



Gary MacFadden <gary.macfadden@gmail.com>

Re: OCPS FY 2024-25 budget and looking ahead to next year

1 message

Sandy Harrington <sharrington@ocss-va.org>

Fri, Mar 15, 2024 at 2:30 PM

To: Gary MacFadden <gary.macfadden@gmail.com>

Cc: Daniel Hornick <dhornick@ocss-va.org>, Melissa Anderson <manderson@ocss-va.org>

Hi Gary:

Thank you for your continued interest, suggestions and feedback.

Sandy Harrington
OCPS Board Member, District 5

On Thu, Mar 14, 2024 at 3:15 AM Gary MacFadden <gary.macfadden@gmail.com> wrote:

The purpose of the attached letter (pdf) is to offer feedback and make suggestions to improve the budget process for FY 2025-26.

Respectfully,
Gary MacFadden

via email March 14, 2024

To: Sandy Harrington
Cc: Melissa Anderson, Chair
Darlene Dawson, Vice Chair
Chelsea Quintern
Jack Rickett
Dr. Dan Hornick

The purpose of this letter is dual:

- first - to briefly comment on the 12 March 24 school board meeting, and
- secondly - to memorialize the suggestions made during recent public comments in the hopes that the FY 2025-26 OCPS budget process will provide greater transparency, and public consensus.

Taxpayers can be happy that OCPS believes that the State of Virginia will fund an additional \$700K in revenue to OCPS. Imagine what a significant impact this \$700K boost in revenue could have made had it been applied to teachers, students, or tax relief! Instead, it went toward increasing OCPS administration overhead.

- One can rightly question how cost restraint was exemplified when prospective additional revenues that could have inhaled to teacher, students, and taxpayers was further negated by the addition of \$376K for a new administrative director, a new coordinator, and a new analyst in the OCPS Finance department. Even prior to adding the \$376K for these new admin personnel, were any expense line-items taken out of the previously proposed \$69,548,837 expense budget which already accounted for a 7.5% increase over last year's approved FY 2023-24 budget?
- The fact is that the public was never given constructive knowledge of these three new personnel additions until they were first broached at the school board meeting on 12 March (contemporaneous to the same meeting wherein the board would vote in their support). I do not feel the interests of the public were well served in what can only be viewed as a last-minute rush job. The FY 2024-25 budget now goes to the county and this year's budget episode is concluded as far as the school board and the public are concerned. It is time to look ahead.

Here are suggestions for next year which I hope the Board will find worthy of consideration.

1. The expense line items in the school budget are well known prior to the revenue line items. Expense and revenue items are disjoint and independent. OCPS should consider making the expense line items available as soon as possible, in order to avoid the situation which we found ourselves in this year wherein the public and the Board had less than five days to review and analyze projected expenditures because the revenue picture was not sufficiently determined.
2. OCPS should implement a methodology to prioritize major spending increases in descending order of their essential nature. Clearly some spending needs are more essential than others. Just as members of the public must deal with the reality that they cannot afford to meet every one of their spending desires, the same should also apply to OCPS. Without an ordered (highest to lowest) prioritization, everything defaults to becoming the highest priority which is simply not the case.
3. OCPS should develop a data dictionary defining the approximately 105 chart of accounts object expense codes, and explain the hierarchical inter-relationships between cost centers, project numbers, department numbers, organization numbers and object codes in order to increase the public's understanding of what is actually included in a particular expense line item.
4. Because contracted services also represent another one of the larger aspects of the OCPS budget, OCPS should set a reasonable total price value threshold to identify all new and carried-over contract services which are price valued over a pre-determined threshold by name, purpose, contract type and method of acquisition.
5. Lastly, OCPS should create a public task force whose ambit is not to interfere with OCPS's development of the budget, but rather to allow the public to better understand how OCPS develops and presents a budget.

All the above suggestions are non-partisan and fully align with the precepts of transparency for which all board members campaigned. **Please let me know if you will support these suggestions.** I truly value knowing your thoughts and positions on the fiscal matters affecting OCPS. Particularly, now with the addition of the three new (and highly compensated employees within the OCPS Finance department), none of these suggestions are unreasonable, and they in comparison to developing a budget are simple requests for OCPS to act upon.

Respectfully,
Gary MacFadden