



Shrewsbury Public Schools

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Superintendent

March 6, 2019

To: School Committee

Re: Colonial Connections Sponsorship – Additional Information

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. Per your request for additional information regarding this proposal, particularly regarding the funding of the proposed Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being, I am providing the following information in a Q & A format help inform your decision whether to endorse this partnership with SFCU.

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

Strategic Priority: Enhanced well-being of all

- Improve support systems and resources to enhance the well-being of students and staff
- Create a common understanding of the benefits of the skills, habits, and mindsets of social and emotional learning and develop a shared, systematic approach to explicitly teach, integrate, and assess these competencies
- By December 2019, create a district-level implementation plan for effective social and emotional learning expectations and practices

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 because I believed that we would need additional leadership capacity at the district level to successfully achieve the goals under these priorities. 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 of 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. A cost/benefit analysis regarding the van’s use is provided separately. 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 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, 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.

Additional context regarding making an investment in district-level administrative leadership is that, as of the most recent state statistics on per pupil expenditures, SPS ranks in the bottom 7.4% of districts in the state for investing in administration. A Central Office administrator has not been added to our district since 2000, and the district's student population has grown by 30% since then, with significant increases in staffing to oversee and significant changes in the volume and intensity of administrative responsibilities. Based on initial comments from the consultants, I do expect the forthcoming report from the UMass-Boston Collins Center will indicate that the span of responsibility for the role of superintendent is too wide, which this role would address; further, the report will likely indicate that the overall administrative capacity of the district is insufficient to achieve what is required and expected. In any case, my professional judgment is that adding any additional significant responsibilities to district administrators or principals is not feasible given the existing administrative load.

What benefits are anticipated from adding the assistant superintendent role?

The reasons I proposed this position a year ago remain. In my State of the District report in January 2018, one of the key points I made was that “realizing our vision, priorities, and goals will require the resources to do the job.” Relative to our strategic priorities and goals, I identified the following areas as places where additional capacity would enable us to execute our plan:

- establishment and coordination of partnerships with community resources, including businesses, higher education, service agencies, alumni, etc., in order to create more experiential learning and career awareness opportunities for students;
- development of systems that promote family engagement and culturally proficient practices within an increasingly diverse community;
- coordination of social emotional learning strategies and programming for students, along with professional development to build staff capacity to address students' social, emotional, and health needs; and
- developing and implementing a comprehensive well-being strategy and corresponding programming for staff.

The Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being position will provide leadership capacity in these areas. I anticipate that in the first year, the following will be areas of focus:

1. connecting with businesses and other organizations to foster partnerships for ways to get students out into other environments (career interest trips, internships, etc.) and to get people from these organizations into our schools (providing authentic audiences for projects, sharing information on careers, etc.);
2. developing a district-level parent engagement strategy to create more effective ways to welcome new families and connect existing families where there may currently be cultural barriers;
3. improving district-level communications with parents and the community regarding the district's strategic priorities, including leveraging cable television and online video to tell stories of successes and challenges;
4. working with the Coordinators of Volunteer Activities & Development to build an alumni database, in order to build business/career connections, to help us reach more potential donors for the Colonial Fund and special projects, and to be able to get better information regarding how alumni are faring in life after high school and how we might better prepare them;
5. given the identification of stress being a major issue among staff, working to develop specific ways to address staff well-being, including creating opportunities for stress-reduction education and programming and promoting physical fitness and self-care; and

6. advancing the district's planning for addressing the social and emotional learning needs of students by working closely with other leaders to meet the district goal of creating a district-level implementation plan for effective social and emotional learning expectations and practices, and then subsequently playing a leadership role in implementing that plan.

Is this program a pilot?

While the Colonial Connections program would be new and is a new concept, I would not characterize it as a “pilot” program, but rather as a program that will be designed to meet firm strategic priorities and goals that have been established. While inevitably there will be adjustments to how to best meet the priorities and goals as the work within this program evolves, the need for resources to do the work remains, regardless of how the program evolves. 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. While this five-year agreement with SFCU is providing funding of the position, it is not the only reason or responsibility for the position.

What about metrics for the position's success?

I have given much thought to this question. I understand that it would be helpful to find a way to measure impact in advance. That said, the metrics for the success of any administrative position under the supervision of the superintendent are determined as part of the supervision and evaluation process and are established between the superintendent and the administrator. This evaluation of school administrative positions is governed by state law and DESE regulations. However, the School Committee does have the opportunity to exercise its influence and authority regarding metrics for the success of the district and the superintendent's work. I would expect that the next iteration of the district goals, which would be from 2020-2022, would establish criteria for success in areas where the new assistant superintendent position would have responsibility, including metrics. Such goal metrics might be related to improving student outcomes related to number and type of business and other community partnerships; quantitative and qualitative measures regarding student learning experiences outside of the traditional school setting health surveys or other measures of social emotional health; family engagement and satisfaction data; etc. Similarly, the goals jointly established between the School Committee and me for my performance could include metrics that measure the success of the Colonial Connections program and the work of the new assistant superintendent position.

Why an assistant superintendent-level position?

An assistant superintendent role signals an appropriately high level of importance being placed on the strategic priorities and goals to be addressed. Whether seeking meetings with business or higher education partners or rolling out internal initiatives with principals and staff, an assistant superintendent position has both formal authority and informal standing that will help move things forward effectively. Additionally, if position(s) at a level below assistant superintendent were added to attempt this work, this would not take pressure off of district-level leadership responsibilities, and would likely create more pressures among the superintendent and assistant superintendents to coordinate the work of others, since director-level position(s) would not have the level of authority to move initiatives forward. While it is clear that the range of responsibilities for this role is significant, as is the case for all Central Office administrators and principals, I believe that there is a high degree of connectivity between them, and time and effort focused on certain elements will ebb and flow depending on circumstances.

Are there other positions like this in other districts?

There are some Massachusetts districts that have district-level leadership roles that are not traditional assistant superintendent positions, such as Framingham's Assistant Superintendent for Equity, Diversity, and Community Engagement, Boston's Assistant Superintendent for Social & Emotional Learning & Wellness, and Newton's District Leader for Social Emotional Learning. We are part of the state's ExSEL Coalition to improve social and emotional learning, and we are finding that member districts are devoting more specific administrative resources to that kind of work. Web searches also reveal that districts across the country have assistant superintendent positions with "community partnerships," "community engagement," or similar terms in their title. I am not aware of a position that explicitly connects both the elements of community partnerships and well-being in its title, although it is likely that these responsibilities come under various district-level leadership positions depending on the district.

That said, this is not a typical role, but I believe that in our efforts to innovate we can and should move forward with solutions that may be different but are a fit for the strategic vision that has been established. In fact, the new report from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development makes the following one of their central recommendations for action: *Align resources and leverage partnerships in the community to address the whole child*. The report goes on to recommend the following specifically, which I think encapsulates the thinking regarding the need for this position for our school district:

"Fund dedicated positions in schools and districts to intentionally engage partners:

Partnerships don't just happen. They require an intentional outreach and engagement

strategy that ensures the right partners are coming together to accomplish shared goals for the young people with whom they work at every level—classrooms, schools, districts, youth development organizations, faith-based groups, community partners, health, mental health, and social service organizations, universities, and businesses. This requires collaborative planning, open communication, intentional coordination, and putting young people at the center in order to ensure a consistent and unified approach toward youth development. At the district and school levels, this requires allocating resources to support a dedicated, full-time, culturally competent person who understands the community and the school district, and who can manage and promote partnerships with youth development organizations, as well as those providing health, mental health, and social services. To promote efficiency and alignment, this dedicated person should liaise with existing provider networks where possible.”

- *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope*, Report of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, 2019

I look forward to discussing this with you and answering your questions.