

M-G outlines plans for ESSER funds

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The long school layoff due to the stay at home order and then returning to school in the midst of the pandemic will have long-lasting effects on students, and Madison-Grant United School Corporation is planning to use federal funding to help address these ongoing issues.

Superintendent Scott Deetz said the district knew social emotional support for students and families would need to be a major focus as the pandemic progressed.

“A lot of our families are under additional stress...and that stress, no matter what the family does to prevent it, does trickle down to their kiddos,” Deetz said.

M-G received approximately \$187,000 through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) initial allocation when the first CARES Act passed last spring. The district used the funds to hire one new social worker in each of the elementary school buildings, as well as an additional custodian to keep up enhanced cleaning protocols, Deetz said.

“That additional help has been tremendous from the standpoint of seeing students who might be falling behind in their studies or might be having some behavioral issues in the classroom,” he said. “And so being able to have extra sets of hands to keep track of the kids and to be able to follow their journey through school has been a tremendous help in our school corporation and identifies needs much sooner before the child falls too far behind.”

As a result of the second CARES Act passed in late 2020, M-G will be receiving an additional approximate \$850,000 through ESSER II, with more funding expected past that as the result of the American Rescue Plan being passed this spring.

Deetz said the district plans to continue to use the funds to pay for the additional social workers and custodian into next school year. In addition, he said the funds will be used for a “much more robust” kindergarten roundup, including a prekindergarten program this summer, expanded summer school offerings for K-12 students and transportation for students to attend these opportunities.

With students learning from home for the whole last quarter of the 19-20 school year, and many students this year out for several weeks at a time due to quarantining or isolating, Deetz said academic achievement is not at the same pace as expected. To combat this, Deetz said the ESSER II and subsequent funds are also planned to be used to hire an additional certified teacher at each building solely focused on identifying and delivering interventions for students in need.

“Right now we have our principals coordinate with classified or non-teaching staff who develop student supports,” Deetz said. “We are going to ramp that up and dedicate a full time certified position to help deliver those services. So they will coordinate the testing efforts, communicate with teachers, deliver supports ... So we’re ramping up those interventions to be able to help close those gaps that developed during COVID.”

Deetz said ESSER funds are also being used to pay for teachers’ additional work with virtual students this year and for additional courses that were purchased for virtual high school students. All M-G employees are also expected to receive an across-the-board stipend for their work serving students throughout the pandemic, and the M-G board was scheduled to consider the stipend at its Monday night board meeting.

“There have been additional duties each and every day to perform those functions safely, and so we are delivering an additional stipend to all staff members for that,” Deetz said.

The ESSER funds are particularly helpful, Deetz said, because schools are not required to present their plan for the entire allocation amount before receiving the funds. Plans can change and be submitted as the district determines how to best use the money through September 2023, he said.

“We truly appreciate these dollars that are coming in because it will help address the after effects of a pandemic,” Deetz said. “We will be experiencing the impact of the spring of 2020 and the summer of 2020 for years to come, and by providing these resources to schools with the focus on interventions and programs to help you know bridge those gaps that we’re already seeing is a tremendous help.”

Deetz said he is proud that Madison-Grant has been able to stay open in person five days a week all school year and credited staff, students and parents for being faithful to protocols and administrators collaborating and communicating well.

“We will be glad when we’re on the other side of the pandemic, but awfully proud of the efforts we put in place to serve our kids and our community throughout this time, and we just appreciate their trust and support that they’ve delivered time and time again,” he said.