

February 1, 2008

To: Board of Education Members

Re: Budget information letter #1

This memo includes staff responses to many of the questions raised in PTA Council testimony at the Board's budget public hearing on January 22.

Note: In this and subsequent budget information letters, we will generally follow this format:

- The budget category, when applicable, is shown in **Bold Underline**
- The questions are shown in *italics*, starting with the program name and number, or subject matter description
- The answers are shown in normal text
- The person(s) providing the answer is indicated in [brackets]

Overall

1. *Budget format – PTA Council asks that HCPSS and the BOE consider having two budget formats. One based on the State criteria and the other based on strategic initiatives and current educational programs the “real” budget drivers that will allow decision-makers and the community to assess the costs and benefits of particular programs and initiatives. For example:*

- *What is the total budget for student assessments, tutoring, remedial activities, academic intervention, etc?*
- *What is the total cost for technology improvement?*
- *Where can the public go to view this information clearly and concisely?*

The current budget format mirrors State budget categories and the line item data in the budget document is derived from the school system's accounting and payroll systems, which also follow the State categories. A major change to the budget format could be accomplished given adequate time and resources to adjust current procedures and systems.

In an attempt provide the type of function-based data suggested by the PTA Council, for the past two years we have included a chart entitled *Budgets by Functional Area* (see budget book page: Appendix – 19). That chart identifies total expenses for technology, academic intervention, and maintenance of facilities.

[David White]

Special Education

2. *Special Education (Overall) – While the point of entry into the Special Education program for preschool children is through Child Find, there doesn't seem to be a clear cut method for children who are already enrolled in the school system. Is the Response to intervention approach being used to identify children in need of additional supports, or are the decisions still subjective or the result of consistent failure?*

State and local regulations on providing special education services provide clear and specific directions regarding the referral of students with suspected disabilities to school based Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams. An initial referral may be initiated by the student's parent or school staff and the school system must respond to the referral within established timeframes. Decisions regarding the existence of a disability must be made based on valid and non-discriminatory assessments drawing from a variety of sources and documented in a written evaluation provided to the parent.

Prior to referral to the IEP team for determination of a suspected disability, Howard County Public School System has established a “response to intervention” pre-referral system in the form of Instructional Intervention Teams/Student Support Teams within schools. Using local assessments of student performance on a regular basis throughout the school year, students who are performing below grade level in reading and math are referred for academic intervention to the Instructional Intervention Team (elementary/middle schools) or Student Support Team (high schools). Analysis of student performance data by the school based team results in student involvement in a range of tiered interventions.

[James Walsh]

Instruction

3. *ESOL (1002) – Materials of Instruction appears to be moved to general materials. Why? What are general materials earmarked for?*

This is an accounting change only. Throughout the budget we have placed only materials funds that are automatically allocated to schools (using the so-called *little budget* process) into the Materials of Instruction line item. Other instructional materials, which are not automatically allocated to schools, are in the Supplies-General line item. In past budgets, the allocated and non-allocated items were not shown consistently.

[David White]

4. *Media and Educational Technology (1501) – Why do so many Middle Schools and High Schools fall short of the state standards for school library media collections?*

The current Maryland State Department of Education standards for library media collections were last revised in the early 1980s. The MSDE School Library Media Advisory Committee recently discussed whether these numbers need to be adjusted in light of the use of online resources. The committee will make recommendations for revisions in the future.

In the past, the Howard County Public School System has used a standard based on the average collection size at each school level in 1997. Until MSDE revises the state standards, the school system continues to compare current Howard County library media collections to the 1997 standard.

The comparisons are:

level	School system target collection size	State collection standards
Elementary	11,207	12,000
Middle	10,586	15,000
High	13,358	18,000

The number of schools that were below the target collection size:

level	Fiscal 2006	Fiscal 2007
Elementary	0	0
Middle	0	0
High	1	0

Are media collections in these schools adequately used, or has the Internet become the research vehicle of state standards?

To ensure that all students are information literate, the school system teaches students how to use a wide variety of materials when conducting research. Library media specialists work with students and teachers to help them understand the importance of using print sources in addition to online resources. Library media collections are used extensively in all areas of the curriculum. The Internet has not become the research vehicle of state standards.

Can you please identify the schools that fall short of state standards?

The following schools do not meet state standards; however, each of these schools meets the Howard County target collection size:

level	schools		
Middle	Burleigh Manor *	Glenwood	Oakland Mills
	Clarksville	Harpers Choice	Patapsco
	Cradlerock Upper	Mayfield Woods	Wilde Lake *
	Dunloggin	Murray Hill	
	<i>* less than 500 items away from standard</i>		
High	Atholton	Howard	River Hill
	Centennial	Long Reach	Wilde Lake
	Glenelg	Mt. Hebron	
	Hammond	Oakland Mills	

Do media mentors and subject leaders at these levels feel that the shortfall is affecting their ability to teach appropriate research skills to students before they enter college?

Secondary schools with small library media collections are not experiencing difficulty in teaching appropriate research skills to students before they enter college. The quality of the library media collection is much more important than the size.

The Office of Media and Educational Technology provides school library media specialists with tools that they can use to ensure that they are purchasing the best possible materials available. Library media specialists spend a great deal of time collaborating with teachers to determine what materials should be purchased to support the curriculum. Media specialists also work to ensure that they are providing the best possible materials for students.

These collections, combined with the high-quality online subscriptions that school system provides for students both in school and at home, ensure that students have the materials they need to be successful when conducting research.

[Carol Fritts]

5. *Psychological Services (5701) – How can an increase of 0.6 in a psychologist position yield a \$385,950 increase?*

The fiscal 2009 budget also reflects negotiated pay increases and other adjustments (see question 6 below).

[David White]

6. *Middle School Staffing (3020) – How can a decrease in 7 teaching positions yield an increase in funding requested?*

Throughout the budget, the changes in salaries between fiscal 2008 and fiscal 2009 reflect:

- New positions, if any
- Reduction of positions, if applicable
- The individual employees currently charged to the program
- Addition of fiscal 2009 pay increases

In this program, while seven positions are projected to be eliminated – a reduction of approximately (\$473,000) – the fiscal 2009 budget was increased by \$1,905,000 to cover negotiated pay raises and changes in individuals charged to this account since preparation of the fiscal 2008 budget (transfers, retirements, new hires, etc.).

[David White]

7. *Homewood Center (3402) – Why has there been such an increase in contracted services used at Homewood in the past two years (\$60K requested for both '08 & '09), but the item was zero in '07 (no past information given).*

The contracted services money funds the Community Counseling program at Homewood Center. The Community Counseling program allows the school system to hire counselors from the community to come into Homewood and provide individual, group, and family counseling services to students. Data clearly shows that students who participate in this program are far more likely to achieve academic success, earn a recommendation to return to their home school, and earn a diploma than students who do not participate.

Before fiscal 2008, this program was funded by a grant from the Local Children's Board. Entering the fiscal 2008 budget development process, the school system knew that it was highly unlikely that the grant funding would continue, despite the success of the students who participated. The funding for this effort was requested in the fiscal 2008 operating budget and \$60,000 was approved by the Board of Education to support the program. The fiscal 2009 budget continues this funding.

[Craig Cummings]

8. *Field trips (various programs) – Most of the listed categories include transportation costs. In most cases the reason is for field trips. This also increases the cost of substitutes for field trips in the wage/salary section. Is HCPSS suddenly subsidizing class field trips costs?*

The fiscal 2009 budget attempts to show appropriate substitute costs that are required to cover classrooms during field trips. The costs of field trip transportation are actually budgeted in the Transportation category and reflect anticipated fiscal 2009 costs. There has been no policy change concerning “subsidization” of field trips.

[David White]

9. *High School Assessments (various programs) – What is the expected pass/fail rate for the HSAs for the class of 2009?*

The goal is to have 100 percent of students meet the High School Assessment graduation requirement. There are three ways that students can meet this requirement:

- Pass all four HSAs
- Meet a combined score of 1602
- Use the Bridge Plan to meet the requirement for one or more tests

At this point, there are 3,763 students in the Class of 2009. Currently:

- 78.5% (2,953) of these students have passed all four HSAs
- 5.6% (209) have met the combined score option
- 16.0% (601) have not yet taken all four tests.

Therefore, over 84% of the Class of 2009 has already met the HSA requirement before entering the senior year.

With January test results due in March and additional testing in May and August, the school system is optimistic that 95% of students will have met this requirement as they head into the senior year. At that time, those who have not met the requirement will continue to participate in retesting opportunities (October, January, and April for seniors only) as well as the Bridge Plan option to fulfill this requirement. Resources to support schools in addressing this need are included in the fiscal 2009 budget request.

[Terry Alban]

Mid-Level Administration

10. *School-Based Administration (4701) – Although a “Leadership Intern Training” program has been proposed for FY ’09 for administrator positions. Where is the training for support staff?*

Training for support staff is incorporated into the initiatives provided by the Office of Professional and Organizational Development. Training is also embedded into countywide professional development days by the Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology Department (Special Education, Early Intervention Services, Media and Educational Technology, Health Services, Secondary Science, etc.)

Office of Professional and Organizational Development initiatives include:

- Cultural proficiency seminars
 - Office professionals (schools) – two days of training, 35 people attended
 - Office professionals (central office) – two days of training, 25 people attended
 - Human Resources (included office professionals) – two days of training, 35 attended
 - Custodial Services – three days of training, 35 people attended
- Workshops for new paraprofessionals were offered during the Spring and Fall countywide professional development days
- On-site training at the schools for paraprofessionals per request of administration
- Bus driver training – supporting the Transportation Department

[Linda Wise]

Community Services

11. *International Student Services (9501) – ...where and how are you expanding your capacity to listen to parents including parents who speak other languages and to fully embrace parents as partners in every school in the county?*

Here are some of the things that have been put in place:

Bilingual Community Liaisons

The primary responsibility of the Bilingual Community Liaison is to facilitate communication with the Limited English Proficient (LEP) families whose children are enrolled in Howard County schools. The liaisons collaborate with school staff and community organizations to coordinate services and to advocate for LEP families. The liaisons are stationed at 12 of the county’s schools and provide language and cultural support for more than 3,000 LEP families.

International Call Center

The Office of International Students and Family Services also provides phone services in Spanish and Korean for families with questions and concerns related to school matters. LEP parents may call the International Call Center and leave messages in their native language. The phone calls are checked daily to support LEP parents who are speakers of Korean or Spanish. Numbers are 410-313-1591 (Spanish) and 410-313-1592 (Korean).

Interpreters and Translated Documents

The Howard County Public School System has a cadre of interpreters who assist with communication at school meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and at other times when needed. Interpreter services can be arranged through the local school. Additionally, most of the major publications of the Howard County Public School System are translated into five languages in addition to English.

Parent and Child ESOL

The Parent and Child ESOL Program helps parents with limited-English proficiency – and their children – understand and appreciate American school culture and practices. The program connects parents and children through shared learning experiences. While parents are introduced to learning experiences similar to those their children have every day in school, their children engage in activities related to American culture themes.

International Parent Leadership Program

The International Parent Leadership Program is designed to help international parents navigate the school system and develop the confidence to serve as advocates for their children. This six-week program also empowers international parents to assume leadership roles in schools and the community. Contact number for the program coordinator is 410-313-6667.

Educational Forums

The Office of International Students and Family Services coordinates education forums for international families throughout the year. These forums help families who are new to this country understand the American education system. Participants receive information about instruction, testing, and academic expectations, so they can help their children be successful in school. Updated information on education forums, is available from the program coordinator at 410-313-6667.

[Patti Caplan]

Administration

12. *Public Information (0302) – An outside communications firm was hired in fall '06 in which they conducted an audit of how HCPSS communications were conducted and perceived by the community, parents, staff and organizations such as CAC and PTACHC.*

Is this audit report available for the public to view?

Requests for the audit report were received from the PTA Council and Board's Operating Budget Review Committee. Each was provided with a copy. The report is available to the public, upon request.

What communication recommendations were made and being implemented?

The final Communication Audit Report contained nineteen comprehensive recommendations. The auditors advised school leaders to carefully consider and prioritize strategies that can be implemented immediately and those that should be included in long-range plans. Some of the recommendations have already been implemented and others are in process. The recommendations are summarized in Attachment A.

Is the new position of Assistant Superintendent of Communications an outcome of this audit? Why does this position need to be at the Assistant Superintendent level?

The auditors reported that in many large school systems comparable to Howard County, the senior communications/public relations professional serves as the strategic communication/public relations counsel to the superintendent and other top-level administrators. This chief communication officer is responsible for proactively overseeing all functions of the communications office.

Many systems also have a coordinator of communication in addition to a chief communication officer. This allows the chief communications officer to function effectively as a senior advisor, manage crisis communications and critical issues, oversee public engagement processes and build strong community relationships while important ongoing activities and internal communications are handled by the coordinator. In addition, the auditors suggested adding three specialist positions to assist with specific communications responsibilities: media relations, marketing, and internal communications.

The position was placed at the assistant superintendent's level to provide strong leadership in overseeing the list of responsibilities attached to the role. The goal was to attract a quality person in the field of communication with the experience and expertise to bring all forms of communication (as listed in the job description) under one umbrella in a seamless manner.

During the budget work sessions, the Superintendent has recommended to the Board that the assistant superintendent of communications position be placed on hold indefinitely. The Superintendent has recommended that an additional communications specialist position be added to the budget. This recommendation is in line with the communications plan since additional staffing was a priority in order to move the plan forward.

[Mamie Perkins]

Operation of Plant/Maintenance of Plant/Capital Outlay

13. *Utilities (Operation, program 7201) – We understand the Superintendent’s request to spend \$405,000 “to prepare electric restructuring and on-going sub-meter analysis and provide assistance for the Green Schools Program”. But what precisely, is the “Green Schools Program”?...*

The EPA’s Green School Program involves environmental issues beyond energy to include landscaping aspects, recycling and use of “green” products. The school system program is based almost exclusively on energy conservation, though it continues to support the schools’ other environmental initiatives. There are three strands of the Green Schools Program within school system: instruction, action, and involvement.

The Energy Management Services office within the Department of School Facilities provides professional training about energy and energy conservation to a group of involved teachers. These teachers bring the program to students either through an after school environmental group or through daily instruction. The teachers receive support including personal expertise, educational materials, lesson plans from a resources binder, and a tool kit (with equipment to measure such things as temperature and electric consumption).

The focus is for the teachers to involve students in specific activities to save energy in the school through behavioral changes of the occupants. Continual feedback and involvement occurs throughout the year.

Currently two high schools, ten middle schools and one K-8 school are involved. The program extends to a lesser degree to many more elementary schools who have become involved in the EPA’s Green School Program. The intent is to gradually increase the number of schools participating fully in the county sponsored Green Schools Program.

What does “contracted services to support project engineering and resource management” mean? In other words, for the money, what is the goal?

Preliminary engineering and development is required in order to contract out some of the larger energy conservation measures of the “Resource Management Program.” The development time is not always linked directly to one specific project or is billed separately. Therefore this expense is a separate \$30,000 budget line item.

The goal of the consultant in these cases is to do an extensive evaluation of proposed projects or provide assistance in developing concepts for additional projects. The result is typically a variety of projects being approved and bid. For example, an expert in the area of transformers may do a survey of existing transformers within the school system and propose that ten of them be replaced with higher efficiency units. The cost for this would be billed, while the replacement of the units would fall under the \$375,000 Contracted Labor budget line item. Additionally, support to develop requests for proposals for energy procurement contracts falls into this area.

Will there be a report to see?

An informational report on the status of the PEPCO energy services performance contract is scheduled for the March 13, 2008 Board of Education meeting.

[Ken Roey]

14. *Building Maintenance (Maintenance of Plant, program 7602)) – \$500,000 is requested for Contracted Services Repair of Buildings – nearly a 50% increase from FY 08 authorized. Why the increase?*

The facility assessment that is being conducted by Gilbert Architects at the middle school and high school levels has identified over \$34 million in deferred maintenance requirements. The increased funding will fully fund the fiscal 2009 comprehensive maintenance program. This will prevent further accumulation of deferred maintenance items and allow the system to address some of the highest priority items within the existing deferred maintenance list.

Where is the breakdown for maintenance requests and needs per school?

In calendar year 2007, 20,758 work orders were completed within ASRIS—the school system’s automated work order system. Attachment B is a sample of open items for one elementary school. The Comprehensive Maintenance Program provides a planned maintenance/replacement schedule by school of six major building systems and eleven other major interior/exterior items. The Gilbert report provides a complete 20 year capital renewal plan for each school, broken down into nine major categories, and further broken out by individual systems (see Attachment C for a sample).

[Ken Roey]

15. *Networks/Technology (Maintenance of Plant, program 7701) – \$4.1M request in FY09 – in Maintenance of Plant category seems to overlap with Information Technology in restricted funds. Why?*

The Networks and Technology Support Services program covers maintenance of computers and related equipment. Computer maintenance/repair is budgeted in the Maintenance category to comply with State categorical budget rules. The Information and Technology budget (Restricted Funds, program 9714) provides data processing, software, and technology services. This is a revolving fund that is supported by chargebacks to other budget categories. Both programs operate within the same department.

[David White]

Transportation

16. *Pupil Transportation (6701) – [Regarding] 4 additional bus drivers to be used as substitutes. Why do we need substitute drivers to begin with?*

Approximately 425 buses run each day. On every day up to 40 substitute drivers are needed to fill-in for drivers who are not at work.

Don't the contracts with the suppliers of our buses have a requirement to provide substitutes?

Even with the use of all contracted substitute bus drivers, the school system still has periodic shortages of drivers. By rerouting, doubling-back runs, etc. the school system is able to get most students to school and home in a timely manner. To supplement the bus contractors ability to fill routes in emergencies, two contractors have been given one year *substitute bus* assignments. These buses park at the Pupil Transportation Office each day and are dispatched as needed. These sub buses have been a valuable resource for school system.

What would the 4 individuals do when not substituting?

Along with substitute driving, which will be the primary function of the position, these individuals will assist the transportation supervisor and assistant supervisors by answering phones, providing information, filing and making reports. As these individuals gain this experience, they will also help develop and deliver school bus driver and assistant training.

Will these 4 substitute drivers be trained in all the routes since they will need to know them all if they are to sub?

No. Current substitute drivers are given route descriptions and maps each time they are dispatched. This system is working well. The school system has over 1,500 routes, so it would be impractical for these few substitute drivers to know all the routes.

Why doesn't the school system utilize their current bus route supervisors, since they train and certify all drivers and are familiar with all the routes?

Supervisors and assistant supervisors each manage about 70 drivers and 250 routes. Duties associated with the management of these assignments fill their days. Using these individuals as substitute bus drivers would not be an efficient use of their time.

What about liability, do current contracts with each of the bus providers allow for school system personnel to drive their equipment and maintain full insurance coverage?

Liability insurance is provided by the Board of Education for all school buses under contract with school system as either route buses or approved spare buses. This insurance is in effect when the bus is engaged in approved school business, regardless of who is driving.

[David Drown]

I want to recognize the many staff members who have helped respond to this large number of questions. I hope this information is helpful. We will be prepared to respond to the Board's questions on this material, as well as other issues, during the budget work sessions.



David S. White
Budget Officer

Attachments