

Budget Reduction Advisory Committee

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the percentage of staff vacancies? Do these need to be filled?

A: The number of vacancies is constantly changing. Approximately 7% of the district's positions are currently vacant. A shortage of teachers and support staff can negatively impact academic achievement and services.

The district reviews the current vacancies to determine which will not be filled while minimizing the impact on academic achievement and services.

Q: How did we get here? How were we not prepared for this?

A: The Texas Legislature has not increased the basic allotment (funding per pupil) since 2019, and the state funding formula does not include adjustments for inflation. Inflation increased 19% from August 2019 through September 2023. The basic allotment would need to be increased by approximately \$1,100 per average daily attendance to fund school districts at the same level as in 2019. In addition, the Texas Legislature has passed bills that impose mandates without providing the funding to implement the mandates.

CFISD has been preparing for the 2024-2025 budget deficit with conservative spending and utilizing the federal stimulus funds to offset the deficit. As a result, the district has maintained approximately six months of expenditures in fund balance. A healthy fund balance allows the district to address the budget deficit over several years. Since budget reductions can impact academic achievement and services, the district established the Budget Reduction Advisory Committee to obtain staff and community input.

The 2024-2025 preliminary budget reflects an approximately \$138 million deficit. The administration recommends budget reductions of approximately \$68 million, including \$50 million or 1/3 of the preliminary budget deficit and \$18 million to fund a 1-2% salary increase (1% raise = \$9 million).

Q: Can the Board push for a local tax increase?

A: The district's maintenance and operations tax rate is at the maximum rate allowed without a Voter Approval Tax Rate Election (VATRE). Based on current law, there are 12 additional pennies available that the voters could approve if the Board of Trustees calls for a VATRE by the 78th day (August 19, 2024) before the date of the November national election. A voter-approved VATRE for all 12 additional pennies would yield an additional \$109 million in revenues.

Q: How can we adjust the way we are funded?

A: The state funding formula is set in statute and can only be changed with state legislative action. Community members should contact the Senate Education Committee and House Public Education Committee members and send a copy of the correspondence to their local state representative and senator to stress the importance of adequately funding public education. Community members can determine their representatives and senators at <https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home>. It is important to research candidates prior to voting.

Q: How do the bonds get paid for?

A: The total property tax rate is composed of the maintenance and operations tax rate (which helps fund the general operating budget) and the interest and sinking (I&S) tax rate (which provides funding for the district's debt). The interest and sinking tax rate provides the funding to make principal and interest payments on the district's bonds. It is important to note that the general operating budget is not used to make principal and interest payments on the district's bonds.

Q: Does all technology and transportation come out of I&S or just opening day?

A: The district's long-range bond plan includes determining the instructional technology, technology infrastructure, and buses needed for the anticipated period covered by a particular bond referendum. CFISD utilizes a portion of the bond proceeds to fund instructional technology, technology infrastructure, and buses. Expenditures for software, maintenance agreements, technology supplies, fuel, maintenance of the buses, etc. must be paid from the general operating fund.

Q: What specific jobs were created from ESSER funds?

A: Campuses were allocated a portion of the ESSER funds to address learning loss. Campuses were given the flexibility to utilize the funding for tutoring, a class-size reduction teacher, or an instructional interventionist. A health services coordinator and 4 LVNs were hired to assist with addressing the COVID-19 health and safety requirements. There are also 15 allocations for content specialists, and we currently have eight filled. There was also one professional and one paraprofessional position hired to administer, record, and report the grant.

Q: How much do booster clubs, PTOs, and VIPS organizations contribute to the budgets of individual schools? Can they be capitalized on to relieve district operational costs?

A: Booster Clubs and PTOs are separate 501(c)3 organizations that support campuses. The funds raised by these organizations are not part of the district's budget.

Q: I'm curious what are the financial unintentional consequences of increasing our calendar by 5 instructional days are or if there are any? How many employees are hourly employees (food service, bus drivers, para educators, etc.)? In addition to the cost of

running the buses, electricity, water and other utilities keeping our campuses open an additional 5 days.

A: Teachers, para educators, food service staff, bus drivers, etc. are already on contract for the 5 additional instructional days added to the 2024-2025 calendar. For these employees, staff development days were switched to instructional days. Campuses were not shut down during these staff development days. Therefore, the district did not incur an increase in utility costs as a result of the calendar change.

Q: When is the first opportunity for the State Legislature or Governor can act to address public school funding?

A: The Governor can call a special legislative session to address public school funding anytime. Due to the Governor's focus on vouchers, it is not anticipated that a special session will be called. The next State Legislative session will begin in January 2025.

Q: When will principals be able to get allocations if the budget is not going to be determined for so long? Is there a way to get us a time estimate?

A: Principals will receive staffing allocations before April 17, 2024.

Q: Within the Bridgeland community, it seems many parents pay for private tutoring or send their kids to various SAT prep programs, not for intervention, but to give their kids an academic edge. There are tutoring companies everywhere financially benefiting. Would it be possible to create our own as a source of revenue, as well as a salary benefit to current CFISD teachers?

A: A similar recommendation was presented in the generating revenue sub-group during the March 27 Budget Reduction Advisory Committee (BRAC) meeting. The BRAC will prioritize and make recommendations to the superintendent.

Q: With Fund Balance able to help address the 2023-24 deficit, and at minimum 3.5 years of subsequent (2024-25, 2025-26, 2026-27, and part of 2027-28) deficits, can CFISD take the legal lead with other districts in attempting to have the federal and state governments be required to address deficits in safety and SPED funding? Obviously, other measures can also be implemented to help minimize the impact on the Fund Balance, but why not pursue legal measures at a time when parents and communities are demanding safety in public schools, willing to put pressure on elected officials, and likely to vote in support of increased safety funding in schools.

A: The number of years fund balance will help address the deficit is dependent on the amount of budget reductions and additional revenue generated as well as future legislative action. CFISD and other districts will continue to advocate for adequate funding including school safety and special education funding.

- Q:** Is it possible to have alcohol sales at the Berry Center for non-school events which could increase the rentals for the space?
- A:** A similar recommendation was presented in the generating revenue sub-group during the March 27 Budget Reduction Advisory Committee (BRAC) meeting. The BRAC will prioritize and make recommendations to the superintendent. The sale of alcohol at non-school events would require a change in Board policy.
- Q:** Have we marketed our schools/facilities to the charter/private/home schools in our area?
- A:** CFISD has implemented several marketing campaigns to highlight why parents and students should choose public education (and CFISD) over charter, private and home schools.
- Q:** Can you tell me more about the CCIS position? Is this a position that could be shared between campuses or in a cluster?
- A:** The Campus Content Instructional Specialist (CCIS) position coordinates with the district curriculum coordinators to ensure fidelity of curriculum and instruction, implements differentiated instruction into assigned content, provides assistance with student achievement interventions, coaches and supports teachers, models expert lessons, and guides teams through data analysis to adjust instruction. The CCIS position is NOT included in the campus staffing formula. Campus principals create this position using their regular teacher allotment. Additionally, principals have the flexibility to assign classes to the CCIS.
- Q:** I wonder if we could provide each counselor with an administrative assistant and then lessen the amount of counselors we have? I believe we currently only have 3 open positions for counselors? So maybe we put this new model for the new schools?
- A:** The district is currently reviewing staffing models to determine potential adjustments while minimizing the impact to instruction.
- Q:** I wonder what would happen if we shortened our day by 15-30 minutes? How much could we save on hourly employees and facility use?
- A:** To receive full funding, Texas school districts must provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction net of teacher-approved staff development days approved through waivers by the Commissioner of Education. Reducing the school day by 15-30 minutes would not save on hourly employees. Custodians work day and evening shifts, the majority of nutrition service workers are part-time and leave campus before dismissal, and bus drivers drive the morning and afternoon runs. The buildings also remain open for extracurricular activities.

Q: Do we offer childcare to the public on teacher workdays or non-religious holidays?

A: Workday Camps are only available to employees' children due to staff and facility availability. Religious holidays have not been considered as potential day camp options due to alignment with the district-wide off-duty schedule for our staff.

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Q: Could we investigate for profits renting our schools/facilities?

A: A similar recommendation was presented in the generating revenue sub-group during the March 27 Budget Reduction Advisory Committee (BRAC) meeting. The BRAC will prioritize and make recommendations to the superintendent. Renting district facilities to for-profit businesses would require a change in Board policy.

Q: Are there any consequences for truancy for both students and parents?

A: School personnel refers student absences to the Cypress-Fairbanks District Attendance Officer using the following guidelines:

Three (3) days or parts of days for unexcused absences within a four-week period (**May file court case for Failure to Attend School and/or Parent Contributing to Nonattendance**).

Ten (10) days or parts of days for unexcused absences within a six-month period (**Shall file a court case for Failure to Attend School and/or Parent Contributing to Nonattendance**).

Five (5) consecutive days of absence without illness verification being provided by a parent or guardian or a health care provider.

Q: What was the actual (not Budgeted) average monthly spend for academic year 2023?

A: The average monthly expenditures in the general fund for fiscal year 2022-2023 per the annual comprehensive financial report was \$89.4 million. However, some expenditures normally charged to the general fund were charged to the federal stimulus funds. These expenditures will be charged to the general fund in 2024-2025; therefore, the adjusted monthly expenditures for the fiscal year 2022-2023 would be approximately \$92 million.

Q: Can you please provide the Job Titles that the district uses and distinguish between those that are specified as overhead and those as classroom related?

A: General administration (overhead) includes positions such as accounting, budgeting, human resources, attendance reporting, internal audit, capital assets/inventory management, purchasing, tax office, instructional materials custodian, legal services, planning and research, community and public relations, and the superintendent's

office. Direct classroom-related positions include teachers, teacher aides, classroom assistants, substitute teachers, and technology assistants for instructional networks. Positions such as librarians, curriculum coordinators, staff development, directors of instruction, principals, associate/assistant principals, counselors, psychologists, diagnosticians, mental health, social workers, nurses, police officers, technology, etc., also support the students and the classroom.

Q: Does CFISD follow the TEA classification for overhead?

A: Yes, CFISD follows the TEA classification for general administration. The TEA Resource Guide indicates what should be charged to general administration in function 41.

Q: Noticed that the % of special education students has increased dramatically over the last few years, growing from 7% to now 13%. Is this due to changing classifications? Someone at our table mentioned that dyslexics will be classified as special education kids going forward. Are the needs stratified/quantified based on severity of resource needs?

A: The percentage of special education students has increased from 11% in 2000 to 13% in 2024. Although the number of identified students is growing nationally, TEA had to adjust how students are identified since the Department of Education indicated Texas was denying students with disabilities the tools and services they need to learn.

Students who are receiving dyslexia services will be under the special education program.

The instructional setting is identified in the student's individual education program (IEP).

Q: Is the ratio of students per employee a fair way of looking at staffing efficiency?

1990: $38,508/4,546 = 8.47$

2000: $63,273/8,425 = 7.51$

2010: $106,134/13,440 = 7.89$

2020: $115,070/19,000 = 6.06$

2024: $118,592/19,000 = 6.24$

What sticks out is the 2024 ratio ($118,592/7.89 = 15,030$ employees) and or about 4,000 more employees than in 2010.

A: Due to the increases in bilingual/ESL, special education, and economically disadvantaged students since 2010, it is difficult to evaluate efficiency based on students per employee. More teachers and aides are needed to provide the required services for these students. In question #4, you addressed the increase in special education students. The percentage of economically disadvantaged has gone from 45% in 2010 to 59% in 2024,

and bilingual students have increased 23.66% since 2010. Also, during this time, districts were required to go from half-day to full-day pre-K, which increased the number of teachers and aides needed to provide full-day pre-K.

In 2010, CFISD implemented a before- and after-school childcare program (Club Rewind/Community Programs). These employees are included in the number of employees, but the cost/revenue to run the program is not included in the general fund. The program makes a profit of \$1-\$2M, and the profit is transferred to the general fund at the end of the fiscal year.

Q: Is it true that the system for qualifying for free/reduced meal costs is essentially an "honor" system whereas school administration can't ask for parents to prove (i.e. ask for their tax returns) their needs? Is this how the number of kids which are economically disadvantaged are quantified?

A: A majority of CFISD's students qualify for free and reduced meals through direct certification which means they are either on food stamps, TANF or Medicaid. These organizations are responsible for verifying the financial need for these services. Parents can also complete an application to qualify for free and reduced meals. Federal guidelines require that we verify 3% of the applications received. We can verify multiple ways, such as tax returns, check stubs, or W-2. Students classified as economically disadvantaged are those eligible to participate in the national free or reduced lunch program.

The Child Nutrition program is a federal fund and not included in the general fund. This program is self-supporting.

Q: The slide on page 33 indicates that safety costs are 1.19% of the budget but slide on page 18 shows \$45,000,000 or 3.72%. Is this an apples/oranges thing?

A: The school safety expenditures shown on slide 18 include actual costs for fiscal years 2015-2023 and the amended budget for fiscal year 2024 for the police department, counselors, psychological services, and the mental health intervention team. These are all allowable expenditures under the school safety allotment, which is why they were included in the comparison of school safety expenditures to the allotment we receive from the State.

The information on slide 33 includes a breakdown of spending by functional category. The safety percentage of 1.19% indicated on this slide only includes the funds budgeted for the police department because they are all coded to the same functional category (function 52) in the district's budget. The counseling percentage of 4.13% includes guidance and counseling, evaluation services, and social work services (functions 31 & 32). The safety and counseling percentages total 5.32%. This is more than the percentage calculation using the information from slide 18 because functions 31 and 32 include other

expenditures that are not allowed to be coded to the school safety allotment, such as diagnosticians.

Q: How does your team plan to use A.I. to improve staffing efficiencies?

A: The district has been reviewing the benefits and concerns of artificial intelligence (A.I.). Technology Services has been working with our vendors to learn what aspects of A.I. they are integrating in their products. For example, our firewall vendor shared several aspects of A.I. integration that could assist technology with operational efficiencies in system alerts.

Q: My notes reflect that school nurses have a role in advising whether a kid should come to school or not. Might be a good exercise to compare pre/post Covid guidance. There may be inconsistencies in applying the guidance and or carryforward of covid practices that are too conservative.

A: CFISD's current health and safety protocols for COVID-19 indicate individuals should not report to school or work until fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medications. This is the same guidance for keeping sick children home from school for any other sickness. Included is a link to the guidelines: <https://www.cfisd.net/Page/1924>. Health Services follows these same guidelines to determine when to send students home from school.

The district's COVID-19 health and safety protocols are subject to change as updated by the Texas Education Agency, governing authorities, and county and state officials.