

Potential Budget Cuts for the Magnets

AISD is currently experiencing a \$30 million deficit and is looking at different ways to reduce the budget.

Two budget cuts that would affect only magnet schools are being discussed:

1. Charging for busing to the magnets (Kealing, Fulmore and LASA) on a sliding scale. The basic plan would be to charge a monthly fee to all families that are not currently receiving free or reduced lunch benefits.
2. Eliminating or reducing the weighted factor in the magnet formula for their staffing allocation. This allocation gives each school additional funds to be used to provide magnet programming.

Magnet programs permit the district to efficiently provide advanced academics by housing specialized programming in one place, reducing overall costs districtwide. Their cost per student, even with the cost of busing added, is significantly less than other schools.

Concerns about bus fees

Charging for magnet transportation could negatively impact the advances magnet schools have made in improving diversity.

- This is potentially a system that stigmatizes students who qualify for free rides, creating inequities and access concerns. It unfairly burdens students in need of free busing to self-identify as “different” from their peers and unable to afford the bus fee.
- Academic and civil rights studies have documented the role free transportation plays in increasing diversity and avoiding segregation effects in school choice programs.
- Families with undocumented members are often reluctant to apply for benefits such as these.

Many families do not qualify for free/reduced lunch (\$45k/family of 4) but still cannot add a bus fee to their monthly expenses.

The anticipated cost savings of charging families for magnet transportation is overstated.

AISD does not currently have a method of billing and receiving payments from parents. Developing or purchasing this system could be costly.

- This proposal assumes that all magnet transportation costs would be regained as revenue from magnet families, when it would likely only recover a small portion. Many families might opt to carpool or individually transport, reducing the expected revenue from paying families.
- Low-income students are found in every part of the city. Therefore, routes would remain largely unchanged and transportation costs would not be decreased.

Removing magnet transportation could decrease the number of students who choose to attend AISD over other options, thus reducing revenue.

- Low-income families could be deterred from applying to magnets due to confusion or concerns about having to pay for transportation.
- Magnets are retaining students and bringing students back to AISD schools. Transportation is an incentive to attend AISD magnets over charter, non-public, and out-of-district options.

Every year, LASA adds around 50 students who are new to the district.

Concerns about changing the weighted magnet staffing formula

Magnets meet a need within the district for advanced academics.

- The purpose of the weighted magnet staffing allocation is not to keep classes small. Many magnet classes are, in fact, larger than classes at most other schools. The purpose of the allocation is to offer advanced academic programming not found at other schools.

Bringing students together at a magnet allows for classes that would be too small to "make" at students' home schools.

- Multivariable Calculus, Pathophysiology, Linear Algebra, AP European History, Organic Chemistry, and AP Environmental Science are options at LASA. At Kealing, electives like Algebra II and Integrated Physics & Chemistry are available. Fulmore is able to offer AP Spanish and Mock Trial.

- The magnet weighted formula permits signature magnet programming. For example, all LASA ninth- and tenth-graders take four semester-long "magnet signature" classes in the sciences and humanities. These ensure that all students, regardless of middle school or background, have the same skill set moving into 11th grade, contributing to equity and the success of all students in the program.
- Decreasing the magnet staffing allocation would reduce magnet offerings and impact the number of students who choose to attend AISD over charter and private options, thus reducing revenue to the district.

Students who come to magnet schools for the advanced math courses not offered elsewhere in this district may find classes in other districts or schools.

The anticipated cost savings of changing the weighted magnet staffing formula are overstated.

- The weighted magnet staffing allocation also provides LASA with necessary administrative staff because there has been no adjustment to the number of assistant principals, counselors and other administrative staff despite its significant growth into an independent high school.
- If the weighted staffing formula is eliminated, this deficiency will have to be corrected because a school requires a minimum number of counselors and administrators to run.
- LASA currently spends 1/3 of its magnet allocation on staff administration positions.

Magnet school staffing allocation also benefits students attending the local school.

- At Kealing, 50% of elective classes are filled by the Academy program and 50% by the Magnet program.
- At Fulmore, a large number of neighborhood students enroll in one or more magnet electives.
- LBJ students are eligible to enroll in a LASA AP class if that class is not available at LBJ.
- At all of the magnets, theater, arts, sports, band, orchestra and other UIL activities are partially supported by the magnet staffing allocation. In short, the magnet staffing allocation benefits and enriches all the schools and all students at those schools.

Decreasing the staffing allocation for magnet schools unfairly targets these specific schools.

- Other schools also receive additional staffing for programming needs, but through other mechanisms. McCallum Fine Arts and the Anderson IB program, for example, receive additional staffing beyond their allocation.

Information compiled and prepared by the Parents and Friends of LASA. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact president@pflasa.org.