

CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE FY 2012 BUDGET GUIDELINES

Mission Statement: *The Cambridge Public Schools will be a diverse urban school system that works with families and the community to successfully educate all of its students at high levels.*

In preparation for the budget for school year 2011/12, the School Committee has worked with the administration to provide guidance in advance of the preparation of the budget. These guidelines, which are based on the Cambridge Public Schools Goals for 2010 - 2012, represent the Committee's thoughts on what are the most important areas of focus as the draft budget is developed.

We recognize that the district faces financial constraints; therefore, a strategic framework for determining budget priorities is essential. In providing guidelines, the Committee acknowledges its role in setting priorities among a number of worthy endeavors. In writing the guidelines, the Committee seeks to provide enough specificity to provide guidance, while leaving details of implementation up to the superintendent and his staff. A comparison of Cambridge's per pupil expenditures with a nearby high performing district's per pupil expenditures is being undertaken in this budget process to help make sense of Cambridge's comparatively high per pupil expenditures and to guide strategic decisions

The School Committee's overarching goal is to maximize student achievement for every student. The following guidelines are to be used in developing budget allocation proposals in support of that objective.

I. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Improving achievement for all students, with a particular emphasis on reducing the achievement gaps that currently exist for students in certain sub-groups, including students of color, low-income students, students who are English language learners and students with special needs, is a critical area of focus for our district. Part of this focus also includes providing challenge for the high achieving students. Opportunities for remedial and accelerated learning both during and outside of the school day are important and strategic to our goal.

The FY 2012 budget should continue and build upon the following initiatives undertaken as part of the FY11 budget:

- Professional development for principals, assistant principals, coordinators, coaches and classroom teachers in differentiated instruction, thus enabling teachers to

employ a variety of instructional strategies to challenge and support the diverse needs of students in their classrooms every day.

- Response to Intervention (RTI) techniques, which is a system of tiered interventions used in the general education classroom that allows for the early identification of and assistance to struggling students.
- Use of student data to determine the areas of need in classrooms and for individual students. This includes training in the use of the Youth and Resource Development System (YARDS), a system designed specifically for Cambridge.
- Continuation of the development and refinement of authentic assessments in all subject areas to assure that student progress is being measured in ways beyond the MCAS tests.

The district has long-standing relationships with community partners that provide services to students and families above and beyond what the district alone is able to provide. The FY12 budget should continue to support those community partners that assist the district in meeting its goals and engage them in a strategic manner to support our efforts.

II. SPECIAL EDUCATION

In our efforts to continue to support and invest in our Special Education department, we ask that the FY12 budget include the resources required to begin implementing recommendations resulting from the Special Education Program Review conducted during 2010.

III. LONG RANGE PLANNING

The FY12 budget will include an implementation plan and the resources to support the Superintendent's recommendations resulting from the work of the Facilities, JK-8th Grade Education Program and Choice task forces. A collaborative process working with school communities should be created to ensure that potential changes are implemented in the most beneficial manner.

IV. ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

A. Early Grades

Continue support for young students and their teachers during their early years in school. Student growth and achievement in the early years is critical to success throughout their school careers. Therefore, professional development will be designed not only to strengthen classroom instruction for all students, but also, effective supplemental interventions will be identified and developed across the district in both reading and mathematics.

B. Middle Grades

Continue to improve and support our middle grades across the district with particular attention paid to schools with small middle grade cohorts to ensure we meet the academic and social needs of our students. Continue working with City Departments on coordinating out of school time services for middle graders.

C. High School

Support the CRLS faculty and staff as they move into the fully renovated high school. Continue to develop rigorous academic core courses embedding 21st century skills with high expectation for all students and appropriate supports and challenges, to maximize intellectual development for each student and to provide equitable opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels.

V. SCHOOL CLIMATE and HEALTH AND SAFETY

Building a safe, supportive and nurturing environment allows students and staff to focus on achievement without distraction. The FY 12 Budget should support and enhance effective programs and curriculum that produce students who are physically, mentally, emotionally and socially healthy and safe. Effective anti-bullying programs, strong home-school connections, and a coherent set of out-of-school time opportunities all contribute to the goal of improving school climate.

Support changes that make schools, schoolyards, and school buses environmentally healthy.

VI. PROGRAM & CURRICULUM EVALUATION

Systematic program evaluation is an important tool for making thoughtful decisions about which programs have the greatest positive impact on student achievement. During FY11 the ISP program, the Special Education program, and the 504 Accommodations program are under review. Additional programs should be identified for review in FY12, including programs provided by CPS partners. The four year curriculum review cycle, initiated in FY11 with a review of the math curriculum, should be continued so that in time all curriculum areas join the review cycle to ensure students are receiving effective instruction of an excellent curriculum in every subject area and that teaching and learning standards are well-conceived and aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Funding to implement improvements recommended in the evaluations should be available.

VII. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Continue to develop technology that will improve use of data in decision making, improve the delivery of services, improve district operations and improve communication and support for families. This area includes both electronic communication for school/home as well as data-driven decision-making support for the district leaders

Improve communication and public information about our schools with particular attention to student retention, student recruitment and the registration process.

On-going review and assessment of operational departments such as transportation, food services, business and finance, and human resources, is key to ensuring that district staff are delivering services in an effective and efficient manner. In particular, the superintendent and his staff should review the impact of the FY11 budget reductions on the Elementary Program and in the operational and administrative departments.

On an ongoing basis, the year budget should ensure funding for continued capital projects so that our schools are safe for students, staff and families. In addition, the district should identify cost-savings through energy efficiency and sustainability in all school buildings.