



Legislation Text

File #: 21-0040, Version: 1

Item:

Additional Funding for HOPE Learning Centers

Date of BOCC Meeting: January 25, 2021

Request for Board Action:

The Board is requested to consider the additional funding request from the HOPE Learning Centers.

Once Durham Public Schools (DPS) determined that the SY20-21 school year would start with fully remote instruction, efforts to identify sufficient remote learning center options intensified. DPS identified six of their own sites which could be used, which were later reduced to three. Due to concerns about outreach, enrollment, and the question of whether there would be enough free seats available, a number of local non-profits determined to open some additional “HOPE” remote learning centers. All seats at these new centers were to be free, and they were to focus enrollment on those children (and families) which qualified for free and reduced lunch, whose parent(s) work essential jobs, whose parents are unemployed because of COVID, and/or who are part of the foster care system or live in public housing.

These providers, under the fiscal agency of the DPS Foundation, began approaching the City and County in mid-August with funding proposals. The cost estimate of \$200 per student per week included sufficient staffing for small, socially-distanced classrooms, backup staffing to account for possible sickness, additional janitorial services similar to those purchased by the County for its buildings, and two meals and snacks for every student each day. On August 24th, Commissioners approved \$405,000 of what they thought was partial funding for the first semester, but due to slower initial enrollment and outside fundraising (including \$338,000 from the City of Durham), the funding available to the HOPE providers sufficed for all of the first semester, which ran through January 15th, 2021.

The HOPE Learning Centers are all operating at capacity at this point, as are the remaining three DPS remote learning centers. Though a small number of staff and students associated with the centers have contracted COVID since the centers opened, there is no evidence that any spread occurred *at* the centers.

Staff conversations with the providers regarding second semester options began slightly before Thanksgiving. Though the providers were asked for a proposal, enough questions about how DPS would operate in the second semester remained that the providers indicated they were not yet prepared to submit a specific proposal and ask. By the Dec. 14th BOCC meeting date, however, they were, and a memo containing a more specific request for \$615,000 in 3rd quarter funding support was submitted that day. Commissioners approved funding (\$124,000) for the final two weeks of January at that meeting and agreed that a fuller conversation about the request could take place on January 4th. Additional information and a request for the remainder of 3rd quarter funding (\$491,000) were submitted by providers for the Jan. 4th meeting, but no additional decisions were made on January 4th or 11th. Staff have indicated that additional information relating to County revenues could help inform a decision at the BOCC’s Jan. 25th meeting. The providers have requested support for the 4th quarter from the DPS Foundation.

Staff have identified funds to support the Hope Learning Centers expense. The allocation will be offset by funding set-aside for COVID-19 related expenses (\$300,000) and budget realignments through the use of lapsed salaries (\$191,000) designated for revenue shortfalls and county-related expenses.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: Safe remote learning centers for Durham students aligns with Goals 1 - 3 of the Durham County Strategic Plan.

Resource Persons: Forrest Perry, Regional Vice President (YMCA of the Triangle); Amy Salo, Acting Executive Director (Student U); Kezia “Kate” Goodwin, Director (Kate’s Korner); Magan Gonzales-Smith, Executive Director (DPS Foundation); Drew Cummings, Chief of Staff

County Manager’s Recommendation: The County Manager recommends that the Board consider the additional funding request from the HOPE Learning Centers. Further, the Board is requested to authorize the County Manager to execute a contract amendment in the amount of \$491,000 for extended services.

County Manager: _____