



Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: April 11, 2021

Last week, I told you a little about the upcoming referendum and why we believe this is an important option for Bay County voters to consider.

This week, unfortunately, I find myself in the position of having to set the record straight when it comes to some additional federal funding we have received and some we hope to receive. While I cannot, and will not, tell people HOW to vote I am committed to doing all I can to ensure voters make decisions based on facts and not misleading graphics shared on social media, via campaign mail outs and other misinformation efforts.

I think we should start with the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding (also known as ESSER) which is money directed to help schools fund pandemic-related expenses as part of the Education Stabilization Fund in the federal government's CARES Act One.

In the first round of funding, we received about \$6 million in ESSER money that was used entirely to purchase much-needed personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer and additional cleaning and sanitizing supplies for our schools. This money was also used to fund additional cleaning staff and school nurses. Twenty percent of this, of course, went directly to charter schools per the statute.

ESSER II brought us about \$24 million to be spent on preventing "learning loss" associated with months of virtual school. Most of that money, allocated for the next two years, will be spent on extended and enhanced summer school to try to ensure our most vulnerable students do not fall behind their peers. These summer programs, which include meals and transportation, are typically very hands-on and involve smaller-than-usual student-to-teacher ratios to ensure individualized instruction is possible. Funds will also be used to extend the school day for schools where the data indicates students would benefit from that. Again, 20 percent of this funding also went directly to the charters.

We have every reason to believe that ESSER III is coming BUT we know for sure that these funds are not for reoccurring expenses like salary increases. Every document we have seen from the state level talks about focusing these funds on pandemic-related one-time expenses. We do not know exactly how much more we will receive, so anyone who tells you they do know

is incorrect, but we are sure there will be the usual strings attached and a long list of ways we can, and cannot, spend it. And, once more, 20 percent will go to the charter schools.

As directed by state officials, we anticipate using large chunks of whatever we receive to upgrade our aging HVAC units (one of the specific suggestions from the state) and to provide additional custodial support for our schools to ensure we can continue to maintain a higher level of sanitation than before the pandemic. We also believe that some of this money will be spent on additional tutoring services for students in need of extra assistance and on providing as much support as possible for students who have experienced a disrupted educational year. Funding streams will support additional learning opportunities for students for the next two years to make up for what was lost this year and last.

Will that mean more money for some employees? Yes, it will but it will be more money for more work which is NOT the same thing as a raise. Asking and paying employees to work during the summer and after school is NOT a raise ... it's simply extra money for extra hours on the job.

Recently it was stated that we've given raises every year so our employees don't need one this year. The actual truth is that since 2008, we have given raises every year except three years but those raises have ranged from one to three percent ... hardly keeping up with the cost of living increases we have all experienced.

Before anyone takes you down the path of "teachers only work nine months of the year" or "everyone needs a raise why are BDS employees more special," I'd like you to think back exactly one year from today.

One year ago, our educators came together as never before to figure out how to deliver education in a virtual world to students who had devices and those who did not. Our team put together a mobile feeding unit using our bus system that delivered thousands of meals a week to children who would have otherwise been hungry. Our teachers and support employees devised ways to deliver virtual lessons to those who had devices and paper-based lessons to those who did not. Our media specialists rode buses to deliver books to students who had no other way to get them and our counselors and administrators rode the same buses to deliver hope and encouragement to students who needed it the most.

I'd also like to make it clear that many of our employees work virtually year-round either teaching summer school, taking on students for state-funded tutoring or completing professional development (some that comes with a stipend but most of it on their own time) because they care about their profession and their students.

In short, just one year ago, our educators and support employees did the impossible and delivered some semblance of stability to our families in one of the most unstable situations any of us have ever experienced.

Did they do that for the money? No! They did it because they love and care about the children in our community and because they are dedicated, compassionate people who want to provide the very best education possible.

They, like all of us, have a vested interest in our community – when our children do well and are taken care of, our community benefits immensely.

This referendum is the only avenue we have available to raise about \$10 million to give those employees a significant, meaningful raise and to let them know that our community appreciates them.

Anyone who tells you it's about anything else is just dead wrong. It's about appreciating those who have done so much and exploring the only option available to us to do that.

Stay safe and God Bless!