


Chapter 8

Discussion Guide



Chapter 8 explores the role of money in education, particularly in California.

“Resources” video: <https://youtu.be/IS62XNkHiOs>

Use the questions below to support conversation based on the lessons. Use the link icon  to visit each lesson online, where you can take the quiz or add a comment.

Lesson 8.1 Spending

- Check for understanding: In plain dollars, California's education funding is average. So why do California schools have less of everything? How do the size and age demographics of the state contribute to this?
- How are learning outcomes of students and classroom environments bound to change with changes in spending on California's education system?
- Do you think most people are aware of how California schools are funded? Do they know just how much of the state budget goes to education? What was your initial reaction to the fraction of spending in California attributed to K-12 education?
- Should we be spending more on public education? Is there a way to do this without increasing taxes?

Lesson 8.2 Education Dollars

- California schools have fewer administrators, counselors, and office staff. So what? How does it affect teachers or students?
- What is the average student-to-teacher ratio in your school? Would decreasing or increasing the class sizes benefit the students more? Does this ratio matter more for certain subjects rather than others?
- California is very different from other states. Is there value in comparing spending and student-to-teacher ratios in California to those in other states?

Lesson 8.3 Who Pays

- Funding for education is prone to wild swings. What is your district's strategy for building and drawing on reserves? How effective are these strategies?
- Do parents in your district know that state income tax, not property tax, is the main source of funds for education? How can we increase understanding of the education funding system?
- State income tax is the main source of funds for education in California. How does this affect schools?

Lesson 8.4 Prop 13 and Prop 98

- Proposition 13 was passed over 30 years ago. Would it pass today?
- What are some of the consequences of Proposition 13? What are some ways to address these problems?
- Proposition 98 was meant to force the legislature to allocate at least a certain portion of the budget to education. In practice, it has become the funding ceiling: the legislature almost never allocates more. Now what?
- Do you think people care more about having lower taxes or better education in their communities? Do you think this should change? If so, what could we do to change people's priorities?

Lesson 8.5 Local Control Funding Formula

- How important is it for parents in your district to understand the rules that cause money to flow to the district? How would this comprehension promote more involvement/action?
- Does your school qualify for supplemental or concentration funds under LCFF? How does your school use the funds?
- Has your district actually allocated LCFF funds in ways that reflect the intent of the law? Does your school receive extra funds for English learners, students in poverty, and foster youth? How do you know?
- LCFF gave districts more power to allocate funds as they see fit in negotiation with teachers and other unions. What are the benefits and drawbacks of this?

Lesson 8.6 Allocations

- Special education is not included as part of the LCFF system in order to avoid over-identifying students for special education services. Is your school identifying students for special education services appropriately?
- Is your school well-funded? Are there fundraising efforts to compensate for budgets in some of your school's programs?

Lesson 8.7 School Funding

- Find your school's latest School Accountability Report Card (SARC). Is it available on [SARConline.org](https://sarconline.org)? If it isn't online, does your district have a plan to make it so?
- Are teachers in your school paid the same as teachers in the rest of the district? (This information should be included in the SARC. You can also find it on transparentcalifornia.com) What accounts for any differences?
- Does your district publish school-level budget information? If so, does it allocate dollars to schools using real salary costs?

- Over which spending decisions does your school have control? Where in the district office are budgeting decisions made that affect your school? When are those decisions made?
- Who allocates funds for classroom materials in your district? Do teachers have enough resources to provide for their classrooms?

Lesson 8.8 Effectiveness

- What are your district's major strategic investments to improve student learning?
- What are some ways to increase productivity in schools? Is it possible to allocate more funding to these areas?
- Does your school use funds productively? How do you know?

Lesson 8.9 More Money for Education

- Should lawmakers raise state taxes to support schools, or is this a decision that should only be made by voters?
- How would increased education funding benefit students at your school?
- Are there many fundraising efforts at your school, and how are they organized? How can participation be increased?
- How much does your school or district raise per year through donations? To compare with other schools or districts, divide the money raised by the number of students. Where does this donated money go?
- Should local communities have more ability to raise taxes in support of schools? How could that be accomplished?

Lesson 8.10 Parcel Taxes

- Has your community attempted to pass a parcel tax? What was the result?
- Parcel tax campaigns tend to require parent leadership, which in turn requires communication between parent leaders at neighboring schools. Are parents in your district connected in this way? How can these campaigns be emphasized in your community? (Hint: Ed100 study groups can be a way to get this started.)
- How has the 2021 court ruling affected the ability to pass parcel taxes? Does this make it more likely your community could pass a parcel tax?

Lesson 8.11 Volunteers

- Are the volunteer parent leaders in your school aware of the value of their role?
- How can your parent leaders work together to build a culture of accountability? Is there a way to promote this involvement among parents?
- How do parents “step up” to leadership roles in your school? Are they asked? Are they prepared?

- How can we make sure parents of all backgrounds feel included in volunteer programs?
Do parents feel that volunteer commitment is flexible?
- What role could Ed100 play in developing your parent organization?

Next Steps

- What information from the lessons in this chapter should be shared with parents (or others) in our school community? How?
- Did your discussion lead to interesting questions or insights? Please consider adding a comment on Ed100, and/or on Facebook. <http://www.facebook.com/ed100.org>
- Invite more people from your school to use Ed100 and increase your PTA's chance of [winning the next drawing](#).