

**Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee**  
**Joint Meeting with the School Committee Finance Subcommittee**  
**March 23, 2021 8:00 AM**  
**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**RECEIVED**  
**TOWN CLERK**  
**BELMONT, MA**

DATE: April 23, 2021  
TIME: 9:24 AM

## **Meeting Minutes**

### **Members in Attendance**

**Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee:** Liz Goss, Anne Helgen, Geoff Lubien, Paul Rickter, Jack Weis, Laurie Slap

**School Committee:** Kate Bowen, Mike Crowley, Tara Donner, Evelyn Gomez, Andrea Prestwich

**School Department Administration:** Superintendent John Phelan, Finance Director Tony DiCologero

### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 AM.

### **FY 21 and FY 22 Budget Updates**

Jack made an introductory comment to let the School Department and School Committee know that the Education Subcommittee would be sending them our report recommending the inclusion of six additional tables in the FY 22 and future School Department budgets. He will send it to John, Andrea, and Mike, who will then share it with the rest of the group.

John started the meeting by sharing an updated version of the four-slide presentation summarizing the COVID relief funds received to date from various federal and state sources, and the amount spent to date and remaining under those various grants. Some of the key points included:

- The federal Coronavirus Relief Fund (CVRF, or 225 grant), federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER I) grant, and the state Coronavirus Prevention Fund (SCPF) grant were all used for similar items – facility support (like air filtration), additional technology equipment, PPE, and additional materials to support hybrid learning. These funds will all be expended by the end of FY 21.
- The second and third rounds of the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER II and ESSER III) grants are the only grants that can be used in FY 22, so the administration is planning to hold back the use of those funds until FY 22. The exact amount of the ESSER III grant is unknown at this time, but is expected to be about \$1 million. Those two grants can only be used for COVID-related expenditures. Some of the projected uses for those funds include:
  - A “recovery camp” for students this summer.
  - Surveillance COVID testing (which is currently being done on a model basis with just a handful of students and staff).
  - A remote-only schooling option for FY 22. DESE will require some sort of remote-only option, but it is unclear whether that will be based on just medical necessity, parental preference, or something else. John indicated that Belmont is discussing various remote-only options with Lexington, Arlington, Watertown, and Burlington to see if there is a way to provide those services on a regional basis. It would be prohibitively expensive for Belmont to create a parallel remote-only option on its own for every grade.

- Belmont has surveyed parents and about 90% want their children to return to the classroom. However, that means that the parents of about 450 students prefer the remote-only option, which is the equivalent of a full elementary school.
- The FY 22 budget does not have any funds in it for COVID-related costs. The department has spent \$200,000 - \$300,000 to date to prepare for re-opening in FY 21. John thinks that the \$1.4 million in COVID relief funds from ESSER II and III are likely to fall short of the actual costs the department will expend in FY 22 returning to full in-person learning.

Anne again asked John about the Chapter 70 funds associated with Belmont's decision to eliminate fees for full-day kindergarten. Tony explained that the increase in Chapter 70 aid to Belmont was likely to only be about \$136,000: \$40,000 from a change in the composition of Belmont's student population (economically disadvantaged, SPED, ELL, etc.), and a \$30 per-student increase in per-student aid under the new Chapter 70 formula. The issue for Belmont is that, given the decline in total enrollment, we will not be receiving the additional Chapter 70 aid that we were anticipating to offset the costs to the General Account from converting to town-funded full-day kindergarten. Tony pointed out that, had Belmont not made the change to full-day kindergarten, our enrollment decline would have potentially been even greater. However, the state's decision to hold communities harmless from cuts to Chapter 70 aid as the result of enrollment declines meant that Belmont's Chapter 70 aid was not impacted by the marginal increase in enrollment from full-day kindergarten. John and Mike Crowley expressed equal frustration with that outcome.

Regarding FY 22 enrollment, the department is seeing a return to normal registrations for kindergarten. Anecdotally, they are seeing some students returning to school from home schooling, but there is no hard data yet. There is no deadline for families to have to decide whether or when to return to school; as a public school system, families are able to register at any time.

Jack mentioned that the Education Subcommittee will be meeting twice over the next week to review the FY 22 School Department budget. We will compile our collective questions from those meetings and send them to John and Tony. Given the production schedule for the Warrant Committee report, we requested that we meet again with the Finance Subcommittee and the School Department sometime the week of April 5<sup>th</sup> (but after the override vote). John was agreeable, but cautioned that that is the first week back to full in-person learning so his priority will have to be school re-opening.

Mike Crowley asked what the administration was panning if the override vote were to fail. John stated that he would meet with the Leadership Council who would discuss options and make recommendations, which they would then bring back to the Finance Subcommittee.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 AM.