

PSD District Accountability Committee Budget Recommendation Report November 2024

I. Introduction

The District Accountability Committee (DAC) is responsible for recommending to its local school board priorities for spending school district moneys. Whenever the DAC recommends spending priorities, it must make reasonable efforts to consult, in a substantive manner, with the School Accountability Committees (SACs) in the district. Both state and federal accountability place great emphasis on engaging families in the accountability process. While state statute requires the formation of accountability committees, these committees can be activated to help meet many of the ESSA expectations as well (e.g., stakeholder engagement in the planning and implementation process under school improvement). Regardless of the structure, parents are expected to be engaged in meaningful consultation in accountability and improvement planning.

II. Stakeholder Input and Engagement

The District Accountability Committee (DAC) surveyed the principals and their respective School Accountability Committees (SAC) to gather information regarding the long-term budgeting priorities of each school. In the budget survey, each principal and their SAC were asked to respond to the following item:

Please list specific budget priorities for your school within the following areas:

1. Professional Development (PD) Needs
2. Staffing Needs
3. Facility Needs
4. Are there other fiscal areas that need to be addressed?

On both October 16 and November 20, 2024, the DAC met to discuss and synthesize the information gathered from the principals and their respective SACs for the purpose of providing this overview to the Board of Education and Budget Advisory Committee. Additionally, the DAC members analyzed information gathered from the district and school Unified Improvement Plans (UIPs) and the PSD Strategic Plan. The UIP and Strategic Plan action steps are developed through a substantial community engagement effort each year. Important districtwide trends and priorities as well as school specific needs have been identified through these processes.

The DAC has also reviewed the latest achievement, academic growth, attendance, graduation rate, student connections, discipline, and other student outcome data to deepen their shared understanding of current PSD strengths and opportunities for improvement. These key performance indicator reviews have been contextualized by visits from various content experts across a wide array of PSD departments. DAC members also serve on multiple other PSD committees and involve themselves in other authentic interactions with PSD schools and departments. Collectively, the DAC has a solid basis of system knowledge informed by a wide array of community connections from which to make these recommendations.

III. Identification of Priorities Based on Stakeholder Input and DAC Insights

Upon reviewing the data, committee members identified the following topics and themes and recommend that these four topics be considered district budget priorities. The intention in sharing these recommendations is that the district address budget constraints while optimizing services for students by focusing on what matters most to our community.

1. **Prioritize professional development** by allocating funds for enhancing literacy instruction, facilitating collaborative planning time for teachers, prioritizing social-emotional and trauma-informed practices, providing specialized training programs, and supporting diverse learners' needs.
2. **Address staffing needs** by prioritizing increased mental health support, specialized program staffing, reliable substitutes, smaller class sizes, and additional paraprofessional and instructional support to effectively address the diverse needs of students.
3. **Attend to facility needs** by enhancing safety and security measures, facility upgrades and maintenance, improved space utilization, upgraded outdoor amenities, and increased accessibility to create a safe and functional educational environment.
4. **Other** - Funding should be prioritized for extracurricular programs, extended learning opportunities and support structures via community partnership coordination, and reliable technology resources to effectively address the diverse needs of students.

For more detail regarding the four topics named above, please review the following budget priority considerations that were derived from the stakeholder input and engagement process described above. The information below represents themes that have emerged as identified by the District Accountability Committee.

Professional Development (PD): Enhance literacy instruction, facilitating collaborative planning time for teachers, prioritizing social-emotional and trauma-informed practices, and support diverse learners' needs.

1. **Literacy Development:** A significant focus on improving literacy instruction, including the Science of Reading, writing intervention, and differentiated support for diverse reading levels. This includes identifying indicators of dyslexia and providing appropriate and effective supports to address significant reading deficiencies.
2. **Collaboration and Planning Time:** Requests for financial support to enable teachers to take time for collaborative work, including Professional Learning Community (PLC) days, common course planning, and cross-grade level collaboration.
3. **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Trauma-Informed Practices:** A strong emphasis on training and resources for SEL, trauma-informed practices for teachers and counselors, and creating supportive environments for students dealing with mental health issues.
4. **Specialized Training Programs:** Interest in specific training programs such as Orton-Gillingham, EL Education, and IB training, as well as the integration of innovative instructional strategies like Project-Based Learning (PBL).
5. **Support for Diverse Learners:** Ongoing professional development aimed at meeting the needs of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and those requiring differentiated instruction for both above and below grade-level performance. Increasing cultural competency among staff should be supported.

Staffing Needs: Investing in increased mental health support, specialized program staffing, reliable substitutes, smaller class sizes, and additional paraprofessional and instructional support to effectively address the diverse needs of students.

- 1. Mental Health and Behavioral Support:** There is a strong emphasis on the need for additional mental health professionals (counselors, mental health specialists, psychologists, and social workers) to address rising mental health concerns among students. Respondents highlighted the importance of maintaining current levels of mental health support to facilitate student engagement and success (i.e., backfill any grant funded positions that are sunsetting). Ensure counselor support meets or exceeds a 250 to 1 ratio of students to staff at each school. Provide administrative support (APs and Deans). Ensure restorative practices are supported systemwide.
- 2. Staffing for Specialized Programs:** Many respondents noted challenges in staffing for specialized programs, such as Autism, English Language Development (ELD), GT, and all programs intended to support neurodiversity. There is a call for dedicated paraprofessional support, interventionists, and additional resources to meet the diverse needs of students in these programs. PSD should continue to financially support center-based programs.
- 3. Need for Substitutes and Support Staff:** A recurring theme is the demand for more substitute teachers and support staff, particularly site-based substitutes who are familiar with the student population. This includes the need for increased staffing during lunch and recess to ensure student supervision and safety.
- 4. Maintaining or Reducing Class Sizes:** Respondents expressed a desire to maintain smaller class sizes to improve student outcomes. Many schools are facing pressures to balance staffing cuts with the need for effective classroom management and support for struggling students.
- 5. Funding for Paraprofessionals and Instructional Support:** There is a significant need for additional paraprofessional positions and instructional coaching to support various interventions, including literacy and math. Many schools are struggling to provide adequate support due to budget constraints and high turnover rates in these positions. There is a pressing need to increase the staffing budget to attract and retain qualified paraprofessionals and quality probationary teachers. The DAC is operating under an assumption that High Dosage Tutoring is not likely to be funded districtwide due to cost, but that individual schools do have the prerogative to prioritize this form of instructional support with SBB dollars.

Facility Needs: Prioritize enhanced safety and security measures, facility upgrades and maintenance, improved space utilization, upgraded outdoor amenities, and increased accessibility to create a safe and functional educational environment. The DAC is in support of addressing the longest standing problems first and relying on the McKinstry study to help guide this process. Consider prioritizing outstanding school-specific small-cost requests that mitigate pressing issues (e.g., blinds installed on classroom windows).

- 1. Safety and Security Enhancements:** There is a strong emphasis on upgrading security measures, including additional cameras, improved door access systems, and overall building safety features to ensure a secure environment for students and staff. “Adult Only” bathrooms may be advisable.
- 2. Facility Upgrades and Maintenance:** Respondents highlighted the need for general maintenance and upgrades across various facilities, such as HVAC improvements (specifically air conditioning), plumbing updates, and repairs to aging infrastructure.
- 3. Space Utilization and Expansion:** Many schools expressed a need for updated and expanded classroom spaces, including specialized areas like science labs, art rooms, and kitchens, to accommodate diverse educational programs and improve functionality.
- 4. Outdoor Spaces and Amenities:** There is a demand for enhanced outdoor learning and recreational spaces, such as shade structures, picnic areas, and upgraded playground equipment, to provide safe and engaging environments for students.
- 5. Improving Accessibility and Compliance:** Respondents stressed the importance of ensuring facilities are ADA compliant, addressing issues like bathroom accessibility and proper drainage to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

Other fiscal areas that need to be addressed: Funding should be prioritized for extracurricular programs, extended learning opportunities and support structures via community partnership coordination, and reliable technology resources to effectively address the diverse needs of students.

- 1. Funding for Programs and Activities:** There is a desire to maintain funding for extracurricular activities, clubs, and enrichment programs, which are viewed as essential for providing a well-rounded educational experience and disrupting disproportionality. School-to-school and school-to-community partnerships should be supported and promoted.
- 2. Community Support:** There is need to increase resources and partnership for initiatives to support families, such as food pantries and community education programs and partnerships. Coordination efforts of extended learning opportunities during summer months and after-school should be supported.
- 3. Technology Reliability and Support:** The DAC wants to prioritize the reliability of new technology, including teacher laptops and classroom devices, with a need for improved resources for student technology repairs and maintenance.

IV. Conclusion:

On behalf of the District Accountability Committee (DAC), we want to express our sincere gratitude for the opportunity to actively participate in the identification of budget priorities for our school district. Your commitment to transparency and collaboration is truly commendable. We are grateful for the open dialogue that has been fostered, allowing us to contribute our perspectives and insights into the budgeting process. Being part of the discussions on budget priorities has not only been enlightening but has also reinforced our belief in the collaborative spirit that defines our district. Your recognition of the value that parents, community members, and staff bring to the table demonstrates a commitment to student success that goes beyond the classroom. We look forward to continuing our collaboration and working together to ensure that our school district's budget reflects the aspirations and needs of our diverse community.

With sincere appreciation,

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