

**Rochester Board of Education**  
**Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole**  
**April 7, 2015**

**Attendance:** Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioners Evans, Adams, White and Campos.

Parent Representative: Giancarlo Giannini.

District Staff: Superintendent Vargas; Adele Bovard, Deputy Superintendent for Administration; Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning; Amy Schiavi, School Chief; Ray Giamartino, School Chief; Kathleen Saville, Grants Director; Bill Ansbro, Chief Financial Officer; Everton Sewell, Budget Director; Michael Schmidt, Chief of School Operations; Barbara Goldammer, Director of Student Placement; Beverly Burrell-Moore, School Chief; and Chris Suriano, Director of Special Education.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 6:07PM.

**I. Round 1 of Budget Review: Sections 1 through 4 of the Budget Book**

Commissioner Cruz reminded all attending that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss Sections 1 through 4 of the Budget Book, which includes:

- Section 1: Introduction and Overview
- Section 2: Policies, Priorities, and Plans
- Section 3: District-Wide Summary Budget
- Section 4: School Profiles and Budgets

Commissioner Cruz stated that the next round of budget review will include any additional questions regarding Section 4 (School Profiles and Budgets) and questions regarding Section 5 (Program Profiles and Budgets). He noted that Section 5 has not yet been released because staff are working diligently on the program-based budgets, but this should be available soon.

Commissioner Cruz asked Superintendent Vargas to comment on the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget. Superintendent Vargas replied that the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget was based on a projection of \$25.9M in NYS Foundation Aid, which was not provided in the final adopted NYS budget. He stated that he hopes to meet this target through additional grant revenue. The Superintendent distributed a copy of a letter that described the impact of the adopted 2015-16 NYS budget.

Bill Ansbro discussed key assumptions upon which the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget was based, with a comparison to the adopted NYS budget:

- Overall \$4M less to be provided in NYS Foundation Aid than anticipated
- Restoration of \$1.2M in State funding for health care services, enabling the District to sustain these services at current levels

- Uncertainty regarding the allocation of \$75M in State funding for low-performing schools because these decisions have not yet been made at the State level.

Mr. Ansbrow reported that he has requested that the decision regarding funding for East High School for 2015-16 be expedited to support the educational partnership with the University of Rochester. He stated that a number of different scenarios will be modeled to illustrate the potential impact on the school and partnership.

Mr. Ansbrow noted that information is currently being obtained regarding all 27 schools in the State that are eligible for this State Aid, and anticipated that the allocation to each school district will be based on student enrollment.

Mr. Ansbrow stated that current efforts are under way to consider potential areas for cost savings in the 2015-16 RCSD budget, particularly with the Position Control Committee.

Mr. Ansbrow reported that the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget was based on receipt of an estimated \$25.9M in NYS Foundation Aid, but the actual amount is approximately \$21M (\$17M more than in 2014-15 and an additional \$4M due to restoration of the Gap Elimination Adjustment).

Commissioner Adams stated that she had submitted a question regarding expanded learning programs and the metrics used to assess student growth in these programs. While the response did provide overall summary information, Commissioner Adams stated that she would like additional detail regarding the methods used to define comparison groups, the criteria and measures used to assess student progress, and the analysis of the results.

**Action Item: Additional detail will be provided to Board members of the data analysis involved in evaluating student performance in expanded learning programs, including the rationale for the methodology used, the way in which comparison groups were identified, and the criteria/measures used to examine student growth.**

Commissioner Adams noted that the proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget includes an additional 50.0FTE for Reading Teachers, and stated that she had asked a question about tradeoffs in the budget to fund these additional positions. She reported that the response she received indicated that there were no tradeoffs, and asked for an explanation of how these positions are supported. Ms. Bovard replied that a review revealed that many classes were below the target class size, which enabled efficiencies to be realized in reducing staffing in K-12 to help fund additional Reading Teachers for grades K-3.

Giancarlo Giannini requested an explanation of the graphs contained in Appendix 1.26 regarding student performance in expanded learning programs. He specifically asked for information regarding what each column in the graph represents, and the information reflected in the data provided.

**Action Item: An explanation of the graphs and data contained in Appendix 1.26 regarding student performance in Expanded Learning programs will be provided to Board members.**

Commissioner Adams noted that the curriculum and instruction budget for the Reading by the Third Grade initiative includes \$54K for professional development, and asked for further information about these professional development needs. Dr. Otuwa replied that ongoing online professional development will be enhanced and the \$54K budget is for the entire school year.

Commissioner White pointed out that the Budget Book does not contain information of graduation rates over time for each secondary school, stating that he would like this information to be included in the Budget Book in the future. Commissioner White asserted that this is the focus of the work of District leadership and the most important measure available in terms of student and District performance. He emphasized the importance of District staff and leadership being synchronized in terms of the measures used to evaluate performance.

Commissioner White noted a proposed reduction in staffing for School Sentries, and requested information regarding the specific schools that would receive this staffing reduction. Ms. Bovard responded that Lori Baldwin, Director of Safety and Security, examined staffing for School Sentries at each school and identified efficiencies, particularly with the District reducing its footprint.

Commissioner White expressed concern about the apparent disproportionate reductions proposed for staff in the BENTE collective bargaining unit. Mr. Ansbrow clarified that Appendix 1.2 only reflects current vacancies, rather than all of the positions proposed to be cut in 2015-16.

**Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board of all positions proposed to have staffing reductions in 2015-16, with detail as to the number of FTE in 2014-15 and proposed for 2015-16, and the location of each of these positions (i.e. school, department).**

Commissioner White asked whether the elimination of the Director of Latino Affairs position in Appendix 1.2 is the same position that the Board recommended establishing in 2014-15. Superintendent Vargas responded that a number of options are currently being considered, which he has discussed with Commissioners Cruz and Campos. He stated that the District is currently considering contracting with Nazareth College to assist in improving Latino student achievement because of their expertise in bilingual education.

Commissioner Evans expressed concern about the way in which student enrollment projections are presented in the Budget Book, as though declining enrollment is an established fact into the future. He emphasized the need to include information about the number of students projected to return to the District each year, and the actions to be taken to reach this goal. Commissioner Evans objected to considering declining enrollment as a fact, and asserted the importance of focusing on planning for student return and retention each year as part of the budget process.

Commissioner Evans noted that charter schools have been quite effective in marketing and advertising themselves in the community, and asked about similar efforts to publicize District schools.

**Action Items: Information will be provided to the Board of marketing plans for RCSD schools and programs, as well as the specific budget for these efforts in 2015-16.**

Commissioner Evans inquired about positions expected to be terminated in 2015-16 due to grant funding being discontinued. He asserted that the District should only apply for grants involving additional staffing if the positions can be sustained over the long term.

Mr. Ansbro stated that it is difficult to determine precisely the number of positions supported through grant funds that may end in 2015-16 because grant cycles do not coincide with the District's fiscal year. He added that the protocol has been to exclude these positions from the proposed budget if no longer supported by grant funds.

Commissioner Evans contended that information of the positions expected to be terminated due to discontinuation of grant funding has major implications in terms of supporting and sustaining programs, as well as in reviewing budget amendments throughout the year.

**Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board of specific positions anticipated to be terminated due to discontinuation of grant funding at some point during FY2015-16.**

Commissioner Campos referred to a question she had submitted regarding the large number of itinerant teachers in Health Education and Family & Consumer Science, inquiring whether the District plans to change the way in which Health Education is to be provided to students. Dr. Otuwa responded that Family & Consumer Education will be provided to 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2015-16, rather than to 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. She stated that this will reduce the number of teachers needed for this instruction because of the smaller number of schools containing 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. Dr. Otuwa reported that the shift to 7<sup>th</sup> grade will enable the District to provide Family & Consumer Education by teachers certified in this subject, which have been difficult to find. She stated that this shift will also enable more social and emotional supports to be provided to students, as well as career advisement.

Commissioner Campos asked about the delivery of Health Education, emphasizing the need to begin this instruction at an early age. Dr. Otuwa replied that the priority is to focus on social and emotional health and career exploration to assist students in becoming successful. She stated that the curriculum is currently being reviewed to determine ways to integrate these skills.

Commissioner Campos reported that the district-wide Wellness Committee is comprised of several Health Education teachers who have successfully integrated social and emotional health and career exploration into the curriculum. She offered to put Dr. Otuwa in contact with these teachers.

Dr. Otuwa stated that the current review is being conducted to identify ways to build a more comprehensive and cohesive curriculum, and these efforts will continue through 2015-16.

Commissioner Campos pointed out that customer service is identified in the Budget Book as a priority (Section 2, p. 6), but the current Ombudsman position is being eliminated. She asked for the following information:

- How will the District monitor customer service?
- Will a formal recognition program be established to encourage excellence in customer service in the District?
- Without the Ombudsman position, how will improvements in customer service be realized?

Commissioner Campos noted that the proposed staffing and resource allocation does not indicate that customer service is a priority for the District. Superintendent Vargas asserted that customer service continues to be a priority, but there also has to be an examination of work performance. He stated that a strategic decision was just made to get staff throughout the organization to understand that customer service is the job of everyone at all levels, from superintendent to custodian. The Superintendent described efforts to audit customer service in different departments, including with internal customers:

- Phone calls
- Complaints
- Aesthetics of buildings

Superintendent Vargas reported that significant strides have been made in customer service, but it is a case of balancing among different priorities – particularly with persistent budget deficits. He described improvements in Student Placement, addition of art and music teachers, and providing enhanced resources to K-8 schools.

Commissioner Campos stated that since the Ombudsman position has not been filled and is proposed to be eliminated in 2015-16, reference to this position should be removed from the Budget Book. She also requested specific information of the measures used to monitor the quality of customer service in the District.

**Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board of the metrics to be used to evaluate customer service in the District and of actions being taken to improve customer service.**

Commissioner Campos referred to Appendix 1.7, which contains a comparison of the number of FTE for ESOL teachers at each school in 2014-15 and proposed for 2015-16. She expressed concern about the proposed reduction in FTE for ESOL Teachers at School Nos. 9, 22 and 28 because each of these schools has a large population of ELL students. Mr. Giamartino discussed staffing plans at School No. 22, noting that the school improvement plan was revised to align staff with specific student needs, based on their language proficiency. He added that options for delivering the curriculum are currently being explored.

Superintendent Vargas explained that School No. 9 is applying for a specific grant because of the urgent need for improvement, as a priority school eligible for receivership. He noted that the District has one year in which to realize substantial improvements in student achievement at this school to avoid having the school placed in receivership.

Mr. Giannini inquired about the estimated \$4.2M in cost savings to be realized in Special Education through redesign of the program, specifically:

- The way in which the effectiveness of the Special Education redesign will be measured
- The specific schools that will receive a reduction in staffing for Special Education (total of 40FTE)

Chris Suriano replied that he will provide Board members with a detailed breakdown of the proposed staffing reductions for Special Education teachers, paraprofessionals, and teaching

assistants for each school. He stated that the effectiveness of the Special Education redesign will continue to be monitored using the same assessments that have been administered since 2013-14, and students' progress toward the goals in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Mr. Suriano explained that the results will be compared for the Integrated Co-Teaching model and the Consultant teacher model.

Mr. Giannini requested a comparison of the effectiveness of these instructional models for students with disabilities at the school level.

**Action Item: Mr. Suriano will provide Board members with data comparing the effectiveness of the Integrated Co-Teaching model with the Consultant Teacher model for each school for students with disabilities.**

Mr. Giannini noted that increasing numbers of students receiving Special Education services are now being integrated into General Education classrooms, and asked whether there is a cap on the maximum number of Special Education students in these classes. Mr. Suriano replied that there is a maximum of 12 Special Education students in classes with the Integrated Co-Teaching model, and of 30% of the students in the class for the Consultant Teacher model.

Commissioner Adams pointed out that Section 1, p. 16 of the Budget Book indicates an increase of approximately \$3M in Title I funding in 2015-16, but Section 3, p. 10 reflects a reduction of \$1.4M in Title I funding. She requested an explanation of this apparent discrepancy. Mr. Ansbrow explained that the difference is due to shifts within Title I, which will increase in 2015-16 as a result of recent census data regarding the poverty level in Rochester. He stated that the NYS Education Department will not officially release this figure until the end of May, after the 2015-16 RCSD budget has been adopted. For this reason, the information was provided in the Budget Book as part of the overview, but not included in the detail regarding federal grant funding.

Commissioner Adams questioned the plan for expanding access to the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at Wilson Commencement Academy, particularly since staffing is proposed to be reduced considerably (i.e. from 85.9FTE to 69.5FTE). She also pointed out that the proposed \$700K increase in funding seems insufficient to cover "additional coaching, clerical support, IB participation fees, student exam fees, training, curriculum writing and marketing" (Section 1, p. 11) as well as the IB program expansion. Amy Schiavi replied that the budget implication for expanding the IB program to provide access to all students is that staffing will have to be increased because this opportunity cannot be offered to all 11<sup>th</sup> grade students while maintaining a target class size of 28 students. She explained that improvements have been made in staffing projections by matching the number of staff members to the number of students expected in the program. Ms. Schiavi added that the budget for the School Chiefs includes funding for additional professional development that will be needed for this program expansion.

Commissioner Adams continued to express concern about the adequacy of staffing and resources proposed in the budget for the IB program to be offered to all students. She stated that she favors the concept of expanding the program to all students, but does not want to offer a program that is insufficiently supported.

Commissioner Evans concurred with Commissioner Adams, emphasizing that the IB program expansion has to be implemented with fidelity or not at all. He commented that too often the

District has attempted to implement initiatives and programs, only to have a series of problems or disappointing results because of inadequate resources and planning. Commissioner Evans pointed out that the quality of the IB program expansion is critical because it could be a selling point for the District in attracting students and families. Everton Sewell clarified that the \$700K increase in funding for Wilson Commencement Academy includes support for additional staffing, but detail regarding the number and distribution of the additional staff was unavailable at the time that the Budget Book was printed. He offered to provide an update of the planned staffing at Wilson Commencement Academy for 2015-16.

**Action Item: Additional information will be provided to the Board of staffing plans for Wilson Commencement Academy in 2015-16, particularly with the expansion of the IB program.**

Commissioner White commented on the rigor of the IB program, noting that his children were prepared for college-level academics after completing the program. He also emphasized the importance of providing the resources, staffing and supports necessary for the program and for students to succeed.

Commissioner White discussed several follow-up questions that he has submitted:

- Who will perform recruitment efforts with the proposed elimination of the Director of Recruitment? Please describe recruitment efforts from 2014-15, such as the colleges/universities from which staff were recruited and changes in the diversity of District staffing.
- A new position is included in the proposed budget for a Chief of Accountability, Research and Development. Please provide a job description for this position, and indicate whether the position is proposed to be included in the Superintendent's Employee Group (SEG).

Commissioner Evans commented that he is pleased that improving school climate is identified as a priority in the proposed budget, and he looks forward to the recommendations of the Rochester Area Community Foundation (RACF) Task Force. He stated that he does not want to continue expending funds to examine these problems because the District is at a point where action simply needs to be taken to improve school climate and to reduce student suspensions. Commissioner Evans referred to a report and recommendations prepared by the Office of the Auditor General, noting that the District needs to take action to implement these recommendations. He emphasized that there is no need to wait for the final report of the RACF Task Force to begin addressing these issues. Superintendent Vargas replied that actions are under way and student suspension and school climate are being monitored. He cited an example of a letter being sent to parents routinely for years regarding their child's suspension, which did not inform parents of their rights in these situations. The Superintendent stated that this has since been rectified, by illustrates the way in which practices have proliferated over the years. He stated that the problems are more complex than simply enforcing the rules; safety and trust must be promoted to the point where metal detectors can be removed from schools. Superintendent Vargas concurred with Commissioner Evans that simply adding funding will not resolve these problems.

Commissioner Evans expressed the hope that the RACF Task Force will address concerns beyond rule enforcement and adopt a more holistic approach in examining these issues. The

Superintendent responded that the District needs to obtain community participation regarding the rules and enforcement.

Commissioner Evans inquired whether the amount of funding used from the Fund Balance will be reduced if additional revenue is provided to help close the 2015-16 budget gap.

Superintendent Vargas replied that while additional funding is anticipated from grants, it would be most prudent to maintain a significant amount in the Fund Balance to cover any unforeseen expenses that may arise. He stated that information is not yet available about additional funding from the State. The Superintendent reported that he is hopeful that the District will end the current fiscal year with a surplus. Mr. Ansbro added that information is not yet available about the way in which the \$75M for low-performing schools will be allocated by the State, and this is a two-year appropriation.

Mr. Giannini requested that data provided in a spreadsheet format be disseminated in Excel rather than an Adobe file, so that calculations can be made. Mr. Ansbro noted that files are sent in Adobe to prevent opportunity for tampering/manipulating data.

Commissioner Campos pointed out that Excel files can be protected with a password.

Commissioner Cruz expressed concern about dissemination of email messages that blatantly misrepresent or misconstrue the facts, particularly from those who should know better. He stated that parents and community members then obtain misinformation, which is extremely difficult to counteract. Commissioner Cruz suggested developing a mechanism for addressing these situations, so that there is a systematic way of preventing release of misinformation and of addressing it if it has inadvertently been released.

Commissioner Cruz requested Finish Line Reports for specific student populations (e.g. ELL students in bilingual programs) in the District to monitor key indices of performance, much in the same way that these reports are currently used to monitor school performance.

**Motion** by Commissioner Evans to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Campos. **Adopted 5-0, with concurrence of the Parent Representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:00PM.