

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE
REMOTE MEETING
May 6, 2021

Present: Ms. Amy Checkoway, Chair
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Secretary
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Andrea Prestwich
Mr. Jamal Saeh
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

1. Opening Business

The meeting was called to order at 8:18 a.m. as a subcommittee.

The Warrant Committee Subcommittee for Education – Anne Helgen, Geoff Lubien, Liz Goss, Jack Weis, and Paul Rickter- joined the School Committee Finance Subcommittee meeting

2. Review of FY21 Q3 Report

The Committees reviewed the general fund variance of \$6,080,000 as reflected in the FY21 third quarter (Q3) report. The Warrant Committee questioned why the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSR) funding was not used during FY21 to offset the charges to the general fund.

Superintendent Phelan explained that the ESSR3 grant was only made available on April 5, 2021 and will be submitted. The ESSR2 funding, which totals about \$400,000, can be used for FY21 and FY22 and the School Department decided to move it to FY22 prior to knowing about the additional American Relief Funding. Andrea Prestwich, Patrice Garvin, Roy Epstein and John Phelan agreed to this decision. To open schools for in person learning this spring, the Schools spent approximately \$600,000 to purchase tents, filters, and other COVID related items. Looking ahead to the next school year, there are still many unknown COVID related costs associated with testing, nursing staff, and a remote only school.

Warrant Subcommittee member Helgen inquired about charges to the general fund. Ms. Helgen suggested the School Department work with the Town to use any unused CARES Act funds, in hopes to have the district charge all COVID related expenses to grants rather than to the general fund accounts. Superintendent Phelan indicated the district would gladly charge FY21 expenses to the CARES Act but have not been made aware of any available funds to do so. Finance Director DiCologero explained that he and John Marshall communicate regularly and no additional CARES funding has been made available to the schools.

While \$694,000 of COVID related expenses have been charged to general funds (not including salaries), the district has been aggressively trying to move to using federal funds. Things were complicated by the need to spend over \$500,000 in three weeks to open schools this spring which exhausted the available funds.

The group agreed that federal funds should be prioritized for use over general funds, and went over the due dates for all ESSR grant applications. Committee member Saeh suggested that a schedule of grants and funds be communicated with School Committee members and the community.

The second item for discussion was the Special Education Out of District (OOD) variance of \$672,000.

The School Committee solicited input from the Warrant Committee on how to best use the IDEA grant while still maintaining a reserve. In response, the Warrant Committee suggested that the School Committee approve the use of reserve funds for special education expenses and then return as much as possible to the town general funds in order to bolster FY22 funds. Superintendent Phelan requested that the School Committee be strategic about using SPED reserve funds and keep some balance (the State suggests maintaining one year worth) with the expectation that there will be an increase in the number of children tapping into this fund in the next few years, post-COVID. Warrant Committee members suggested keeping somewhere in the range of \$1.1-1.3 million in reserve and cautioned against allowing it to build too large.

Turning to other salary adjustments in FY21, Warrant Subcommittee member Lubien requested a salary adjustment table from the administration which will include recent layoffs of anyone hired for a one year position last year and position changes due to COVID needs. Three special education positions that were hired will be carried over into FY22. Stipends paid for summer work and extra Unit D support hours may be charged to federal grants.

The group touched upon the FY22 budget for Town Meeting. Superintendent Phelan explained the full time position of Athletic Director will be reduced to half time and the librarian and community service positions at the high school will be repurposed to add classroom teachers without adding any FTEs.

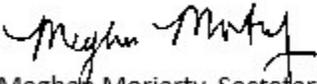
The process moving forward was reviewed for the upcoming May 11 School Committee vote on their FY22 budget and the Warrant Subcommittee's portion for the Town Meeting report. The district agreed to make a draft FY22 School budget available to the Warrant Subcommittee Tuesday morning, with the knowledge it is a non-voted draft, after it was requested by the Warrant Subcommittee to help with their section of the report.

Chair Checkoway requested the Warrant Committee share their draft report for the Town Meeting. Warrant Subcommittee member Weis appreciated the collaborative efforts of the district and would try to accommodate the request with their short turn around, while committee counterparts agreed to meet offline to digest the Out of District numbers.

3. Adjourn

The Finance Subcommittee adjourned at 9:51 am

Respectfully submitted by:


Meghan Moriarty, Secretary