways. Budget categories used to calculate such costs were not entirely consistent across the research reviewed here as it was prepared by different researchers, for different purposes, and covering different periods of time. Although such definitions may have varied across reports, within the reports themselves consistent comparisons were made.

## References

- Forsyth, J. (2004) Could Administrative Funding be Better Spent?, *The School Administrator*, American Association of School Administrators, May.
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*All reports distributed by Research Services can be accessed at <http://drs.dadeschools.net>.*