

# FROM THE EDITOR

## Closing Time



“**N**o one likes closing schools.”

Kansas City Superintendent John Covington said those words following the board’s 5-4 vote to shut down nearly 29 of the district’s 61 schools and layoff up to 700 employees. The move, which comes after a process that Covington described as “difficult and painful and emotional,” is designed to offset a projected \$50 million budget shortfall.

It’s also symbolic of the challenges school leaders face in an era of unprecedented financial turmoil. As Senior Editor Del Stover notes in his sobering cover story, “Uncharted Territory,” districts are looking at an economy that is not rebounding as quickly as any of us had originally hoped. In fact, more radical moves like the one by Kansas City may be on the horizon.

Meanwhile, in a related story, Senior Editor Naomi Dillon looks at “The Pension Problem.” As she writes, districts are struggling to meet their contractual obligations to employees as the cost of health care and retirement benefits spirals out of control.

Both stories look at how districts are trying to slice and dice budgets that already have been cut to the bone. They also point to some encouraging

trends, such as increased collaboration and sharing of services in states such as Michigan, and negotiations between districts and their employee unions to keep insurance costs down.

Even in good times, developing a budget that serves the myriad needs of today’s schools is no fun. Inevitably, projects and programs that would benefit students are cut and others are kept. But the cuts are running ever more deeply as boards push forward this year.

Without question, some of Kansas City’s 29 schools probably should have been closed long ago, as the district’s enrollment declined by more than half over the past decade and by more than 75 percent since the late 1960s. But for a variety of reasons, that didn’t happen until it was almost too late: The district faced financial insolvency in 2011 if no moves were made.

Making the right call is a hard one, to be sure. But no call can be just as damaging to your district’s long-term health, as Kansas City’s leaders discovered. As you face your individual district’s challenges in the coming weeks, we hope you will consider all options carefully, and ultimately make that right call.

Until next month ...

*Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief*