

Board of Finance Questions Regarding the BOE Proposed Budget
April 14, 2020

1. Does the BOE have any sense of what funds it may receive under the CARES Act for COVID-19-related expenses?
2. Does the BOE have any clarity on what constitutes a "COVID-19-related" expense?
3. Has the BOE incurred what it considers to be "COVID-19-related expenses?"
4. Has the BOE incurred what it considers to be any additional unanticipated expenses since the schools shut down?

The State of Connecticut provided additional guidance on CARES Act funding on Tuesday. Specifically, it reads:

Will the use of the 90% set aside for LEAs be flexible, with LEAs being permitted to spend the funds on all the same activities permitted under all the major programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)?

Yes, the uses of funds for this money are very flexible. Under the law funds may be used for any activity authorized by ESEA, IDEA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Perkins CTE Act, or the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in addition to other activities to help with the response to COVID-19 (including preparedness and response efforts, sanitation, professional development, distance learning, and others).

Some expenses we have incurred for distance learning include additional hot spots for students, food service preparation and service, and maintenance costs. We are keeping an account of all expenses in preparation for further state guidance on the reimbursement process.

5. Has the BOE saved any money because of the school shut down? If yes, how much?

Please see the document with 19-20 projections.

We have attached language on non-lapsing accounts as provided in state legislation. We will seek to use a non-lapsing account to carry over funding to defray potential budget reductions, support an expanded extended school year program for special education students, and support additional technology purchases.

6. Please explain the current bus contract situation; namely is the BOE paying on the bus contract even though school has been shut down? If yes, will the BOE receive any credit for next year's contract?
7. How has the BOE handled Governor Lamont's Executive Order regarding transportation; has the BOE opened discussions with the bus company?

We are in negotiations with our two transportation providers. Our best estimates for projected costs are included in the projection worksheet

8. When can an employee or family member of a BOE employee be added to the Board's medical insurance and has there been an uptick in enrollment since the COVID-19 crisis commenced? What are the costs associated with this, if any?

Employees may change coverage at any time due to a qualifying event (birth, death, marriage, divorce, or involuntary loss of coverage). We have not experienced increased enrollment recently.

9. In the Superintendent's presentation, major maintenance projects are listed. It is understood that the BOE would have to vote on deferring these projects, but in the opinion of the District, which ones could be deferred for a year if necessary?

Final determination of which maintenance projects remain in the 20-21 Adopted Budget will be decided by the Board of Education.

10. A necessary starting point with BOE is what can we NOW expect for FY20 EOY results?

Please see the document with 19-20 projections.

11. Has the BOE asked the FEA to open the current CBA for givebacks?

We have had a preliminary discussion.

12. Has the BOE Finance department run the numbers on where it expects to land at 06-30-20?

Please see the document with 19-20 projections.

13. Given the dire economic predictions for FY21, has the BOE reconsidered the ask for a 3.9% increase? Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the BoE has not met since March 10. At that time, the Board of Education budget request had already been reduced by 1.4M dollars by the BoS. Under different circumstances, the Board of Education may have been asking the BoF to restore those funds in order to maintain our high-quality school district. Given the current financial outlook, the Board does understand that difficult decisions will need to be made for both the short term and long term well-being of our community; however, no action has been taken to change the board's unanimously approved budget. While the financial outlook is filled with uncertainty, there are some things that have remained unchanged. The Fairfield Public Schools is still required to provide a free, appropriate, public education to approximately 9600 students. Teaching and learning have continued through this pandemic. The need for the funding remains in this time of crisis. Given we don't know when students will be returning to schools, the Board of Education is waiting to make budget adjustments, hoping that time will provide a clearer understanding of both the financial, educational and social impact of this pandemic for both this fiscal year and the next.

14. What are we expecting for State or Federal aid as they may relate to SPED instruction as a result of COVID-19 shutdowns?

We do not expect additional aid specific to special education costs as a result of the COVID-19 shut down. Excess cost reimbursements may be impacted and the BOE will work with the Town if ECS funding is negatively impacted due to the school closure.

15. Please identify and quantify (dollar) district initiatives that are to be rolled out in the FY21 budget.

3 Middle School SRBI coordinators (coordinate interventions for each school) \$327,000

1 High School Health teacher \$109,000

1 Math Academy Grade 5 Teacher \$109,000

Maintenance projects \$532,243

16. How/if will FY21 State income (grants) be affected?

We have not been informed of any changes to state grants for next year

17. What is the risk that additional costs may need to be incurred for technology/curriculum development/professional development for teachers to support distance learning, i.e., in the event of a fall resurgence of the virus that necessitates an additional school closing? Can this risk be quantified and how does the administration view/plan for this possibility?

We need to consider purchasing additional Chromebooks for students in grades 3 to 5. We had budgeted for 906 Chromebooks. We need an additional 1148 units for a cost of \$254,856. Each machine costs \$192 plus an additional \$30 licensing fee. Funding for this would need be addressed through budget reallocations.

18. How is the success of the distance learning program being measured as it relates to learning outcomes?

Our current measure of success is student engagement. Are students accessing learning from home? Are they able to maintain pace with their class? Do we need to modify the pace of instruction to account for asynchronous learning?

We are reviewing modifications to our curriculum as we determine if we can reach traditional end of year goals for content and skills. We are reviewing how to best assess student progress. Traditional assessments are not useful in distance learning. When students do return, we know we will need to invest time in using pre-assessments to measure learning growth and loss. Our most vulnerable students are the greatest concern.

19. Do you anticipate that additional resources will need to be allocated in general or to SPED specifically to fill any identified gaps during the summer or later?

An Additional \$650,000 is anticipated for extended year services (special education summer school). Currently the special education department is planning its extended school year services to be longer than in the past due to this mandated school closure. Programming for additional students is anticipated as well.

Currently there is not an additional anticipated cost to deliver the high school summer school program.

There may be unanticipated nursing costs, however, depending on re-entry protocols if requirements to take student and staff temperatures or other medical protocols are implemented in order to enter schools.

20. What are the updated healthcare savings predictions for FY21?

The CT Partnership 2.0 Plan was scheduled to change carriers on July 1, 2020, but the change was postponed until October 1, 2020, and rates will not increase for that 3-month period. The savings for those 3 months is approximately \$400,000. Currently, the state anticipates the 10/1/20 rates to increase more than the originally anticipated 6.5%. If rates increase 8.5% for the remaining 9 months, that will negate the 3 months of savings. In addition, there is no allowance for changes in single, two person, and family coverage, and more importantly, involuntary loss of coverage.

21. What are the District's plans to hold summer school?

Currently the District is planning on holding extended school year services (special education summer school) throughout the months of July and August.

Currently the District is planning on holding the high school summer school program for four weeks (20 days total) in the month of July as usual.

22. If summer school is held, will it focus on addressing deficits related to delivering special education services via distance learning?

Extended school year services (special education summer school) will focus on goals and objectives identified in each student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Determination of specific services will be based on individual student needs as determined by the planning and placement team (PPT).

Summer school for high school students will focus on credit recovery.

23. If summer school is held, what are the related anticipated/unanticipated expenses?

Please see the response to #19.

24. How will expenses related to technology costs/expenses change, given what we have learned during distance learning and what we may anticipate occurring next year?

Please see the response to #12.

25. Please explain how the role of the paraprofessional (as well as other staff) has changed during distance learning. How might the paraprofessional (and other staff) role change next year and how will that affect staffing needs and expenses?

The role of the special education paraprofessional during distance learning is to assist the special education teacher in various capacities as assigned by the special education teacher and principal in order to support the needs of students with disabilities. This may include preparing materials to be posted on Google Classroom, preparing pre-recorded videos under teacher guidance to support student learning, contacting parents more frequently in order to monitor student progress, etc.

The role of the general education paraprofessional is to support students in their literacy and math skills as assigned by general education staff and principals. This may include providing additional support in reading or math for students, preparing pre-recorded videos under the guidance of the teacher, contacting parents more frequently in order to monitor student progress, etc.

Staffing needs and expenses moving forward should not be impacted. Participation in distance learning has the potential to expand the instructional support capabilities of certified and non-certified staff moving forward.