

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:21 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and Bobbi Brown. Board member Albert Benejan was present. Board member John Weldon joined the meeting subsequently as indicated.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the committee's minutes of January 13, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic noted the first two agenda items had been presented to the board last week.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, presented a 2020-21 budget update. She said the February 28th financial condition report will be posted in the first week of March. A balanced condition is still projected.

Ms. Siegel said she has been informed all board of education items throughout the country are not allowable under FEMA guidelines and other grants such as the CARES Act and ESSER II must be utilized first.

Ms. Siegel said the projected shortfall in the nutrition department is between four and five million dollars, with \$4.8 million used in the forecast.

Ms. Siegel said the state is aware of the nutrition revenue situation and it is believed they are exploring options to provide resources to the districts.

Ms. Siegel said the revenue from the juvenile detention center is projected to be 50 percent lower this year(\$400,000).

Ms. Siegel said the excess cost cap will be finalized in March for special education out-of-district expenses. The number of out-of-district students is lower than last year, but special education expenses have been rising.

Ms. Siegel said transportation savings will result from the shortened school year to 177 days. She said the district continues to operate in deficit prevention mode.

Mr. Weldon joined the meeting.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the bilingual classes in the district are allocated as part of the school allocation model. She said many English language learners receive supplemental instructional services from ESL teachers. She added that in addition to the operating budget there are federal and state funding sources for ELL and bilingual students.

The next agenda item was on the 2021-22 budget. Ms. Siegel said the budget request was approved by the board at February 3rd's special meeting. This Friday there will be a Zoom meeting with the state delegation on the state legislative session. During February and March the superintendent will confer with the mayor and the city administration about the budget request. On April 6th, the mayor will submit the proposed general fund budget to the

City Council, following which the board will meet with the Council's Budget & Appropriations Committee. On May 11, the Council will submit the adopted to the mayor, and by May 25th the mayor can veto the budget. June 1st is the last day for the Council to vote on the veto, if there is one. So the city budget will be final on June 1.

Ms. Siegel said the state budget is typically established by May, but that is not guaranteed. It is anticipated that the district will receive at least \$2.3 million in additional funds in Alliance/ECS.

Mr. Sokolovic noted March 1st is the public hearing of the state education appropriations committee. He said he would like to get a virtual bus tour together. He said CAFE would do a presentation on the state budget tomorrow.

The next agenda item was an overtime report. Ms. Siegel said the report shared was reflective of data from July 1, 2020 to December 4, 2020. Five areas were identified: facilities, stock room, trades, school security, and payroll/benefits. The overtime expenditures were separated into COVID and non-COVID expenses. Facilities was the highest, then trades, followed by school security, and stock room. Payroll/benefits was a low amount. She said overtime in the IT department is primarily for board meetings or other projects.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the non-COVID overtime is probably slightly lower than prior year. It is needed if there are custodians who are on leave or absent. She said Mr. Hammond has to approve overtime in facilities.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the hybrid schedule this year resulted in reduced overtime.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would make this a separate agenda item at a future meeting.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said there is not a specific budget for overtime. She said she believed Lt. Grech confers with the superintendent before authorizing overtime in security.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said if there is a city activity in a district building overtime charges are coded for charges to the city account.

Mr. Weldon said it would be helpful to see what percent of the total payroll the overtime represents in each department. Ms. Siegel said the approximate total facilities budget is \$26 million and the current rate of overtime expenditure might reach \$1 million for the year. Mr. Weldon said he would like to see what percentage of total wages the overtime is in a future document. Mr. Sokolovic said a year-to-year comparison would also be valuable. He said data presented to the board – including discipline and demographic data – should include such comparisons.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said Mr. Hammond is on the city's payroll. Mr. Weldon said it seemed odd that Mr. Hammond was able to approve overtime but Lt. Grech is not.

Ms. Siegel said the ESSER II is the new grant for COVID-related relief. It will expire in September 2023. The current CARES Act grant expires on September 30, 2022. The amount for Bridgeport is \$40.56 million. The state allocated the funds on the basis of the respective share received under Title I in fiscal year 2020. There is not a requirement for equitable services to nonpublic schools this time.

Ms. Siegel said all allocations made by the district must be COVID-related and cannot be used for standard operating expenses. The funds could not pay the salary of a principal or a teacher of an ordinary class.

Ms. Siegel said the state is developing a new ESSER II application which will also be used as a planning tool. It will require a needs assessment created by the state.

Ms. Siegel said pending receipt of the state's planning tool and the requirements, the district is in the process of designing a preliminary 2.25 year program. It is anticipated that funds will not have to be drawn until July 1st because CARES Act funds are built into the 2021-22 plan. She said these funds are devoted to services that are part of the strategic plan, but qualify because they are classified as supplemental services.

She said there will be components for technology renewal, instructional and curriculum renewal, supplemental teacher support, and summer services, among other items, to address learning loss.

Mr. Sokolovic said the governor announced that the increase in state ECS is on hold. Ms. Siegel said she did not have that information. Mr. Sokolovic said he would forward her the information. Ms. Siegel noted the ESSER II funding can only be used for certain types of services.

Mr. Sokolovic said if the reports are true the district may be worse off due to this funding in the long run.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see the full board approve the eventual plan that is developed. Ms. Brown

said she agreed and suggested the superintendent and Ms. Siegel make a presentation for the public on Facebook Live.

The next agenda item was on legal services. Mr. Sokolovic said he would prefer to address the item in a special meeting.

Ms. Brown moved to “*postpone this portion of the presentation.*” The motion was second 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 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod