

2024-25 BUDGET ADVISORY COUNCIL

Wednesday, September 11, 2024

Syphax Center, 2nd Floor

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Meeting started around 7pm.

Attendees present: Peter Strack (Chair), Sianni Cabello (Vice Chair), Erik Sullivan, Jonathan Hui, Dan Rosman, Melanie Bowen, Chen Ling, Chris Cummings, Bob Ramsey, Justice Estrada

County Board liaison: APS Board Vice Chair, Bethany Zecher Sutton

Joshua Folb (AEA)

Chair comments

- Expressed concerns regarding structural issues associated with budget; both the operating budget and capital improvement budget face structural deficits
- Interest in understanding APS priorities, VDOE priorities and exploring school-based budgeting alternatives
- Further emphasized concerns regarding widely different customer experiences (students, parents, teachers) across the Arlington school system
- Interest in identifying value being provided and the corresponding level of effort required to sustain it (or achieve it in areas where it is lacking)

Discussion

1. **Identifying BAC goals for the year.** Prior BAC efforts, by the time it was provided to the School Board near the end of the school year, was too late to be incorporated. Increased interface with board member(s) and APS superintendent could address this concern by providing BAC with more insight into how best to assist decision-making and budget drafting processes.
 - Discussed the possibility of BAC focusing on a single priority: **solving structural deficit**
 - What goes into the school system

- Influence difficult school board decisions
 - Work with school board early in budget design rather than submitting a single comprehensive report very late in the process
 - Where does the board most need the BAC's help?
 - Potential subcommittee to look at providing input to budget direction
- 2. School Activity Fund (SAF) - recent audit and impact.** Recently presented internal audit of SAF accounts revealed challenges and lapses in discretionary management oversight. APS COO is acting on audit findings and recommendations. However, the money in these accounts can be used to provide services to the current student body.
- Identify checks and balances – are the right policies in place
 - Potential subcommittee topic
 -
- 3. Standards of Learning (SOLs).** There is concern about whether all SOLs are taught to all students. Some standards are not measured (e.g., Digital Learning Integration)
- 4. Desire for increased transparency into budget design and development.** What are the trade-offs being made by the Superintendent? Board would like help to identify the tough choices board.
- How can we increase transparency regarding the budget process?
 - What difficult problems/issues are most opaque to the school board?
 - What are we willing to put on the table?
 - A more disciplined process will help drive: What goes into the school system increased BAC ability to have a greater impact and overall Improvement in understanding justifications for budget cuts
 - Board is open to new ways of working with advisory committees
- 5. Considering a future-state Student-Based Budgeting (SBB) model**
- student based funding formula requires stringent guidelines

- most states already use student based funding model (only 9 do not, including Virginia currently)
- concern that planning factors do not sufficiently account for student attributes, which could lead the way towards a comprehensive student-based funding model

6. New APS strategic plan

- New strategic plan is in place – drills down much further into strategic activities and how we’re going to measure them
- “strategic abandonment”
- Looking at structural deficit, but things change at the state level
 - What will we get from the state, county, etc?
- We are more reactionary than we should be
- Significant study of planning factors
 - There are price tags associated with any change to planning factors
 - Looking at implementing certain planning factors sooner rather than later
- What are our strategic priorities? What is the cost benefit analysis?
- Comparative analysis? Are we willing to look at hard choices?

7. Potential areas of budget impact

- Changing format of budget may be an early impact
- Big cost areas and areas of opportunity
- Identify areas being looked at to drive cost savings – what are the big tradeoffs

8. Problem of structural deficit

- Fewer options to make up the budget shortfall
 - Less in reserves, less in one time funds

Meeting adjourned around 9pm.