

Portland Public Schools

CBRC Annual Budget Review

FY 2020-21

Background and Purpose of the Community Budget Review Committee (CBRC)

The Community Budget Review Committee (CBRC) reviews, evaluates, and makes recommendations to the Portland Public School Board of Education (Board) regarding the Superintendent's Proposed Budget and any other budgetary issues the CBRC or the Board identify. The CBRC also monitors and advises the Board on the allocation and expenditure of Local Option Levy funds, which will be completed under separate cover.

Context and Limitations of the FY20-21 Budget Review

The FY20-21 budget review process has been challenging for both PPS finance staff and the CBRC. Physical distancing requirements related to COVID-19 disrupted the usual budget review process and meeting schedule. With the assistance of PPS staff, the CBRC was able to convene a number of meetings using videoconference platforms. COVID-19 impacts to PPS operations also delayed staff's ability to provide certain key information to the CBRC until just last week, truncating our review period.

There are significant limitations around our ability to provide a comprehensive report and recommendations to the Board. First, the budget itself reflects pre-COVID-19 revenue assumptions and is therefore overstated by tens of millions of dollars. Second, the budget includes General Fund cuts of over \$12 million - \$7 million in central services and \$5 million in staffing - but does not detail how those cuts will be taken. Third, the uncertainty around how schools will reopen this fall makes it very difficult to evaluate whether the budget being proposed will ultimately be responsive to the new reality we face. Combined, these factors greatly limit the efficacy of our review. We acknowledge the unprecedented nature of this year's budget cycle and share this context and limitations of our review as a means to underscore a central recommendation: that the Board continues to engage the CBRC and broader community in the anticipated amendment process over the coming weeks as the district reconciles the budget to final forecasts.

Focus of Review: Four Board Goals

The primary focus of CBRC's review is tied to the four goals articulated by the Board as the result of a comprehensive visioning process completed in 2019: third grade reading; fifth grade mathematics; eighth grade Snapshot of Graduate performance, and; post-secondary readiness/ready for college and career. Of the four goals, we believe the third grade reading goal is most immediately at-risk because of the limitations of distance reading instruction, especially for grades K-2.

Observations

CBRC's observations about the budget follow.

1. We believe the budget demonstrates substantial support for the four Board goals.

2. We believe the Superintendent and Board are deeply committed to racial equity and social justice and that the Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) lens has improved the District's focus on historically underserved students.
3. We believe the Board and Superintendent have overall crafted a budget that is squarely focused on investing in historically underserved students, and specifically Black and Native students. The investment of millions of dollars of Student Success Act funding in particular is key.
4. The equity allocation of 8% of the staffing model at targeted schools has held steady since FY16-17. We continue to support this investment and approach, and note that the visibility in the Budget Book, Volume 2 (once updated with FY20-21 data) is a useful tool to demonstrate transparency to the community.
5. We acknowledge that the district, like others across the country, finds itself in the dire position of supporting the growing needs of students in the face of deep cuts to education as a result of the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19.
6. It is precisely for that reason – the growing needs of students, particularly those most disparately impacted and who are more likely to be Black, Native, systems-involved, and/or experience housing and food insecurity --that we have concerns about proposed cuts to pre-COVID Student Investment Account investments in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and school counselors. We are particularly concerned about the impact of not placing additional school counselors in K-5 and K- 8 schools that receive federal Title I funding and/or are identified based on low student performance for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI).
7. We believe \$2 million in cuts to central services may be unsustainable. While we have no detail about how the cuts will be taken as of the drafting of this report, we note a history of PPS cuts to core support services that has resulted in uneven implementation and outcomes in schools.
8. Lastly, we recommend maintaining support for diagnostic assessments such as the MAP and adding student and school-wide measures of social and emotional learning supports to more nimbly and effectively understand students' needs and progress. Assessments alone won't result in increased support and outcome for students, and so we also call on PPS to make new resources available to increase educators' data literacy skills.

Recommendations

1. We recommend additional investment in K-3 literacy. While all students have been impacted by the limitations of distance learning, younger students in particular are often unable to self-direct. Estimated projections suggest students may lose up to 70% of typical learning gains in reading and 50% in math by next fall and these estimates are much starker for students in lower grades. States are shifting literacy policies to implement the science of reading. We know more resources are needed to assist Portland Public Schools if we are to stay on-track to meet our Board-adopted goal of 60% of third graders reading proficiently by the end of the 21-22 school year within this context.
2. We recommend that PPS continue to advocate for protecting and enhancing the K-12 budget for Oregon school districts. Class sizes, even net of Student Success Act investments, remain unacceptably high. The Oregon Department of Education Quality Education Model recommended funding level has still not been achieved. While the Student Success Act was a big step in the right direction, we note that overall investment in Oregon's students is still not adequate.

3. We recommend that when clear guidance for opening schools is available, the Board revise the budget to address the new reality. The massive variation in distance learning by school and even grade-band within a school that students experienced this spring is unacceptable. If schools are allowed to open on a limited basis with low student density through, for example, block scheduling or hybrid/ blended learning, the districts' budget should reflect a move towards standardized approaches to distance learning and teacher training to support these new systems. These budget revisions should be operationalized through the RESJ framework to ensure blended learning offerings will not exacerbate inequities regardless of how instruction is delivered.
4. We recommend increased investment in recruiting, supporting, and retaining teachers of color even as the district faces budget constraints that could lead to teacher reductions in force (RIFs). We cannot afford to lose ground on early progress we've made; to be clear, our Black and Native students will stand to lose the most if we back off our commitments.
5. We recommend the district protect or increase funding for services to support students with disabilities (SWD). Next year, special education leaders and teachers will be challenged to provide supports within a continuum of teaching and learning models, distance and/or brick-and-mortar. It will be imperative that they have adequate funding to address critical decisions about whether to provide services in separate settings, how to support parents now responsible for more services at home, and the complication of following compliance.
6. We recommend the PPS Board continue to engage the CBRC for the very substantial budget amendments that are expected to come as the budget is reconciled to final forecasts.

Closing Remarks

CBRC is deeply appreciative of Superintendent Guerrero's leadership and in particular his commitment to ensuring the needs of our district's most historically underserved students are prioritized during this challenging time. The fact is, we have a lot of work to do to meet our goals, including work to undo decades of inequitable investments and systems that have served to protect white privilege at the expense of Black and Native students and families. We call on the Board to adopt a budget that reflects these commitments and keeps us on an urgent, focused path toward a more equitable and excellent system of schools even in the face of cuts or delays to our planned timeline. Our students cannot afford anything less.

CBRC respectfully submits this report to the PPS Board of Education:

Sara Kerr, Co-Chair
Thomas Lannom, Co-Chair
Tastonga Davis
Roger Kirchner
Jeff Lewis
Judah McAuley
Krystine McCants
Brad Nelson
Irina Phillips
Christine Pitts
Leesha Posey
Betsy Salter
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Parker Myrus, Student Representative
Judith Solomon, Student Representative