

**Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS)  
Citizens' Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC)  
Recommendations to School Board for 2015-2016 Budget**

**Background**

The CBAC (Citizens Budget Advisory Committee) had the dubious task of evaluating and looking at what the school system (including the school board) did right, what we felt it did wrong, and what we felt could be improved. During our meetings, we were privileged to hear from school personnel on a variety of issues that (in one way or another) had a direct and indirect relationship with the budget set forth by the DMPS board.

Some of these speakers and attendees at our meetings were:

- Thomas Harper - CFO DMPS
- Holly Crandell - Chief of Academics
- Shelly Bosovich - Executive Director, Student & Family Services
- Susan Tallman- Executive Director, Elementary Schools
- Nick Lenhardt - Controller
- Vinh Nguyen - English Language Learners
- Wilma Gajdel -Director of Grants and Special Programs
- Carolyn Cox -Director of Teaching and Learning, Elementary

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This is the 5th year of the CBAC. In the first year we had to address a budget shortfall. In the subsequent years we have been lucky to discuss budget recommendations relating to a budget surplus.

Of note- CBAC has remained constant in it mantra of ALL KIDS-ALL THE TIME.  
This something that has been echoed throughout this committee's tenure.

Our recommendations are 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 - regardless of the budget situation. Those strategic priorities have been (and are)-

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

**1. PK-3 education**

DMPS serves more than 2,500 Preschoolers

DMPS has over 18.5% of its students that are ELL.

DMPS has over 15% of its students who are classified SPED

DMPS has over 72% of its students in the Free/Reduced Lunch program

It is our opinion and recommendation that areas such as full (all) day programming, transportation of children whose families may be laden in poverty, extra-curricular activities before and after school, and that all students are nourished properly - continue to be a priority for DMPS.

With the ELL population at DMPS rapidly approaching 20%, it is time to expand opportunities for ELL Students which could include expanding weighted ELL funding. Some classes are over 28% and projections place the ELL population in Des Moines schools at 7,000 students by 2016.

With the SPED population at DMPS over 15% of its total population, additional resources need to be given to this demographic.

DMPS students who are eligible for Free and Reduced lunches continues to expand (especially in the inner city schools). This number will most likely continue to increase due to the fact that our minority population continues to rise as well as the fact that the economy has not turned the corner yet.

But it is a proven fact that children who have a full stomach perform better in class and we need to do whatever it takes to ensure our students are nourished and fed. - before school, during school, and even after school (if possible).

**2. Sustainable Staffing**

The committee is happy that most of the 150 positions that were eliminated in 2011 have been restored but...we recommend that the board add funding to provide for more opportunities for Pre-Kindergarten students and to continue to pursue alternative funding streams/grants and legislative remedies that will eliminate funding inadequacies/inequities in Pre-Kindergarten, SPED, and ELL.

We would also recommend taking a look at additional funding for at-risk students. Whilst the DMPS dropout rate has decreased incrementally, we need to take a look at our programming, our diversity, and our funding sources attributed to this demographic.

Our committee believes that the addition of blended learning / flip classrooms etc. is a start but more needs to be done. With blended learning and flip classrooms- Students learn by doing and

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asking questions. Students can also help each other, a process that benefits both the advanced and less advanced learners.

But...blended learning (as the combination of digital content and activity with face-to-face content and activity) has its advantages; it should not be considered a one size fits all approach. It looks very different in each class at the school. When a teacher has an activity that works well face-to-face, there isn't any reason to look for a digital replacement. If they can find something digital that is more effective or efficient, then that should be implemented.

Technology supports effective teaching and learning but does not replace it.

Along the same lines, DMPS has recently implemented the TLC program. Whilst this is an important step to ensure DMPS has the best trained and properly compensated teachers-it also must not be seen as a cure-all.

Most importantly- if the funding for this initiative is "backed out" of our overall legislative funding (allowable growth), it becomes a detriment or deterrent as it does not figure in the inflation and associated cost involved with DMPS budget. It is time now since the State of Iowa has a budget surplus to completely fund this initiative WHILE still adequately funding our continued growth. Iowa is currently 35th in the nation for per pupil education spending (more than \$1,600 below national average) while at the same time is in the top 10 in terms of cash reserves. The legislature has proposed a modest 1.25% increase. With this increase, Iowa would fall to 40th in the nation. This is totally unacceptable. Iowa boasts that it once was number 1 in the nation in terms of education...let's get that moniker back! The "roller coaster" of teacher staffing serves no one well-either our teachers OR our students. We need sustainable staffing! DMPS needs to maintain adequate staffing at competitive wages in order to retain quality teachers and administrators - which have a direct correlation to student outcomes.

### **3. Technology Improvements**

Our committee is proud of the recent technology improvements that DMPS has implemented and the board has approved. This includes everything from improvements of bandwidth/wireless capabilities to VOIP to improved security systems all the way to classroom upgrades (including the new "white boards" etc.

We suggest the board improve communication to shareholders throughout the community and show the ROI that is taking place. We realize improved technology is also not a cure-all but it directly relates to student achievement. Without the upgrades/improvements, DMPS falls further behind and that cannot happen.

#### **4. Communications (Engagement)**

The district has made many advances in this area from smartphone apps and website enhancements to doing a much better job of reaching out and educating the community. The CBAC would like to acknowledge the work done by Superintendent Ahart and the communication staff (Phil Roeder, Amanda Lewis, and others). But...we can't rest on our laurels and must continue to reach out to our community and engage them the best we can.

#### **Synopsis:**

-All kids. All the time.

-Moving in the right direction. Move forward. Stay the path.

-Value of investment. Toot our own horns!

-Instruction first. Always.

Encourage Board and DMPS Administration - primary focus on student achievement, when success is proven with quantitative and qualitative data.

-TLC Grant

-Principal Supervisor Grant

-Other best practice implementation throughout the district

Remain focused on:

-Sustainability of technology initiative

-Sustainability of current staffing levels

-Student before and after school engagement

-Sustain high level of legislative advocacy

-Sustain communication and engagement with all district stakeholders