

To: Leslie Peterson

From: Budget Advisory Committee (BAC)

Re: Response to request to generate ideas to close the expected FY21-22 budget gap

Date: November 22, 2020

Dear Ms. Peterson,

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in during the budget planning process this year. We are submitting the following ideas in response to your request of the BAC, and other APS Board and Superintendent Advisory Councils, to help generate ideas to close the current and future budget gaps, given their size and the unprecedented uncertainty of the current times.

Given our current fiscal position, we believe that it worth evaluating a wide variety of ideas, and we have taken that approach in submitting the list below. Please note that the following list includes ideas presented by individual members of the BAC which have not been curated or voted on and should not be construed as a reflection of any consensus among the council. In fact, there are ideas on this list that individual members of the BAC oppose. The list merely serves as a collation of ideas for further evaluation by the school board and APS executive staff.

We hope our input proves helpful as you begin the difficult tasks of closing the FY21 budget gap and proposing a new budget for FY22. We look forward to continuing to partner with you throughout the year, as you do so.

PRIORITIES FOR FY22

- Delivering quality education, for students attending either in hybrid or virtual formats
- Equity
- Making hard choices about staffing and our instructional model given the size of our budget gap, including evaluating ideas which consider the elimination of positions
- Evaluating the large budget decisions first, given the size of our gap
- Reducing (or at least stabilizing) the cost of transportation, including expansion of transportation hub stops
- Asking department managers to bring forward reduction ideas of different sizes (e.g., 3, 5, 7% cuts) and evaluating the consequences of different scenarios before decisions are made, as not all cuts have equivalent impact

AREAS THAT SHOULD BE PRESERVED FOR FY22

- Expenditures for safety measures
- DOJ settlement
- Special Education recommendations

BUDGET REDUCTION IDEAS

- Bring all Community Activities costs in line with the revenue each generates, aiming at least to break even.
 - Scale back aquatics operations to the point where costs are in line with revenue.

- Consider adding Covid-19 emergency operations fees to pool usage to increase revenue to ensure the pools break even, or ask the County to allocate additional revenue to APS to close the gap.
 - Schools should not be subsidizing community swimming activities, nor should we be forced to prioritize pool staff over teaching staff this year.
 - Furlough Extended Day employees until that program resumes.
 - Ideally, deploy as many other employees as possible to support additional bus and classroom needs unless funding for extended day employees is clear (e.g., budget gap is closed, additional county/state/federal funding is allocated to APS).
 - Ensure any other line items in the Community Activities bucket are also at least breaking even with regards to revenue and cost.
- Reduce Transportation costs by getting a more accurate count of student riders and/or reducing the number of students and number of trips required to get students to school.
 - Ask parents to opt in or out of transportation services, and do not include students whose parents have opted out when calculating overall ridership and costs.
 - We hear a lot about how we plan for students who never ride the bus. In this environment, parents may be more willing to opt out if they never intend for their children to ride the bus, especially if they understand the budget implications.
 - Explore starting a parent carpooling network to support those parents who opt out of APS transportation.
 - Integrate Special Education and general education transportation wherever possible to reduce trips. (ACTC recommendation)
 - Revisit boundary process to expand walk zones around neighborhood schools to reduce need for transportation when a neighborhood option is available (e.g., don't bus students to Taylor if they can walk to Key). At very least, allow parents to opt into neighborhood schools in advance of a larger boundary process.
 - Expand walk zones for neighborhood schools by partnering with the county on additional crossing guards.
 - If aligning school start times enable us to run more routes with current buses, try to do so as quickly as possible. (FCPS is doing this for this current school year with some schools. They will even adjust start times for certain schools once hybrid learning starts due to bus constraints.)
 - Explore further use of ART busses for students/schools on ART routes (assuming resumption of normal service post Covid).
 - Expand the use of hub stops beyond choice schools. (ACTC recommendation)
 - Explore bus routes that pick up and drop of children for more than one school, especially when busses are running a reduced capacity for choice schools (post Covid).
- Simplify our Instructional Model, reduce staff.
 - Maintain an online high school program, even after the pandemic, as a choice program, using people and resources that exist in the system today. Allow them to participate in after school programs and sports at their base high schools, and allow teachers and

students use facilities at their base high schools if other physical facilities are needed. (Josh Folb developing formal proposal)

- Reduce number of options programs at the elementary level to reduce curricular and transportation costs and focus on walkable neighborhood schools for younger students, (unless data show that choice programs create meaningful diversity in schools that are closing opportunity gaps and helping APS reach other specific equity goals, in which case the cost/benefit should be better understood and addressed in this context.)
 - Increase class sizes at all levels to bring us in line with other large districts in the area.
 - Reduce class choice at the high school level, and explore options to offer choice through expanding our partnerships with NOVA, Virtual Virginia, and other online offerings which would enable students to take classes offered elsewhere rather than staffing every option at every high school.
 - Look more closely at the Resource Teachers, and how they benefit all levels of learners (Gifted, English Learners, & Special Ed) in an effort to simplify and reduce staff.
- Identify other opportunities to reduce non-(core) teaching staff.
 - Eliminate repurposed fractional allocations at the school level.
 - Many principals take the fractional remainder of allocations dedicated to instructional departments and repurpose them. For example, they may be allocated 1.2 positions for Art and 3.5 positions for Math, and 1.3 positions for PE. But they only hire 1 art, 3 math and 1 PE. They then take the $0.2 + 0.5 + 0.3$ and hire another person to do something else, like a special project, rather than giving back those allocations.
 - If each building has just one of these heads, in aggregate, and there are roughly 40 buildings, and teachers cost roughly \$100K, then this is \$4M. There is a feeling in the system that there are many more than just one per building.
 - Reduce non-teaching T-scale staff at schools, even one position across 40 schools = ~\$4M.
 - Look for further reduction in central office staff, especially in larger departments like Department of Teaching and Learning and Facilities and Operations. Explore the following to make this possible:
 - Outsource maintenance
 - Reduce complexity in curriculum and programs across schools, especially at the elementary school level.
 - There are likely additional ideas, but the committee did not feel like they understood the details of these department well enough to generate more specific ideas at this time.
 - Add or increase fees to generate additional revenue, seek other sources of funding for specific programs.
 - Add activity fees for activities and sports outside of core academic classes. Look to FCPS where even curricular band class requires an activities fee. A sliding scale can be implemented [for Free and Reduced lunch students] to help with equity.
 - Add fees for summer school, again on a sliding scale.
 - Add an option school transportation fee, on a sliding scale.

- Seek funding for specific programs that are much loved but expensive and easy targets for reductions but may appeal to local funders (e.g., Outdoor Lab)
- Allow families to opt out of receiving iPads or laptops if they agree to provide their own
- Evaluate potential delay of other important, but large, investments.
 - Delay school moves and opening of the Reed school to delay all associated costs.
 - Ask for permission to slow down implementation of the DOJ settlement requirements.
 - Slow phasing in of the recommendations from the Special Education review and report.
 - Take this opportunity to learn from other districts, to ensure we are following best practice, from both an instructional and a cost/benefit point of view.
- Consider other more extreme temporary measures during the Covid-19 pandemic emergency, such as:
 - Suspending participation in athletics while the students are not attending school in person.
 - Reducing 403b match for APS staff for a defined period of time.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our ideas at this early phase. We look forward to working with you throughout this challenging year.

Sincerely,

Melanie Bowen, Chair, Budget Advisory Council

Members of the Council: Chuck Rush (Vice Chair), Bob Ramsey (Chair Emeritus), Lisa Blackwell, Nellie Carr, Katherine Christiansen, Dedra Curteman, Julie Davis, Cristina Diaz-Torres, Juan Gordon Sr., Sean Miller, Valerie Smith, Erik Sullivan, Jennifer Wagener