

**LNSU/LNMUUSD Finance and Capital Committee Meeting**  
**December 13, 2023**  
**Minutes of Meeting**

**In Attendance:** Mark Stebbins, Sue Prescott, Bart Bezio (Zoom), Deb Clark, Bethann Pirie, Diane Reilly, Denise Maurice, Dylan Laflam

**Minute Taker:** Sue Trainor

**Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Public Comment:** Stebbins called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. Prescott made a motion, seconded by Bezio, to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously. There was no public comment.

**Discuss FY25 Budget Development:** Clark reported that late this afternoon she had received updated long-term ADM numbers. The State had pulled back some of the free and reduced students. Overall it was still good news but some of the items put into the high school budget had been removed. Because of the new numbers, Monday's Board meeting would be an overview of where the FCC was with the budget process. Clark stated she didn't believe they could try to approve a budget or move one forward until the numbers settled down.

**Facilities:** Laflam provided information on the budget drivers, with salaries and benefits being a huge driver. Laflam offered a list of projects or equipment that were deferred maintenance items. Whatever item not included in the budget would roll over into the capital plan. Laflam stated that safety was most important so any safety concern would be funded and added to the top of the list.

Laflam also included information on the District's Act 72 School Facilities Assessment report. Laflam didn't necessarily agree with all of the financial estimates. The report primarily reflected replacement costs. Laflam's goal was always to perform preventative maintenance rather than replacement of an item. Replacement costs tended to be quoted as 20 years, whereas the District's goal was to maintain items properly, resulting in 30 years or longer. The report noted that there were no unsafe conditions listed, as well as no ADA or code violations.

Laflam then addressed the ongoing capital plan. The District had not funded any of the FY23 project list. There were only two items on the FY24 list moving forward in the budget and both of them were low cost items. The proposed budget did not address any of the expensive repairs that would need to be dealt with eventually. The walk-in freezer roof in Eden would be dealt with and half of the door replacement at LUHS would be replaced.

Clark stated the middle school gym bleacher was rolled into the budget at a cost of \$60,000 and possibly the kitchen floor as well. However, Clark said those would be pulled from the budget. Prescott stated that over the years money had been put into a capital fund annually for repairs and asked if that was still going on. Laflam stated that was not being done. Clark reported the items that had originally been put into the budget were bleacher repair, the kitchen floor, and some technical services at the high school. They were taken out, then replaced and now she was probably going to have to take them out again because of the updated numbers.

Prescott asked about the capital reserve fund. Clark reported there was \$300,000 in reserves at the secondary level and \$26,000 available at the elementary level. Stebbins explained that after the merger all schools had had to use their capital at their individual schools and now they were trying to rebuild the reserves at five elementary schools. It was difficult to catch back up. Clark stated with the volatility of the tax rates, the surpluses all went to the budgets to hold them down. It was definitely time to get back to building up those reserves. Laflam noted that because the District approved preventative measures, it protected the District somewhat from big emergency repairs. Laflam said they were at the end of life cycle of the roofs of several buildings. Air conditioning would also need to be addressed.

**High School:** Pirie provided details of enrollment and class size. The major line items were salaries and benefits. Pirie explained that the ESSER positions had made the school a better place. There were three positions they hoped to add and/or keep. Included in this budget was a request for one full time behavior specialist and an increase from .5 to 1 full-time behavior specialist. These had been ESSER funded. Pirie said that what had allowed the school to make the progress it had made making the school feel like a safer and better place were the behavior specialists. Pirie also hoped to add one full-time substitute coordinator to be shared with the middle school. This position would work with all substitutes and would build teaching schedules. Currently the high school only had one full time substitute.

Another item that had increased in cost was trading in the driver's education car. The car was supposed to be traded in every three years. However, due to COVID, the miles on the car had been significantly lower than normal. The guidance costs also looked higher because the student assistance coordinator had moved into that line item. Capstone costs were also moved into guidance. The middle and high school shared the home school liaison which was another ESSER position. That position had a significant impact on building relationships between home and school that helped to bring students to the school. The technology line was increased for rental fees, subscriptions, and different programming.

Clark asked if the new employees being added were in addition to the FY24 budget or an addition to what was happening in the schools. Pirie said they were in the schools now and had been for two full years. This was the last full year of ESSER funding.

Clark explained that a dynamic also happening was that the big increase in salaries for teachers was not reflected in the FY24 budget. Therefore, those FY24 salaries and the expected increase for FY25 were in the budget. These FT employees were genuine additions even though they were in place now. The positions were there but being funded differently and not hitting the general fund. In response to a question about the behavior specialist positions, Clark explained that these were not special education positions. The individuals were working with the general population, which the school hadn't needed to do in the past. There had been an opportunity room person in the past, but the behaviors the school saw coming back from COVID were much different. It was necessary to have people in place that were well trained in behavior issues.

Maurice explained that prior to COVID, the middle school had a student support center. The mix of students in the center who had IEP's was 50/50. Once COVID hit, the need for that space increased and they couldn't provide all of the students with the skills and maturity they needed prior to entering high school. Therefore, the high school needed to fill the need. That's where the ESSER funded positions came in to assist. Pirie stated that having the behavior specialists provided teachers and other students the ability to continue without disruptions. It had become a system in which if Pirie had to trim the budget she would trim anything but these behavior specialists. They were making the school a better and safer place.

**Middle School:** Maurice explained that salaries and benefits were the main drivers. Maurice noted the biggest change in the budget was the athletic trainer. This position was shared with the high school. A trainer was required to be on site under VPA rules. Pirie noted the high school was paying Copley Hospital for their services and were sharing and competing with other schools for the hospital's athletic trainer. As the VPA was looking at what were considered high impact sports, schools across the state were moving to hiring athletic trainers so they didn't have to cancel games.

Maurice continued, stating that both schools shared a home school liaison caseworker for families and students who were struggling. This position helped connect a student and their family to other agencies that may be of assistance to the family. The middle school also had a part time mental health provider funded through ESSER. That position worked with groups, teachers, and struggling students and that had been a very valuable resource.

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator was now listed under the Supervisory Union budget. That position had been funded through ESSER. The tech integrationist and proficiency-based learning coach were both positions shared with the high school. Both positions had not been filled over the past two years, primarily because they couldn't find the right fit for both of those positions and they were looking to find funds for other positions. Clark explained that the tech integrationist bridged curriculum and traditional IT and supported teachers and students using the technology. Another reason for not filling the positions was because they had a new Curriculum Director in place and they wanted her to have time to develop her role and be a part of the hiring process.

In response to a question from Stebbins about the proficiency-based learning coach position, Pirie stated it should be called an instructional coach because that position kept teachers aware of best practices and shifts in models.

Stebbins asked about the substitute coordinator. There was a lengthy discussion in which Maurice and Pirie explained the difficulties they were having in finding substitutes. Since COVID, there were fewer substitutes available to call. Additionally, there was more staff calling out. The coordination of substitutes was now being done by one person for grades 7 through 12. That person also was a sub for classes. This was difficult for one person to manage. Clark explained they needed a full-time person responsible for finding substitutes as well as full-time subs. Pirie stated they needed to build back a base of substitutes. This was a problem they had been working on for quite some time. Pirie explained the coordination that had to take place when substitutes weren't available.

Prescott asked about block scheduling, noting there had been some conversation about going back to traditional five days a week. Prescott noted it may be more difficult for a substitute to deal with a 90-minute block rather than a shorter block. Pirie stated they had not had any discussions or action steps in this area since Pirie had been there. However, the leadership team had thought quite a bit about what content areas would work well for students to meet daily for shorter blocks of time. Math and language were the two areas that came up in these discussions. This year there was a trial run with a math class.

Stebbins asked about leasing rather than owning the driver's education car. Pirie said she would look at leasing.

Stebbins asked about the request to increase the hours of the part-time secretary to a full-time position. Pirie explained the school needed to have someone who was able to work from morning to late afternoon.

**Hyde Park:** Reilly stated she had the highest increase in the district. The largest increase was in salaries. This was a result of the salaries of Hyde Park teachers being realigned. Hyde Park had the most teachers who were realigned. Additionally, they were given a raise and would be given a second raise in this budget. Salary increases alone were around \$229,000. Prescott noted this was a two-year combination of salaries. The SU assessments also went up considerably.

The literacy interventionist and math interventionist positions had been ESSER funded and Reilly wanted to be able to keep those positions. Reilly stated the school had never had these positions. The interventionists schedules were full with multiple children on waitlists.

Reilly then discussed the need for an additional teacher. Currently there were sixteen students in 6th grade with one teacher. Next year's 4th grade class of 35 students would be moving to 5th grade which only had one teacher. 25 students would be coming from 5th to 6th. The 5th and 6th grade only had one teacher while the rest of the classes had two teachers.

Reilly reported that at present there were 30 students in kindergarten, 25 students in 1st grade, 28 students in second grade, 29 students in 3rd grade, 29 students in 4th grade, 25 students in 5th grade and 16 students in 6th grade.

Reilly stated there were 11 new students from outside of district who had moved to Hyde Park. There were 18 students who were in-district transfers. There were two state-placed students. Prescott brought up the idea that the district was able to deny access to in-district transfers. Reilly said she couldn't take any more 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. Reilly then outlined the fact that 18 of the 30 in-district transfers had a plan of some sort that required additional support. Prescott was concerned about capacity and suggested considering not taking any more students from outside the district.

Reilly was happy to see her school numbers increasing. The school had lost students when they moved the school to the Plaza. Now the numbers were getting back to normal. Prescott stated she would like the Board to explore the in-district transfer numbers and asked that Central Office review that. If students were coming from another school in the district, would it be possible for a teacher to transfer as well.

Stebbins was surprised the school hadn't had a math or literacy interventionist before. Reilly stated the school had a Title 1 literacy and a math position before. The school had one math person who did intervention, coaching, in charge of supporting math instruction and was also the assessment coordinator. Reilly stated it had been hard changing math programs and her interventionists had taken on district roles supporting other schools with math instruction.

Prescott stated that what they were hearing through the budget process was that the ESSER funded positions were the important positions that schools wanted to keep. Reilly stated the students still had a large deficit. The students in the middle years were missing quite a bit that required the assistance of the interventionists. Members of the Committee talked about the allure and dangers of the internet and how to move students away from using their phones in school. Reilly stated the school had cut back on using digital instruction.

Moving on to the District budget, Clark reported that the student numbers had changed and were a little lower. There were funds at the primary level the Committee would have to find. Clark would look to find places that were less painful to cut. Clark noted that what the Committee heard universally was that people/positions were the most valuable investment.

Prescott suggested looking at an 8% increase. She was concerned that a 9% increase was too close to going over the 10% increase with all the variables taking place. Clark stated the student count needed to settle down before coming to that decision. This was the only year they could do this. Clark reminded the Committee that the deadline to approve the budget was January 16<sup>th</sup> and she was hoping to approve on January 8<sup>th</sup>.

Reviewing the elementary schools, Eden's expense increase was 12.48%, Waterville's expense increase was 20% and Hyde Park's was a 23.26% increase. Clark noted that both Waterville and Hyde Park were experiencing growth.

Clark explained that once the budget was below 10% per LT ADM spending threshold increase, taxes wouldn't go up as much as she thought they would. If they removed \$275,000 at the elementary level and applied all the reserves, before the 5% protection it was going up \$83 per \$100,000 home. The 5% increase would hold it to \$67 per \$100,000 home. This provided the District four years to get to the natural tax rate of 3-5% per year.

Prescott stated it was important to explain why the ESSER funded positions were needed and it would be important to have student data that showed what the impact had been since returning from COVID. A lot of positions were being added and it was important to show why they were needed. Stebbins noted that he had heard the issues were evolving and more complex services were needed. It was clear that after COVID more students were exhibiting behaviors that you'd never expect to see. Everyone was struggling. Clark stated it wasn't so much that there were more students with issues, but the complexity, breadth and depth of the issues had grown with students and families. The services were still needed. It was clear that home liaison and guidance positions was now needed at all the schools.

Clark reported that with the revised numbers provided by the state, she would remove \$275,000 from the elementary schools for expenses and use all of the \$243,000 in the FY25 surplus. The secondary schools would see a reduction of \$200,000 in expenses and she would apply \$162,000 in reserves.

Monday's meeting would be a review of the budget process and another explanation of Act 127. It seemed that Board members were unclear about the impact of that Act. Prescott suggested sending a one-page explanation of Act 127 to Board members.

**Adjourn:** The Committee adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m.