

Classrooms in Crisis **Brevard Public Schools**

Q & A

1. How are decisions being made regarding the recommended budget reductions for the 2009-10 school year?

It is important to understand that no budget reductions for 2009-10 are being made at this time. The identified reductions are POTENTIAL budget cuts that could occur if the state legislature does not find additional funding sources to support education. If necessary, the district will consider these identified POTENTIAL budget reductions as well as suggestions submitted by the community to meet the required reduction in budget.

The POTENTIAL budget reductions identified by the superintendent and his staff were selected using established criteria and represent an array of options for the School Board to consider when and if it is determined that budgetary reductions must be made.

2. The list of POTENTIAL budget reductions totals \$66 million. How did you determine the number of dollars needed to cover the potential revenue shortfall?

Sixty-six million dollars represents a conservative estimate of our POTENTIAL revenue shortfall. This figure was derived by examining ongoing statements of declining revenues as well as the projected funding for education for the 2009-10 school year. Funds that have been reduced in the last two years which are non-recurring (e.g., transfers for textbooks to the operating fund) were used in developing this estimate. The POTENTIAL budget reductions to be announced on February 10 are just a sample of the types of jobs and services that may have to be eliminated to balance the 2009-10 budget.

3. I have heard that the District has had a 41 percent increase in the operating budget since 2001-2002. Is this correct?

It is accurate that the District has seen a 41 percent increase in its operating budget through the 2008-09 school year. However, it is important to understand that a significant portion of the District's increased operational budget represents funding received by the State to implement the Constitutional Amendment for Class Size. To comply with this Constitutional mandate, the District has employed 543 teachers at an annual cost of approximately \$28.7 million in addition to constructing 359 classrooms and purchasing hundreds of relocatable buildings.

If the District had not received funding to support the implementation of the Class Size Amendment, the District would have only recognized a 21 percent increase, approximately three percent per year, in its operating budget in spite of increasing student membership by 2,430 students since the 2001-02 school year.

4. How many of Brevard Public Schools' current employees may be affected by these POTENTIAL budget cuts?

Since 80 percent of the District budget supports personnel, it goes without saying that employees providing direct or support services to students may have to be reduced. It is estimated that approximately 950 positions may be impacted.

5. Would the POTENTIAL budget reductions impact new teachers and new employees to the district?

The most recent hires would be potentially the most vulnerable to reductions. However, the potential loss of identified positions may also impact long service employees at all experience levels.

6. I hear that funding for my job is going away. Should I be looking for another job?

This is a personal decision on your part. The best action to take at this time is to contact your state legislators to encourage them to identify additional funding resources for education. If sufficient funding is provided, many, if not all, of these reductions would not be necessary.

7. What can I do to prevent these POTENTIAL budget reductions from happening?

Obviously, there is a serious financial problem in the state of Florida. Education is primarily funded by the state; therefore, these POTENTIAL budget reductions will become a reality unless the legislators increase funding for schools. You need to communicate your concerns in a personal letter or e-mail (do not use a form letter) to the legislators and the governor. District personnel may not use Brevard Public Schools' e-mail, equipment at their worksite, or work time for communicating these concerns.

8. What are you suggesting that the legislators do to lessen the financial impact on education?

Legislators must find additional revenue resources to support our schools.

9. Some people have suggested that flexibility in regulations or mandates is the solution. Is that accurate?

Flexibility is always helpful, but it is not the ultimate solution. The magnitude of the loss of revenue being projected for school districts cannot be overcome with flexibility alone. Unless state funding for education is increased, students will not receive specialized programs and enhanced educational opportunities due to the required reduction of professionals and support staffs who serve them.

10. How would you uphold your vision of excellence as a standard for every student?

We wouldn't. The level of funding that we are projected to receive for the 2009–10 school year would make excellence almost impossible, resulting in a poorer quality of student performance. Without funding, educational opportunities and experiences that have enhanced academic student achievement in Brevard County will not be available for students.

11. Would parents and booster clubs be able to support athletic programs that are potentially slated for elimination?

If POTENTIAL budget reductions should become a reality, consideration will have to be given to "pay to play" or a special activity fee for all students to participate in extracurricular activities. All schools will operate under the same parameters if this option is utilized.

12. When will everyone know more definitively what is going to happen?

The legislative session begins on March 3 and ends on May 1. Until the session concludes, we will not know with certainty what the funding for the 2009-10 school year will be or what POTENTIAL budget reductions will have to be made.

13. There is discussion at the federal level of a stimulus package. Would the stimulus package help?

Yes, but to a limited extent. The proposals announced thus far would provide additional funding for Title I, IDEA (exceptional education students), and construction. It is important to understand that the stimulus package revenue may be restricted for the most part for these identified programs. Therefore, funds allocated to Title I and IDEA cannot be used for the general operation of our schools. In addition, current provisions of these federal programs generally require maintenance of existing efforts to qualify for these funds. With reductions in state funding for education for the last two years, Florida may not qualify for the specified funds of the stimulus package.

14. The District has received increased funding for the past five years. Why can't you accommodate these revenue reductions by simply rolling back expenditures to the 2003-2004 level?

Along with the increase in funding, the District has realized the same types of cost-of-living increases that you have experienced. Some examples of such increases include fuel, electricity, property insurance, and food. In addition to these increased expenditures, the District has made increases to salaries to respond to cost-of-living needs for employees.

The district has also invested in curricular enhancement programs for students such as strings program in all schools, Robotics, Career and Technical Programs, seven-period day at high schools, Future Problem Solving, Odyssey of the Mind, and relevant educational field trips. In addition, increased revenue was utilized to provide a comprehensive summer school program (SOAR) resulting in enhanced academic student performance.

15. Many critics say that the District is fat and bloated at the top level. Is this true?

The District has implemented a hiring freeze for two years and has reduced 60 positions assigned to the central office and currently there are 35 additional frozen positions as of February 10, 2009. More importantly, maximum dollars going to our schools has always been a priority and a strategic plan initiative. This is reflected in Brevard Public Schools' ranking of 66 out of 67 school districts in District administrative spending which equates to less than three cents per dollar for administrative support. If all District offices were eliminated, it would have a minimal financial impact. Critical functions associated with maintaining and operating an efficient

organization such as facilities and maintenance, transportation services, information technology system and network, payroll, human resources, accounting, background checks for employees, and curriculum development would still have to be maintained.

16. Why are you purchasing new textbooks when the old textbooks could continue to serve the purpose?

Funding textbooks has been a categorical allocation, prohibiting the district from utilizing the monies for other expenditures. However, the District applauds the Legislature for providing flexibility in the purchase of textbooks for the current school year and the next school year. Therefore, the district will not purchase new textbooks except **as required** to address increased student enrollment or the replacement of damaged books.

17. Why is the District still engaged in construction projects such as Heritage High School, Cocoa High School, and Eau Gallie High School?

With the exception of emergency, committed, and previously contracted projects (e.g., Heritage High School, Eau Gallie High School, and Cocoa High School), all prospective construction has been put on hold.

18. Are any actions being considered regarding the retired personnel working in the District through the DROP program?

The DROP program is established by law; therefore, this is an issue for the legislature to address. Our policy to date is to reemploy those employees in DROP deemed to be excellent performers and who provide essential services to the District, including critical shortage areas. Some of our most outstanding teachers and administrators are in the DROP program, and the impact to our school system would be tremendously negative if these employees were not permitted to continue to serve our students.

The DROP program is no different than retired professionals (e.g., retired military) in our community seeking employment at the District. Moreover, many retired workers in the space and related industries serve as outstanding math and science teachers (critical shortage areas), helping the district in its quest to be first in the nation.

19. Is the District considering a four-day week for students?

No. We do not have the flexibility to modify this Florida Statutes mandate that requires students attend school 180 days per year. Additionally, the four-day week would likely be extremely disruptive for working parents in Brevard County.

20. Does the District plan to eliminate all student field trips?

In an effort to maintain our excellent academic programs this school year, the District continues to provide students with relevant field trip experiences. However, field trips and many other activities such as Project BLAST (all seventh graders), Project SEINE (all eighth graders), and Lagoon Quest (all fourth graders) could be eliminated if the District must reduce the current operating budget. The District will seek additional community support for these exciting and

relevant student activities as well as other existing programs such as Space Week, 1776, and Brevard Symphony Orchestra.

21. Will the District continue to implement its energy conservation plan to save money?

The District has been engaged in an energy conservation initiative for the first six months of the 2008–09 school year. The overall energy consumption has been reduced by 12.82 percent, exceeding the District's established goal by 10 percent. Despite these significant energy savings, we were only able to realize a 3.75 percent reduction in our budget due to FP&L rate increases.

22. Why does the District continue to provide free breakfast for all students? Wouldn't eliminating this service provide significant savings to the district?

State law requires the District to provide the breakfast program to all students. Brevard is very fortunate to receive funding for this service at no cost to the District. Therefore, no savings would be gained by eliminating breakfast and thousands of students would not benefit from this excellent free breakfast program.

23. Can you explain the difference between the capital (construction) budget and the operating budget and how these two budgets are being affected?

The Operating Fund is primarily funded by state sales tax and local property taxes. This fund is used to record the activities necessary for the operation of the governmental entity. In the case of the School Board, the Operating Fund is used to record items such as salaries and benefits, purchased services (charter schools), energy services (electricity), materials and supplies, capital outlay (furniture, fixtures and equipment), and dues and fees.

The Capital Projects Funds are used to record revenues and expenditures for items such as new construction, remodeling projects, site improvements, new buses, and relocatable buildings. The primary funding source for these funds is state PECO money, local property tax proceeds, impact fees, and borrowing by the School Board to fund large scale projects.

Because there is a huge shortfall concerning the revenue generated by the state for the current year, the Legislature chose to shift more of the burden of operating the schools to school districts by reducing the 2.0 mill local property tax to 1.75 mills and adding the 0.25 mills to their share of the state funded dollars for education. The result of this shift had a tremendous impact on the Capital Projects Funds and all new projects and renovations have been put on hold indefinitely. However, if the Legislature had not done this, the budget reductions for the current year would have been much higher than they were for the Operating Fund, adding \$10 million to the amount required to be cut.

24. Will the District consider closing or combining schools with low student enrollment?

POTENTIAL budget reductions include the possibility of closing or combining schools with low student enrollment. We will also explore sharing resources at low enrollment schools to reduce future expenditures.

25. Why are we continuing corridor transportation for schools of choice and District-approved choice programs at this time of budget constraints?

The District has identified the elimination of choice corridor transportation as a POTENTIAL budget reduction. In addition, staff are analyzing the cost savings of consolidating bus routes and changing school start times, which would greatly reduce the number of needed buses.

26. Why are employees allowed to take District vehicles home each night?

Many District employees are on call twenty-four hours a day; therefore, they are permitted to drive their assigned vehicles home nightly. It should be noted that the District is currently examining the use of its fleet of vehicles to minimize operational costs.

27. Can the District eliminate FCAT testing to help schools reduce costs?

No. The District does not have the authority to eliminate FCAT testing, which is a critical component of the state's educational accountability program.

28. Is the District eliminating all school resource officers (SROs)?

At this time, the elimination of school resource officers assigned to elementary and middle schools has been identified as a POTENTIAL budget reduction.

29. Will the District continue to operate the BPS-TV station?

While BPS-TV is an excellent way to communicate with parents and the community, the District is currently looking at ways to reduce the costs of its operation.

30. Is the District considering eliminating the seven-period day or block scheduling for secondary students as a way to reduce the budget?

No. Eliminating the seven-period day and block scheduling would significantly reduce curricular opportunities for our secondary students, such as fine arts, music, and career and technical education. Moreover, the additional period supports the District's Secondary Schools of National Prominence initiative, created to promote rigor, relevance, and relationship in the secondary school experience. The seven-period day is also necessary to meet the mandates of the Legislature and State Board of Education for Reading and Mathematics remediation for students presently below grade level. Brevard takes great pride in offering this successful and unique educational opportunity for students to earn additional credits and to explore enhanced curricular and instructional programs.

31. How many employees are currently working for Brevard Public Schools?

Brevard Public Schools currently employs over eleven thousand employees. A breakdown of employees includes:

Administrators	284
Teachers	5,204
Support Personnel	3,907
Substitutes	2,072