

Rochester Board of Education
Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole
April 24, 2012

Attendance: Commissioner Powell (Chair); Commissioners Elliott (arrived 6:31PM), Campos, Adams, and Cruz. Parent Representative: Giancarlo Giannini (arrived 7:09PM).

District Staff: Vernon Connors, Chief Financial Officer; Interim Superintendent Bolgen Vargas; Beth Mascitti-Miller, Chief of Teaching & Learning; Shaun Nelms, NE Zone Chief; Dr. Deasure Matthew, South Zone Chief; Ann Scott Brown, NW Zone Chief; Gladys Pedraza-Burgos, Chief of Youth & Family Services; Chuck Johnson, General Counsel; Lori Baldwin, Director of Safety and Security; Vicky Ramos, Director of Student Placement.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Powell convened the meeting at 6:06PM, noting that Section 5 (Program Profiles) and 6 (School Support) of the Superintendent's proposed 2012-13 budget are to be reviewed this evening. She stated that follow-up questions can be asked for any of the previous sections of the budget that have been covered.

Commissioner Powell noted that information was provided in the first budget deliberation meeting that a minimum of 1.0FTE for parent liaison or home school assistant positions was provided in every school. She stated that she has received information that some of the high schools do not have this minimum staffing level in these positions.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board with a breakdown of the number of FTE in parent liaison or home school assistant positions in each school.

Section 4: School Profiles (Continued from April 12th Budget Deliberation Meeting)

Commissioner Adams asked about the basis for elementary schools selecting the On-Campus Intervention Program (OCIP), In-School Suspension (ISS), or other program to address student disciplinary issues. Mr. Connors replied that these programs developed out of the Contract for Excellence, and the District is required to report on their status even though the State no longer provides funding support. Shaun Nelms explained that a number of programs are in place to prevent or address behavioral issues in elementary schools, such as OCIP, ISS, and Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS).

Commissioner Adams inquired as to the cost difference between these programs. Mr. Connors reported that the OCIP program is more intensive and provides social and emotional supports, leading to approximately \$1,000 greater cost per school than the ISS program.

Commissioner Adams asked about the cost effectiveness of each program, and the rationale for having a number of different programs to address disciplinary and behavioral issues.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to the basis for schools selecting a particular program out of the many offered in the District to address student behavioral/disciplinary issues.

Commissioner Cruz pointed to an apparent discrepancy in the data on the school profile pages reflecting the number of suspension incidents and the use of ISS. He cited School No. 9 as an example, noting that the number of incidents declined from 130 in 2007-08 to 19 in 2008-09 – yet the number of ISS suspensions increased from 1 to 16 during this time period. Dr. Deasure Matthew noted that 2008-09 was the year that former Superintendent Brizard established the ISS program. Ms. Mascitti-Miller stated that School No. 9 has the OCIP program, and “incidents” are defined and reported differently than for ISS.

Commissioner Cruz expressed concern about the large number of incidents at School No. 3 as compared to other elementary schools. (i.e. 273 in 2006-07, 291 in 2007-08, 144 in 2008-09, 79 in 2009-10, and 206 in 2010-11). He noted that School No. 33 has a much larger student population, but far fewer incidents. Ms. Baldwin replied that School No. 3 includes 7th and 8th grade students, and Carleen Meers has been working with PBS with school staff to address the problem.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the substantial drop in 3rd grade Math scores at School No. 1, from 65.6% (2005-06) to 18.8% (2010-11) passing rate. Dr. Matthew replied that a full-time ELA and Math coach has identified interventions to use with teachers in this school to try to improve instruction and assessment scores in these areas. Superintendent Vargas noted that 2009-10 was the year that NYS raised the minimum passing score required from 55 to 65 on State assessments.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the rationale for reducing the FTE for an Assistant Principal at School No. 8, since this is a “grow-out” school. Superintendent Vargas replied that an additional Assistant Principal had been allocated to School No. 8 in 2011-12 because of extraordinary circumstances over the last year.

Commissioner Adams conveyed concerns raised in the public budget hearing held on April 18th regarding the loss of positions and funding for several years at School No. 15. She stated that a request was made to ensure that at least 300 students would be enrolled at this school in September so that additional resources could be allocated. Dr. Matthew responded that declines in student enrollment at a school lead to reductions in staff, which has been the situation at School No. 15.

Commissioner Powell noted that this issue was raised last year when Central Office attempted to reduce staff at this school, but the student enrollment demand has continued. Ms. Mascitti-Miller pointed out that School No. 15 has been committed to having ELL students comprise half of the student population, and this has created some difficulty with student enrollment for the school. She stated that student enrollment is projected at 290 students for 2012-13 for School No. 15. Vicky Ramos clarified that this school will only accept a maximum of 22 students per class because of their use of a co-teaching model. She stated that enrollment would increase if the maximum class capacity were increased. Ms. Ramos stated that there is currently a waiting

list for School No. 15 for general education students, but excess capacity for ELL students. She offered to look into possible options with school staff again in June.

Commissioner Powell asserted that the wait lists should be worked through for schools that are in high demand, and that the Placement Office should be addressing the issue of excess capacity for ELL students in the school. Commissioner Powell pointed out that attempts were made in the 2011-12 budget cycle to undermine the school's mission, and this is the reason for the additional questions this year.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to the reason for significant reductions in "Other Compensation" for a number of schools. Mr. Connors replied that the apparent reduction is due to budgeting for substitute teachers centrally, rather than at the school level. He stated that this will aid analysis of the use of short-term and long-term substitute teachers in the schools.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that the number of incidents has increased significantly at School No. 41, yet the proposed budget indicates a reduction of staff for this school. She asked how the increase in behavioral/disciplinary issues will be addressed. Ms. Mascitti-Miller replied that a number of District initiatives are in place to address these issues, such as PBS, OCIP, and ISS.

Action Item: Additional detail will be provided to the Board regarding the way in which "incidents" are defined and reported under ISS, OCIP, and PBS.

Commissioner Adams asked about the reference to the "Alt Program" in the Suspension data in the Budget Book. Ms. Baldwin replied that this category refers to elementary long-term suspension.

Commissioner Powell noted that this data is not provided under School No. 29, which houses the elementary long-term suspension program. Mr. Connors clarified that elementary long-term suspension consists of two classrooms at School No. 29, but the program staffing and budget are not included in the data for this school.

Commissioner Cruz inquired about equity among schools in staffing for music programs, noting that some schools do not have any staff for a music program. Superintendent Vargas replied that some positions are being added for the arts and music in 2012-13, but acknowledged that staffing is still not at adequate levels. He emphasized his commitment to the arts and music, particularly given research results demonstrating the positive effect on student achievement. Ms. Mascitti-Miller noted that the District just received a grant to offer music in after-school programs at schools.

Commissioner Elliott commented that she does not want arts and music programs to be used as an excuse to retain teachers, emphasizing that all jobs are on the line when the District is confronted with difficult economic circumstances.

Commissioner Powell asserted that arts and music programs are an equity issue, citing an example in which the music program was cut from a school primarily at the behest of parents

well able to afford private lessons for their children. She emphasized the need to ensure access to art and music for students whose parents may not be able to afford private lessons or whose concerns may not be reflected in the decisions that are made.

Parent Representative Giancarlo Giannini noted that the arts and music have been very important to District parents, who have advocated for retention of these programs. With regard to School No. 23, he stated that the arts and music programs appear to have been retained at the expense of an intervention specialist. Mr. Giannini asked about the extent to which schools have had to make these types of tradeoff decisions. Ms. Mascitti-Miller replied that staffing and resource allocations for schools have been based on projected student enrollment for 2012-13.

Mr. Giannini pointed out that information was given in the previous budget deliberation meeting that an estimated \$5M in savings would result from the All City High School and accelerating phase-out of five schools. He noted that additional detail was requested as to the specific items and dollar figures generating this savings, and asked whether this information would be forthcoming. Mr. Connors responded that the original All City High School model had 1700 students and two campuses, whereas the most recent model estimates 1000 students on only one campus. He stated that the difference between these two models is approximately \$7.4M, but that figure does not include the supports necessary for the students in the five phase-out schools. Mr. Connors noted that more definite figures will be available after the students have been interviewed to obtain information as to the specific services, programs, and placements to meet their needs.

Section 5: Program Profiles

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to the specific items included in the “Benefits” category of the Program Profiles. Mr. Connors replied that “Benefits” include retirement payments, Social Security, unemployment, Worker’s Compensation, and dental insurance.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the items funded under “Other Compensation” in the Program Profiles. Mr. Connors stated that this includes pay for substitutes, or for working extended day or summer school.

For Career & Technical Education (CTE), Commissioner Elliott suggested making the mission statement more specific and adjusting the program’s alignment with Strategic Goals.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the efficacy of the Careers in Teaching (CIT) program, particularly with the District’s low assessment scores and graduation rate. Ms. Mascitti-Miller replied that the role of CIT is increasing with the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system. She stated that the budget includes mentors for new teachers and for those needing improvement.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the rationale for paying for a program to help teachers retain their jobs, when student achievement has not been improving. Ms. Mascitti-Miller noted that alignment with student achievement will be incorporated as the evaluation measures and data are refined.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether the new teacher evaluation system is only being implemented for specific grade levels at this point. Superintendent Vargas replied that the system will be applied for all teachers in 2012-13. Mr. Nelms commented that it would be illustrative to examine five-year trends to determine the number of teachers rated highly effective that received mentoring under the CIT program.

Commissioner Adams inquired about staffing levels for the CTE program, noting that there should be fewer staff if their role is essentially monitoring and oversight. She stated that there should be more staff if their role is to actually provide career and technical training. Ms. Mascitti-Miller replied that staff conduct the training, collaborate with community business leaders, and coordinate classes.

Commissioner Cruz pointed out that while the staff levels for Instructional Technology remain the same in 2012-13 as in the current year, there is an almost 70% decrease in the cost of employee benefits for 2012-13. Mr. Connors clarified that the benefit costs for 2010-11 and 2011-12 were misstated in the Budget Book, and need to be corrected.

Commissioner Cruz asked about the long-term outlook for the I'M READY program. Superintendent Vargas responded that a great deal of effort has gone into the I'M READY program, but the majority of students have not been ready to return to the regular classroom. The Superintendent commented that these students have many needs and consideration is being given to staff suggestions for program re-design.

Commissioner Elliott inquired whether sufficient resources have been allocated to the I'M READY program. Dr. Matthew replied that one of the suggestions under consideration is to allocate resources differently by increasing the number of social workers and psychologists to address the social and emotional needs of these students.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the average number of students served in the I'M READY program on a monthly basis. Dr. Matthew replied that the monthly average is approximately 80 students. Superintendent Vargas noted that a critical problem is that this program has about the worst attendance rate in the District, which clearly indicates that it is not meeting these students' needs.

Commissioner Elliott inquired whether the Alternative High School could supplant the I'M READY program. Superintendent Vargas replied that the District has to give students a menu of options that are appealing, and staff have to be trained to meet the needs of these students.

Commissioner Cruz expressed concern about the proposed funding reductions for the Native American Resource Center, particularly since the objectives are even more ambitious for next year. He stated that he would like to see resources restored to this program because it serves a unique student population not served by any other program.

Action Item: Funding allocations for 2012-13 for the Native American Resource Center will be re-examined, with a view to restoring funds.

Commissioner Cruz also voiced concern about large proposed reductions in funding for the NorthSTAR program, particularly given the needs of the children served. Ms. Mascitti-Miller noted that some classrooms were consolidated due to decreased attendance and concerns about program effectiveness.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern about meeting the needs of students who are to be served by this program, rather than simply cutting staff and resources as a result of low attendance. Superintendent Vargas pointed out that these are not typical attendance issues, as many of these students have medical issues.

Commissioner Cruz noted that the State is reducing funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities, and urged the District to reach out to community agencies to offer services to this population if there is excess capacity.

Mr. Giannini asked about opportunities to combine core services for the variety of programs addressing student disciplinary issues, such as OCIP, ISS, I'M READY, Incarcerated Youth, and Agency Youth programs. Superintendent Vargas acknowledged that further analysis is needed of outcomes, types of students served, and the intensity of services necessary to meet students' needs.

Commissioner Adams inquired about responsibility for conducting overall assessment and analysis of these programs. Superintendent Vargas replied that program evaluation measures at this point primarily consist of self-reporting, but quantitative and qualitative data are necessary for accurate assessment of efficacy. Chuck Johnson explained that the NYS Comptroller had cited the District for not examining performance when issuing contracts. He stated that tailoring program evaluation effectively with 500 different contracts in a year is quite difficult, so evaluation has consisted of inquiring whether an organization would recommend using a particular contractor again.

Mr. Giannini stated that United Way has approximately \$7.5M allocated for child and youth services, and asked how the District collaborates with external agencies to make use of these services for students. Gladys Pedraza Burgos replied that the District has quite a few Student Support Centers which house community agencies providing these services through United Way. She stated that the District assists these agencies by applying for grants to augment services that the District is not able to fund. Ms. Pedraza Burgos explained that this type of support is provided for services that are evidence-based, and involve collaboration and sharing of data.

Commissioner Elliott expressed concern regarding the level of support for the Home Hospital program. Ann Scott Brown replied that the home instruction component of this program is for any student requiring instruction in their home for any reason, which includes students with medical needs or who are on out-of-school suspension.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she is concerned about students who are suspended out of school and not receiving adequate instruction to be able to re-enter school successfully.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board with a breakdown of the staff and resources in the Home Hospital/Home Instruction program for each type of student served (e.g. with medical needs, out-of-school suspension, etc.).

Commissioner Adams expressed concern that the number of sports teams in the District has been increasing while funding has been decreasing.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board to verify the number of sports teams in the District in 2011-12. In addition, information will be provided of trends over the last five years in the number of students participating in athletics, with a breakdown by grade level.

Commissioner Adams commented that the funds used to support the RIT Middle College program could be used to recruit/retain more guidance counselors in the District. She asserted that counselors support college- and career-readiness for all students, rather than only for a select group. Mr. Nelms reported that all of the students in the RIT Middle College program have made a commitment to following through to graduation and to college, and there have been no drop outs from this program.

Commissioner Adams urged re-examination of this program because the students selected to participate are already likely to go to college and attend District schools that have quite a few resources.

Motion by Commissioner Cruz to adjourn. **Adopted 5-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:33PM.