

Rochester Board of Education
Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole
May 3, 2012

Attendance: Commissioner Powell (Chair); Commissioners White, Adams, Campos, Cruz, and Evans. Commissioner Elliott absent. Parent Representative: Giancarlo Giannini.

District Staff: Vernon Connors, Chief Financial Officer; Superintendent Bolgen Vargas; Gladys Pedraza Burgos, Chief of Youth & Family Services; Bethany Centrone, Chief of Human Capital Initiatives; Ann Scott Brown, NW Zone Chief.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Powell convened the meeting at 6:05PM, stating that the last two sections (Section 6 – School Support; Section 7 – Administration Profiles) of the Superintendent’s proposed FY2012-13 budget are to be reviewed this evening. She noted that any follow-up questions can also be entertained, as this is the final deliberation session prior to budget adoption. Commissioner Powell asked if her colleagues had any follow-up questions regarding the School Profiles or Program Profiles.

Follow-Up Questions regarding School Profiles (Section 4) and Program Profiles (Section 5)

Commissioner White questioned the rationale for continued funding of the I’M READY program, given its poor performance. He asked about other options for addressing the needs of students in long-term suspension. Superintendent Vargas replied that he has discussed the issues with the I’M READY program with Board President Malik Evans, and the current model will not be continued. He stated that a committee has been working with parents and families to make programmatic changes, such as enhanced staff training and offering greater social and emotional supports to students in long-term suspension. The Superintendent stated that he would report to the Board in approximately six weeks as to the programmatic changes that are planned, but the funds to serve these students must be included in the budget.

Commissioner Evans confirmed that these questions were raised in a Board Leadership meeting, including the rationale for continuing to fund a program that is not working.

Commissioner White urged that consideration be given to involving parents in developing the new program to maximize their participation after it has been established. He emphasized the importance of parent engagement to the potential success of the program, urging that consideration be given to the suggestions provided by Board members regarding addressing the needs of these families as well as of the students.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that the plan to redesign the I’M READY program raises concerns about the basis for Program-Based Budgeting. She stated that over \$2M is allocated for I’M READY in the proposed FY2012-13 budget, but this is not the program that will actually be funded. She suggested that these funds be placed in reserve to support the redesigned program.

Commissioner Evans advised that funding be continued for the program, with the understanding that plans will be made to improve the existing framework. Superintendent Vargas stated that the current I'M READY program is neither effective nor efficient, but the District has an obligation to address the needs of students in long-term suspension.

Commissioner White noted that the same argument about continued funding for an apparently ineffective program could be made about the NorthSTAR program. He also recommended including the GPA of the students participating in each program in the budget. Commissioner White stated that he understands that funds must be budgeted to address the needs of these students, but consideration should at least be given to shifting the funds to another program that has shown results. He expressed concern about approving funding in the budget for programs that have not yet been determined (i.e. \$2.1M for I'M READY and \$1.4M for NorthSTAR). The Superintendent replied that while there is a need for collaboration to develop more effective programs, the District still has an obligation to meet the needs of these students.

Commissioner Evans asserted that the Board essentially approves the District's overall revenues and expenditures by adopting the budget. He emphasized the importance of asserting the Board's ability to direct school or program changes at any other time of the year outside of the budget cycle. Commissioner Evans cited recent examples in which the Board made changes outside of the budget cycle by restoring social work and school psychologist positions.

Commissioner White emphasized that the Board already has the knowledge that programmatic changes are needed to I'M READY and to NorthSTAR and should be able to act on it at this point, particularly since the Board does not have line item veto authority. He suggested allocating funds to a program to be defined to meet the needs of students in long-term suspension.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that the budget provides the Board with an opportunity to address these programmatic changes. She suggested putting the funds allocated for I'M READY into reserve for the "program formerly known as I'M READY" so that they will continue to be available to serve these students. Vern Connors responded that the Board's intent is clear, and suggested keeping the funds and positions under this program line to ensure their availability in the redesigned program.

Commissioner Evans requested information as to the basis for determining the number of FTEs to be allocated at the school level, noting that his concern is to ensure that schools are adequately staffed. Ms. Centrone explained that the process used this year differs from the past by first considering contractually mandated staffing levels (i.e. class size limits and course requirements), and then the goals of the Superintendent (e.g. librarians in every school). She reported that schools were staffed at levels above contractual requirements, but below the level of maximum allowable students in a class. Ms. Centrone stated that all of these factors were taken into account in making decisions as to the number of FTE to allocate to each building.

Commissioner Evans stated that he wants to avoid either extreme of overstaffing or not providing adequate staff to support students. He asked whether staffing is based on the number of students, on student needs, or other factors.

Ms. Centrone explained that the process began with vacancies projected for next year and job postings have been based on anticipated vacancies, particularly since the figures for the Alternative High School have not yet been finalized. Going forward, she stated that staffing will be based on the number of FTEs required for the required number of positions in each school. Ms. Centrone noted that the Superintendent has been quite vigorous in the budget process in ensuring that classes are not overstaffed, and the Director of Student Placement has made great strides in ensuring that staffing decisions also consider students who have not been attending school. Superintendent Vargas emphasized the importance of these considerations because the District's structural budget gap can only be contained through control of personnel. He stated that the needs of each school will be re-examined in August (rather than October) to ensure that schools have the resources they need at the outset of the school year.

Commissioner Adams asked about new and more effective methods being considered to enhance parent engagement, beginning in early childhood. Gladys Pedraza Burgos responded that the Youth & Family Services Division is currently exploring evidence-based programs such as "Parents As Teachers" (PATs). She stated that further examination is being conducted of the use of Title I funds and the way in which schools use these funds for parent engagement, with technical assistance provided from the Central Office and expansion of the use of best practices among schools. Ms. Pedraza Burgos reported that the new Parent Engagement Coordinator has promoted enhanced outreach and communication with parents, as well as increasing participation in PTA/PTOs and School-Based Planning Teams. She added that Parent Connect has also been an important aspect of these efforts. Superintendent Vargas emphasized the importance of clearly defining expectations regarding parent engagement, particularly since this involves many different aspects of the District's functions and in many different locations. He discussed identifying these expectations at different levels in the organization as critical to establishing an effective accountability system and incorporating this into performance evaluations.

Commissioner White reflected on the Board's evolution from initially requesting performance measures for external contractors to assessing internal operations and the efficacy of each department. He noted that these assessments help determine where to focus additional effort and recommended including program measures in the budget for each department.

Commissioner Adams pointed out that parent group leaders were cut from last year to this year, but this is not reflected in the budget because these positions were reclassified. She stated that she would like to see the parent group model be incorporated into kindergarten, the early grades, and 7th grade because these are critical transitions for children and the model has been shown to be very effective. She suggested that funds used to support the Title I Parent Conference be used to support expansion of the parent group model, since the Conference is primarily attended by District staff rather than parents.

Commissioner Powell also emphasized the importance of building on effective programs and approaches, noting that the District sends a contradictory message to parents and families when parent groups are emphasized in pre-K and then abandoned for parents of students in later grades.

Parent Representative Giancarlo Giannini asked about the breakdown of funds under Title III, which indicated a total of \$21.19M but the summary only reflected \$500K. Mr. Connors explained that the District typically receives \$500-600K per year in Title III funds, which is used primarily to support ELL, ESOL and bilingual programs throughout the District. He stated that the \$21.19M is a breakdown of funding from various categories for these programs, the vast majority of which are from the General Fund (\$19M).

Commissioner Powell stated that the response provided to a question about staffing for parent liaison positions in the last two budget deliberation sessions indicated that a minimum of 1.0 FTE was allocated to each school, but the detailed staffing breakdown indicates that some schools have only a partial FTE or no staff in this position. She expressed concern that information given to the Board has not been correct and is not supported by the written documentation.

Commissioner Campos pointed out that she had requested a breakdown as to the amount of discretionary funds in the budget several weeks ago, and has not yet received this information. She also questioned whether schools were actually able to provide input as to the levels of staffing for art, music, and P.E. or whether this was presented as a “mandate”. Commissioner Campos stated that information is needed as to the schools that did not receive their requested level of staffing and the rationale for these decisions.

Ms. Centrone replied that the staffing process used this year was intended to prevent multiple changes up until September, which created considerable disruption in the educational process in previous years. She stated that there were different reasons for different schools not receiving their requested level of staffing. Ms. Centrone stated that some staffing levels were not changed because some principals attempted to make changes at the staffing table, instead of during the 4-6 weeks given to review and discuss their templates with HCI and budget staff. In other cases, she reported that the request was not sound educationally or not in compliance with mandates. She stated that principals may not have received their full staffing request, but their requests were certainly considered and discussed in terms of the needs of the school.

Commissioner Campos asked when the Board would receive the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), as this is a component of the budget that must be reviewed. Mr. Connors replied that the process of developing the CIP this year has been complicated by the Maintenance of Effort issue.

Action Item: The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for 2012 will be provided to the Board tomorrow.

Section 6: School Support Profiles

Commissioner White expressed concern about the proposed \$15,089 reduction in funds for the African-American Studies Department, particularly since the Department will be rolling out a new curriculum to every school in 2012-13 based on a pilot project conducted at Marshall High School. He questioned the ability of the District to expand the impact of African American studies in every school under these funding reductions.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to how African American studies are to be expanded throughout the District in the face of funding reductions.

Commissioner White inquired as to the status of developing a system to measure progress in terms of increasing the diversity and cultural sensitivity of the RCSD workforce, as recommended by the Diversity Committee. He emphasized the importance of measuring the impact of these efforts, particularly in light of the District's significant expenditures for professional development. Ms. Centrone replied that she plans to follow up on these recommendations as soon as student enrollment and placement have been settled in June. She stated that since methods for measuring and gathering relevant data have to be developed, it will be some time before a determination can be made of the efficacy of different initiatives. She discussed the BOCES recruiting model, which gathers critical data and facilitates analysis.

Commissioner Adams asked how the Teacher Incentive Fund could be used to increase diversity among teachers in the District, and how these funds are reflected in the budget. Ms. Centrone explained that the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) will be used for professional development and also allocated to schools to facilitate program improvement. She acknowledged that the District needs to improve tracking of professional development to ensure improved outcomes, and also pointed out that professional development is critical to recruiting more qualified teachers and providing incentives for continued learning. Ms. Centrone stated that this Fund will also be used to provide differentiated pay to establish a career ladder for teachers and an incentive for continued learning and improved performance.

Commissioner Adams questioned whether consideration has been given to using the curriculum developed by the Rochester Teachers' Center for professional development and demonstration of effective programs and instructional approaches. Ms. Centrone replied that the District certainly plans to use these resources and the agreement with the Rochester Teachers' Association regarding the Teacher Incentive Fund refers to use of the Rochester Teachers' Center. Commissioner Adams urged the Administration to utilize the Rochester Teachers' Center as a resource, rather than continuing to proceed on separate paths.

Commissioner Cruz expressed concern about the proposed \$134K funding cut to the Bilingual Education Program (p. 6), particularly in light of significant increases expected in the ELL student population. Mr. Connors replied that many funding reductions (over \$1M) were made to Teaching & Learning programs because of cuts in grant funding.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to the basis for the \$134K reduction in funds for the Bilingual Education Program, particularly since significant increases in the ELL student population are expected for the foreseeable future.

Commissioner Cruz asked whether Title I funds could be used to replace the grant funds that have been lost, so that effective programs can be continued.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to the programs for which funds will be reduced due to grant reductions, as well as the extent to which Title I funds can be used to replace lost grant funds.

Mr. Giannini inquired about the average dollar amount allocated in the budget for ELL students, as well as a comparison with these allocations for 2011-12. Mr. Connors replied that funding allocations for ELL students were only separated out with the equitable student funding formula used in 2011-12. He noted that 2012-13 allocations were based on the projected ELL population in each of the schools and programs, level of need, and resources required to meet these needs. Mr. Connors clarified that generally schools with greater ELL student populations received greater allocations than those without many ELL students.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that the budget does not contain any funding for the Office of Foreign Languages (p. 6), and asked whether this function is being assumed by another department.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board regarding funding for the Office of Foreign Languages for 2012-13.

Commissioner Powell inquired about the purpose of funding for the Match Team (p. 7) and the reason for the proposed funding reduction. Ann Scott Brown replied that the Match Team provides assisted technology for students with disabilities, and funding is based on estimates of the number of students with disabilities who require this technology to enhance their functional ability.

Commissioner Powell asked whether there are expected decreases in this student population. Ms. Scott Brown explained that the District obtained equipment in 2011-12 that will not have to be purchased next year.

Commissioner White asked about the Superintendent's plans to fill the position of Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Academic Officer. Superintendent Vargas replied that he intends to fill both of these positions, but would like to consult with the Board regarding the Chief Academic Officer and would like to conduct a nation-wide search for the COO because an individual with extraordinary talent is needed to fill this position.

Commissioner White inquired whether the Zone Chief model will be continued. Superintendent Vargas responded that there is a larger issue of holding staff accountable in the District because functions are too dispersed, with too many layers and too much fragmentation. He stated that he would like to examine this issue with the Board to increase internal accountability.

Commissioner White expressed concern about approving the budget when it is based on a particular organizational structure that may be changed. He stated that he supports the Zone Chief model to provide supervision and accountability on the part of school principals. Superintendent Vargas replied that implementation and execution of functions has to be monitored daily and it would be a mistake to expect that this will not change after the budget is passed or to address this only once a year. He emphasized the importance of changing the organizational structure to clarify roles and responsibilities and to improve accountability.

Commissioner Powell noted that the RCSD budget is transmitted to the City with an organization chart because changes in organizational structure must be approved by the Board and have budgetary implications. Superintendent Vargas stated that the Zone Chief model will continue, but their roles will be defined differently to clarify lines of responsibility.

Commissioner Adams asked when a budget would be presented for the Alternative High School. Mr. Connors responded that the staffing was finalized in a meeting last night, and the operating portion will be concluded so that the budget can be sent to the Board tomorrow.

Action Item: The budget for the Alternative High School will be provided to the Board tomorrow.

Commissioner Adams noted that the Board passed a resolution recently to fill effective programs that are under capacity and to provide additional support to existing alternative programs if this would improve their efficacy. She cited the example of providing transportation and day care to the Young Mothers program. She stated that funding for alternative programs has been rather flat and asked about the possibility for increased financial support, rather than placing all of the projected savings from the Alternative High School into contingency funds. Mr. Connors replied that \$100K has been added to provide transportation for the Young Mothers program. He noted that while funding for these programs has remained rather flat, support has been at a much greater level on a per pupil basis than for schools. Superintendent Vargas explained that the students in the Young Mothers program have expressed the desire to be able to remain in the program for a longer period of time to gain stability in their lives with their newborn infants. He discussed this vulnerable student population and the importance of continuing to monitor their needs. Superintendent Vargas stated that he is considering obtaining funding for extended learning to enable these young women to start school at a later time in the day due to child care issues.

Commissioner Adams emphasized her concern for equity in providing funding for services and alternative programs for students whose needs have not been adequately addressed in the District, even if those students do not attend the Alternative High School. Mr. Connors responded that the District is trying to ascertain the specific placements for these students and after this has been determined, decisions can be made as to resource allocation.

Commissioner White noted that the flat funding for many alternative programs is based on waiting for students to enroll and then adjusting resources, rather than reaching out to students who may have been overlooked or failed by existing programs and considering their needs in developing the budget. He objected to this sort of complacency, which keeps program expenditures flat by ignoring those students whose needs continue to go unmet. Commissioner White asserted that adopting a more proactive approach in reaching out to these students would lead to an increase in program expenditures because the variety of needs of students would be addressed. He asked whether the budget includes funds for day care for the children of the students in the Young Mothers program.

Commissioner Powell explained that discussions have been held with the Administration about involving the County to obtain priority for students in the Young Mothers program for

subsidized day care. She also discussed plans to coordinate with Head Start to obtain priority for the children of the students in the Young Mothers program to be placed at the Head Start location in the same building. Commissioner Powell expressed the hope that this type of service coordination could be established on a budget-neutral basis.

Commissioner Adams asked whether the budget includes other alternative educational approaches discussed previously for East High School, specifically using the Freedom School model. Superintendent Vargas replied that a proposal had been received based on this model, but it was not defensible and would have to be revised.

Mr. Giannini pointed out that the staffing breakdown for parent liaison positions did not include some schools, and asked whether these schools would have these positions. Mr. Connors responded that this indicates that the school does not have a parent liaison this year and does not plan to have this position next year. Ms. Centrone stated that the Zone Chiefs conducted a survey of the schools that chose not to have a parent liaison, and offered to provide this information to the Board.

Commissioner White inquired as to the number and percentage of schools that requested a parent liaison but did not receive one.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to the rationale for schools choosing not to have a parent liaison, as well as the number and percentage of schools that requested parent liaisons but did not receive them.

Commissioner Powell requested that her colleagues articulate specific changes needed before the budget adoption meeting next week (May 10th). She stated that she would like to see a list of programs discontinued due to lack of funding. Mr. Connors offered to include information in future budgets as to the programs that have been discontinued.

Action Item: Future Budget Books will include a list of programs that have been discontinued, as well as the rationale for their discontinuance. This information will be provided in the Program-Based Budgeting section.

Commissioner Adams stated that she will need to see the budget for the Alternative High School prior to voting on the budget.

Along with Commissioner Cruz, Commissioner White noted that he would also like information as to the programs proposed to be discontinued due to loss of grant funds. He stated that he would also like information as to other potential sources of support to continue programs that have been found to be effective. Mr. Connors replied that many of the programs have multiple sources of financial support, and budgeting is on the basis of funding sources rather than programs. He stated that he may be able to put this information together by analyzing the funding sources for the departments in which the program resides.

Commissioner Powell noted that minutes have been presented from the April 12th and 24th budget deliberation meetings.

Motion by Commissioner Cruz to approve the minutes of the April 12th and April 24th Finance Committee Meetings of the Whole. Seconded by Commissioner Campos. **Adopted 6-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

Motion by Commissioner Cruz to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Campos. **Adopted 6-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:52PM.