

Unbundling Education

Michael McShane, Ph.D.

Director of National Research

EdChoice



THE UNBUNDLING SERIES: FIVE SERVICES PUBLIC EDUCATION SHOULD DO DIFFERENTLY



BY [MARTIN LUEKEN](#) and [MICHAEL Q. MCSHANE](#) and [BEN SCAFIDI](#)

Published Aug 11, 2020

The greatest superpower the world has ever known laid low by a pandemic, driving divisions that eventually lead to its downfall. Sound worrying?

No, we're not talking about America, we're talking about Ancient Rome.

In the year 165 AD, a plague (probably smallpox) began to ravage the Roman Empire, killing roughly 20 percent of the population over the next 15 years and throwing the Roman economy and society into a tailspin. As Kyle Harper argues in his fantastic book *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*, it was this and subsequent plagues coupled with changing climatic conditions that exacerbated the fissures in the leadership of Rome and eventually led to its downfall.

The later Roman Empire had a problem: The Emperor. There could be only one, and the rules for succession were unclear. When an emperor would die, power struggles would emerge, particularly amongst the powerful generals of the Roman Legions. (This is how the year 193 became the Year of Five Emperors.) As Roman emperors centralized power at the same time they created leadership challenges, the Empire proved less able to deal with crises, from invading barbarians to pandemics to

RELATED POSTS



Unbundling: How K-12 Education Could Do Transportation Differently

Martin Lueken
Updated August 11, 2020



Unbundling: Three Ways Public Schools Can Rethink Food Services

Martin Lueken
Updated August 11, 2020

Percent of school districts that outsource school support services to private vendors for food, custodial and transportation services

State	Overall	State	Custodial	Transportation
Michigan	70.8%	42.8%	52.2%	26.6%
Pennsylvania	75.2%	44.6%	9.0%	66.4%
Ohio	16.6%	10.7%	4.2%	6.5%
Georgia	38.3%	2.2%	36.7%	1.7%
Texas	22.8%	14.9%	9.9%	3.7%

Source: Michael D. LaFaive and James M. Hohman (2015). *School Support Service Privatization: A Five-State Survey*, Mackinac Center, retrieved from: <https://www.mackinac.org/archives/2015/S2015-06.pdf>

Transportation

- ▶ Prior to COVID-19, public K-12 school districts spent more than \$25 billion annually on student transportation, or 7 percent of its total spending.
- ▶ An estimated 55 percent of public school students, more than 25 million students, are transported by an estimated 480,000 school buses each day at public expense.
- ▶ Nationwide, the cost of transporting students on a per-pupil basis, after adjusting for inflation, rose from \$657 to \$912 between 1998 and 2017, an increase of 40 percent.

Recommendations

- ▶ Eliminate costly and unneeded regulations.
- ▶ Embrace innovation.
- ▶ Learn from other states.
- ▶ Get the processes right for contracts.

Food Service

- ▶ School districts spend about \$24 billion on food services each year. According to the USDA, approximately 29.8 million students receive school lunch every day through the National School Lunch Program. That's about 60 percent of public K-12 students in the country.
- ▶ The public school system spends about \$4.50 on average each day to feed each student (based on a 180-day school year). These costs vary across states and will also vary within states across school districts.
- ▶ Nationwide, the cost of providing food services on a per-pupil basis, after adjusting for inflation, rose from \$890 to \$1,097 between 1998 and 2017, an increase of 23 percent.
- ▶ Students are dropping out of the Federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program because the meals are terrible.

Recommendations

- ▶ The Federal Government needs to rethink its regulation of school lunches.
- ▶ Schools and Districts can take a hard look at their participation in the federal school lunch program.
- ▶ Schools and districts can partner with local restaurants and non-profits to provide better meals for students.

Teacher Professional Development

Research by The New Teacher Project found:

- ▶ Teachers spend about 19 days per year in professional development activities.
- ▶ The total cost of this PD (including the cost of teachers' time) is estimated to be about \$18,000 per teacher per year.
- ▶ Teachers are not happy with it.
- ▶ It is not effective.

Recommendations

- ▶ Establish teacher professional development accounts.
- ▶ These accounts could be funded with up to \$750 per teacher to use on PD resources best suited to their professional needs.

Tutoring and Remedial Services

- ▶ Tutoring is a promising intervention for struggling students.
- ▶ Persistent gaps exist in student performance.
- ▶ Existing efforts via Title I and other avenues have not been successful.

Recommendations

- ▶ Create Tutoring Grants for students.
- ▶ Grants don't have to run through existing public school.
- ▶ At \$1,000 per child, for example, then families could provide their children a \$30 per hour reading tutor for 33 hours of instruction during a break week or in the summer—one-on-one.

Core Educational Services

- ▶ Families might like school, but not every bit of it.
- ▶ Great schools still have weak spots.
- ▶ Rural schools can struggle to offer full range of courses.

Recommendations

- ▶ Education Savings Accounts
- ▶ Course Access Programs
- ▶ Supplemental Education Funds

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades of green, creating a modern and dynamic look. The shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the slide, framing the central text.

Questions?

Connect with me:
mcshane@edchoice.org

Michael McShane, Ph.D.
Director of National Research
EdChoice