

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 27, 2021, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. Present were Chair Joseph Sokolovic, and member Bobbi Brown. Board member 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 September 21, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was an overview on the district's grants.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said a PowerPoint on the screen would be displayed. She said there are two major types of grants: allocated and competitive.

Ms. Siegel said the focus tonight would be the allocated grants, which are determined by a formula, and the major allocated grants to fund the strategic educational plan: Alliance/ECS, state Priority; federal Title I, Title IIA, Title III and state Bilingual; Title IV; and IDEA.

Ms. Siegel said the Alliance/ECS grant is part of the operating budget. She said services funded included prep enhancement teacher allocation; guidance counselors and library/media specialists at the elementary level; special

education resource teachers; technology and curriculum renewal; and a percentage of positions focused on educational support.

Ms. Siegel said the state Priority Grant includes the extended school hours and summer components. The total is about \$5.7 million. Also funded are dropout prevention; reading and math instruction; parent involvement; and technology. The summer component funds literacy support, early reading, and a portion of the special education extended school year. Voluntary extended day programs at Classical Studies are also covered.

Ms. Siegel said the federal Title I grant is designed to cover the educational needs of children in the nation's highest poverty schools. The \$14.2 million amount includes a non-public school component of several hundred thousand dollars. Title I funds the grants office staff; staff in the early childhood office and the school readiness program; three additional pre-K teachers; the excess operating costs for pre-K classes; paraprofessionals; substitute teacher and para costs; and parent involvement.

Ms. Siegel said the Title IIA grant is about \$1.2 million, which is focused on recruitment of employees and teachers and professional development. Human resource positions are funded, along with a percentage of key senior leadership; Teach for America costs; new teacher orientation and support; and professional development.

Ms. Siegel said Title IV was initiated in 2017-18 and Congress has continued to fund it. It covers student support and academic enrichment, with the focus on rounded educational opportunities; safe and healthy students, including social-emotional learning; chronic absenteeism;

and anti-bullying. Technology for professional learning and elective courses are also covered.

Ms. Siegel then discussed the federal IDEA grant, which covers the education of children with disabilities. She noted grants provide supplemental services as a general rule, however, IDEA is utilized to fund mandated special education services, including the transition center; the special education ombudsman at Skane; two pre-K teachers and paras; a large number of special ed assistants; all of the therapeutic support facilitators; PPT and evaluation support; substitution special ed paras; and instructional materials for CPI courses.

Ms. Siegel discussed the grants summary document on the screen, which includes the history of the major grants starting in 2014-15. She noted the state Priority Grant has been reduced from \$6.7 million to \$5.6 million currently, a loss of about 25 percent.

Mr. Benejan joined the meeting.

Ms. Siegel said there is a new grant from ARP/ESSER specifically for IDEA, covering pre-K over two years, and K to 12, which is funding four new classes.

In response to a question, Nadira Clarke, director of grants said there are 131 smaller private grants, including direct donations.

Ms. Siegel said the financial condition report posted five times a year includes a tab on every grant that the district is administering, including encumbrances, expenditures, and balances.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the district pursues every possible grant, but there has to be a program coordinator available to manage it.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel described the positions in the finance office, the business office, the payroll office, and the grants office. She said there are 22 fulltime positions currently.

Mr. Sokolovic said the staff does a phenomenal job managing all aspects of finance. He said he believed the ladies and gentlemen of the department were doing a fine job.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke described grants in the special education area.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke described the agreements that must be put in place for a private grant, which includes review by herself and the superintendent. Supt. Testani said the agreements are important to be sure liability insurance is in place and that the employers or volunteers of the granting entity are vetted properly.

The next agenda item was an update on the ESSER funding balance.

Ms. Siegel said the first formal financial condition for 2021-22 will be completed on October 31st. She said the forecast for all major grants will be ongoing through November. She said the figures discussed would be preliminary based on initial projections.

Ms. Siegel said the three grants are CARES, ESSER II, and ARP/ESSER. She said fiscal forecasting in regard to

personnel only reflects the payroll to date, not the full cost of the position for a whole year.

Ms. Siegel said the CARES grant will expire on September 30, 2022. The appropriation was about \$8.7 million. At the end of the last fiscal year about \$1.4 million was carried forward. The current balance is about \$140,000. The remaining funds will likely be spent by June 30th of this fiscal year.

Ms. Siegel said ESSER II expires on September 30, 2023. The appropriation was about \$44.6 million. In 2020-21, \$1.9 million was expended for technology, with the balance carried forward. Initial projections are \$18 to \$20 million will be spent in the current year, with the balance to be expended in 2022-23 in accordance with the budget plan.

Ms. Siegel said ESSER III will expire on September 30, 2024. The appropriation was over \$100 million. In the current year the projection is between \$28 and \$30 million will be spent, with the balance spent in the following two years in accordance with the plan.

In response to a question about a backup plan, Supt. Testani said the facilities department is always in need of additional funding, including in the HVAC area, so funds could be redeployed into that area. Columbus and Cross are being investigated for future HVAC systems. He said resources are being put into technology, but there are currently supply chain issues. He said installations of Promethean boards in classrooms are underway with two vendors.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on November 17, 2021