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\$25 mil in stimulus bill could be headed to FBISD

By Barbara Fulenwider

The estimate today is Fort Bend County school districts will receive an estimated total of \$25,554,000 out of the just passed federal stimulus bill. The Strategic Partnerships Inc. of Austin, a government consulting firm, made that estimate based on their estimate that "approximately \$4 billion" will be heading to Texas for education and public schools.

The estimates are what the U.S. House of Representatives research organization did," said J. Lyn Carl, chief of staff of Strategic Partnerships. She also said since the company sent its press release out on Sunday, they've been bombarded with phone calls from school districts wanting to know when they will get their money.

The answer to that is no one is sure but Carl said over the next 30 days all the federal agencies tasked with doling out the stimulus money will each be writing their own rules and regulations on how they will do it. Sixty days after the 30 days have elapsed, "then the states have to deal with it," she said.

Carl also said there are two classifications for the funds: special needs students and poor school districts. The estimates the Austin firm provides on its Web site show that Title 1-A funds for Fort Bend ISD would amount to \$4,763,000 and IDEA, Part B funds would amount to \$12,834,000 for a total of \$17,597,000.

Mike Seale, FBISD chief financial officer, says there are four issues regarding the stimulus money. "This money traditionally goes through the state to get to us and they may scrape off a bit of it for administrative fees and that type of thing.

"Number 2 is that money is tied to Title I, so it has to be used to service students who the state has identified as being at risk, and IDEA, Part B is special education students. So none of that money is available to pay teacher raises or utility bills. It has to be used just for those special populations.

"Number 3 we just don't know what all the strings are that will be attached and No. 4 is that money is only going to be available for the next 2 years."

Seale said the \$17,597,000 FBISD may receive will be split between two years. "Once the two years are over," Seale said, "If we've used it to fund new programs then we have to figure out how to come up with \$17 million more in order to keep funding those programs. Money for building schools was in the stimulus package but the Senate killed it and that would have been really helpful because you build it and you have it."

Regardless of how much it turns out to be and when it arrives, Seale said, "It is welcome money to any district that receives it. We're all certainly better off having it than not having it but we just don't know what it will mean to the students of this district until we find out what the mandates are that go along with it. This money has to be parsed out over a two-year period so it has got to be handled really carefully," the chief financial officer said.

Estimates of the total amount other Fort Bend County school districts will receive as reported by Strategic Partnerships, Inc., are \$6,210,000 to Lamar Consolidated ISD; \$896,000 to Stafford Municipal School District; \$759,000 to Needville ISD; \$92,000 to Kendleton ISD. Those amounts plus the \$17,597,000 FBISD may get amounts to the total of \$25,554,000.

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