

Community Budget Meeting Feedback

Raw notes have been categorized by District Plan Objective



OBJECTIVE 1

Deliver Ambitious Instruction & Effective Supports

- Under the impression that all these clubs were happening like Math Club, GSA, but was then informed 20+ clubs were not happening due to not being able to pay the teachers over the contract.
- Felt the spotlight was put on the contract/staff raises, rather than the longer school day (specifically at last week's school committee meeting). Curious to see numbers on what costs are associated with the longer school day.
- Staff who spend time with our students have the highest impact. Having two interventionists was very beneficial. Only having one this school year is difficult.
- Saw so much improvement with small group instruction
- Pulling staff out of buildings prevents small group instruction from happening.
- Principal's decide what to spend on their SIPs. How much of the content material from school programming is being provided by the school vs district level?
- SIP has more parts than it used to. It is more visible and gaining more attention. Appreciate the 90 day goals as it feels more extensive.
- What will the impact of dismissal time have (i.e. opportunity for clubs)?
- Equitable access to programs but still allow schools to have their own identity/different needs.
- Funds for high needs children.
- Lunch clubs had to stop but were very wonderful and crucial for development. Provided a break in the day and an opportunity to form new friendships. Teachers should be compensated for this. Teachers can do after school but if student is on NRT bus, they lose out on opportunities.
- ABAR (Anti-bias Anti-racism) curriculum is extraordinary. Hoping that this can be extended and supported across our district and budgetary considerations.
- Additional Support needed for Special Education services at highest need schools in particular.
- Making sure the budget includes monetary compensation to the teachers and staff that facilitate lunch clubs to middle schoolers and the teacher contract allows for teachers to have these clubs during the school day so that all children have access to these social emotional lunch club groups.
- Although I appreciate how schools are allowed to operate independently and offer separate services, I do see inconsistencies.
- Appreciate the different specialized programs and wonder how to make sure that services and supports are consistent.
- Implement the Pulitzer Center Education K-12 program during Black History Month, also incorporate the 1619 Project.
- Schools are embracing, celebrating, and teaching about diverse cultures but is neurodiversity included? In general, are all schools receiving consistent direction and curriculum around this?
- Programs like Books and Ballers are a positive after school program that is not available in other schools.
- What are schools learning during Black History Month, AAPI month and etc? There should be equity and diversity beyond race and cultural diversity: neurodiversity, mental health awareness, etc. How do we tailor these particular curricula for different age groups?
- How is the SCALE program represented?
- How are services paid for by ESSER?
- Support in the elementary level: how is the SCALE program supported? Services for students are not organized well, do students get what they need? It is very hard to have your child receive the services.

**OBJECTIVE 1 CONTINUED****Deliver Ambitious Instruction & Effective Supports**

- How do the cuts in the budget influence where the money goes? Do students get less support because positions are added on administrative levels? How do we know where the money is going?
- How come the schools did not have a say in the planning process?
- Schools should have a budget page focused on their particular budget, which should be shared with their respective families
- School budgets should be available and shared during SAC meeting.
- Longer school days means more money is needed to pay paras and teachers, therefore, taking funding away from students.
- Is my child ready for work or school? How do we know that our children are ready, where is the data?
- Teacher to student ratio is too high
- Students who are high level math and not being challenged are not allowed to opt out of math, therefore, have to sit in class, bored.
- District wide testing for dyslexia - so many kids are diagnosed late, and that would be a simple fix
- How is CPSD ensuring culturally relevant content in every grade?
- Heterogeneous classrooms are great, but we've got a lot of personnel - what is the impact of personnel changes - is there an extra adult in the room and what is the role of that adult?
- When discussing the budget, it is hard to tie the budget back to the goals.
- What if we increased the number of classroom teachers rather than adding programs to outside of the day, for instance, extracurricular after school support
- Is there a better way to solicit student feedback?
- School resources: does each school get the same dollar amount?
- Specific breakdown of costs for software and various Ed Tech programs that the district pays for. This line item has increased considerably each year and is projected to increase. Consider a process for evaluating the value of these products.
- Extended Day Consultant Budget: What was the budget for outside consultants for extending the school day and what budget item was this funded from? Will this investment be made in the next year for the upper and high schools? What is the line item and how much was spent and how much will be spent?
- What funding is going towards classrooms and teacher's wish lists?
- At the last school committee meeting, Superintendent Greer said that she has asked all departments to provide hard data on how well their programs are serving the students; what will the district "start, stop, or continue" if cuts are required and will school communities be included in the conversation?
- Baseline activities should be universal: Field Trips, Dances, need for wishlists, etc.

**OBJECTIVE 2****Provide Accessible College & Career Pathways**

- I really appreciate CPSD being one of the first districts to adopt free lunch for all. One of the basic necessities for success is a full stomach and energy to perform throughout the day. This program needs to continue.
- Schools are siloed and might not be working towards the same goals
- How do our costs compare to similar districts?
- Is there a school that most out of district placements go to?
- Why does CPS want a longer school day?
- It looks like some schools are getting more money and some are getting less, how are schools getting their money?
- Wondering about the Cambridge Preschool Program
- Families are choosing 10 schools?
- Before planning the Cambridge Preschool Program, there were no conversations about the program.
- Who makes the call for the longer school day?
- Students who end up transitioning from CPS to a private school during the elementary to Middle School transition, have we talked to these families?
- What resources go into supporting all students to self-advocate?
- Positive impact: available college courses for the CRLS students at Bunker Hill and Harvard extension
- Many free or low-cost clubs available for students at CRLS
- There is often a large focus on extracurricular support rather than the core of the day. Rather than adding more support outside of the school day (which touches fewer students and may not address students with the greatest need), focus on the core of the day where most students can be impacted.
- How do we assure that support and necessary services are reaching all students that need academic support?
- iReady: slow, hard to work with, explicitly teaches our students to evaluate their performance compared to others. The “data” generated by iReady is very un-useful and the experience of learning on it is uninspiring and discouraging.
- How can the district reach out to businesses in Kendall square and other parts of the city to ensure that internships and partnerships are happening in our schools?

**OBJECTIVE 3****Effective Staff Learning & Support**

- The district says they want to support kids, but then it always seems like you have to fight tooth and nail to get another support person, i.e. Math Interventionists.
- With the anticipated cuts, how does that trickle down to the “front line”?
- How are the newer educators being supported?
- A large part of the budget goes to staffing, what amount of the budget is actually going towards the added time.
- Why are Math Interventionists being pulled from the schools? Leads to labor intensive practices. What are the values here and where is the money going?
- All resources are important, but human resources/our staff are important and should take up a majority of the budget.
- How will discipline be used in FY25? Are teachers going to be trained in Restorative Justice? Is a consultant necessary, when we carry quality people that are maybe not being used appropriately?
- Assistant Teachers (compensated fairly) are extremely valuable to classrooms and students.
- More educator (and student) education around neurodiversity and how to accommodate needs in a variety of classroom settings

**OBJECTIVE 3 CONTINUED****Effective Staff Learning & Support**

- Do new educators receive training and learning on neurodiversity and different learning styles/differentiation?
- Inconsistencies observed between schools in the level of teacher training and the abilities around teaching diverse/neurodiverse learners.
- Tackling the difficult topics of equity, justice and our histories, are teachers developed enough to tackle the truth of challenging material, specifically referencing the history and lived experiences of Americans of color - and do it justice so our children of color feel seen and feel that they truly belong?
- Who are the project managers and who is looking at the plans?
- Where does the central admin fall into the budget? Superintendent: what is the split between central admin and staff? Are we more top heavy than other districts?
- Paraprofessionals make a significant difference to the students, we need enough of them in each school
- Lunch clubs at middle schools were recently eliminated as new contract said that they cannot be compensated for that time: teachers should be compensated
- If having more paras was/is effective - is there a way to keep them here?
- People tell you what is working or not working, what would it cost to add 50% more paras?
- Lunch aide schools - a little bit of wiggle room with that
- More teachers in the classrooms, but in the high school, there is a science teacher and they cannot even find a long term sub, can only have subs, which causes lots of burn out
- Are teachers paid only based on step, not what they teach?
- Can you give a one-time bonus to teachers to hold on to them?
- I think it would be so valuable to ensure there is a para in every classroom. There is a lot of frustration when cuts are made in student-facing staff, when there are increase in staffing in the central office
- There needs to be more student support for SEL - paraprofessionals, adjustment counselors, etc.
- Paras are important to the academics side too
- I would love to see a budget that prioritizes student-facing staff and joyful learning rather than what has felt like a focus on test scores. It was discouraging this year to learn that an outside consulting firm was paid to generate the new elementary school schedule which wasn't workable and didn't include things like transition time for kids coming in from recess. It feels like a focus on administrative budget lines rather than on the things that are really important to our kids, like staffing in the classrooms, interesting lessons, specialist classes, sufficient lunch periods, time outside, etc.
- Can they tell us exactly what the school department is going to do about staff evaluations? Is it for everyone, i.e. teachers, paras, clerks, custodians, food service, and how did it affect the budget?
- There's a lot of concern about the district adding more top level administrators vs school level aides, but it's impossible to know how it really works with any granularity based on the big numbers presented.

**OBJECTIVE 4****Build Welcoming & Supportive Schools & District**

- More transparency where money is being spent in the budget.
- What can we change?
- What impact are these meetings having and what are other people saying?
- What is the district looking to do?
- Anti Bias/Racism (ABAR) at KLO is extraordinary and the school is very diverse and has many new families.
- Curious about how and when the district will incorporate the Thrive report regarding the budget process. Will the community be part of the evaluation?.
- Love the diverse schools and the adding of families from emergency shelters.
- Concerned about state of facility/playground at some schools, e.g. FMA
- Appreciate the hybrid option for the budget meeting.
- Being diverse as Cambridge is, do we also acknowledge other recognized awareness months as well?
- Inclusion and equity themes across topics.
- Many of our schools have parent-led nonprofit Friends Of groups that help fund school-based fundraising and initiatives, but some of our schools with more working class populations do not have the capacity to do such things. If there are stark socioeconomic differences between schools, what can be done to level the playing field across schools, so that participation in these programs are incentivized? Also, what can parents do to encourage families/parents/caregivers to get involved outside of their own school level and to support children across the district. "Let's do better together".
- Facilitating best practices across schools for how to communicate with parents, and get parents engaged in School Councils and more.
- Neighborhood thinking vs. Cambridge as a singular community.
- Can times and communication methods be varied for school councils to help more parents participate? Attendance can be variable, and it's often the same parents who are involved in things.
- School council is a great forum to get information and ask questions, however, it is challenging to attend for working parents. Create more opportunities for parents to get involved.
- How did everyone hear about the Community Budget Meeting:
 - Email - Greer Gazette
 - CPS/School Council listserv
 - Postcard at home with QR code
 - Parent Square
 - Word of mouth
- Many issues with transportation
- When will the stakeholders be able to have input on the draft budget?
- How does CPS spend money compared to other school districts?
- What can be done for school buses and how is that represented in the district budget?
- Lack of communication and more transparency before making decisions
- Clear explanation of the thoughts and plans before implementing anything new that is paid by the district
- Looking forward to feedback after this session
- There was a document that was created by the district regarding all the concerns about the KLO budget.
- Families would like to be part of the decision making process, without being overwhelmed.
- We trust that we have experts in the district, however, we would like to have a say and be part of the planning.
- Are some schools represented by parents more than others?
- Difficulties with transferring children within the district
- Parent information

OTHER OVERARCHING QUESTIONS

- The budget feels “theory-like” still. What is the district looking for? Would like more details on initiatives and big bucket items.
- What are we going to say goodbye to specifically?
- How involved are CPS schools with Cambridge Public Library? What is the utilization or partnership like?
- What are the other priorities for 2024/2025?
- Is it a mission to provide to all schools or only to some?
- Budget is a lot of work to have done in just 4 weeks.
- What changes are being made?