



TEACHER FIELD GUIDE

Education policy

Follow the school money

The district budget is huge. Why is the theatre curtain still falling apart?

School budgets decide which rooms get repaired, which programs survive and how many adults are in the building, and students are rarely told where to ask. Learning to read a budget's year, stage and units turns "where did the money go?" into a question a school board can actually answer.

WHAT STUDENTS MAKE

Source card plus a 2–3 sentence question

THE CIVIC IDEA

Words that do the work.

Revenue sources Fuentes de ingresos

Where school money comes from: federal, state and local sources, in a mix that varies by place.

The NCES table shows the mix differs by state. It can't tell Mari what her district spends on curtains.

Budget stages Etapas del presupuesto

A proposed budget is a plan, an adopted budget is approved, and actual spending is what happened.

The document the crew found is the proposed budget for next year, not this year's actual spending.

Per-pupil amount Cantidad por estudiante

Money divided by the number of students, so places of different sizes can be compared.

A post compares one district's total with another's per-pupil figure. Those units don't match.

Equity vs. adequacy Equidad y suficiencia

Equity asks if resources are fairly shared given different needs; adequacy asks if there's enough to meet the goals.

Even a fair split might not be enough to replace a \$6,800 curtain. Those are different questions.

Intent vs. implementation Intención e implementación

What a policy is meant to do versus what actually happens when people carry it out.

The facilities line was meant for repairs; the question is how requests actually get prioritized.

Local control Control local

In most states, elected local school boards adopt budgets within state and federal rules.

Dec and Anika's school board, not the principal alone, adopts the district budget.



LUPA

⦿ “Proposed, next year” is printed at the top. That’s not what was spent this year.



Ay, bendito, that curtain. Okay, before we get mad at the big number, which line is supposed to fix it?

THE EVIDENCE

Handle the case file.

Every artifact comes with a question. The captions are the lesson.

BUDGET POSTED FOR NEXT SCHOOL
YEAR, SPRING

**District proposed budget,
facilities excerpt**

1 Is this a plan or what was actually spent?

POST

SHARED TUESDAY, 6:10 P.M.

Social post comparing two districts

2 Which figure is a total and which is per student?

FORM ISSUED TO THE THEATRE ADVISOR

**Facilities repair quote for
stage curtain**

3 Which budget line would pay this?

**DUDA**

① Total or per pupil? The post compares one of each.

THE WORKSHOP

45 minutes, block by block.

5 MIN

The curtain

TEACHER

Show Mateo's photo of the curtain (with permission) and the district's total budget.

STUDENTS

Write the question the photo raises and the question the total raises.

CHECK

Students notice the two questions aren't the same.

10 MIN

Label the number

TEACHER

Hand out the budget excerpt. Teach year, stage and units.

STUDENTS

Label the excerpt: which year, proposed or adopted, total or per pupil?

CHECK

Labels identify "proposed, next year, total."

10 MIN

Fix the comparison

TEACHER

Show the social post comparing a total with a per-pupil figure.

STUDENTS

Explain the mismatch and what you'd need to compare fairly.

CHECK

Students name matching units, year and category.

8 MIN

Who decides?

TEACHER

Map federal, state and local roles; explain equity vs. adequacy.

STUDENTS

Place the curtain request on the map: which level, which line, which body?

CHECK

Map points to the local board and a facilities line.

9 MIN

Write the question

TEACHER

Model a one-line budget question.

STUDENTS

Draft a question and a 60-second comment for the board.

CHECK

Question names a line, a need and a request.

3 MIN

Exit

TEACHER

Ask: what could make spending rise without improving a service?

STUDENTS

Write one possibility.

CHECK

Answers include cost increases or different categories.

DIFFERENTIATED ROUTES

One case. Seven ways in.

Each route changes what students read, make and prove, not only how long it takes.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Grades 6–8: Make a source card for the district budget and write one question the theatre crew could bring to the school board.

SOURCES

A one-page budget excerpt with the facilities line and a photo of the curtain.

PRODUCT

Source card plus a 2–3 sentence question

RAISES THE RIGOR

Explain why the district total alone can't tell you whether there's money for the curtain.

Supports

- Source-card template: year, stage, units, line
- Frames: “The budget says __. We noticed __. Could the board explain __?”
- Vocabulary: revenue, expenditure, per pupil
- Worked example

Success looks like

- ☐ Labels year, stage and units correctly
- ☐ Connects the curtain to a specific line
- ☐ Asks a question the board can answer
- ☐ Doesn't accuse anyone of wasting money

HIGH SCHOOL

Grades 9–10: Correct a misleading social post that compares mismatched budget figures, then write a better comparison.

SOURCES

The post, two district budget excerpts and the NCES revenue table.

PRODUCT

Correction post (80–120 words) plus worked calculation

RAISES THE RIGOR

Calculate a per-pupil figure from a total and enrollment to make a fair comparison.

Supports

- Comparison checklist: year, units, category, stage
- Model correction

Success looks like

- ☐ Identifies the unit mismatch
- ☐ Calculates a comparable figure correctly
- ☐ Cites the source and year
- ☐ States what the numbers still can't show

HIGH SCHOOL

Grades 11–12: Write a policy brief on how facilities requests should be prioritized in a district budget.

SOURCES

Case sources plus a teacher-selected district capital-planning document.

PRODUCT

Policy brief, 450–550 words

RAISES THE RIGOR

Distinguish equity from adequacy and recommend criteria for choosing among repair requests.

Supports

- Brief template
- Equity vs. adequacy explainer

Success looks like

- ☐ Accurately explains federal, state and local roles
- ☐ Uses equity and adequacy correctly
- ☐ Proposes clear criteria
- ☐ Acknowledges trade-offs

HIGH SCHOOL

Honors: Argue whether students should have a formal voice in school budget decisions.

SOURCES

Case sources plus one article on participatory budgeting in schools.

PRODUCT

Argument, 550–650 words

RAISES THE RIGOR

Address concerns about expertise and accountability.

Supports

- Claim/counterclaim chart
- Examples of student advisory roles

Success looks like

- ☐ Clear, qualified thesis
- ☐ Uses evidence from two contexts
- ☐ Engages counterarguments seriously
- ☐ Proposes a workable structure

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE

AP Lang: Write a synthesis argument: what should students bring to a school board budget hearing?

SOURCES

Sources: district budget excerpt, NCES table, Mateo's photo, Mari's conversation.

PRODUCT

Synthesis essay, about 550 words, 40 minutes

RAISES THE RIGOR

Integrate at least three sources, including the visual, and explain what each can and cannot prove.

Supports

- Source-citation practice
- Thesis with qualifier

Success looks like

- ☐ Defensible thesis
- ☐ Integrates three sources with commentary
- ☐ Uses the visual source rhetorically and accurately
- ☐ Sophisticated treatment of limits

MIDDLE YEARS

IB MYP: Investigate “How are school resources shared?” and create a visual comparing two districts fairly.

SOURCES

NCES table and two district budget summaries; global context: Fairness and development.

PRODUCT

Visual plus 200-word explanation

RAISES THE RIGOR

Explain one reason the comparison might still mislead.

Supports

- Inquiry statement frame
- Chart template with unit labels
- Checklist for fair comparisons

Success looks like

- ☐ Units and years match
- ☐ Visual is accurate and labeled
- ☐ Explains a limitation
- ☐ Connects to fairness

DIPLOMA

IB DP: Analyze how numbers function as arguments in public debate about school funding.

SOURCES

Case sources, including the misleading post.

PRODUCT

Analysis, 700–900 words

RAISES THE RIGOR

Evaluate when a number clarifies and when it hides a choice about values.

Supports

- TOK prompts on quantitative claims
- Perspective chart: board, teachers, students, taxpayers

Success looks like

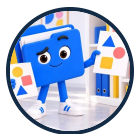
- ☐ Accurate treatment of the figures
- ☐ Analyzes several perspectives
- ☐ Links numbers to values and power
- ☐ Reaches a nuanced conclusion

Access for every learner

- Provide a pre-labeled budget excerpt with one line highlighted
- Use a calculator and a worked per-pupil example
- Spanish vocabulary: presupuesto, ingresos, gasto, por estudiante
- Read the budget notes aloud
- Reduce to the source-card task

Extension

- Find your own district's adopted budget and locate the facilities or capital line
- Compare two years of the same line and explain what might explain a change



PAUTA

⑤ The local board adopts the budget within state and federal rules.

ANNOTATED STUDENT WORK

What a draft shows us.

Write the question the theatre crew should bring to the school board.

FIRST DRAFT

Our district has a ¹ \$48 million budget but our theatre curtain is ⁵ ripped and gross. That's so much money and ² they can't even fix one curtain? It has been like this since before any of us joined the crew and it keeps getting worse every show. Where is all the money going? ³ Other districts get way more. I saw a post that said so. We deserve better and ⁴ the board needs to explain themselves. We are honestly tired of waiting for this.

¹ **EVIDENCE** Is this proposed or adopted, and for which year? Label it.

² **GAP** The total covers everything. Name the line that should cover repairs.

- 3 **GAP** Compared how? Totals, per pupil, same year? Show the matching figures.
- 4 **AUDIENCE** Turn this into a specific question they can answer.
- 5 **STRENGTH** A real observation. Add the evidence: the photo and a repair quote.

REVISED

Our question is about next year's proposed budget. The theatre curtain is torn at the seam and no longer closes fully; we have a photo and a \$6,800 replacement quote from the facilities office. The proposed budget lists \$310,000 for building repairs across the district. We'd like to know whether stage equipment is covered by that line or a different one, how repair requests are ranked, and when the board considers them. Could a student from the theatre crew submit a written request before the budget is adopted? Thank you for considering it.

ASSESSMENT

One-page rubric.

Mark the evidence you see. Leave room for a comment and a next step.

CRITERION	BEGINNING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	ADVANCED
Evidence	☐ Uses an unlabeled total.	☐ Uses a figure without year or stage.	☐ Labels year, stage and line and cites the need.	☐ Adds a repair quote and notes what the figures can't show.
Reasoning	☐ Assumes waste or theft.	☐ Compares mismatched numbers.	☐ Links the need to a specific budget line.	☐ Explains process questions: ranking, timing, decision-maker.
Audience & purpose	☐ Accuses the board.	☐ Complains without a request.	☐ Asks a question the board can answer.	☐ Asks a question and offers a concrete way for students to contribute.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Removes insults only.	☐ Adds labels and a specific line.	☐ Explains how each change makes an answer more likely.

Evidence I saw

Next step

STANDARDS

What this case teaches, by the book.

CCSS 6–8**4**

RI.6.7 Students connect the budget table's numbers with the text labels and notes.

RH.6-8.7 Students integrate a budget chart with the written question they want answered.

SL.6.4 Students present a budget question with relevant facts and clear delivery.

W.8.2 Students explain why a total and a per-pupil number can't be compared directly.

CCSS 9–10**3**

RH.9-10.7 Students integrate budget figures with the district's written explanation.

RI.9-10.8 Students evaluate the reasoning in a social post comparing mismatched figures.

SL.9-10.4 Students present a two-minute budget question to a mock board.

CCSS 11–12**3**

RI.11-12.7 Students integrate the district budget, NCES data and a photo of the curtain.

RH.11-12.8 Students evaluate the premises behind claims that the district “has the money.”

W.11-12.1 Students argue for a budget priority with evidence and counterclaims.

C3 Framework**4**

D2.Civ.4.6–8 Students explain the powers of local school boards compared with state and federal governments.

D2.Civ.11.9–12 Students evaluate how the budget process achieves or misses civic purposes.

D2.Civ.13.9–12 Students evaluate intended and unintended outcomes of how facilities money is allocated.

D4.8.9–12 Students apply democratic procedures by preparing a question for the board.

AP English Language

3

Claims and Evidence (CLE) Students use budget figures accurately and label their units.

Reasoning and Organization (REO) Students build a line of reasoning from observed need to budget line to request.

Rhetorical Situation (RHS) Students tailor a comment to a board that must balance many requests.

IB MYP

3

Individuals and Societies B: Investigating Students investigate where facilities money comes from and who decides.

Individuals and Societies D: Thinking critically Students evaluate what budget number can and cannot show

Individuals and Societies C: Communicating Students present findings with correct units and source

IB DP**2****Global Politics — key concepts: power, equality and development**

Students analyze how resource decisions distribute opportunity.

Theory of Knowledge — Knowledge and politics (optional theme)

Students ask how numbers gain authority in public debate.

TAKE IT OFF THE PAGE

Find one line in your school's budget.

1. With a teacher or advisor, find your district's budget on its website
2. Label the document's year and stage
3. Find one line connected to something you use (facilities, arts, technology)
4. Ask your student council how students can submit a budget question or comment

WHO TO ASK

Student council advisor, school business office, school board clerk, principal

STAY SAFE

Get permission before photographing spaces or people at school. Stick to observed facts when posting about budgets.



VOZ

➞ One line, one need, one question. That gives the board something to answer.