

<p style="text-align:center">DISTRICT ADVISORY COUNCIL Recommended District Budget Priorities for 2008-2009</p>

The DAC recognizes that there are a number of very important programs and initiatives currently being undertaken by the district, including support for academically struggling campuses, high school redesign, middle school improvements, support for English Language Learners, and Strategic Compensation. The DAC of course supports these efforts, but feels they are certain to receive significant attention during the 2008-2009 budget development process. In identifying budget priorities for 2008-2009, given the limited amount of discretionary funding available, the DAC has chosen to concentrate on two specific areas of need that might not otherwise receive sufficient consideration, even though they are directly related to improving student achievement.

In alignment with AISD Strategic Plan priorities for education and resources, the DAC hereby recommends the following budget priorities for 2008-2009 for careful consideration by the Budget Task Force, district administration, and the Board of Trustees:

1. ***Ensure that every campus has adequate technology support staff.*** Bond programs can provide for considerably more technology, but they cannot pay for additional support staff. Even if campuses receive the current computer hardware and software they need, these resources cannot be used to their maximum educational and administrative effectiveness without adequate technical support. At a minimum, the district should provide funding to Instructional Technology and Network Systems and Support at a level of approximately twenty dollars per student per year. This funding should be allocated to meet the greatest campus needs. (See Attachment 1 for additional justification.)
2. ***Ensure that every campus has adequate library resources.*** Campuses are currently required to allocate two dollars per student from their budgets for library funding. This is inadequate to provide the media resources needed to support instructional programs. At a minimum, the district should provide funding for library resources to meet the recommended national and state standard of 1.5 million dollars per year, or approximately one book, or twenty dollars, per student per year. This funding should be allocated to meet the greatest campus needs. (See Attachment 2 for additional justification.)

In addition, in the longer term, the DAC recommends that the district ***study the overall budget process in order to assess how improvements might be made***, including earlier and more meaningful involvement of the DAC and CACs. (See Attachment 3 for details.)

Attachment 1
Additional Justification for Campus Technology Support

- The district's Technology Plan recommends overall improvements to campus technical support, and for on-site technicians at all secondary campuses.
- Most districts require \$300 to \$500 per student for technology. But the state only provides approximately \$26 per student for technology, and most of this funding is used for technology refresh and licenses, with very little reaching campuses for discretionary use.
- Some campuses are able to raise money locally for technology support, but other campuses do not have this capability.
- Based on a 2007-2008 AISD survey, 35 campuses have a full-time technician, 19 have a half-time technician, and 6 pay a teacher supplemental pay for technical support. This support is funded at the campus level, not at the district level. [Round Rock ISD provides a full-time technician for all campuses with 900 or more students, and a half-time technician for all campuses with fewer than 900 students.]
- At the centralized level, AISD currently has 11 "break-fix" staff for over 36,000 pieces of equipment. The district has 12 instructional technology staff, who are often pulled into break-fix work.
- Teachers are often pulled into technology trouble-shooting, taking away from valuable instructional time.
- The industry standard for technology support is one technician per every 300 to 400 customers. However, this usually refers to a corporate or office environment; instructional technology needs are often at a much higher level.
- Central technology support that requires a campus visit may take from one to four weeks, or even longer, depending on the time of the year.

Attachment 2
Additional Justification for Library Resources Funding

- The DAC has received numerous letters from CACs in the district concerning the crisis level at which libraries are currently operating.
- Compared to Texas State Library Commission standards, AISD libraries are deficient in the number of resources per child, currentness of collections, budgetary allocations, and adequate staffing.
- A strong correlation between library resources and student achievement has been documented in nationwide studies.
- Libraries at AISD campuses serve a vast array of student needs, including students who speak and read Spanish and other languages.
- Wear and tear on popular titles, providing students with new titles for which they are clamoring, and the need to continuously update changing information calls for constant evaluation, replacement, and addition of books and reference materials to remain current. Periodicals and newspapers are also purchased with reading materials funds for libraries.
- Teacher needs, including professional materials, audiovisual needs, manipulatives, and books to support the curriculum (IPGs in particular) are necessary.
- Support at an adequate level for the school library is in alignment with the AISD Strategic Plan (i.e., placing emphasis on addressing the greatest needs in allocation of resources), as well as the AISD Annual Report (i.e., providing our children with a great variety of opportunities in which to learn).

Attachment 3

Study on AISD Budget Process Improvements

Detailed Description

Premise

The district should study possible improvements in its current process to develop the annual budget to encourage and facilitate regular, recurring, systematic and substantive participation and input by community stakeholders.

Recommendations

To improve the preparation, regularity, substance, and timeliness of community input in the budget process, the district can enhance and expand ownership of this important school improvement strategy through the following actions:

- 1) The district should contract for the development of a written guide to the district budgeting process that will serve to educate all interested parties.* Particular attention should be paid to the timetable, participants (individuals and groups), responsibilities, key performance measures, and historical results. In addition, alternative budget processes should be explained and explored.
- 2) The Board of Trustees should establish a community committee charged with developing a set of recommendations that will increase knowledge of the budget process, disseminate accurate and timely information regarding budgetary decisions, and expand community participation in the budget process.

Supporting Arguments

While participation of broad segments of the community in educational decision-making has not proven to be a panacea for improved student performance, many districts across the country have benefited from such strategies. Just as parent involvement in a student's education demonstrates a strong correlation with student success, so too does community participation benefit the educational system. One area of particular importance is that of participation in the process of investigating, analyzing, and developing an annual budget. A budget process that achieves early and regular input from a variety of stakeholders, and that is based on concise yet comprehensive analysis of past district practice and performance, has the potential to improve campus and district educational achievement.

AISD should seek to implement policy and practice that result in routine, regular, and substantive participation by community stakeholders in the budget process. The cyclical nature of the budget process and the manner in which many of the most important and consequential decisions coming very early – months before the selection of Budget Task Force members – precludes any meaningful participation in the decisions that have the greatest potential to impact student achievement. In addition, the current process often results in the introduction of major initiatives *after* the Budget Task Force has completed its work, with no opportunity for any involvement by the most knowledgeable, informed, and responsible group available. The district needs to ensure that the Budget Task Force and all stakeholders are: involved early in and throughout the budget process; engaged with issues of consequence; provided with adequate, complete, and substantiated information; and focused on the educational mission of the district.

*An example of such a guide, *Mechanics of a School District Budget - A Guide to Understanding the Illinois School District Budget Process*, can be found at <http://www.isbe.net/sfms/pdf/mechanics.pdf>.