



**Talking About Education + Budgets and Taxes,
Featuring *SWAMPED!*:**

Frequently Asked Questions

This document is not intended to provide “the right answers” to questions you might be asked, but rather to offer illustrations of how to more effectively communicate about the linked topics of education and budgets and taxes. In the following question and answer sequence, we demonstrate how an advocate might think about turning unproductive frames embedded in questions into opportunities to advance a more effective message when combining these two issue areas. Communicators will find their own ways of putting these illustrative principles into practice.

Q 1: While it's clear that our public schools are not performing as well as they should, it's not clear that more money will help. Don't states and the federal government have the responsibility to make the same kind of budget sacrifices families make in order to support students?

Less Effective Response:

Yes, as taxpayers we hold our state and federal governments responsible for making the same kind of budget sacrifices we do in our daily lives in order to support programs and services that benefit us. Unfortunately, most states operate under balanced-budget constraints, leaving governors and legislators to face unusually painful decisions, like cutting needed educational programming and services to students and raising taxes. So states *are* making budget sacrifices, just like families. But taxes are important too; by increasing taxes to support American education, states can actually use the money to expand the quantity and quality of educational programming and teacher resources to help students learn, while promoting economic development and employment growth for communities.

Analysis:

- Triggers unproductive, “little picture” thinking that links household budgets to public budgets.
- Buys into a consumer orientation.
- Reminds the public of negative notions of government (e.g., vast bureaucracy, waste, and inefficiency) without discussing the greater social good of what public budgets and taxes do for all.

More Effective Response:

Supporting our schools is and continues to be a top priority for our country. It is one of the most important ways we ensure that our children develop the skills they need to become productive members of our workforce and our communities. Although some have proposed that we postpone our response to the fiscal challenges in the education system, we are better off using our resources today to prevent the deterioration of educational programming for our children. If we postpone dealing with problems, they just get bigger and cost more to fix later on. We need to take steps today to prevent the fiscal problems that we know will affect the wellbeing of our children and the long-term prosperity of our state and nation.

Analysis:

- Uses values Future Preparation and Prevention to point to the importance of dealing with education-related issues today by preventing problems before they occur.
- Makes the case for linking the need for funding American education to tax resources as a solution that benefits all.

Q 2: If you don't have children in the public education system, why do you have to pay for educational programming through your taxes? That doesn't seem fair.

Less Effective Response:

All of America's children deserve the right to have access to a quality education. They need strong programming, great schools and teachers, and the resources to build skills they need to succeed. Financing public education takes the money all taxpayers pay in to ensure all students receive these resources. If we cut taxes, which support these programs, then we deny our children a hope for a brighter future. So, instead of playing the "what's fair and what's not" game, what's needed most is collaboration and cooperation.

Analysis:

- Relies on the concept of collaboration and cooperation as a value.
- Clouds the notion of a collective good and invokes zero-sum thinking that pits those who pay more taxes against others who are judged to pay less.
- Triggers "vending machine" mentality: you get out of government what you pay for.
- Doesn't help people understand how budgets and taxes are infrastructures that support entire communities both in the long and short term.

More Effective Response:

The real issue here is how we support the next generation of our workforce, who will be responsible for the prosperity of our state in the future. We do this by supporting our nation's schools and improving the quality of education that children receive. When we pay our taxes, we pay forward; not for immediate exchanges for public

goods, such as education, libraries, and highways, but so we can have them available in the future. Public goods, like education, are not only paid for by taxes from people who need it now or in the near future, they are paid for in the past with taxes that were budgeted then to meet the community's needs now. So, having a good public budget that accounts for improving education today is one that plans for the future. And we can say that good taxes are the ones that allow every community to pay for the public goods and services it will need in order to prosper.

Analysis:

- Takes a positive approach to using tax resources to improve education by helping people see taxes as a shared responsibility.
- Uses the simplifying model of Forward Exchange to build support for funding public education by considering how taxes, public goods and services are not immediate exchanges, but are distributed in time.
- Uses the value of Prevention to shift thinking away from individualism and toward a common good.

Q 3: Improving teacher quality in American education is one of the top subjects being debated today. Some people argue for increasing teacher pay while others argue the fiscal environment prevents us from doing that. How do we encourage improved teacher quality without more pay? What makes a good teacher?

Less Effective Response:

Good teachers are not born; rather, they are made, through rigorous recruitment, preparation, and continuous professional development. Teaching is a profession built on the hard work, reflection, care, persistence and intellect of good teachers. Good teachers understand that teaching is not merely pouring content into children. It is about facilitating learning: motivating children to learn, giving them the support necessary to develop skills and knowledge, and helping them overcome problems and assume responsibility for their actions and their learning. We rely on teachers to provide our students with an education that will truly prepare them for the future.

Analysis:

- Inadvertently reinforces the belief that “teachers are born, not made” by restating the claim.
- Reinforces the cultural model of “caring teachers” and “intrinsic motivation” as the most important factor in teacher quality (hard work, care, persistence, etc.) and in student success.
- Places responsibility on teachers and students by focusing on student motivation and achievement as indicators for success.
- Fails to make a claim on the value of teaching that accrues to society, not just to individual outcomes.
- Doesn't help people see the many parts of the education system that exist beyond teachers and the classroom – what impedes or promotes their efforts.

- Doesn't effectively address the important role budgets and taxes play in planning for and supporting effective teacher resources.

More Effective Response:

There are many groups of people in our communities who play an important role in supporting the educational aspirations of our children — coaches, civic groups, local business leaders, and many others—as well as teachers. A well-functioning education system is like an orchestra; all of the players know their parts and the orchestra practices until they are able to play as one cohesive unit. A conductor is then able to bring out the best in each player individually and collectively. Good teachers need resources to teach effectively, plan lessons, monitor instruction and assess student learning — all of which benefit and support their students. When good teachers are connected to a network of resources, they are able to collaborate with other teachers, parents, community members, and school administrators to ensure that all students are successful.

To make sure teachers have the resources to perform well on behalf of their students, our public budget and tax systems need to adequately fund their work. Without it, we simply won't be able to realize the goal of improving education for all of our children. Budgets and taxes allow us to see into and plan for the future. Because we pay taxes forward, we use their resources to provide the educational supports we will need in the future. It is only through the use of these instruments that we distribute the resources to help teachers play their part in the orchestra, and to be the brain builders we need them to be.

Analysis:

- Includes the value of Future Preparation.
- Uses the simplifying model Orchestra to point to the other important actors in the education system, in addition to teachers.
- Moves the focus away from public sentiment that good teachers are “caring” and have other innate qualities, and instead points to resources that help improve the quality of teaching and teaching effectiveness.
- Uses the simplifying model of Forward Exchange to help people see how taxes distribute educational resources in time.

Q 4: There are some students and schools that fare better than others. Why should taxpayers continue to put money into schools that are failing the most vulnerable students?

Less Effective Response:

Blindly putting money into schools is often presented as the panacea to education reform. But not all students and schools are equal. Some schools need more programming to motivate students, some parents need to be more involved and engaged, some teachers lack the necessary credentials to teach in certain subjects and, let's admit it, poor administrators are sometimes to blame for not properly evaluating and getting rid of underperforming teachers. Tax monies help us make the

necessary investments in education so that improvements can be made to level the playing field and minimize the achievement gap between students and their schools. All children deserve a chance. Investing in their future today can bring huge returns tomorrow.

Analysis:

- Promotes an “us vs. them” view of the educational system that is competitive and divisive.
- Blames education system failures on individuals, including the tangible triad (parents, teachers, students).
- Makes education a consumer good: to be bought and invested in.
- Doesn’t address concerns about how taxes and budgets can be used as strategies for educational reform and systems improvement.
- Reinforces the notion of “throwing money at the problem” without any plausible solutions.

More Effective Response:

Preparing for America’s future requires us to ensure that educational resources are distributed across all communities. This means ensuring that we prepare young people to be productive, contributing members of our communities no matter where they live in our state. We would never want students in some parts of the state to go without the benefit of a quality education simply because of their ZIP codes. Our task is to remodel the education system in our state to ensure that it supports the aspirations of ALL of our students, not just the ones lucky enough to live in more affluent neighbors. The good news is that we don’t have to tear down the existing system; we can take a measured approach to our remodeling efforts. Like remodeling a house, you assess what needs to be fixed, develop a plan, and gather the resources to carry it out. The challenge here is that our budget and tax systems need to be oriented to help us do the remodeling work. Our budget and tax systems can allocate funding and opportunities across communities in ways that place greater resources where they are needed most, whether they are rural or urban. When all students have access to the best educational resources and opportunities, they will be better able to contribute to our country’s future.

Analysis:

- Reinforces the notion of “Fairness between Places” to emphasize equitable resource distribution and de-emphasize competition and “us vs. them” thinking.
- Uses the value of Future Preparation to remind people of the common good for everyone.
- Uses the simplifying model of Remodeling to direct thinking toward realistic education reform.