

In response to some concerns that have been raised about spending of the ESSER funds, I wanted to take a moment to clarify a few things and highlight some of the ways that we have supported our students and staff with the esser funds. First off, I would like to explain what ESSER Funds are and how they are to be used. After this meeting, links to training slides from the December KSBA Trainings on “How To Maximize Federal Dollars” will be posted on the District’s website. There were 3 rounds of monies released from this federal fund over the last two years for a total of \$7,613k available. To date we have spent \$3,288k of those funds. These funds were designed to help offset the impact of COVID-19 on schools. Funds are available to use ONLY through September 30, 2022 (ESSER I), September 30, 2023 (ESSER II) and then September 30, 2024 for ESSER III. Expenses may include almost anything as long as you are using the funds to react to, prevent, limit the spread of COVID-19 or located on the spending matrix. . This is important to understand as the uses can be broad and cover a range of issues, needs, and concerns.

Now, onto some of the concerns:

One of these concerns was that we paid for diesel fuel. That diesel was used to transport students to and from summer school where the focus was on remediation and recovery of learning loss. The Summer school program was also paid for by ESSER II Another major expenditure of \$700,000.00 was used in one time supplements for our teachers and staff members to reward them for their hard work and dedication through the pandemic. We have paid for school nursing staff that have seen their daily work increase immeasurably during this time. We purchased furniture

to allow social distancing, purchased PPE including plexiglass dividers and funded industrial cleaning services which provide daily sanitization of every school. We added an Employee assistance program to allow employees and their families access to mental health services. This was applauded by the district employees when it was implemented. All of these decisions were made with the data available at that time about the best practices for covid mediation and all of these decisions were made with the best interest of Woodford County students and employees.

Busses were purchased as a way of furthering social distancing on transportation routes. It's unfortunate that due to the labor markets, we could not hire enough bus drivers to cover these routes. This labor issue is a national issue that has affected every industry, and we have no way of knowing how long it may continue but we are required to place bus orders almost a year in advance of their delivery.

Another concern raised was the notion of moving ESSER Funds into the general fund as a way of "padding" the budget. This is simply not true. As I explained above, these ESSER Funds have a real expiration. If we are able to move these into our general fund, it removes the "expiration date" on them. This has been a common practice across the state and was highlighted as a smart way to make sure we can utilize these funds at our training in December.

Additionally, concerns about "re-coding" of expenses have arisen. This for some reason has been viewed as an underhanded or improper action. The Funds were *designed* to be utilized on

expenses dating back to March 13, 2020. This would actually require re-coding on items.

This is highlighted in the training slides from December 2021 as well. One of the expenses that was re-coded was the industrial spray cleaning. It had been allocated from the general fund, when it is clearly a direct result of COVID-19 containment. ESSER funds were reviewed and tested during the external audit, and no inconsistencies or improper entries were found.

And finally, there has been much debate about an ESSER “budget” being approved by the board, and subsequent changes to spending being unauthorized. It is very important to first understand the difference between a spending plan and budget. There was never a “budget” for ESSER, only spending plans. Spending plans do not need formal board approval, whereas budgets do. At the time of the May 2021 approval of the spending plan, it was clearly discussed and understood this was a framework. Guidance from KDE at the time made it unclear how much discretion District administrators could exercise and what aspects of ESSER spending had to be specifically authorized by local boards of education. Out of an abundance of caution, Superintendent Hawkins presented the spending plan to the Board for approval with a clarification provided during that meeting that the spending plan was a framework, and was subject to change. More recent guidance from KDE has made it clear that this level of detailed Board involvement was not required. There was never an approved budget for the ESSER funds, so there was no deviation that needed to be approved by the board.

Many sources were used in determining the spending plans. A

covid task force was created late spring of 2020. While it wasn't the main goal, they did make recommendations on ways to utilize ESSER I and ESSER II. Big Rock Action Plans were incorporated into the spending plans as well. The District Cabinet met and agreed upon the initial plan for ESSER II. And on May 20, 2021 a survey was emailed through Infinite Campus to all parents, all staff, and students in grades 8-11. The purpose of this survey was to identify the priority areas of need going into the 2021-2022 school year and collect input from stakeholders in regard to the use of ARP-ESSER funds. This was a specific requirement of ESSER III (stakeholder input). The survey was conducted via Google Forms. 551 Parents, 231 Staff, and 109 Students responded to the survey. The results of that survey will be posted after this meeting in case they were missed when first reviewed.

GMAP reports detailing actual spending and their justifications, were submitted and reviewed by KDE. This would include the re-coded expenses that have been under question.

In closing, It is imperative to mention that all of the expenditures that have been made using ESSER funds have been reviewed by the Kentucky Department of Education. They have also been reviewed through our annual audit and were deemed appropriate and compliant with all audit standards. Woodford County schools have consistently been transparent with our citizens and will continue that way going forward. As always, contact me or your school board representative for clarification.

