



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

April 10, 2019

To: School Committee

Re: Colonial Connections Sponsorship: Request for Approval

A proposed agreement with Shrewsbury Federal Credit Union (SFCU) for their sponsorship of the “Colonial Connections Project” was presented to you at your February 27th meeting. Since then, members have requested additional information regarding this proposal, particularly regarding the funding of the proposed Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being position. This is an updated version of a memo I provided in early March to address those questions and provide additional context.

What prompted the partnership/sponsorship proposal with Shrewsbury Federal Credit Union?

The School Committee has charged the district administration with carrying out its 2018-2022 Strategic Priorities & Goals and its 2018-2020 District Goals. These include:

Strategic Priority: Connected learning for a complex world

- Build community partnerships with businesses, institutions, and individuals in order to increase access to experiential learning and career awareness and to enhance learning in the STEAM fields (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics)
- Provide opportunities that help students develop independence after graduation, including exposure to career choices
- By June 2019, create at least one partnership with a business and at least one partnership with an institution of higher education, and identify how these partnerships will be expected to promote experiential learning and career awareness in the STEAM fields

In January 2018, more than a year ago, after consideration of these new strategic priorities and goals to be carried out by 2022, I proposed the new Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being position because I believed that we would need additional leadership capacity at the district level to successfully achieve

the goals under these priorities, as well as those under the “Enhanced well-being of all” priority. Due to funding limitations in the appropriated budget, I sought alternative funding to find a way to add this position and move these initiatives forward effectively. I believed that the “community partnerships” element of this role would appeal to a business partner, and this engendered the creation of the proposal to SFCU for a project, named “Colonial Connections,” that would facilitate the “real world” learning elements of our strategic plan, including funding the assistant superintendent position in its entirety in year one and then subsidizing it over a five-year phase out. The partnership also includes the purchase of a van to provide transportation to students for off-site learning and community service opportunities, and funding for activities, speakers, etc. to build the Colonial Connections program.

Did Shrewsbury Federal Credit Union approve this partnership?

The total financial commitment by SFCU is \$400,000 over five years, which is very generous and an unusually large commitment by a local business, for which I am extremely grateful. As I stated on February 27 when I presented the proposal to you, the SFCU board has voted to approve the partnership agreement, and I later learned that this vote was unanimous. This very generous support is a strong endorsement of this partnership and of the work we are trying to accomplish.

What about the financial sustainability of the proposed van?

The operating costs of the van will primarily be borne by municipal funds, as is typical for town vehicles for our courier van and other municipally-owned vehicles. A cost analysis has been completed that shows the savings we expect to experience due to not requiring rental of outside contracted vehicles to accomplish transportation of small groups of students. This analysis is provided along with this memo, and it shows approximately \$245,000 in savings over five years between the current method we would need to use vs. using the van purchased through the sponsorship.

What about the financial sustainability of the assistant superintendent role?

The full cost of the salary for this position would be paid for by the sponsorship in FY20 (\$145,000), followed by subsidies of \$85,000, \$50,000, \$30,000, and \$15,000 in the subsequent four fiscal years. This would translate into additional funding needed to sustain the position of approximately \$63,000 in FY21, \$101,000 in FY22, \$124,000 in FY23, and \$142,000 in FY24. For context, with modest assumptions for the total town-appropriated School Department budget in those years, the amount of the position’s salary funded by the School Department would represent approximately 0.10% of the appropriated budget in FY21 and increase to approximately 0.20% by FY24 (i.e., one-tenth of one percent in FY21 to two-tenths of one percent by FY24). Given that this position would address several key strategic priorities and goals, I believe that this is a reasonable, modest investment to sustain a position that I believe will provide excellent returns on that investment in terms of benefits for students, families, and the community.

It is my opinion that this level of funding is sustainable and that the administration can present budgets that include this level of funding for this position that the School Committee will be able to support. We also intend to leverage this position to help provide additional resources for the district over time, whether financial or programmatic, concretely demonstrating value. If for some reason there was a significant budget issue that emerged and called the level of district investment into question, and if the position is having the intended impact, I expect that we will either be able to justify the continued investment or find alternative means to offset costs. As we saw with the Campaign for Shrewsbury Athletic Fields, there are community resources to be tapped if donors perceive value in what they are providing to the school district, and I expect that this significant investment by SFCU will enable us to attract additional investment.

How will the Colonial Connections program be evaluated?

It is my expectation that the school district will be able to demonstrate the value of the Colonial Connections program as it evolves in the coming years. Based on feedback from the School Committee, it should be understood that the Colonial Connections program is certainly a new concept and approach, and as such, can be fairly categorized as a “pilot program.” As stated in the MOU with Shrewsbury Federal Credit Union, either party can withdraw from the sponsorship agreement with one-year’s notice, so there is protection for both sides if a significant problem were to arise. As this will be a high-profile program, the administration will be communicating progress on a regular basis. Metrics to consider would include:

- documentation of number, type, and impact of new partnerships;
- documentation of student learning experiences outside of the traditional school setting;
- documentation of efforts to increase career awareness;
- documentation of learning experiences provided by community partners within schools; and
- documentation of the quantity and types of use of the van.

I look forward to discussing this with you and answering your questions, and I strongly recommend that the School Committee vote to approve the MOU with Shrewsbury Federal Credit Union in order to fund the costs associated with the Colonial Connections program.