



REYNOLDS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Budget Input Report: Listening and Learning Summary



BR|IC

PREPARED FOR REYNOLDS SCHOOL DISTRICT BY BRIC ARCHITECTURE, INC. DECEMBER 2022

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Introduction

In the fall of 2022, Reynolds School District, with the support of BRIC Architecture and the participation of SEI and Latino Network, conducted a series of 19 budget input sessions to gather input on community priorities for the 2023-2024 budget cycle. This report details the key themes of this feedback, for the Reynolds School Board's deliberation on budget priorities.

While some of the themes identified here do not have specific budget implications, participants often expressed a strong desire to be heard and understood by the District's leadership. As such, we have included the range of feedback we heard.



Session Design and Facilitation

The District hosted four general sessions in October 2022: two for staff, and two for community members. The staff present at these sessions held various positions at schools across the district (including teachers, community liaisons, TOSAs and MTSS staff, librarians, and others).

General community turnout was lower at these sessions, but District staff were able to hear from representatives from community partner organizations SEI and Latino Network, and two Spanish-speaking families.

In these sessions, participants were divided into small groups. Each group had a facilitator present, a note-taker, and District staff representative (usually, Anthony Lebron or April Olson). To maximize opportunities for feedback, participants were given a printout of a budget presentation, and invited to ask any questions. The facilitator guided the group through a series of questions (italicized questions were used in the affinity sessions):

- What is working well in our district for your students and family?
 - What is not working in our district for your students and family?
 - Do you feel that your school has strong ties in and with communities?
 - In what ways do you feel connected to your school? What are the features of your current school that make you feel welcome, celebrated, and seen and why?
 - What is the kind of space that would welcome creating a sense of belonging for ALL students? For their families?
 - What does it mean for your child/student to be successful in school? To what degree does their current school provide this?
 - What ideas do you have to create school spaces that better reflect marginalized communities, or communities that have not historically been represented?
 - What changes and/or investments should we make to better support your students and/or family?
- We heard from community members in previous outreach that the top community priorities are Arts, Music, Sports; Mental Health Support; Staff Diversity and Cultural Training; Class size and Parent Engagement. Do these still feel like the top priorities for the district? Is there anything that should be expanded, or added? Anything that you feel is less important?
 - If you had control of the budget, how would you prioritize spending to maximize student outcomes?
 - Flash forward several years into the future and imagine that we have achieved true racial equity and social justice for all marginalized or underserved groups. How did schools contribute to this?
 - If you could build your dream school, what would that look like? (This question was only asked in the student engagement sessions)

The November sessions aimed to create affinity space for community members, in collaboration with community partners. The November 1st session was held entirely in Spanish and aimed to engage Latinx community members and families through Latino Network. The November 2nd session partnered with SEI to engage Black and BIPOC families, and the November 3rd session focused on other families facing educational inequities, especially families with children supported by specialized programs. Each session had culturally appropriate food for participants and interpreters available. In some of these sessions, District staff were not present at the discussion table to preserve the affinity of the space, and to create space for participants to speak honestly and candidly. Facilitators from BRIC Architecture guided the groups through the same questions outlined above.

2 SESSION DESIGN AND FACILITATION

Many of the groups identified a need to seek feedback from students. The District is also undertaking a bond planning process, which offered an opportunity to synchronize engagement for both budget input and bond planning. Ten student sessions were held between November 15th and December 1st to engage students at H.B. Lee Middle School, Reynolds Middle School and Reynolds High School. These student input sessions focused on centering students who are often deeply impacted by educational inequity: BIPOC and Latine students, LGBTQIA+ students, recent arrivals to the school, Eastern European students, Pacific Islander and students receiving special education services. These sessions were conducted in schools, with a series of questions, tailored to students, to support bond planning and budget planning.

Additionally, the District ran an online survey in tandem with the in-person input sessions which got 17 responses. These participants were a mix of District staff and parents/guardians.



GROUPS REACHED

- **Staff and Community** - Oct 27
- **Staff and Community** - Oct. 11
- **Culturally Specific Sessions** - November 1, 2, 3
 - Latinx families (in collaboration with Latino Network)
 - Black Families (in collaboration with Self Enhancement Inc.)
 - Other families, especially those served by specialized programs
- **Student Input Sessions** in mid-November and early December:
 - One session with BIPOC students at H.B. Lee Middle School
 - Two sessions with BIPOC & Latine students at Reynolds Middle School
 - 9 sessions at Reynolds High School:
 - > LGBTQIA+
 - > Pacific Islander
 - > Latine
 - > IEP/504
 - > Eastern European
 - > African American
 - > Asian
 - > New Students to RHS
 - > ELD

19 sessions total

3 FEEDBACK THEMES



Feedback Themes

WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE PEOPLE ARE HAVING IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT?

What's going well?

- Communication is improving between parents, teachers, and administrators (ParentSquare is a huge plus).
- Programs at the schools are helping to keep kids and families engaged:
 - CTE programs
 - Dual language programs
 - Extracurricular activities and after school sports
 - Literacy and library programs
 - Wraparound services have improved
 - Health clinics offered at school are helpful
 - AVID and College Possible
- Community partners are a trusted, important part of school life.
- Schools are highly diverse, with multiple languages and cultures present in the student body.

- People are noticing better relationships between the district and the community, and a focus on equity and inclusion.
- Staff care deeply about their students, and the District has been intentional about filling gaps (and hiring diverse staff), increasing access to mental health and social workers, and creating spaces for collaboration.

What's not going well?

- Staff need much more support to be successful: many are feeling burned out, unprepared and alone.
 - Educational Assistants are desperately needed in classrooms, and many feel that EAs are not paid enough to hire and retain folks in these critical positions.
 - In addition to EAs, participants felt that bus drivers, kitchen staff, and community liaisons were other staff that were not paid enough to address the recruitment and retention issue.
 - Many staff are being asked to do work that is not part of their role (for example, social workers end up as substitute teachers).

3 FEEDBACK THEMES

- There's a sense that the system is not resilient enough: if one person leaves, or calls in sick, it has a dramatic ripple effect on others.
 - Folks don't feel that students are safe at school: either from people who could come into the school, or from within the school itself.
 - Nearly all RHS students engaged did not feel safe at school.
 - Bathrooms are not seen as a safe place for any students engaged at RHS.
 - Many noted fights and bullying happen at many schools across the district.
 - Many felt there were not enough security personnel, and students felt that SMTs and SROs did not always make them feel safer at school.
 - Some felt unsafe due to racism (both micro and macro aggressions).
 - Many students did not feel that they had access to a trusted adult to help them if they needed it.
 - Transportation to and from school and for after school activities is major barrier for many families
 - Facilities don't inspire pride, and older buildings are seen as run down or dirty.
 - Technology either doesn't work, or presents a barrier to students, families, and teachers.
 - Many people don't feel connected to the District:
 - They don't see themselves reflected in District staff and see a high turnover of District administrators.
 - They feel that the District is disconnected from the everyday experience in schools.
 - They don't see schools as a place to access resources and support.
 - People are unsure (and distrustful) of how the District is currently spending it's budget.
 - The relationship between the District and community partners needs to be more defined:
 - Understanding the value partners add to the lives of families and students
 - Building in feedback loops and opportunities for direct communication
 - Many recognize that this District has intense academic needs:
 - Kids are behind their peers in other school districts, and more interventions are needed.
 - SPED programs need support and improvement.
 - Curriculum does feel culturally sensitive or appropriate.
 - Students want to see more opportunities offered to them, for advanced placement courses, CTE, electives, and others.
 - Kids don't get enough time to eat, and food is of poor quality and lacking choices for students with dietary restrictions or religious/ethical preferences.
- When asked what students need to be successful, participants responded with the following needs:
- Support for students: both academic (including mentoring and tutoring opportunities), programmatic (more EAs and supports for specialized programs and restorative) and socioemotional (access to counselors and trusted adults, and restorative, rather than punitive, programs).
 - Representation, including the ability to see themselves and their communities reflected in staff and curriculum.
 - This includes bilingual and BIPOC staff and teachers, dual language and cultural programs.
 - Strong and consistent communication between schools and parents.
 - Technology that is right-sized, reliable, and accessible (especially to those who might not have Wi-Fi or computer access at home).
 - A safe learning environment.
 - A healthy school, which includes reliable structure and route, access to healthy food (and time to eat), and access to mental health resources.
 - Expansion of AVID and College Possible programs to expose students to more careers and prepare them better for life beyond HS.

3 FEEDBACK THEMES

WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT TO SEE IN THE FUTURE?

We asked participants two questions about what they'd like to see in the future, and where they think the District should prioritize budget spending. (What changes or investments should be made to better support students and families? And if you were in control of the budget, what are the top three things you would prioritize?). The themes from both questions were very similar, generating a range of ideas:

- Invest in staff:
 - Incentivize opportunities for EAs (tuition waivers, higher pay, or other tools) to keep and retain these critical roles.
 - Higher pay for bus drivers, kitchen personnel, EAs, and other classified staff.
 - Invest in onboarding, offboarding and specialized training for staff, especially cultural competency, and differentiation.
 - Create more systems for teacher evaluation and provide opportunities for mentorship and peer support networks.
 - Provide tech support for every building.
 - Have District administrators and leaders experience 'a day in the life': substituting in a class and spending more time in schools to understand issues on the ground.
 - As pedagogy shifts, ensure that staffing is considered thoughtfully (for example, if the District is moving toward an inclusion model for SPED, ensure that teachers have sufficient training and tools to support those students).
 - Provide more guest speakers and training opportunities on equity.
 - Hire interventionists and mental health professionals.
- Invest in programs that keep students interested and engaged:
 - Increase CTE offerings, especially programs that start in middle school and that provide certifications to help students enter the job market.
 - Increase after school sports programs.
 - Increase music, dance and arts programs.
 - Provide more extracurricular clubs and activities (especially in middle school) and give staff the resources they need to have a sense of ownership to lead these programs.
 - Provide programs with low barriers to entry for kids living in poverty.
 - Offer programs that parents and students can do together.
 - Provide safe and reliable transportation home, especially after extracurricular activities.
 - Offer more language classes.
 - Offer programs that teach students real-world skills (including personal finance, taxes, career and post-school life options, etc.).
- Invest in academic success:
 - More one-on-one tutoring and check-ins between students and staff.
 - Expanding AVID and College Possible programs to prepare students for life after high school.
 - Strong support for a block schedule at secondary schools (for student outcomes, and to support teacher planning time).
 - Provide dual language programs in all elementary schools.
 - Keep class sizes small.
 - Focus on building reading and literacy skills in younger students.
 - Hire a District librarian, who can focus on the overall system (and not just individual libraries and programs).
 - Increase the library's allocation of dollars spent per student.
- Increase student support systems:
 - Ensure that there are enough counselors for students to be able to have access to the support they need.
 - Increase mental health support and consider how to best use MTSS staff.
 - Provide mentoring to foster student leaders.
 - Consider separating kids into skills-based groups and scaling learning to make sure students get what they need to succeed.
 - Open a crisis center.
 - Allocate more resources to McKinney-Vento.
 - Expand counseling opportunities to ensure that students have easy access to trusted adults more regularly and not just when they are in crisis.

3 FEEDBACK THEMES

- Invest in a healthy school for all:
 - Provide better food (especially healthy options).
 - Make sure students can make nutritional choices, offering foods for different dietary restrictions, and foods that kids want to eat.
 - Ensure that there is sufficient time and space for students to eat lunch.
 - Lunch is often seen as the scariest time for students due to fights and bullying.
- Invest in community partners:
 - Dedicate staff time to have a direct liaison with community partners and CBOs, to build awareness and participation in services and training, and to troubleshoot any issues that may arise.
 - Allocate staff time to co-create plans and strategies with community partners.
 - Hold events to bring all community partners together, to build relationships and awareness with each other, and with the District.
 - Invest in resources for community partners.
- Invest in safety and security:
 - Hire more security personnel that reflects the demographics of the school or ensure that there are more staff and teachers present during breaktimes.
 - Ensure that SROs are trained and help students feel safer, not afraid.
 - Upgrade bathrooms at RHS so that all students feel safe using them.
 - Enforce stricter rules around entry into buildings, students leaving campus during school hours, and safety overall across the District.
 - In addition to physical safety, consider how students and staff feel emotionally safe, supported, and understood.
 - Improve communications between the District, staff, students, and families to ensure everyone is appropriately informed of any threats or incidents.
- Invest in facilities:
 - Upgrade SPED classrooms so that they are fit for purpose.
 - Provide more sensory rooms and places for self-regulation, especially for SPED students.
- Upgrade the buildings and landscaping.
- Provide better sound systems in schools.
- Modernize libraries.
- Maintain equipment to ensure everyone has the tools that they need across the District (parity).
- Consider building another high school. RHS is seen as too big.
- Improve the theater at RMS.
- Upgrade the fields (for football and track) at the middle schools.
- Create welcoming entryways at all schools.
- Provide better heating and cooling systems in older buildings.
- Ideas on buildings a health center, multicultural center, sports stadium and upgraded sports facilities at RHS.
- Provide spaces that support student health and wellbeing, including a more spacious cafeteria, places to comfortably hang out with friends, places to study, and places for quiet meditation and prayer.
- Provide better Wi-Fi and technology that advances learning outcomes.
- Improve the traffic flow in and out of schools, to mitigate traffic and make it easier for students to get picked up.
- Invest in planning for the future:
 - Invest in more communications staff
 - Intentionally research the ‘why’ behind consistent issues throughout the District (such as attendance).
 - Build succession planning to ensure that systems are in place to maintain relationships and knowledge when staff leave.
 - Analyze the success of promotions and marketing
- Invest in supporting parents and caregivers:
 - Academic programs for parents.
 - Monthly educational seminars or workshops for parents to help them build awareness of the District, educational systems, and how they can best support their students.
 - Incentivize participation in meetings and events.
 - Consider paying parent volunteers or providing ways for parents to be more involved in schools that don’t disadvantage some families.

4 CONCLUSION AND KEY THEMES

Conclusion and Key Themes

While the topics raised by participants will certainly encompass more than the District can fund in a budget cycle, many participants were eager to share their thoughts and perspectives with District leadership. Some were doubtful that their opinions would be heard and understood and noted a lack of trust with the District. However, nearly all participants expressed a deep desire for a school district that serves the needs of students, their families, and the people who work here.

The top themes of feedback we heard most consistently can be summarized as the following:

Schools need to be safer:

- Bathrooms that are safe and offer dignity for all
- School design and safety tools that mitigate risk
- Security personnel that create a safe, secure, and welcoming environment
- School culture that prioritizes social and emotional safety

Kids need better food:

- Healthy choices, options kids can (and want) to eat
- Time and space to eat

Staff need much more support

- EAs in classrooms
- Better staff pay (especially for classified staff)
- Tools and technology to support teaching and learning

Community needs better representation

- Improve relationships and coordination with community partners
- Hire and retain BIPOC and bilingual staff and teachers
- Increase involvement of parents and families in school life

Academics and Programs

- Expand programs that keep students engaged and interested in school (at all ages)
- Safe and reliable transportation to and from school
- Expand AVID and College Possible

ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK FROM SESSIONS

Participants generously provided feedback on how to best engage families and communities in future events. Some of that feedback includes:

- Community partners have a strong desire to work more closely with the District. When planning events, ensure there is plenty of notice, and that events are not scheduled during times when partners are on break.
- Involve community partners in the planning, recruitment, and facilitation of District engagement events.
- Many folks would like to attend more in-person events at schools and feel more connected to life in Reynolds. Some ways that this can be accomplished is by:
 - Make sure there are bilingual staff present at events, and the opportunity to meet in affinity groups.
 - Continue to provide culturally specific foods at in-person events, childcare, and align with other District-wide events to minimize time away from family and work.
- While many participants liked that more information is provided in languages other than English, some noted that the translations are often not great and need to be revised.

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