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The cost of clocks

Brandon Davenport Feb 7, 2018 Updated 16 hrs ago

So far in our discussion of the shot clock in South Dakota high schools we've looked at the on-court effects. This week we'll take a look at the financial aspects of the transition.

As stated previously, South Dakota is one of just eight states that use the shot clock in high school basketball, and perhaps the biggest factor in other states being hesitant to join them has been the financial burden it passes onto individual school districts.

As Terry Gerber, Superintendent in the Canton school district, says of the shot clock debate "It was more of a financial issue than a philosophical issue."

The unfunded mandate set forth by the South Dakota High School Activities Association has meant different things for different districts, after all, districts are not financially equal. But across the state, the financial obligation is somewhat similar.

"To purchase the shot clocks alone was around \$7,500," said Dell Rapids Superintendent, Summer Schultz. "For us it cost another 3,000 to install. You figure the up-front initial cost was about \$10,000."

That \$10,000 mark, which represents the shot clocks themselves, which typically sell for \$2,000 to \$2,500 each, the installation of the clocks, and upfront service agreement costs, is fairly representative of the initial costs, although some districts were closer to the \$6,000 mark, and some eclipsed the \$10,000 mark.

In situations where the investment has been higher than \$10,000 it's sometimes been because entire scoreboards were purchased, like was the case in Oelrichs.

According to Oelrichs' Athletic Director Katie Bauder, the schools scoreboards were already outdated and were in need of being replaced with or without the shot clock mandate.

In all, Oelrichs, a class B school, spent \$12,622 for the scoreboards themselves and installation. \$3,391.50 of that total was allocated to the addition of the shot clock on the board. \$866 was allocated to installation.

On the low-end of the spectrum, some schools were able to get away with up-front costs in the \$6,000 range. These schools typically had qualified staff who were able to perform the installation themselves, only needed to purchase two clocks to outfit a single gym, had infrastructure that was able to accommodate the installation without major electrical work, or all of the above.

In addition to the up-front costs, be they \$6,000, \$8,000 or \$12,000, schools must also budget for continual costs associated with the clocks, mainly from maintenance and from monies paid to operators.

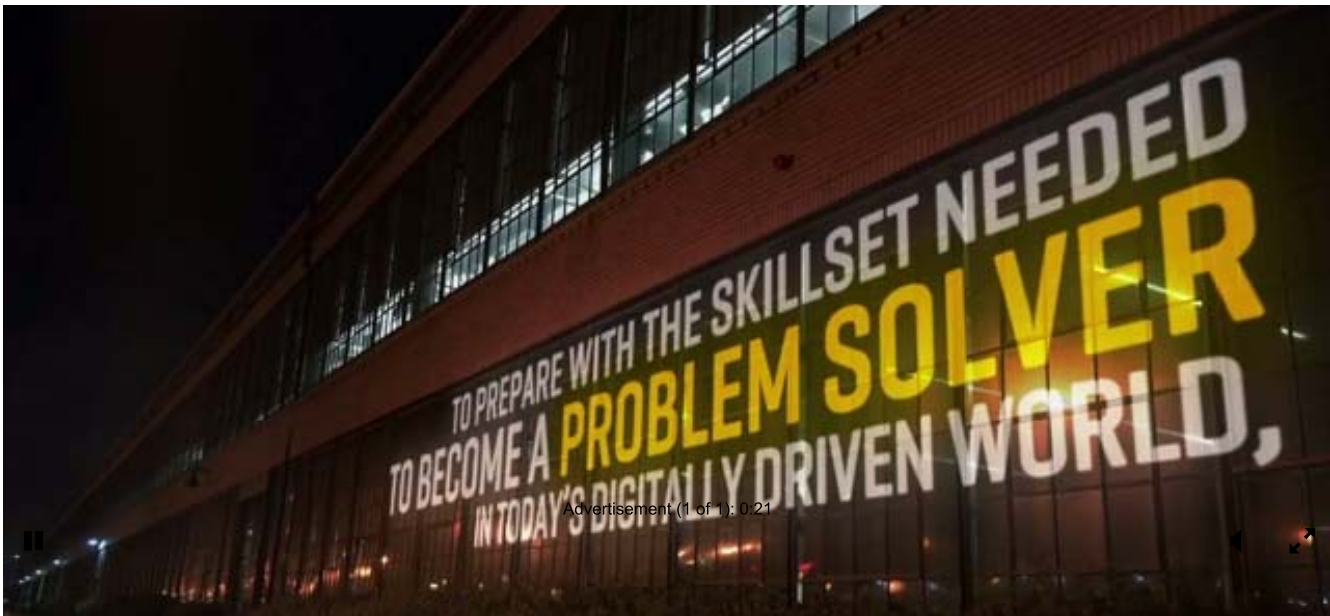
With regard to maintenance, many schools opted into service agreements with their clock providers that alleviate the costs of performing necessary repairs. Other schools employ staff qualified to make repairs when needed, and still others face service calls that can be as high as \$300 per visit, with no service agreement, in addition to parts and labor involved in any repairs.

Like most pieces of technology, the costs of repairs is likely to vary greatly. Some schools will never experience mechanical issues with their clocks or scoreboards, some will see issues from brand new units, most will fall in between. Such is the nature of the beast.

In contrast, ongoing costs attributed to paying shot clock operators are almost guaranteed. Payment to operators does vary between schools, but most seem to be paid between \$20 and \$30 per game, although some districts have found unpaid volunteers to handle the duties.

For class AA schools that are typically located in more populace areas, finding operators doesn't seem to have presented a significant problem, but for class B schools that tend to be much smaller the issue can be quite problematic.

In Oelrichs, Bauder was lucky enough to have contacts from a previous position she held at another school who were willing to travel.



Other schools have been able to find locals willing to familiarize themselves with the operation of the clocks.

In at least one district, Canton, the decision was made to have operators, who Superintendent Gerber calls “quasi-officials,” only in varsity games as a way of lessening the burden on the budget.

Now that we’ve heard some of the numbers involved, what many are interested in knowing is how South Dakota schools paid, and continue to pay, for the transition.

The Mount Rushmore state is no different than any other in the nation in that its school districts vary somewhat greatly in terms of wealth.

Because classes are divided based on enrollment, and large enrollment schools tend to be in more populace, and therefore wealthier, areas, it’s safe to assume, and many Superintendents and Athletic Directors agree, that the burden to class AA schools was less damning than that of the burden to class B schools.

Many of the Class AA schools, as well as Class A schools were able to absorb the burden with capital outlay funds – funds set aside to provide repairs or upgrades to capital assets.

That said, some class B schools, such as Warner, which spent around \$8,000 up-front on the clocks, was also able to use capital outlay funds.

A representative from Warner added that since class AA and A schools began using the shot clocks well before class B schools, their district was able to foresee the necessity of purchasing the shot clocks and had planned accordingly.

Still other class B schools had to resort to fundraising to meet the financial obligations, with at least one school getting assistance from the city, who own the gym the teams play in.

Edgemont, a class B high school, was fortunate enough to have a community member take the fundraising project under their wing, eventually raising the funds by way of donations from local businesses and ex-alumni.

Unfortunately for the school, the mandate came at a time when several other activities-related improvements required funding, limiting the availability of funds that might have otherwise been able to go toward purchasing and installing the shot clocks.

At least one class B school representative commented that the cost of the shot clocks wasn't an enormous financial burden.

No matter the cost, no matter how it was paid for, whether schools did it with a smile, or with a groan, the deed has been done, and outside of repair costs and payments to operators, much of the financial burden has come and gone for South Dakota high schools.

Given how heated the debate over using the shot clock for high school basketball has been, interest in how South Dakota adapted to the financial demands will likely stay high.

While the on-court and financial effects of the use of the shot clock tend to dominate the debate, there's one other aspect of South Dakota's transition that remains for us to discuss. Be sure to look to next week's issue of the Hot Springs Star for our final installment in this series which dives into the political facet and fallout of the decision.

