

**Rochester Board of Education
Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole
April 15, 2014**

Attending: Commissioner Powell (Chair); Commissioners Evans, Adams, Elliott, Cruz (arrived at 6:29PM); and White (arrived at 6:58PM). Parent Representative: Giancarlo Giannini. District Staff: Superintendent Vargas; Bill Ansbrow, Chief Financial Officer; Vern Connors, Budget Director; Patty Malgieri, Chief of Staff; Ed Lopez-Soto, General Counsel; Bethany Centrone, Chief of HCl; Robin Hooper, Director of Early Childhood Education; Caterina Leone-Mannino, Executive Director of School Innovation. Board Staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Powell called the meeting to order at 6:08PM, inquiring about updates regarding the proposed 2014-15 RCSD budget. Superintendent Vargas discussed his commitment to the Board to strengthen fiscal management and ensure the long-term fiscal health of the District. He stated that this is the guiding rationale in determining whether to initiate a new program because long-term sustainability is essential to prevent upheaval for staff and students. The Superintendent offered to provide a plan to the Board for bringing the District's structural budget gap under control.

Action Item: Superintendent Vargas will present a plan to the Board by the next budget deliberation session (May 1st) for bringing the District's structural budget gap under control.

Commissioner Evans pointed out the importance of clearly explaining to the public expenditure requirements under different grants to aid in understanding the rationale for funding certain items that may not initially appear to be necessary (e.g. the SUPES Academy, as discussed in April 3rd public hearing). Superintendent Vargas replied that he will consider how to present this information to the public in the future.

Commissioner Adams noted that it would be helpful to receive responses regarding the budget priorities that the Board has identified (e.g. the Early Childhood Education Director and K-3).

Commissioner Elliott commented that early in her tenure with the Board, she observed funds being spent in the District without an awareness of fiscal constraints. She stated that she has observed this practice less often in recent years, but emphasized the need to keep fiscal constraints in the forefront of all considerations and decisions. Commissioner Elliott also discussed the importance of staff making financial concessions to improve the District's long-term fiscal condition.

Commissioner Adams noted that the questions submitted by Board members in Round 2 of the budget review reflect certain themes:

- Social/emotional supports

- Alternatives to Suspension (ATS)
- Expeditionary Learning (EL)

Commissioner Adams stated that the responses received to these questions primarily indicate that the program is currently being examined, but this examination has been ongoing for more than four months (i.e. expeditionary learning). She underscored the importance of providing greater specificity in the responses, particularly with regard to:

- Potential funding
- Possible grant sources
- Possible community partners
- Opportunities for leveraging with existing resources and partnerships

Commissioner Adams objected to the vague responses received to specific concerns, questions, and requests for information submitted by the Board.

Commissioner Powell reported that she had asked Mr. Ansbrow to discuss funding for in-school suspension (ISS) for School Nos. 12 and 33, which are projected to have enrollment of over 700 students in 2014-15.

Mr. Ansbrow discussed staffing for Special Education, noting that the proposed 2014-15 budget reflected a staffing reduction for Teaching Assistants rather than for Paraprofessionals. He stated that Special Education staffing will utilize Teaching Assistants to a greater extent and there will be a staffing reduction among Paraprofessionals. Mr. Ansbrow explained that this will result in approximately \$377K in increased costs due to higher pay for Teaching Assistants as compared to Paraprofessionals.

Commissioner Adams asked whether increased use of out-of-school suspension will result from discontinuing funding for Alternatives to Suspension (ATS) and limiting in-school suspension at the elementary level to schools with more than 700 students. She noted that one of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Student & Community Safety convened earlier this year was to restore ATS to as many schools as financially feasible, beginning with those with the highest suspension rates. Commissioner Adams requested specific information regarding the assumptions and fiscal consequences of no longer funding this program. She also asked for information about the criteria for making this decision, and for prioritizing among schools to identify those most in need of alternative approaches to student discipline.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board regarding the criteria for making the decision to discontinue funding for the Alternatives to Suspension (ATS) program and the fiscal impact of this decision.

Superintendent Vargas offered to provide information regarding the cost of ATS for each school, and noted the need to provide additional social/emotional support to students through art, music and sports. He stated that he would like to have a community discussion

regarding the use of suspension in grades K-3 and the provision of services through a school social worker. The Superintendent noted that the Board would like to have a social worker in every school, as in suburban schools, but there are tradeoff costs.

Commissioner Adams asked whether suspension will be banned for elementary students, given the discontinuation of funding for ATS and elimination of ISS in most elementary schools. Superintendent Vargas stated that this must be discussed internally and with the communities of smaller schools (i.e. fewer than 700 students) to ensure that their needs will be met.

Commissioner Adams insisted that an explicit ban on suspension in elementary schools is necessary if ISS is no longer used and social/emotional supports are to be provided by the social worker in every school. She also emphasized the importance of increased engagement with parents and families, and use of alternative approaches to student discipline such as restorative justice. The Superintendent questioned whether the community is actually in support of restorative justice approaches, and whether school administrators and staff are skilled and committed to carrying out such a major shift in approaches to student discipline.

Commissioner Adams retorted that adequate financial support of alternative approaches must be provided to offer an opportunity for success.

Commissioner Evans inquired about the extent to which staffing cuts proposed for Central Office will displace school staff. He asked about the rights of an administrator in the Central Office to return to a school-level position if their position has been cut. Superintendent Vargas responded that displacement of school staff from Central Office cuts would depend on the individual's seniority and contract with the collective bargaining unit.

Commissioner Evans expressed concern about school staff being replaced by a Central Office administrator because the administrator is not necessarily prepared to address needs at the school level and these displacements lead to loss of effective school-level staff. Ms. Centrone replied that NYS law requires the District to make staffing reductions based on tenure and seniority in the position. She noted that while the possibility does exist for a Central Office administrator to "bump" a school administrator, none of the proposed Central Office staffing reductions would lead to staff displacements in schools.

Commissioner Evans remarked that parents and community members expressed a great deal of concern in the April 3rd public hearing about the possible elimination of the current Assistant Principal at School No. 10. Ms. Centrone replied that the positions of 7.0FTE Assistant Principals are being eliminated, and this is not due to displacement from reductions in Central Office staff. She also pointed out that RCSD has a much higher ratio of administrators to students than other school districts in the State.

Commissioner Evans emphasized the difficulty in managing a school without knowing the individuals in key positions from year to year. Ms. Centrone stated that the District does have control over administrator positions that can be retained, but the law does not allow

retention of a staff member in a tenured position with less seniority. She noted that this may have led the District to retain a greater number of administrators over time to ensure that effective staff members are kept.

Commissioner Elliott contended that the Board has not done its due diligence and examined the RTA contract holistically. She stated that advocacy is needed at the State level to change the practice of retaining staff purely on the basis of seniority.

Parent Representative Giancarlo Giannini described a number of concerns with the proposed 2014-15 RCSD budget from parents' perspective:

- 1) Difficulty in aligning programs with Common Core standards, particularly non-traditional programs such as Expeditionary Learning, International Baccalaureate, Montessori, and School of the Arts. These non-traditional programs have a great deal of support of parents, and have been successful in engaging children and promoting their growth and development.
- 2) Importance of ensuring that staffing is in place in June, so that students and parents know what to expect for the upcoming school year.
- 3) Support for social and emotional supports/services to address the needs of students because of the impact on instruction and learning opportunities for all students.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she would like consideration to be given of the impact of teachers' expectations on their students. She asserted that social and emotional supports may not be necessary if the impact of teachers' low expectations for their students is addressed.

Commissioner Elliott requested information of the actual compensation of RCSD staff, rather than the average pay for position titles that has been reported in the 2014-15 Budget Book.

Action Item: Mr. Ansbrow will provide information to the Board of the actual compensation for each RCSD employee, from the highest to the lowest level.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the proposed funding reduction for School No. 44 in 2014-15. Mr. Ansbrow replied that the reduction is due to elimination of kindergarten and grades 7 and 8 at the school in 2014-15.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the rationale for the \$2M reduction in funding for All City High School in 2014-15. Mr. Ansbrow replied that the District is currently evaluating the number of over-age and under-credited students, and actual funding will depend on student enrollment. Ms. Burrell-Moore explained that over 300 students currently enrolled at All City High School will graduate this year. She stated that a committee comprised of parents and administrators are exploring ways to serve the remaining over-age, under-credited students. Superintendent Vargas noted that the students at All City High School

were disproportionately in upper grade levels because they came from a variety of RCSD schools that have been phased out.

Commissioner Powell noted that 548 students attend All City High School this year, but the proposed 2014-15 RCSD budget projects only 250 students at the school in 2014-15. She asked about the estimated number of incoming 9th grade students, and the number of students who have dropped out at All City High School this year.

Commissioner Elliott noted that approximately \$1.5M in funding is proposed to be cut for Charlotte High School next year. Ms. Burrell-Moore responded that the reduction in funding is due to termination of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) at the end of the current school year, which has also led to staffing reductions at the school. She stated that student enrollment at Charlotte High School is expected to decline in 2014-15, and an Assistant Principal position was cut in anticipation of the reduced student population.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the rationale for the proposed increase of over \$17M in the budget for the Chief of Schools. Mr. Connors replied that the budgets for summer school, substitute teachers, Title I Supplemental Academic Services, building substitutes, textbooks, and the budget reserve are placed under the Chief of Schools until school staffing has been determined from actual student enrollment in the fall.

Commissioner Elliott requested a definition of “Fixed Obligations with Variability” in the budget. Mr. Connors explained that these are known categories of expenses that the District will have to cover, but the actual amounts are not yet known because these expenditures are based on student need and actual enrollment (e.g. transportation, Special Education tuition to be paid to BOCES for services, and charter school tuition).

Commissioner Powell inquired about the planned expansion of Wilson Foundation Academy from K-2 and 6-8 to K-3 and 5-8, requesting information as to the source of the incoming 5th grade students. She expressed concern that 5th grade students would be drawn from other schools, which would result in inefficiencies in terms of staffing additional classrooms. Ms. Burrell-Moore replied that the idea of adding a 5th grade was explored two years ago and was determined not to be feasible. She stated that this has been reported erroneously in the 2014-15 Budget Book.

Commissioner Powell asked about the source of incoming 6th grade students at Wilson Foundation Academy, particularly with respect to other K-6 schools. Ms. Burrell-Moore clarified that the Wilson Foundation Academy has had a 6th grade since 2012-13 because of the Middle Years College Program.

Commissioner Powell asserted that most parents receive information about school choice when their child is already in 6th grade, and the majority of parents do not know about this program. She objected to the District’s practice of allowing only the parents “in the know” to take advantage of specialized programs, while the majority of parents are told that there is no choice of school placement until their child is ready to enter 7th grade.

Commissioner White discussed continuing concerns regarding funding decisions made without data indicating the effectiveness of programs or initiatives, and the vague responses given to Board members' requests for this type of data. He noted that the District typically does not perform baseline assessments to establish benchmarks before providing funding, and data is apparently not available or used to assess whether programs/initiatives/services are effective. Commissioner White emphasized that he has repeatedly requested performance data over the years to ensure that funds are used effectively. He cited a question submitted by a Board member about regarding the timeframe for obtaining a comprehensive evaluation of expanded learning programs in each school. Commissioner White noted that the response referred to six different organizations performing evaluations of these programs, yet none of the data will be available until after decisions must be made about the proposed 2014-15 RCSD budget.

Superintendent Vargas explained that five RCSD schools are participating in the expanded learning program in the current school year. He stated that the program was initiated in September 2013 and the first NYS assessments are being administered in the next two weeks. The Superintendent stated that the results from these assessments will not be provided by the State Education Department until this summer, so evaluations cannot be performed at this point. He emphasized that the NYS assessment results are critical in serving as the basis for State standards and for designating "priority" and "focus" schools. Superintendent Vargas stated that attendance data and teachers' reports indicate that the expanded learning programs in these five schools have been implemented with fidelity. He contended that it is unfair, unwise and unreasonable to expect evaluation results when the program has not even been implemented for a full school year. The Superintendent stated that program implementation has been evaluated on an ongoing basis, and the outcome results will be available by September 2014.

Commissioner White recalled that expanded learning was first piloted at NE College Preparatory Academy and NW Preparatory Academy approximately two years ago. He requested data regarding the impact of expanded learning at these two schools. Superintendent Vargas replied that an evaluation report is available regarding the impact of expanded learning in these two schools. He pointed out that during the first year of implementation, the State designated these two schools "priority schools" and the District was given six weeks to develop and submit a restructuring plan. This resulted in changing NW College Preparatory Academy to a middle school and NE College Preparatory Academy to a high school, rather than having grades 7-12 at each school.

Ms. Leone-Mannino reported that the data from NWA assessments of 7th and 8th grade students at NE College Preparatory Academy and NW College Preparatory Academy reflected accelerated growth rates in scores. She added that NE College Preparatory Academy has experienced significant challenges in implementing expanded learning. The District is currently collaborating with Generation Schools to strengthen the expanded learning model and to create a more connected, career pathway approach at the school, which is one of the goals under the School Improvement Grant.

Commissioner White asked for data regarding the effectiveness of expanded learning at these schools, rather than information about actions that have been taken. Ms. Leone-Mannino replied that NWA assessment data reflected improvements in assessment scores among 7th and 8th grade students at both schools. She reported that data is also available regarding the number of credits recovered by students in grades 9-12, based on expanded learning time and the credit recovery options offered. Ms. Leone-Mannino added that information is also available of the number and percentage of students at NE College Preparatory Academy who passed the Regents exams in January 2014.

Commissioner Adams inquired about significant differences between the two schools in assessment scores for 7th and 8th grade students during this period. Ms. Leone-Mannino responded that she will provide this information.

Action Item: Data will be provided to the Board regarding differences between NE College Preparatory Academy and NW College Preparatory Academy in terms of NWA assessment scores for 7th and 8th grade students.

Commissioner White emphasized that the purpose of these comparisons is to examine multiple data points and to determine whether different actions/approaches used at one particular campus led to unique and different results as compared to other schools. He asserted that this is the type of analysis necessary to make funding decisions.

Ms. Leone-Mannino stated that data for School No. 9 also indicates positive growth rates, as compared to schools without expanded learning.

Ms. Leone-Mannino added that changes in the expanded learning model at NE College Preparatory Academy created major implementation challenges, particularly at the secondary level. She clarified that the school began with a volunteer-based model, and switched to a teacher-provided model in the middle of the year. Ms. Leone-Mannino reported that the NYS Education Department required a plan for stabilizing the campus and overall structure at the school due to other problems with implementing the School Improvement Grant.

Action Item: An analysis based on multiple data points will be provided to the Board regarding expanded learning implementation and outcomes at NE College Preparatory Academy, NW College Preparatory Academy, and School No. 9.

The Superintendent pointed out that the original model for expanded learning at NE College Preparatory Academy involved voluntary participation, but now involves a NYS mandate to add 200 hours of instruction time and a plan that must be approved by the NYS Education Department. He noted that NE College Preparatory Academy and NW College Preparatory Academy are now subject to this mandate, which was established by the State for “priority schools” (“extended learning”). Superintendent Vargas stated that RCSD schools not designated “priority schools” are able to participate in expanded learning voluntarily, which may include up to 300 hours of additional instruction time.

Commissioner Powell questioned why extended learning was not one of the options offered by the NYS Education Department for East High School. Ms. Leone-Mannino stated that extended learning has been required at East High School for the last two years as part of the Title I allocation and involves offering additional tutoring and Regents exam preparation to at least half of the students. She explained that termination of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) in the summer of 2013 prevented implementation for the entire school. Superintendent Vargas noted that SIG grants did not initially require implementation of extended learning programs at schools receiving the grants, but this requirement was added last year.

Commissioner White stated that he understands the legal requirements regarding programming and funding in these circumstances, and contended that there has been a pattern of failing to respond to questions regarding program data. He objected to making decisions in the absence of data and information, and proposed prohibiting payment for programs or contractors until data is provided to demonstrate effectiveness.

Commissioner Adams asked whether the requirement to provide at least 200 additional hours of instruction time would apply to all students in priority schools. Superintendent Vargas replied that these requirements vary according to the grant, with at least 50% of students participating in additional instruction time in priority schools and the specific level of required student participation determined by the terms of the SIG grant for schools receiving this funding.

The Superintendent added that the District can request an exemption for specific groups of students. He cited an example of students participating in the Hillside Work Scholarship Program, who are considered “in good standing” academically and are employed and therefore do not have to take additional instruction time.

Commissioner Adams inquired about the projections of staff layoffs and attrition for different positions proposed to be cut in the 2014-15 budget, noting that few actual layoffs were anticipated for any position. She stated that she has received conflicting information, and requested an update of these projections.

Action Item: An update of the projections of staff layoffs and attrition under the proposed 2014-15 budget will be provided to the Board.

Ms. Centrone added that the staffing projections were based on preliminary analysis, which is subject to significant change based on tenure in specific positions, resignations, and the final plan for East High School. She offered to provide an update based on the most recent information available.

Commissioner Powell pointed out the significant fiscal impact from cutting Paraprofessional positions rather than Teaching Assistant positions, and requested data regarding the specific staffing reductions for each of these positions.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board of the number of FTE to be reduced in Paraprofessional and Teaching Assistant positions in 2014-15.

Commissioner Adams noted that 620 students are enrolled at the STEM High School this year, but projected 2014-15 enrollment is only 536 students. She asked whether the 2014-15 enrollment projection includes students recruited into the P-TECH program. Mr. Connors replied that P-TECH was not included in the proposed 2014-15 RCSD budget in terms of funding or staffing.

Commissioner Adams inquired about the timeframe for the P-TECH budget, and whether this funding would be included in the budget for the STEM High School. Ms. Burrell-Moore responded that 125 students will be added to participate in P-TECH, and another strand will be added to comprise a total of 250 incoming 9th grade students. Ms. Leone-Mannino explained that STEM High School currently has three academies: IT Academy, Health Science Academy, and Engineering Academy. She stated that the IT Academy will continue to grow at the 10-12 grade levels, while 9th grade will be replaced with the P-TECH cohort. Ms. Leone-Mannino noted that P-TECH implementation will help strengthen the IT Academy and the partnership with Monroe Community College (MCC), while offering enhanced opportunities for students to earn college credits at MCC.

Commissioner Adams asked when funding for P-TECH will be added to the budget for STEM High School, and questioned whether the P-TECH program has been approved by the Board. She recalled that the Board approved a grant for MCC to design a program and for the District to hire a Program Coordinator, but not for the design of the program itself. Superintendent Vargas replied that P-TECH is a grant-driven program that has been approved by MCC and the NYS Education Department, and the Board's approval of the grant was tantamount to approval for the program.

Commissioner Adams expressed concern about the haste with which the P-TECH program has been developed and recruitment of students before the program is ready for implementation. She pointed out that a recent expert study indicated that the District does not have qualified Career & Technical Education (CTE) leadership for existing programs. Commissioner Adams emphasized the importance of conducting an analysis to address the problems cited in the expert study and to ensure a clear, well-articulated plan for implementation. Ms. Leone-Mannino pointed out that the District has been working with the P-TECH Director, who has experience as an RCSD teacher and employee of the IT Department. She stated that the Project Director at MCC is a retired high school principal who has been working with workforce development through the Regional Economic Development Council. Ms. Leone-Mannino asserted that these two individuals bring the ideal combination of leadership for the P-TECH program. She offered to provide information to the Board about the Steering Committee and governance structure, including all of the NYS offices involved in implementing the P-TECH program in fourteen districts throughout the state. Ms. Leone-Mannino added that this program is also part of a strategy to strengthen the IT Academy at STEM High School because there are gaps in the current structure.

Action Item: Ms. Leone-Mannino will provide an updated P-TECH Plan to the Board by the end of the week (i.e. Friday, April 18th).

Commissioner Cruz stated that he would appreciate the Administration's feedback in response to his suggestion to establish a Director of Latino Student Achievement and to Commissioner Campos' suggestion for creating a model for incoming Latino students. He also requested a report regarding the current accountability status of each school in the District, and of the specific actions needed to prevent additional schools from being subject to mandates similar to those for East High School.

Commissioner White concurred with this suggestion, noting the importance of identifying the specific schools at risk so that proactive steps can be taken to address the situation and to include parents and community members in these discussions. Superintendent Vargas replied that this will be the first order of business after the end of the current school year.

Action Item: Superintendent Vargas will present a report to the Board on Monday, April 21st, regarding the specific schools "at risk" in terms of censure by the NYS Education Department, the factors affecting each of these schools, and plans to address these risk factors for each school.

The Superintendent pointed out that data from the NYS Education Department regarding academic performance and accountability designations for each school is typically provided in the summer. He stated that this will be included in the "State of Our Schools" presentation this summer.

Commissioner Elliott asked about funding for the African – African American Studies Department. Mr. Connors responded that this is included in Section 6 of the 2014-15 Budget Book.

Commissioner Elliott noted that the proposed 2014-15 budget reflects \$18M for early childhood education and \$23M for UPK, and questioned the difference between these funding allocations. Mr. Connors stated that the approximately \$5M difference is due to staff benefits, which are reported in Section 7 of the Budget Book.

Commissioner Elliott stated that this should be explained in the Budget Book to avoid confusion or misunderstanding.

Commissioner Adams inquired about the rationale for increasing spending for Interscholastic Athletics from \$665 per pupil to \$1067 per pupil. Mr. Connors replied that this is due to failure to update the 2013-14 budget to include Athletic Directors.

Commissioner Adams asked whether Athletic Directors are fully dedicated to Interscholastic sports, or also involved in teaching physical education. Ms. Burrell-Moore responded that Athletic Directors also evaluate physical education programs and teacher instruction.

Commissioner Adams noted that available evidence supports restoring Student & Family Support Centers in schools in need, and it was a mistake to reduce these services last year.

Commissioner Powell observed that the proposed 2014-15 budget contains far fewer programs than in previous years, and requested information regarding the programs that have been excluded.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board regarding the programs reported in the budget in previous years, but not included in the proposed 2014-15 budget.

Mr. Connors pointed out that the reduction in programs may reflect a lack of long-term sustainability, noting that cuts were made when NYS Foundation Aid was frozen or reduced. Mr. Connors emphasized that difficult decisions had to be made under these fiscal conditions.

Commissioner Powell responded that better decisions would be made if based on evidence of poor performance. She objected to these decisions not being based on data, and to the District succumbing to financial pressures and NYS mandates. Commissioner Powell asserted that the children bear the consequences of these decisions and of the failure to support effective programs. She noted that the result is to fund only mandated services and programs, regardless of whether they are meeting students' needs.

Commissioner Powell announced that questions are due for Round 3 of the budget review by the end of the day on Monday, April 21st. She stated that a summary of the proposed Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) will be provided this week, and the full CIP will be provided to the Board by the end of the month.

Motion by Commissioner Cruz to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Evans. **Adopted 6-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:46PM.