

Portland Public Schools Community Budget Review Committee

2025-26 Annual Budget Reports
Presented to the Board of Education
May 6, 2025

Background on CBRC

Community Budget Review Committee (CBRC) reviews, evaluates and makes recommendations to the board regarding the Superintendent's Proposed Budget and local levy funds and provides a vital connection between the district and school students and families.

Purpose and Focus Analysis of Budget Alignment with Board Goals

1. Third-grade Reading
2. Fifth-grade Mathematics
3. Eighth-grade Readiness
4. High School Graduation

CBRC Core Messages for 2025-26

- Mitigating the direct impact of reductions on students and classroom staff is a top priority for the communities CBRC represents.
- Without a structural plan that spans several years, PPS risks drifting further into austerity while losing sight of its goals for equity, excellence, and innovation.

Long-Term Outlook

- PPS must **reassess its priorities** and determine what is **truly essential and feasible**.
- CBRC urges the board to consider more targeted **structural reductions**.
- CBRC supports **advocacy with the legislature to fund Oregon districts at the Quality Education Model (QEM) level** to provide additional revenue as PPS transitions to a more sustainable model.

Areas of Inquiry and Recommendations

Observations on Staffing and Student Impacts

- This **budget continues investments** identified as **aligned with closing racial achievement gaps**.
- CBRC observes that the **school-based reductions of teaching FTE reflect enrollment declines**, though **Title 1 schools have experienced greater reductions relative to enrollment declines**.
- CBRC appreciates the effort to preserve Special Education funding during a challenging budget cycle.
- CBRC notes the **continuation of significant variance in staffing** reflected in school FTE per student.

Recommendation:

- CBRC recommends **PPS conduct and publicly report an analysis on class size and other benchmarking within the QEM at various school levels**.

Title 1

Based on the **anticipated 25% reduction in Title 1 funding** the budget **disproportionately impacts schools with the highest percentages of historically underserved students.**

Recommendations:

- We **recommend the district analyze the percentage of staffing reductions occurring at Title 1 vs. non-Title 1 schools to better assess equity impacts.**
- The district should **explore options to minimize impacts of staffing reductions at Title 1 schools**, so that staffing remains stable relative to enrollment.

Based on the finding we encourage the board to **consider targeted investment directed at improving student outcomes at Title 1 schools** such as targeted remediation or other high impact practices.

Impact to Student Supports

CBRC notes that positions including High School Career Coordinators and Language Line Access staff are key student supports.

Recommendation:

- We recommend the board ensure there are avenues for families and students to **initiate conversations and request interpreters** or ensure partnerships/coordination with community resources.

Equity Funding and Differentiated Supports

While the budget maintains the 4% equity allocation aligned with board goals, the proposed uniform 9% equity allocation across all high schools raises questions about whether this approach effectively supports the district's goal to close racial disparities in academic achievement.

We note the elimination of the 0.5 FTE position for the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program. This reduction follows a two-thirds reduction to the TAG budget in 2024–25.

Recommendation:

- We recommend the district **clarify how it intends to comply** with state TAG requirements and the Corrective Action Plan in the absence of a designated TAG coordinator or FTE.

Blended Classrooms and Staffing Strategy

PPS proposes expanding blended classrooms in 3rd/4th and 4th/5th grade configurations as a staffing strategy.

Recommendation:

- Provide an **analysis comparing the cost of overload pay to the cost of additional EAs or other in-class supports.**
- **Report the estimated savings created by increasing blended classrooms.**
- Evaluate the educational **effectiveness of blended classrooms** and how they impact student outcomes, particularly for students needing more individualized support.

Assessment Alignment and Cost Savings

NWEA's MAP assessments compare students to national norms, not Oregon standards. This disconnect impacts instruction and can create a deficit-based mindset, as 50% of students will rank below average. This practice conflicts with our district's equity goals and Oregon law (HB 2009), which mandates standards-aligned assessments.

Recommendations:

- We recommend the **district discontinue the use of MAP assessments and adopt the free, standards-aligned interim assessment model provided by the Oregon Department of Education.**

Replacing MAP with these free state-provided assessments would **ensure legal compliance, improve instructional coherence, better support equity efforts, and redirect funding toward higher-impact priorities.**

Operational Efficiencies and Central Services

Although Central Office reductions have been described over multiple years, it is unclear how much central office spending has changed overall and what the impact of the reductions has been.

Recommendations:

- Provide detail on the **specific types of central positions eliminated, and how these changes may affect school support and instructional services.**
- **Disclose the total amount of cuts to central office spending** in a way that is clearly separated from school-level reductions.

We note the addition of senior administrative positions and ask the Board to consider whether this is the time to prioritize expanding senior leadership over other urgent student needs.

Enrollment

Demonstrating the quality and value of PPS education to families and the wider community is critical for our near- and long-term financial stability.

Recommendations:

- Developing messaging to highlight positive attributes and gains in student outcomes to rebuild family confidence.
- Conducting outreach to families by leveraging community partnerships, referral networks and family testimonials that highlight strong classroom experiences.
- Marketing the value of PPS education—especially during times of economic uncertainty.
- Considering a pilot of exit interviews with withdrawing families, to understand the reasons families are choosing to leave public school.
- Reviewing and sharing transparent enrollment building strategies, supported by data and measurable outcomes.

Attendance and Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

Recommendations:

- Prioritizing restoration and protection of roles proven to impact attendance and engagement, such as social workers, counselors and librarians for new funds.
- Implementing no, low or cost-saving initiatives:
 - Changing the school calendar to dramatically decrease the percentage of shortened weeks. The 2024-25 instructional calendar chops up school weeks with early release days and non-instructional days so that PPS students only attend 16 five-day weeks out of 38 weeks of school, 42%. Short weeks have been linked to chronic absenteeism and may contribute to achievement gaps.
 - Launching a short-term “Attendance Matters” campaign alongside deeper re-engagement efforts with students who have withdrawn or are chronically absent.
 - Exploring evidence-based strategies to improve attendance, such as offering breakfast during the first period rather than before school—a model shown in some studies to reduce tardiness, improve attendance and potentially reduce unreimbursed nutrition costs.
 - Continuing efforts to evaluate and work to lower barriers for reentry for dropouts and students who left due to life circumstances.

In the long-term as funds are available, we urge the district to invest in:

- Sustaining and growing in-school wraparound services that address non-academic barriers to learning.
- Lengthening the school year to support student learning.
- Positioning schools as hubs of support, possibly partnering with other government agencies or non-profits—offering academic, social, health and emotional services that increase student engagement and attendance.

2025 Capital Bond

Recommendations:

- **Ensure that implementation of modernization projects included in the bond is thoroughly reviewed**, with transparent adjustments made in response to prior board guidance and community input.
- **Clearly communicate to the public** the process and outcome of project scopes revisions to protect core instructional resources.
- Make every effort to **stay within cost estimates and use funds to benefit the greatest number of students** covered by the scope of projects.

Revenue Diversification and Innovation

The district must be innovative and strategic in its approach to long-term fiscal health. **Identifying and responsibly leveraging district assets and community partnerships will be essential to weathering fiscal constraints and building a stronger foundation for future generations.**

Recommendations:

- Explore and pilot alternative models for both financial stability and broader community benefit.
- Pursue opportunities to lease unused school buildings and underutilized portions of properties.
- Explore public-private partnerships as a means to enhance infrastructure and programming.

We urge caution in permanently selling school properties—as these are public assets that, once sold, are unlikely to return—we support the strategic sale of assets that are not viable for future educational use due to costly upgrade requirements.

Reserves and One-Time Spending

We urge the board to take a long-term view and resist balancing this budget in ways that will deepen structural imbalances in future years. Reserves are not a solution to chronic underfunding—they are the district's safety net.

Recommendations:

- **Avoid using one-time reserves or general funds to close the budget shortfall** unless the expenditure has a clear exit strategy or leads to long-term cost reductions or revenue gains.
- **We recommend that if House Bill 3435 is enacted the district allocate the resulting state nutrition funds to replenish reserves**, rather than backfilling previously planned spending.
- **Commit to a plan to gradually rebuild reserves above 5%** to ensure operational flexibility, reduce borrowing costs and protect against future volatility in state funding, health care, PERS or other large budget drivers.

Local Option Levy Review

Local Option Levy Review

CBRC finds that Levy funds have been used in accordance with Measure 26-246 and continue to support teaching and classroom positions across the district.

- In the current year, PPS has received **\$104.6 million in Levy revenue** and supports about **744 teaching positions**.
- In 2019–20, Levy funds supported over 916 teachers. That number is projected to fall to approximately 718 by 2025–26, a **22 % decrease over seven years**. The primary driver of this reduction is not a loss of revenue but a steady rise in personnel costs.

Recommendations to increase clarity, equity, and sustainability:

- Provide an annual breakdown of Levy-funded positions by school, role type, and alignment to district goals.
- Develop a public-facing dashboard that tracks Levy spending, teacher funding trends, and overall impact.
- Gather feedback from staff and students on the effect of Levy-funded roles on school climate and academic recovery.
- Create a five-year sustainability plan that anticipates cost growth and identifies strategies to avoid steep staffing reductions in future budget years.

CBRC Members

Caitlin Bice (Student Member)
Minyana Bishop
Karanja Crews
Aaron Cronan
Mariah Hudson (Chair)
Dashiell Elliott
Tasz Ferguson
Paul Freese
Jen Grey-O'Connor
Grace Groom
Natan Hadgu (Student Member)
Sonya Harvey
Stephan Lindner
Adriel Person (Vice-Chair)

Questions & Discussion
