

**Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS)
Citizens Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC)
Recommendations to School Board for 2014-15 Budget**

Background

After addressing challenges associated with budget shortfalls in 2011-13, a budget surplus in 2013-14, the DMPS CBAC has discussed an investment strategy for 2014-2015 based on a stable financial environment, considering current cash reserves and state funding levels. It is significant to note that the strategic intent of the CBAC has remained consistent since 2011, regardless of the budget situation. Over the years, the CBAC has recommended the following strategic priorities:

1. PK-3 education
2. Sustainable staffing
3. Technology Improvements
4. Communication

Our 2014-15 recommendation seeks to highlight accomplishments within these strategic areas and to continue to build on our success.

1. PK-3 education

The district has made the following improvements in PK-3 education.

- Restored 76 teaching positions in K-5 classrooms
- Implemented a reading recovery program in select schools based on current reading assessments.
- Restored reading and math positions to be aligned to overall staffing ratios

The CBAC recommends that DMPS Board add funding to provide for more opportunities for Pre-Kindergarten students and to continue to pursue funding streams and legislative remedies that will alleviate funding inequities in Pre-Kindergarten and special education.

2. Staffing

The district has made the following advances in staffing:

- Created improved staffing models
- Completed competitive wage analysis
- Restored 119 teaching positions
- Added 19 specialists positions
- Added one administrator position

The committee agrees that a stable staffing pattern is preferable to dramatic ups and downs, and the district should continue to be very cautious with staffing expansions to assure they can be sustained in the future.

The CBAC recommends that DMPS Board highlight for stakeholders the returns from investments in increased staffing levels. We want to maintain adequate staffing at competitive wages in order to retain quality teachers and administrators, which has a direct correlation to student outcomes.

3. Technology Improvements

The district has made the following improvements in technology:

- Time and Attendance system, increased efficiencies and created standard practices
- Several improvements in backend solutions to improve automation and reduce manual processing.
- ERP system enhancements to further utilize software capabilities
- Improvements to network bandwidth
- Improvements to Wireless capabilities
- Phone system update to Voice over IP
- Improvements to Security Systems

The CBAC recommends that DMPS Board highlight for stakeholders the returns from investments in technology improvements and adoption. Operational efficiencies should lead to greater capacity for central office administration. Adoption of technology in the classroom should lead to advances in student learning.

Adopting new technology requires thoughtful implementation and clear insight into the benefits received. Adequate training and instruction are required for new users. The District is accountable that the tools are being utilized. Classroom advances need to consider how students and parents can access these tools from home if they don't have access to the internet. We must be clear on our expectations of these improvements and closely monitor the use of technology to ensure we attain the performance and benefits we expect.

4. Communications (Engagement)

The district has made the following improvements in district communications

- Billboard advertising
- Smartphone App design
- TV station and radio enhancements
- Website enhancements
- Recognized by the National School Public Relations Association as a model of excellence two years running.

The CBAC would like to acknowledge the work done by Superintendent Ahart and his communication staff which has resulted in an award winning communications platform. We would ask the DMPS Board to capitalize on this success and set the conditions for enhanced community engagement. We need to encourage the school district to start looking for new models of parent engagement that recognize constantly shifting demographics in our schools,

especially our ELL families, understanding that parent involvement strengthens student achievement.

Other Observations

Extracurricular activities

The CBAC recommends that the DMPS Board enthusiastically continue to invest in extracurricular activities in order to increase both student achievement and pride within the hallways of our schools. We want to applaud and support the great strides DMPS has made, but encourage the district to continue exploring funding sources that will expand the breadth of student activities choices, as well as ensure equity of availability of activities among buildings.

Long term planning

The CBAC understands that a budget is an allocation of resources in order to achieve a desired set of outcomes. The District is fortunate to have both the Student Outcomes statement and the School Board Belief statement to guide their actions. However, the CBAC feels more work can be done to demonstrate how district priorities align to the School Board Belief Statement so that Student Outcomes are achieved. We strongly feel that a clear set of priorities and a plan to achieve those priorities will help the community at large understand the challenges we face and how we intend to face them.