

12-04 Meeting Notes: Budget Priorities and Pupil-Teacher Ratio

1. Meeting Information

- **Topic:** Budget Committee Meetings - Finalizing Memo for the School Board on Budget Priorities
- **Date & Time:** Thursday, December 4th, 5:36 p.m.; January 20th (Next meeting date mentioned)
- **Participants:** Morgan Dulian (Chair), Andy DeGraw , Ms. Peterson , Ms. Nilson, Ms. Redmond, Ms. Lesage, Ms. Gunderson, Ms. Scott, Ms. Bell, Ms. Stansel, Mr. Becker, Ms. O'Donnell, Mr. Loeffler, Ms. Johnson, Ms. Brown, Ms. LaPlaunt, Ms. Carroll-Hubbard.

2. Discussion Overview

- **Agenda Item 1:** Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) as a Top Budget Priority
 - **Key Points:**
 - **Morgan Dulian:** ." The goal is to "dial in a little bit more. I want to talk about the waiting, anything missing, really kind of figure out which ones are we going to make sure to put into the memo."
 - **Andy DeGraw:** "I think it's important that we have a good, solid understanding of the makeup of the memo tonight before we adjourn... it's really difficult to make significant substantive changes to a memo after we've all adjourned and through email..."
 - **Ms Bell:** "I know in our building we'd be thrilled to not say we're starting with [28] six-year-olds
 - **Ms. Peterson:** "State recommendation actually has middle school 30 versus 29. And I think it's important to also consider that we have some older buildings that were not built to hold 30 students."
 - **Mr. Loeffler:** Suggested a statement like "the committee views or considers the current PTR levels of one acceptable or untenable or suboptimal. We encourage the board to start the budget cycle with a PTR at or below."
 - **Ms. Lesage:** "if our class sizes were five or six lower, achievement would be higher."
 - **Member:** "the discipline, at the high school level, secondary, gets exponentially more difficult when you have more than 31 kids in a classroom"

- **Points of Divergence:**
 - The initial survey did not place PTR reduction at the top, which was attributed to the survey having three separate options for PTR reduction, diluting its priority.
 - A discussion occurred on whether small PTR reductions benefit all students equally. Mr. DeGraw noted a small reduction might not change many class sizes, while others viewed any reduction as a universal benefit.
 - Ms. Scott expressed hesitation about framing the ideal PTR as the starting point.
- **Interim Conclusion:**
 - The committee agreed through a roll-call vote that reducing PTR is a top priority.
 - There was strong consensus to reframe the budget discussion in the memo. Instead of treating PTR reduction as an "add-back," the memo should propose starting each budget cycle with the ideal PTR as the baseline. Any increase from that baseline would be framed as a deliberate budget reduction that requires justification.
- **Agenda Item 2: Prioritizing Other Program Investments and Reductions**
 - **Supporting Data:**
 - Reducing PTR to a [25-27-29] ratio would cost approximately [\$3 million].
 - State-suggested (not mandated) numbers of [23-30] from a recent House Bill were presented as a data point.
 - The weighted totals from the priority tool will be Appendix B.
 - The full priority submission tool with all comments will be Appendix C for the public record.
 - The top three investment priorities from a tool were: "invest in CTE classes, reduce the PTR, and to invest in looking at before and after school care options".
 - **Recommended Actions:**
 - **Band/Orchestra:**
 - **Member:** Expressed surprise that Band and Orchestra ranked low.
 - **Ms. Lesage:** Raised concerns about adding band/orchestra during the elementary school day, asking, "what are we not teaching so that we can teach band and orchestra during the school day?"
 - **Ms. Peterson:** Suggested creative solutions like "extra duty contracts to our existing music teachers" or "an SAS contract."
 - **Before/After School Care:**
 - **Mr. DeGraw:** Clarified the administration is looking at a basic "babysitting" model and an "enhanced version" with tutoring.

- **Mr. Loeffler:** Suggested changing the wording for the before/after school care item from "explore" to "implement."
 - **Ms. Bell:** Note their Title I school is starting free before-care for a limit of [45] students by having
- **Staffing and Student Support:**
 - **Member:** "Schools that aren't Title I don't have extra tutors to serve kids, and we have some very real needs."
- **Star of the North/Satellite Stations (possible closures):**
 - **Member:** Recommended that "prior to doing that, the committee requests that the board do a thorough evaluation of the impact on usage prior to" making a decision.
 - **Member:** Asked, "Is it possible to still keep that program, but possibly push them into the high schools."

3. Decisions Made

- **Confirmed Items:**
 - ★ Reducing Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) is confirmed as the committee's top priority.
 - ★ The memo to the board will frame the budget process by starting with an ideal PTR, with any deviation upward considered a budget reduction.
 - ★ The memo will include the current PTR levels for reference and to track progress.
 - ★ The committee agreed on the top three investment priorities for the memo: 1) Reduce PTR, 2) Expand CTE classes, 3) Implement before/after school care.
 - ★ The weighted totals from the priority tool will be Appendix B and the full submission tool will be Appendix C (public record).
 - ★ Recommend implementing before-school care and exploring after-school care options.
 - ★ Advocate for increased Tier 2 tutors, especially for non-Title I schools.
 - ★ Request the board to conduct a thorough evaluation of the impact of closing satellite stations and moving the Star of the North program before finalizing the decision.