

Budget Development- Part 1

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Longwood University Academic Pledge:

I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code.

Introduction

In January of each year, the Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent submits an “Estimate of Needs” budget to the LCPS School Board based on the district’s goals, priorities, and strategic plan. As I learned from school principal, Erin Timothy, over the next several weeks, public hearings are held and the school board modifies and approves the Superintendent’s proposed budget. Once approved, the School Board submits the budget to the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors where it is approved, with or without adjustments. The finalized budget becomes the basis for operating the school division (Timothy, 2024).

The Supervisor for Reading and Writing determines literacy allocations for each of the 52 elementary schools and each school receives three allocations annually: for Literacy Materials, Classroom Libraries, and Virginia literacy screening assessments. Reading Specialists at each school determine how to spend the funds within county guidelines and work with the principal to prioritize literacy needs (Petrusky, 2024).

The Elementary Literacy Materials Allotment is based on the number of classrooms in each school. These funds are exclusively for literacy supplies. However, it is up to the principal to determine how these funds, typically around \$2,800 annually, are used. During the 2022- 2023 school year, Belmont Station used this money to purchase University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) manuals for K-2 teachers to support a much-needed phonics program.

The Classroom Libraries Allotment is based on enrollment. Schools are encouraged to purchase high-quality, diverse texts that support the curriculum and encourage reading engagement. These funds may only be spent through Mackin, a publisher that provides significantly discounted books to LCPS. Belmont Station typically receives around \$3500 and uses it to purchase books for our guided reading collection and, in recent years, to enhance our decodable text library.

The PALS/VALLSS Allotment is provided by the state as part of the Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) and is based on the number of students requiring reading intervention in grades K-3.

These funds can only be used for reading tutors or specific materials. “EIRI furnishes incentive funds for school divisions to provide identified students with additional reading instruction. Localities are obligated to match these funds based upon the composite index of local ability-to-pay” (VDOE, 2023). Belmont Station receives around \$10,000 annually, which provides for a PALS/VALLSS tutor.

Interviews with Key Stakeholders

“I would request additional funding for books!” (Petrusky, 2024) The consensus among those interviewed is that the purchase of classroom books is the most pressing need for this budget. Classroom teachers also feel the strain. “Books are so expensive!” (Rosado, 2024). With the recent adoption of the *Science of Reading* model, there is a critical need to furnish classrooms with decodable books. Research indicates that these texts are a necessary component for quality, evidence-based reading instruction. “Our priority at Belmont Station is that staff have the materials they need to teach every day and students have the materials they need to access the curriculum” (Timothy, 2024). An example of this prioritization is the purchase of materials from UFLI. Belmont Station used instructional funds to purchase these materials before the division adopted the program in an attempt to address observed learning gaps in phonics and phonemic awareness. Additionally, understanding the budgetary limitations, Reading Specialist Petrusky determined that money could be saved if we opted out of the interactive reading boards that were offered by UFLI at the cost of \$30 per pupil. With nearly 300 students in grades K-2, that would earmark nearly \$9,000 for the boards alone. Instead, a volunteer committee was formed to create similar boards using file folders and die-cut letters. This example of distributive leadership provided students with access to materials that would strengthen foundational literacy while enabling \$9,000 to be spent on decodable texts.

The purchasing of upper-grade novel sets will be prioritized at a later date, due to funding limitations. “It may seem that the literacy allotments received by each elementary school would be enough. However, materials, especially books, are extremely expensive. It costs over \$100 to purchase multiple copies of a paperback novel, even with our Mackin discount. In addition, paperback books

eventually need to be replaced, so there's never enough money to purchase new titles and replace damaged ones. Prioritizing which texts and materials to purchase is a challenge with limited funds" (Petrusky, 2024)

Positive and Negative Aspects of the Budget Process

Numerous factors and perspectives are tied to the budget development process for a school division and within each school building. Superintendent Aaron Spence prioritizes transparent communication through stakeholder listening sessions, scheduled several times each month throughout the county. Assistant Superintendents must share a thorough analysis of their needs with the School Board, demonstrating clarity of vision. Another positive aspect of the process is the makeup of our newly elected school board. Composed of community members, parents, teachers, and a prominent educational leader, our board offers varied perspectives that add tremendous value as they work to lead our division. The diversity of the board is its greatest attribute.

A weakness in this process is that many key stakeholders do not make their voices heard. Often, teachers complain about perceived misappropriation of funds but rarely share these sentiments with building administrators or at the Superintendent's listening sessions.

Another weakness is that funding is contingent on school metrics, such as number of classrooms or total enrollment, rather than specific demonstrated needs. Reading Specialists have no control over how the budget allocations are made. "We do our best to 'stretch' the funds based on the needs of our school. Our principal is an ardent supporter of literacy and frequently re-allocates school-based instructional funds to purchase additional books and resources" (Petrusky, 2024). However, the cost of fully funding the Reading budget at our school would require a significant amount of additional money.

To enhance the UFLI initiative alone would amount to anywhere from \$9,000 - \$18,000 initially (Timothy, 2024). Though the materials could be reused in years to come, both Principal Timothy and Ms. Petrusky noted that elementary students are "hard on books and materials" so the likelihood of repurchasing these resources would need to be configured into future budgets.

Prioritized Challenges

The two areas in the Reading budget that require additional funding are classroom books and instructional materials for targeted reading programs in K-5. Significantly increasing our allotment to purchase text sets for the upper grades, in addition to K-2, would be beneficial. In addition, funding for specialized reading programs, such as Read Naturally, UFLI Foundations, and Orton-Gillingham, would support literacy instruction, especially in the upper grades (Petrusky, 2024).

Data Analysis and Distributive Leadership

The importance of foundational literacy is undeniable, leading to long-term positive outcomes, including school success. If we set high standards for literacy instruction, we must provide the resources needed to make learning optimal. Children deserve access to a diverse collection of reading materials that foster interest, engagement, and motivation along with evidence-based instruction. Results from a recent family survey indicate strong pressure from parents “to provide children with the materials they need to be successful” (Timothy, 2024). This, along with test scores, shows a significant need to provide tools that lead to greater student achievement. Aligning our budgeting needs with our annual SIP goal of increasing Reading growth is paramount.

Standardized test scores are a benchmark for success and must be considered. The SIP team is addressing this by emphasizing high-yield instructional strategies. School-based teams collaborate to strengthen literacy instruction through regular peer observations, administrative “Reading Walk Throughs”, and teacher-led professional development. These examples of distributive leadership build the capacity of teachers as literacy instructors while relying heavily on evidence-based reading programs that are research-backed. As our previous reading curriculum was neither, there is much to be added to our classrooms and resource libraries.

References

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