

Portland Public Schools  
 Community Budget Review Committee Annual Budget Review  
 Fiscal Year 2025-26  
 May 6, 2025

## ***Background and Purpose of the Community Budget Review Committee (CBRC)***

The Portland Public Schools Board of Education (board) established the Community Budget Review Committee (CBRC) to perform the following functions:

- Review, evaluate and make recommendations to the board on the Superintendent's Proposed Budget
- Monitor and advise the board on the allocation and expenditure of Local Option Levy funds
- Provide and strengthen the link between the district and school students and families

## ***About the CBRC***

The CBRC is a group of fourteen volunteers representing a diverse group of parents, staff, community members, and two students who give voice to the diverse interests of the PPS communities in the budget process. This is the third consecutive year of significant budget reductions and PPS is at a critical point where we must thoughtfully address the structural deficit and reestablish financial stability and a predictable environment for students, families and employees.

In light of unprecedented challenges, not only financial but also a 10.8% drop in enrollment since 2020 and dramatic increase in students who are chronically absent, now over 36% and a \$1.4 billion maintenance backlog, ***the need for community input to prioritize difficult budget decisions has never been greater.***

## ***Purpose of Budget Review***

CBRC's role is to analyze the superintendent's proposed budget and ***to provide recommendations that reflect the perspectives of our diverse communities—parents, teachers, students, from across the district—to the board.*** In doing so we keep in mind both the needs of students and the board goals which center on reducing and racial and socio-economic disparities in academic achievements at key milestones Third-grade Reading, Fifth-grade Mathematics, Eighth-grade Readiness, High School Graduation.

## ***Overall Reflections to Frame This Report***

Overall the proposed budget attempts to spread the cuts across most service areas and protect classroom staffing which impacts students most directly. ***We appreciate the effort to mitigate the direct impact on students and classroom staff, which is a top priority for the CBRC and the communities we represent.*** We affirm the superintendent's maintenance of

the prioritization of PPS' equity allocation, especially in light of the 25% reduction in Title 1 funds, which we discuss further below.<sup>1</sup>

The reduction of 247 positions – people with valuable skills and knowledge committed to serving our public schools – to help close this year's \$40 million budget shortfall will be felt across all service areas and throughout our community. Simply put, after three consecutive years of budget cuts there are fewer operational efficiencies to find and **no easy choices**.

### **Budget Context and Concerns**

The proposed budget largely continues the direction set by previous administrations and boards. It maintains investments in programs, interventions and staffing patterns that have produced limited progress in closing achievement gaps. Graduation rates have improved modestly, but too many students remain underprepared for careers and college. Chronic absenteeism, which is both a symptom and multiplier of underlying disparities, resource gaps and unmet student needs—identified by the superintendent as a key concern and discussed further below—remains high at over 36%, ten points above the national average.

This year PPS will receive—in part due to the 2019 Student Success Act, projected to generate nearly \$2.4 billion statewide in the 2025–27 biennium—and other stable funding sources, one of the highest per-student allocations in Oregon history. Yet, we face a \$40 million shortfall this year and likely cuts for years to come.

*Temporary solutions, such as incremental staffing cuts or one-time reserves, may balance a single fiscal year but do not address the long-term trajectory. **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**

As a committee representing our communities, we find it difficult to support a budget process that continues to result in cuts, the loss of educator talent and reduced student access to a well-rounded education—especially *in the absence of a clear, actionable plan or even a timeline*.

***PPS must reassess its priorities and determine what is truly essential and feasible.***

Research by PSU and EcoNorthwest has made clear that most municipalities and school systems, of which PPS is typical, can anticipate declining budgets for at least another decade.<sup>2</sup>

Going forward, ***we urge the board to consider more targeted structural reductions***—whether to whole programs, initiatives, or locations— to address the structural deficit. We recommend that the district articulate a clear long-term fiscal strategy that addresses the underlying issues driving budget instability. This plan should include specific milestones, timelines, and opportunities for stakeholder input

We support 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. Recognizing the fiscal environment, we also urge the board to pursue public private partnerships for supplemental investment and revenue.

<sup>1</sup> The Equity Formula was reduced in last school year's budget from 8% to 4% for all K-8 schools. The Equity Formula for high schools is 9% across the board (no matter the demographics of the school). This budget proposes to maintain the 4% equity allocation for K-8 and the 9% equity allocation for all high schools.

<sup>2</sup> The Our Next 20 Report on municipal finance projects meaningful budget shortfalls and distress for most governments and school systems for through 2037 based on legacy obligations and demographic trends.

## Areas of Inquiry and Recommendations

Within the framework of the budget presented here are the CBRC's areas of inquiry and questions or recommendation for the board:

- Staffing, Title 1, and student impacts
- Equity funding and differentiated supports
- Blended classrooms
- Operations and central services
- Assessment alignment
- Absenteeism
- Enrollment
- Partnerships, innovation, and revenue
- Reserves and use of one time funds

Addendum

- Transparency and reporting
- Effective engagement of the CBRC
- Family engagement

## Observations on Staffing and Student Impacts

This budget continues investments in practices it has identified as aligned with closing racial achievement gaps. We observe that while not entirely proportional, the school-based reductions of teaching FTE reflect enrollment declines, though because of Title 1 cuts, Title 1 schools which have higher staffing ratios have experienced greater reductions relative to enrollment declines.<sup>3</sup>

The superintendent's April 22 report to the board references 98% of PPS kindergarten through fifth grade classes are below class size targets. We would like to better understand how PPS determined class size targets and how these compare to the QEM targets. We note the continuation of significant variance in staffing reflected in school FTE per student (from 4.4 to 14.1 FTE per students at the kindergarten through fifth grade level for 2025-26<sup>4</sup>) and classroom size variance across the district.

While research is mixed on the value of *marginal reductions in class size above thresholds*, it is unclear how many PPS classrooms are already well above thresholds where reductions in class size would *not* be meaningful. We also note below in our discussion of enrollment that the board should take into account other considerations including student and family experience when funding for class size.

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

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<sup>3</sup> Title schools average is less than 1% enrollment decline. Non-Title is a 4% decline. This is just looking at the drop from this school year to next, not longer-term projections. Staffing cuts - Title school average is 9.9% and non-Title school average is 8.1%. So even though non-Title 1 schools are decreasing enrollment by over four times that of the non-Title schools, they are on average receiving almost 2% fewer staff cuts than Title 1 schools.

<sup>4</sup> 2025-26 Proposed Budget Book Volume 2, page 5

<https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/214/2025-26%20Proposed%20Budget%20Volume%202.pdf>

We believe benchmarking to the QEM will provide important context for the public, elected officials and the board, and could guide board decisions.

We appreciate the district's effort to preserve Special Education funding during a challenging budget cycle. SPED programs were not impacted, and continued to be resourced according to enrollment.

### **Title 1**

Based on the anticipated 25% reduction in Title 1 funding the budget includes a corresponding reduction in Title 1 staffing, which disproportionately impacts schools with the highest percentages of historically underserved students. While we do not recommend directly backfilling these positions that are no longer funded with general or reserve funds, we recognize the disproportionate impact this reduction has on historically underserved students will make it more difficult to close racial achievement gaps.

We have observed that enrollment declines are very modest in Title 1 schools, while staffing cuts have been disproportionately greater. We want to express concern over the loss of classroom supports for students at Title 1 schools, especially for positions that provide direct support for literacy.

- **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.

Focusing on outcomes particularly for historical underserved or underperforming schools is a focus on equity. We recommend strategies including funding and policies (for example, incentive pay for educators) directed to retaining and attracting great teachers to underperforming schools, not simply an additional percentage allocation, which is a component we see missing from this budget.

### **Impact to Student Supports**

We also note that positions including High School Career Coordinators and Language Line Access staff are key student supports at both the school and central services level. We are concerned if these are eliminated these could limit access and disproportionately affect vulnerable students and families.

- Particularly with interpreters, **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.

We note the reduction of Library Assistants last year, while districtwide, disproportionately affected vulnerable students and families.

## **Equity Funding and Differentiated Supports**

In our review of equity funding and differentiated supports beyond Title 1, we observe that the proposed budget largely maintains the equity allocation and aligns with board goals. We observe that the budget maintains the 4% equity allocation, which aligns with board goals. However, applying a uniform 9% equity allocation across all high schools raises questions. Because all high schools receive the same equity bump regardless of the percentage of Combined Underserved students they serve, we question whether this approach supports the district's goal to close racial disparities in academic achievement.

However, we note an exception: 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. Under Oregon state law Programs services for students identified as TAG are required. Since PPS is currently under a Corrective Action Plan with the Oregon Department of Education, we are concerned about the district's ability to meet those obligations without dedicated staffing.

- **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

In the 2025–26 budget, PPS proposes expanding by about 18 blended classrooms in 3rd/4th and 4th/5th grade configurations as a staffing strategy. Additional supports are required for these classes which operate with smaller class sizes and is unclear what the savings are or whether this is designed to enable significantly under-enrolled schools to continue to operate with the minimum class size of 15. We understand the desire to maintain smaller schools near enrollment thresholds and the importance to many families of attending a neighborhood school.

We would like to understand the plan for this solution, whether, given demographic trends, it is a stop gap or a part of a long term fiscal and educational strategy. The board should carefully consider whether this meets long-term instructional needs and long term costs of operating this model.

We note a significant rise in teacher overload pay—from \$1.7 million in 2021–22 to over \$4 million projected in 2025–26—which raises questions about the substitution of overload pay for hiring additional Educational Assistants (EAs) or the necessity of other enrollment balancing strategies.

We recommend the district:

- **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.

Feedback from families and educators consistently highlights a preference for more adult support in classrooms, not fewer. If blends are necessary, we urge PPS to ensure strong classroom support and targeted resources.

We caution the district against deferring difficult decisions about school consolidations. A sustainable future requires clarity and long-term planning, not recurring short-term fixes. The board should weigh whether this strategy supports lasting educational quality or simply postpones structural issues.

## Assessment Alignment and Cost Savings

NWEA's norm-referenced MAP assessments compare students to national norms rather than evaluating mastery of Oregon state standards. This creates a disconnect between assessment results and classroom instruction and reinforces a deficit-based mindset by design—ranking 50% of students below average regardless of actual achievement. This practice undermines the district's equity goals and conflicts with Oregon law (HB 2009), which requires the use of standards-aligned, criterion-referenced assessments.

Financially, the MAP contract represents a considerable and avoidable cost. PPS is spending \$655,000 over three years on a tool that does not meet legal or instructional alignment criteria—\$215,000 in the 2024–25 school year alone. In contrast, the Oregon Department of Education provides interim assessments at no cost, aligned to the standards teachers are required to teach.

- **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

In our 2023 report, we noted the district had reduced central office spending by approximately \$55 million over the previous three years and recommended more transparent reporting on those reductions. This year's budget references a cut of 65 central office positions (p. 4), but it remains unclear how much central office spending has changed overall.<sup>5</sup>

We offer the following recommendations:

- **Provide detail on the specific types of central positions eliminated, and how these changes may affect school support and instructional services.**<sup>6</sup>
- **Disclose the total amount of cuts to central office spending in a way that is clearly separated from school-level reductions.**

Additionally, we note the introduction of a new senior administrative position with a salary range of \$224,000 to \$239,000, added in the same budget that eliminates 247 staff roles. A budget reflects values, and ***we ask the Board to consider whether this is the time to prioritize expanding senior leadership over other urgent student needs.***

## Enrollment

The proposed budget protects core classroom staffing, which may help build family trust and stabilize enrollment. However, it is clear it will take concerted effort—not more of the same—to retain and win back families that have left the district.

<sup>5</sup> Function 26000 (Central Support Services) was not clearly presented, and Function 2000 (Support Services—representing central and school-based supports) shows only a modest reduction—approximately \$2.2 million, or 0.5%, from \$453.7 million to \$451.5 million. This raises questions about where and how efficiencies are being achieved.

<sup>6</sup>It has been shared that specificity is not provided for central staff reductions in draft budgets for privacy reasons. We would note reductions at the school level offer a level of transparency that often makes the position subject to reduction identifiable and a similar standard should apply.

PPS faces the feedback loop—declining enrollment leads to budget cuts, which in turn reduce the quality of student experience and drive more families away. Keeping students in PPS—and bringing families back—requires more than budget balancing. It requires showing that PPS is a place where students thrive and families are supported. Reversing this trend requires a strategic focus on the in-class experience, family engagement and is also linked to proactive attendance strategies. See our discussion and recommendations for family engagement in the addendum.

It will take more than marketing, but ***demonstrating and communicating to families and our broader community the quality and value of PPS education.*** *This will be critical to both the near and long-term financial stability of PPS.*

As representatives of our communities we recommend:

- Developing messaging, possibly in partnership with community leaders, known alumni or public figures, 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 including **Expanding on work closely with ELD and Early Learning Programs** to attract families earlier and retain them.
- **Marketing the value of PPS education—especially during times of economic uncertainty**, when private school tuition becomes less feasible for many families.
- **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

Chronic absenteeism is one of the most urgent challenges facing PPS and a major driver of the district’s widening achievement gap. Post-pandemic, Portland is lagging behind national trends in attendance recovery. We are encouraged to see this issue named as a priority in the superintendent’s proposed budget; however, the connection between stated priorities and actual funding remains unclear.

While chronic absenteeism is named as a concern, the budget maintains flat or reduced funding for key roles that directly impact attendance and long-term enrollment—including attendance specialists, social workers, and school librarians, the latter of which face cuts in 2024–25. These roles are essential to student engagement and school connection, particularly for those most at risk of disengaging.

We recommend:

- 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

The proposed budget assumes passage of a new \$1.83 billion, eight-year capital bond to be voted on in May 2025, and if the bond fails, the district may face critical facilities needs that could strain the general fund.

We recognize that modern, safe, and well-equipped school facilities support all board goals—especially those related to academic readiness, CTE, science, and technology learning. Safe and modern buildings can also improve attendance and student well-being.

We support the bond’s intent but recommend the board:

- **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.

***Non-bond allocations for capital expenditures*** like the \$2.5 million spent in March 2024 to replace bleachers at Roosevelt High School, rather than including the project in the next bond, ***are no longer feasible and have contributed to current shortfalls***. The board should be forward-looking and ensure that capital investments align with long-term enrollment trends and fiscal sustainability.

## Revenue Diversification and Innovation

Portland Public Schools continues to rely heavily on traditional funding sources, which leaves the district vulnerable to economic shifts, enrollment declines, and rising operational costs. While advocacy for increased state funding is important, the district must also take more proactive steps to diversify its revenue base and reduce overdependence on a narrow set of resources.

Based on guidance from Governor Kotek and the Legislature, large increases in state school funding—enough to close the district’s projected budget shortfalls—seem unlikely. Given this context, we recommend the board pursue a proactive and diversified strategy to generate long-term, supplemental revenue in addition to necessary budget restructuring strategies.

As the district navigates ongoing cost pressures, it must explore diversified and sustainable funding streams.

We recommend the district explore and pilot alternative models that can bring both financial stability and broader community benefit. These include:

- Public-private partnerships that support infrastructure upgrades, technology integration, or school-based health services.
- Shared services or cooperative agreements with local agencies and government bodies.
- Co-location models that bring in universities, cultural institutions, or workforce development partners.
- Creative land use strategies such as solar installations, community gardens, or limited development agreements where appropriate.

These ideas are not new and have been raised consistently by CBRC members. What is needed now is visible action, timelines, and public accountability. PPS has a chance to lead by designing innovative, community-rooted models that reflect Portland’s values and meet the moment with courage and creativity.

We support the district’s plan to increase Civic Use of Buildings (CUB) revenue from \$100,000 to \$250,000 next year. This is a modest but meaningful step.

- We further recommend the **district pursue opportunities to lease two currently unused school buildings and underutilized portions of other district properties.**

Doing so may require limited investment to bring facilities to rentable condition, but the long-term revenue and community use benefits make this a worthwhile pursuit.

## Pursue Public-Private Partnerships and Strategic Asset Sales

We encourage the board to explore public-private partnerships as a means to enhance infrastructure and programming. Examples of promising partnerships include:

- Tech and university collaborations (e.g., Faubion-style partnerships)
- Infrastructure upgrades through private investment
- Health care partnerships that reduce absenteeism and improve student well-being
- Renewable energy initiatives such as solar installations or cell tower leases (site-dependent)
- Affordable housing or mixed-use development on PPS-owned land via city development agreements or TIF district participation

## Asset Management

PPS holds significant physical assets that require both immediate upkeep and long-term strategic vision. Thirty-eight schools were built before 1930, and many still rely on building systems installed during their original construction, which along with deferred maintenance has led to a \$1 billion maintenance backlog. These systems are operating far beyond their intended design life, increasing the risk of failure and driving up maintenance and energy costs

While **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.** For example, the sale of properties like the Dixon Street site could be considered, provided proceeds are reinvested in core educational priorities.

- Leases or shared-use agreements with community-based organizations.
- Facility co-location with nonprofits, early learning centers, or service providers.
- Time-bound development partnerships that retain district interests and meet community needs.

We recognize that property sales can be controversial, especially when historical ties and community needs intersect. Any such consideration must be guided by a transparent, community-first process and reinvested into educational quality and access.

**These opportunities should be guided by community input and aligned with PPS's core mission of serving students and families.** Partnerships that improve facilities, expand services, and increase enrollment should be prioritized.

**Conclusion** 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.

## Reserves and One-Time Spending

The CBRC continues to recommend that the district maintain reserves above the 5% minimum required by board policy. Last year, the superintendent substantially drew down reserves leaving PPS at the minimum 5% threshold. While the strategic use of general or reserve funds can temporarily sustain valuable programs and delay painful permanent cuts, it also significantly reduces the district's ability to respond to emergencies or unanticipated events—such as the 2024 ice storms, which forced widespread school closures and caused significant facility damage.

The proposed budget continues the use of one-time general funds to sustain programs originally supported by ESSER and other pandemic-related relief, such as instructional coaches and universal free lunch<sup>7</sup>. While we do not wish to single out these initiatives, shifting costs supported to one-time funds to general funds without new revenue only deepens the structural deficit. The district cannot afford to make temporary programs permanent without permanent funding.

Accordingly, we make the following recommendations:

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<sup>7</sup> The budget report notes that the district "served 4,735,732 breakfasts, lunches, and after school suppers." This is a slight increase from last year (4,437,685, or a 6.7 percent increase). Proposed spending for these food services has increased accordingly, from \$25,275,000 to \$28,638,000. However, when expressing these spending amounts relative to the number of enrolled students, we see a larger increase: average daily enrollment (ADMr) was 43,302 in 2024-2025 and is projected to be 42,281 for 2025-2026. Thus, the costs per ADMr will increase from \$583.69 to \$677.33, which is a 16 percent increase.

- **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.

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.

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**The choices before the board are not easy, but even in this difficult financial climate, there is a path forward.** With clearer priorities, community collaboration and a long-term plan rooted in equity and sustainability, PPS can rebuild trust, reinvest in what matters most, and move closer to delivering the high-quality education that every student deserves. We appreciate the opportunity to bring the perspectives of our diverse communities and offer the board our recommendations for the budget and future of our school district.

We believe in the value of public education.

### ***Appreciation***

CBRC has welcomed the opportunity to work in concert with the district during this process. We recognize the difficult budgeting decisions and investments that the district needs to make to have a budget reflective of the overall PPS community. CBRC is appreciative of the district’s efforts to continue growing and learning with students, staff, and community members to create a budget that is increasingly more reflective of its own mission of racial equity, inclusion, rigor and high quality academic learning.

The following CBRC members respectfully submit this report to the PPS Board of Education:

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)

## Addendum

### Transparency, CBRC Engagement, and Public Engagement

The way financial information is presented also impacts public understanding and trust. The proposed 15% decrease in the total budget—from \$2.39 billion to \$2.04 billion—**can appear alarming and can be misleading without proper context**. Transparency in explaining these distinctions is essential.

In reality, this change primarily reflects the planned completion of one-time bond-funded construction projects. **The core operating budget, particularly the general fund, is both stable and flat**, increasing slightly from \$1.366 billion to \$1.391 billion.

However, this important distinction is not clearly communicated in public-facing documents.

To avoid confusion and ensure transparency, we recommend:

- Presenting budget summaries that clearly differentiate ongoing operational funds from one-time or capital funds
- Explaining what is included in vague categories such as “All Other Budget Resources”
- Avoiding language or visuals that suggest deep cuts when the general fund remains stable

### Effective Engagement if the CBRC and Review Timeline

The CBRC’s ability to provide meaningful feedback is directly tied to how and when budget materials are shared. This year, as in years past, the committee received just nine days to analyze more than 500 pages of budget content. This timeline severely limits the depth and quality of feedback that a volunteer advisory group can provide. In our last report, we noted the need for more time. That recommendation remains unaddressed.

To strengthen community oversight and allow for more robust analysis, we recommend:

- Releasing a draft of the proposed budget to the CBRC at least two weeks before the formal release
- Alternatively, beginning the review process earlier in the spring so members can engage more fully
- Including a plain-language summary of key year-over-year changes and contextual explanations for major shifts
- Share information transparently on program performance to allow for evaluation

Taken together, clearer timelines, more accessible financial summaries, and better contextual framing will significantly improve how the community engages with the budget. These changes are necessary to ensure the CBRC can fulfill its advisory role and the public can understand how resources are being allocated.

## PPS Reputation and Family Engagement

The repeated pattern of budget cuts, rising class sizes, and delayed investments has taken a toll on how families and the broader public view Portland Public Schools. Confidence in the district's ability to provide a stable, high-quality education is weakening, particularly among those who have historically been underserved.

While the district's engagement summary cites 3,929 total responses, only 202 were tied to the key budget feedback form, and just 56 of those came from certified educators. For a district serving over 45,000 students, these numbers highlight a major gap in representative engagement.

Families need more than announcements and surveys. They need to see that their input is being heard, valued, and acted upon. Engagement efforts must go beyond compliance and reflect a sincere effort to rebuild trust. This includes:

- Disaggregating engagement data to show how perspectives vary by role, race, language, and neighborhood.
- Clarifying how input from external community members is weighted and applied in decision-making.
- Expanding outreach efforts to include families who may not have digital access or language familiarity.
- Being transparent about how survey results and public comments are integrated into budget and programmatic decisions.
- Families may benefit from more specific information about outcomes associated with PPS strategic investments impacting their students, for example, curriculum adoption and other student-facing programs.

When families feel ignored or tokenized, they leave. Restoring trust will take intentional work, stronger communication, and a cultural shift that treats families as partners rather than passive recipients.

## Data Transparency and Use

Data is one of the district's most powerful tools, but only when it is used transparently and interpreted in context. Throughout this budget cycle, CBRC raised repeated questions about how community input was gathered, who responded, and how those responses were disaggregated by role or demographic group. Unfortunately, much of that information remained generalized or inaccessible.

We encourage PPS to strengthen its data practices by:

- Publishing disaggregated survey data that clearly shows distinctions between parents, educators, students, and community members.
- Ensuring that internal staff responses are not conflated with external community engagement in public reporting.
- Including context about sample size and representativeness when reporting survey results.
- Sharing back findings with the community in plain language so stakeholders can see how their feedback shaped decisions.

The district has made efforts to engage with community voices, but these efforts must be paired with consistent follow-through. Transparency in how data is shared and applied is critical to building trust and ensuring decisions reflect the full scope of community needs.

The CBRC finds that the current format of the budget document makes meaningful analysis challenging.

Year-over-year comparisons only show raw dollar figures, requiring readers to manually calculate percentage changes and trends. This adds unnecessary complexity and increases the likelihood of errors.

To enhance transparency and usability, we recommend:

- Including percentage changes and trend indicators alongside raw numbers.
- Exploring the use of landscape formatting or a supplemental volume, similar to Volume 2, for the financial data.
- Publishing a spreadsheet version of the budget data so stakeholders can sort, filter, and analyze more efficiently.