

2011 Budget Summits: Cost Saving Strategies for Pennsylvania School Districts

In the face of a \$4 billion state deficit and the most challenging fiscal times at the state and local levels in our memory, state government is contemplating a more than \$1 billion cut in education spending. Public school leaders are seriously committed to pursuing cost saving strategies that will preserve education dollars that are so essential for student success in the classroom, while at the same time providing the relief that taxpayers need.

On March 29, 2011, more than 750 school superintendents, school board members and business managers convened “budget summits” at thirteen intermediate unit offices across the state to share experiences and generate new ideas for delivering quality education at a reduced cost. The thirteen events on March 29th were in addition to similar events previously hosted by six other intermediate units. The budget summit events held at intermediate units across the state were sponsored by PAIU, the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), the Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA), and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS).

This document offers a summary list of the many strategies discussed at the budget summits across Pennsylvania. PAIU has also created a video library of presentations made at many of the budget summits on successful cost saving strategies that have been implemented in Pennsylvania schools. To access these videos, go to <http://video.paiunet.org> and select “2011 Budget Summit” from the drop-down menu.

Administrative Services

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Consolidate back office services across districts	HR, payroll, legal, other routine business functions
Share administrators across districts	Including superintendents
Refinance debt	Take advantage of low interest rates
Mandatory direct deposit for all employees	
Utilize an IU-wide grant writer	Reduce district costs and create opportunities for new revenue
Seek IU support for district ACCESS billing	

Administrative Services (cont'd)

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Implement district safety/risk management program	Reduce worker's compensation costs
Expand health insurance consortia – more districts and possibly liability insurance	
Validate insurance-eligible dependents	
Require zero-based budgeting with department heads to justify all purchases	
Establish/increase user fees	Such things as school lunch, parking, sports, clubs, field trips
Identify opportunities for shared services with local municipalities	
Seek waiver to extend time to collect current-year real estate taxes	Reduce tax collection costs; increase revenues
Establish IU-wide contract negotiations	Requires change in state law
Establish IU-wide purchasing consortium for food service, custodial service, maintenance, IT support	Requires district contracting out these services
Expand IU instructional materials purchasing consortia to include more districts and more products	

Personnel and Benefits

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Implement staff reductions through attrition	Possible increase in class size
Implement wage freeze	Requires union agreement
Offer early retirement incentives	Reduce complement of more senior/higher paid staff
Reimburse staff who acquire multiple certifications	Increase staffing flexibility
Reduce or eliminate retiree health care benefits	Requires union agreement
Increase employee health insurance co-pays	Requires union agreement
Allow furloughs for economic reasons	Requires state legislation
Reduce or eliminate staff tuition reimbursement	Might require union agreement
Reduce/eliminate overtime	

Buildings, Grounds and Energy

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Sell delinquent real estate taxes to collection agency	Cash upfront as much as \$.85/delinquent dollar
Revise facility rental/use policy to generate additional revenue	
Consolidate district buildings; close schools with low enrollment	
Reduce facility use in summer	Energy savings
Enroll in Duquesne Light “Watts Program”	Utility pays district \$25.00 for every family that enrolls
Establish IU-based equipment maintenance/spare parts shared services program	
Invest in alternative energies	Some providers will assist with upfront costs
Expand IU operated energy purchasing consortia to include more districts and more products	
Develop repository of architectural prototypes for school construction projects	Reduce architectural fees; promote green construction
Conduct energy audits to identify opportunities for savings	
Participate in summer demand/response programs	
Implement 4 day work week	For summer if not year round

Transportation

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Outsource busing services	Cost savings for fleet
Redesign bus runs to eliminate separate runs for private schools	
Establish cross-district transportation consortium or at least coordination	Particularly for students attending special needs programs
Provide vouchers to parents who transport their children	Possible reduction in fleet and bus routes
Eliminate mid-day runs and late buses	
Eliminate district-provided transportation and offer a fee-based transportation option for parents	
Coordinate sports schedules to streamline busing	
Coordinate school bell schedules to streamline busing	

Instructional Services

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Share teachers across district lines for low enrollment classes	Use Polycom/videoconferencing technology to deliver instruction
Increase class size	Reduce staffing costs; possible negative impact on instruction
Increase district provided online/cyber instructional opportunities	Reduce expensive cyber charter school payments
Create cross-district special education instructional services	Reduce costs for low enrollment programs and services
Open multi-district charter school or IU-wide program in lieu of out-of-district alternative education placements	
Offer low-enrolled classes once every three years	
Eliminate non-mandatory academic programs	Allows for reduction in staff; driver's ed; full day kindergarten
Combine upper level classes	Examples: Spanish 4 and 5; AP and Honors Language Arts
Decrease physical education classes based on student participation in sports	State policy/regulation change needed
Implement "pay to participate" in ancillary programs such as driver's ed, summer school, etc.)	
Implement/expand volunteer programs to help replace funding cuts to tutoring/mentoring/extracurricular programs	
Partner with community colleges to deliver grade 12 general education course instruction	
Schedule in-service and professional development sessions in the evening and weekends	Reduce substitute teacher costs
Increase use of online resources and e-textbooks	
Establish district-wide common planning time	No planning time while students are in the building
Implement common calendars across districts	Facilitate opportunities for course sharing via videoconference
Increase use of videoconferencing for professional development	
Fill unused seats at CTCs for adult learners	New revenue source

Technology

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Remove individual printers and create “printing pods”	
Outsource technology services	Lower costs and secure more specialized services
Implement paperless meetings	School board, staff
Revise policies to permit student use of personal technology devices	Reduce district technology hardware purchases
Extend the shelf life of laptop and desktop computers	

Athletics/Extracurricular

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Move 9 th grade sports teams to Junior Varsity	Reduces busing and referee costs
Implement “pay to play”	Creates access issues for some students
Sell advertising at sports venues, on buses, etc.	Offset athletic expenses
Change all athletic events to daytime	Save on building operating costs
Install artificial turf on athletic fields	Save on maintenance costs; upfront investment required
Share extracurricular activities across districts	

Miscellaneous

Strategy	Savings/Barriers/ Comments
Create a district educational foundation	New revenue to support critical programs
Operate automated school libraries	Eliminate/reduce staffing
Eliminate national conference attendance for all staff	
Implement corporate sponsor program	New revenue to support critical programs
Create community task force to generate cost saving` strategies	