

**ACPS  
Budget Advisory Committee (BAC)  
Report June 2010**

This report will be brief for a number of reasons:

- The BAC was late in getting started with its first meeting January 5, 2010. Therefore it was running to catch up during the budget cycle.
- Because the members of the BAC were all new (except for one) there was considerable time spent on learning the details and structure of the ACPS budget and budget cycle. This was to be a year of mainly listening and learning.
- The BAC was never at full strength and over time dwindled to about four regular member participants.
- This Chair is late in putting together the report due to substantial work conflicts in the months of May and June.

This report will cover three issues: BAC membership, BAC activity, and ACPS support.

**BAC Membership**

In these economically challenging times, it is important to provide diverse viewpoints to the Alexandria School Board on budget issues. After a one-year hiatus, the Budget Advisory Committee began anew in the 2009-'10 school year, holding several meetings and providing some input during the budget process. But with only six community members—the overwhelming majority from District B—it is clear that more must be done to make the BAC a vital sounding board for Alexandria. Additionally, with two of its current members representing the Chamber of Commerce and PTA Council, BAC has filled only four of its 10 “at-large” members from the community.

We believe that to play a more active role in district affairs, the Board should actively recruit additional at-large BAC applicants, with a particular focus on Districts A and C. One option may be to restore the practice of Board members each designating a representative to the committee. With its bylaws allowing up to 12 members, the BAC needs to fill its ranks so it can serve as a liaison between the board and the community and engage effectively in dialogue with board members.

We also recommend that, when filling available seats, the Board institute a process of staggered terms to maintain a level of expertise on the committee from year to year. With the district facing its toughest budget outlook in decades, the BAC can play a role to bring together board members, administrators, and the larger community for constructive discussions about hard decisions and common challenges.

We also recommend it be made clear to those who wish to be part of BAC, that this is a working committee that will require not only monthly meetings of the BAC (possibly more during the budget cycle), but also attendance at other ACPS budget meetings during the budget cycle. In addition, research will be required of BAC members during the year on specific assignments. While all of this year's BAC members came to the table with the best intentions to support ACPS, only one had any true idea of the time commitment required for this committee to meet its intended goals.

While including high school students as members of the BAC is an admirable goal, we found it impractical. If this practice is to be continued, students should not be counted for a quorum. The one student member approved for the panel attended only one meeting.

We recommend that appointments to the BAC be made at the close of each budget cycle or as soon as possible so that the BAC can begin its work in September each year.

### **BAC Activity**

Along with the BAC meetings during January- June 2010, most of the ACPS School Board and public budget meetings were covered by one or more BAC members; this included the Alexandria City Council's budget work sessions regarding ACPS. One of the most productive meetings was one held with the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee (BFAAC). This meeting was attended by BAC members and Margaret Byess. The presentation made by Margaret was well received and ACPS was complimented on its strategic planning and more importantly the division level plans that contained output metrics and target dates. We support and recommend increased interaction between BFAAC and BAC.

The BAC made two interim recommendations for the 2011 budget in February 2010 as follows.

Interim Recommendations (*NOTE: As presented*)

2011 Budget

ACPS BAC Committee

To: Yvonne Folkerts, School Board Chair and School Board  
From: Budget Advisory Committee  
Date: February 1, 2010

During the BAC meeting Wednesday January 27, 2010, two issues generated a good deal of discussion and the following two recommendations for the Boards consideration.

#### 1. Short term solutions for school overcrowding

At our meeting on Wednesday, January, 27 2010, we discussed the proposed Modified Open Enrollment plan as a means to alleviate overcrowding in our elementary schools. It was understood to be a "short term" solution until facilities can be expanded and/or new schools can be built. Certain information was given by ACPS Staff and our School Board liaison as to the budgetary efficiencies of the Modified Open Enrollment.

Given that a Modified Open Enrollment plan is a temporary/short term solution, the BAC would like to suggest that the School Board consider the use of trailers. The use of trailers might preclude or minimize the need to bus students away from their neighborhood schools and trailers might be a more palatable solution to parents who have bought homes in or moved to specific attendance zones. This would be especially true for families with multiple children in or expected to attend ACPS schools.

In the past the use of trailers has created controversy, mostly because they have remained in use longer than expected, they are problematic in inclement weather and not considered the best learning environment. Any future use should come with the clear expectation that they would be temporary. This should include a timeline that shows how continuing increases in enrollment would be dealt with including the removal of all trailers from school sights. While we suggest that budgetary considerations should be a major driver in this decision, we recognize that there needs to be significant sensitivity to the impact any decision has on children and families we serve.

#### 2. Linking the Key Objectives in the Budget to the strategic goals.

We commend ACPS for including Key Objectives and metrics as part of the budget document. We believe the linkage of these Key Objectives/metrics in the budget document to the Goals and Objectives

in the Strategic Plan would provide a valuable connection and message to the community. Because the Strategic Plan should be the driver for ACPS and in fact should be the driver for the budget, such a direct linkage supports the vision, mission and goals of the district. When looking in from the outside, whether one has children in the Alexandria public schools or not, people like to see why the dollars are being spend, not just for what.

We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations and are available if you have any questions.

*Richard Dorman – Chair*  
*Charles Dervarics*  
*Richard Fowler*  
*Anival Herman*

*Sean McEearney*  
*Jennifer Penoso*  
*Jeffrey Zack*

The committee also participated in public hearings and received briefings on the proposed public/private partnership envisioned for the Jefferson-Houston school property. We continue to be engaged on this issue and look forward to further study of this topic during the 2010-'11 school year.

###

### **ACPS Support**

The committee was supported by School Board Member Sheryl Gorsuch as well as by Margaret Byess and Jean Sina. We understand that during an active budget cycle both Margaret and Jean are focused on the budget, as they should be. Their support was and is very appreciated by the BAC. It is essential for the BAC to have contact with these two key ACPS employees out of the budget cycle to better serve the ACPS. During the budget cycle, we must be conscious of their limited time. However, their availability to the BAC is important. This is another reason to have the BAC at full strength much earlier for the 2012 budget cycle.

### **Summary**

The formulation of an active, strong, and productive BAC for ACPS and the community has strong support from the City, the BFAAC and the School Board. If this vision is to reach its potential, however, the committee must be positioned for success. For the BAC to be properly positioned, it will require the following:

- A full committee in place before September, at the latest, each year
- Committee members who understand the commitment required for success and willing to do the work
- Consistency with at least one third of the members returning the following year
- A plan of work, well in advance to facilitated proper planning
- Support of ACPS appropriate staff
- Support of the ACPS School Board

Respectively submitted by,  
*Richard Dorman – Chair*  
*Charles Dervarics*  
*Richard Fowler*

*Sean McEearney*  
*Jennifer Penoso*  
*Jeffrey Zac*