

Guest Essay: Necessary Decisions for the Financial Health of Georgetown ISD

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We are proud of our financial stability, reflected in a balanced budget for two consecutive years. We also reached this point through tough, unpopular decisions.

In the past two years, we eliminated \$8.3M in district expenses while growing by 700 students. That \$8.3M includes \$1.4M in reductions at the central office level. While department budgets were cut, reductions included unavoidable position cuts because 86% of our budget is personnel.

However, the biggest temporary budget-savings decision was to delay the opening of Ames Elementary and Marshall Middle School.

Delaying the Opening of Two Schools

School bonds only pay for building construction and necessary resources like buses and technology. Those funds cannot pay for the most important part of our district: the people who work in them. Schools are funded based on enrollment, and the enrollment forecast in December of 2023 clearly showed the need for these schools. That report projected we would have 15,100 students today. Even with a margin of error pulling it back down to 14,800, the per-student funding would cover staffing costs for those schools.

Today, we have 14,100 students due to soaring inflation and interest rates that slowed home development. If every student brings the district \$10K in revenue, the difference from the projection is \$7M. While teachers are essentially funded by students in the classroom, a school's "overhead" costs total between \$2-3M. This includes administration, counselors, utilities, custodians, cafeteria staff, and transportation costs.

The decision to delay allowed us to maintain a balanced budget and a chance to increase teacher and staff compensation through a tax rate election. Based upon enrollment growth this year and what we project for next year, these two schools are slated to open next August.

The Finer Details

You can learn more about our budget by reading our Efficiency Audit posted on our website under “[Special Notices](#).” It compares our budget to peer district averages (districts of similar size) and the state on average. The findings reveal Georgetown ISD is a lean organization.

- Our total revenue per student is \$11,515, while the peer district average is \$11,636 and the state average is \$12,548. If Georgetown ISD had the peer average in revenue, it would equal an additional \$1.7M. The state average would bring \$14M more to GISD.
- 58.8% of our budget goes into the classroom. That is 4.3% more than our peer districts across the state, which equates to \$7.1M more going directly to classroom staff instead of other areas.
- Only 2.3% of our budget goes into district administration compared to the state average of 3.1%. Average administrator pay in Georgetown is \$6,331 below peer districts and \$7,761 below the state average.

Rising Insurance Costs

We projected a small surplus this school year and faced a tough decision. Should we provide a small raise while health insurance premiums rise by at least \$150? Our Board of Trustees urged us to use surplus funds to offset health insurance premiums, even if that meant no pay increases. This decision saved most employees from a reduction in their paycheck, since the monthly pay increase after taxes is less than insurance costs.

Every time we make a decision involving compensation, we are reminded that the most important thing we can do for the students of Georgetown is recruit and retain the best people to serve them across our schools. Academic gains are evidence of that, and we will continue to use that mindset as we make complex and fiscally responsible decisions.

We remain committed to the following budget priorities:

- Maintaining a balanced budget
- Increasing staff compensation to remain competitive
- Preserving student experiences

I’m grateful for your engagement as we navigate this.

Devin