SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

October 5, 2021 at 4:00 PM

Chairman Want called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Alderman Long, Terrio, Shaw, School Committee Member Want

Absent: School Committee Members Perich and O'Connell

Messrs.: A. Allen, J. Goldhardt, K. DeFrancis

1. Presentation regarding ESSER II & III Funds.

Amy Allen, Assistant Superintendent, Teaching, Learning and Leading, stated we are here today to discuss the ESSER funds and the impact on teaching and learning. All of the funds will be used to keep students on the path of recovery and acceleration. These additional funds will allow schools to add intervention teachers in our elementary and middle schools to help build a foundation of literacy, math and critical thinking skills. Secondary schools will add more tutoring time to provide individualized instruction to make up for the unfinished learning. Children in schools will benefit from additional mental health services while students with learning disabilities will receive more direct support. Accessible and supplemental material will be purchased so all students in the Manchester School District will have access to higher learning opportunities. We will again invest in technology for students and staff. In addition, for our bilingual liaisons, we will add five more with different languages to work with our students to build deeper relationships. All the dollars will be allocated based on needs. Every elementary student who needs help in reading will receive it. Secondary students will get more individualized instruction. All students will have access to mental health resources. This is a momentous step for the district. This is the largest increase in student support we have seen in years. I believe this increase will help improve education for all students in

Manchester. In the packet sent to the Board, you will see a full teacher and learning plan. This plan is called the SAU Learning and Recovery Acceleration Plan. It outlines how many positions will be added to the district and what types of professional development will be added. We will be at the point of adding a new science and social studies curriculum in addition to the other supports that we are proposing here. One of the requirements of the ESSER funds is to increase learning time. With that, learning time means increasing the school day tutoring; before, during and after school. We are also looking to increase extracurricular activities for our students and this increases the social emotional support for our learners. The budget is broken down in the packet. We are well on our way to hiring these positions. All the middle school teachers have been hired to reduce class sizes in addition to our coaches and English language learners. We originally had seven English language learner teachers to be added to the budget but we have actually added nine to meet increasing needs for the students within the district. You will see other positions in there. We know this is one-time funds so we want to go in and make this investment for our students. It is important to look at the unfinished learning so they need to make additional gains.

Alderman Long stated the presentation in the packet was fantastic, however, Alderman Shaw and Terrio did not get it. It is very comprehensive. I wanted to get the record straight and let me know if I am thinking wrong. This funding is getting us caught up and we only have so many years, until 2024, to get our students caught up both behaviorally and academically. You want to use this money for operations and you actually can. You want to get to a point so in 2024 we are back to our normal status. There is a little misunderstanding out there that it should be used for one-time only items.

Ms. Allen stated we will be looking at the positions added through the three years to make sure they can be included in our general fund budget and if they are effective. Hopefully, we will not need as many interventionists.

Alderman Long stated what I am understanding is that you need to report whatever you set-up. If you are not achieving X, then you need to redistribute the money to achieve X. I think that is fantastic. We are in the same situation with our ARPA funding. The reporting requirements are you meet the goals that you set-up to meet.

Ms. Allen stated this month we are finishing up our first round of pre-assessments to see where students are at this point. Our initial data looks like there is a lot of unfinished learning, especially with our students in grades three and under. We are already making adjustments to make sure we are targeting even more individualized instruction for those reading in that age group.

Alderman Long asked does all of this funding needs to be applied for. This money is not in your account, so you have to set-up a plan, send it to the NHDOE then they send it to the feds correct?

Ms. Allen replied yes we went through that process. In August we wrote a part of the return plan. As part of getting this money, we had to have a return to school plan. Students had to be in classrooms and then we had to put it forward in making sure we follow the maintenance and equity of reports and all the federal regulations that go along with the reporting.

Dr. John Goldhardt, School Superintendent, stated in each part of the plan we do have to go to the NHDOE to say here is a proposal for this chunk. Before we can spend it they have to approve it. It is quite laborious.

Ms. Allen stated if we want to change we need to add something…

Alderman Long interjected asking do you spend the general funds and then get reimbursed. Is that how it works? If I want to hire somebody the general fund is going to pay for that until we get reimbursed for that employee?

Ms. Allen replied it has to be in the grant; it has to be approved and align with the goal.

Alderman Long replied that is great. Do you see any difficulty in spending general funds then getting reimbursed with this?

Karen DeFrancis, Chief Financial Officer, stated it is not a problem as we will get reimbursed monthly. We submit whatever we paid for that month to the NHDOE and then they send us a transfer for that money.

Alderman Long stated I see the large effort for family support. I think that is excellent. Who knows best for these students other than their parents? I don’t sit on the Board of School Committee so I don’t know the minutia of all this. I see you mentioned a few groups and I have sat on a few councils addressing youth behavior and mental health. The data I see is that mentoring programs are the most effective in bringing a student that is flagged to not graduate up. Having an adult who mentors and cares for them helps in achieving their goals. My Turn and the Hope Program have mentoring programs that affect all of these.

Ms. Allen stated we do have a line item under student enrichment and student support programming with community partners. One of the requirements under ESSER is it has to be under evidence-based research partners and you have to go through that vetting process. As RFP’s go out for some of the ESSER funds, some of our partners have returned with that. We have to vet them through this process and then they also have to meet the NHDOE requirements as evidence-based practices.

Alderman Long asked would City Year meet that.

Ms. Allen replied it did.

Alderman Long interjected and My Turn would meet that?

Ms. Allen replied yes.

Alderman Long stated those programs, especially My Turn, get a list of students that are critical.

Ms. Allen replied they do a terrific job in our schools; absolutely.

Alderman Long stated their data blows me away. I recently listened to a presentation on their successes. I was blown away by the percentage of successes that they are having. It fits in with the data that if you get a mentor, somebody who cares and wants them to succeed, they will succeed. The educational and emotional impact is where I'm at. I am thinking we have until 2024 to get ahold of that and start changing them. This is…I had no doubt you would come up with great initiatives.

Ms. Allen replied we will rely on our community partners as well. It will take a lot to get to where we need to be.

Alderman Long asked is ESSER I done.

Ms. DeFrancis replied we have until September of 2022 to spend those funds but we have just a few hundred thousand left out of $6.9 million.

Chairman Want asked if Breakthrough Manchester would qualify?

Ms. Allen stated they currently are one of our partners and they may qualify for these programs. Our priority right now is getting interventionists and teachers into the classrooms. Guidance counselors and the mental health piece is a factor district wide. We will need a lot of tutors.

Alderman Terrio asked are we still talking about ESSER II and ESSER III?

Ms. DeFrancis replied correct.

Alderman Terrio stated in the beginning it says that the Manchester School District is going to get $26 million and change from ESSER II and $58 million and change from ESSER III, about $84.5 million dollars. When I go into your allocation over three years it totals $46.5 million which is almost $38 million less. Why the difference between the two numbers?

Ms. DeFrancis replied that would be the operational side of the budget. What you are referencing is simply the teaching and learning side of the budget.

Dr. John Goldhardt stated the other portion is going to facilities. We are trying to replace every air handling system in the entire district.

Alderman Terrio replied so you are spending another $38 million but it’s not on these items.

Ms. DeFrancis stated correct; that is just student impact for learning loss.

Chairman Want stated if you look at page 4 of the agenda, you will see what they are saying.

Alderman Terrio replied ok I see it now, thank you.

Chairman Wants asked are there any further questions on ESSER II and III funds.

Alderman Terrio asked so these do not affect the budget since they are federal dollars and not city dollars.

Ms. DeFrancis replied correct.

Alderman Terrio stated so our budget is just what the city put into it not including the federal funds.

Ms. DeFrancis stated we asked for an appropriation for our general fund as well as for our food service accounts. These numbers are outside of that.

Alderman Long asked prior to receiving these funds, did you use any general funds to pay for some COVID related items.

Ms. DeFrancis replied we did, however, the state had some funds that were allocated to us. I think it was about $4.3 million. In addition to that there is a FEMA application out there. No general fund dollars were used for COVID because we did have grants to support those expenditures.

Alderman Long stated so you were made whole?

Ms. DeFrancis replied correct.

Alderman Long asked were any of these funds used for the contract with the nurses.

Ms. DeFrancis replied if we were going to add the nurses for that then yes.

Alderman Long stated I noticed on page three, the 3.6 bullet regarding low income families, disabilities, English learners, and racial ethnic minority student experiencing homelessness and foster care youth. What needs are we looking at with respect to that? Is there…particularly with homeless…

Ms. Allen interjected mental health care, the extra tutoring, and access to internet via hot spots-providing the internet are included in those services.

Alderman Long replied there is an added incentive.

Ms. Allen replied yes it has to be a focus area to report on.

Alderman Long replied that was in your plan so we are covering that. What are we seeing out there for homeless youth in our district? We got a report a few years ago around 600.

Ms. Allen stated our new data reports are starting to come in from our social workers and schools on students that went missing or disconnected during the pandemic. We are putting feet on the ground to try to reconnect.

Dr. John Goldhardt stated we are just trying to know where they are.

Alderman Long stated super. I also noticed in here there was an initiative on Wi-Fi. My understanding was that in a federal bill somewhere else Comcast or Xfinity are required to do provide Wi-Fi in an area where low to moderate income people are living. Is that happening?

Ms. Allen stated one of the things we do is put a booster in. If there is a housing unit with 20 kids in it, they may be pulling off one modem and we want to make sure they have full access and can download whatever they need. The program is called Comcast Essentials.

Chairman Want interjected Internet Essentials.

Alderman Long replied that is that the intent.

Ms. Allen responded our family liaisons are going to the houses and working with the families that may not understand how to hook it up or log onto the family portal. A lot of outreach is happening.

Chairman Want stated I would like to make it clear that all of our students are in school, there is no remote option.

Ms. Allen replied correct but we do know the internet is a barrier for some homework. We want to remove all barriers for our students to facilitate learning.

Alderman Long stated we need to assure that this is continuing. When they go home they have access for homework or whatever. With respect to administering these funds, does the district get a percentage or is that just the NHDOE that gets the percentage?

Dr. John Goldhardt stated it's only the State.

Ms. Allen stated we had to move some staff around and have only one person solely working on this and our grants. She did some extra work but it's a full time job. When we have to make changes it's a lot of work.

Alderman Long stated my only concern, for what it's worth, is that these hands-on mentoring programs in other districts have expanded because they are over capacity. Once they get the money they can expand more and work with middle school kids rather than just the high school kids.

Ms. Allen stated the principals are coming up with ideas on how to implement the tutoring to middle school kids. One of them is partnering with the high school students and paying them to come tutor the middle school kids.

Alderman Long replied that is great. Thank you. This was a great presentation.

2. Request for a supplemental appropriation in the amount of $10,847,571 due to the increase in Adequacy and Relief Aid.
(Note: This request was referred to a public hearing, which is taking place at 6:30 PM and is also on the BMA agenda for a vote this evening.)

Ms. DeFrancis stated I will give you some background. During the budget process last spring, the revenue estimates that we had from the state for the adequacy funds were based on enrollment in the free and reduced accounts from the 2021 year. These numbers were lower than our counts from the pandemic. They were actually lower because of the pandemic. When we submitted the FY22 budget to the BMA, we had to request the tax cap budget in compliance with the tax cap. This resulted in an appropriation of $10 million below the previous year. Again, this is because we didn't have the revenues to support a higher appropriation. The Board of School Committee actually submitted two budgets - a tax cap compliant budget of $173 million and then a higher number. The aldermen appropriated the $173 million again because we didn't have excess revenues to support a higher number. Just for informational purposes, our budget the prior year was $183 million. After our appropriation was set by the aldermen, the state passed its budget which included new legislation that honored the enrollment in the free and reduced account from the 2020 year and in addition there was new aid referred to as relief aid. The new legislation resulted in additional revenues equaling $10.8 million. We didn't know about that when building the budget in the spring. Had we known about it, we would have requested a higher budget. At the BMA meeting, Sharon Wickens noted that these dollars would still be in the tax cap for FY22. There is no overriding of the tax cap required. That was a letter from Ms. Wickens on September 7th. We also expect to receive a similar revenue stream for FY23. I just wanted to point out that if these FY22 dollars were not appropriated to us then the additional dollars we get in FY23 would require a tax cap override on the expenditure side because we will have additional revenues while the expenditures would have been lower for the previous year. I want to point out we are not requesting any additional tax dollars. These are funds from the state designated for education to address the declining revenues due to the pandemic. We intend to focus these funds on unfinished learning caused by the pandemic. We do have some other items we plan to spend that $10.8 million on.

Alderman Long asked do you know what you are going to recommend to the Board of School Committee on allocating the $10.8 million.

Ms. DeFrancis replied yes. When submitting our budget, because we were short by $10 million, we did not want to lose all that staffing. We allocated $5.5 of the ESSER funds to basically cover the general fund staff. We would now bring those staff members back into the general fund with this $10.8 million which frees up $5.5 in ESSER funds. We would use this for unfinished learning. $250,000 would be added back into our buildings. During our budget process, we had recommended eliminating $250,000 in closing a wing, floor or building at our high school level. We will have community forums later this month and next. We need to add that money back into the budget because we have not closed those floors or wings and won't until we hear from the community. Our food service had a shortfall in the first year of the pandemic of $300,000. The general fund had to support food service. Last year we had a shortfall of $1.4 million. We are anticipating we would possibly need $1.4 million. I really don't think it will be that high but it is a placeholder right now. If monies free up and we don't need that entire $1.4 million, then we would put the excess funds towards unfinished learning. IDA and Title I are also based on our free and reduced accounts so we anticipate putting some money towards those programs. We have a placeholder of $750,000 and then other staffing needs and classroom needs equates to $500,000. We are estimating that out of the $10.8 million, based on state estimates, that about $2.5 million will be one-time funds. We want to make sure not to put that towards our operating costs as an ongoing basis. We are looking at technology infrastructure and the clear touch panels that Ms. Allen spoke about, as well as unfinished learning costs and dual immersion materials.

Alderman Long asked when you break it down by academic and, either structural or other such items as food services, would you consider that academic.

Dr. John Goldhardt replied it can be.

Ms. DeFrancis stated if they are not fed then they are not learning correctly. The technology infrastructure is a huge piece of it.

Dr. John Goldhardt stated we are adding more malware protection too.

Alderman Long asked is a higher percentage of the $10.8 million going towards academic needs.

Ms. Allen replied yes. Our high schools have gained some enrollment, particularly Memorial High School. We will go ahead and put more resources towards them and their unfinished learning. The mentoring is huge. They almost need to be retaught how to learn again and the mental health component is significant.

Alderman Long stated the case you brought up Karen, you’re right. If we don’t allocate the $10.8 million, you are at $173 million so in FY23 if you get $7.5 million that will have to be an override. The state can’t give us what they are giving with overriding. I get that.

Alderman Terrio asked will any of the money be used to replenish the trust funds.

Ms. DeFrancis answered no.

Alderman Terrio asked what is the status of your trust funds.

Ms. DeFrancis replied we are just closing our books for last year and after the transfer from last year the trust funds will be at about $25 million.

Alderman Terrio asked do you have three trust funds.

Ms. DeFrancis replied we actually have six. The newest one is the teaching and learning trust that was just approved maybe a year or two ago. We also have health insurance, special education, repairs and maintenance, capital projects, athletic equipment and then the teaching and learning.

Alderman Terrio stated just to clarify, of the six trust funds we have approximately $25 million dollars, this sounds like they are in good shape?

Ms. DeFrancis replied yes. This is the highest balance that we've ever seen in them. It will support education going forward, especially that teaching and learning trust.

Alderman Terrio replied excellent. Between the ESSER funds and these funds, more of my focus I guess are in these funds but how much of it is more operational? My concern is that these are one-time funds and if we hire staff or what have you going forward we will not have the money. How much is it?

Ms. DeFrancis sated of the $10.8 million, we anticipate about $2.5 million being one-time funds. The balance of that is money we expect to see in the FY23 budget. Right now, the way the law is enacted the relief aid is part of the law. We will expect that aid moving forward. The reason we would see a dip is because of the enrollment in free and reduced accounts. If our enrollment in our free and reduced accounts go down, that is what the formula is based on. Based on the fact that our enrollment has been dropping, the state is estimating about a $2.5 million reduction.

Dr. John Goldhardt stated within that $2.5 million that we consider one-time funds we are not budgeting staff because we know it is one time.

Alderman Terrio replied going forward it will not hurt the district as far as staff or ongoing budgetary items. You won't have to say to us next year either we have to cut the staff, this program or we need more money. Sounds like you budgeted to avoid that?

Dr. John Goldhardt replied correct.

2. Manchester School District Updates:

- Facilities Plan
- Start of School Year

Dr. John Goldhardt stated the facilities plan this month was to have several forums scheduled. On October 19 from 9:30 AM-10:30 AM at the YMCA; October 19 from 6:30 PM-7:30 PM at Parker Varney; October 21 from 6:30 PM-7:30 PM at McDonough and October 27 from 6:30 PM-7:30 PM at Highland Goffes Falls. These will be for the purpose of community feedback for the facility recommendations I made to the board.

Ms. Allen interjected the media release on those dates will be out this week.

Dr. John Goldhardt stated I couldn't be happier to have all of our students back in person. Last year was not one of the more enjoyable years in my career. Having all of the students back in person has been absolutely joyful. To see them in action and to see how happy they are has been incredible. We are staying on top of the health mitigations. Unfortunately, we will see cases that will come forward but we are very cautious and careful to make sure we are working hand-in-hand with the Health Department. So far I feel like we have done a pretty good job in that regard in staying vigilant in our mitigations to keep schools open all year in person.

Alderman Long asked are what did we lose as far as enrollment. A thousand or so? Are we starting off equally or is there a little increase?

Dr. John Goldhardt stated we are going over our October 1 report. The report from two weeks ago stated we were at 12,897.

Alderman Long asked so a little bit of an increase.

Dr. John Goldhardt stated it is a little bit of a decrease but nothing like we had before.

Alderman Long stated there was something I forgot to ask about the ESSER funds. In the presentation we were sent I did not see any exhibits, am I missing them? It says refer to Exhibit B, C and D but I did not see them.

Ms. Allen stated they are in the hard copy.

Alderman Terrio asked what page is it.

Ms. Allen stated we are looking at pages 40-45.

Dr. John Goldhardt stated if any aldermen want to see how these clear panels are used, they can call Shelly Larochelle at Northwest and have a demonstration. It is pretty incredible what they are doing with them.

Ms. Allen said page 40 is the Chromebook replacement. It gives you the budget for the Chromebook and then the clear touch panel. Page 49 is the asset management system they are looking at to track assets.

Alderman Terrio stated as you just said to Alderman Long approximately 12,900 students. How many teachers do we have now?

Ms. Allen replied just about 1,100.

There being no further business, on motion by ***Alderman Terrio,*** *duly seconded by* ***Alderman Long,*** *it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

Matthew Normand

Clerk of Committee