

Dear OUUSD Board:

After last week's meeting our group met again to discuss the revised budget and other issues and concerns with the result being the questions below. We hope you will have an opportunity to work with administration to provide answers before or, at the latest, your next meeting.

1. We are concerned with the lack of timely transparency with notifications of upcoming meetings and minutes from the last meeting being posted anywhere. Can the board make sure that these documents are posted as soon as possible so that the public can be informed? Typically the minutes and documents are posted as quickly as we get them. I believe the policy is that minutes need to be posted within one week of the meeting. Minutes must be available for inspection five calendar days after the meeting. 1 V.S.A. § 312(b)(2). In addition, minutes must be posted no later than five calendar days after the meeting to an official website, if one exists, that is maintained or has been designated as the official website of the public body.

2. Has the professional staff contract actually been finalized with that 3.5% salary increase? That last \$62,500 add-on came as a real (and unwelcome) surprise. Negotiations are ongoing.

3. We recognize that you are working diligently to communicate the importance of getting families to complete and submit the paperwork relative to application for free & reduced lunches and that there is a possibility that the district could reach the 40% threshold which would trigger federal funds for fully covering the breakfast and lunch programs. With that in mind, we have a series of questions:

a. what are the current percentages by school (Oxbow, NES, BES?) It is important to recognize that there are two school lunch programs that folks are referencing and possibly mixing up.

1). Community Eligibility Program.

This is fully funded by the Federal Government. For a school to be eligible, 40% of families in the community must have successfully applied for and participated in four specific Vermont state programs: 3 Squares; Essential Person; Fuel Assistance; and Reach Up. Additionally, any family with a foster child would qualify. These programs are separate from the school and the State of Vermont tracks and informs each school district of its numbers. Currently these are the numbers for the schools in OUUSD. We monitor them monthly.

Bradford 26.59%

Newbury 31.58%

Oxbow 23.00%

For further information on the programs. look here:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/mybenefits/apply>

2) Provision 2

This is a program that requires local support to provide universal meals for all students. Families apply for Free and Reduced lunch. We are urging all families to apply as it is often true that some families might qualify but don't apply. The ratio of F & R lunch and breakfasts to "paid" (under Provision 2, paid by the District) customers locks in after the first year and there is no need to do the whole application process for four years after, nor need to chase down unpaid bills, and no need to track F&R meals for the time period. Obviously the more F & R meals there are, the lower the overall contribution from the budget. We did the best we could to project the numbers, but there is no absolute certainty here.

Oxbow and Newbury are bid out. The Abbey Group won the bid two years ago, so there is one more year. Bradford never went to a private company and thus is not bid. The prices for meals are common to all three schools, and for that matter, all of our schools. Both the Abbey Group and our local provider in Bradford are preparing to do the Provision 2 process if the budget passes. This year the Agency extended the deadline for application and implementation to October 1. Were the budget to fail, it will be too late to use this program in the current year. Normally each year parents fill out F & R meals application and so the percentage of qualification will not be known for a few weeks. Last year it was in the 40 - 50 % range. But again, this percentage has nothing to do with the CEP program directly.

With all this said, the 195K projection is a net cost after all reimbursement funds have been applied.

- b. Is the \$195k figure that's in the budget a contracted amount that has gone out to bid - and is it the net cost after all federal funds are received for those families eligible for free-and-reduced? Part of the reason we would like all families to fill out the Free and Reduced lunch applications is the more families that qualify the more the Federal program pays and the less our community would pay.*
- c. In Danielle's most recent 'plea' for all families to submit paperwork she stated that the district is at approximately 30% right now. It seems like quite a stretch to increase that by another 10%, but if that can happen, might the board consider committing to 'setting that \$195k aside' to be used to offset taxes next year? This would need to be discussed by the board.*
- d. And if that 40% is reached, would it take effect for the '20-21 school year (i.e., are there deadlines for submission to get it included this year? See above.*

4. Can you tell us if any CARES-ESSER funds have been received from the federal government and if so, were they awarded to individual schools or to the district? And if so, how much has been received to-date? We have received a preliminary allocation from the State at the SU level. This amounts to about \$619,000 at the SU level. There is a process to go through with the Agency of Education to distribute these funds to each district, as well as the two independent schools in the SU. This process needs to be completed and the Agency needs to approve a plan for how the funds can be spent. This is not going to be something that we can use as a revenue stream to reduce the OUUSD budget and educational spending directly, just like Title funds can't be used in that manner.

5. Do you have any expectations as to what further federal funds associated with COVID may be destined for the district?

We are still awaiting notification from the State and have not yet received any further allocations of monies.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Fred Clements, Kathy Damon, Bud Haas, Marvin Harrison, Rick & Emmy Hausman, Paul Jewett, Janet Mitchell, Daniel Perry III, Claude Phipps, Monique Priestley