

**Rochester Board of Education**  
**Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole**  
**April 21, 2015**

**Attendance:** Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioners Adams, Elliott, White, Powell, Campos (arrived at 6:12PM), and Evans (arrived at 6:18PM).

Parent Representative: Giancarlo Giannini.

District Staff: Superintendent Vargas; Adele Bovard, Deputy Superintendent for Administration; Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning; Ray Giamartino, School Chief; Bill Ansbro, Chief Financial Officer; Everton Sewell, Budget Director; and Barbara Goldammer, Director of Student Placement.

University of Rochester: Dr. Steven Uebbing, Superintendent Select for East High School; Gary Valenti, Consultant to the UR Warner School of Education

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 6:04PM.

**I. Review of the Minutes of the April 7, 2015 Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole**

**Motion** by Commissioner White to approve the minutes of the April 7, 2015 Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole. Seconded by Commissioner Adams. **Adopted 5-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

**II. Discussion of 2015-16 RCSD Budget Section 7 (East High School Educational Partnership)**

Commissioner Cruz announced that Dr. Steven Uebbing from the University of Rochester will first give a presentation about the plans for East High School in 2015-16, and then the other sections of the proposed budget will be discussed. He noted that questions for Round 3 are due tomorrow, and includes Sections 5 (Program Profiles & Budgets) and any follow-up questions on previous sections of the Budget Book.

Commissioner Powell asked when the Board members will receive the Capital Improvement Plan (Section 9). Everton Sewell replied that the Capital Improvement Plan should be finalized and ready to distribute to Board members by Monday, April 27<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Uebbing stated that the University of Rochester (UR) officially becomes the educational partnership organization for East High School on July 1, 2015, and a great deal of learning and discovery has been taking place with this groundbreaking unprecedented effort. He reported that 90 applications have been received for administrative positions, with 40 interviews having been conducted for these positions. Dr. Uebbing announced that recommendations for administrative

and teaching positions at East High School for next year will be presented to the Board in the first week of June.

Dr. Uebbing added that a total of 447 applications were received for teaching positions, including 146 applications from current teachers at East High School. He reported that the remaining applications were primarily from teachers within the District or at charter schools within the City. Dr. Uebbing stated that over 600 reference checks have been made, and 14 different subject area committees have conducted a total of approximately 400 interviews of candidates. He noted that over 30 UR faculty members have been involved in the hiring process for East High School for next year.

Dr. Uebbing introduced Gary Valenti, Consultant to the UR Warner School of Education, adding that Mr. Valenti has been supervising the hiring of support staff for East High School. He stated that 33 applications have been received from the Rochester Association of Paraprofessionals (RAP) and 77 from the Board of Education Non-Teaching Employees (BENTE) union.

Dr. Uebbing reported that 56 students have registered so far for 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade student enrollment is expected to reach 80 students. He described plans to contact students from a school that will be closing to invite them to consider attending 6<sup>th</sup> grade at East High School next year. Dr. Uebbing pointed out that every incoming 6<sup>th</sup> grade student has chosen East High School because of the program being offered, which will be a literacy-rich extended day program.

Dr. Uebbing stated that a total of 115 students indicated East High School as their first choice, noting that many students who had not chosen the school were enrolled in the past.

Dr. Uebbing stated that the UR School of Medicine, Nursing, and Optics have been included in efforts to create a new East High School and to expand opportunities for students attending the school. He noted that the proposed 2015-16 budget for the educational partnership was created in October 2014, and does not include positions that are traditionally funded at the District level: School Resource Officers; substitute teachers and staff; certain positions in Special Education; staff to support the Hillside Work Scholarship program; and nursing staff (from BOCES).

Dr. Uebbing described plans for professional development, with May 1<sup>st</sup> dedicated to training regarding the educational partnership and 11-16 days of training to be provided to East High School staff this summer. He stated that all staff will be trained in the use of restorative practices because of the importance of instilling a positive school atmosphere and expectations from the outset of the school year.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the demographic composition of the teaching staff at East High School next year. Dr. Uebbing replied that the recruitment and hiring process is still under way, so this information is not yet available. He discussed the difficulties in diversifying staff in schools and school districts because of a shortage of available, qualified candidates.

Commissioner Elliott commented that there are qualified candidates, but greater effort has to be made in terms of outreach and recruitment. She asked about the number of candidates with urban experience. Dr. Uebbing responded that almost all of the teachers hired at East High School for the 2015-16 school year will have urban experience, particularly since the vast

majority of applicants are already teaching in the City at RCSD or a charter school. He noted that only a handful of applications were received from teachers in suburban districts.

Commissioner Adams stated that she had submitted a budget question regarding the proposed reduction in the number of Science Teachers at East High School next year, and asked about the impact on the Optics and IT programs at the school. Dr. Uebbing replied that UR is committed to the growth of all of these programs, and described offering an exciting new science program in Pre-Physics. He stated that the responsibilities of Science Teachers will increase, and they will teach for a longer period of time during the school day.

Commissioner Adams asked about the potential for offering medically related programs at East High School, given the stature of medical science at the University of Rochester. Dr. Uebbing responded that plans are under way to offer medically related Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs at the school, and discussions have been held with administrators at Strong Hospital.

Dr. Uebbing added that he is in the early phase of discussions to develop an Avionics program, which would be located at the Rochester International Airport. He stated that he is planning to approach the City of Rochester to explore this idea further.

In terms of additional programs planned for East High School, Dr. Uebbing referred to the “Big Picture” program involving partnership with the City of Rochester, and the “Leader in Me” program based on the teachings of Steven Covey and involving a partnership with the City and the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

Commissioner Powell noted that there is a radio tower in her area of the City, and asked about plans for a program in radio broadcasting. She stated that she personally knows an individual who dropped out of high school, and later became a jet repair technician by participating at a radio station and learning how the parts interact. Bill Ansbro pointed out that the radio tower is currently used for RCSD emergency communications, and will need to be replaced in a few years.

Dr. Uebbing referred to an underlying question about the capacity of one high school to support a variety of CTE programs, noting that the number of programs is limited according to the number of students enrolled. He stated that the UR Warner School of Education has connections and resources to offer for medically related careers, so this is planned to be offered as a CTE path at East High School. Dr. Uebbing suggested that radio broadcasting may be better suited to a student organization or club.

Dr. Uebbing added that he would like to have a Driver Education program at East High School, noting that this is missing from program offerings in the District and commonplace in suburban districts. He stated that he is trying to get a car donated, and he plans to look into liability and insurance issues.

Commissioner Elliott expressed concern that School Safety Officers and Teaching Assistants are paid an average of \$27K per year, while Secretaries and Maintenance Technicians are paid an average of \$55-60K per year. She noted that School Safety Officers and Teaching Assistants have direct contact and influence on students, but do not seem to be valued as highly.

Commissioner Elliott also stated that this salary structure also seems racist in that School Safety Officers and Teaching Assistants are primarily African American, while Secretaries are primarily White females.

Commissioner Evans reported that a lot of questions have been raised about the expense of the educational partnership for East High School, and asked about milestones indicating progress after the first year. Dr. Uebbing replied that the major milestones indicating that the school is making progress include:

- Literacy levels of students in 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade, particularly incoming 6<sup>th</sup> grade students
- Extent to which 9<sup>th</sup> grade students are on track for graduation
- Attendance (goal of 95%)

Dr. Uebbing noted that there will be extensive support for ELA and Math, which represent the bulk of the budgeted expenditures (staffing for Extended Day). He explained that there is a problem with students entering middle and high school grades at Level 1 on the NYS ELA exam because this indicates that they are beginning below proficiency and are not expected to succeed. Dr. Uebbing emphasized the importance of providing intensive supports upon entry into the school.

Commissioner Evans inquired about coordination between the District's Central Office and the East High School educational partnership. Dr. Uebbing responded that meetings have been held on a regular basis with Superintendent Vargas, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning Dr. Otuwa, and Deputy Superintendent for Administration Adele Bovard. He stated that the District and UR Warner School faculty members have to work at these relationships, and when there are disagreements, focus on finding a resolution. Dr. Uebbing reported that there has been a great deal of collaboration so far in this developing relationship, and he does not anticipate difficulties in terms of working together to find a resolution. He pointed out that the educational partnership organization (EPO) agreement contains an arbitration clause in case a resolution cannot be found, but he stated that he currently has no reason to think that this will be necessary. Superintendent Vargas added that District staff want to learn from this experience to benefit students in other schools. He stated that the work with UR so far has been a model of collaboration.

Commissioner Evans asked about plans to involve UR students in the educational partnership to inspire and motivate students at East High School, particularly minority students. Dr. Uebbing replied that the first and foremost task is to ensure that operations are running effectively and efficiently at East High School. He stated that after this foundational work has been accomplished, they will be ready to build partnerships with schools at UR. Dr. Uebbing reported receiving a great response from UR staff and students to assist in efforts to improve East High School. He explained that he does plan to have UR undergraduate students mentor and tutor East High School students, but first the small "family" groups of East High School students need to be established and relationships solidified before these networks can be expanded to college students (e.g. UR, RIT, Nazareth College).

Commissioner Cruz directed Board members to submit any additional questions regarding the educational partnership for East High School to Ms. Flanagan, who will forward them to Dr. Uebbing.

### **III. Continuation of Review of Section 4 (School Profiles & Budgets) of the Budget Book**

Commissioner Evans asked about the process for recommending amendments to the proposed budget, specifically whether offsets have to be identified to suggest funding sources for the amendment.

Commissioner Cruz stated that responses to all Board budget questions should first be examined before suggesting changes to the proposed 2015-16 budget. He directed Board members to notify him as soon as possible if they have suggestions for changes to specific budget items. Commissioner Cruz noted that the problem is finding revenue to support budget changes, and suggested that Board members also identify possible areas in which funding could be reduced to support their suggested budget changes.

Commissioner Evans questioned the way in which revenue is recorded in the budget for a school that is being phased out. He asked how projections of cost savings are calculated in these situations. Mr. Ansbrow replied that additional revenue is anticipated from the \$75M set aside in the NYS budget for schools that are effectively in receivership status. He explained that this revenue was not included in the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget because information is not yet available regarding the amount to be allocated to the District. Mr. Ansbrow stated that models have been created of a minimum range of funding for East High School because the NYS Education Department has approved the plans and budget for this school. He reported that no other funding increases have been modeled, but District staff are involved in planning for the other schools in receivership status.

In terms of the schools that have been approved for closure by the Board, Mr. Ansbrow stated that the projected cost savings have been included in the budget for closing School No. 36 and for decreased student enrollment/staffing at School No. 44.

Commissioner Evans sought clarification that the projected cost savings from closing or phasing out a school is based on expected student enrollment. Mr. Ansbrow clarified that the projected cost savings from phasing out this school are based on the number of staff associated with student enrollment. He noted that the projected cost savings from closing School No. 36 are described in the Executive Summary of the Budget Book, and based on reductions in teaching staff and school administrators. Mr. Ansbrow explained that the students from School No. 36 will now go to other schools that had under-utilized classrooms, thereby increasing staffing efficiency.

Commissioner Evans inquired about other sources of cost savings from closing a school building. Mr. Ansbrow replied that the City of Rochester wanted the buildings housing School Nos. 36 and 22 returned, so utility costs for these buildings are not included in the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget. He added that the District has the month of July to remove items in these buildings that may be re-purposed.

Commissioner Elliott referred to a discussion in this morning's Leadership Meeting at School No. 28 regarding barriers to schools realizing an improvement in student achievement. She asked whether schools have been consulted to ensure the provision of resources critical to attain their academic goals. Superintendent Vargas replied that the Principal of School No. 28

approached the Administration to report problems from having too many part-time staff in the school, which has been addressed in the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget.

Commissioner Elliott sought confirmation that school principals support the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget. The Superintendent replied that everyone may not be entirely pleased with the budget, but all school principals have had input into the budget process and sometimes are not even aware of adjustments that have been made in response to their concerns. He cited the example of reducing the number of itinerant teachers throughout the District, of which some principals were unaware. Mr. Ansbrow added that further refinements to the budget were made based on principals' feedback.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about criticisms received from administrators at other schools about the investment in East High School. Superintendent Vargas noted that the Board and Administration have effectively addressed these concerns, but school administrators are also waiting to see the impact of the proposed 2015-16 budget. He stated that there will be no reductions in art, music or physical education programs because these programs help engage students.

Commissioner Adams requested information regarding the rationale for including Reading Teachers in the UPK budget. Dr. Otuwa explained that 1.0FTE for a Reading Teacher is funded through the UPK grant, but the possibility of shifting funding within UPK is being explored to try to increase the number of Reading Teachers in the program.

Commissioner Adams expressed concern about expectations of children in UPK and pressuring them to perform before they are ready developmentally. Superintendent Vargas replied that the Reading Teachers in the UPK program would provide general literacy support in assisting children to learn letters and numbers, rather than expecting them to read at this age. He concurred that instruction must accommodate the child's developmental readiness.

Commissioner Adams inquired about research findings supporting having Reading Teachers in UPK. Dr. Otuwa replied that the results of the Brigance Screening Assessment indicate that children in the District enter UPK at a disadvantage in terms of literacy, and this was the reason for including Reading Teachers in the program.

Commissioner Adams asked how the lags in literacy among children entering UPK supports having Reading Teachers at this level. Dr. Otuwa replied that examining students' readiness at the kindergarten level and their struggles with letters and literacy awareness led to building in Reading Teachers at the PreK level.

Commissioner Adams requested further detail in terms of research and evidence-based data to support these proposed changes in the UPK program.

**Action Item: Dr. Otuwa will provide additional detail in terms of data and analysis to support having Reading Teachers in the UPK program.**

Commissioner Powell inquired about practices in suburban districts in terms of having Reading Teachers at the PreK level. She noted that Reading Teachers were cut from the budget several years ago, and are now being restored at the PreK level rather than a more developmentally

appropriate grade level. Commissioner Powell expressed concern about the proposal to introduce changes to the UPK program without any apparent basis.

Superintendent Vargas stated that the funding for Reading Teachers and to promote literacy and language development is from a grant. He agreed that the District's UPK program is a national model, and asserted that this does not mean that there is no room for improvement – particularly when the language development of children entering the District is compared with that of middle class children.

Commissioner Elliott asserted that additional literacy support and enrichment is necessary for the children entering PreK in the Rochester City School District, particularly for African American students, because they often enter school at a level behind their peers. She emphasized that these supports are vital in promoting college- and career-readiness.

Commissioner White contended that his children were ready to enter the school system because he and his wife read to them from birth and provided literacy and language development support. He stated that all families in the District may not be able to provide this support, so the District must offer it to children.

Commissioner Adams clarified that she has no objection to providing literacy and language enrichment to young children, but questions the need for Reading Teachers at the UPK level because the program already offers language/literacy enrichment that is developmentally appropriate and meaningful. She emphasized the need to disseminate strategies for literacy/language enrichment to parents to enable them to provide these supports to their child.

Commissioner Cruz directed Board members to submit their questions and concerns in writing about having Reading Teachers involved in the UPK program.

Commissioner White announced that substantial changes recently enacted to NYS Education law through adoption of the NYS budget compel the Board to re-examine the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget in a new context. He reported that the law effectively makes the Superintendent the receiver for all failing schools in the District, with the power to override the Board with regard to all aspects of managing these schools. Commissioner White requested a written plan from the Administration for each school that is at risk for receivership, as described in the recent report issued by the Governor.

**Action Item: The Administration will provide the Board with a written plan for each of the RCSD schools identified in the Governor's recent report as being at risk for receivership.**

Superintendent Vargas confirmed that four schools are currently identified as “persistently failing” under the new statute and will become solely under his management in September 2015 if 2013-14 data indicates that progress has not been made. He identified East High School, Charlotte High School, School No. 9, and School No. 45 as deemed “persistently failing” according to the criteria in the statute.

Superintendent Vargas stated that another eight schools will be deemed “failing” if the data from 2013-14 and from 2014-15 does not indicate that progress has been made: School Nos. 3, 8, 17, 22, 34, 41, and 44. He stated that these changes in the law not only affect the role of the Board

of Education with respect to these schools, but also affect the collective bargaining units, parents and the community. Superintendent Vargas pointed out that if improvement targets are not met in the next 1-2 years, an external entity (i.e. receiver) will be managing many RCSD schools.

Commissioner Cruz suggested that the Board conduct a Work Session specifically to examine the implications of the statutory changes for these schools and students.

Commissioner Campos noted that student enrollment at Monroe High School is expected to increase in 2015-16, but the proposed budget includes a reduction of 7.0FTE in staffing and a decrease of approximately \$500K in funding. She expressed concern about the school being set up for success in 2015-16. The Superintendent reported that there will be significant changes at Monroe High School next year because their school year will begin in August to give these students a head start, since Monroe High School has one year to realize improvement to prevent receivership.

**Action Item: The Administration will provide the Board with a more thorough plan for Monroe High School for the 2015-16 school year, specifically indicating changes being made to substantially improve student achievement to avoid having the school go into receivership.**

Superintendent Vargas pointed out that Monroe High School will receive additional funding, along with the other RCSD schools designated as “failing” or “persistently failing”. He explained that \$75M was set aside at the state level to assist school districts in making substantial improvements to these schools. Everton Sewell added that the \$0.5M funding reduction is due to a reduction in staffing, primarily in Special Education. He noted that the configuration of Special Education classes has been changed, resulting in a need for fewer staff.

The Superintendent reported plans to continue the work initiated by the current principal of Monroe High School, Vicky Ramos. He noted that the graduation rate for the school will increase, and his observations indicate that the school has one of the best testing environments of any school in the District this year. Superintendent Vargas stated that additional support will be provided for the Bilingual program at Monroe High School, explaining that there has been a shortage of certified staff at the school and that this continues to be a problem for the District.

Commissioner Campos referred to the response to a question raised earlier in the budget review process (#1.18) about Health Educators and Family & Consumer Science Teachers, noting that the plan is to provide Health education beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade rather than 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She expressed concern about this proposal because students are becoming aware of many issues at earlier ages, and need instruction earlier to understand the implications of their choices. Dr. Otuwa responded that Family & Consumer Science is being shifted from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and the extra class period in 6<sup>th</sup> grade is to be used for literacy and academic intervention services to support students who have tested below grade level on the NYS ELA exam. She reported that work is under way this year to integrate the components of the Family & Consumer program into Health and ELA courses next year.

Parent Representative Giancarlo Giannini requested a comparison of student performance in AP courses online and in regular classroom formats. He stated that he will re-submit this question to clarify the information being sought.

Mr. Giannini referred to the process for matching staffing to student enrollment and the information provided in Appendix 2.36, which lists the number of FTE for each position in each school for 2014-15 and 2015-16. He asked whether Appendix 2.36 provides the best summary of the impact of staffing changes and efficiencies on each school, as proposed in the 2015-16 RCSD budget. Barbara Goldammer replied that Appendix 2.36 in combination with student enrollment data would provide the best indication of the impact of staffing changes at each school next year.

Mr. Giannini stated that he was hoping that a breakdown would be provided of the projected \$7.3M cost savings from staffing reductions and efficiencies for each school. Mr. Ansbro explained that the \$7.3M in estimated cost savings in the proposed 2015-16 budget was based on the overall reductions in teaching staff in the District, with adjustments made for investments in online credit recovery and reducing the number of part-time and itinerant staff. He stated that staffing levels for each school were determined by examining the number of “no show” students, students absent more than 80% of the time, and attrition data. Mr. Ansbro emphasized that these factors were examined in an attempt to allocate resources more effectively and in alignment with the actual number of students being instructed.

#### **IV. Review of Section 6 of the Budget Book (Administration Profiles & Budgets)**

Commissioner Elliott noted that the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget includes reductions in staffing and funding for Central Office, and inquired about criticisms received in response to these proposed cuts. Superintendent Vargas replied that reductions in Central Office staffing are necessary because RCSD has been quite “top-heavy” in terms of administrators and additional resources are needed in schools. He explained that a total of 52.0FTE are being cut from Central Office staffing, pointing out that RCSD is in the top 5% of school districts nationwide in terms of the number of Central Office staff. The Superintendent contended that reduction of Central Office staff has to be accelerated to accommodate the needs of schools and students.

Commissioner White expressed concern about the number of administrators and the salary levels for the positions contained in the proposed 2015-16 budget for the Chief of Staff (Section 6, p. 16). The Superintendent reported that he has reduced the number of positions in the Superintendent’s Employee Group (SEG) to the lowest levels in recent history, and he has been operating without an Assistant.

Commissioner Evans asked whether the positions of Senior Director of Management Efficiency and the Educational Data Strategist have been included in the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget. Mr. Ansbro replied that these positions have been included in the proposed budget because the grant funding continues until October 2015. Adele Bovard added that these positions are necessary to support the creation of a new Office of Accountability, Research and Development to coordinate requests received from many different sources and prevent duplication of effort.

Commissioner Evans inquired whether the Volunteer Coordinator position will be retained in 2015-16. Mr. Ansbro replied that this position is also supported through grant funds, which will end in October 2015. He reported that the District is committed to continuing support for this position through the use of General Funds, if necessary.

Commissioner White asked about the position of Special Assistant to the Superintendent. Superintendent Vargas replied that this position will be eliminated in 2015-16, and it has not been filled since the departure of former Superintendent Brizard.

Commissioner White stated that only one position will be eliminated from the 2015-16 budget for the Chief of Staff. He expressed concern that positions at the top level in Central Office are being retained, displacing positions at lower levels.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the half-time Secretary I position at a pay level of \$65K per year. Mr. Ansbro stated that the Budget Book contains average pay levels for each position based on full-time employment for the year, so this is the average pay for a full-time Secretary I position for the year.

Commissioner Evans asked about reductions in staffing for the Preschool Parent Program, which involves teaching parents strategies for reading to young children and enhancing literacy at early ages. He stated that many parents have been concerned about staffing reductions to this program. Mr. Ansbro replied that this staffing is not being reduced in 2015-16, and was actually increased in 2014-15.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that the Young Mothers program is reported as a program in the Budget Book, while All City High School is also considered a program and is reported in the school section of the Budget Book. She questioned the rationale for considering these two programs differently in terms of budgeting.

Commissioner Powell objected to the continued reduction in staffing and funding for School No. 15, which has received decreases in budget allocations every year and thereby compromising the school's ability to remain faithful to their program design.

Commissioner Campos inquired about the Newcomer program for Latino students just arriving to the United States and the District. She asked the location of funding for this program in the proposed budget. Superintendent Vargas replied that this program will be initiated at Monroe High School next year, and a teacher at School No. 9 has also expressed a commitment to this program. He stated that the funding will be provided through the District's allocation from the \$75M set aside by the state for failing schools.

Commissioner Campos sought verification regarding a number of items:

- Bilingual Home School Assistant positions have been shifted back to the Teaching & Learning budget;
- A Bilingual Community Engagement position has been included in the budget for the Office of Parent Engagement;
- The Bilingual Lead Teacher position has been redefined to be based more on Special Education

Dr. Otuwa confirmed Commissioner Campos' understanding regarding these positions in the proposed budget.

**V. Review of Section 8 (District-Wide Profiles & Budgets)**

Commissioner Cruz asked for questions that Board members may have about Section 8 of the Budget Book. No questions were raised at this time.

Commissioner Cruz reminded Board members that Round 3 budget questions are due tomorrow, and that this includes Section 5 (Program Profiles & Budgets) and any follow-up questions. He stated that the responses to these questions will be due by Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>.

2<sup>nd</sup> Public Budget Hearing: Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00PM

3<sup>rd</sup> Budget Deliberation Meeting: Thursday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00PM

Meeting adjourned at 8:16PM.