

Committee on Finance & Operations
Minutes of Meeting
March 8, 2024
Central Office Building/Conference Room
57 Suffolk St/Holyoke, MA

5:50 p.m.: Meeting came to order with John Whelihan, Chair; Ronald Collamore and Finance Director, Sean Mangano in attendance. The meeting was televised and recorded. Doctor Gloria Caballero-Roca attended the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

6: 10 p.m.: Superintendent/Receiver Anthony Soto was made a host for Spanish interpretation. He participated in the meeting via a cell phone. (reception was lost at various times)

Documents Presented:

- FY25 Budget Report
- October 18, 2023 Finance Committee minutes
- Student Opportunity Act (SOA)
2nd three-year plan "focus areas"

The Committee welcomed Finance Director, Shawn Mangano to the meeting. The Board reviewed a February 12, 2024 Budget Report.

Items discussed in the report included:

- Mr. Mangano stated the budget formation was developed through consulting with cabinet members, and principles. The school budget would be submitted to the city council in April or May 2024. Mr. Collamore asked whether the cabinet would present their individual budgets to the school committee. Mr. Mangano stated that unlike the city council, departmental budget hearing are not part of the school budget process. Principles and Cabinet members present their individual budgets to the Superintendent and Finance Department for review and approval.
- Mr. Mangano reviewed the district's FY25 revenue/expense projections
- Discussion arose over the current six million dollar school budget deficit. Mr. Mangano stated that work has begun to close the budget gap.
- The committee reviewed the FY25 School Budget Calendar
- The committee reviewed the state budget timeline including the House and Senate Budget.

Transportation:

- The administration is looking to reduce the transportation budget that is paid through the city side of the budget. The district is in the first year of their three-year contract with Durham School Services.
- Transportation costs are increasing throughout the state.
- Mr. Soto stated that although many students have SPED requirement, attempts are being made to cut the van pool costs.

- The DPW and Police Department are assisting the district regarding safety issues for student walkers. Lawrence School has a walking school bus. Mr. Whelihan stated that a cross walk was recently installed on Kane Road to assist McMahan's school walkers.
- Mr. Collamore inquired about the district using the vans for other school purposes.
- Foster Care Transportation (Title 4) costs are between \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year. The Federal Government reimburses the district for part of this cost.

ESSER Funding: (Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief)

- Funding for this federal program ends in September 2024. This is an earlier deadline than AARPA funding.
- Although the district was unsuccessful in hiring additional teachers with this revenue, Mr. Soto stated that \$1,000 bonuses were provided to our teachers and paraprofessionals. The district also provided attendance bonuses, up to \$1,500, to our employees. Mr. Whelihan commented that unfortunately the local press turned this into a negative story.
- Mr. Mangano provided a report detailing the school district's large contracts and grants. Mr. Collamore asked whether the district can use unused grant funds to provide employee raises. Mr. Soto stated that this has been done in the form of \$1,000 to \$3,000 retention bonuses. The current teacher's contract has one year remaining.

Affordable Connectivity Program:

- Doctor Caballero-Roca introduced discussion involving this Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Program. The program was created during the COVID pandemic. It provides a monthly discount for internet service to low-income recipients. Due to a lack of funding, the program will end in April 2024. Mr. Soto stated only 120 Holyoke families participated in this program. Discussion included whether the City Council/School Committee should lobby our local representatives to continue this program.

Doctor Caballero-Roca made the motion, seconded by Mr. Collamore, to request the School Committee request our local representatives to lobby for an extension to this program. The motion passed 3-0.

Charter School Costs:

- The District is only reimbursed 2 million dollars for its charter school assessment.

Student Opportunity Act (SOA):

- The district is working within the current plan that was created in 2022. Each district is required to create a new evidence based (SOA) plan to reduce persistent disparities in student achievement across all student groups. There will be a public meeting on April 1, 2024 to discuss the proposed plan. The new SOA Plan will hopefully:
 - Identify achievement gaps
 - Choose best practices
 - Determine how to achieve positive results
- The district has created a survey that the entire community can respond too. The new plan will be presented to the full school committee before it's finalized and presented to DESE.

Old Business:

- Mr. Collamore made the motion to approve the October 18, 2023 Finance Committee minutes. Mr. Whelihan seconded. The motion passed 2-0 with Doctor Caballero-Roca abstaining.
- The Board tabled discussion involving the current central office lease at 57 Suffolk St. The city is currently discussing the possibility of purchasing 217-225 High Street (2 buildings) and moving the central office into both buildings.

The committee thanked Mr. Mangano and Mr. Soto for their time and budget presentation.

7:15 p.m.: Motion to adjourn

Respectfully submitted,

John Whelihan
Chair