

Budgeting for Success Comments (Parents & Community)

The following comments have been received through a variety of sources, including feedback from the BfS web site, school-based parent meetings, and the school board's public engagement sessions. Duplicate or similar comments on a particular topic or issue are limited, and only appear if the comment provides new insights or arguments.

Administrative Reductions

- There appears to be no suggestions of administrative cuts. All departments should feel the pinch. Edina has cut Assistant Superintendent position. I know they took a pay freeze, but are we top heavy?
- I do not see any staff cuts in the Educational Equity area. This should be considered as they have two secretaries.
- With all of the cuts that have to be made, I was disappointed to see that the Community Relations department was spared any cuts. Many of us know that more staffing has been added to the department over the past year and there has not been an increase in information or services.
- I would like to see some suggestions for saving money at ESC. The administration should be looking at how they can trim, not just schools.
- Before we start to look at the "healthy hanging fruit," how about taking a look at the "rotting fruit" on the ground. There is a lot of very expensive waste at the district level that would not impact students or classrooms.
- District leadership & principals should submit proposals to attend workshops/conferences using a procedure similar to teachers. Attending out-state workshops/conferences should not be automatic, but should rotate so the same leaders are not attending every year.

Athletics

- Continue to combine athletic programs between the two high schools; saves money and builds community.
- Combine Jefferson and Kennedy hockey programs. Kennedy's coach has resigned so that is a position that does not need to be filled. Kennedy can barely field a varsity team and is currently playing a modified schedule. Students who would be cut can play Junior Gold, a program that needs more players. If students are financially unable to play, there are booster club scholarships available.
- I think there could be problems with eliminating the athletic director position. We have seen, in music that without a person accountable for a district vision there was lack of continuity between elementary, middle and high schools. I would expect similar issues to happen with athletics.
- There should be interaction with the community feeder programs for athletics and how could that happen when each school is responsible for their own programs. I don't know how much community interaction there is

- today in athletics but other surrounding communities certainly have healthy feeder programs and it seems critical to success. Though people like to focus more on academics, athletics is a factor when parents are choosing a district. I would reconsider the impact of this move.
- Synchronized swimming has been in existence for 40 years, and has a tradition of cooperation between high schools and middle schools; have had strong placements in state tournaments. Girls are high performing students and committed athletes. Supporters of the program feel it is cost efficient, and the strong booster club covers many expenses, such as transportation fees. Synchronized swimming is an excellent value. Participants and parents of participants urge the Board members to continue to support the sport.
 - Raising fees on school athletics creates a class system where some cannot participate. The fees are already quite high for some families.
 - We have seen an increase of kids asking for athletic scholarships.
 - As a 10-year synchronized swimming judge for MSHSL and former high school swimmer, I'd like to encourage you to keep the sport alive and active in the Bloomington district. I graduated from Prior Lake High School in 1998 and we had the same issue my senior year. Our district was in a dire financial situation and almost cut the program. However, we campaigned hard to save it, convinced them to hold off, and interest in the sport took off. We went from 13 swimmers my senior year to over 30 now. It is rare gem of a sport (with less than 20 schools in the state offering it) that you should be pleased to offer, taking pride in its uniqueness and ability to set you apart from other districts. It takes lots of talent to run and fill a synchronized swimming team and to just dismiss that talent would be a huge shame. We may be a smaller group than other huge sports, but we are dedicated to the sport of synchronized swimming and we're fierce supporters of keeping it alive and active in Minnesota! Please help us in this mission.
 - Why would you choose to eliminate a sport as successful as synchronized swimming? Why don't you make cuts to the athletic teams in the district that are not as successful as the synchronized swimming team? There are many sports with very low success rates that cost a lot more than synchronized swimming. Maybe they should take cuts until they can perform as well as the synchronized swim team.
 - Sports are good, but should not be considered critical to the education of the students. Therefore, they should be seriously considered and examined for cuts if necessary.
 - The synchronized swimming program is already a combined Jefferson/Kennedy program. It is small but very successful. Last year, three new girls joined the team. This year, the three returned, and five new girls joined the team. Every year my daughter has been on the team, she and other team members have qualified to swim at the state meet. Last year, every team member qualified to swim at state. This is a very exciting and challenging opportunity. These girls are also excellent student athletes. Most girls participate in one or two other high school sports

during the school year. Five current team members are also members of NHS and most of these young women are in the top 25% of their class academically. These girls practice 3 hours/day, 6 days/week, using a school pool, working around other teams and swimming lesson schedules.

- Keep a growing program going. Visit Olson pool any day from 3-6 pm to see the commitment, dedication and hard work put into this sport. This hard work, teamwork and confidence are values they can use the rest of their life. These values cannot be measured in dollar amounts.
- You can imagine how dismayed we were to learn that this great sport for girls was singled out for elimination. The BPS team, which is undergoing a period of rebuilding after a coaching change last year, now has an incredible coach and consistent with other budgeting recommendations, economically combines Jr. Varsity and Varsity on the same squad. Given how low Bloomington's athletic participation fees are, perhaps a modest increase in athletic fees would be worth considering before eliminating programs that take years to rebuild (families who couldn't pay the fee might receive assistance).
- Because my husband and I are both employed full-time, we have had to deal with substantial inconvenience in providing the transportation for our daughter to Bloomington every day (since out-of-district students are responsible for their own transportation). However, we have really felt it was more than worth it. But now, with the possibility of curtailing (or eliminating) programs that are central to us, I find myself wondering whether we should continue in the district next year. As a possible drawback of eliminating synchronized swimming on the budget website, it is noted that there is a risk that students may go to other districts which have teams (such as St. Louis Park, in our case). I think losing students is, therefore, a real possibility.
- If activity fees are increased this mean poor families can't send kids on field trips.

Class Size

- Small class size is important not only for student learning but also for attracting new families to Bloomington and property taxes.
- Increasing class size could be bad for students.
- Increasing class sizes by one actually means decreasing teachers.

Marketing and Partnerships

- Explore public-private partnerships more to offset increased costs of education. We should not be “cutting up” our children’s educational experiences. You get what you pay for!
- Keep in mind building strong programs so we keep families in the district and attract others. Parents have many choices and shop.
- Continue Parade of Schools event; brainstorm additional ideas, encourage “word of mouth,” advertise what we do offer (ex: small class sizes, experience/well-oiled machine with behavior plans, etc.)
- Volunteers are a key to keeping costs low and education quality high.

Salaries

- Keep in mind that in the private sector, many of us have already taken pay cuts, with no debate and little or no complaint. Schools may need to do the same.
- Why should Bloomington educators be exempt from what the rest of America is facing. These are extraordinary times. I don't know how the district could justify increasing teacher and staff salary increases while student programs are being cut or reduced. Teachers need to operate consistent with the real world.
- Before suggesting salary freezes/reductions for employees, how about letting the public know the percentage of raises that have been given to teachers each year going back 8-10 years. Then tell the percentage of raise for principals for each year and the superintendent, including bonuses. Then everyone will have a realistic idea of how salaries have been handled in the past.
- I don't like the idea of a pay freeze for teachers. They are already underpaid considering their average education. We ask a lot of them. We have recently shifted a much higher portion of health costs to them. And, perhaps most importantly, they will never make up for the lost income. This all leads to unhappy employees. I want happy teachers who really want to work in Bloomington.
- Admire that superintendent and his cabinet took a pay freeze, but teachers don't get much of a raise in the first place.

School Day/Week

- Please do NOT go to a 4-day school week. It may save money, but students, particularly elementary students, have a limited capacity for learning each day before they shut down. And parents would have increased child-care costs, or students will be left at home for a full day while their parents work (as opposed to a couple hours before or after school). This is not in the best interests of our students or families. I would much prefer an all-year school model.
- Get rid of MEA. Move up November inservice days

- The recession provides an extraordinary opportunity to make revolutionary educational improvements while simultaneously balancing the budget. During this time of change please keep in mind that even progress needs to be presented properly, and in a timely manner, so as not to be perceived as floundering. Past Change Example: Relocating Dimensions Academy from Hillcrest to Ridgeview was a positive change that made all the sense in the world. However, it met with huge criticism because it was presented to current students and parents at the last minute in a chaotic manner. Future Potential Change Suggestion: It appears from the spring school surveys that MEA is not productive. Eliminating that break gains two days of education or teacher development. However, there are families that consistently plan activities during this break. If it is to be eliminated, give families a year's notice so they can adjust their schedules.
- Please feel free to shake up the status quo. Because something has been done a certain way the last 10 years doesn't mean it's the best policy.
- Four-day week for middle and high schools only.
- No late start/early release.
- Longer winter/summer breaks – money savings? How does that change number of school days? Does it go to “hours”? This is not on the “fruit list, why not? This seems like an easy one.
- Increase the contact time during the school year so that the June release date is earlier in May. Saves on transportation, building expenses, etc.
- Analyze the four-day week's overall impact; it may save district but will cost families more than the savings.
- Eliminate or decrease factored snow days to shorten school year because they are rarely used.
- Create our own plan for 4 day week – year round instead of longer days. It would be harder for students to be at school for longer days regardless of the plan.
- 4-day school week would negatively impact students.

School Programs (Dimensions Academy, 5th Grade Band, etc.)

- There is no doubt that the Bloomington Dimensions Academy (DA) program is successful. We hope it keeps its success and remains competitive. We understand the current budget situation of the district, but we believe the continuous success of the DA program is very important for Bloomington.
- My son is currently part of the Gifted and Talented program at OGMS and his success is based solely on the leaders and teachers that take on the challenge of teaching these gifted and talented students. This program is the envy of our neighboring school districts and its success is based on the devotion and leadership of the teachers and administrators who helped to develop and institute this program.
- As the parents of a DA student, we are concerned about the potential

impact on the program as a result of the budget cut. Last year our daughter attended the DA program from a neighboring school district. We made this decision because of the high reputation of the program, even though we both work full-time and have to transport her daily. We believe and have already seen that our daughter has benefited a lot from Bloomington's rich and challenging curriculum. Recently, the school district of our residency decided to start a similar G/T program this fall. One of the reasons that they started the program is because they are losing students to other G/T programs, including DA. At this point, we still decided to stay with DA for its well-established quality of education.

- 5th grade band submission is appalling. Parents don't have resources to go elsewhere. Don't cut the 5th grade band program without figuring out how to enhance our middle school music programs.
- Thank you for not cutting music programs in this process. The arts should be stronger in Bloomington. Programs should be enhanced.
- Music committee is working to create a solid music program in Bloomington, which will hopefully be a draw to our district.
- I took 5th grade band – I think parents should have to pay or wait until middle school even if it means they go without.
- The nice thing about 5th grade music is that every student has the opportunity to play an instrument.
- Arts are a very important part of a child's development. Just as in sports, this also puts music students at a competitive disadvantage when auditioning for area bands, and potential scholarships to college. I would say it is a severe impact as I was a fifth grade student in Bloomington in 1980-1981. Bloomington has long prided itself on its inclusion of the arts, and it would make me think about switching districts, even though I am an alumnus.
- I am concerned that instrumental music may be removed from 5th grade because I feel it is important for every child to have a chance to try an instrument. I feel that many children will not have the chance to ever play an instrument, and in particular, I am concerned that children from lower economic income homes would not try an instrument because of the proposed policy to remove 5th grade band.
- I would love to keep 5th grade band as a way to show that the Bloomington Public Schools really believes in the arts and the power they have to improve a child's thinking skills.

School Restructuring (including closing or consolidating schools)

- Schedule changes: Don't move to the cheapest method unless it continues to support the District's successful programs.
- I have been a fan of the 4 period day until the last couple years. I agree it gives extra time for in-depth learning. But since the expansion of AP classes to 3 and 4 quarters, a college bound student who wants or needs to take AP has extremely limited options for the rest of their classes.

There is no time left to pursue other interests. I have seen 9th graders drop music because they already see they will not be able to fit it in in later years so why start? I see kids who cannot try a marketing class or take a high level language because they don't have enough time left. The AP classes are either overkill, not needing 3-4 quarters, or if that is what is needed then the 4 period day no longer works. High school is the time to try classes to see where students' interests are before they have to pay for college credits. We are not able to offer this any longer to many students.

- 4-Period day negatively impacts music and AP selections; limits student choice; has had an adverse affect on the music program.
- Block schedule limits student choices, especially hard on music and art programs. It may not be the best academically. Limits options for students and creates fragmented programs of study. Students end up in classes they don't want because it may be all that is available.
- Favor a 7- or 8-period day, which affords more consistent course of study, comprehensive and doesn't create gaps in the day. Testing requires students to have more of the core classes, which they don't get on a daily basis with the four-period day.
- If the District can save dollars by eliminating the block schedule at the high schools, it's worth pursuing.
- When calculating savings for closing/consolidating schools take care to consider dollars lost due to students/families who will potentially take their enrollment dollars to other districts. If parents are no longer offered a choice school within the district, they are likely to go to other districts.
- Restructuring the district with the possibility of closing one of the grade schools. If it hasn't been done in 25 years, it needs to be done.
- If needed, consolidate schools.
- At the high school level children need to choose between math & music when using the current block schedule.
- I would eliminate the block schedule for 3 reasons: 1) it doesn't work for music and fine arts kids because many are forced to spend 25% of their class time on it; 2) high school should allow some experimentation with new classes (if not then, when does this happen? and 3) saves money.
- Consider the impact of changing high schools from the current block schedule in relation to number of textbooks currently owned and number of additional textbooks that would be required by making such a change.
- Closing a school would make class sizes too big. I question how this would this affect schools, teachers, and students.
- Don't want district to close a school because those kids all have to go somewhere and class sizes would likely increase or teachers eliminated.

Special Education

- Do we require all the special education teachers that are employed by the two high schools? How many special education students are in the

district? (10%). What percent of the budget goes to special education? (20%).

- Do not cut special education, these kids have hopes and dreams.
- Why do we think it is a positive that we spend less of the general fund per student for special education than other surrounding districts? One would assume the funding each district receives is the same per special needs student, so that would translate into our district spending less per special education student than other school districts near us. Our students with special needs deserve the same level of special education services as our surrounding districts, not less. Our special education staff are overloaded and cannot deliver the service that our students need to help them make adequate progress. It is sad that this is one of the ways we promote the fact that we are fiscally responsible. At what expense to students, families and staff for our students, the impact could be life long!
- I have serious reservations about the idea of viewing District 287 students as a source of revenue (the flip side of stating we could save the district almost \$3 million if they stayed in the District.) If it's considered a revenue source, then the tendency will be to keep expenses low in this program to ensure it will be a net income provider, or at the very least a break-even proposition. "Those" kids are in need of highly skilled teachers. If "those" kids are integrated into the school, without highly skilled staff and a low enough student/teacher ratio to provide adequate oversight, then you have increased the risks and created problems that affect the entire educational population, both for the 287 students and the general student population, whether in a building, after school activity, bus route, etc.
- This is the population that is least likely to lend itself to being self-sustaining from an income/expense perspective because special education is never fully funded, and the most expensive population to educate. To reintegrate the most expensive to educate and the highest risk students into the general student population has far reaching consequences that need to be carefully analyzed from the aspect of what is best for 287 students and the general education/community populations whom they will be integrated with, the need for very highly trained staff, and adequate staff levels to provide beneficial oversight. The tendency will be to bring back as many students as possible over which to spread the cost of the staff. Where does one find these highly skilled staff to work with this population? How accepting will the general educational community be of these students? If they are not accepting, then you have set yourself up for a bad situation, and perhaps tragic outcomes or events in the future. Don't be blind to the challenges here; truly qualified and quality special education staff is difficult to find. Really look at the type of training they receive in colleges today. If it is difficult to find and retain quality EBD staff who get the resources and support they need to do the job right (as I have been told by knowledgeable sources) how much more difficult will it be to adequately support and maintain resources and staff to work with much more disabled individuals?

- Is BPS committing itself to becoming exceptional at educating the most difficult and highest risk special education students, including it's retained special education students, in such a way that the District's reputation would pull students into their specialized programs from all over the metro area? The answer points to why District 287 was probably formed in the first place, because the expense involved in this student population within a school district could not be justified due to the limited number of students over which to spread the cost.
- Unless you have as your starting point "What is in the best interests of these students, and are we able and willing to provide it?" and unless you can point to the data that shows Bloomington's current retained Special Education students are meeting NCLB and MDE Grad Standards and the District 287 students are not, it is not wise to view District 287 students simply as "dollar signs" who could benefit the District budget.

Staffing

- Consider cutting the computer lab paraprofessionals at the elementary level; they are underutilized and outdated. Tech support could be their role and title.
- Our concern is with the elimination of the Strategic Mentor Program. We hope that doesn't mean the district will lose Steve Banks as he has an exceptional ability to relate to and guide students. Good people are hard to find and whether he's mentoring, or doing something else that uses his talents, Steve is an asset well worth keeping.
- Media support position cuts should be considered – could be tasks for volunteers.
- Is twice-monthly media director meetings worth the sub costs?
- I question all of the copying done by a para at their site.

Transportation

- High school buses are empty. Parents don't know they should unsubscribe to a bus schedule. If we knew this, we would.
- Not supportive of increasing walk-in distance by .5 mile. Especially with the assumption that \$200,000 will come in.
- How long does it take a kindergarten student to walk 1 mile? If transportation distances are to be increased, this should only be done in the upper grade levels. Having to cross a busy or four-lane road should qualify for busing.
- I would like to see the walk-in distance increased by .5 mile
- Don't increase walk-in for elementary, but OK for middle and high schools.
- Increase busing/walk-in distance a positive idea.
- Increasing the walk-in distance creates safety hazards for kids.
- It's frustrating to see a bus drive by my house and not pick up my kids.

Other Comments

- Keep focusing on protecting kids, like it appears you have done.
- This is fundamentally not a spending problem, but rather, a revenue problem. (The Governor) gutted funding for education in this state. There is no way around it, we have to bite the bullet and make a commitment to fund our children's future by increasing sales and property taxes and committing those funds to education. Maybe we cannot do much at the local level but we can initiate a referendum to support funding "the basics" for every child in Bloomington.
- This is a long-term goal, not a short-term fix, and one that would require federal and state changes in school funding. Consideration should be given to the "Edmonton Model" a "weighted student formula" approach to education funding. Schools receive state funding based on enrollment and each student's individual characteristics, but the funding follows the student. Parents are free to choose the best school to meet their children's individual needs. *(Editor's Note: Under this model, principals have the freedom and autonomy to manager their schools as they see fit, because they control more than 90 percent of the school's budget.)*
- Thank you for being proactively fiscally responsible and doing so in such a transparent manner. I printed out the Budget Recommendations for our entire family to read and everyone understands and supports the proposed changes.
- School Lunches: There are a number of families that can afford to pay more for lunches than what's proposed. Has anyone looked at making a larger increase on school lunches and at the same time adjusting who can get assistance so the change is not overwhelming for the people who can't afford it?
- Consider what other neighboring districts are doing and seek to try to attract out-of-district students.
- Challenge Food Services to generate more money, not by increasing prices but increasing good/healthy alternatives that kids want to eat.
- Quantify Hillcrest's fostering community volunteerism. I want to make sure all of the "intangible" things that make Hillcrest a great, progressive school are factored in to the balance sheets and any further recommendations.
- Could we make more of an effort to go paperless? All online: *School Pages*, weekly staff bulletins, and other publications. No colored paper in schools, no quarter grade print outs.
- Keep mental health support – strategic mentors, counselors, social workers, etc.
- Innovative programs – difficult to actually predict the financial costs & cost to students.
- Use reserve money (Fund Balance) to get us through, that's what it's for.

- Enhancement: Develop language programs – FLES (foreign language immersion elementary school) model
- Instead of cutting programs, continue to offer them for a fee.
- We have to remember we are down to the bones because we have had cuts in the past. There is nothing left that is “fat.”
- Voters have been very good to us.
- Anything that impacts kids causes pain.
- Clerical staff should continue to do tasks such as placing orders and working with department budgets. Teachers already do their own typing.
- Media Centers refraining from purchasing is not a good idea. Media Centers need to renew subscriptions for magazines and databases. Without databases and magazines, students would have no resources to use for research projects except whatever they find on the Internet. Much of the free content on the Internet is not edited and often contains biases, commercial messages or unreliable information.