Budget Process Report, Considerations and Recommendations

ACPS – Budget Advisory Committee (BAC)

School Board Budget Work Session
May 20, 2021

Essential Questions

- How can the sequencing of the review and approval of the School Board and City Council budgets improve the School Board's authority and autonomy?

- How can the Board develop a more streamlined, efficient budget process?

- How can community engagement and feedback on budget-related issues be improved?

Background

- During 2019-2020, BAC surveyed School Board Members in an effort to more fully inform BAC's 2020-21 Scope of Work and to find ways BAC could support the Board in its budget work.

- The School Board identified sequencing of the review and approval of the Board's and City Council's budgets as an issue for the following reasons:

  - Any Board vote adjusting the Superintendent's proposed budget *after* the City Manager's budget is released would be practically difficult to implement;

  - The current sequencing of the budget decisions undermined one of the primary roles and functions of the Board, to review and approve the Division's budget; and

  - The City Manager publicly stating that he's met ACPS' funding request *before* the Board has approved the ACPS budget diminishes the Board's role and autonomy.

Goals

- To develop a more streamlined, efficient budget process
- To explore issues within the budget process, such as:
  - Identify sequencing concerns between ACPS & the City's budget calendar;
  - Explore impediments to aligning the Board and City budget calendars;
  - Compare ACPS' budget calendar to other jurisdictions; and
  - Identify recommendations for a more streamlined and efficient budget process, with the related costs/benefits identified.
- Provide Budget Staff with information to inform development of several FY23 budget calendar options for the Board to review in June 2021

Process

Comparison with other Jurisdictions

- Examined the school budget process in four neighboring or comparable jurisdictions:
    - -- Arlington County   -- Fairfax County
    - -- City of Newport News   -- City of Richmond
- Examined timing and sequencing of budget decision-making by the School Board and City/County officials
- Examined the components of the budget process in specific areas

Components of the Budget Process

- Budget calendar, w/ attention to these key dates:
  - Superintendent release of proposed budget
  - School Board vote on Superintendent's Proposed Budget
  - Release of City/County proposed budget by the City Manager
  - City County Vote on the Final Budget
- Formal exchange between School Board and City/County around budget setting (e.g., joint budget work sessions, meetings, etc.);
- Level of public engagement during School Board budget process
  - Public Hearings and Community Forums
- Rules of engagement for budget process; and
- Whether, how and when budget priority setting is made and how it is incorporated into budget planning and decision making.

General Observations re: Comparisons with Surrounding Jurisdictions

- Timeline is comparable for priority setting and Superintendent's release of their proposed budget

- Deliberation process is truncated in other jurisdictions

- Alexandria somewhat of an outlier in having the Board approve the Superintendent's proposed budget after the general budget is released by the City Manager/Executive

- Alexandria offers more public engagement and work sessions

- More formal City/Schools engagement in Alexandria

Recommendations:
School Board, City Council Budget Timing and Engagement

- The School Board should adopt a budget calendar that allows for a Board vote on the Superintendent's proposed budget prior to the City Manager's budget release to the Council

- The Board should continue to have robust engagement with the Council on budget related issues both before and during the budget process

- ACPS should consider preparing a list of "reach" items beyond the Superintendent's proposed budget that could be pursued with additional funding

Recommendations:

Public Engagement on Budget Issues

- The Board should revamp its public engagement on budget issues to be more equitably accessible, meaningful, and efficient, in keeping with the Board's stated equity and inclusion goal.

- ACPS and the Board should create a detailed and actionable communication plan related to budget-related engagement.

Recommendations: Public Engagement (cont.)

- This plan should include:
  - multiple modes of communication and engagement opportunities for the community (e.g., text, e-mail, in-person, video, audio) - both in sending out *and* in receiving information/feedback
  - collaboration and engagement with external stakeholders (e.g., FACE, PTAC, community organizations like Casa Chirilagua)
  - sufficient notice to the public for budget-related opportunities/events
  - use of online tools (e.g., survey, comment page on Division website)
  - continued improvements to the website in order to pair public engagement opportunities with robust public information
  - use short, digestible fact sheets to "tell a story" about the budget

Recommendations: Public Engagement (cont.)

- Other recommendations

  - Revamp the Community Budget Forum, traditionally held in October (consider goals, format, timing, partnership, Board participation)

  - Utilize BAC to solicit public feedback on the budget to submit to the School Board for consideration.

  - Instead of live, in-person commentary, use written and virtual commentary at Board meetings and public hearings. Consider tools like "Think Tank" that promote interactive

- Consider how engagement translates to community members who do not have family members enrolled in ACPS; emphasize the importance of investing in ACPS as a community good

Recommendations – Internal ACPS Process

- ACPS budget staff should develop a streamlined and simplified version of the Budget book without losing information and analysis needed by the School Board to make informed decisions.

- ACPS budget staff should propose several versions of the FY23 Budget Calendar for the Board to consider, consistent with the observations and recommendations included in this memo.

Recommendations - Internal ACPS Budget Process

Priority Setting, Rules of Engagement, and Initial Public Engagement Stage

- Reduce the budget-related work sessions in September to one work session to discuss the budget calendar, budget process resolution, rules of engagement, priorities, and fiscal forecast

- Replace the Community Budget Forum with alternative communication channels or vastly reformat the forum to ensure broader, more equitable public engagement

  - Consider combining the Community Budget Forum with a public hearing

  - Involve all Board Members as an opportunity to receive public comment

  - Eliminate a formal CIP/CF Public Hearing and pursue alternate channels to receive public comment

Recommendations - Internal ACPS Budget Process – CIP and CF Process

- Consider sharing substantive work session presentations on the date that the Superintendent releases the proposed CIP budget and CF budget in an effort to accelerate questions and add/deletes.

- Hold a public hearing after substantive budget presentations to receive public comment, but pursue other engagement opportunities. Consider reducing the number of work sessions by combining with a public hearing.

- Reduce the two CIP and CF work sessions to one work session; consider whether these work sessions should happen before or after the Joint City Council/School Board Budget Work Sessions in November and March

- Reduce the two CIP and CF Add/Delete work sessions to one

Questions?

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