

GUIDE FOR PARENTS TO HELP INFLUENCE SCHOOL BUDGETS

INTRODUCTION

In New York City, parents of public school students have the ability to influence budget decisions at their children's schools. This is important because parents can bring crucial insights to help their schools to make the best spending choices and to ensure that core services which support classrooms and learning are budget priorities.

This guide is to help you as parents play a meaningful role in budget decisions at your children's schools.

Budgets can seem intimidating, but we offer concrete tools and explanations here to help demystify the process.

For references to appendices, please see <http://www.uft.org/files/attachments/uft-school-budget-guide.pdf>.

A few key things to know:

- Each school's budget is really just a blueprint of the school's values, of what that school considers important.
- Your school's budget should be aligned with the school's Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP), and the CEP should reflect the priorities of your school.
- As a parent activist, two ways to influence your school's CEP and budget are through the PTA and the school leadership team.
- Make sure that your school's PTA president works with the school leadership team and other parent activists to ensure that the school's CEP and budget reflect the school's priorities.
- If you are on the school leadership team, remember that the two responsibilities of the team are to write the CEP and align the school resources to it. As a team member, you work with the principal to create, not simply review, the CEP.
- Do your homework, craft your arguments and plan ahead before meeting with the principal or the full school leadership team about the budget. For example, if class size is a concern at your child's school, work with your PTA and school leadership team to find ways to carve out funds to pay for an additional teacher.

WHERE TO START

A great deal of school budget information is available publicly. Parent activists, working with other members of the PTA and school leadership team, can start with budget information posted by the DOE to discuss priorities and programs for this school year. The DOE posts a Galaxy budget allocations chart and budget summary for each school on the school's website under "statistics." (See Appendix A for step-by-step directions.)

The **Galaxy budget allocations** chart lists the amounts allocated under various categories. Some funding amounts may change over the course of the year, especially if there are changes in student enrollment. The DOE will also post these changes in the Galaxy budget allocations chart. Make sure someone from your school leadership team checks this chart regularly to see if any new allocations are given to the school.

- The **school budget summary** summarizes how the principal has scheduled the allocated funds. The summary can change on a daily basis if a principal moves scheduled funds from one category to another. The summary is also something that should be checked regularly.

FOR MORE DETAILED BUDGET INFORMATION

For more detailed information, discuss the **Galaxy table of organization** with your school's chapter leader and principal at a school leadership team meeting. This table lists all allocated funds and scheduled spending for each school. The school budget summary is the summary of this table.

Unlike the school budget summary, the Galaxy table of organization lists every full-time staff member working in the school, the budget amount associated with that staff person and the allocation source. It also lists amounts budgeted for per session - broken down by allocation source, for per diem costs and for the category called Other than Personnel Services, or OTPS, which includes supplies, equipment and books.

See Appendices B, C and D for examples of a Galaxy budget allocations chart, school budget summary and Galaxy table of organization.

SOME POINTERS FOR UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCHOOL'S BUDGET

Tax levy allocations are the greatest portion of allocations a school receives. This allocation is extremely flexible and can be used for any part of the school's budget: personnel (the greatest part of any school's budget), per diem costs, per session, and OTPS (Other than Personnel Services).

Other allocations which schools receive are called reimbursable allocations and include: Contract for Excellence, Title I, Early Grade Class Size Reduction (EGCSR), Attendance and Drop Out Prevention (AIDP) and New York State Textbook Law (NYSTYL). Allocation memoranda explaining how each of these allocations can be used are on the DOE website at

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/DBOR/default.htm>. See Appendices E-I for examples. Parents and school leadership teams should have a say on how allocations are used.

One thing that's important to realize when thinking about using these different allocations is that the cost of a teacher to the school depends on **the allocation source**. When a school pays for a teacher from tax levy funds, the cost charged to the school does not include benefits. When a school pays for a teacher using reimbursable funds, the cost of benefits is included in the charge. Thus, paying for a teacher with reimbursable funds is more expensive to the school.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS THAT THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM COULD ASK DURING ITS BUDGET CONSULTATION WITH THE PRINCIPAL:

General Questions:

- ✓ What changes to the school's comprehensive education plan need to be addressed by the budget?
- ✓ Are there any rollover funds from last school year that can be used this school year? Will there be any funding available to roll over from this year to next year? How could a rollover assist the school in meeting the needs of students?
Note: The issue of rolling over funds is dealt with by school allocation memorandum #5 (see Appendix E).
- ✓ What was the projected enrollment this year? Is the school's actual enrollment under or over what was projected? Should funds be set aside going into next year to protect against a possible loss after the Oct. 31 enrollment audit?
- ✓ What opportunities are there for enrichment programs? Is there money for afterschool, or art or music programs?

Personnel:

- ✓ How many F-status (part-time) positions does the school have? What services are they providing to the school community?

Per Diem:

- ✓ How many absences are covered by the per diem budget you have scheduled?
- ✓ What coverage is there for professional development, either out of the building or lost prep?
- ✓ Is the per diem money being used fully and well, or could it be better used to serve students?
Note: As part of the tax levy allocation, the school receives an average of eight absences per staff member. So the amount in the budget should be: the cost of sub (\$154.97 per day) x 8 x number of teachers.

Per Session:

- ✓ What per session activities (hours and number of positions) are planned for this year?
- ✓ What after-school activities do students and their families want and need?
- ✓ What outreach was done to solicit parent participation in decisions about per session activities?

Other than Personnel Services (OTPS):

- ✓ What consultant or staff-development contracts have been chosen for the school? What services are supposed to be provided through these contracts? What is the cost? How is it paid - in a lump sum or distributed throughout the year? What is the process for assessing their quality or effectiveness of these consultants? Based on an analysis of the consultants' effectiveness, should the same ones be used next year? (See Appendices C and D to see how consultants are listed in the budget.)
- ✓ What is the plan for supplies, textbooks, furniture, and equipment? How much of the amount scheduled for these purchases has been spent? How much of the scheduled amount is NYSTYL? How much could comfortably be cut?

Reimbursable Allocations:

What is the plan for the use of reimbursable allocations?

- ✓ For Contract for Excellence, which of the six areas was chosen and why? (See Appendix H)
- ✓ For Title I, how is the school using the 10 percent in set-asides for professional development and the 5 percent for helping teachers become highly qualified? (See Appendix F)
- ✓ What are the other components of the Title I plan for the school? (See Appendix F)