



## Observer Corps Report

**Observer:** Linda Gass

**Meeting Observed:** Special Called Meeting - FY27 Budget Meeting

**Meeting Date:** 4/23/26

[Agenda](#)

[Video Recording](#)

### **Three Main Observations:**

1. The Board of Education unanimously approved three budgets for the fiscal year 2027: a \$717 million General Purpose Budget, an \$82 million Capital Budget, and a \$33 million Nutrition Budget. The budgets will be presented to the Knox County Commission for approval in May.
2. Board members asked clarifying questions about declining enrollment, resulting in the cutting of 57 teaching positions and 27 staff roles. One board member raised concerns about not having sufficient time to review the budget before the vote.
3. The General Purpose Budget is largely dedicated to teacher and staff salaries and wages. It includes a 2.5% raise for certified teachers and a 2% raise for general employees.

### **NOTES**

Budget approval for FY 2027 was the only item on the agenda. Three items; three votes, all unanimous (ayes).

[FY27 KCS Budget](#)

#### Public Forum

One person spoke (Cadence Collins). She said there is a need for transparency, She is particularly concerned with the cuts of 57 teaching positions and 27 staff roles. When was the decision made? These numbers were not shared at the community budget meeting she attended.

Item 1 - Approve the Fiscal Year 2027 General Purpose Budget at the Major Category Level for \$717,685,000.00

**Board member Kat Bike** asked several questions about the technology line items.

**Ms. Lautner** responded there is no single line item for technology in the budget. It is present in hardware, general purpose and the capital improvement plan software throughout the entire budget. Demystify that where we spend - a lot is curriculum (software) and instruction. Compared to 15 yrs ago we spent more on textbooks, now more on technology. Lots of software, administrative, speech technology, also personnel costs. FY27 proposal \$12 million technology spending across hardware, software, and personnel, and across 3 budgets.

Q: Ms. Bike - How much of the percentage of the \$12million is hardware. If we were not one-to-one, what would it take to shrink the budget?

A: Ms. Lautner said \$1.3 million in replacement cycle costs is reflected in this year's budget.

Q: Ms. Bike - Is it \$80,000 for instructional technology?

A: Ms. Lautner - Yes.

Q: Ms. Bike - How does this compare with paper resources?

A: Ms. Lautner - We would need to research it more. We would have to go back to FY 25 analog, where device software was \$6.7 million. KCS will continue to study how technology is being used.

Q: Ms. Bike - Asked about declining enrollment data and impacts to teachers/staff

A: **Ms. Hemmellgarn** - staffing allocation formulas have not changed. Align resources where students are.

Q: Ms. Bike - What is the plan on reassigning the impacted teachers?

A: Ms. Hemmellgarn - We are committed to keeping the teachers in reassigned roles. Not all the positions are impacted. Some are going away from natural attrition or retirement. We are committed to keeping those who want to stay.

Q: Ms. Bike - In considering student-teacher ratios, how do students with IEPs who need supports get taken into consideration?

A: Ms. Hemmellgarn - We have the at-risk factor staffing formula. Our special education teaching needs fall outside the student-teacher ratio formula, and are figured separately.

A: **Dr Rysewyk** added p 11 in the "book" (*not sure what book he is referring to*) shows 57 positions are being reduced. We are trying to be transparent. See red line, held harmless, keep teachers at school. For the last four years, we've stayed true to ratios - One to 20 in the classroom every year. Ratios of fluctuating between 18, 17, 16, were hard to afford over time. In prior yrs, we had a position of hold harmless. With a budget with a 2.5 percent revenue growth, it isn't huge. We had to look at how do we maintain those student-teacher ratios. Also, this isn't special to Knox Co. Lower student enrollment in public schools is common across TN - Anderson, Blount, across TN. We didn't balance budget by reducing teachers.

Q: Ms. Bike - what is the plan for intellectually gifted students?

A: **Dr. Brown** - For first time ever, we designated four positions for gifted students (formerly Gifted & Talented program) when child is screened, we test for giftedness. Will cont Dr Carter is prepared to make shifts. IEP services.

Q Ms. Bike - Are there any incentives for classroom teachers?

A: **Dr. Wilson** - Can add endorsement. Grant money.

Q: Ms. Bike - can you address teacher pay increase?

A: Ms. Hemmellgarn - All teachers will get a pay increase regardless of which scale they are on. Certified teachers will receive a 2.5 percent pay increase; general teachers a 2 percent pay increase. Plus the step increase.

Q: **Board member Mr. Triplett** - At what point does declining enrollment affect our ability to keep increasing our budget?

A: Mr. Rysewyk - it has an impact. We received \$17 million in new dollars, but made \$22 million in investments. This means each department had to cut things. Any time enrollment goes down, that impacts TISSA funds and is a reduction to revenue in previous years. Unfortunately, student reduction doesn't reduce our cost to operate. Student reduction impacts us a lot. Losing 1500 -1600 kids in four years, that's a significant impact.

Comment: Mr. Triplett - Concerns about the timeline of the budget. We had 6 days to review this large budget and be ready to vote on it. We don't get any info ahead of the individual budget meeting so it's not a time to ask questions. If we can get something before the individual budget meeting so we can ask questions that would be appreciated.

Q: Mr. Triplett - do we have a regular cadence of reviewing "Contract of services?" (pg.22)

A: Dr. Rysewyk - Five years is max for contractor services, renewed each year.

Q: Mr. Triplett - questioned the increase in devices funded?

A: Dr. Adams - Increase because we've funded outside of the general purpose budget. We will need to continue this funding moving forward.

Q: Mr. Triplett - On p. 28 the visions budgets, operation budget is largest percentage increase. Asked to explain the allocations.

A: Dr. Adams - Increase in every department. Captures 2 percent raise across the board. We deferred the replacement cycle for box trucks for several years due to significant budgetary impacts. We need to replace those trucks. We also have the 1-to-1 device replacements factored in as well.

Q: Mr. Triplett - Do we get state dollars for preschool funding?

A: Dr. Wilson - We do receive state dollars through a grant, but there is a match portion.

Q: Mr. Triplett - Is this a larger increase than normal?

A: Dr. Wilson - Yes

Comment - Ms. Kristy - We have to submit the budget to County Commission by May 1.

Motion: Ms. Morgan. All in favor, no nays.

#### Item 7 - Approve Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Budget for \$82,011,000

Q: Ms. Bike - how does a project get added to the capital plan?

A: Dr. Adams - window of five yrs to balance. A caveat if there was a natural disaster or rezoning, we would go through the process. We have three projects in the capital plan - 1 year design process and 2 construction and approvals.

Q: Ms. Bike - I have 9 schools in my district, some are older. What impacts need to be seen in population growth to get projects looked at more quickly?

A: Dr. Adams - We look on a school by school basis. Look at surrounding schools if they absorb more students. We haven't purchased new portables, with the exception of a fire. Great job maintaining. Same as brick and mortar. We look at rezoning first.

Q: Ms. Bike - If slow sustained growth in district and rezoning isn't an option.

A: Dr. Rysewyk - We can't raise money. The Board of Education can't levy taxes. Our caps are set by the County, which also funds libraries, health dept. Limit to capital project for five years capital plan. We have to be frugal with what we put in the capital plan. With declining enrollment, we look at rezoning first. We are restricted and locked into County debt.

Q: Ms. Bike - is there any future plan to do something other than portables?

A: Ms. Lautner - Our team [who??] and Dr Adams' team discuss how to plan for growth. Knox County sees surges in concentrated areas, others declining. We identify where. In Powell, rezoning was the best option due to availability in nearby schools. Dr Adams did well in maintenance and getting as much life out of facilities as possible. We strategically use what we have, looking at not just how many a school will hold, but how many you can educate. If schools are losing students, they may have available seats, where we can shift teachers. It has been a protracted project. The viable solution isn't new construction any more.

Motion made: All ayes.

Item 8 - Approve Fiscal Year 2027 Nutrition Fund Budget at Major Category Level for \$33,943,000

**Q: Board member Ms.Morgan:** Dr. Adams, will you please confirm that the price of lunch is not increasing? Our parents will appreciate hearing that.

A: Dr. Adams - Yes, that's correct.

**Q. Board member Ms. Fontenot Ridley** - How much would it cost for teachers, staff, administration to not have to pay for lunch?

A: Dr. Adams - \$5.5 million is a significant amount of the budget that pays for students.

A: Dr. Rysewyk - We'd have to pay into nutrition. These are federal dollars allocated only for students. If we wanted to pay for staff meals, it would have to come out of our general purpose budget.

Motion made: All ayes

Board Forum

Student Representative - selection committee meeting soon for next student representative

Ms. Fotentot Ridley - Congratulation to all the athletes who competed in the Elite Regional Meet.

Ms. Bike - Excited to attend graduations soon. Looking forward to gifted support.

Ms. Morgan - Thanked Dr. Rysewyk and team for the budget and answering questions. Probably four hrs budget mtg. Make these dollars count.

Ms. Kristy - thank you for staff helping at the regional track meet

Adjourned at 5:56 p.m. .