

# ACPS School Board Budget Advisory Committee

September 10, 2019 7PM  
George Washington Middle School Room 101

## MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m.

### Present:

**Budget Advisory Committee Members:** Erin Dahlin (Chair); Nancy Drane (Secretary); Sean McEnearney; and Sukumar Rao

**ACPS Staff Liaisons:** Dominic Turner (CFO) and Robert Easley (Budget Director)

**Special Guest:** Dr. Gregory Hutchings (ACPS Superintendent)

The Chair, Ms. Dahlin, welcomed the BAC members, ACPS staff liaisons, and guest, Dr. Hutchings, to the meeting. Ms. Dahlin noted that BAC members Christopher Ricks and Janine Rubitski will be leaving the BAC. BAC member Lillian Vagnoni is seeking reappointment, which will go before the School Board soon.

### ➤ Minutes Approval

- A motion was made by Mr. McEnearney, seconded by Mr. Rao, to approve the June 11, 2019 BAC minutes as drafted. All members present voted in approval.

### ➤ Setting the Stage for 2019-2020

- Ms. Dahlin began the meeting by setting the stage for the 2019-2020 year. Ms. Dahlin shared that she met with Ms. Gentry (School Board liaison), Mr. Turner, and exiting Chair Ms. Rubitski to discuss the BAC's work and how it can bring the most value to the School Board.
- Ms. Dahlin shared that she hopes that BAC members will become familiar with the ACPS budget process and the budget itself (both operating and CIP) in order to be best informed going into BAC meeting discussions. To that end, she asked each BAC member to review the FY 2020 operating and CIP budgets before the October BAC meeting.
- Ms. Dahlin also wants to be sure that we are working collaboratively with BFAAC

### ➤ Staff Report

- Ms. Dahlin then transitioned to Mr. Turner, who shared some thoughts about the BAC's role from the ACPS perspective.
- He agreed that having BAC members informed about the ACPS budget process and content is important. At the next BAC meeting, Mr. Turner will engage the BAC in a 'Budget Hold 'Em' exercise to model the mindset of budget analysis (i.e., balancing a budget, drawing priorities, etc.)
- As Dr. Hutchings will discuss later, ACPS' goal is to make sure that the BAC is being used to provide advice and counsel to the School Board. Dr. Hutchings wants the BAC and its

leadership to be more present at relevant School Board discussions (e.g., having the BAC Chair present when the Superintendent delivers his budget presentation to the School Board).

- One recommendation is to use this year to look at what is required of BAC (e.g., combined memos) and other things that we've done that may or may not have been well utilized by the School Board. We can use this year to set up a series of best practices around memo development, engagement with the School Board, and relevant timing.
  - BAC members embraced these goals. Members shared that, in the past, it has been challenging to know where the areas of need are in terms of being useful to the School Board. It would be helpful to receive more guidance from the School Board about what would be most helpful to them.
  - BAC members also asked about ways to be better informed about the types of benchmarks that have been used to guide School Board priority setting around the budget. Mr. Turner shared that during its September 5 work session, the School Board reviewed relevant data and developed a set of priorities for both its operating and CIP budgets. Mr. Turner also shared that he is working with Dr. Monzingo and the academic team to information share around academic needs and budget realities. In practice, these discussions help the budget team work with the academic team to help estimate costs for desired programming and then identify ways these programming requests might be incorporated into the budget.
  - In terms of timing, the ACPS budget team does the bulk of its planning work between July and December. During August, ACPS staff do 'two by twos' with School Board members to talk to them about the budget process and prevailing needs. Once the School Board sets its budget priorities in September, the budget is developed to align along those priorities. The ACPS budget team also meets with Principals during this time to identify individual school needs.
  - ACPS staff sees the BAC playing a role in being a sounding board for budget challenges and decision points. The BAC can provide insight based on its own knowledge of the budget process, and can also help ACPS flag questions or concerns that might come from the community around budget issues or challenges.
- Special Guest: Dr. Hutchings
- Dr. Hutchings joined the BAC meeting to share his views about ACPS budget issues and the BAC's role. One of his priorities for this year is to find a way to use the BAC as advisors to help ACPS and the School Board make sound financial decisions. Part of the BAC's role is also to get feedback on how critical budget decisions and priorities can best be communicated to the community.
  - He has asked Mr. Turner and Ms. Dahlin to work together to set up BAC agendas to ensure that BAC members have the appropriate information. This might include inviting ACPS guests to present on relevant topics (e.g., a department head if we're talking about something in his or her purview).
  - He'd also like BAC to help ACPS think more about communications around the budget, both in anticipating reactions to budget decisions (especially tough ones) but more generally in educating the greater community about the ACPS budget process.
  - One BAC members asked whether there is a role for BAC in the unified planning effort among Alexandria child-serving agencies. Dr. Hutchings said that he'd keep that in mind, depending on whether there are budget implications. One example: whether it would be beneficial to deliver health services more directly in school buildings.

- Dr. Hutchings reiterated that he and the School Board are working hard to ensure that budget priorities are developed based on relevant data. He wants budget priorities to be more specific this year (e.g., not just ‘reading’ but ‘reading in PK-2’). This year, the School Board reviewed a data book and identified areas where growth was either flat or declining. The School Board then developed a list of priorities based on those identified areas, ultimately establishing 2 budget-specific goals for each of ACPS’ 6 strategic priorities. This will drive the budget development work in FY21 with ACPS, the School Board, and BAC. The group discussed that next year, BAC members should be included in this exercise. BAC members could review the data in advance and provide recommendations to the School Board; BAC members could participate in the discussion or simply observe; review and comment on budget priorities before adoption; etc. Mr. Turner noted that the developed budget priorities will be posted on September 18 in advance of the September 26 School Board meeting.
  - The group discussed the importance of community engagement goals around BAC’s work. How can we use the BAC, PTAC, the FACE Center, School Board liaisons, and PTAs to better educate and inform parents about ACPS budget issues? We should aim to be more proactive about messaging budget priorities and how those priorities were developed. The group also discussed how BFAAC and BAC could work together on educating the broader community on the impact of ACPS and the educational system – and why it should be a priority. Dr. Hutchings suggested that there may be some pro bono external communications resources we could tap into for guidance on budget communication issues.
- Deliverable: FY 2020 Budget Advisory Year End Report
    - Ms. Dahlin shared that BAC needs to finalize its year end report in order to get it before the School Board for its September 26 meeting. Anyone with edits should reach out to Ms. Dahlin by Friday, September 13 at the latest. (It has to be posted with the Board materials by September 18.)
  - BFAAC Meeting Dates
    - BFAAC-BAC liaison Kathy Stenzel would like to have a joint BAC/BFAAC meeting in September or October. September 25 was identified as a potential date, but ACPS staff and several BAC members are unavailable. Ms. Dahlin will follow up with Ms. Stenzel and get back about scheduling this meeting.
  - Benchmarking Project Update
    - The Benchmarking Project update is included in the draft BAC Year End Report. Mr. Rao asked Mr. Turner to encourage School Board members to reach out with any questions about the project or areas where it wants BAC to do more. We want to be as helpful as we can.
  - Walk on topics
    - A BAC member flagged the ongoing issue of data sharing being challenging between ACPS and other city agencies. Perhaps this is something for BAC and BFAAC to explore together.

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.**