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GFOA: Best Practices in School Budgeting Framework Aligns Resources and Student Outcomes.

GFOA's best practices in school guidelines are centered on a comprehensive budget process framework focused on academic and finance collaboration to best align resources and desired student outcomes. The framework represents the culmination of a multi-year effort led by GFOA, with input from numerous school district officials and other experts in education finance to develop guidelines for better budgeting tailored specifically for school districts.

The recommended framework is not limited to financial topics. A robust budget process should engage and communicate with stakeholders, along with prioritizing goals, allocating resources, and tracking progress. The budget process is a plan, a tool for transparency, and a structure for ensuring accountability.

Budgeting—the process by which programs and services are planned and funds are allocated to accomplish their goals— is crucial to any organization's success. The need for better budgeting is ever more pressing given the constant pressure to provide high-quality services with limited resources. This is especially true in school districts, where budget decisions can affect the education of future generations.

GFOA's best practices in school budgeting framework begins with guidelines for district-wide communication and collaboration, including setting baseline expectations for what the budget process will achieve. The focus then shifts to developing robust goals and integrating the process with the district's strategic plan, including developing a comprehensive package for implementing a district's goals, or instructional priorities. Also included are guidelines on how to develop a strategic financial plan and a budget document that communicates not only the district's financial plan but also student learning objectives. To help assess and improve programs, services, and the budget process, recommendations for incorporating continuous improvement principles are embedded throughout the framework.

The framework is organized around five major steps or phases: 1) plan and prepare; 2) set instructional priorities; 3) pay for priorities; 4) implement plan; and 5) ensure sustainability. Included within each of the five major steps are more specific sub-steps, which provide details on how to implement the best practices, including supporting evidence and research on their effectiveness. Each of the 15 sub-steps include a highlight of recommendations, the key points, and also how the recommendations meet the criteria related to [GFOA's Award for Best Practices in School Budgeting](#).

Districts can find additional resources that complementing the best practices in school budgeting—including tools for implementing recommendations and case studies on districts use of the framework—www.smarterschoolspending.org.

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