

Budget Advisory Council Presentation to the School Board

Input on the Proposed FY22 Budget

April 6, 2021

This presentation is a high-level summary of the BAC's 14-page report to the School Board on the same topic.

The Budget Advisory Council

- The BAC is comprised of 15 Arlingtonians from across the County, 1 student representative, and 1 liaison from the AEA.
- Our APS partner is Leslie Peterson, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Management Services.
- Our School Board partner is Monique O'Grady.
- Collectively, we have 19 children attending APS schools, across Elementary, Middle, and High School, around the County, including the TJHSST pathway. We also have 3 children who are not yet in school, and 7, including grandchildren, who are successful graduates of APS. We also have committee members without children and whose children have previously attended APS but now attend another school.
- We bring a diverse set of experiences, perspectives, and priorities to our discussions and our recommendations.
- While we are not experts on the budget, we care deeply about APS - about educational quality, equity, outcomes and the APS staff.
- We have all contributed to the input and recommendations we shared in our report.

Overall Observations

- We are **concerned that the proposed cuts** offered in the FY22 budget are **largely small and short term**, and do not address the magnitude of our budget gap in FY22 and beyond.
- We collectively believe that, given the deficits, we need to make **more structural changes**, and we encourage the School Board and the Superintendent to begin to study the areas with the greatest potential as soon as possible so that they can be **considered in future budgets**.
 - e.g., teacher pyramid, options school programs, administrative v. schools costs, student/teacher ratios, energy savings, transportation savings, planning factors, collaboration with the County, etc.
- We **welcome the Superintendent's focus on equity**, and recognize the increasing challenge we face in future years to balance the budget and close our opportunity gaps.
- We believe that we should have a **plan to meet existing staff compensation expectations before increasing the size of our staff**, and we propose a larger re-evaluation of staff's roles and responsibilities and perceived gaps for realignment given the magnitude of future deficits.
- We think **enrollment expectations** need to be further evaluated and **adjusted downward**, to avoid overcutting elsewhere
- We **do not support using all of our reserves** this year to meet operating expenses, especially since we learned our lesson this year about how uncertain the future can be.
- We do not think we should automatically reinstate all FY21 reductions (or create that assumption going forward).

Input on Revenue

- We encourage the School Board to **continue its conversations with the County for additional revenue** and also to **negotiate more favorable terms on shared assets** like community centers, fields, playground, pools, and even assets like the Planetarium so that they do not get cut with our growing deficits.
- We encourage the Superintendent and the School Board to **explore additional increases in income-based fee revenue, charged on a sliding scale for equity.**
 - Fees could save some of the Middle School and other sports and academic programs currently on the tiered cut lists.
 - Fees could offset some of the higher costs of transporting students to options schools (this should be studied).
 - Fees charged should all be on the same scale (note the difference between Montessori and Extended Day fee scales).
 - Aquatics fees should be sufficient to cover the full costs of operating the pools.
 - Rental fees for school facilities should also be evaluated.
- We encourage APS to actively **seek local commercial partnerships**, for example:
 - Approach Amazon about a multi-year STEM grant for things like TJHSST tuition, the Planetarium, Outdoor Lab, and other technology initiatives
 - Cultivate partnerships with other local businesses for the Middle School and other athletics programs currently on the tiered cut lists

Input on Expenses (1 of 4)

We understand the need for magnitude of the cuts proposed. However, we have highlighted a few cuts and concerns for consideration, and our report includes additional ideas to be used as offsets.

Tier 1 Considerations

- **TJHSST** - BAC has mixed feelings about closing this pathway completely. There is also strong community support from segments of our community to maintain it. There is no pay your own way option (as some mistakenly believe).
- **Summer School Reductions** - BAC recognizes that summer school will be very important this year given the pandemic, but has mixed feelings about size, timing and permanence of these expenses.
- **Middle School Academic and Athletic Stipends** - BAC is concerned about cutting all Middle School programs. Can we save these programs with income-based fees and sponsorships?
- **DEI Professional Services** - The committee supports using reserves for an Equity Audit.
- **Adobe Creative Suite** - We suggest that the IT office look for a Google Suite or other open source/ low cost alternative, and support the proposal to buy licenses on an individual basis as needed in the meantime. (Flagged by our student representative.)

Input on Expenses (2 of 4)

We understand the need for magnitude of the cuts proposed. However, we have highlighted a few cuts and concerns for consideration, and our report includes additional ideas to be used as offsets.

Tier 2 Considerations

- **Late Busses** - BAC is concerned that this creates an equity issue.
- **Coaches for No Cut Sports** - BAC is concerned that cutting this small expense will have disproportionate impact on students after the pandemic year. Can we find sponsorship?
- **Outdoor Lab** - This program has strong local support and is a unique STEM program. Can we renegotiate the contract to share the space with another school system to reduce the cost. Can we find a local sponsor or get County support?
- **Planetarium** - BAC has mixed feelings on this expense. This is another unique STEM asset. Could we run the facility with a less expensive staff member? Could we find local sponsorship? Could we get County support?

Input on Expenses (3 of 4)

Tier 3 Considerations

- We do not support using reserves for this tier.

Tier 4 Considerations

- **Aquatics** - BAC strongly recommends that the pools be required to operate at a profit in FY22, to cover all costs and contribute to maintenance costs.
- **Canvas** - We recommend a closer look at the Canvas investment to evaluate a shift from Canvas to Google Classroom if not in FY22 then in FY23. Many students believe that Google Classroom is a superior tool to Canvas, despite our investment in Canvas.

Input on Expenses (4 of 4)

Other Potential Areas for Savings (sample only)

- **Class size increases** - Given the size of the budget deficit, BAC recommends that we increase class size at least by 1, across all grade levels.
- **Leadership reorganization** - BAC recommends this change be budget neutral.
- **Legal office** - BAC recommends this office not be created until it saves the district money.
- **Travel** - BAC recommends all travel funds be removed from the budget.
- **Transportation** - BAC recommends placing greater emphasis on decreasing transportation costs, especially around assigning students in walk zones to those schools to decrease the number of students on busses, and expanding walk zones.
- **Postpone school moves/openings** - BAC recognizes that delaying these moves/openings could save the district \$3/4M next year, especially while enrollment is down.
- **Technology** - BAC encourages the Superintendent and School Board to explore options to reduce overall technology costs - e.g., Dell Latitude to replace the Apple Macbook, use of personal cell phones for staff (with small stipend to defray cost), slow down in additional hiring.
- **Narrow curriculum offerings** - BAC recommends we phase out American Sign Language as a World Language given the expense of the program. We also recommend evaluating other programs with high cost/student.

Thank you
APS School Board, Administration,
Teachers, and Staff