



Say Yes Buffalo Operating Committee American Rescue Plan ESSER Recommendations

Say Yes Buffalo Operating Committee

Otis Barker
Deputy Commissioner, City of Buffalo

Hon. Sharon Belton-Cottman
President, Buffalo Board of Education

Crystal Boling-Barton
President, Buffalo Council of School
Supervisors

Mark Boyd
Office of Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-
Stokes

Marie Cannon
Commissioner, Erie County Department of
Social Services

Dr. Kriner Cash
Superintendent, Buffalo Public Schools

Dr. Katherine Conway-Turner
President, Buffalo State College

Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker
President/CEO, Community Foundation for
Greater Buffalo

Rachel Fix Dominguez
Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization

Dr. Matthew Giordano
President, Villa Maria College

Dr. Ellen Grant
City of Buffalo

Molly Hirschbeck
Office of NY State Senator Timothy Kennedy

Dr. Will Keresztes
Chief of Intergovernmental Affairs, Planning,
and Community Engagement, Buffalo
Public Schools

Dr. Kenneth Macur
President, Medaille College

Blythe T. Merrill
Sr. Vice President for Programs, John R.
Oishei Foundation

Dr. Wendy Mistretta
President, District Parent Coordinating
Council

Dr. Bill Reuter
Interim President, SUNY Erie College

Phil Rumore
President, Buffalo Teachers Federation

Jerry Turcotte
Co-Chair, Buffalo Parent Teacher
Organization

Emmanuel Wright
Student Representative, Medaille College

- 1. Collaborative Innovation.** The Operating Committee views these “one-time” funds as an opportunity to re-imagine what our public education system looks like. The suggestion is to approach this opportunity with an innovative lens and consideration to how “we” – all stakeholders involved – can be innovative together. An investment in innovations that yield a return for K-12 is recommended. (Macur/Merrill)
 - **S.T.E.A.M. Pathways.** It is recommended that the district implement innovative programming that establishes a pathway to opportunities in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. This can be embedded into extend-learning time opportunities. This recommendation considers the long-term (5-10 years) economic needs, trends and demands. (Belton-Cottman)
- 2. Systemic Reconnection for Disconnected Youth.** The recommendation is for a “self-sustaining” system between BPS and the Youth Employment Coalition (YEC) to reconnect youth who are withdrawn from school. The YEC hub is standing up its reconnection capacity to re-engage youth with BPS through adult Education, K-12 and post-secondary education. The suggested execution strategy is to engage The Career Collegiate Institute (CCI) with the YEC. The intent is to connect disconnected youth with opportunities such as the services offered by CCI. (Dedecker/Rust)
- 3. Engage the Business Community.** Extend an opportunity for the business community to submit recommendations. For example, Dr. Cash and President Belton-Cottman to request time with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership Board to provide input. (Dedecker)
- 4. Caring Adults.** It is suggested that funds be used for Covid related concerns that call for more caring adults to work directly with children. Parents and caregivers are really concerned about the long-term consequences of this past year and what that means for children as they return to buildings and the kinds of supports available. While parents are thinking longer term, they are also acutely aware of the short-term needs that we have right now. The number one request in a survey put out by the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization (BPTO) was for caring adults. (Fix-Dominguez)
 - **Counselors.** Specifically, the need for a strong social worker presence in K-12 buildings is requested. Additionally, support for post-secondary counselors previously funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is welcome.
- 5. International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School Program.** The idea for a standalone IB program was presented by the BPTO at community meetings. The district is configured with a Younger Years program at school 99 Makowski along with a middle-high school IB program at City Honors. The idea is to make the middle school a standalone IB program which would open more seats into the program for Buffalo

students. (Fix-Dominguez)

6. Independent ESSER Advisory Council. The creation of a council including parents, students, partners, and providers; So, there is not only an opportunity to provide recommendations, but also sit at the table over the next 3 years to make sure recommendations are being carried out with transparency and accountability. Participatory budgeting is suggested for more open communication process. (Merrill)

7. Mental Health Assessments. There are studies about the impact of the pandemic on every sector of our population including K-12 youth. The suggestion is an early mental health assessment of our student population to provide a true sense of the magnitude of the problem in Buffalo Public Schools. Following the assessment would be clear early intervention for students who are beginning to manifest problems. There could be opportunities to develop virtual programming for students we see are already stumbling and having difficulty. The concern is also the educational gap - what students have and have not learned. It is suggested that this recommendation be crystallized to include that the current Mental Health Task Force will work directly with the Division of Student Support Services to execute this recommendation. (Conway-Turner/Keresztes)

- **Mental Health Task Force Feedback to BPS**

- Creating a universal mental health screening for all grades for the start of the school year will likely require outside contracting for increased people/professionals to develop the assessment, or alter if using a preexisting assessment, work with BPS systems by school on implementation, establish processes to administer/gather/respond, and make sure there is an effective response plan for a universal screening in every school. School-based clinics could be considered to participate in this. University at Buffalo Department of Psychiatry has already provided psychiatric case consultation services for the past 2 years through funding provided by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. Given the preexisting relationship and area of expertise, they should also be considered to assist with this. (Paul)
- BPS has an approved SHAPE grant for universal screening already in process. This team has been meeting for several months to identify an evidenced based model, review process, and discuss rollout for the next school year. The potential screening tool is Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which is what every school-based agency uses for children enrolling in their clinic as a pre and post measure. Work from this Collaboration Team, overseen by Mai Nguyen, can be used to support this work. Additional funds could be delivered to support the work of this team- and perhaps contract out with external partners to support the work noted above. (Paul)
- The embedded mental health satellite clinics are still in existence and the Mental Health Task Force continues to operate consistently. Some clinicians are very low on their caseloads, and they may have capacity to conduct Mental Health Assessments. This would also streamline and drive traffic to the clinics. This would be agency-by-agency to determine as some clinics supplement school-based caseloads with clinic caseloads. (Paul)
- A lot of the adult caring programs like Project Soar and other programs have been discontinued because of the pandemic. Reinstating them with a sustainability plan could hit on the mental health and adult care. (Paul)

- 8. Suicide Prevention Training.** It is recommended that BPS include training in suicide ideation and suicide prevention as the numbers continue to rise, even among young children. It is suggested that the district intentionally seek out diverse organizations that the student population can identify with. The concern is that the needs of students are not always met due to the lack of diversity in vendor contracting. (Merrill/Belton-Cottman)
- 9. Racial Equity.** Use of the stimulus funds presents an opportunity to lift and expand the district’s work around racial equity challenges. Suggestions include scaling efforts to hire a diverse workforce; providing culturally responsive professional development with a focus on health and safety, trauma-informed and social-emotional learning pedagogies and academic acceleration strategies; focusing on equity to ensure that programming targets underserved students who were most impacted by the pandemic (Merrill)
- 10. Robust Community Partnerships.** It is suggested that funding be utilized to create stronger relationships between the district and community partners through a network of supports and stronger connections in the community. Suggestions include widening the circle of supports with an all-hands-on-deck approach including sharing federal funds with local partners able to expand on program and support delivery; and sharing data with community partners outside of the district to enhance real time, seamless communication and develop appropriate program response (Merrill)
- 11. “Where Are They Now” Student Outreach.** The suggestion is for counselors, near peers and/or grassroot groups to check-in with high school seniors who took a gap year in 2020, reconnect and engage them on a path to higher education. Short-term counseling assets is one way to carry this out. A one-time “where are they now?” survey following high school seniors who did not enroll in college in fall 2020 is suggested. (Macur, Giordano, Hill-Cheatom)
- 12. Summer Bridge Programs.** The suggestion is to revisit the summer bridge programs and consider how can we increase the size of the summer bridge programs? How can we change some of the things that we’ve done in the past with the knowledge of coming out of the pandemic? Also, consider the funding of college credits to ensure that students make the transition directly to higher education programs. (Conway-Turner)
- 13. Grassroots Communication.** The suggestion is connecting with community groups such as churches or youth sports organizations where young people are active, present and are receptive to messages about staying in school and pursuing higher education. If there is something we can do that really helps on the grassroots level with communication and continuing to have outreach and support for these students as they think about next steps, that would be beneficial. (Giordano)
- 14. Economic Incentives for College Scholars.** The suggestion is to offer an economic incentive that addresses the economic need for students choosing between full-time work and pursuit of higher education. Institutions of higher education are exploring ways to support students with a financial or economic incentive while offering academic credit. There are examples in other parts of the country where students have been paid and incentivized to participate in the degree program. There is discussion about partnerships with regional employers such as Amazon or Telsa. Support of this sort of program or partnership is needed. (Macur, Rust, Giordano, Hill-Cheatom)
- 15. Extended Learning Time.** The AARP funds can be used across the next three summers, beginning this summer. We are seeing a huge increase in demand and in summer learning this year. The

district made a huge robust investment in extending learning this year. It would be great to see that continue over the next couple of years to help us really get through. Additionally, the expansion of after school programming from two to three hours could be great over the next couple of years to really strengthen that dosage to help students get back on track. (Cross-Viola)

- 16. Housing Needs.** Following the pandemic, we do anticipate homelessness, or “couch surfing” and evictions once landlords can evict families who do not have the resources to pay rent expenses. This disrupts educational learning. Thus, the suggestion is an investment in support for this population and the mental health office. Support is also requested for guardians as we are seeing an uptick in kinship/alternative care providers of children. (Lloyd)
- 17. Early Foundation Space.** 3-year-old classrooms have been a big ask from our community. This would be a prime opportunity to not only meet that need but address a lot of the readiness and social emotional needs of those students as they prepare for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. In terms of sustainability, we could look to see if the County would be able to reimburse those daycare expenses for those families who meet the income guidelines, as they enroll. (Smallwood)
 - This model is a purposeful learning through play model where we would work in partnership with existing providers as we expand the opportunity for these 3-year-old spaces. It is also suggested that the early foundation investment include a 2-year program targeting 3 and 4-year-olds. Children would receive 2-years of solid and consistent instruction and be prepared for kindergarten. (Belton-Cottman)
- 18. Student Success Plan.** As a way of ensuring that our efforts are student-centered using a Whole Child Model, we would like the co-development of a new Individualized Student Success Plan (I've heard that CA has something that they call a Map). Similar to plans already used for our SPED and homeschooled students, such a plan would focus on the strengths, skills, talents, and challenges of each student. It would provide the basis for identifying when and where enrichment and intervention was needed. As well as ensuring that our students were on track for college and careers throughout their school years. (Mistretta)
- 19. Buffalo.** The City is developing plans to “address people in places, progress and prosperity.” This includes expansion of the summer youth program, stipends for students enrolled in coursework, children’s bank initiative and others. Recommendations are welcome and can be brought forth on the City’s website or by calling 311. (Grant)
- 20. Family Development.** It is suggested that funding be set aside for the economic development of the whole family. An example is a partnership with institutions of higher education allowing opportunities for BPS parents to participate in a certificate or degree program. (Belton-Cottman)
- 21. Expansion of Middle Early College.** The recommendation is for co-enrollment opportunities where high school students can enroll in credit-bearing college courses and enter college with credits already earned. (Behrend)