

Duval County Families' Perspectives on School Funding

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. Families' voices are critical to ensure that school budgets reflect a community's needs and priorities for our students.

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 (October-December, 2020) to reveal local community priorities and contribute to a nationwide study around education finance. Twenty-seven Duval County public school parents 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

1. **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.

Recommendations: Help families understand how they can be more engaged in the budgeting process in Duval County Schools. Establish and publicize a point of contact who families should reach out to if they have questions about how money is being spent

2. **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 is not deployed in a way that reaps the most benefit.

Recommendations: Provide more transparency about how funds are spent and why.

"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."

3. **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."

Recommendations: Provide more information about why certain schools receive more money than others. Ensure the information is easy for families to access and understand.

4. **Families believe schools need more funding and identified Teachers & Teachers Aides, Counseling services & Counselors, and Facilities as priorities.** More than half (55%) of Duval County 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 participating families 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.
- **Counseling Services.** 43% of Duval County participants chose Counseling Services as one of their top priorities for more funding. Families 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.
- **Facilities.** 38% of participating families 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.

- **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.

"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."

"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."

"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."

"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 County families noted the following priorities*** for decreased funding: District Central Office Roles (90%), Family Engagement Programs (35%), Transportation (25%), and Instructional Materials (20%).

Recommendations: Provide resources to help families learn to advocate for increased funding on the local level, and from the state and federal government. Prioritize investments in staffing including teachers, aides, specialists and counselors, as well as facility maintenance and upgrades.

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%