

BUDGET PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS

A. Principles of Budgeting and Accounting

The California School Accounting Manual and the California Education Code govern budget development for California school districts, and their standards form the basis for development of the District's Adopted Final Budget. Among these standards are:

Basis for Accounting. The California School Accounting Manual mandates that districts use either the accrual basis or the modified accrual basis in accounting for revenues and expenditures. The difference between the two is as follows:

- In the Modified Accrual Basis, revenues are recognized in the period when they become available and measurable, and expenditures are recognized when a liability is incurred, regardless of when the receipt or payment of cash takes place. School districts use the modified accrual basis in accounting for governmental funds such as the General Fund and Adult Education Fund.
- In the Accrual Basis, revenues are recorded when earned, and expenditures are recorded when a liability is incurred, regardless of when the receipt or payment of cash takes place. School districts use the accrual basis in proprietary funds such as Self-Insurance Funds.

Basis for Budgeting. The California School Accounting Manual also mandates the basis for school district budgeting. It requires that "generally, for California (school districts), the basis of budgeting should be the same as the basis of accounting used in the audited financial statements. Budgetary accounting must conform to the account codes in the standardized account code structure." California school districts are required to display their budgets by fund, by object, and by function.

Budgetary accounts are "projections and show how much is estimated to be spent or received during a given period of time to carry out the local educational agency's (LEA's) goals." In general, budgetary accounts have two purposes: (1) to record the estimated revenues of a fund by source and amount, and (2) to record and control the limits that are set on the expenditure levels by the appropriations. The recording of actual revenue and expenditures allows a comparison to the available amounts to be committed or expended within the limits set by law or by the governing board.

Revenue Budget. For each fund, the revenue budget anticipates all income from federal, state, and local sources, as well as the anticipated beginning balance. The total of beginning balance and income is the maximum amount a school district may legally budget to spend for any fund.

Expenditure Budget. Each fund has an expenditure budget reflecting the fund's authorized costs, and, for most funds, the anticipated expenditure level.

B. Budget Process

Budget Preparation. The first step in preparing the budget is to determine the cost to continue the existing program. Enrollment-related costs are adjusted for projected changes. Costs not directly controllable by the District, such as utilities, retirement contributions, insurance, continuing contractual obligations, and legal costs, are adjusted to reflect estimated expenditures for the coming fiscal year.

Estimates of income are developed based on a review of federal and State statutory provisions and local revenue sources. Beginning balance amounts for the budget year are calculated utilizing a comparison of anticipated revenues and expenditures for the current year. The projected beginning balances and revenues are compared to the cost of continuing current programs to determine whether budget reductions may be necessary or whether unanticipated amounts may be available for allocation.

Board and public participation. Board meetings are scheduled for discussion of proposed budget changes. A public hearing, at which any member of the public may address the Board regarding the District's proposed budget, is mandated prior to Board adoptions of the Final Budget in June.

C. Budget Revision Process

Budget adjustments. The Budget Services and Financial Planning Division either receives or initiates well over 20,000 requests annually to adjust or revise the adopted budget. Generally, a budget adjustment (B.A.) enables a school or office to use funds previously budgeted for a particular purpose.

Certain limitations apply to B.A.s. For example, schools or offices may not transfer funds from a restricted program into an unrestricted one (e.g., transfers from Title I into a District-funded school instructional material account would not be permitted).

B.A.s may be either continuous (ongoing), or limited to the remainder of the current fiscal year. They may be either "routine," requiring only normal handling by staff, or "non-routine," requiring formal approval by the Board of Education.

Categories of "non-routine" B.A.s are determined by the Board, and are currently defined as follows:

- A. All B.A.s from Undistributed Reserves.
- B. All B.A.s which increase the total number of regular, non-school-based budgeted positions, except for those that are fully funded from the budgeted resources of the requesting office ("cost-neutral" budget adjustments).

In addition to the above, California Education Code §42602 authorizes Boards of Education to increase income to reflect unanticipated new revenues during the course of the fiscal year.