

## **BPS budget Ideas for year 2018-2019 and beyond** (updated March 13, 2018)

The Boston Public Schools use student weights to create budgets for individual schools. Depending on the needs of each student, they each get a weight or a dollar amount of how much it would cost to educate them. That student weight follows a student, no matter what school they go to.

The problem is that this does not create school budgets that are large enough to educate each student well, when a school has declining enrollment.

Since BPS wants to keep weighed student funding I think the focus should be on how best to set this up so that all schools get what they need.

Since low enrollment can hurt a school's funding, my first suggestion would be to have the number of seats at schools, (in the lottery and administratively assigned) match a good estimate of how many students will be choosing seats. Also, for each school to have the number of seats available to be enough to provide enough funding for a school to maintain their staffing from the year previously and cover a foundation budget. Each year there would be a discussion among school leaders about which staff the foundation budget would cover district wide.

For this year it is too late to use these suggestions. However, they could be used for the 2019-2020 budget.

For the 2018-2019 budget I would offer the following suggestions:

1. Have each school have a small foundation budget regardless of enrollment, that would fund a full time nurse, social worker, and psychologist.
2. In addition, I would address declining enrollment and find creative ways to help schools get additional critical staff.
3. For schools who have extended learning, (who were already a Tier 1 or Tier 2 school before extended day was implemented) who do not want it, move the funding for extended learning to a school that is a Tier 3 or Tier 4 school who does want it.
4. For Build BPS make school safety a priority. Making schools safer from gun violence would be the priority. I would also recommend that water be made safe to drink in all K classrooms. Children that age generally can't read signs that say, "this water is not for drinking. In general, I think that safety repairs should be the priority on construction projects.
5. Add Kindergarten seats slowly. This is an area that can be grown at various rates. Until all schools are funded more equitably it seems unfair to the current enrolled students to put a lot of money into this direction. It is like having a second child when you can't fully afford the first child. Savings in this area could go directly to adding critical staff to all schools- nurse, social worker and psychologist.
6. Perhaps paying for partnerships that are district wide like the debate league might make more sense than funding some schools, and not others. The debate league is an example where the more schools participate, the better for the educational outcomes for the whole district. In cases where partners can benefit the entire district the funding could be given to any interested school centrally. For partners that help pay for a staff person like a social worker (like City Connects) it would be good to find a way to fund that too. Anything that is considered a value to schools and saves BPS money is worth considering. Also, if it is a way to increase the number of critical staff positions at all schools then that is another reason to consider it.

7. Return the original weights for autistic and emotionally impaired students. That would help the budgets of some struggling schools and well as help individual students.

### **Addressing Declining Enrollment**

1. First learn what the main causes for declining enrollment are. Then think of a possible plan of action
2. If the reason is loss to Advanced Work, then add an Excellence For All, or Advanced Work classes, or an international Baccalaureate program at the school. There appears to be a concern about not rolling out Excellence for all classes too fast but Advanced Work is already in the district and could be added without that concern.
3. If the school is not being chosen because it is a Level 3 or 4 school then increase the investment in academics to improve educational outcomes. Perhaps the school could hire a learning coach(s) to address the areas of most concern.
4. If the school is in a neighborhood where the majority of students have to travel a long distance to get to, consider moving the school to a more convenient location where more students need seats. This might make sense for some Allston Brighton Schools if the school communities liked this idea. The other approach would be for the mayor to target affordable housing for families in that neighborhood. I like how that approach would address two goals at once and not have to move school communities to boot.
5. If the school is under enrolled due to neighborhood safety issues make sure the start time and end times are not contributing to that concern. A middle start time might be the best time for safer travel, so students don't either go to school in the dark in the morning or go home in the dark in the afternoon. Also the mayor could provide more police around the school. In addition, have the school provide community service to the neighborhood. If the school gives to the community that sends a good message to the neighborhood and starts a good cause and effect.
6. When popular schools create more seats, this takes away seats from less popular schools. In the Build BPS process, it would be wise to make sure that schools are not set up to fail in terms of enrollment. As middle schools are closed it should be considered carefully if new plans for a school would give that school a good chance of having a strong enrollment that could be sustained. Perhaps there should be a process for schools to go through when they want to expand their seats that take into consideration how that growth would cause other school communities to lose seats. If the impact would hurt other schools too much maybe some expansions should not be allowed. Perhaps under enrolled schools should become popular first through investments before other popular schools are allowed to expand.

### **Ways for each school have critical staff**

The goal would be for each school to have the following critical staff positions for this year, funded through a small foundation budget to all schools. This budget could be used in a number of ways to fund these positions.

- Social Worker
- Psychologist.
- Nurse

Partnership funds could be used to help fund Social Workers through "City Connects" if school leaders preferred. Partnerships with area hospitals could help pay for some nurses and

psychologists as well. For all these positions it is important for each school to have staff able to communicate easily with students who speak a second language.

For Psychiatrists another possibility is for schools to pay the co-pay of a caregivers' insurance. Then parents could use the therapist of their choice, or that the school partners with. This would save money for BPS and for individual families as well.

The following staff would be paid for through student weighted funding where possible.

- Librarian.
- Art Teacher
- Music Teacher
- Art Therapists

There could be flexibility in how this need would be met.

For Librarians a school could pay for this position with weighted student funds. Another option would be for parent(s) to volunteer to work in the library or a community member. Another option would be for schools to use nearby libraries as their school library.

For Art teachers a school could pay for this position with weighted student funds. Another possibility would be for an art college to pay for an art teacher's salary as community outreach. If there isn't room in a school for an art room an art cart could be used. Field trips could help expose students to more types of art.

For Music teachers a school could pay for this position with weighted student funds. Another possibility would be for a music college to pay for an music teacher's salary as community outreach.

For Art Therapists, schools could cover the co-pay of a caregivers' insurance. Then parents could use the art therapist of their choice, or that the school partners with. This would save money for BPS and for individual families as well.

## **Moving Forward**

1. Increase diversity at schools, even if it means losing some title 1 funds. Here is a link to a proposal that goes into detail about this: <http://lgraf.com/BPS/Equity.pdf>
2. A number of years ago I listed a number of ideas for the budget that I think are still useful. Instead of relisting them I think just sharing the document would make the most sense: <http://lgraf.com/BPS/schoolfunding.pdf>
3. To save money BPS can stop paying lawyers to lobby the state to make teachers at-will employees. A teacher made this suggestion and I agree with it.

## **Ideas for New Initiatives**

- If a school has a need to strengthen a safety plan no extra funds are available for the school. Although money for support can come from student weighted funding this doesn't help if a family doesn't agree to an IEP. If there was a fund set up in the BPS safety department that schools could tap into quickly when needed, that would be helpful for addressing immediate safety issues. One use of this fund would be to add an additional teacher or para to a classroom. Another use of this fund could be to pay for

bus monitors. Perhaps the fund could be part of the safety department or “Welcoming schools, safe schools” group.

- Money for therapy for students that have undergone trauma and/or abuse. Even help with an insurance copay would be useful. Therapy costs (in or out of school) possibly could be paid for by student weighted funding and not tied to an IEP (which some families consider having a stigma attached to it.). Also, perhaps area hospitals could help fund this.

This is a work in process. Please email ideas! [lisa\\_jeanne\\_graf@msn.com](mailto:lisa_jeanne_graf@msn.com)