

The Facts

Districts dubious of stimulus estimates

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Area school district officials say they are reserving opinion about the possible \$27 million Brazoria County schools could receive as part of a proposed \$825 billion plan to stimulate the national economy.

Austin-based research firm Strategic Partnerships Inc. released figures last week detailing how much each school district would get as part of the proposed plan. The stimulus bill is set to go to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives for debate.

Pearland, Angleton, Alvin, Columbia-Brazoria, Sweeny and Brazosport school districts could receive more than \$1 million from the plan that would be spent over the next two years, Strategic Partnerships President and CEO Mary Scott Nabers said.

While the money looks attractive, it's not certain districts will receive it. Even if they do, they likely would be restricted in how they spend it, local school officials said.

The bill is in the preliminary stages and might not ever make it into educators' hands, Brazosport ISD spokesman Dennis McNaughten said.

The district would receive up to \$8.26 million over the next two years, more than any other Brazoria County school district, according to Strategic Partnership's numbers.

"None of that is guaranteed at this point," McNaughten said. "If we get it, sure, it's a good thing. But we aren't going to plan on it until we get formal notice, and who knows when that will be."

Formal notice means notification from the U.S. Department of Education stating it has allocated money for district's use which the district has not received, McNaughten said.

Also, McNaughten said the money is set to be used over a two-year timeline for certain areas, such as maintenance and special education.

The district has yet to start preparing to receive it, McNaughten said.

“That’s like counting your chickens before they hatch,” he said.

School spending accounts for about one-sixth of the \$825 billion economic recovery package, which also includes money for health care, energy, highway projects and tax cuts. Critics say the measure won’t help the economy fast enough and will saddle the government with long-term, budget-wrecking commitments.

The plan would spend about \$20 billion quickly to build and fix up classrooms, from kindergarten through college, in an effort to spur job creation and growth. States would receive \$39 billion to stave off cuts in schools.

But it also would pump an extra \$26 billion into two long-term programs, No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The bill includes a \$15 billion bonus fund to encourage reforms related to teaching and student tests.

Alvin ISD, estimated to get \$7.27 million, is not getting excited about reports of increased funding, Deputy Superintendent for Business Services Tommy King said.

“This is the time of year when everyone puts forward their bills and you start seeing the impact studies that everyone will run,” King said. “I’m always extremely cautious before I react to them.”

Many times, the packages come with strings attached that might offset any benefits, he said.

“Sometimes those numbers have been inflated or deflated, one of the two, depending on how they calculate it,” King said. “Those formulas are completely complex, so you have to look at the details and start looking at what they entail and why.”

Angleton ISD Assistant Superintendent Pat Montgomery said the district would like to receive the \$3.7 million it’s slated to get, but right now there are not a lot of details about how the funds could be spent.

“We’re excited about it but we haven’t been told anything officially,” Montgomery said. “We could make good use of the money.”

Sweeny ISD Superintendent Randy Miksch said he likes the idea of receiving the estimated \$1 million over the next two years, but he doesn’t know about the restrictions.

“It could help us,” he said. “Our federal funds have been going down.”

Nabers said Strategic Partnerships, which sifts through government

appropriations bills for its clients, released the information as a public service.

“This bill has an opportunity to really stimulate the local economy,” she said.

Counting Chickens

Estimated funding, over a two-year period, for Brazoria County school districts as part of the proposed federal stimulus bill:

Alvin ISD: \$7,273,700

Angleton ISD: \$3,740,800

Brazosport ISD: \$8,265,300

C-BISD: \$2,197,900

Damon ISD: \$151,800

Danbury ISD: \$339,400

Pearland ISD: \$4,026,800

Sweeny ISD: \$1,006,700

Source: Strategic Partnerships

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