

# Candidates for Cobb commission say federal money should go to schools first

- Aleks Gilbert [agilbert@mdjonline.com](mailto:agilbert@mdjonline.com)

- May 9, 2020

Calling upcoming budget cuts to the county school district “crushing” and “catastrophic,” candidates for the Cobb County Board of Commissioners have asked the board to first use federal aid to support the district.

In late April, the county received \$132 million in federal aid as part of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act bill Congress passed in March.

Cobb commissioners are now debating how to spend the money. In an interview last week, County Manager Jackie McMorris said the board is considering using it to support small businesses and nonprofits and cover the cost of county spending related to the coronavirus, such as the purchase of personal protective equipment for county employees.

School districts around the state, meanwhile, have been asked to trim their budgets by 14%.

Larry Savage, a retired businessman running for Cobb chairman, and Andy Smith, a former county planning commissioner who is running for the District 2 seat on the Board of Commissioners, say guidance from the U.S. Department of Treasury allows the county to reimburse expenses the Cobb County School District incurred related to the coronavirus.

The district is expected to receive \$14 million to \$16 million in federal aid related to the coronavirus, but the candidates, both Republicans, said it would not be enough to make up for the budget cuts.

“It would be disgraceful for Cobb County government to run through this money on frivolous projects, even if they are technically permissible, if there are more valuable ways to deploy the funds in the school district and help relieve the funding crisis CCSD will face,” Savage wrote in a letter to the Marietta Daily Journal. “Cobb County School District is the one thing we all share that must be protected at all costs.”

County Chairman Mike Boyce said he has spoken to district superintendent Chris Ragsdale about the use of the CARES Act money.

“He has submitted a proposal to the county to use some of the funding for school programs there,” Boyce said in an interview Friday. “I think it’s our responsibility as a county to adopt the spirit and the intent of this legislation to use these funds to benefit as many people in the county as possible. And again, it’s my responsibility to shape some kind of agenda here for the board to consider for discussion and then to bring that to a vote to see how they want to spend that money, and that includes school funds.”

Ragsdale said the district is waiting for the state Legislature to complete its budget before deciding how to enact the budget cuts, something that will likely happen in June.

Smith said a number of organizations will likely seek — and deserve — a portion of the CARES Act money.

“What I am proposing is that we take care of our future first and provide as the top priority funding to our Cobb County Schools to assist them in offsetting the additional costs they have incurred and will incur educating the County’s students during this crisis,” he wrote in a letter to the MDJ. “The quality of life in Cobb County, our property values and the very reason that many of us settled in Cobb County to begin with is inextricably tied to the quality of education provided by our Cobb County Schools.”