
Re: OCPS Budget Transparency

1 message

Gary MacFadden <gary.macfadden@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 5, 2024 at 1:57 PM

To: Sandy Harrington <sharrington@ocss-va.org>

Cc: Daniel Hornick <dhornick@ocss-va.org>, Melissa Anderson <manderson@ocss-va.org>, Chelsea Quintern <cquintern@ocss-va.org>, Darlene Dawson <ddawson@ocss-va.org>, Jack Rickett <jrickett@ocss-va.org>, Laura Byram <lbyram@ocss-va.org>

Dear Sandy,

While I appreciate your acknowledgement of my letter, I was hopeful that you would address the specific requests which were made within the letter.

I am hopeful that as my school board representative you will agree to use your position on the board over the next few months to actively advance the ideas proposed in my letter.

Please let me know if you will support the suggestions which I identified to offer all citizens greater transparency and clarity to the OCPS budget process.

Thank you,
Gary MacFadden

On Mon, Aug 5, 2024 at 1:14 PM Sandy Harrington <sharrington@ocss-va.org> wrote:

Dear Mr. MacFadden,

Thank you for your continued interest in the school division. The board appreciates and takes into account feedback to improve practices and policies in our division.

We encourage you to remain an active member of our community, and include all school board members in the "To" line of your future correspondence.

Sincerely,

Sandy Harrington

PS: I have updated the reply to and included board member Mr. Jack Ricketts, and our board clerk Ms. Byram. You may want to remove Mr. Jones.

On Fri, Aug 2, 2024 at 11:48 AM Gary MacFadden <gary.macfadden@gmail.com> wrote:

The attached letter (pdf) reiterates what I believe are reasonable requests designed to afford the public, as well as school board members, great transparency with respect to OCPS budgetary spending requests. I hope you will offer a substantive response.

Respectfully,
Gary MacFadden

via email August 2, 2024

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

My purpose in reaching out to you again is to ask for your express commitment to support five (5) ways in which OCPS can provide better budget transparency. This is my third letter on the topic.

1. The expense line items in the OCPS budget are well known prior to the revenue line items. Expense and revenue items are also disjoint and independent. In order to avoid the situation earlier this year in which the public and the Board had less than five calendar days to review and analyze projected expenditures, I suggest that the expense line items spreadsheet be made available to the public as soon as possible.
2. This past year the OCPS School Board accepted all OCPS requests for increased spending. OCPS should implement a methodology to prioritize spending increases. Clearly some spending needs are more essential than others (e.g., list-items 4a and 4b below). 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 prioritization, everything defaults to becoming a priority which is simply not the case.
3. OCPS should explain the hierarchical inter-relationships between cost centers, project numbers, department numbers, organization numbers and object codes (by the way there are some object codes with the same number but differing names). The development of a data dictionary defining the approximately 105 chart of accounts object codes used for expenses would require a one-time effort and would vastly increase the public's understanding of what is included in a particular line item.
4. Because "Contracted Services" represent another one of the larger aspects of many budgets, after setting a reasonable total price value threshold, OCPS should identify all new and carried-over contract services which are price valued over the set threshold by name, purpose, contract type and method of acquisition.
 - a. I cite the example where \$90,000 was bundled within a proposed \$415,000 expense line item located under cost center 66009 (Vehicle and Equipment Supplies), Department 663400 (Vehicle Maintenance Services). According to school officials, the \$90K was allocated for GPS software used to enable the public to discern the location of school buses. Save for school officials pointing this out at a school board meeting, how would anyone know a) what the proposed \$90K increase was for, and b) if such spending was indeed a necessity in the face of other more worthy funding concerns?
 - b. \$90K could fund the starting salary of two new teachers – which some would consider a better use of taxpayer dollars than the ability to track the instant location of school buses.
5. Lastly, I suggest that OCPS create a combined school and public task force whose sole purpose is not to interfere in OCPS's development of the budget, but rather is limited to understanding how OCPS develops and presents a budget.

I have made these appeals to OCPS before in writing and in public comments, albeit without any substantive response back from OCPS. 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. None of these suggestions are unreasonable, and they are simple requests for OCPS to act upon.

Respectfully,
Gary MacFadden