What is a Student-Centered Budget?

Budget business as usual. . .

Starts with the previous year's expenditures as the baseline.

This approach preferences already funded positions and programs. Assumes that every dollar spent last year was equally effective and requires no data to justify ongoing investment.

Budget team operates independently from academic leaders and educators on the ground.

Leads to things like non-strategic, across- the-board cuts in various departments.

Adult-centric staffing decisions.

Bargaining and adult politics determine what positions are budgeted and then allocated to schools, with little regard to student interest. Central office positions furthest from students are protected over those closest to students.

No consistent use of annual measurable outcomes.

Programs and contracts are regularly proposed without a clear rationale, intended outcome, or system for accountability.

Equity in name only.

Equity is stated as a value but is only reflected in key decisions when it comes to basic needs like meals for low-income families. Equitable access to instruction is deemed too expensive or "extra".

Tokenism.

Community and family engagement is treated as a one-way discussion, with limited opportunities for meaningful input for anyone but the most powerful voices.

A student-centered budget...

Starts from scratch, identifying priorities and objectives, with every budget line included for an explicit, student-centered purpose.

What specifically does our district hope to achieve next year in terms of student well-being and outcomes and how will we target resources accordingly?

Academics integrated within the budget.

Co-created by instructional leaders. Ultimately this requires an organizational culture and vision from top leaders that recognizes that all resource decisions are academic decisions (and vice versa). And some accountability for academic outcomes rests with financial leaders.

Creates staffing models designed to ensure students' core academic needs are met.

Asks questions like: How many teachers do we need to provide the student instructional experience? How many administrators and support staff are needed to enable that instruction? What other positions are critical to ensuring students have meaningful relationships?

Demands data and evidence of effectiveness

to decide which investments are most likely to have positive student impact.

Equitably allocates resources.

Ensures every student has what they need to access excellent instruction, including people, time and money.

Partnership.

Meaningfully engages families and the community early in the process and often in a two-way discussion.