Tap Dancing on Marbles: Key Concepts, Indicators & Strategies to Move from Viability to Financial & Organizational Sustainability

Mission & DATA
Mission-driven, Data-informed Leadership and Governance

ACIS
ASSOCIATION of COLORADO INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

January, 15 2026 | 4:30 - 5:30 MDT

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Co-Founder and Partner

Sadie Albertyn
Senior Organizational Effectiveness Strategist

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AGENDA

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01 Framing Our Time Together

02 6 Key Concepts in Financial & Organizational Sustainability

03 Lessons from Higher Education: Indicators of Financial & Organizational Fragility

04 The Path to Progress & Long-Range Financial Modeling

05 Discussion & Questions with Alan Smiley

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Mission Driven + **Community Centered** + **Data Informed**

We are the trusted partner across our industry

261

Independent School Clients

27

Membership Associations

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Strategic Data Partners

Enrollment Management Association

TABS

ATLIS
Association of Technology Leaders in Independent Schools

Other National/International Partnerships

CASE

NBOA
BUSINESS LEADERSHIP FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

CAIS
Canadian Accredited Independent Schools

10+ State & Regional Associations

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Independent Schools on the Brink

A collaborative effort of 33 independent school member organizations

1,900+ trustees and school leaders

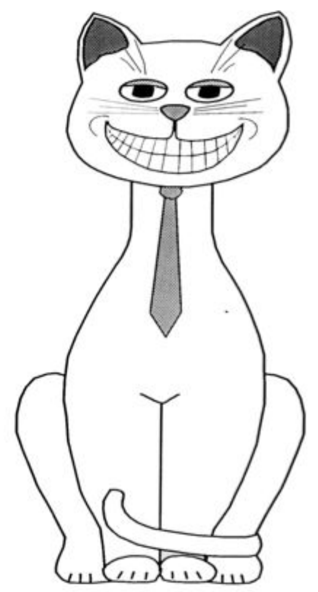
April 21, 2020

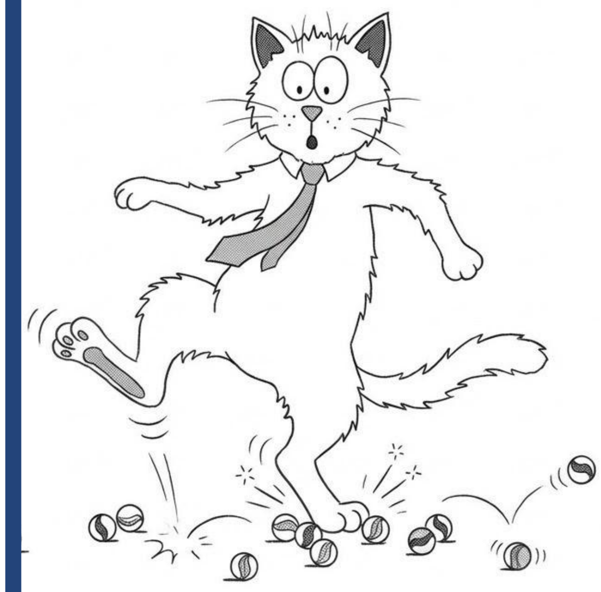
Moderator:

- Debra Wilson, President, SAIS

Panelists:

- Ari Betof, Co-Founder and Partner, Mission & Data
- John Gulla, Executive Director, E.E. Ford Foundation
- Jane Hulbert, Partner, The Jane Group
- Kristen Power, Director of Membership, EMA





What we tell ourselves life was like for school leaders before the pandemic	**The lived experience of many school leaders over the past several years**	**The challenge of cultivating a financially and organizationally healthy school** (on top of everything else)

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Organizational Stewardship

Leadership

Governance

Financial Sustainability

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Living the Mission

&

Cultivating Financial Sustainability

&

Organizational Stewardship

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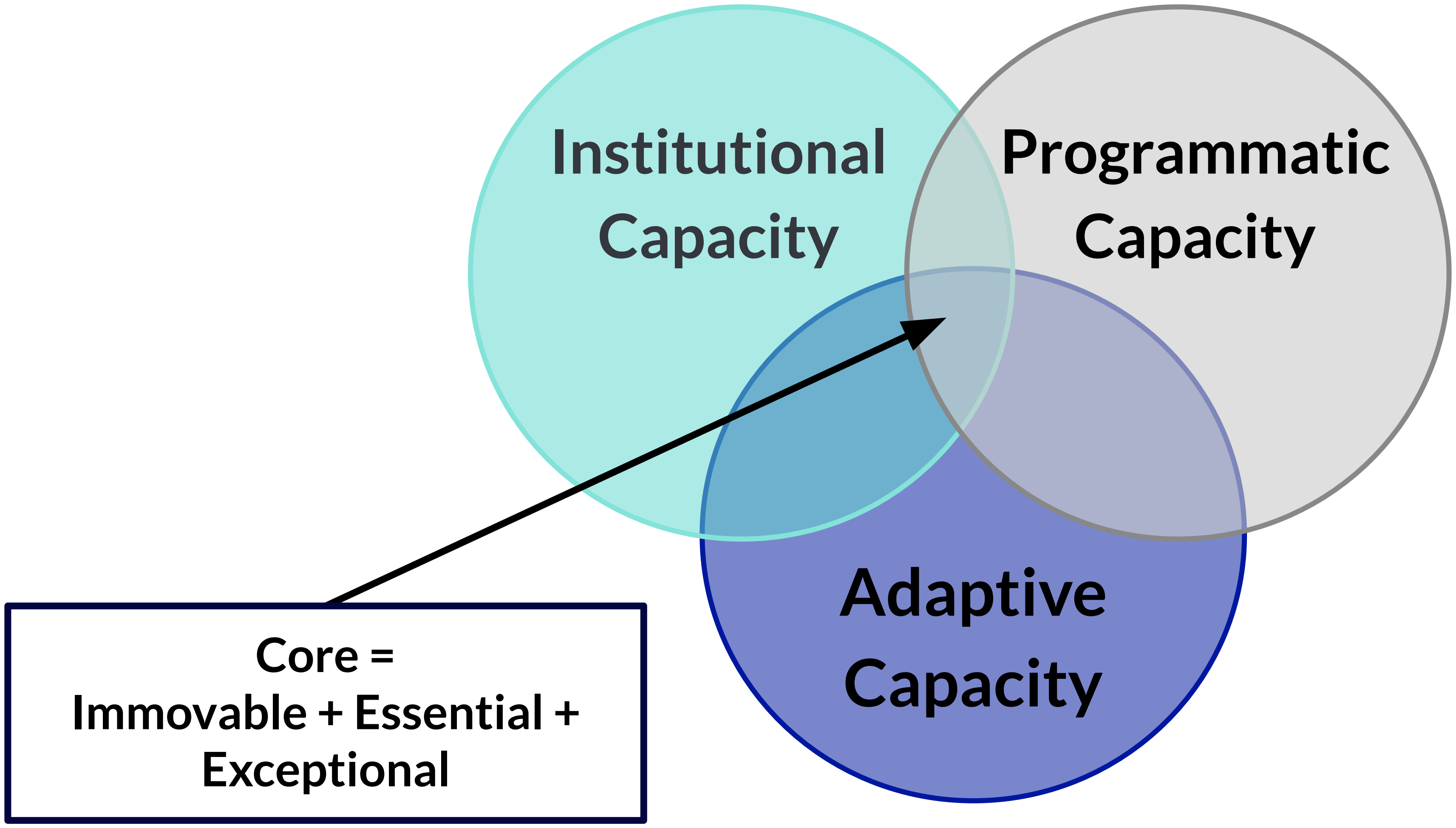
Stewardship of What Is Core & Leveraging Organizational Capacity



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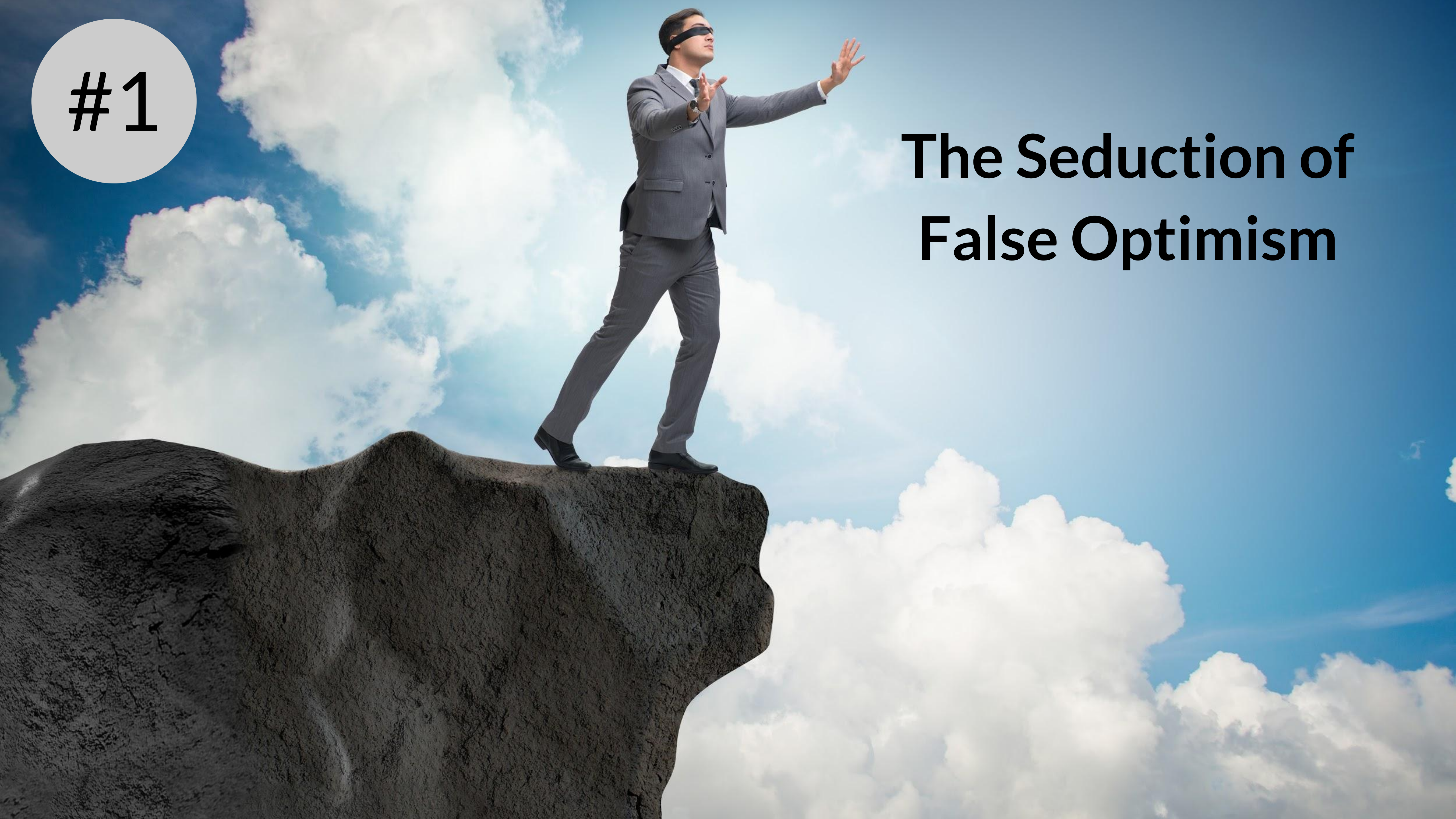
6 Key Concepts In Financial & Organizational Sustainability


#1
The Seduction of
False Optimism

Spectrum of Financial & Organizational Health

Focus on **survival** in next 12-24 months

Viability in next 10+ years not in question

Situate your school on the viability-stability-sustainability spectrum:

Focus on **survival**
in next 12-24 months

Viability in next 10+ years
not in question

#2

Independent Schools are a Premium (not a luxury)

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These Boots Have Lasted Me 12 Years. Unfortunately, They're $600.

Published October 9, 2025

Save

"[O]n the night before my 23rd birthday, a shoebox arrived by express mail, all the way from Australia…

I am 35 now, and those same boots are still the first shoes I reach for whether I'm wearing black jeans and a T-shirt or a dark navy suit…

The only real issue with these boots is their cost: $619. That is still a lot of money to spend on a single item of clothing, but given that my old pair has lasted 12 years so far, I believe that even their price is worth it."

The New York Times


#3
Shared Understanding of
Revenue & Expense Drivers

2nd & 3rd Order Implications

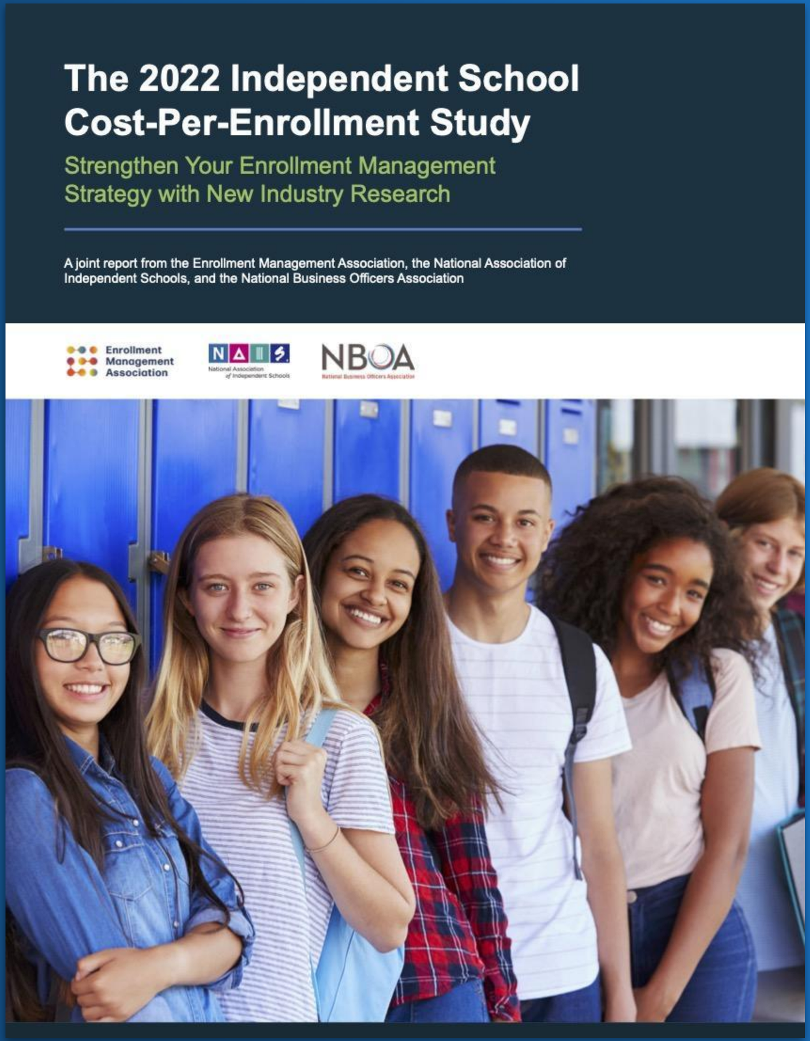
#4


#5
Managing Reality & Perception

#6

Adequately Fueling the Resource Engine…

Enrollment Management Association



every $1 spent on enrollment management

yields $7 in return*

*EMA-NAIS-NBOA's 2022 Independent School Cost-Per-Enrollment Study

High-Water Mark Budgeting

vs

Low-Water Mark Budgeting

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Lessons from Higher Education:

Indicators of Financial & Organizational Fragility

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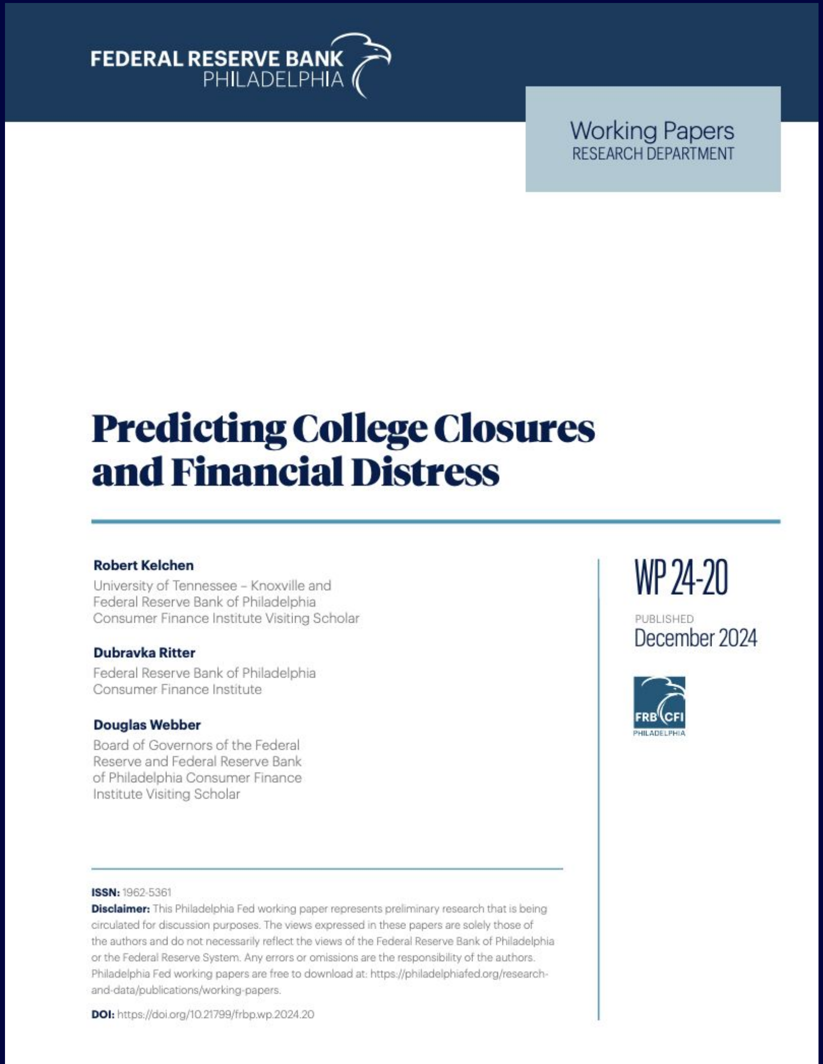
Predicting College Closures and Financial Distress

~ By Kelchen, Ritter, Webber December 2024



FEDERAL RESERVE BANK PHILADELPHIA

Working Papers
RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

Predicting College Closures and Financial Distress

Robert Kelchen
University of Tennessee – Knoxville and Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia Consumer Finance Institute Visiting Scholar

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Colleges Face a Financial Reckoning. The University of Chicago Is Exhibit A.

Decades of big spending, new federal funding cuts and a changing view of higher education created a perfect storm; 'Spending Your Tuition On Its Mistakes'

Share Resize 1187 Listen (2 min)

By Sara Randazzo Follow and Heather Gillers Follow | Photography by Jamie Kelter Davis for WSJ
Oct. 30, 2025 9:00 pm ET

The University of Chicago helped build prestige with heavy investment in its programs and campus.

The school that produced Milton Friedman and 34 other Nobel Prize-winning economists is struggling to manage its pocketbook.


THE TONIGHT SHOW JIMMY FALLON
HANNAH BERNER
AND PAIGE DESORBO

A College Missed Its Enrollment Goal by Nearly Half. What Happened?

By Taylor Swaak

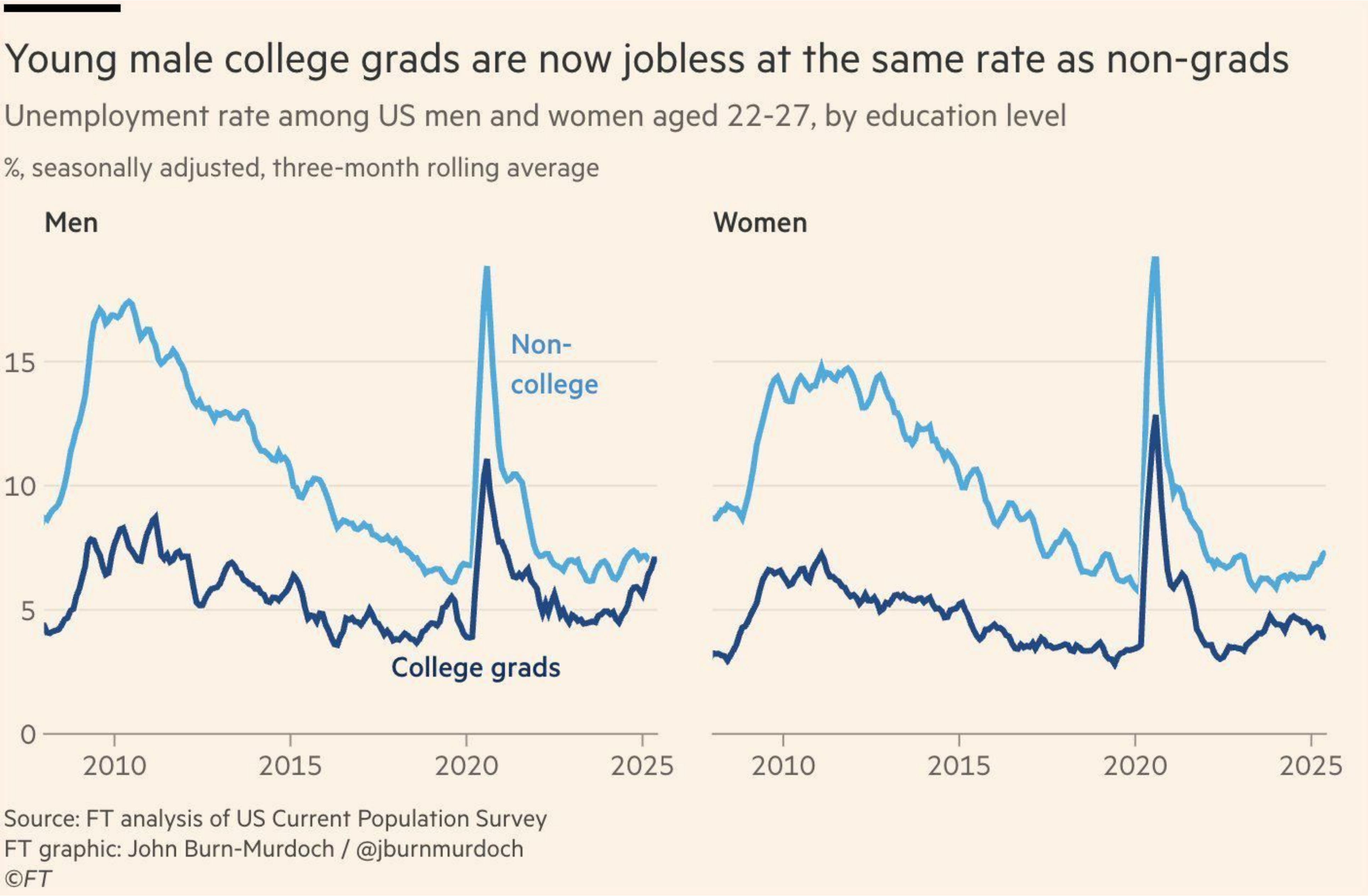
January 12, 2026

ILLUSTRATION BY THE CHRONICLE; GETTY IMAGES

Hampshire College, a small, embattled liberal-arts college in Massachusetts, missed its fall enrollment goal by nearly half — a striking shortfall after seeing years of recovery in its student population and its highest number of applications in over a decade.

Factors That Most Contributed to Non-Profit 4-Year College Closures

- Undergraduate Enrollment was Down 15% from 2010 to 2021
- Increase in Discount Rates To Over 50%
- Lack of Data – Quantity and Quality
- Structural Predictors



Source: Financial Times, 2025

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Pressures in Higher Ed

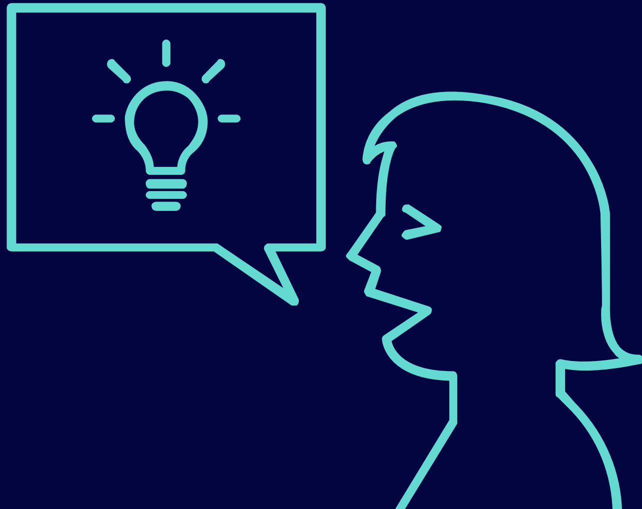
- Demographic Cliff
- Broader Economic Concerns
- Decreasing NTR
- Competition from Public Universities
- Inconsistent Data
- Endowment Size
- Structural Pedictors

Pressures in Independent Schools

- Demographic Cliff *It's Already Here!*
- Same Broad Economic Concerns
- Competition from FREE Public Schools
- Decreasing Net Tuition Revenue
- Lack of Sufficient Endowment
- Structural Predictors Are A Mixed Bag
- Some Markets Simply Have Too Many Seats
- Data Likely Even Less Consistent


PAUSE

The Path to Progress & Long-Range Finance Modeling



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Make sure you're solving the right problem

Structural Budget Deficit

vs

Episodic Budget Deficit

Burying one's head in the sand....

.....is not the solution

Zombie Schools

When facing a structural budget deficit*

- org effectiveness
- org transformation
- merger
- acquisition
- closure

* Without a money tree

If your school is going to have a deficit

Productive Loss

VS

Unproductive Loss

Addressing Root Causes Instead of Symptoms

When leadership teams and/or boards **address problem symptoms instead of root causes**, there can be unintended consequences, which can make the problem worse.


MOVING TOO SLOWLY RISKS RUNNING OUT OF RUNWAY


MOVING QUICKLY
REQUIRES YOU
TAKE MORE RISKS

Mountain Bike….First Mover Advantage

DEMO

Board of Trustees Dashboard

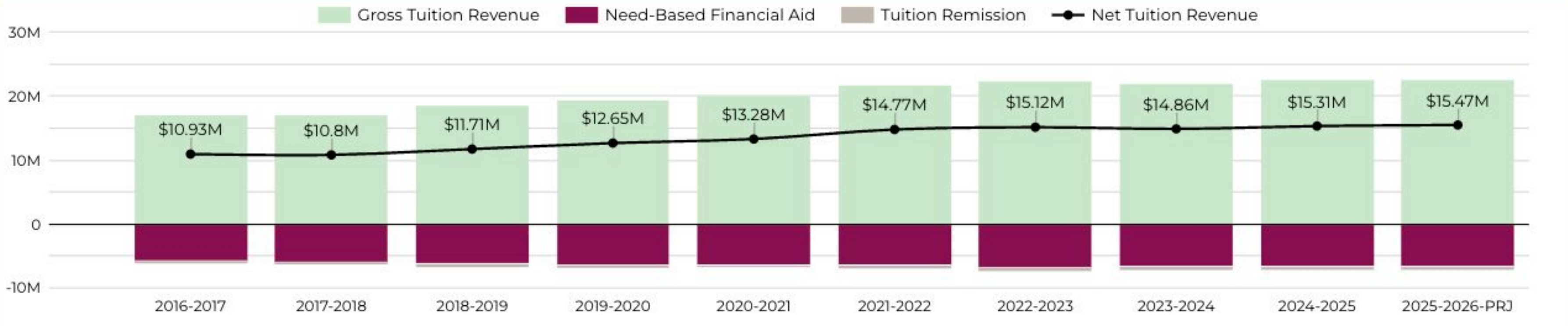
Financial Detail

Last Updated	Jan 2026

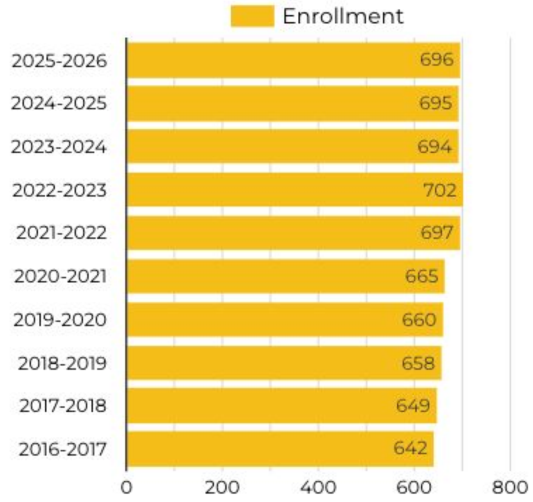
Year-PRJ : Projected; Year-BDG : Budget, PRJ- Projected

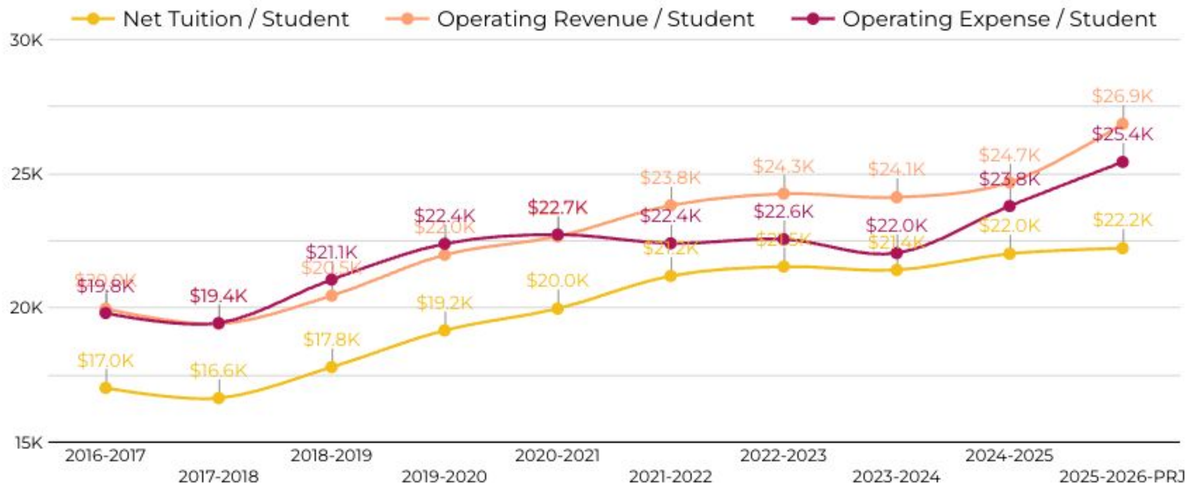
Filter data by: Year

Year-Over-Year Trends in Net Tuition Revenue



Year-Over-Year Per Student Metrics

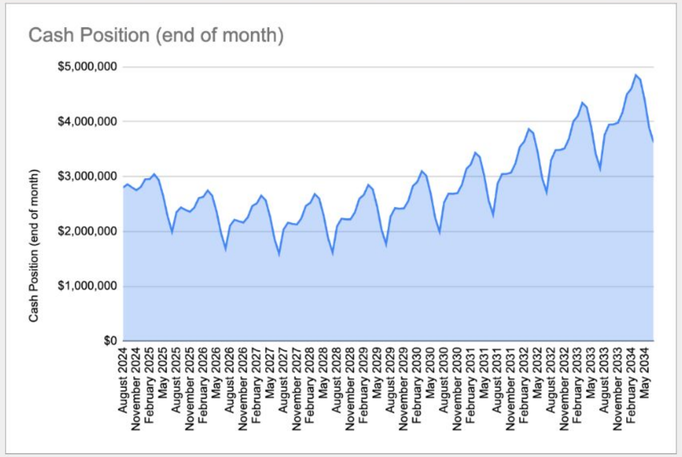




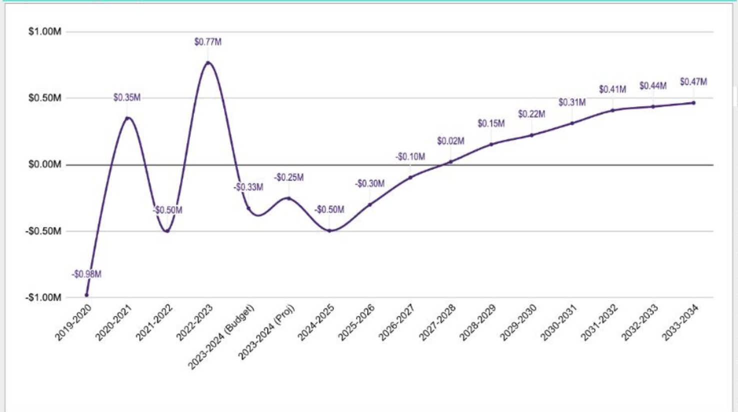
M&D Demo 10-Year Long Range Financial Modeling (LRFM)

	2024-2025 (Budget)	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030	2030-2031	2031-2032	2032-2033	2033-2034
% change gross tuition	4.25%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	4.00%	4.00%
FTE # Students	148	160	168	170	170	170	170	170	170	170
Discount rate	22.0%	25.0%	26.0%	27.0%	26.5%	26.5%	26.5%	26.5%	26.5%	26.5%
Salary Pool Increase	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%
Medical HSA Pool Increase	15.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%

5%	Standard Growth Rate for Fundraising
3%	Standard Growth Rate for Other Non-Tuition Revenue
3%	Standard Expense Growth Rate
8%	Non-Medical Insurance Expense Growth Rate

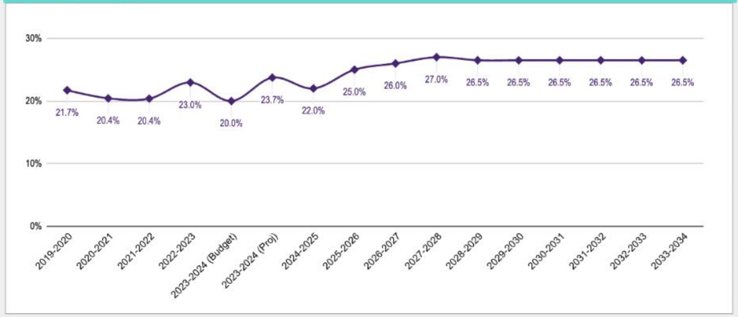


Operating Surplus / Deficit



Tuition Rates

Discount Rate



Revenue per Student (Covid Neutral)

Expense Per Student

THRIVE 2025
NAIS Annual Conference

Real World Insights of Moving from Financial

Viability to Stability to Sustainability

Alli Williams, Dan Hickey, Ari Betof

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Questions & Connections

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Mission & Data is a firm dedicated to the effectiveness, health, and vitality of educational institutions and other organizations that make the world a better place. We are committed to enhancing mission-driven, data-informed leadership and governance by:

- ***Integrated strategy consulting*** to promote financial sustainability, improve organizational effectiveness, and facilitate organizational transformation.
- ***Developing custom data products***, visualizations, and dashboards to highlight progress, identify trends, and leverage actionable insights.
- ***Auditing current practice*** and analyzing organizational data to recommend process efficiencies and strategic improvements.
- ***Coaching leaders and boards of trustees*** to enact institutional vision and build a culture of inquiry-based decision making practices.

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