

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 10, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Bobbi Brown. Board member Albert Benejan joined the meeting subsequently as indicated.

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the committee's minutes of February 10, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan joined the meeting.

The next agenda item was the 2020-21 budget update. Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said the third formal fiscal forecast of the fiscal year was recently completed and she continues to project a balanced budget, without a need to withdraw from the \$2 million pre-2018 component of the Internal Service Fund(ISF). Surplus funds of \$3 million from the ISF are included in the budget plan.

Ms. Siegel said the projected shortfall in nutrition continues to be four to five million dollars, which is built into the operating budget forecast. The state has provided updated guidance regarding ESSER I and II funds for revenue loss related to food service. The state has advised that districts that have a shortfall in federal funds for nutrition and the need is related to the coronavirus a portion of ESSER funds may be used in covering outstanding costs.

Ms. Siegel said she did not have a specific number for the amount at this time of ESSER funds that will be used.

Ms. Siegel said the excess cap for out-of-district special education will be finalized this month. The amount of special education expenses have been rising, although the number of out-of-district placements is lower than last year. She said juvenile detention revenue and Medicaid reimbursement revenue are lower than last year. Overall, Ms. Siegel said the trends tend to be balanced in this area.

Ms. Siegel noted savings in budget areas are applied to losses in other areas of the budget.

Ms. Siegel said the curriculum renewal initiatives include the math for Grades 9 and 10 is about \$548,000 over six years; math for Grades 2 to 5 is about \$1.2 million; literacy for Grades 7 and 8 will be about \$660,000; and an add-on component for about

\$130,000. An online learning service for ELL students is about \$105,000 for five years. The grand total is about \$2.6 million.

Ms. Siegel said districts must maintain a curriculum renewal cycle in order to keep curriculum and the related digital resources up to date.

Ms. Siegel said eight schools have received low-performing bond grants, which are focused on physical facilities and technology. Barnum, Bassick, BMA, Cross, Dunbar, Harding, Marin, and Roosevelt have received about \$200,000 each.

Ms. Siegel said the district remains in deficit prevention mode, including stringent cost control and management.

Mr. Sokolovic said the news on nutrition funds was excellent.

Ms. Siegel reported on the 2021-22 budget request, the next agenda item. She noted the budget request was approved by the board on February 3rd. She noted the mayor will submit the proposed general fund city budget on April 3rd and the board will meet with the City Council's Budget & Appropriations Committee.

Supt. Testani said there was a meeting this afternoon with the Alliance districts and a state bill has been

passed to provide PILOT funding and the city is set to receive over \$5 million. He said, in light of this new finding, he has requested the city use this as a pass-through to the Board of Education since it would not have been received if we were not an Alliance district. He said the funding can be added to the MBR.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested an information campaign on this issue. The superintendent said he would be doing so.

Ms. Siegel said the governor's proposed budget has ECS at the same level as last year and the district has objected to the flat funding. She noted an additional \$2.3 million being received had been built into the budget plan. She said the flat budget would create a fiscal cliff that would be create two years later when ESSER grants have expired.

The next agenda item was on the ESSER II funding. Ms. Siegel said the funding for Bridgeport is about \$40.5 million. The grant will expire on September 30, 2023. Funds were allocated on the basis of the Title I methodology with 2020 data. There is not a requirement for equitable services to nonpublic schools. The overall goals are educational recovery and learning acceleration for every student.

Ms. Siegel said the official guidelines were shared with the board. The four state priorities are academic support, learning loss, learning acceleration and

recovery, which include equity and access family and community connections; school safety and social-emotional wellbeing of the student and the staff; and remote learning, staff development, and the digital divide. All allocations must be Covid-related.

Ms. Siegel said the needs assessment tools entails discussion with four stakeholder groups, which have been created by the superintendent. She smart goals are to be established with attainable criteria that is measurable. She described the process that will be used, with the application to be submitted to the state by the end of March.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed significant programming changes due to the funding should be brought to the Finance Committee and the board for input and oversight. Supt. Testani said he understood.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the district has to apply for the funding and designate the areas where it will be spent, and then funds are released. He said the money had to be used or it is returned to the federal government. He said the district would not allow any amount of money to go back.

Ms. Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on April 21, 2021*