

## Syracuse City School District 2015-16 Proposed Budget

### Question & Answer

March 5, 2015 Public Hearing

Welcome to the Syracuse City School District 2015-16 Budget online Question & Answer site. We appreciate the community's passionate support for education of the students of the Syracuse City School District.

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### Pre-k

1. Question / Comment: Please consider expanding Full-day Pre-k for 4-year-old children.

Answer: The School District was awarded funding last September allowing for the expansion of 36 full-day Pre-k seats in the District. We currently operate 88 Pre-k classrooms with 1,577 seats (1,029 full-time & 548 part-time). We have 199 vacant pre-k seats of which 86 are full-time. We continue to advertise and reach out to families to encourage enrollment of three and four year old children into Pre-k.

In the final adopted budget we are planning to expand another 2 classrooms of full-time Pre-k 4 year old classrooms in 2015-16 only if the current seats are filled.

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### Staffing Changes – Teaching Assistants (TA's)

2. Question / Comment: What is being done about the 31 Teaching Assistant position reductions?
3. Question / Comment: I am concerned that the loss of 31 Teaching Assistants cannot be “made up for” by the addition of the Academic Intervention Specialists. What is the role of an Academic Intervention Specialist and how will these positions be incorporated into the schools? While it appears that there will be a net gain in adults present in the schools, I'm concerned that the TA position and the AIS position are not equivalent.
4. Question / Comment: Concerns with change from TA's to Certified Teachers have to do with lunch duty, hall duty, restorative justice practices and dismissal.

Answer: These 31 Teaching Assistant positions are assigned to buildings to provide additional supports to students with special needs. These are not one-to-one Teaching Assistant positions required by student Individual Educational Programs (IEPs). However, the TA positions identified for repurposing will be replaced by certified Teachers to best serve the academic needs of our students. With respect to the concerns about TA duties as outlined in question #4 above, teaching assistants are hired to perform instructional support duties.

The proposed restructuring of the Office of Student Support Services ensures that all buildings will have appropriate supports, including technical assistance in IEP design,

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implementation and progress monitoring. Additionally, students are now receiving increased social-emotional supports given the increased number of staff who are providing targeted intervention services as needed.

The funding for these positions is being repurposed to provide Certified Teachers to support Reading and Math grades K-5 for all students requiring targeted interventions. Targeted intervention services provided by certified personnel will result in opportunities to improve individual student skills and overall academic achievement.

We expect zero layoffs based on known and anticipated attrition and retirements. The Teaching Assistant positions supporting specific students per an IEP, Kindergarten Classroom TA positions and those TA positions supporting the Behavior Intervention Centers will not be impacted by this repurposing.

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### Staffing Changes – Instructional Support

5. Question / Comment: **What are the specific roles of the 58 new instructional positions? What will Instructional Staff do and where will they be assigned? Encourage specific job descriptions for these positions. Recommend reduction of Instructional Coaches instead of Teaching Assistants.**
6. Question / Comment: **I need to understand what instruction will look like in the classroom. Will this teacher move between classes and grades and give direct instruction on a daily basis or will this person pulls kids out of the room or a combination of both?**

Answer: These additional Certified Teachers will be placed in Elementary and PreK-8 schools to provide specialized reading and math intervention to students in need of additional support. There will be at least one Reading and one Math Intervention Teacher at each school (regardless of a School's Priority Status) for Grades K-5 and larger schools will have two additional Teachers for a total of four. These teachers will be scheduled to work with small groups of Special Education, English Language Learner and General Education students throughout the school day.

Just as our students need support in developing mastery of skills, so do our Teachers. Instructional Coaches are dedicated Teacher coaches who support our teachers and facilitate continuous learning and improvement. Syracuse City School District's coaching model recognizes the needs of each individual teacher and is tied to individual school improvement plans. At the core, coaches facilitate effective collaboration around instructional priorities with the ultimate goal of improved student performance.

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**Staffing Changes – Administration**

7. Question / Comment: I also hope you will clarify the 13.0 proposed FTE additions for "Administration." Are these additional school-based administrators (Principals or Vice-principals) or additional Central Office staff? What will be the role of these new positions?

Answer: As demonstrated in the Budget Presentation, in 2015-16 we will continue the restructuring of Student Support Services to include four areas of Student Support Services, Student Behavior, School Culture & Climate and Special Education Services. This restructuring involves the addition of needed leadership positions to effectively support the schools in each critical area. This accounts for 11 of the 13 added administrative positions noted below.

The 13.0 proposed Administrators include the following:

- +2.0 Assistant Directors (Special Education)
- +7.0 Educational Specialists (Special Education)
- +1.0 Director of School Culture and Climate (Student Support Services)
- +1.0 Director of Student Discipline (Student Support Services)
- +1.0 Talent Management Coordinator (Talent Management)
- +1.0 Administrator for Benefits (Talent Management)

Please see the organization charts attached.

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**Instructional Support**

8. Question / Comment: Would like the District to provide students textbooks to bring home.

Answer: The District provides textbooks for students and has set the expectation that all students should have access, at school and at home, to the textbooks and other books that they are using in each course. **Board Policy 4730 – Homework** clearly stipulates that textbooks will be made available to take home to complete homework, if necessary. Many textbooks now are available online for students to access at any time. If your child is not allowed to take a textbook home or needs the code to access their online texts, please contact the school Principal. After contacting the school, if you have further questions then please call the Teaching & Learning office at 435-5844.

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- 9. Question / Comment: A Character Education Program was mentioned. When and where will this program be rolled out?**

**Answer:** The Responsive Classroom is a research and evidence based character education program that leads to greater teacher effectiveness, higher student achievement, and improved school climate that will be rolled out districtwide in 2015-16.

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## **Contract Services**

- 10. Question / Comment: Why are contract services increasing \$7.8 million (Object 4450)**

- 11. Question / Comment: I am curious about the \$5.5 million for "investments in priority schools" (slide 11). Slide 31 indicates that an additional \$2.0 million will be invested in enrichment programs at extended learning time schools previously funded in grants. Are these enrichment programs at the same priority schools referenced on slide 11, and if so, what is the purpose of the remaining \$3.5 million? Is the remaining investment for costs associated with extended learning time?**

**Answer:** The District contracts with outside service providers for many instructional support and non-instructional activities to provide expertise and guidance in a variety of areas. The cost of contracts varies from year to year depending on the services needed and funding sources. The increase from this budget year to next year is the result of the following factors:

1. New York State Education Department requires as part of the transformation model that priority schools operate with extended learning time, regardless of whether or not a district receives School Improvement Grant funding.
2. Section 1003(g) of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 requires that priority schools must offer extended learning time to students in order to qualify for School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding.
3. In 2015-16 School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding is reduced, however the District is still required to provide extended learning time at the priority schools. The priority schools currently offer academic and enrichment programming during the school day allowing teachers time to plan and collaborate with their grade level and subject peers. Academic and enrichment programming is provided by outside partners such as Redhouse Arts Center, The MOST, Syracuse University, Baltimore Woods, Syracuse Stage and SUNY ESF. Although the cost of these academic enrichment services is not increasing, the expense is shifting in 2015-16 to the General Fund from the Grant Fund resulting in a year over year increase from the prior year budget by

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approximately \$2 million. The District is required to continue the current level of programming and opportunities for students in these schools.

Another \$2.5 million is for other expenses previously funded by Grants for school reviews and intensive support and coaching from outside educational experts as required by New York State Department of Education for our priority schools.

There are a number of contract services required under the Assurance of Discontinuance (AOD) with the Attorney General's Office that are currently in place but were not included in the 2014-15 budget because the AOD was issued after the current year budget was finalized. In the 2015-16 school year we are including these expenses in the budget to ensure continued social-emotional support for students and compliance with the Assurance of Discontinuance.

Additionally, we are including \$566,000 in the 2015-16 budget for collaboration with the Syracuse Police Department to provide one School Resource Officer in each K-8 and each Middle School.

The 2015-16 budget also includes fully funding the Hillside Work Scholarship Connection at the Middle School Alternative program at the Phoenix Center.

**12. Question / Comment: Why are consultant services increasing \$205,000 (Object 4070)**

Answer: The primary reason for the increase year over year is the Assurance of Discontinuance requirements. There is also a slight increase for Science Curriculum technical support partially offset by a reduction of services for Talent Management.

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## Communications

**13. Question / Comment: Why is postage increasing \$80,000 (Object 4730)**

Answer: As outlined in Goal 5 of ***Great Expectations: Communicate more effectively with district stakeholders***; we endeavor to be more effective in communicating with parents and guardians. We have heard from many parents that they prefer to have important documents mailed directly to them at home to ensure timely and efficient communication. The law requires expedited delivery of hearing and special education notices to parents and guardians. We have budgeted \$75,000 for potential delivery services to ensure timely notification.

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**Other**

**14. Question / Comment: Why is out of district travel increasing \$61,000 (Object 4750)**

**Answer:** There are four reasons for the increase in out of district travel as follows:

- \$40,000 for AVID Summer Institute
- \$8,000 for Middle School Orientation Conference
- \$7,000 for Science and STEM conferences
- \$4,000 for the National Talented & Gifted Conference

**15. Question / Comment: Why is insurance increasing \$612,000 (Object 4730)**

**Answer:** This year the District purchased General Liability Insurance to provide an umbrella of liability insurance as well as to allow our Special Needs students to participate in work-based programs at local merchants such as Marshalls and Wegmans. Large employers require the District to provide adequate proof of insurance when our students participate in various work-based programs in their locations. The cost of this insurance is about \$205,000 and there is an offsetting reduction of the Judgments & Claims expense line by \$235,000.

Additionally the budget includes a provision for additional employment related insurance plans for up to \$400,000.