



Wisconsin Rapids Board of Education
Educational Services Committee

510 Peach Street · Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494 · (715) 424-6701

MINUTES

Katie Bielski-Medina, Chairperson
John Benbow, Jr.
Troy Bier
Larry Davis
John Krings, President
Kathi Stebbins-Hintz
Julie Timm

March 4, 2024

LOCATION: Board of Education Office, 510 Peach Street, Wisconsin Rapids, WI
Conference Room A/B

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: John Benbow, Jr., Katie Bielski-Medina, Troy Bier, Larry Davis, John Krings, Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, Julie Timm

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Craig Broeren, Roxanne Filtz, Steve Hepp, Aaron Nelson

- I. Call to Order
- II. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- III. Public Comment – none.
- IV. Actionable Items

A. Stronger Connections Grant

Ms. Roxanne Filtz, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, presented information concerning the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections Grant application submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for which the District was successful in receiving a \$400,000.00 grant award. The purpose of the grant is to support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in establishing safe, healthy, and supportive learning opportunities and environments for students.

Action steps in the District grant plan are to maintain its partnership with Gaggle Therapy and other mental health providers, continue the implementation of TIER I Social and Emotional Learning resources that follow the WRPS Multi-Level Systems of Support, continue established partnerships with Families and School Together (FAST) and Playworks, and work with professional staff members to complete the Trauma Resilience Certification through the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, along with other action steps that support the work the District has outlined in its Strategic Plan. The grant requires Equitable Services for private schools, and WRPS will provide ongoing consultation with the three private schools who have opted to participate in the grant funding. The annual award is effective from February 1, 2024 through September 30, 2026.

A question was raised by the Committee around whether grant dollars could be used toward equity or social justice initiatives. Ms. Filtz confirmed that this is an area that would be covered under the grant.

ES-1 Motion by John Benbow, seconded by Julie Timm, to approve of accepting the \$400,000.00 grant award as outlined in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act – Stronger Connections Grant. Motion carried unanimously.

V. Updates

A. Families and Schools Together (FAST) Program

Teri Thomas, District 4K Coordinator and Student Engagement Facilitator at Pitsch Early Learning Center, presented information on the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program which is an internationally acclaimed parent engagement program proven to help children succeed at school by building stronger, more supportive relationships at home. The District has implemented the program in four elementary buildings: Pitsch, Grove, Howe, and Washington. FAST activities are scheduled to run for eight weeks in the evening and are designed to strengthen family bonds, empower parents, increase positive communication, and improve the child's overall academic performance and emotional functioning. The program has been well received by participants.

B. Play and Learn Program at Pitsch Early Learning Center

Ms. Thomas also provided information about the WRPS Play and Learn program which is a collaborative effort between 4K teachers and the Special Education team that was introduced to families in the fall of 2023. Play and Learn provides some school experience to general education students in the community who may not be enrolled in a 3K or 4K program, and it also provides an alternative general education setting for 3- and 4-year-olds with special needs to receive special education services. Between ten and twenty families attend Play and Learn weekly on a fairly consistent basis.

Strong family connections are formed and children in the program expand and grow in their social, fine motor, and communication skills which helps increase their readiness for 4K. Families are provided helpful resources, and the program's partnership with community groups such as Women's United helps provide items such as books for students to take home and keep.

Two parent surveys were conducted in October and December, and another round of surveys will go out in April and May to gauge program success and determine other ways families can be supported. For the future, the program may be offered on Monday mornings at Pitsch and potentially at a community site such as McMillan Library.

C. ESSER III Formula Grant Spending Summary

Ms. Filtz provided an update on the use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) funds. The District has strategically and responsibly utilized these dollars in the amount of \$7,082,465 to address challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. WRPS has demonstrated transparency to stakeholders through routine reporting and Board approval on expenditures throughout the grant funding process. As required, all reporting deadlines have been met and at least 20% of the funds were identified as meeting the required Evidence Based Instructional Strategies (EBIS); in fact, WRPS allocated 83%, or \$4,973,515.07 of its total ESSER III funds, to support activities and strategies outlined in the EBIS categories.

Examples of how funds were used include the hiring of classroom teachers to reduce class sizes, the addition of Student Engagement Facilitator (SEF) positions, purchases focused on a deliberate effort to improve the overall school culture and atmosphere for learning at the middle school, numerous professional development opportunities for both instructional and non-instructional staff, enhanced programming to promote social and mental well-being, and expanded community partnerships to offer opportunities for families to take advantage of such as the Morning Jumpstart program which offers wrap-around care service and additional academic support for elementary school students.

Ms. Filtz concluded by stating that all ESSER III Formula Grant Funds are on track to be expended by the September, 2024 deadline. It is possible that approximately \$400,000 may be available

to strategically assist with the looming budget shortfall anticipated for the upcoming 2024-25 fiscal year.

Committee members thanked Ms. Filtz for her thorough report and expressed their appreciation for the excellent planning and appropriate use of ESSER III grant dollars.

VI. Consent Agenda Items

ES-1 BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Approval

VII. Future Agenda Items/Information Requests

The Committee reviewed the following future agenda items:

- Start College Now (SCN) and Early College Credit Program (ECCP) Applications (April)
- Career and Technical Education Updates (April)
- Student Code of Conduct (April)
- K-12 Revised Art Curriculum Maps (May)
- K-12 Art Acquisition Request (May)
- District Professional Development Plan (May)
- 2024-25 Professional Development Calendar (May)
- 6-8 Science Acquisition (June)

Ms. Medina adjourned the meeting at 6:35 p.m.