

ED Report – April 2020

Academic Update:

- Exploris transitioned to a digital learning plan on 3/19/20. The staff participated in 3 days of professional development and team planning to prepare for the launch and transition. Staff have been doing an amazing job during this transition to support students academically, socially, and emotionally. We have received an incredible amount of support and appreciation from our families for quickly pivoting to online learning and providing needed supports for families.
- A video created by Deb and Amanda highlights the digital learning experience and can be viewed here <https://youtu.be/BPgAnqmD8dc>
- End of year portfolio conferences will be scheduled virtually and the staff are discussing options and plans. Information will be shared with parents when finalized.
- Plans are underway to develop a virtual graduation and celebrations to recognize our 8th graders as they close their chapter at Exploris and move on to high school.

Enrollment Data for 2019 - 2020:

Update as of 4/20/20

Grade	Total # of students	Change
K	35	
1	37	
2	38	
3	39	
4	38	
5	38	
6	74	
7	74	1 withdrawal to home school
8	75	
TOTAL	448	

Demographics and Enrollment Data:

	Wake County Public Schools	The Exploris School 18-19	The Exploris School 19-20
Black	22.7%	10%	12%
Hispanic	18%	7%	7%
Asian	9.2%	2%	2%
Multi-racial	3.8%	5%	8%

Non-Hispanic White	45.8%	75%	71%
Other	.3%	1%	1%
Free and Reduced Lunch	32.2%	10.8%	12.7%

Personnel:

- **Board approval is requested to accept the retirement of Helene Elliston, effective 6/30/2020.** Helene is completing her 16th year of teaching at Exploris as a 7th grade teacher. We would like to recognize and thank Helene for the contributions she has made to support our students, staff, and parents. Helene has been a leader in the classroom and has led our Science Olympiad team to many competitions inspiring our future scientists. We are grateful for Helene's dedication, service, and commitment to the entire Exploris community.
- The Middle School interview team is in the process of evaluating and interviewing candidates for her replacement and anticipate having a recommendation at the May meeting.
- **Board approval is requested to accept the resignation of Ellie Schollmeyer, Executive Director, effective 6/30/2020.**

Operations:

- **Board approval is requested to renew and approve the following contracts to support EC for next year. Copies included in board packet.**
 - OT Services - Pediatric Therapy Associates
 - Dr. Snow – Psychologist
- **Board approval is requested to approve the contract with RTP Studio to redesign and upgrade our school website. This initiative is being funded with ACCESS grant resources. The contract is provided in the attachment for your review.**
- **Board approval is request to approve the contract with SchoolPass for a new visitor management system discussed in previous board meetings.**
 - The contract is attached for your review, total cost year 1-\$3,710 and Year 2- \$2,550. Funds from the safety grant -\$2,280 and PTO contributions of \$1,430 will cover the cost of the new system for the 20-21 school year. The PTO has also generously approved a contribution of up to \$3,500 to support the volunteer background checks that will be implemented in the 2020-2021 school year.

COVID-19 Related

- The North Carolina State Board of Education voted on 4/9/20 to ask the N.C. General Assembly to waive all state accountability requirements for the current academic year because of statewide school closures ordered last month to slow the spread of COVID-19. Cancelling end of year testing measures would also eliminate the summer reading camp because the measures needed to qualify students would not be available.

- The state board also approved a measure asking the legislature to ease licensure testing requirements for beginning teachers who are now facing a June deadline for gaining a continuing license. They have also requested a 1-year extension for all renewals.
- On April 28, the legislative session will formally reopen for business with appropriate measures in place to ensure health and safety. The General Assembly will review and issue recommendations and approval that will guide schools for the remainder of the school year.
- The Department of Public Instruction has issued guidance on grading for schools. At Exploris, our teachers are providing feedback to students and parents on assignments while being flexible and sensitive to unique family living and learning situations. We have ensured that all students have technology to support their remote learning but recognize that each family situation is unique and some students may not have the supports needed to be successful independently. It is critical that we are providing equitable access to our education plan and have guided our teachers to be flexible and understanding. Teachers will not implement any punitive measures for missed assignments or class meetings but will encourage all students to be fully engaged in the remote learning process. This is a challenging time for all of us and we are encouraging everyone to provide grace, patience, and flexibility during our remote learning environment. We anticipate that the end of year achievement reports will be comments only and that specific grades for standards will not be measured. The leadership team and staff are collaborating to plan for the third trimester portfolios and for the 8th grade passage portfolio process in a remote environment.
- A summary of COVID-19 Funding, Waivers, and Resources for Charter Schools from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is provided as an attachment in your packet for additional information.
- DPI resources in response to COVID-19 can be located [here](#).
- DPI padlet of FAQ and resources linked [here](#)

Transitioning back to in-person instruction

- After careful evaluation of the available data on the benefits and risks associated with returning to school this year, I recommend that we finish the 19-20 school year utilizing the newly established online learning platforms. The second transition back at the end of the school year if approved by the state would incur additional lost learning time and resetting of norms, expectations, and instructional processes with only 3 weeks remaining in school. The facilities available at Exploris would not allow us to implement social distancing and creating an alternating schedule for students with such a short time to finish would reduce instructional opportunities for students and increase instructional plans needed by teachers to accommodate both online and in-person instruction.
- Team planning is underway to evaluate and consider alternative schedules for the fall in order to implement a safe return to school for the 2020-2021 school year.
- **Board approval is requested to continue digital learning for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year to protect the health and safety of our students and staff and maximize the integrity of our instructional program.**

Enrollment and Admissions for 2020-2021

Applications received as of 4/20/20 – 1,141

- Board & Staff – 3
- Siblings - 54
- FRL – 98
- Open Seats – 77 – assuming reduced class sizes for K (17) and 1st (18) – (\$50K budget impact)
- Lottery Held on – 3/6/20
- Adding an additional student in each 8th grade crew- 4 new openings were added on 4/20/20
- 7- Open/Pending Seats to be filled in total as 4/20/20

Finance:

2019-2020 Budget Update

The Finance committee met on 4/15/20 to review the year to date revenue updates, expenditures, and project future impacts. Based on YTD activity, we are projecting an end of year surplus of **\$196,550.25**. The balance sheet and income statement along with the YTD budget report are attached for your review.

COVID-19 Related

The State has allotted schools supplementary funding to support all during the COVID-19 crisis. Exploris received an additional \$10,337 to support incremental expenses associated with digital instruction. The finance committee agreed to provide a \$200 stipend to all staff members to cover incremental costs of internet and phone usage which will total \$10,600. The \$263 difference will be covered by surplus funds in the operating budget. Staff will receive these stipend checks at the end of April.

The OCS offered NC ACCESS grant recipients the opportunity to apply for an incremental \$30,000 to support the transition to digital learning learning as well as sanitizing the school to ensure it is safe for staff and students when we return. I submitted our request for the incremental funding to the OCS and received approval to utilize these funds to purchase additional chromebooks and sanitize the school. An additional 120 chromebooks and carts were ordered and contracts are being reviewed for the school sanitization project.

- **Board approval is requested to provide a \$200 stipend to all staff with the state allotment and utilize the Access grant supplement for chromebooks and sanitizing the school. Funds were restricted for specific use.**

We have investigated two programs made available through the CARES Act. The Employee Retention Tax Credit and the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) were implemented to support small businesses impacted by COVID-19. Although other charter schools may be applying for the PPP, we have determined that Exploris is not eligible since we have not lost revenue due to the impact of COVID-19. However, we are applying for the employee retention tax credit and are partnering with Charter Success Partners on this initiative. The Employee Retention Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit against certain employment taxes equal to 50 percent of the

qualified wages an eligible employer pays to employees after March 12, 2020, and before January 1, 2021. Eligible employers can get immediate access to the credit by reducing employment tax deposits they are otherwise required to make. Also, if the employer's employment tax deposits are not sufficient to cover the credit, the employer may get an advance payment from the IRS.” The finance committee recommended that any savings related to the employment tax credit be shared with all staff.

- **Board approval is requested to share the proceeds from the Employment Retention Tax credit if applicable with all staff.**

2020 – 2021 Budget Process

Budget input meetings were held in December and January with all teams at the middle and elementary campus to identify remaining needs for 2020 and plan for the 2020 – 2021 budget. A budget input session was held by the finance committee on February 4th after school to allow for additional input. A staff survey on class size was also used to provide additional input to the budget process.

Additional committee meetings were held on 3/31/20 and 4/16/20 to discuss the economic climate and project the impact on our school. The finance committee approved the recommendation to implement a new salary schedule to recognize and reward the important role our teaching partners play to support our students and teachers.

Teaching Partners Salary Scale

Years of Experience at Exploris	Salary
Starting Salary	\$ 22,330
1	\$ 23,000
2	\$ 23,690
3	\$ 24,401
4	\$ 25,133
5	\$ 25,887
6	\$ 26,663
7	\$ 27,463
8	\$ 28,287
9	\$ 29,136
10	\$ 30,010

In order to finalize the 20-21 draft budget, several scenarios were evaluated using information provided by DPI as well as Charter Success Partners to determine the best course of action. DPI Business and Finance division are projecting a 5% decline in the per pupil allotment due to the economic impacts from COVID-19 related closures.

The budget was forecasted using a best case, worst case, and most likely scenario as well as evaluated using different salary schedules for consideration. Four salary plans were evaluated to estimate payroll expenses including: using the current Exploris salary schedule, a flat rate

increase of 3%, a flat rate of 2.5%, and holding salaries stable until the state announces the per pupil allotment for the upcoming year.

After much discussion and thoughtful deliberation the finance committee is recommending that we hold salaries and positions stable to start the 20-21 school year except for the increases recommended for teaching partners. The committee also is recommending that the Board approve re-evaluating salaries after the state announces the per pupil allotment.

We were able to negotiate a reduction from the original projection of a 7.82% increase in our benefit costs to a 2.75% increase for our Blue Cross and Blue Shield health plan. All ancillary health benefits rates will remain at our current rates ensuring our employees have stable health benefits. Salaries and benefits represent 76% of the total school budget. Facilities represent 11% of the 20-21 school budget.

The proposed budget includes the following key assumptions:

- 95% reduction in the per pupil allotment
- 99% attainment for ADM of 454 (reduction in crew sizes in K-17, 1st-18, and increase in 8th-20)
- Annual fund contributions of \$55,000
- Employee subscription to the health benefit plan remains the same. (8 employees currently do not elect coverage – Savings of \$53,414)

Based on the key assumptions defined above the 2020-2021 school budget shows a **\$3,884** surplus.

Board approval is requested to move forward with the recommendation from the finance committee to finalize the budget for 20-21 keeping salaries stable and approving the increases for teaching partners using the new teaching partner salary schedule.

Board approval is also requested to re-evaluate salaries after the state announces the per pupil allotment and will make any salary increase retroactive to July 1, 2020.

The final budget proposal will be shared at the May meeting for a final vote of approval.

Facilities Update:

Elementary Lease Renewal

The elementary land lease and lease with Wilscott for the trailers expires in December 2020. Ellie has worked with Gordon Smith to extend the land lease an additional year. Mr. Smith is willing to meet again in June to discuss further extensions. Theo will be following up with Wilscott to extend the leases for the trailers.

- **Board approval is requested to extend the land lease agreement 1 year with Gordon Smith, The Woodpile, LLC. Contract is attached for your review.**

The legal complaint against our developers was filed on 1/17/20 in Superior Court in Wake County and all information was shared with the Board in an email on 1/17/20. Our attorneys have recommended the following response to any inquiries about our complaint. **"We are unable to comment on matters in active litigation and our complaint speaks for itself."**

Legal Update from Morningstar Law

The Chief Justice has extended all deadlines in Superior Court actions, like the Exploris case, through June 1. Therefore, although the defendants' answer was due this week, it is possible that we will not receive anything from them until June. On the other hand, nothing prevents them from filing their answer on time, or at least before June 1. We shall have to wait and see.

In the meantime, our attorneys have prepared and served a first set of discovery and anticipate getting responses no later than June. There likely will be no significant action in this case for the next couple months, due to the delays caused by the COVID-19 situation.

Future Meetings:

The next Board Special Board meeting is scheduled on May 26, 2020 at 4:30 via zoom.