

Duval County Families' Perspectives on School Funding

Families' voices are critical to ensure that school budgets reflect a community's needs and priorities for our students. Explore this resource to learn more about school funding, including families' top priorities when it comes to spending. Share this information in your community and use these findings to advocate for the changes you want to see.

The stress from the multiple pandemics of the 2020-21 school year has made it challenging to meaningfully engage families and to finance the relief and recovery needed for students' learning and wellbeing. This year, Duval County Council PTA partnered with National PTA as part of an initiative to more authentically listen – and respond – to the questions and concerns of families regarding school funding. What do families know about school funding in Duval County Schools? What areas do they feel are adequately or inadequately funded? And how do families think about the differences in per-pupil funding in the community?

Specifically, Duval County Council PTA helped conduct virtual listening sessions with and distribute surveys to families in Fall 2020 to reveal local community priorities and contribute to a nationwide study around education finance. 27 participants attended virtual listening sessions facilitated by National PTA staff. See Appendix A for table of demographics for parents participating, and please note, compared to community demographics, an overrepresentation of white families in this sample.

Key Learnings

- Families do not feel confident in their understanding of school budgets and they are not sure where to go to find information.** Only 32% of Duval County participants agreed that they have a general understanding of how their child's school district uses its funding and 36% agreed that they knew where to find information on school funding in their community.
- Families were unsure if money was being spent effectively and felt skeptical about the district's role.** Participants noted situations where they feel money is wasted, or where they feel there is adequate money allocated but it's not deployed in a way that reaps the most benefit.

"I don't feel like there's a shortage of resources, I feel like the pressure on testing has prevented the schools from giving them the time they need."

"I've got my sixth grader, who goes to PE every day, and my elementary school kids, once a week. [It] doesn't make any sense."
- Families value educational equity and prefer for schools to receive funding based on need.** 91% of participants shared they believe schools should receive funding based on need, and only 5% shared they believe schools should all receive equal funding.

"I think money should be distributed based on the school's needs for each area as well as considering the students that go there as well, [and] what they need."

4. **Families believe schools need more funding and identified Teachers & Teachers Aides, Counseling services & Counselors, and Facilities as priorities.** More than half (55%) of participants believe their child's school does not receive enough funding. In addition, families noted priorities for increased funding for:

- **Teachers & Teachers Aides.** 57% of participants chose Teachers & Teacher's Aides as one of their top priorities for more funding. Participants repeatedly indicated that **teachers are underpaid and they would support salary increases.** They also highlighted that **understaffing is an issues** and some classes don't even have a full time teacher.

"We are fortunate to have some amazing teachers, but they are so underpaid!"

"The teachers that we have, I love them, but there are teachers that are missing in some of [my daughter's] classes. I don't think she's had a science teacher for a year and a half, so I think that they need more teachers."

- **Counseling Services.** 43% of participants chose Counseling Services as one of their top priorities for more funding. Participants shared that **counselors' caseloads are too large** and **services and support available tends to be more reactive than proactive.** A participant also shared that the services offered feel like they are there in order to "check a box" and meet a requirement, rather than offer guidance and support.

"My daughter, she was given a block [of time with the counselor]. This is your time, come we'll talk to you over this, six months and when your time is up, that's it... and whether or not my daughter's issue is taken care of or not, it was, her time was up, time to move on."

"Our experience, it always seems like the counselors are just there to help figure out class schedules. They're almost like registrars... [We] never had any sense that there's anything that we could go to them [for] beyond what their class schedule should be and what their direction is."

- **Facilities.** 38% of participants chose Facilities as one of their top priorities for more funding. Participants shared that there are **recurring issues with temperature control** and that the **buildings are old and require frequent maintenance.**

"I know that there have been times where something small, the handicap buttons on door will break. They will stay broken for months on end, just because there's, A, not enough people to come and fix it. But, B, there's often not enough funding to get simple things fixed and completed."

- **During the listening sessions, families also highlighted issues related to lack of funding for health and safety services.** There were recurring concerns about schools that do not have full time nurses, which can make medicine distribution and emergency management an issue.

"When I moved here ... I could not wrap my head around the that there was no nurse in the school"

- **If forced to make spending cuts, Duval families noted the following priorities** for decreased funding: **District Central Office Roles** (90%), **Family Engagement Programs** (35%), **Transportation** (25%), and **Instructional Materials** (20%).

Steps Advocates Can Take

Familiarize yourself with information about your school district's spending and look for patterns.

- Duval County Schools' primary source of funding is the local (49%), followed by state (40%) and federal (11%) revenue.
- 62% of Duval County Schools' budget is spent on labor costs (staff salaries and benefits)
- The average per pupil expenditure (PPE) in Duval County Schools in FY 2019 was \$7,876, significantly lower than the national average of \$14,439.
- Duval County schools with the highest per pupil expenditures are:
 - Grasp Academy (\$13,507)
 - Biltmore Elementary School (\$12,794)
 - Somerset Academy, Eagle Campus (\$12,474)
- Duval County schools with the lowest per pupil expenditures are:
 - James W. Johnson College Prep Middle School (\$5,527)
 - Jefferson Davis Middle School (\$5,543)
 - River City Science Academy at Mandarin (\$5,804)
- Understand why spending may vary: student need, special programs, inequitable allocation.
- Compare spending with outcomes. See what trends emerge!
- You can gather even more information annually on the state report card. [Start here!](#)

Engage in district planning processes.

- Understand your district's budget cycle.
- Know when your school board meets and attend or view recordings. Express your thoughts and concerns during public commentary.

Ask your school board members and district officials questions to learn more. Here are a few to get you started:

- What factors go into determining the per pupil expenditure for each school?
- How does the district decide where to spend its money?
- What is the best way for community members to share their input about their budget priorities?



Contact Us

Contact Duval County Council PTA at president@dccpta.org

Appendices

Appendix A – Demographic Information of Duval Participants

Race/Ethnicity				Income			Gender		Education	
White or Caucasian	Black or African American	Latino/a or Hispanic	2 or more races	Less than \$50k	\$50-100k	\$100k+	Female	Male	High School Degree or Higher	Bachelor's degree or higher
50%	27%	5%	18%	32%	50%	18%	95%	5%	100%	64%