

# State of the Budget and Future Planning Feedback Summary

Feb. 1, 2025

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The feedback form launched on Nov. 20, 2024, during the first State of the Budget Town Hall meeting at Cooper High School, and responses were collected through Feb. 1, 2025. A total of 162 responses were received, reflecting a broad range of community concerns and suggestions regarding the district's financial challenges and restructuring efforts.

## 1. School Closures and Boundary Adjustments

- Strong support for closing underutilized schools to consolidate resources and improve efficiency. Multiple mentions of closing middle and elementary schools before the 2025-26 school year.
- Suggestions for closing Sandburg Middle School, Robbinsdale Middle School (RMS), or combining the FAIR schools into one K-8 site.
- Calls to reevaluate building leases, particularly the Crystal Learning Center lease, and consider repurposing district-owned buildings.
- Boundary line adjustments are needed to balance enrollment and reduce transportation costs.
- Concern over community attachment to buildings, recommending proactive communication and transition plans to ease closures.

## 2. Central Office and Administrative Cuts

- Widespread frustration that while cuts were made at the school level, director and administrative positions were added at the ESC (Education Service Center).
- Consensus that budget reductions should start at the top, cutting non-student-facing roles before classroom teachers and educational assistants.
- Suggestions to eliminate or consolidate director positions, assistant superintendents, and program specialists who do not directly impact student instruction.
- Calls for more transparency on administrative spending, salaries, and job duties.
- Questions about pay increases for top administrators despite budget concerns.

## 3. Impact on Staffing and Student Services

- Concerns about further reductions to classroom teachers and EAs, which are already at minimal staffing levels.
- Repeated concerns about special education, multilingual (EL) services, counselors, and mental health support being underfunded and stretched too thin.

- Some called for cutting TOSA (Teachers on Special Assignment) and coordinator positions that do not work directly with students.
- Concerns about middle and high school staffing disparities and how student needs are supported equitably across buildings.

#### **4. Fine Arts and Elective Programming**

- Strong opposition to further cuts in music, arts, and extracurricular programs, which are seen as essential for student engagement and district reputation.
- Loss of sectional lessons and itinerant fine arts teachers has negatively impacted music education.
- Concerns that eliminating electives could push families to open enroll elsewhere, worsening the budget crisis.
- Some called for rethinking IB (International Baccalaureate) programs, arguing they are expensive and inconsistently implemented.

#### **5. Budget Accountability and Transparency**

- Anger and frustration over the \$20M budget miscalculation, with demands for accountability and consequences for those responsible.
- Concerns that the shortfall was known before the election but not disclosed—raising questions about trust in leadership.
- Calls for an independent audit of district finances and purchasing contracts, particularly for curriculum materials and professional development programs that were adopted without piloting.
- Requests for clearer explanations of how the mistake occurred and what safeguards are being put in place to prevent future errors.

#### **6. Open Enrollment, Transportation, and Retention**

- Questions about why the district provides busing for open-enrolled students from outside the district while cutting services for in-district students.
- Calls to discontinue open enrollment transportation to save money.
- Suggestions to invest in successful magnet programs (RSI, SEA, FAIR) to retain and attract students.
- Frustration that behavioral disruptions drive families out of the district, leading to enrollment declines.

#### **7. Alternative Cost-Saving Measures**

- Four-day school week: Several suggested moving to a four-day week to reduce transportation, utilities, and operational costs while maintaining academic hours.
- Early retirement incentives: Could help reduce payroll costs without layoffs.

- Eliminate redundant subscriptions and costly programs, such as BARR, IB, Modern Classroom, and unnecessary PD initiatives.
- Increase partnerships with businesses (e.g., Boston Scientific, Target) for sponsorships and academic funding.
- More strategic curriculum purchases: Avoid buying expensive new curriculums if current materials are effective.

## **8. Community Trust and Board Accountability**

- Demands for accountability from school board members, with some calling for resignations or recall elections.
- Desire for transparency and consistent communication, with a clearer plan for the future.
- Concerns over district reputation, with families reconsidering staying in the district due to instability.
- Calls for leadership to engage directly with teachers and staff instead of relying solely on internal consultants.