



SCHOOL WISE PRESS

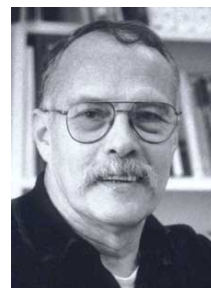
**Brown-bag  
Teleconference Series**



## BROWN-BAG SEMINAR SUMMARY

# Making Cuts Wisely Can Make Your District Stronger

**Prof. Henry Levin, December 11, 2008**



In the December brown-bag teleconference, Prof. Levin provided new perspectives on the ways that districts can get a better return on the dollars they invest in running schools. He offered advice in seven areas that we've summarized below.

His wisdom as an economist, his experience as a Palo Alto school board member, and his work as a researcher with a strong pragmatic bent equip him unusually well to shine a light in new directions. Note that his pragmatism is best expressed in his founding the Accelerated Schools movement in 1982, which turned the wasted effort of traditional remediation into a productive burst of learning by treating lagging students the same as gifted ones.

### **1. Classroom time**

Wonder where time goes? In many schools, it is lost to wasteful practices, and practices get embedded through tradition. Prof. Levin recommends conducting an audit of time by both teachers and administrators. He cautions that many will object, saying that the audit itself is a waste of time.

### **2. Teacher tenure**

"If tenure is easy to get, make it easy to lose," suggests Prof. Levin. "But if it's hard to get tenure, make it hard to lose," he urges. Teachers' job rights can be protected without giving teachers a job for life.

### **3. Teachers' professional development**

So much time is wasted on unfocused teacher training, often unrelated to the knowledge or pedagogical deficiencies of the teacher. If leadership guides this investment more actively, better student outcomes can result.

### **4. Algebra in middle schools**

Prof. Levin believes that lower-level escape hatches from a rigorous math curriculum allow teachers to steer too many students away from algebra. He urges an end to "checkbox math" and a focus on algebra success for all. He recounts the story of a middle school in New York that succeeded in eliminating tracked math classes, and he provides a research brief for reference (see below).

### **5. Remediating lagging students**

Prof. Levin reiterated his critique of remedial teaching from the early 1980s. When students are considered to need "fixing," they are treated as if they are broken. In founding the Accelerated Schools movement, Prof. Levin learned that by treating lagging students like gifted and talented students, they could accomplish great gains at a fast clip. The key difference: work with their strengths.

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## 6. Before-school and after-school programs

Too many programs are producing too little in the way of results. He urges a more thoughtful approach to the teaching that occurs in these programs and to the cost of running them. Is that time, and are those dollars, being used productively?

## 7. Class-size reduction

The Tennessee study “Class Size in the Early School Grades” was based on a reduction in class sizes in elementary schools to 15 students. There was not a straight-line gain in effective learning as class sizes gradually decreased. Rather, there was a quantum leap. Less dramatic reductions may not produce gains.

## Biography

Henry Levin is the William Heard Kilpatrick Professor of Economics and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Director of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education. As a professor at Stanford for nearly thirty years, Prof. Levin was close to the ground of California schools. A believer in the bridge from research to practice, many of his graduate students rolled up their shirtsleeves and took leadership roles in districts. He is a specialist in the economics of education and human resources, and he has published 16 books and almost 300 articles on these and related subjects. He also serves on the Board of Trustees of the Educational Testing Service.

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### Accelerated schools

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