

# VICTOR CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Use of Stimulus and State Aid Survey Results

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## Background

The Victor Central School District has been restricted financially for several years, largely due to New York State “freezing” their state aid formula after the economy deteriorated in 2008. The frozen formula did not account for the growth in student enrollment within the district, during a time in which most other schools remained the same, or declined. For the 2020-2021 school year, Victor received only 57.8% of the state aid they should have received based on the formula.

During the development of the 2021-2022 budget, Victor was the recipient of several positive budget decisions made by both the Federal Government and the State of New York. Beginning in February, and again in March, the Federal Government signed into law the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, which provided stimulus allocations to schools. Then, in April of 2021, New York State proposed a gradual “thawing” of the state’s “frozen” state aid formula, which resulted in Victor becoming about 70% funded.

To assist with the planning and development for the use of these additional funds, the District sent out a survey in June to all stakeholders who have registered to receive communication from the District. The survey provided prospective respondents background on the two different sources of funding along with possible uses. Respondents were asked to rank the options provided to them from most important to least important. At the conclusion of each section, there was an opportunity to provide additional feedback. The results of those surveys are detailed below.

## Statistics

942 different survey responses were received. Each respondent was first asked to identify their relationship with the district; either a parent or guardian, family member, community member, representing classified children (Student with disabilities, English Language Learners, McKinney Vento, and Incarcerated Youth), student, or staff member. Each respondent had to select at least one, but could select all that applied. Of the 942 responses received, 131 respondents identified with 2 or more stakeholder groups. The demographics of the completed surveys were as follows:

<b>Category</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Parent or Guardian	719	76%
Family Member	32	3%
Community Member	79	8%
Representing Classified Children	19	2%
Student	94	10%
Staff Member	183	19%

## Stimulus Funds

The first part of the survey asked respondents how they believed the District should consider using the approximately \$7.1 million dollars allocated in CRRSA and ARP stimulus funds. The guidance for the stimulus funds restricts the money to the following:

Options:

1. Extended School Day Intervention/Enrichment and/or Summer Programming for Students (Expansion of Academic Intervention & Supports for Students beyond the regular School Day/Year)
2. Expansion of Academic Intervention & Supports for Students during the School Day (Additional small group services that supplements the general curriculum instructional to assist students in meeting the NYS learning standards)
3. Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity for students that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors)
4. Supporting Early Childhood Education (use of funds to sustain and support access to early childhood education programs such as UPK)
5. Expansion of K-12 Social & Emotional Programming for Students (Implementing evidence based strategies to meet students' social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs)
6. Health and Safety of Facilities (Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean the facilities and continue to provide training for staff on sanitation / Air Quality Improvements- Roof Top Units)

Respondents were asked to rank these options from 1-6, with 1 being the most important, and 6 being the least important. The option with the lowest average score was viewed as the most important by stakeholders, and the highest score was the least important. The results were as follows:

Option #	Avg. Score	Ranking
1	3.543	5
2	2.417	1
3	2.513	2
4	3.672	6
5	2.941	3
6	3.535	4

Based on the information received, stakeholders felt that expansion of intervention and support services for students during the school day and technology upgrades were the two most critical uses of stimulus funds, followed by expansion of social and emotional help, health and safety of facilities, extended school day and year, and early childhood education.

## Comments

In addition to ranking the six options, respondents had the opportunity to leave comments that were not addressed. There were 231 comments entered, with various themes. In order for a theme to be developed, it required at least 10 responses to fall under the same category. The themes present in the comments were:

- 1) Need for More Technology – 47 responses
- 2) More Enrichment Opportunities – 24 responses
- 3) Additional Programming / Course Offerings – 23 responses (30 if you include UPK and Early Intervention)
- 4) More Social / Emotional Support for Students – 23 responses
- 5) Focus on Facilities / Air Conditioning – 13 responses
- 6) Additional Staffing / Smaller Class Sizes – 13 responses
- 7) Professional Development for Teachers and Staff – 11 responses
- 8) Health and Safety – 10 responses.

## Plan for Use of Stimulus Funds

When determining how to use the stimulus funds, the District analyzed its' needs through all lenses. The plan was to ensure that the programs that would be instituted were going to be effective and could be maintained.

One of the largest needs across all constituents was the need to purchase additional technology. The goal was to get to a 1:1 device to student model. One concern of using stimulus funds to create a 1:1 model is the legacy costs to purchase new devices once the stimulus funds are exhausted, and the potential future burden on taxpayers. In order to make it possible, the District needed to get creative and find ways to build additional revenues to support future expenses from this decision. One option was to increase revenues through BOCES aid. Unfortunately, BOCES aid cannot be generated on purchases made with grants, so with some strategic planning, the decision was made to shift other expenses that did not generate aid into the grant, and make these purchases from the voter approved General Fund budget, which would generate BOCES aid.

The expenses that were moved to the stimulus grant were the salaries and fringe benefits of counselors, social workers, and teachers. Because these salaries were originally in the General Fund budget, there was already a placeholder to move them back into the General Fund when stimulus funds expire, and the additional BOCES aid could be added to the BOCES equipment budget line to replace these additional devices as they reach the end of their useful life.

# Foundation Aid

Similar to the federal stimulus funds, districts that received an increase of \$1 million, or 10% increase in state aid were required to seek input from stakeholders on the use of the additional state aid. The District received an extra \$2.4 million, or 20%, meeting both thresholds to seek input. Much like the federal stimulus funds, community members had 7 categories to choose from, but this time they were also given the opportunity to create their own response. The categories pre-populated for them were as follows:

Options:

- 1) Restore UPK and Enrichment Positions
- 2) More emphasis on student social/emotional health
- 3) Strengthening the district's financial position
- 4) Promote cleanliness in the buildings through hiring additional cleaners
- 5) Hire a translator to assist English Language Learners
- 6) Add additional staff to the technology department to help support expansion of technology into the classroom
- 7) Increase instructional positions
- 8) Other - please use next section to explain

Following the same format used to gauge the federal stimulus funds, respondents were asked to rank the categories above between 1 and 8, with 1 being the most important to the respondent, and 8 being the least important. In order to analyze the data, we took the average score for each category, so the lower the score, the more important it was viewed by respondents. The results are as follows:

Option #	Avg. Score	Ranking
1	3.675	4
2	3.083	2
3	3.883	5
4	4.356	6
5	5.205	7
6	3.326	3
7	2.950	1
8	5.518	8

The results of the state aid portion of the survey showed that respondents felt that the additional monies would be better suited to hire additional instructional staff to keep class sizes down. This was followed closely by an increased emphasis on social emotional health, additional technology staff to support technology, restoring UPK and enrichment positions, strengthening the district’s financial position, promoting the cleanliness of the building with additional cleaners, hire a translator for English Language Learners, and “other”, which is synthesized below.

## Other

Of all the responses, there were 162 instances when the “other” option was utilized on the state aid portion of the survey. It was difficult to use 10 similar responses to create a theme with the low participation, so comments that appeared more than 3 times were considered a theme. The majority of the responses were to reiterate one of the 7 prepopulated categories, but there were some additional themes such as the need to examine our facilities/air conditioning, increasing teacher/staff compensation, improving athletic fields, increasing supply budgets for content areas, additional professional development for teachers, and increased funding for special education.

## Comments

At the conclusion of the survey for state aid, respondents had the opportunity to share any information that they would like to be considered. We again used 10 or more comments in the same category to determine whether or not there was a theme with responses. The theme that was the most present was the need to address learning loss related to COVID, from hiring additional teachers to reduce class sizes, or hiring additional aides to work one on one with students. Coming in a tie for second is the need for enrichment, both during the school day/year but also after school and in the summer, and the need for strong financial planning to keep taxes low. The last theme present in the comments was the need for additional technology for instruction. The number of responses for each theme are listed below:

- 1) Hire additional teachers/aides to decrease class sizes and provide more support to students – 18 responses
- 2) More Enrichment Opportunities, during the day, after school, and summer – 13 responses
- 3) Be fiscally responsible / keep taxes low – 13 responses
- 4) Need for more Technology – 11 responses

## Use of Additional State Aid Funds

The District used the additional state aid to restore positions that were originally proposed to be cut, such as a section of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and enrichment. In addition, the District added a Reading Teacher in the Early Childhood Center, a part time Special Education teacher, two Academic Intervention Teachers, two Social Workers, a Behavior Analyst, and a full-time Parent Information / Translator to help support students when they return in the fall.

On the support staff side, approximately 3-5 additional cleaners will be hired to assist with the cleanliness of the bathrooms and buildings to ensure the safety of students and staff. Three additional part time BOCES employees were hired in the Technology Office to support the roll out of the additional devices, and clerical positions were created to support the administrative team focus on the future of instruction.

To improve our instructional delivery of curricula and to assist in the transformation of instruction caused by COVID, the District hired two K-12 Directors to assist with curriculum development and professional development. These positions will work directly with other leadership staff to strengthen our academics.

To reaffirm that it is being fiscally prudent, the District also removed the use of any assigned reserves to balance the budget so it is not spending more money than they are receiving for the upcoming school year. This allows the District to potentially look at flattening the tax levy increases in future years.