

To: School Committee
From: Lemma Jn-baptiste, Director of Business & Finance
Date: September 9, 2021
RE: IDEA Grant Offsets and Esser III

In this memo, I would like to highlight two changes related to our Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding in FY'22. This memo summarizes these changes, including potential impacts on FY'23.

In addition, I will discuss our opportunities and engagement efforts as related to ESSER III funds.

Uses of IDEA Grant Offset

Historically, we have applied funding from the IDEA grant toward tuitions and contracts that support students with IEPs. In our FY'22 proposed budget, we originally planned to charge approximately \$800K in tuition and transportation contract expenses to the IDEA grant.

Districts may not claim Medicaid reimbursement for expenses paid through a federal grant. We believe that we may be eligible for partial reimbursement for tuition expenses if we paid for these expenses with Town funds. We also hope to simplify our claims for eligible, medically-necessary transportation by paying for those with Town funds when possible.

Salaries for Instructional Aides in Special Education are not reimbursable through Medicaid and are an allowable use of the IDEA Grant funds. In order to potentially increase our Medicaid reimbursement, we propose to charge approximately \$800K in Instructional Aide salaries to the IDEA Grant in FY'22.

One-time IDEA American Rescue Plan (ARP) Grant Funding

After we proposed our budget last winter, the American Rescue Plan Act was signed into law. It dedicates supplemental funding to serve students with disabilities.

Specifically, Westwood Schools will be receiving an additional \$198K in funding to support the mission of the IDEA. In addition, Westwood Schools will receive an additional \$17.5K to support Early Childhood Programs.

In addition to the obligations that are outlined in the IDEA, districts are encouraged to use these ARP funds to consider the challenges related to the pandemic, including:

- School re-entry
- Disruption in the education of children with disabilities
- Mental health services

- Sustainability
- Focus on issues of equity in special education and early intervention services

Engagement re: ESSER III Funds

Westwood Schools has been allocated \$170K in ESSER III Funds in FY'22.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief's (ESSER III or ARP ESSER) purpose is to help schools and districts safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools. These funds must be used to respond to the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of all students, and particularly those disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the allowable uses of ESSER III funds are broad, at least 20 percent of district ESSER III funds must address lost instructional time through the implementation of evidence-based interventions and ensure that those interventions respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups:

- low-income children or students,
- children with disabilities,
- English learners,
- racial and ethnic minorities,
- students experiencing homelessness, and
- children and youth in foster care

Districts must consult with stakeholders within the community and determine the best use of the funds before submitting their grant application, which serves as the district's ESSER III implementation plan. We plan to engage the parent community and seek feedback on the proposed use of these funds through school-based PTO meetings this fall as well as a meeting with the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC). Input will also be requested from school leaders and principals (including Student Services Department administrators), instructional staff, and students.

Our initial thinking is to spend the majority of ESSER III funds on addressing lost instructional time through evidence-based interventions. I am previewing this for you now so that we can plan to have a discussion at a future School Committee meeting. These funds are available through June 30, 2022. At the district's request, the timeframe for spending may be extended through September 30, 2024.