

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

REMOTE MEETING

February 2, 2021

Present: Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Chair
Ms. Catherine Bowen, Secretary
Ms. Amy Checkoway
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Evelyn Gomez
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

Absent: Ms. Tara Donner

1. Opening Business

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 a.m.

2. FY21 Q2 Budget Update

The Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee – Anne Helgen, Geoff Lubien, Liz Goss, Jack Weis, and Paul Rickter- joined the School Committee Finance Subcommittee meeting. Director of Finance, Anthony DiCologero gave a report on the School’s FY21 Q2 budget position. The District is projecting a total general fund positive year-end balance of approximately \$186,000. The projected ending balance is subject to changes over the course of the remainder of the fiscal year, based on a number of factors. Programs and cost centers have been, and will continue to be, impacted by COVID in FY21 and there may be further operational changes needed to respond to local, state and federal guidance and/or mandates regarding this global pandemic.

Accounts with a projected positive balance include middle school teacher, high school teacher, administrative and support salaries; fringe benefits; special education expenses and transportation (even with bus fee reductions). A projected break even balance includes the school based and district-wide instructional support expenses, regular education transportation, and special education tuitions, although this is a volatile category.

Elementary salaries account indicates an anticipated deficit, largely due to the waiver of Kindergarten fees. These are offset with other positive staff balances due to unfilled positions (support and nurse). The special education salary expenses are projected with a deficit, as the department addresses a backlog of student assessments. Committee members discussed the positions that are still being sought to be filled, including Unit D and Nurse.

The break-even status in the general fund reflects the district’s Multi-Year Out-of-District (OOD) Funding Plan, as that Plan incorporates anticipated expenses charged to all regular OOD tuition funding sources: General fund, Federal IDEA Grant, State Circuit Breaker Grant, LABBB Collaborative credit and SPED Reserve Fund. The current negative available balance will be corrected by a reclassification of expenditures to one or more non-general fund sources on which the School Committee will have to vote later in the spring.

The district is in discussions with LABBB districts about discounted amounts for remote days. Director of Finance DiCologero sent a request to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to confirm that the Chapter 70 calculations took into consideration the change in Kindergarten salaries increasing from .5 to 1.0 FTE, as the overall amount of Chapter 70 funding was lower than anticipated.

Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee member Helgen was concerned Kindergarten fee income loss was not incorporated in the Town budget planning and asked about balances on COVID grants. Director DiCologero indicated COVID expenditures will be posted to the appropriate grants. Town Cares Act grant funds have been expended and were used to purchase student technology devices and building air purifiers.

Revolving accounts discussion followed with the district's desire to minimize expenses to these accounts. It is not known at this time if the district will be able to rent out its facilities in FY22. The goal is to keep facilities accounts separate from school (revolving) accounts. The district's facilities rental policy gives school programs first priority, Town recreation programs second priority, with no charge to the Town except custodial salary. The district then prioritizes non-profit Belmont based groups with custodial fee only (BYBA). Lastly, non- Belmont groups with fee based rentals are considered. The district will address this rental policy going forward to protect the new middle and high school building facilities at a meeting possibly in March.

WC Education Subcommittee member Helgen requested an updated OOD plan and any updates to Chapter 70 funds. The SC Finance Subcommittee agreed to include the WC Education subcommittee at any upcoming meetings on the FY22 budget. Superintendent Phelan asked the group to hold Tuesday, February 9, 2021, for a possible meeting.

The WC Education Subcommittee adjourned their meeting at 9:18 am.

3. SEVIS: F-1 VISA Program

The Belmont Public Schools has been a part of the Student Exchange and Visitor Program since 2004 with authorization for the F-1 VISA. It supported families that wished to bring a relative to live with them for a year or other special circumstances. Tuition was paid for the full amount of the per pupil expenditure and the student would attend Belmont High School for 1 year. More recently, agencies promote opportunities to students and then find families in towns/cities that are authorized to accept students under the SEVP.

Initially the district included the program to bring diversity to schools, but over time Belmont has attracted diversity on its own. Expense and enrollment figures are now prohibitive for the program. The district has not had any students participate for the last four years and schools have to be recertified every 2 years. In the past there was no cost associated with recertification, but now there is a fee of \$1250.

Given the district's high enrollment, Assistant Superintendent Darias recommends withdrawal from the program. In the future if the district decides to participate again, it would go through the application process and pay the associated fees (\$3,000 filing fee, \$655 site visit fee). Committee members noted that it was unlikely to have new participants, acknowledged the enrollment and financial constraints, and appreciated the program could be reconsidered should it be warranted in the future.

A motion of support to withdraw from the Student Exchange and Visitor Program in good standing was made by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Mike Crowley, and it was VOTED on a roll call. (4-0-2)

4. Fall 2 Athletic Fees (Vote)

MIAA approved a Fall 2 season which will include cheerleading, football and volleyball and will begin the Monday after February break. The Middlesex League group will have a meeting on Friday to discuss protocols and restrictions for the fall 2 season. Superintendent Phelan proposed the district provide a discounted fee structure similar to athletic Seasons 1 and 2, if viable. The fees will be discounted but not refundable and will be approximately 73% of the regular fees or: 1st sport \$325; 2nd sport \$220; 3rd sport \$110.

School Committee members were in support of providing the same fee structure for the fall 2 season as was offered for fall 1 and winter, with the rationale for reducing fees sustained and not to be reimbursed. There was some discussion of a \$110 fee for potential 4th season athletes. Committee members discussed the community concerns and their own concerns about poor mask compliance and viral spread, and the risks posed to regular school operations. Superintendent Phelan indicated he would take the Committee's concerns to the Middlesex League meeting this week.

The members noted along with continuing to offer avenues for physical activity for students in team sports and extracurricular activities/clubs, COVID related protocols/policies (mask wearing) need to be enforced and an update on unique students served by the competitive program was requested in service of understanding how students were being served. Superintendent Phelan will provide the enrollment data. Superintendent Phelan will ask Principals Koza and Taylor to recap activities occurring and look to repurpose unused extra-compensatory stipends to support additional outside activities.

It was noted that Executive Session would be held that evening at 5:30 and was anticipated to last for 30 minutes.

5. Adjourn

The Finance Subcommittee adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:


Catherine Bowen, Secretary