

# Questions Received from Community Budget Forums

April 15, 2024

1. What is the school funding formula?
  - Number of students multiplied by the district cost per pupil (DCPP) amount set by the State
2. Why was the SSA (State Supplemental Aid) higher back in the 1980s?
  - That was a time where the SSA was set by a formula. This was changed to be set by the Legislature instead of by formula.
3. What should be SSA be to maintain financial viability for districts?
  - 6% – 8%
4. Are DOP allocations based on need?
  - No. It is a set formula, irrespective of the needs of students.
5. There is so much non-taxable land in the school district. Is there any way to get funds to compensate?
  - The funding received is a set amount per student. Where that funding comes from is different in various community, based on the property composition. DMPS receives larger amount of state aid to compensate for the lower property tax base.
6. What is the balance in the General Fund Balance?
  - The district's unspent spending authority (unrestricted) for FY23 is \$107M.
7. What is the purpose of Fund balance?
  - Fund balance represents the net worth of a fund at a specific time. The purpose is to handle political and economic issues that arise over time. It is used to help mitigate risk such as revenue shortfalls and unexpected expenses, this contributes to fiscal stability.
8. What are the communities' thoughts about the district having a large fund balance?
  - The district practice is to maintain an unrestricted General Fund fund balance that equates to 2 months of expenditures to mitigate current and future risks (e.g., revenue shortfalls and unanticipated expenditures) and to ensure stable tax rates. This is a best practice recommendation from the Government Finance Officer Association.
9. What departments were part of the 4% reduction?
  - Leadership and Learning, Talent and Personnel, Transportation, Operations, Student Services and Superintendent's Office.
10. Why is property tax dropping when the school does not have enough money to do what we want to do in schools?
11. Why is the district lowering the tax when we are in a budget crunch?
  - The district has very little control on setting property tax rates.

The state funding formula for the schools sets the maximum rate for the general fund property tax. The factor in the funding formula is the state supplement aid which the legislature sets for schools. The district has no control over this. The district can elect to levy for Instructional Support and Dropout Prevention at a set rate, which it does.

The property tax rates for PPEL (Physical, Plant and Equipment Levy) and PERL (Public Educational Recreation Levy) are also a set rate.

The one rate the district can set is the Management fund levy, but the fund can be only used for limited type of expenses. Property and casualty insurance, Cyber insurance, unemployment benefits, legal judgements, and certain early retirement benefits as part of an early retirement program.

Even though the property tax rate is reducing the amount of taxes to be received is projected to increase by \$1.4M (all funds) (\$0.9M general fund only) due to an increase in property tax valuations.

12. Issue with the 10 FTE reduction in High School, all high schools are not the same size so why does Lincoln have to take cuts?
  - The reductions were a district-wide effort. In actuality, Lincoln increased 0.5 FTE.
13. What was the rationale behind the cut at Hoover not matching the reduction in Hoover enrollment?
  - Hoover was not cut and maintained their staffing levels.
14. Is using enrollment the best way to determine the budget? Is there other methods to use to build a budget? Is this the right way to do the budget?
  - This is the way it is it is mandated by the Iowa School Funding Formula. Funding follows the student.
15. How can we understand the budgeting process with clarity on how staffing is done at the schools?
  - Schools receive allocations based on a staffing formula. Building leaders develop a staffing plan based on their allocation. Budget is the driver of the allocation given buildings based on what needs to be reduced from schools.
16. From my understanding as an educator, we currently employ our own special education specialists to support our sped teachers, provide support for MTSS, and other key duties in schools. Other districts use the AEA for this function. I'm wondering what is the reason we choose not to? And what is the cost benefit analysis in terms of financial cost, quality of service, accessibility of service, and other factors related to this decision?
  - DMPS is in the unique position that we have an arrangement that some AEA staff spend 100% of their time with DMPS, but fully funded by the AEA. Over and above that, because the needs of students exceed the capacity that AEA could provide, we use AEA flowthrough funds to hire full-time SPED employees on DMPS contracts.
17. How are the AEA Media Service and General service funds utilized currently? How will they be used going forward?
  - The district is currently evaluating how the Media Services are being used. The district will develop a plan for the 60/40 split next year and the 100% distribution to the district the following year.
18. Does the AEA Media services funds have to be spent on SPED services?
  - No, this funding is not tied to SPED services.
19. Does the district know what students open enroll out and what students open enroll in?
  - 2021/22: lost 3,089 students and gained 2,188 students; NET: -901  
 2022/23 lost 2,842 students and gained 2,334 students; NET: -508  
 2023/24 lost 2,874 students and gained 2,399 students; NET: -475
20. Does DMPS know what the demographics of students are that are leaving DMPS?
  - These are open enrolled out students that we know of (ie, that we have records of)

Race/Ethnicity	Students
1 - Hispanic/Latino	311
2-American Indian or Alaska Native	*
3-Asian	106
4-Black or African American	169
5-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	*

6-White	913
7-More than one race indicated	86
Choose not to respond	1055
Grand Total	2654

\*Small n, exact count redacted

21. What does the data show for the students that are leaving? What is the reason that students are leaving?
- Parents are not required to provide a reason for leaving, so the data is incomplete. However, the data does show that there is a striking increase in the number of students who open enroll out of DMPS at the start of their middle school years.
22. What students have left DMPS because of the ESA funding? What is the reason for them to leave?
- Approximately 1400 students who reside in DMPS boundaries received a school voucher/ESA funding. The State did not provide the breakdown of new versus continuing private school enrollment. The families are not required to articulate to the State why they are electing to attend private school.
23. Of the students that chose ESA do we know the number of students that were new moving to the non-public schools?
- No, the state has not made available that number of students that moved to non-public during FY 24.
24. Is there a mechanism in place for students who chose to take the ESA funds and now are back in the district?
- Per the DE:  
Students that do not attend an Iowa accredited nonpublic school are not eligible for an ESA. Payments for invoices submitted by the nonpublic school for students that did not attend the nonpublic school are required to be refunded to the ESA. The state does not determine whether an obligation exists with the parent in the case of a student who started the semester and later withdrew. Refunds for the semester are based on the school's contract with the parent. If an amount is deemed due, any amount that was paid using ESA funds must be refunded back to the ESA.
- An ESA participant who withdraws from the nonpublic school and returns to the public school generates funding for the public school the same as any other entering student.
25. Of the students that took the ESA funds, do we know what age the students were to know whether they were Elementary, Middle, or High school students?
- No. The Department of Education has not released this information.
26. Would it be possible for Food & Nutrition offer food from their native country (Africa)?
- Absolutely! We plan to pull students together to create a group that can help guide us on what we can do as we learn more about the foods, customs, and traditions that we can incorporate into our menus and service delivery model. The district has received \$50K from Maverick to serve culturally diverse foods for students.
27. Why did my kid not get a card, but other families do get a card?
- DMPS does not issue meal cards. DMPS is a Community Eligibility Program district, meaning every student in DMPS (regardless of income) qualifies for free lunch at school.
28. What efforts are being made to increase ELL student enrollment?
- The district is piloting a plan to offer additional compensation to D Band employees who are multi-lingual with the intent of expanding to other staff in the future.
29. What can be done to create inclusive environment at the schools for our children?
- We will continue to recognize the varying cultures of student and encourage all to be respectful and responsive to their needs.

30. Did Virtual school help bring in students when it was started?

- Virtual High School enrollment is approximately 400 students. This amount has stayed relatively flat. During the pandemic, the district offered a middle school program, which was not-viable post-pandemic.

31. Is there a plan to reach out to students to try to get them back to DMPS?

- The district will continue the marketing campaign that highlights the amazing opportunities for students at DMPS.

32. Is it possible to have bussing for preschool students?

- Currently, preschool in Iowa is voluntary, and Iowa law does not require the transportation of our Statewide Voluntary Preschool. Consequently, transportation funding is not available. Currently, now we only provide transportation for ACCESS-level preschoolers and preschoolers with an IEP that requires transport.

We are exploring opportunities to transport preschoolers who are attending preschool in comprehensive buildings.

33. Does the Education Industry have a benchmark for what percentage should be directed towards educational service versus Admin and other services?

- Per the National Center for Education Statistics: the majority of current expenditures for education [are] spent on salaries. ... Altogether, 80 percent of current expenditures were spent on salaries and benefits in each year from 2010–11 to 2019–20. About two-thirds of expenditures for salaries and benefits were considered instructional spending.

34. When will the teacher's contract be sent out?

- On Wednesday, April 17, 2024, Talent and Personnel will email continuing contracts to employees with a return date to the district, with the employee's electronic signature, by May 8, 2024.

35. What can be done to create a culture to keep teachers within the district?

- We will continue to seek input and value the voice of the teachers in decisions being made for hiring and retention.

36. What is Reimagine Education?

- Des Moines Public Schools is beginning an important project to make plans for the future of our district's facilities and infrastructure. This effort is to not only look at our school buildings and campuses but to reimagine what education can and should be for our students moving into the future.

37. What are going to be the results of Reimagine Education?

- The end goal of this process is to develop a 5-10 year facility plan that drives 21st Century educational excellence in DMPS.

38. Are there concerns with using the Fund Balance now? Won't we need the funds when the district determines the outcome of Reimagine Education?

- Not at this time. The district is within the targets set by the Board for Spending Authority and Solvency. The district has the opportunity to use its General Fund balance and remain within those targets. If the district was not meeting the targets, we would not use General Fund balance to this extent.
- No. Funding for the Reimagining Education will not be a General Fund expenditure. The district uses different funds (SAVE, PPEL, PERL, and Debt Service) for capital expenditures.

39. Has the district used General Obligation bonds?

- GO bonds are typically used for large-scale construction projects. The district has not issued a GO bond for at least 2 decades.

40. What is the calculation for the SAVE?

- One cent from each sales tax collected goes into a statewide pot. This pot is distributed to schools based on the proportion of students enrolled in the district.

41. How might we consider restructuring student grade groupings to provide better service and save money?

- This is something that the Reimaging Education committee is evaluating.

42. What was the Staff FTE back in FY 2009 when our student enrollment was like our current enrollment? Are we on the same FTE numbers?

- 2008-09 – Enrollment: 30,783 FTE: 4,878  
2023-24 – Enrollment: 30,802 FTE: 4,845

43. Is it possible to incentivize staff with building base or performance-based incentives?

- Currently, incentives have been focused on the recruitment of new employees in hard to fill positions. There isn't anything in place at the moment for incentivizing based on performance.

44. Is family health coverage available to employees?

- Yes

45. What can be done to communicate to the community about finances that shows that the schools need additional funds?

- The district hired a Philanthropic Coordinator to work with private companies to support DMPS. As a staff, we can encourage families to enroll in DMPS.

46. Are health insurance rates increasing?

- Yes. Approximately 8%

47. What has been the percent increase in pay for administrators, district personnel, middle management, etc that do not have daily direct contact with kids over the past ten years? How does this compare to the people who do have direct contact with kids?

- The percent increase has been equal to or less than the rate settled with DMEA.

There have been other pay adjustments to the non-bargained staff due to compensation reviews. However, these adjustments were not across the board increases and, therefore, did not impact all non-bargained staff.

48. Currently, a lot of printing that comes to the school is thrown away by teachers. We are issued curricular materials that are not necessarily needed or used. How might we create a more responsive system in which teachers can opt out of materials that are not being used?

- We do not intentionally print items that are not planned to be used. We have systems in place to monitor this and will look into specific examples on a case-by-case basis.