

**Citizens Budget Review Committee
Summary of April 22, 2009 Meeting
6:15 – 9:00pm**

15 of 17 members were in attendance.

Charge & Guiding Questions

The Co-Chairs led a discussion of the preliminary guiding questions, which were crafted to assist in tackling the Board-approved CBRC charge. Many noted that a useful starting point would be to think about the top three shortcomings of the current budget process and put these at the top of the guiding questions. Following this approach, preliminary agreement seemed to converge on three problems of the budget process: (1) lack of transparency, (2) lack of inclusiveness and clarity of roles, and (3) the need to link programs with results. Many members made points or asked questions related to these three issues.

Budget Development Process

Steve West, Interim Chief Financial Officer, reviewed the various documents that CBRC members received at the meeting (and are also posted on the web). He explained many aspects of the current budget process, such as budget assumptions, calendar, and overview of process. He noted how these same documents were presented to the Board recently. In addition, he answered questions from CBRC members regarding various aspects of the budget. Steve explained the complexity of the budget, which includes a 20 digit code for each line item and 70 separate funds aside from the General Fund.

During discussion, CBRC members raised concerns and questions about how Title I funds are spent, when campuses get a first glimpse of the budget (February 1st), and which decisions are made centrally versus at the campus.

Cost-Effectiveness Evaluation of Programs

Dr. Anne Ware, Executive Director of Accountability presented the CBRC with a draft document that outlined a proposed process for evaluating district initiatives as well as a more general overview of the work conducted by her office. Discussion and Q&A covered a variety of topics including: the need for programs to have clearly defined objectives and metrics in order to be evaluated, the difficulties in tracking costs to programs, the types of evaluations that have been completed (all available online; see link on CBRC website), grant-funded programs get evaluated because of grant requirements, the need for findings to be disseminated in summary form, the need for findings to impact the budget process.

Efficiency Study

Dr. Mary McKeown-Moak of MGT of America provided context and background on the efficiency study nearing completion. She reviewed the 15 tasks that were outlined in the handouts (also posted online). She noted that they did not do a true program evaluation, except at a high level. The purpose was to look at options for cost-savings.

She noted that the findings in the areas mandated for the study, as well as findings in two areas that were outside the scope, but which the consultant team observed during on-site visits and interviews, fall into four broad categories:

1. Best practices. These are areas in which AISD excels and can serve as a model for other school districts or agencies.
2. Areas where additional study is needed. These findings relate to services of the District that were outside the scope of the review.
3. Options for cost savings. MGT identified areas where the District has options for cost savings. AISD may choose not to take these options, as there are both positive and negative consequences to these actions. In these cases, results of either District evaluations or other studies are cited to provide information for decision-making.
4. Efficiency or effective processes. These findings relate to areas where improvements in processes would result in more efficient or effective operations. Also included in this category are areas where reporting on performance measures is suggested to increase public confidence that the District was using money for public schools efficiently and wisely by demonstrating improvements in or outstanding performance.

The final report will be available Monday, June 1st, when it will be presented at the Board meeting.