

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held September 21, 2021, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. Present were Chair Joseph Sokolovic, and member Bobbi Brown. Board members John Weldon and Albert Benejan joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of May 12, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the budget closeout.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said the financial condition report was completed and then posted in the first week of September. She said the operating budget ended in a surplus condition. The surplus was moved to the Internal Service Fund(ISF). It was not needed to withdraw any funds from the ISF in 2020-21 in order to balance the budget.

Ms. Siegel said in the end the food and nutrition budget ended with a positive balance of \$875,812.

In summary, Ms. Siegel said the ISF currently has on deposit the \$2 million carried forward from the pre-Connecticut partnership, \$6.5 million from 2019-20, \$10.8 million from the end of 2021, and the \$875,000 positive balance from the

food and nutrition budget. The grand total is about \$20 million.

Ms. Siegel said as part of the 2021-22 budget, \$9.5 million of the ISF funds have been committed. She said the remaining balance will be available to balance budgets and counteract the fiscal cliff that is forecast in coming years.

Ms. Siegel noted the rising costs of special education services. She said grant funds would be used to the optimum extent possible where permissible. Nine additional special education resource teacher positions were allocated in the current year.

Ms. Siegel said the budget gap plan for the current fiscal year includes \$2 million from the city and \$1.5 million from the state in new revenue. The balance of \$13.5 million is obtained through the ISF, grant funds, and the deficit prevention mode. She added the \$9.5 million projected from the ISF could be lower, but it is not anticipated to be higher.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said about \$2 million can usually be saved through deficit prevention mode. Mr. Sokolovic said the fiscal cliff was looming in 2024-25. Supt. Testani said advocacy would continue for funding in advance of the fiscal cliff.

Mr. Weldon and Mr. Benejan joined the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested a representative from the board present these numbers of the City Council and the state. The superintendent noted the City Council has not resumed in-person meetings as of yet. He said he had spoken informally with members of the legislative delegation and Rep. Himes.

The next agenda item was an update on ESSER and ARP funds.

Supt. Testani said the district's written application has been submitted to the state and is awaiting approval. He noted the district had been recognized for its response to the pandemic.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said supplies of PPE and cleaning supplies were in good shape. He said air purifiers are being installed in all school cafeterias. Additional units will be added to classrooms and offices. He said the units were funded by federal funds for air quality and ventilation.

Supt. Testani said the federal funds did not need to be spent rapidly because the funding continues for three years, which allows for planning. He said it is not an overnight process.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on entering into a joint committee with the City of Bridgeport concerning the pooling of ARP and ESSER funds.

Mr. Weldon said he understood this as a staff-level selection committee to evaluate proposals. The superintendent said the city has placed its funds in various buckets, one of which is for youth. He said there were discussions with the city about city/board initiatives in the area of youth programs. He said he wanted to make sure that the programs service Bridgeport Public School students. He suggested two board members serve on the committee, along with staff members and city representatives.

Mr. Sokolovic asked if the programs could be brought to the district's buildings to make sure the overwhelming majority of youth served are district students.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the assumption is that he would be the chair of the committee.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the proposed \$2 million board contribution would have to remain in the board's ESSER grant and the board's account.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the initiative began with the city approaching him. He said he thought it would be a good idea to get more community collaboration in delivering services. He said combining city and board funds would allow more reach of community partners and youth. The city decided to increase its contribution to \$3.5 million. He said the board would have the majority of folks on the committee.

Mr. Benejan said he would like to be part of the committee. Mr. Weldon said he would send out an e-mail to the board on the subject.

Ms., Brown said a lot of parents don't know many programs exist, so this would create greater exposure.

Mr. Sokolovic noted every taxpayer, parent or group has an equal opportunity to give input into the expenditure of ESSER/ARP funds via public forums. The superintendent noted the process was transparent, with many of the expenditures coming through the board.

In response to a question about security overtime, Supt. Testani said Lt. Grech decides whether security details are needed for any given event. He said there is a misconception created by the union that a lot of police overtime is being paid. He said security was not needed at a backpack giveaway on a Saturday outdoors. He said the Labor Board indicated employing security guards when buildings are open is at the discretion of the district.

Mr. Weldon said Lt. Grech is in charge of overall security and he makes an evaluation what type of security presence is needed. Mr. Benejan said he would like to see the matter discussed in the Facilities Committee.

The superintendent said Lighthouse does not hire security officers any longer. They use a climate specialist and the program runs smoothly.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the security costs, including overtime, are over \$5 million a year. The superintendent characterized that as a lot of money.

Ms. Brown moved *“to recommend to the full board that we enter into a joint committee with the City of Bridgeport concerning the pooling of ARP and ESSER funds with a dollar amount of \$2 million to be pooled with the city.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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