



School Budget Communication Kit

For K-12 business managers, communications teams, and district leaders

Make the change understandable.

Use this kit to explain one budget change: the numbers behind it, the practical effect, the decision status, and the next update. Start with verified facts, then write for someone outside the business office.

A 30-MINUTE DRAFTING SESSION

Bring the current budget version, the comparison version, and the supporting calculation. Choose one audience and one main question. Suggested timing below covers drafting only; allow separate time for district review.

01 CHECK THE FACTS | 10 MINUTES

Use page 2 as an example, then complete page 3. Keep estimates, proposals, and approved actions distinct.

02 WRITE THE UPDATE | 10 MINUTES

Use page 4. Explain what changes for people, what remains uncertain, and where the official details live.

03 TEST THE MESSAGE | 10 MINUTES

Use pages 5-6 to prepare answers, check numbers, and assign the next update. Ask an unfamiliar reader to explain the change back.

Original planning tools from Commerce Street Cares. Fictional examples are for practice. Use your district's normal review, approval, notice, and recordkeeping processes.



Worked example: explain the increase

Fictional training scenario. Dollar amounts, dates, and actions are illustrative.

Same annual supplies scope	Earlier plan	Revised estimate
Classroom materials	\$80,000	\$92,000
Delivery	\$5,000	\$8,000
Total	\$85,000	\$100,000

Change: \$100,000 - \$85,000 = \$15,000. **Percentage:** \$15,000 / \$85,000 = 17.6% (rounded).

The 17.6% applies to this supplies-and-delivery estimate, not the entire district budget. The fictional comparison holds the budget period and scope constant.

BEFORE | TOO VAGUE

“Due to inflationary pressures, the district is adjusting allocations to maintain operational effectiveness.”

AFTER | A CLEARER DRAFT

“Our annual classroom-supplies and delivery estimate is now \$100,000, compared with \$85,000 in the earlier plan. The \$15,000 increase reflects \$12,000 more for materials and \$3,000 more for delivery. These are estimates, not approved spending changes. Staff are reviewing reuse and order timing; no service change has been approved in this scenario.”

Finish with the real source and next step

Add the dated official document, review route, public question channel, and next-update date. Do not publish this fictional paragraph as a district announcement.



Build the fact sheet first

Working copy | Budget period: _____ Owner: _____ As of: _____

1. Compare like with like

Budget line / scope, earlier version and date, revised version and date, source document and page.

2. Show the calculation

Earlier \$ _____ Revised \$ _____ Difference \$ _____ % = difference / earlier x 100. If earlier is zero, use dollar change.

3. Explain the drivers

Amounts by cause must reconcile to the difference. Separate rate, quantity, scope, timing, and corrections.

4. Label the decision and impact

Estimate / proposal / approved action? Evidence of status? Verified service effect? What has not been decided?

5. Assign the unknowns

What is missing? Who will verify it? By when? Which public source can readers consult?



Draft the community update

Copy this structure into your district channel. Replace every bracket before release.

HEADLINE + STATUS

[Specific budget area]: [what changed] [Estimate / proposal / approved action] | [Budget period] | Updated [date]

THE MAIN MESSAGE

"For [period], [budget area] is [new amount], compared with [earlier amount and version]. The difference is [amount]. [Explain the main verified reason in everyday language]."

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PEOPLE

"For [audience / service], this means [verified practical effect]. [Action] is [status]. We are still checking [unknown], and [owner / department] will report back by [date]."

SOURCE + NEXT STEP

"Read [official document title / date / page or section] at [accessible link]. Submit questions through [public channel]. Our next update will be [date / location], even if the review is still underway."

Plain-language swaps

"Reallocation" → explain what money moves from and to.

"Variance" → say "difference" and name the comparison.

"No impact" → specify which service, for what period, and how verified.

Avoid an unsupported promise. A draft, estimate, or recommendation is not an approved decision.



Prepare for the questions

Answer framework | Adapt to verified facts; do not copy unsupported assurances.

Why did this change?

Name the comparison and the causes with amounts. If the cause is still under review, say so and identify the next check.

Does this mean a service will be cut?

State only verified effects. If options are still being reviewed: "No decision on [specific option] has been made as of [date]. The next review is [date]."

Why can't another fund pay for it?

Have finance verify the permitted uses and available balance. Explain the specific constraint in ordinary language; do not assume all money is interchangeable.

Could we reuse items or delay spending?

Describe the options actually evaluated, their limits, and any effect on service or timing. Distinguish a deferred cost from a lasting reduction.

Who decides, and how can we ask questions?

Name the verified decision route, official materials, public question channel, and next-update date. Use approved public contacts.

What if we do not know the answer yet?

"We are checking [specific issue]. [Department] owns the follow-up. We will post an update at [location] by [date]." Do not fill the gap with a guess.

Keep personal student, employee, and other nonpublic details out of public replies. Use aggregate, approved information.



Review, release, and close the loop

Internal release record | Draft title / version: _____

NUMBERS AND SOURCES

- ☐ Same period, scope, and units. ☐ Totals and percentage denominator checked.
- ☐ Causes reconcile to the change. ☐ Current official source linked.

STATUS AND MEANING

- ☐ Estimate, proposal, and approval clearly distinguished.
- ☐ Practical effects verified. ☐ Unknowns have an owner and due date.

READABILITY AND ACCESS

- ☐ Unfamiliar reader can state the change and next step. ☐ Acronyms explained.
- ☐ Key facts appear in text, not only a graphic. ☐ Links work.
- ☐ Language and accessible-format needs reviewed through district processes.

RELEASE CONTROL

- ☐ Financial reviewer and communications reviewer signed off.
- ☐ Required district approvals complete. ☐ All channel versions match.
- ☐ Public question route and next-update date confirmed.

Financial review: _____ Date: _____

Communications / authorized approval: _____ Date: _____

Release owner: _____ Channel / date: _____

Next update owner / date: _____

IF A FACT CHANGES AFTER RELEASE

Record the correction, update the dated source, and use the district's correction process. Keep an internal record of what changed and who approved it.