

**Budget Advisory Committee
MINUTES
Thursday, March 2, 2023
Via ZOOM**

**Staff:
Deb Whitten, Superintendent
Karl Caldwell**

Approval of Minutes

By consensus, the Committee approved the minutes from the February 23, 2023 meeting.

The three questions submitted by a committee member following the February 23, 2023 meeting were answered:

Question 1

I see that the information about the March 7 open budget meeting has gone out. Can you speak on Thursday about what the BAC's role is at this meeting? Will we be at tables as moderators or participants? Do we need to RSVP to Caroline?

The BAC's role will be to participate in the meeting and interact with the public at tables. We are working on having District Staff facilitate and take notes at the tables, if possible. Please RSVP to Caroline if you plan to attend in any capacity.

Question 2

I would like to propose that the terms of reference or guiding principles be amended to possibly include something along these lines: "That when considering recommendations for cuts (or savings), the Budget Advisory Committee members receive detailed information about the expected impacts that such reductions would have on students, staff, and infrastructure at SD61 schools."

However, efforts have been put forth this year to try to recruit additional EAs. The district is holding an EA bridging program this year, and has been spending funds on EA recruitment advertising.

Music Options

Associate Secretary-Treasurer Lutner presented the Committee with an overview of the budget options for Elementary Strings and Middle School Music for the 2023-2024 Budget.

The set of options for Elementary Strings included:

- 28 Elementary Schools with Strings; \$258,485 addition
- Hub Model – 5 Sites; \$91,675 addition
- Hub Model – 10 Sites; \$183,350 addition
- Strings Prep \$0

The set of options for Middle School Music included:

- Maintain Current FTE 8.822; \$0
- Reduce FTE by 20% to 7.058 FTE; \$226,450 savings
- School Population: Base FTE 7.000; \$233,843 savings
- Base FTE + Participation Rate FTE: 10.000 FTE; \$151,189 addition
- Band as an Exploratory/Elective: \$859,939 savings

Questions and comments following the presentation included:

- Elementary Strings Prep \$0; wondering if we could consider as trial run? Saw increase when opened up to all schools, but participation declined when outside of school day
 - Would present challenges; some schools not set up for within schedule; might not have enough instruments; hard to make this fit across all schools
- Saw decrease in numbers at keen schools; used to be in timetable; might also have to do with space; how would it work with extra prep in contract, if already have music prep teacher?
- 4/5 splits, logistical problem; need empty classroom; could be creative solutions, but not sure of them at the moment
- When Elementary strings outside school day, makes program not as accessible; if continues as is, need more discussion to bring into timetable; challenging to move this into 25 schools; what about trying in some schools to see if they can overcome challenges? Elementary strings program important to parents
 - Haven't asked schools if they would want to go in this direction; could go there if committee willing
- Have we done hub model or strings in prep before? Have we done the Middle School options before? Do a trial in first year; pros and cons; not a large FTE; sensitive that these are music teachers
 - Some schools do music as prep/exploratory now; do Ukulele as a hub model now
- Hub at Elementary is at M (s)12-4 (t)6 6 (c)4 (ome)9 (n;mu)-4 (w2 (ry)4 (e)-1 (ld14 (f t)0()10 (t)-4 (rbs)2 (ic

- Is it 2 blocks per week?
 - Depends on participation
- How many blocks per week? Con is disruption to learning, but not that disruptive because consistent
- Challenging when only looking at 2 options; out of context; prefer to have complete picture of y loctIH

- Are there other options to consider?
- Consider emotional impact of budget on students; post-COVID is challenging
- Discretionary spending review

Building Consensus

a. Operating Surplus and Operating Reserve

The Committee broke into small groups to discuss the following questions regarding operating surplus and operating reserve:

- The current operating reserve is \$1.1M, which is .5% of the prior year operating revenue. District Policy states that the operating reserve should be at 2-4%. Would you increase

- maintain student ratios or refresh devices in a timely manner. What should we add to the operating budget in 2023-2024 to address this issue?
- The District has invested \$900K in the first two years of a 5-year network infrastructure plan. Year 3 of the plan costs \$618K. If we do not proceed, we will lose Wi-Fi access in areas of schools. Should year 3 of this plan be added to the operating budget?

Groups reported back highlighting the following:

What should we add to the operating budget in 2023-2024 to address the issue of replacing staff and student devices?

- In general, we haven't contributed and now we have to catch up; funding at 100% may not be realistic; budget model going forward should be consistent amount each year
- Coming up with a specific amount is challenging
- If funded at 30-40%, what would priorities be?
- Teacher laptops are critical

- Spreading of costs was part of initial plan, but unable to sustain; was not funded appropriately and technology usage has increased
- Planning; using volume leverage to reduce cost by purchasing up front; then put away annual requirement to ref (o)4 0 Td(P)-8.2 Tc 00.1 (lb -15.6i)4 (n1 (ut a))(o)-2 (re)-1 (d)JJ0.005 Tc -0.ed

Work Plan

The Committee reviewed the draft work plan for the upcoming meeting including reviewing priorities and savings, and reaching consensus on recommendations to the Board.

Questions

The following question was asked:

- If the funding for education has not increased, do we have a list of how much things have increased?
 - We do not currently have a list, but Associate Secretary-Treasurer Lutner has been keeping track of inflationary increases while working on the 2023-2024 budget.

Next Meeting: March 9, 2023 6pm-8pm in person

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

APPENDIX A: VCPAC FEEDBACK TO MUSIC OPTIONS

VCPAC opposes any cuts to the 2023-24 SD61 school budget that targets student programming. Music, at the elementary and middle school levels, has been severely cut for the past two years. If we continue whittling away at it, we will have no program left.

AMIS, as a sub-committee of VCPAC, has spent more than two years researching and speaking with current and former music students, teachers, arts leaders in the community, parents, and other music specialists across the province. We have sent hundreds of letters and made multiple presentations to the Board of Education, citing how important these programs are to the district and the community at large. Music teachers and families are feeling untold stress at having to advocate for this program year after year. Parents and families have told the District that they overwhelmingly value music education for their students and they do not want to see further cuts to this program.

VCPAC does not understand why music is being targeted yet again for cuts for the third consecutive year. **We are requesting that at the March 9 BAC meeting that District Staff provide a rationale why they are proposing cuts to student programming in our District, that provide such clear mental health and socio-emotional benefits and why cuts to other areas are not being proposed.**

Below, we have provided our recommendations for Elementary and Middle School music, comments about each option, and suggestions for further research and analysis.

Elementary Strings Recommendations

1. Offer Elementary Strings to each school in the current format while exploring options to keep the program within the school day. Currently, 47% of Grade 5s participate in Elementary Strings, which speaks to how popular the program is. The current program which offers Elementary Strings in 24 schools has 15 classes offered **outside** the school schedule, which is not equitable or accessible to all Grade 5 students in the district. Note that the current level of funding was for 15 schools in the 2021-22 school year; the level of funding has not increased, despite the program being now offered in 24 schools.
2. Provide Principals with the choice between a prep time program and in-school instruction. The

- children in the class – under the prep model, this should not be a cost that families need to absorb.
- Can an Indigenous focus be added to the Strings program to make it more inclusive to all students?
 - Are there ways to explore a middle school mentorship program? Perhaps it could be used as part of a hub program? Can Grade 6/7 strings students mentor Grade 5 students?

Middle School Music Recommendations

1. Keep Middle School Music as is. This program promotes inclusivity and equity. We should not be cutting popular performing arts programs that are so critical to our students' mental health and well being. Music gives students connections; a sense of belonging; a place to feel comfortable; and the same teacher over several years, which studies show can be integral to student success.
2. If further cuts need to be explored, VCPAC recommends a 5 to 10 percent cut across the board in the district. If this is considered, these cuts need to be done in an equitable way, which means they should not proportionally affect students who depend on Inclusive Learning or who are Indigenous.

Comments About Each Option:

1. Keep as is:
Reasons We Should Keep the Program:
 - Students already have faced changes in programming over the past two years; when music cuts began, students were in Grade 7. They will be entering high school and have only known cuts to music, which we know is a passion for many of them.
 - Families and music teachers are feeling strain that these cuts are targeting music every year.
 - Further cuts would mean a decrease in qualified staff = a decrease in class and program availability.
2. Reduce FTE by 20%
Challenges:
 - Continuation of cuts would continue the precedent of chipping away at the program until it is gone.
 - Already middle school music programs have cut choirs and strings programs at district schools. The program cannot sustain further deep cuts and remain a high quality, vibrant program.
3. Adjust FTE to the size of the school population starting at base FTE 7.0. (It is currently 8.82).
Challenges:
 - Continuation of cuts would continue the precedent of chipping away at the program until it is gone.

- It is inequitable to base the FTE on the