

Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee
Joint Meeting with the School Committee Finance Subcommittee
April 16, 2020 3:00 PM
Remote Meeting via Zoom

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BELMONT, MA

DATE: May 12, 2020
TIME: 9:11 AM

Meeting Minutes

Members in Attendance

Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee: Chris Doyle, Anne Helgen, Geoff Lubien, Paul Rickter, Jack Weis

School Committee: Kate Bowen, Susan Burgess-Cox, Amy Checkoway, Mike Crowley, Tara Donner, Andrea Prestwich, Superintendent John Phelan, Finance Director Tony DiCologero, Assistant Superintendent Janice Darias, Chenery Principal Mike McAllister

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:04 PM.

Impact of COVID-19 on FY 20 and FY 21

John provided an update on policy changes implemented to control spending for the balance of FY 20. The department has frozen hiring and purchasing (text materials and supplies) for the balance of the year. John, Tony, and Janice must approve any purchase orders going forward. The only purchases currently being considered are those related to remote learning. John and Tony will provide an estimate of the projected FY 20 savings from the foregoing policy changes.

One important issue that the School Department must resolve for FY 20 is a policy on rebating fees for those activities and services that have been cancelled since school has closed. Tony presented a spreadsheet showing what the impact on the revolving funds would be under a conservative policy where full rebates are provided for any activity that has been cancelled or materially altered as a result of school closings. Also included in that analysis is an estimate of any savings in expenses by, for example, not paying for purchases of food supplies or not paying coaching stipends for spring sports. Under this analysis, the projected net impact to the revolving funds would be about \$865,000. Even under that conservative policy, Tony believes that the revolving funds would all still remain solvent (meaning that they would have enough money at the start of FY 21 not to need more money from the General Fund than was originally anticipated in the initial FY 21 proposed budget).

John articulated a proposed policy which he asked the Finance Subcommittee to consider whereby, if no service was provided (e.g., spring sports, bus fees for days where school was cancelled, potentially summer school, etc.), then a full refund would be provided for any fees previously collected. However, where a service was provided, albeit in remote fashion like the rest of school services are currently being provided (e.g., full-day kindergarten), then it is still appropriate to charge fees. The Finance Subcommittee will discuss this proposed policy further at the next meeting.

In response to a question, John noted that the current guidance from DESE on out-of-district special education tuitions is that districts continue to pay the providers the full tuition because those providers are still providing some services remotely and because the districts need those providers to survive so that there is a place to send SPED students when schools re-open.

Regarding FY 21, John noted that the department would typically be starting to hire backfills now for the next school year. However, they will hold off for now until the FY 21 budget comes into clearer focus. John noted that, given the anticipated reductions in revenue to the Town in FY 21, he and Tony are beginning to look at salary and non-salary options for reducing the FY 21 budget from the one that was initially proposed. However, John indicated that, for now, it was hard to be more definitive until there was a clearer idea of what the revised revenue estimates to the Town might be and until there was a clearer idea of how any projected revenue shortfalls might be allocated between the schools and the other Town departments.

One point John did make, however, is that the schools might need to prepare for the possibility that the traditional classroom instruction might be intermittent next year if the coronavirus surges again. He also noted that the department may need to provide additional services next year to help address the needs of students who have not been as successful in adjusting to remote learning, this year and next. Both of these issues could result in increased costs to the department over and above what was anticipated in the initial proposed FY 21 budget.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the Education Subcommittee meetings on February 26, 2020 and March 4, 2020 were approved.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Thursday, April 23, 2020 at 3:00 PM. It will be a joint meeting with the School Committee Finance Subcommittee and the school administration.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 PM.