

POLK DES MOINES
TAXPAYERS
ASSOCIATION

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EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT

THE TRUTH?

The phrase don't shoot the messenger contains an enormous amount of truth, namely that delivering bad news is not something that typically wins you many friends. People like to deliver good news, regardless of its validity, in large part because most people seem to prefer hearing good news. The important insight here is that a lie takes two parties - the person who tells the lie and quite frequently the listener who signals in a number of ways that she or he wants to be lied to.

Building a culture of truth-telling and acting on hard facts require an enormous amount of self-discipline in order to not only be willing to hear the truth, however unpleasant, but to actually encourage people to deliver bad news. You can't fix things or bring advice and talent to bear on problems unless you know about them. It is better to know the truth early, when the situation can be remedied, than later, when it may be too late to do much.

VITURES AND DRAWBACKS

No drug is without side effects. Most surgical procedures have risks and even when performed perfectly may have downsides. Too often, many solutions to issues are presented as costless and universally applicable, with little acknowledgement of potential pitfalls. Yet all management practices and programs have strong and weak points, and even the best ones have costs. This doesn't mean organizations shouldn't implement things like Six Sigma or Balanced Scorecards, just that they should recognize the hazards. That way, managers & superintendents won't become disenchanted when known setbacks occur, or worse yet, abandon a valuable program or practice.

BE NEUTRAL

Ideology is among the more widespread, potent, and vexing impediments to using evidence-based management. People routinely ignore evidence about practices that clash with their political convictions or idiosyncratic personal histories. People "see what they believe". Learning is difficult when leaders or anyone else is driven by ideology rather than evidence.

At the moment, US schools are applying and enforcing the most stringent performance standards ever, specially holding students, teachers, and administrators accountable for performance. It is hard to argue against high standards. But when an ideal is applied without regard to evidence about which tough practices work and which don't, performance suffers. For example, there is great pressure to end *social promotion*, advancing a child to the next grade even if his or her work isn't up to par-in other words, to start flunking more kids who don't meet certain standards.

Going to summer school before starting the next grade may help. Advancing kids who can't perform at the next grade level certainly creates frustration and may lower motivation of kids who put forth the effort to meet standards. But ending social promotion harms students and schools, and the strongest negative effects are found in the best, most rigorous studies. At least 55 studies show that when flunked students are compared to socially promoted students, flunked students perform worse or drop out of school at higher rates. One of the most careful studies found that, after controlling for numerous alternative explanations including race, gender, family income, and school characteristics, students held back one grade were 70% more likely to drop out of high school. Holding students back also leaves schools crowded with older students, and costs skyrocket as more teachers and other resources are needed because the average student spends more years in school. (Robert M. Hauser, 1999)

BARRIERS

One of the most formidable barriers to implementing evidence-based management is the belief that things can't be different because they have always been that way, are that way everywhere, and *must* be that way for good reasons. If people don't know or understand alternative paths, or haven't been enticed or forced to think about such alternatives, they won't make changes, regardless of the evidence.

If people don't understand the history of how and why things came about, change is difficult because they don't come to grips with the (often obsolete or suspect) reasons and assumptions behind present practices.

POLK CO. ASSESSOR

In 2007, the Polk County Assessor filed suit against the Iowa Department of Revenue. At issue was a controversial ruling by the Department that mandated property to be assessed at its "value-in-present-use" rather than its market value.

The Assessor's office announced in its 2nd Quarter newsletter that in April, a District Court judge ruled in the Assessor's favor. The portion of the Iowa Administrative code that had been amended to require value-in-present-use assessments is now rescinded and declared void.

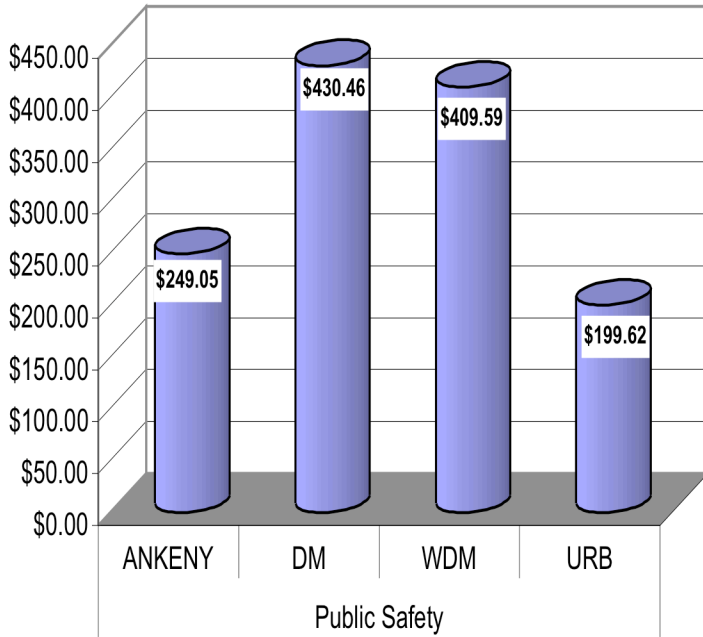
The newsletter continues, "We're pleased the case was resolved in our favor, and that the market value standard will continue to apply to assessments in all cases. It's an approach that has served our state well for many years – and it's the law."

MERGER'S?

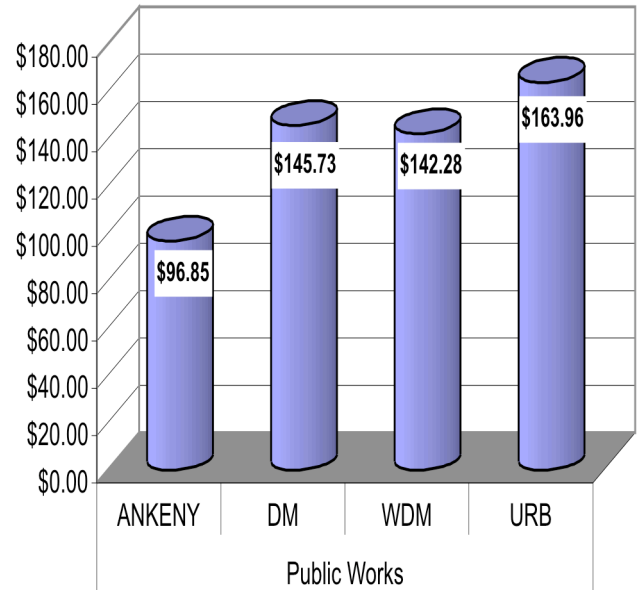
Can merger's pay off? In the five years since Louisville merged with Jefferson County, Kentucky, it's become more attractive to businesses and has enjoyed a downtown building boom, while shedding 1,000 of its 7,000 public-sector workers.

The merger of Tampa, Florida with Hillsborough County has been before the voters three times, and failed three times. This fall, however, the Hillsborough voters will get to decide on a different brand of management reform: whether to create an elected mayor to run the county, abolishing the current commission/administrator format. Why? The citizens in favor of the change say they are looking for more accountability from their elected officials. Proponents also say that county commissioners are inevitably parochial and that putting a single elected leader in charge will give voters one person to thank, or to blame, as the case may be. On the other hand, opponents say, a strong elected executive can put too much power in the hands of one individual, leading to corruption and cronyism. "A professional administrator is accountable every day, because they can be fired at will. A mayor is elected once every four years, and then benefits from the power of incumbency," says Beth Rawlins, a Florida public affairs consultant.

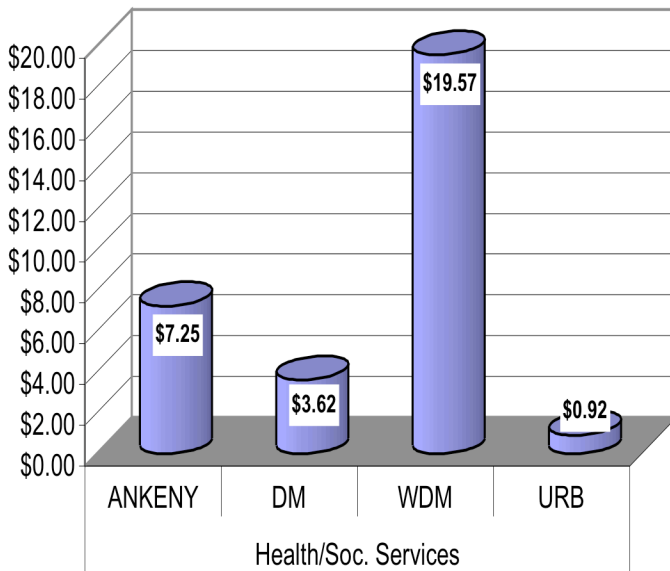
#9 - PUBLIC SAFETY EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA



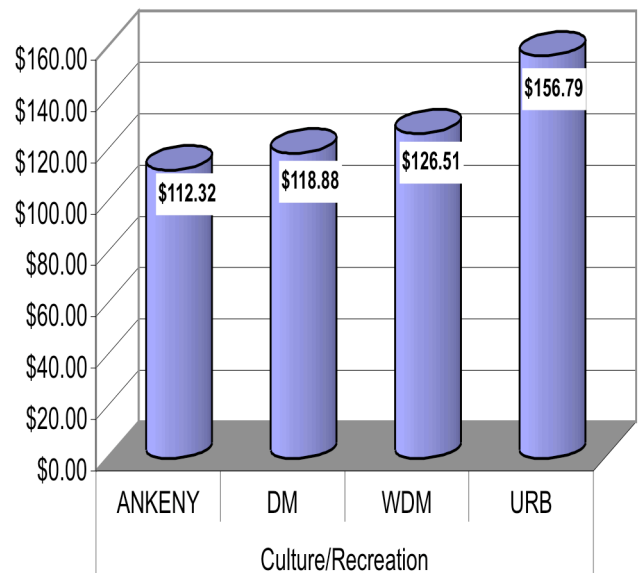
#10 - PUBLIC WORKS EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA



#11 - HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICE EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA



#12 - CULTURE & RECREATION EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA



FLAG DAY



JUNE 14, 2008

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