

CLERK OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
20 IRVING STREET
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01609

AGENDA #6

on: Friday, February 26, 2021
from: 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Virtually in: Room 410 at the Durkin Administration Building

ORDER OF BUSINESS

ACTION

I. CALL TO ORDER

INVOCATION - NONE

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/NATIONAL ANTHEM

II. ROLL CALL

Miss Biancheria, Mrs. Clancey, Mr. Foley, Ms. McCullough,
Mr. Monfredo, Ms. Novick and Mayor Petty

There was absent: Ms. McCullough and Mayor Petty

Mayor Petty arrived at 9:23 a.m.

III. APPROVAL OF RECORDS - NONE

IV. MOTION FOR RECONSIDERATION - NONE

V. IMMEDIATE ACTION - NONE

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT - NONE

VII. COMMUNICATION AND PETITION - NONE

VIII. REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES - NONE

IX. PERSONNEL - NONE

X. GENERAL BUSINESS

gb #1-64 - Administration
(February 11, 2021)

(See notes)

To meet with the Legislative Delegation to discuss the FY22 Budget and any other legislative priorities.

X. ADJOURNMENT

10:12 a.m.

Helen A. Friel, Ed.D.
Clerk of the School Committee

N O T E S

The School Committee of the Worcester Public Schools and the Legislative Delegation met virtually in Open Session at 9:16 a.m. in Room 410 of the Durkin Administration Building on Friday, February 26, 2021.

There were present at the Call to Order:

Miss Biancheria, Mrs. Clancey, Mr. Foley, Mr. Monfredo and Ms. Novick

There were absent: Ms. McCullough and Mayor Petty

Others in attendance:

Senator Harriette Chandler, Senator Michael Moore, Representative Daniel Donahue, Representative David LeBoeuf, Representative James O'Day and Representative Mary Keefe

Vice-chairman Foley chaired the meeting from 9:16 a.m. to 9:23 a.m.

Mayor Petty arrived at 9:23 a.m.

1. GENERAL BUSINESS

Superintendent Binienda thanked the Legislative Delegation for attending the meeting and for the support that they have provided during the pandemic. She stated that she would like their support for the one time Hold Harmless Enrollment funding for the FY22 Budget by using the October 1st 2019 figures.

Mr. Allen provided a PowerPoint on the FY22 Preliminary Budget Estimates and also stressed the importance of the Legislators' endorsement of the one time Hold Harmless Enrollment funding for the FY22 Budget by using the October 1st 2019 figures.

Mr. Allen highlighted the following:

- The FY22 Budget, as presented by the Governor, will result in a budget less than the FY21 Budget adopted last June before the late summer budget reductions.
- The district has seen an enrollment decline of 1,058 students or a 4.2 percent dropoff from the prior year. Seventy one percent of this decline is at the pre-school and kindergarten levels.
- The state has seen a total student enrollment decline of 37,263 students or a 3.9 percent drop-off from the prior year versus 8,200 students over the last 10 years.
- The private and parochial schools have reported the following enrollment decline from last year.

- St. Paul's High School (-32%)
 - St. John's High School (-17.7%)
 - Nativity School (-6.6%)
 - Worcester Academy (-34.4%)
- The district would see a decline in the Foundation Budget of \$3.5 million without the Student Opportunity Act money.
 - Due to the enrollment decline, the FY22 Foundation Budget and the FY22 General Fund Budget are less than the original budget amounts adopted last year.
 - FY21 Budget reduction (\$16.0 million) balanced on one-time, pandemic-related savings (transportation, crossing guards, literacy tutors, etc.)
 - FY22 provides less funding than adopted in the FY21 original budget (and FY22 cost increases makes less revenue available than last year's original budget amount).
 - The total Budget increase needed for the FY22 Baseline Level (restored one-time spending cuts) and 3% inflation growth is \$25,236,317.
 - The Student Opportunity Act provides an \$18.8 million Foundation Budget increase to be phased in over a seven year period.
 - The Student Opportunity Act reinstates the definition of low-income enrollment used prior to FY17, based on 185% of the federal poverty level. It replaces the economically disadvantaged designation (based on 133% of the federal poverty level) used from FY17 through FY21.
 - For FY22, a district's low-income enrollment is the higher of:
 - the number of students matched through the Department's current direct certification process (which identifies students whose families have been approved for various federal and state benefit programs) or
 - the district's FY16 low-income percentage multiplied by its current foundation enrollment.
 - The difference between Hold Harmless Enrollment and Hold Harmless Funding is:
 - Declining enrollment often results in lower foundation budget amounts for those districts. This could result in needing less Chapter 70 state aid to meet the Foundation Budget.
 - The state uses Hold Harmless Funding to protect school districts by providing no less in Chapter 70 state aid than received in the previous year.
 - The FY21 Hold Harmless Amount is \$361.3 million.
 - Hold Harmless Enrollment recognizes an unprecedented statewide enrollment decline attributed to the pandemic.
 - Forty-six percent of statewide enrollment decline is at the Pre-K and Kindergarten level.
 - It levels the funding for anticipated return of Pre-K and Kindergarten students next year that did not enroll this year.

- The redevelopment of Saint-Gobain property will require that the Facilities Department vacate their space before the end of this year. This space was at no cost to the system. Therefore, the FY22 Budget will reflect facility rental costs that did not exist prior to this year.
- The additional money needed for the maintenance and repairs to all Chromebooks.

Senator Chandler asked if the district is anticipating a large enrollment next year at the preschool and kindergarten levels.

Mr. Allen stated that the Administration is anticipating the 700 plus students that did not enroll in preschool and kindergarten this year to enroll next year plus the normal enrollment of students.

Senator Chandler asked if the Hold Harmless Enrollment is just a Worcester problem or if it is a statewide issue.

Mr. Allen stated that the decline has occurred mostly at the pre-K and Kindergarten levels and that it is a statewide problem.

Mayor Petty requested that the Administration provide an update on the FY22 Budget and an enrollment breakdown for each grade level.

Mr. Allen stated that Charter Schools and School Choice enrollments were not different from last year and resident students attending private and parochial schools are significantly down from last year. Therefore, the low enrollment figures that the Administration has seen were not due to migrating into private or parochial schools.

Mayor Petty asked if there were more homeschool applications filed, due to the pandemic.

Superintendent Binienda stated that, due to the pandemic, homeschooling applications increased.

Mr. Foley stated that by including the Hold Harmless funding in the Budget will allow the Student Opportunity Act money to be used as intended.

Ms. Novick suggested that the delegation engage with other districts in the conversation regarding Hold Harmless Enrollment.

Senator Chandler stated that Mr. Allen's presentation was a very thorough and clear report which helps the delegation to be ahead of the curve.

Ms. Novick requested that the updated slides that Mr. Allen presented be forwarded to the Legislators and School Committee members.

Miss Biancheria asked what roll Legislators play for the dissemination of the COVID-19 vaccines and whether or not prioritizing teachers is under their jurisdiction. She would like to know how the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccination is being handled by the Governor and the Legislators.

Representative LeBoeuf stated that there is a House and Senate Joint Task Force to deal with COVID-19 emergency preparedness. He stated that the delegation has been working very diligently but unfortunately, their concerns are falling on deaf ears. He indicated that he would forward to Dr. Friel an email address for individuals to submit their comments and testimony related to the vaccine rollout.

Miss Biancheria stated that it is discouraging that senior citizens can't get an appointment for the vaccine but homeless people and prisoners have received it.

Senator Chandler stated that every delegation member has been very busy talking with people who have concerns and complaints. She feels that the process has been a disaster and confusing for everyone, due to the constant changes in the process and procedures for the dissemination of the vaccine. She stated that the Governor made the right decision to administer the vaccine to homeless people and individuals in the House of Corrections due to the congregate living facility.

Miss Biancheria asked what, if any, changes will take place in order to make it easier for people to schedule an appointment for the shots.

Senator Chandler stated that a central system will be put in place and more COVID-19 vaccine sites will be open once more supplies are received.

Miss Biancheria stated that the two-one-one system (2-1-1) is not user friendly and very difficult to navigate. She asked if teachers are going to be put on the priority list to receive the COVID-19 vaccination shot.

Mayor Petty stated that Pfizer and Moderna announced an increase in the vaccine supply and also Johnson and Johnson's vaccine should be available soon which will allow more individuals to receive it.

Senator Moore stated that Massachusetts is in the top 10 for the rollout of the vaccines, but it is very inefficient and State officials are looking for ways to resolve the issues. He also stated that most legislators have raised their concerns regarding issues with the two-one-one system, the website and the administration of the shot.

Ms. Novick asked if there is anything that School Committee members can do to help advocate for the Hold Harmless Enrollment.

Senator Moore stated that any help from the MASC, MASS, MMA and at the grassroot levels is encouraged especially by reaching out to the House and Senate Ways and Means Committee members expressing concerns regarding the Hold Harmless Enrollment.

Representative LeBoeuf stated that each legislator has a meeting with the chair of the House, Ways and Means Committee prior to the discussion of the Budget. Therefore, when Legislators are apprised of concerns from school districts, beforehand, they can express these concerns to the chair and it is taken more seriously than if one person is saying it.

Ms. Novick asked if School Committee members should be reaching out to community members and other districts to make certain that they are contacting their representatives regarding Hold Harmless Enrollment concerns.

Representative Donahue stated that there are six or seven weeks before the Budget comes out of the House, Ways and Means Committee. He suggested that, as soon as committee members can get the word out to other districts to suggest that they contact the House, Ways and Means Committee members regarding their concerns to add Hold Harmless funding to all school district Budgets, the better. There is only a two-week window, after the Budget is released from the committee for an amendment to be filed and debated, if needed.

Ms. Novick stated that if there is a need for an amendment to be filed regarding the Hold Harmless, that School Committee Members would be willing to work with the Legislators to get it added into the Budget.

On a roll call of 6-0-1 (absent Ms. McCullough), it was moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:12 a.m.