

**Rochester Board of Education
Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole
May 1, 2014**

Attending: Commissioner Powell (Chair); Commissioners Evans, Adams, Cruz, and White. Parent Representative: Giancarlo Giannini. District Staff: Superintendent Vargas; Bill Ansbrow, Chief Financial Officer; Vern Connors, Budget Director; Beverly Burrell-Moore, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning. Board Staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Powell called the meeting to order at 6:19PM.

Superintendent Presentation: Establishing Long-Term Financial Stability

Superintendent Vargas noted that he had offered in the previous budget deliberation meeting (April 15th) to present a plan to the Board for closing the District's structural budget gap. He identified a number of actions necessary to attain this goal by 2019-2020:

- Reduce the number of District staff each year to maintain a ratio of 5.4 students to each District employee (FTE), which will align staffing with student enrollment.
- Adjust the expected annual cost increase of total employee pay and benefits to the level of increased revenue (2.5% per year).
- Reduce staff absenteeism to reduce costs for substitutes
- Reduce spending for Special Education tuition by working with providers to find opportunities for cost reduction.
- Improve class fill rates to maximize efficiencies in staffing.
- Reduce the square footage of District facilities to align with declining student enrollment (i.e. "rightsized").
- Increase grant revenue.

Commissioner Evans discussed the importance of taking proactive steps to address the challenges of priority schools and the arrival of charter schools. He asserted that priority schools offer an opportunity for innovation and enable the District to stem losses in student enrollment. Commissioner Evans stated that the District has the infrastructure and information systems necessary to identify problems and opportunities.

Commissioner Adams concurred with Commissioner Evans' comments, emphasizing the importance of providing stability in staffing and a minimum level of financial support to each school community. She disagreed with the notion of using the same staff-to-student ratio for each school because the ratio is not based on an assessment of the needs in the school.

Commissioner Adams pointed out that expanded learning programs must be evaluated over time, particularly since these programs have been replicated in the District without evidence of effectiveness and are largely supported through grants.

She expressed concern that cuts have been made too deeply in staffing and funding of other programs and initiatives, while expanded learning has been promoted --- the net effect has been to the detriment of the schools and students.

Mr. Giannini noted that the costs for RCSD employee benefits are much greater than for employees in the private sector, and stated that there are opportunities to explore ways to adjust RCSD employee benefits.

Commissioner White discussed the assumptions in the Superintendent's presentation regarding the number of students projected to attend charter schools in future years, emphasizing that the District does not have to accept these projections. He pointed to opportunities for improving and replicating successful schools and programs (e.g. School of the Arts, School Without Walls).

Commissioner Cruz inquired whether the District conducts exit interviews with parents who have chosen to enroll their child in a charter school. Superintendent Vargas replied that surveys will be conducted in fall 2014 of the families of the estimated 865 students attending charter schools in September. He noted that the enrollment projections in his presentation assume no further growth in charter schools from 2014-15 to 2018-19. The Superintendent stated that the District has opened 8 new schools and redesigned another 9 schools in the last three years, and this trend cannot continue without evaluating outcomes. He discussed the need for modifications to enhance the success of these new and redesigned schools, such as providing the Leadership Academy for Young Men with their own building rather than sharing a building with a school with girls. He emphasized the need to focus on the 25 new, redesigned and K-8 model schools to provide stability for students, families and staff.

Commissioner Evans remarked that the 25 new, redesigned schools could easily increase to 50 schools because of State requirements to restructure schools with poor academic performance. He urged focusing on "at risk" schools and developing innovative plans to prevent more schools from being required to be restructured. The Superintendent stated that 2014-15 offers opportunities to develop strategies to address the problems of "at risk" schools and to reinforce ongoing evaluation of progress in these schools.

Commissioner Powell contended that the best outcome in the requirement to restructure East High School has been the Board's involvement in examining and discussing development of a plan. She stated that past practice has been to present plans and strategies to the Board without any opportunity for meaningful input.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that the expenditure chart in the Superintendent's presentation does not reflect the impact of the Facilities Modernization Plan (FMP) in future years. She explained that debt service will become a much larger component/proportion of District expenditures, while employee compensation and benefits will appear to have been reduced proportionately. Commissioner Powell stated that this is due to the fact that the District will have to begin paying the local share of the

debt service in future years for costs incurred under the FMP, and will not actually indicate a reduction in costs or expenditures for employee compensation and benefits.

Commissioner Powell also noted that NYS Aid has been frozen according to 2009 RCSD student enrollment, while the District has experienced significant decreases in the student population since that time. She stated that expenditures must be reduced in anticipation of a shift in the future in which NYS Aid will be based on actual enrollment, which will lead to a significant revenue reduction for the District.

Commissioner Powell contended that if the State had fully funded the Contract for Excellence, the District would not have such a large deficit. She emphasized the importance of advocating for fair and equitable funding at the State level for urban districts, particularly since economic recovery from the recession is evident.

Superintendent Vargas asserted that the District has better resources and more talented, qualified teachers than charter schools. He stated that the District must become a more flexible organization to respond to the needs of students and to realize efficiencies. The Superintendent cited several examples of efficiencies that could be realized through increased flexibility: opening schools earlier in the morning to enable parents to transport their children to school before work; changing the school calendar to reduce summer learning loss.

Beverly Burrell-Moore: Presentation regarding new Pupil Personnel Services Department

Ms. Burrell-Moore described plans for a new department of Pupil Personnel Services, which will coordinate the District's provision of social, emotional, and behavioral supports and services. She stated that the emphasis will be on comprehensive assessment of student needs, and linking each student to services in the District and community according to their particular needs.

Ms. Burrell-Moore discussed using a multi-tiered approach in which all students would be offered physical and emotional outlets such as art, music, sports, extracurricular activities, and expanded learning. She explained that students needing additional support would be offered services through Student Support Teams consisting of social workers, psychologists, and service providers in community agencies. For students in need of intensive and/or multiple types of supports, Ms. Burrell-Moore stated that case management would be provided to coordinate care from District and community service providers.

Ms. Burrell-Moore noted that the staff in the Pupil Personnel Services Department will supervise case management and coordination of services provided by the Student Support Teams. She pointed out that the staff in this new department will have the training to evaluate factors affecting behavioral and academic challenges to provide guidance in prevention and case management. Rather than having staff in different departments assessing, monitoring, and providing services to students, the new department will

integrate the efforts of nurses, social workers, attendance monitors, school counselors, and Youth & Family Services staff.

Commissioner Powell asked whether the funding and staffing for the new Pupil Personnel Services Department is included in the proposed 2014-15 RCSD budget. Ms. Burrell-Moore confirmed that the proposed budget contains funding and staffing for this new department.

Commissioner Adams noted that most of the service coordinators at the Student & Family Resource Centers were eliminated in last year's budget, and asked whether funding opportunities are being sought for coordinator positions for the Student Support Teams. Ms. Burrell-Moore replied that opportunities for case management and coordination of services are always being sought, but these functions may be assigned to staff in other positions (e.g. school psychologist).

Commissioner White inquired about specific opportunities to tear down silos in the District. Ms. Burrell-Moore explained that the department of school counseling services has been moved to the Teaching & Learning Division, while the school social work department has remained in the Youth & Family Services Division. She also reported that school nursing services and attendance are in the School Operations Department, but in different units. Ms. Burrell-Moore stated that integrating these services will model the cross-collaboration that should also be done in the schools.

Commissioner White requested additional information about the new director position of Pupil Personnel Services. Ms. Burrell-Moore clarified that the existing Director of School Counseling position will be re-titled to Executive Director of Pupil Personnel Services, so that no additional cost or staffing will be involved. She stated that the current Director of School Counseling has the experience, expertise, and reputation for collaboration with staff and community organizations to serve as the Executive Director of this new department.

Ms. Burrell-Moore noted that cost savings from eliminating some administrator positions will be used for critically needed professional development and for the Naviance platform, which offers social and emotional supports for middle school students. She stated that the Naviance platform assists students with the transition to high school and with planning a career pathway. Ms. Burrell-Moore described the Naviance platform as consisting of career interest surveys and personality tests, provision of academic support (e.g. preparation for PSAT and SAT exams), assistance with college applications, and connecting students with career opportunities based on their interests.

Commissioner White asked about accountability and supervision of suspension hearing officers and staff in Alternatives to Suspension (ATS) programs under this reorganization. Ms. Burrell-Moore responded that student discipline would be included under the purview of the Pupil Personnel Services Department, so the suspension hearing officers and staff in ATS programs would report to the managers in this department.

Commissioner White inquired whether consideration has been given to shifting to a restorative justice approach to student discipline. Ms. Burrell-Moore replied that this

approach is being pursued, and approximately 300 staff members have been trained in restorative justice practices. She pointed out that this will also be incorporated into the Pupil Personnel Services Department to monitor implementation and ensure consistency in practices throughout the District.

Commissioner White asked about the role of the Executive Director of the new department with regard to evaluating the effectiveness of programs and initiatives, and the extent to which these functions would be performed by another department. Ms. Burrell-Moore explained that a data analysis and collection protocol will be assigned to specific staff members in the Pupil Personnel Services Department, who will collaborate with data analysts in the School Operations Department. She stated that the School Operations Department would essentially provide services to the new Pupil Personnel Services Department to assist with program evaluation. Ms. Burrell-Moore emphasized the importance of using protocols to ensure data accuracy and consistency throughout the District.

Commissioner Cruz commended the use of an integrated approach, reporting that he has observed conflicts between agencies over providing services to students. He discussed the value of utilizing a cross-functional team with representatives from different professions and perspectives to assess and address needs more comprehensively. Commissioner Cruz emphasized the importance of having a coordinator to monitor provision of services and implementation of the care plan, noting that the most critical component is for the coordinator to establish a supportive relationship with the student and their family.

Commissioner Powell observed that a coordinator linking students to services is especially crucial in an era of diminishing resources and services in the community.

Additional materials were handed out to Board members: the full Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and a table indicating proposed FTE changes for school clerical staff.

Commissioner Powell inquired whether the table used to determine the appropriate level of clerical staff in schools was based on an “industry standard” or developed by the District. Mr. Ansbrow responded that the proposed staffing cuts in the 2014-15 budget would affect clerical staff in 21 schools. Mr. Connors noted that there is no “industry standard” to provide guidelines of the appropriate ratio of clerical staff in schools. He explained that the staffing ratios were developed two years ago, when a determination was made of the appropriate level of school administrators to students. He stated that it was assumed that clerical support staff would have a one-to-one ratio to administrators. Mr. Connors pointed out that school administrator positions have been cut over the last few years, but no corresponding reductions have been made to school clerical staff positions.

Commissioner Adams asked about methods used to verify the staffing level ratios that were developed, such as conducting surveys of school principals and/or a functional analysis of the work performed by school clerical staff. She stated that a number of similar positions have been cut over the years, and clerks have assumed additional responsibilities. Mr.

Ansbrov replied that the school staffing plan was reviewed with six principals to obtain feedback about the impact of the proposed reductions in clerical staff in schools.

Commissioner Adams pointed out that if the principals of the schools that would be affected by the proposed clerical staff reductions were not consulted, then the feedback would not be meaningful.

Commissioner White expressed concern about disproportionate reductions in support staff positions, emphasizing the need to examine these staffing levels comprehensively over the last 10-15 years. He noted the importance of these staff members in terms of the functions performed, and in providing customer service in the District. Commissioner White asked whether the impact of support staff reductions over the years has been evaluated, reporting that Board members receive a lot of complaints about the difficulty in reaching District staff (e.g. response to telephone calls, greeting visitors, interacting with the public, etc.). Mr. Ansbrov responded that data has been provided of 15-year trends for different staffing groups as student enrollment has declined.

Commissioner White inquired about the potential source of funding if a decision was made to restore some of the school support staff positions. Mr. Ansbrov replied that this issue was addressed in the Superintendent's presentation about closing the structural budget gap. He stated that adding/restoring positions at this point will lead to greater staffing disruptions in the future.

Commissioner Evans noted that the Superintendent has presented the proposed 2014-15 RCSD budget and responded to hundreds of questions from Board members. He asserted that the Board needs to determine priorities and recommend changes at this point, with the caveat that any proposed additions/restorations to the budget must be offset with funding reductions in another area.

Commissioner Powell asked about the cost of restoring 20FTE of school clerical staff positions. Mr. Ansbrov replied that the cost would amount to \$1.3M for staff in this category.

Commissioner Powell reported that she and Board President White met with Mr. Ansbrov to discuss Board budget priorities. She noted that the Board's priorities had a significant fiscal impact, and did not include restoration of school clerical positions. Commissioner Powell requested information from her colleagues about budgetary changes that are a priority, so that these changes can be incorporated in a budget amendment.

Commissioner Adams expressed concern that a number of budget items are still unclear, such as funding for:

- The LynCx program
- Alternative programs
- P-TECH – budget and plan for this new program

- Literacy initiative – information of the methods for evaluating this initiative, data collection and assessment, and organizational structure

Commissioner Cruz requested a response to his suggestion to establish a Director of Latino Student Achievement, and asked about the potential budgetary impact. Mr. Ansbrow replied that establishing this position would not be budget-neutral.

Commissioner Evans stated that he was pleased with the increased financial support in the proposed budget for social workers, the arts, music, and sports to address students' needs and to engage them in school. He noted that the budget process this year has been very instructive and informative due to the questions that were raised and the information that has been provided.

Mr. Giannini concurred that the level of detail was exceptional in the information that was provided, particularly in the later rounds of the budget review.

Commissioner Adams expressed continued concern about the possible displacement of school staff due to reductions of Central Office administrator positions. She requested an update regarding the potential impact of these staffing changes. Superintendent Vargas replied that there is no updated information because NYS law requires school districts to allow individuals with greater seniority to displace those with less seniority, regardless of work performance. He pointed out that difficult choices had to be made to align staffing levels to student enrollment because this has not been addressed for years. The Superintendent gave an example of a school with 183 students, one Principal and one Assistant Principal to illustrate some of the inefficiencies that have been maintained over the years.

Mr. Connors announced that the District is required to provide the complete 2014-15 RCSD budget to the City by May 14th. He requested that Board members notify the Administration of priorities for budgetary changes by the end of the day on May 6th.

Commissioner Powell noted that 90% of the items requested by the Board have been identified, so meeting this deadline should not be a problem. She pointed out that there were an enormous number of questions in the budget review process this year, and observed that major changes such as the new Pupil Personnel Services Department, UPK, and the Literacy initiative did not allow meaningful comparison to the 2013-14 budget. Commissioner Powell suggested that the Administration discuss major changes with the Board early in the process in anticipation of many of these questions.

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:57PM.