

Board of Education

Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole April 6, 2010 5:30PM

Attending: Commissioner Powell (Chair); Commissioners Campos (left at 8:28PM), White, Williams (joined at 5:50PM), Elliott (joined at 6:02PM), and Evans (joined at 6:53PM). Commissioner Cruz absent.

District Staff: Superintendent Brizard, Joyce Martelli, John Scanlan, Vern Connors, Kirsten Barclay, Gladys Pedraza Burgos and Kathy Mykins.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Powell convened the meeting at 5:38PM.

Review and Approval of Minutes from Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole

Motion by Commissioner White to approve meeting minutes from Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole held on March 18th and March 30th. Seconded by Commissioner Campos. **Adopted 3-0**

Section 4: School Profiles and Budgets

Commissioner White recalled a recent resolution to fund academic support for one of the autonomous schools and inquired as to the extent to which expansion of some of these schools has presented academic challenges. Superintendent Brizard replied that this resolution was for professional development and pay for additional work performed by teachers, but expansion of these schools has not led to any challenges in terms of academic achievement.

Commissioner White noted frequent allegations made that RCSD students often do not have textbooks available, yet \$2.015m is allocated for textbooks in the proposed 2010-11 budget. He inquired as to the current process for textbook distribution and monitoring. Superintendent Brizard explained that a Central Repository had been used in the past to house and distribute textbooks to schools, but now this is done by the schools themselves.

Commissioner Powell asked about the percentage of textbooks purchased for new curriculum adoptions and the percentage that are replacements of missing or worn texts. Vern Connors replied that approximately 50% of the purchases are for new textbooks and 50% are to replace old or missing books. The Superintendent added that State-mandated curriculum changes (e.g. math) and having to update to keep current with emerging knowledge in subjects (e.g. history) require purchase of new textbooks. He explained

that past purchasing cycles included significant increases in expenditures for textbooks to ensure that students have one book at school and one at home. Superintendent Brizard contended that with this funding devolving to the schools, a greater incentive will be provided to monitor and retrieve books, particularly those that students have at home.

Commissioner White inquired as to the specific use of funds for supplies and materials and the rationale for the significant reduction. Mr. Connors replied that some of these costs have been shifted to other categories such as custodial supplies and office supplies. He noted that many of these purchases are funded by grants, so the funding reductions reflect changes in grant funding.

Commissioner White pointed out that funding for schools in the NE Zone are significantly below that of the South Zone, inquiring as to the rationale for this apparent discrepancy when the schools in the NE Zone are struggling. Superintendent Brizard responded that funding differences between zones are at least partially due to differences in student population. He also noted that the South Zone has two specialty schools (SOTA and World of Inquiry) which require additional financial support for their programs.

Commissioner White emphasized that the NE Zone has a more challenging student population and several special programs (Young Mothers, Youth & Justice) that do not appear to be reflected in the allocation. The Superintendent reported that the schools in the NE Zone have the lowest student-adult ratio, and these specific programs may not be included in the overall budget for the NE Zone. Mr. Connors cautioned against making interpretations based on the raw dollar figures, underscoring the need to examine the number of students supported by these funds.

Commissioner White questioned the substantial decrease in funds for substitute teachers in 2010-11. Mr. Connors explained that these funds are centralized in the budget and later allocated to schools when data is available regarding enrollment.

Commissioner White asked about ways to reduce costs for substitute teachers. Superintendent Brizard acknowledged that absenteeism has to be reduced among regular teaching staff; he asserted that this will improve with increased autonomy and accountability of principals for expenditures under school-based budgeting.

Commissioner Powell inquired whether an oversight process is in place to ensure that principals are monitoring absenteeism and allowing regular teaching staff to participate in professional development opportunities. Superintendent Brizard replied that the number of professional development days, overtime, and absences are examined centrally to ensure adequate monitoring at the school level.

Commissioner White asked whether consideration has been given to providing a small monetary or in-kind reward to schools realizing improvement in student achievement. Superintendent Brizard discussed current incentives in providing greater autonomy in school-based budgeting to schools with high performance. Commissioner White

emphasized the importance of providing some incentive to schools realizing incremental improvements to assist in developing capacity. Superintendent Brizard responded that this is not possible under current fiscal conditions. Commissioner White stated that he will pursue this idea in the private sector to provide immediate incentives to encourage further growth and progress.

Commissioner Campos pointed out that salary and compensation comprise 92% of expenditures for all schools, asking whether this includes all programs in all schools. Superintendent Brizard replied that some programs are centrally funded and would not be included in the budget for all schools. Mr. Connors noted that the salary and compensation appear to comprise a high percentage because the budget for all schools does not include capital expenses, debt service, utilities and other items that are centrally controlled.

From the responses received to Board questions previously submitted, Commissioner Campos noted plans for redesigning the Great Beginnings program. She asked how the redesign will change the program and the anticipated outcomes. Kirsten Barclay explained that the program has provided direct services for students in kindergarten and 1st grade, but only 1.4% met the ELA target for the year. With such a low rate of student achievement, this component of the program could no longer be justified. Ms. Barclay stated that the redesign involves development of a literacy-based curriculum in early childhood.

Commissioner Powell questioned whether the targets had been set too high for the Great Beginnings program. Ms. Barclay stated that the targets had been based on national standards and the results were at levels expected without the program.

Commissioner Williams inquired whether the Great Beginnings program had been funded through a grant. Ms. Barclay replied that program development was funded under the Contract for Excellence.

Commissioner Williams asked whether this was the first year for which low achievement rates had been observed in the Great Beginnings program. Superintendent Brizard stated that poor performance was noticed last year and staff reductions were planned, but insufficient outcome data and the availability of federal stimulus funds led to restoration of these positions. Commissioner Williams questioned the rationale for continuing the Great Beginnings program at all. Ms. Barclay stated that the direct service component has been eliminated and there is still a need for literacy intervention in the early grades. Superintendent Brizard noted that the program redesign will improve alignment with the Rochester curriculum.

Commissioner Williams inquired as to the basis for knowing that the redesigned program will be effective and the benchmarks being developed to make this determination. The Superintendent emphasized the importance of implementation in affecting program results and the need for intervention to teach literacy in early grades. Commissioner Williams persisted in asking how the new design will be different and at what point the

results will be available. Superintendent Brizard stated that curriculum experts will be designing the literacy component. Ms. Barclay reported that there are significant staffing costs associated with the existing program: 62.0FTE in Special Education, Occupational Therapy, and Speech Pathology; in contrast, developing the curriculum will only require 13.0FTE. Superintendent Brizard explained that the District does not currently have a continuum of support for students who need help with literacy, but this curriculum development and READ 180 are a starting point.

Commissioner Williams expressed concern regarding previous staff reductions in reading specialists and the impact on student literacy. Superintendent Brizard responded that ELA scores have improved and contended that reading certification is not necessary to be able to teach literacy.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out the myriad of programs in the District which are based on research models used with students of European descent. She contended that the research is irrelevant if students' cultural backgrounds are not considered in the design of these programs.

Commissioner Campos asked about the number of FTE reductions for all of the schools, as this number kept changing last year. She emphasized the importance of having information as to the number of reductions in FTE and employees to determine the impact of staffing cuts in the District. Joyce Martelli explained that this figure changes due to retirements and resignations during the year.

Action Item: A report reflecting the number of FTE and employee reductions for each school and department will be provided to the Board.

Commissioner Williams commented on the strikingly similar patterns across schools in terms of the types of positions being cut. He stated that most of these positions are art and music teachers, librarians, and foreign language teachers. Commissioner Williams questioned the basis for making these staffing determinations and the extent to which this was directed by the Superintendent. Mr. Connors explained that in such a difficult fiscal situation, principals tended to making staffing cuts to all but core programs.

Commissioner Williams inquired about oversight of these decisions to ensure that programs are not completely eliminated and that students are able to obtain all of the credits needed to graduate. Ray Giamartino replied that the Zone Chiefs have been meeting to review the disaggregated figures to evaluate the impact in each of the schools. Superintendent Brizard added that these decisions were not examined last year and he had been caught by surprise by the proposed reductions in the art and music programs. From this experience, he stated these decisions have been more closely monitored this year.

Commissioner Powell noted that the list of FTE Staffing Adjustments only reflects proposed changes and does not provide information as to the extent to which staffing will remain for each position and program.

Action Item: A report will be provided to the Board to show the current levels of FTE in each position for each school and department compared to those proposed for 2010-11.

Commissioner Williams inquired as to the basis for the \$7.86m increase in funding for School Support. Mr. Connors explained that these funds are centralized for summer school, substitute teachers and Zone supervision and later distributed to the schools when information is available as to student enrollment and school needs.

Commissioner Evans expressed concern regarding high levels of expenditures for Professional and Technical Services, and reduced support for art, music and the Truancy Center. He emphasized the need for cost reductions across the board, noting that escalating salaries cannot be justified under current economic conditions. He objected to pay increases proposed for some of the most highly paid positions in the District.

Section 5: Program Profiles and Budgets

Commissioner White suggested adding data regarding the recidivism rate for the Agency in Youth program to monitor outcomes for this student population.

Commissioner White noted the apparent success of the Bryant & Stratton Middle College Partnership program in terms of graduation rates and the percentage of students earning college credits. He questioned why this program is not being expanded beyond the four schools currently participating. Superintendent Brizard replied that development of a college-going culture is a multi-pronged effort and involves a number of programs such as Bryant & Stratton, AVID, and RIT. Commissioner White asked how the RIT and AVID programs compare with the Bryant & Stratton program in terms of graduation rates and earning college credits. Superintendent Brizard responded that a comparison is difficult because of the different schools participating with different student populations and leadership. Commissioner White questioned the value of program measures when leadership and implementation have such a presumably large impact on the results. Ms. Barclay explained that the Bryant & Stratton program was only continued in schools where participating students have experienced success.

Action Item: Information to be provided to the Board as to the specific schools in which the Bryant & Stratton Middle College Partnership program has been discontinued due to lack of student success.

Commissioner White inquired as to the way in which success is measured for the Bry Mentoring program, and whether data regarding drop out rates could be included. Gladys Pedraza Burgos offered to add this information to the Program Profile for the Bry Mentoring Program and for the Youth in Transition Program.

Commissioner White commented that the goals established for some programs appear to be quite high, with the expectation that achievement rates will double or triple within a few years. He questioned the basis upon which these goals are established and the

consequences of failing to obtain these results. Ms. Barclay replied that the data would be examined again next year using the same measures to determine whether sufficient progress has been made; this information would be used next year when developing the budget.

Commissioner White commended the Administration for the success of the Commencement Summer School program in terms of the high percentage of students completing summer school (86% in 2009-10) and passing courses (85.6% in 2009-10). Superintendent Brizard stated that this program will be expanded to offer Regents tutoring and four courses in the summer.

Commissioner White asked about the modest goals established for the Diversity in Teaching program, noting a projected increase from 21% to 23% in minority teachers over the next year. The Superintendent commented that enhancing diversity is quite difficult when the District is undergoing reductions in staff.

Action Item: Additional information will be provided to the Board regarding the basis for the projected rate of increase in the percentage of minority teachers in the District.

Commissioner White pointed out the low graduation rate for students in the Gateway to College program, which only served 61 students for a cost of \$600K and questioned the rationale for continuing this program. Superintendent Brizard emphasized that this program serves students aged 16-20 who have dropped out of school and would not experience any further educational achievement otherwise. Commissioner White commended the goal of the program, but insisted that it is not a wise investment of funds, particularly since the president of MCC herself has stated that it has not met specified goals. Superintendent Brizard reported that this model program has been effective in other cities throughout the U.S. and participants at MCC are committed to adapting it to better fit the needs of our community. He underscored the importance of the program not only in assisting disengaged youth in graduating from high school, but also in encouraging them to pursue advanced education through earning college credit at the same time. Commissioner Powell noted that this information should be reported as an indicator of success, since many of these disengaged young people may not be as concerned with earning a high school diploma as with advancing toward college.

Commissioner White noted significant gains attained through the OACES Workforce Development Program, with 84% entering postsecondary education or training. He asked why this program could not be expanded instead of continuing the less effective Gateway to College program. The Superintendent responded that each of these programs serves a different population with different needs and challenges.

Commissioner Campos asked about the number of students that have graduated so far from the Gateway to College program, noting that the District expends \$80K for each student to graduate and the same rationale was used last year to continue funding for this costly program. Superintendent Brizard replied that funds were kept at the same level as last year and the program is being sustained because of the students still participating.

Commissioner Campos emphasized the need for a greater return on investment in terms of funding programs (e.g. Great Beginnings and Gateway to College), particularly given the current fiscal situation.

Commissioner White inquired as to the reason for reduced funding for the Hillside Work Scholarship program, and the extent of the City of Rochester's funding commitment. Superintendent Brizard explained that the program is serving an increased number of students and that funds will be restored if possible.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to the amount and percentage of funding provided by the City of Rochester for the Hillside Work Scholarship program.

Commissioner White requested that data be provided regarding the percentage of students graduating and dropping out from the Incarcerated Youth Program and the Young Mothers program to monitor outcomes for these students.

Commissioner Campos asked which programs have been cut due to reductions in Title I funding. Mr. Connors replied that funds were reduced for programs serving a small number of students and/or for few hours.

Action Item: Information will be provided to the Board as to all of the specific programs cut due to reductions in Title I funding.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the purpose of the various programs and the reason for not simply focusing on the core curriculum. Superintendent Brizard noted that additional supports and interventions are needed for students who are not grasping the basic core curriculum. He emphasized the importance of data to indicate specific problem areas, so that determinations can be made as to the types of program modifications needed.

Commissioner Williams expressed concern regarding AVID program objectives and measures, noting that \$1.7m is spent to increase the number of students taking algebra or AP courses. He suggested using additional indicators regarding students' proficiency in these courses to more accurately measure program efficacy.

Kathy Mykins explained that the primary intent of AVID is to accelerate academic rigor to push toward college readiness. She stated that most AP courses are offered in 11th and 12th grade, and 2009-10 is the first year in which students in these grades are participating in the program. For these reasons, the data is just beginning to monitor progress. Superintendent Brizard added that AVID was initiated in East High School and focuses primarily on students who tend to be overlooked because they are in the academic middle in terms of achievement. He offered to provide national data regarding the impact of AVID on student achievement and college attendance. Commissioner Williams responded that while national data is useful, the program impact has to be assessed for Rochester to know whether these funds are being expended wisely.

Commissioner Evans questioned the \$1.7m allocated for AVID staff, particularly since only 14% of these students advance to AP courses. Superintendent Brizard explained that AVID is part of a multi-pronged effort to prepare students for college and includes components that are difficult to measure, such as improving study habits and note-taking skills. Commissioner Evans asked about the necessity for a separate program to teach students these basic skills. The Superintendent stated that teachers do not have time to teach students these skills, particularly since it is for a specific group of students of average achievement. Commissioner Williams asked for additional data regarding the retention rate for students remaining in the AVID program from year to year.

Commissioner Williams inquired as to the methods used to evaluate the efficacy of Dream Schools. Superintendent Brizard replied that these assessments are based on ELA and math scores, as well as graduation rates for high schools. He emphasized that three to five years are required for schools to turn around in terms of overall progress. Commissioner Williams highlighted the importance of weighing the cost involved in attaining relatively small improvements in student achievement (e.g. 1% increase in percentage of students passing ELA or math). He inquired at what point a school's failure to progress should result in its closure.

Action Item: Report regarding Dream Schools will be provided to the Board.

Commissioner Evans asked about the use of funds under the PENCIL program and the necessity for these expenditures when there is already in-house capacity. The Superintendent replied that the PENCIL program provides a system of support and training regarding best practices for its partners, which include principals and business leaders. He explained that quality mentoring is provided and integrated with the curriculum to offer real world experience and applications, which cannot be provided with existing staff. Commissioner Evans inquired at what point expenditures would be reduced to reflect that these partnerships have been established. Superintendent Brizard replied that the integral aspects of the program have not yet been incorporated into the school or business culture.

Commissioner Evans questioned the \$106,160 salary for a new administrator for the Positive Behavioral Supports program. Superintendent Brizard stated that this position is needed to coordinate a systemic approach to address fundamental changes in attitudes and interactions with children to encourage positive behavior and change existing culture. The Superintendent added that the schools have not had the capacity to do this work and an administrator is needed to conduct training and provide support to sustain these changes, which will lead to reduced student arrest and suspension rates. Commissioner Evans pointed out that suspension rates have been declining even before the advent of this program. Superintendent Brizard acknowledged that ISS has led to a reduction in suspension rates, but this alone would not be sufficient to sustain the decline in suspensions in the long term. He asserted that a proactive approach is needed to ensure sustainability in the future.

Commissioner Williams contended that it is difficult to support funding for numerous programs with uncertain results when teachers are being laid off in core subjects. He pointed out that funding is being reduced in all areas, except for the SEG group, which has had significant increases in staffing and pay over the last 2-3 years. Superintendent Brizard stated that pay increases have only been for staff assuming new positions.

Action Item: Data will be provided to the Board regarding the specific positions in the SEG group and the pay rate for each of these positions.

Motion by Commissioner White to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Williams.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40PM.