

Board of Education

Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole

April 26, 2010

Immediately Following Special Meeting

Attending: Commissioner Powell (Chair); Commissioners Cruz, Williams, Elliott, and White. Commissioner Campos absent due to missed flight from out of town and Commissioner Evans absent due to meeting conflict.

District Staff: Superintendent Brizard, Joyce Martelli, John Scanlan, Vern Connors, and Jerome Underwood.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Powell convened the meeting at 6:22PM.

Final Budget Deliberation

Commissioner Powell emphasized the importance of presenting questions and concerns in this meeting so that they could be addressed prior to the vote on the proposed 2010-11 budget on Thursday, April 29th. She took a straw poll to indicate the extent to which Commissioners support the proposed budget at this point. Four Commissioners indicated that they would not approve the proposed budget at this time (Commissioners Williams, White, Elliott, and Powell) and one Commissioner (Cruz) stated that he would approve the budget at this point.

Commissioner Williams explained that he was not comfortable with the lack of detail provided in the responses to questions submitted by Commissioners and too many questions still remain.

Commissioner White noted that the responses often led to additional questions, which he had submitted in the last few days to obtain thorough information and understanding prior to the budget vote.

Commissioner Powell conveyed appreciation to the Administration for responding to the Board's questions and for suggesting alternatives. She expressed concern about making funding concessions conditional upon agreement of bargaining units to forego pay increases, particularly since the bargaining unit negotiations will be conducted after the budget vote.

Commissioner Williams observed that all schools appeared to share in the staffing reductions except for a select few, such as School #58 which actually has a proposed increase in staffing. He noted that the success of a few schools seems to be at the expense of the other schools. Superintendent Brizard remarked that staffing levels were derived through a formula which was applied consistently to each school. He explained that the rationale for increasing the staffing at School #58, 19, and Wilson is due to the fact that each of these schools will be growing or adding at least one grade.

Commissioner Williams questioned the impact of proposed reductions in the number of foreign language teachers, particularly for students who need these credits to graduate or to get into college. Superintendent Brizard asserted that foreign language instruction would not be eliminated for students who are in the process of obtaining these credits. Commissioner Williams noted that the District has received grants for the foreign language program and asked how these funds will be preserved with the proposed staffing reductions. Superintendent Brizard replied that the grants do not require staffing for central coordination of foreign language programs, and that additional grant funding is being sought for the Early College High School and Mandarin Chinese language instruction.

Commissioner White inquired as to the number of teaching positions and retired teachers working in the Central Office. Superintendent Brizard responded that teaching positions have been phased out of the Central Office, but some are working on projects under grant funding.

Commissioner White expressed concern regarding the proposed reduction of 3.0 FTE in school-level administrators at East High School at a time of considerable restructuring into small learning communities. Superintendent Brizard replied that the majority of reductions in school-level administrators are for Assistant Principals, which are to be made across the board in all schools. John Scanlan noted that school-level administrators will be based on student enrollment in each school, using the ratios of one administrator for every 450 elementary students and for every 300 secondary students. He noted that equity among schools is being addressed in phases to prevent too much upheaval at one time. The Superintendent commented that the final student enrollment figures for each school would be available in June and staffing decisions regarding school-level administrators will be made at that time.

Commissioner White asked for the total amount budgeted for consultant services so that the Board can consider this budget when making decisions regarding each individual contract. Superintendent Brizard stated that this figure is quite difficult to obtain because consultant services are sometimes mandated through Title I or other types of grants, or selected by a group of schools through their TAPU funds.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the rationale for eliminating the Encompass program. Superintendent Brizard replied that while the program did attain the intended results in most cases, but the District was compelled to consider less costly options due to the budget deficit.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the response of the unions thus far to the suggestion of a pay freeze. Superintendent Brizard responded that he has presented this proposal to the bargaining units, but has not yet received a response.

Commissioner Cruz requested a breakdown of staffing levels for 2009-10 and 2010-11 for Parent Liaisons in the schools. He noted that Parent Liaisons perform a critical function by serving as the primary contact for parents in each school. Superintendent Brizard offered to make these positions non-negotiable in any future funding decisions, if the Board so desires. Commissioner Cruz stated that this would be his preference.

Commissioner Cruz commented on the extensive list of consulting services paid by the District, requesting a breakdown in terms of which of these services are due to mandates. He also noted the large amount paid for consulting services with architects, asking whether this work could be performed in-house as a long-term cost saving measure. Mr. Scanlan responded that hiring architects to design projects of the magnitude of those at the District would be more costly than contracting for these services.

Commissioner Cruz urged the Administration to explore other options for increasing cost savings in this area, and inquired as to whether a central coordinator is examining all requests for out-sourcing. Joyce Martelli replied that all contracts are reviewed by Purchasing and Contracts in the Law Department.

Commissioner Cruz pointed out the importance of identifying mandated and non-mandated items in the budget so that decisions can focus on prioritizing discretionary funding and the public can be informed as to the extent of mandates confronted by the District. Superintendent Brizard stated that the Monroe County School Boards Association and the Office of the Big Five School Districts have examined this issue in the last few years and found that the vast majority of funding is mandated. He reported that New York State has the highest level of expenditure per student, but also the greatest number of requirements.

Commissioner Powell voiced concern regarding inequities among schools in terms of staffing and resources, and asked how this will be more fully addressed. Superintendent Brizard asserted that one of the mechanisms to improve equity is the weighted student funding formula, which will take into account the number of Special Education and ELL students in the school. He emphasized that equity has to be addressed over a period of time to prevent devastating effects on individual schools.

Commissioner Williams stated that he would like a copy of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) with the proposed 2010-11 budget. Ms. Martelli asserted that the CIP will be voted on separately from the budget this year. Commissioner Powell contended that the CIP is typically provided at the same time as the budget to indicate the way in which capital funds are to be expended. Jerome Underwood replied that staff are currently working to develop the CIP.

Commissioner Williams also noted that the Food Services contract is reviewed annually, asking as to the status of this process. Mr. Underwood replied that the District is currently awaiting New York State approval for renewal of this contract.

Commissioner Williams requested a breakdown of the Capital Fund budget and the associated staffing levels (FTE). Ms. Martelli explained that a portion of the Budget Book presents the funds being placed into the Capital Fund. Vern Connors clarified that the Capital Fund consists of two components: 1) the CIP, which includes all positions working on capital projects; and 2) Cash Capital, which is the cash portion to be paid by RCSD for capital projects.

Commissioner Williams acknowledged receipt of a list of the employees in the Superintendent's Employee Group (SEG), but stated that it did not include any vacancies (e.g. Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning). Ms. Martelli replied that she had thought the original

request was for currently filled positions and pay levels, but will provide information regarding vacancies in SEG.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board regarding the positions and pay for the Superintendent Employee Group (SEG), including positions which are currently vacant.

Commissioner White proposed a number of opportunities for cost savings by consolidating services with the City of Rochester and/or Monroe County: garbage pickup, snowplowing, printing and copying, coordinating lease agreements for office equipment, and legal services. With regard to legal services, he noted high pay levels for staff in the Law Department and encouraged Administration to examine pay rates in the private sector. He also asked about the source of funds to cover the cost of contracts with outside legal firms.

Commissioner White presented a number of questions regarding the proposed 2010-11 budget:

- 1) How many positions have been added in the last six months to the SEG and what are the salaries for these positions?
- 2) How can the District move forward without a Community Liaison Specialist for the Truancy Center, particularly given the truancy problem in the community and the risk that inadequate staffing will lead to greater costs in the future.
- 3) Do any of the other Big Five school districts pay the police department to place officers in schools?
- 4) Has consideration been given to approaching the City of Rochester to reduce the number of School Resource Officers (SROs) by 50% and to ask them to cover a portion of these costs?
- 5) How much of the District's funding is discretionary? What is this amount and percentage?

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to each of the Big Five school districts' use of SROs and extent to which each covers these costs.

Ms. Martelli replied that the portion of the budget containing discretionary funds is reflected in Other Variable Expenses, which amounts to 5.0% or \$40m. She cautioned that some of these funds are for mandated items such as legal judgments and claims, nursing services, and grant-driven professional development and contracting. Commissioner White insisted on obtaining a breakdown in terms of the portion of Other Variable Expenses that are discretionary to enable the Board to make decisions regarding funding priorities.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to how the budget could be adjusted to provide transportation services to all students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Mr. Underwood responded that this could not be accomplished without a change in Board policy, noting that an analysis of the costs associated with additional transportation services for each student in kindergarten through sixth grade was provided to the Board in February. Superintendent Brizard contended that it would not be realistic or feasible to expand transportation services in September, which may exacerbate equity issues among schools. Mr. Underwood offered to analyze costs associated with utilizing corner bus stops to reduce ride times and enhance efficiency, which could be implemented within the existing transportation structure in September.

Commissioner Elliott requested a list of all positions and associated salaries, noting that this information should be contained in the Budget Book and accessible to the general public. The Superintendent offered to provide the salary ranges for each position in the District. Ms. Martelli stated that she would send a copy of the information provided in the City budget for Board review and approval. Commissioner Elliott stated that this information could be provided with the budget amendments throughout the 2010-11 year, and contained in the budget in succeeding years.

Commissioner Elliott objected to having a Chief of Innovation and a Chief Strategy Officer because these functions could be performed by the Superintendent or other management staff, particularly the Chief of Teaching & Learning. Superintendent Brizard replied that his cabinet is smaller than his predecessors and these positions support critical functions to restructure the District. He noted that these positions are also in other school districts, such as New York City and Chicago.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the value of continuing programs which have not attained results. Superintendent Brizard stated that these programs are planting the seeds of reform, which requires three to five years to realize.

Commissioner Cruz pointed out the significance of critical positions in responding to federal and state mandates, and cautioned against cutting back too much on staff and resources because this will lead to crisis management and significantly hamper the District in the future. Superintendent Brizard emphasized that the District's efforts are based upon effective programs and approaches in other urban districts, particularly those that have realized substantial progress in student achievement.

Commissioner Powell asserted that without a Chief of Innovation or a Chief Strategy Officer, necessary reforms could not be designed or implemented in this District. She asked whether RTA has been approached to amend their agreement to allow school-level administrators losing their jobs to return to teaching. Superintendent Brizard replied that the positions slated for cuts would not result in 100% layoffs because of attrition through retirements and resignations. He explained that school administrators cannot push a teacher out of their position, but can fill any teaching positions remaining after available teachers have filled positions. The Superintendent stated that more precise information will be available this summer as teachers make their own plans.

Commissioner Powell emphasized the availability of significant cost savings from enforcing zone boundaries for transportation, noting that quite a bit of effort went into this analysis. She also pointed out that these savings would be realized for one year due to the gap between provision of transportation services and adjustment of State aid to reflect reduced costs. Commissioner Powell urged the Administration to consider enforcing the zones beginning in September so that the District could realize the one-year savings prior to the funding cliff anticipated with the loss of federal stimulus funds in 2011-12. Superintendent Brizard offered to consider this option in the future.

Commissioner Williams asked when data will be available regarding student enrollment in the newly created schools. Superintendent Brizard stated that the funding for these schools are based on projected enrollment in September. Ms. Martelli remarked that information is not yet available in terms of the specific schools from which students would be transferring to attend the new schools, but the budget will be adjusted as this information becomes available.

Action Item: Information regarding enrollment projections and the basis for funding for each of the new schools will be provided to the Board.

Commissioner Williams expressed concern with the Administration in approaching the Board only a few days prior to the deadline for submission of a grant to request approval. Superintendent Brizard emphasized that these are situations over which the District has no control, and often these grants are determined at the State or federal level.

Commissioner Williams recommended significant cutbacks in funding for the Gateway to College program, noting poor results for the investment of funds and the availability of effective programs for RCSD students still under the charge of the District. Superintendent Brizard suggested eliminating the program next year to allow the 48 students currently enrolled to transition.

Commissioner White requested information as to the extent to which other urban districts in New York utilize school resource officers and provide for their pay and benefits.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board regarding the use of school resource officers in other urban districts in New York and the extent to which these districts cover the cost of their compensation and benefits.

Commissioner White inquired as to the extent of discretionary funding in the budget over which the Superintendent and Board have control and ability to make decisions regarding their use. He emphasized the importance of having this information to enable the Board to determine funding priorities.

Commissioner Powell also reinforced this message, emphasizing that the Board has identified a number of potential cost savings measures such as reducing/eliminating the Gateway to College program, approaching the City regarding covering some portion of the costs of pay and benefits for school resource officers, and strengthening zone boundaries for transportation. She pointed out that enforcement of zone boundaries would save approximately ten times the cost of the Gateway to College program and that these expenditures are not directed toward promoting student achievement.

Commissioner Powell conducted another straw poll to determine the extent to which each Commissioner's concerns have been addressed thus far. Two Commissioners indicated that they would not approve the budget at this point (Commissioners White and Elliott). Two Commissioners stated that they would approve the budget at this time (Commissioners Cruz and Powell). Commissioner Williams indicated that he was uncertain at this point.

Commissioner Williams expressed serious concern regarding the graduation rate for young African American males and the high percentage of these students identified for Special Education.

Commissioner White objected to not being provided with information regarding the amount of discretionary funds in the budget and stated that he suspected that there are further opportunities to attain cost savings without harming students or educational quality.

Commissioner Elliott emphasized the importance of the Board having information specifically regarding District positions and pay levels, stating that she objected specifically to the staffing levels and pay for the Superintendent's Employee Group.

Commissioner Powell stated that she could approve the budget at this point if it were amended to eliminate the Gateway to College program. She also expressed dismay that potential cost savings in transportation are not being pursued at this time through strengthening zone boundaries.

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:22PM.