

**Rochester Board of Education
Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole
April 28, 2009**

MINUTES

Attendance: Willa Powell, Chair; Commissioners Elliott, Evans, Williams, Brennan (arrived at 5:22PM), and White (arrived at 5:44PM). Commissioner Campos was absent.

District staff: Joyce Martelli; Vern Connors; Jim Fenton; Rachna Vaid; Gladys Pedraza Burgos; Marilyn Patterson-Grant; Michelle Hancock; Jeannette Silvers; Kim Dyce; Mary Doyle; Kirsten Barclay; Jerome Underwood; Sue Kaufmann; Cheryl Holloway; Ray Giamartino; Linda Stagles; Jim Shepard.

Board staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Powell convened the meeting at 5:09 p.m.

Commissioner Powell stated that the meeting would begin with the Superintendent's presentation of changes to the original budget proposal, arising primarily from the federal stimulus package. In his presentation, the Superintendent highlighted the following points:

- reductions in the NYS Governor's proposed budget have been offset by the Federal Deficit Reduction Act by \$13.4M, but these stabilization funds are available only for one year.
- receipt of \$2.9M less than anticipated for Title I and IDEA, for which federal stimulus funds will be provided for only two years.
- no additional revenue from other federal grants and a decrease in interest income.
- reduction of the RCSD structural deficit over three years through staff reductions and reducing operational line items by 10% or more.

The Superintendent stated that clear guidelines have not yet been provided at the federal or state level for use of federal stimulus funds. He also explained that the net effect of these changes is a slight increase in the total budget (by 1.8%) to \$699,482,694 and restoration of staff positions, primarily because of the provision of federal stimulus funds.

Questions regarding Superintendent's Presentation of Changes to Proposed Budget

Commissioner Powell inquired as to the types of positions restored as a result of provisions of federal stimulus funds. The Superintendent stated that most of these are teaching positions.

Commissioner Powell asked about the factors considered in determining the specific teaching positions to be reduced. Joyce Martelli provided the example of staff being reinstated to the Great Beginnings program as a result of the federal stimulus package. Superintendent Brizard asserted that staff reinstatements had been planned with the provision of these additional federal funds and these plans have been discussed with RTA, and are not a response to any type of political pressure. He also

explained that the additional funding for IDEA is to be used to build capacity and implement recommendations from the Council of Great City Schools report.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to the way in which federal stimulus funds will affect the RCSD deficit. Joyce Martelli replied that these funds have prevented deeper program and staffing cuts, and that there is no deficit currently because the District must have a balanced budget. She explained that the District has an ongoing structural deficit due to declining revenue and rising expenses, and that this is a factor to be addressed in each budget cycle.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that the deficit in January was \$61M and that an equivalent amount of additional funding must have been provided to result in a balanced budget. Ms. Martelli replied that the budget gap was closed by reducing costs by 10% across the board, as well as through receipt of additional funding. Superintendent Brizard stated that staffing costs, particularly benefits, pay increases, and retirement matching funds are all leading to significant expenditure increases in the future. He pointed out that in a few years, there will be as many retirees as active employees of the District, noting that the structural deficit will not be eliminated until operational costs and staff pay raises are controlled. The Superintendent stated that this is the situation faced by all of the Big 5 school districts in New York State.

Commissioner Williams asked for an estimate as to the deficit for next year. Ms. Martelli stated that this is difficult to estimate at this point because the amount of grant and other funds in relation to costs are not yet known for next year.

Commissioner Williams inquired as to whether New York State has ever failed to provide increased funding to RCSD. Superintendent Brizard pointed out that the State has not increased funding to the District this year, and additional funding has been provided at the federal level. Ms. Martelli emphasized that the current economic climate is quite different from that in the past, which creates difficulty in projecting revenue from the State and from other sources.

Commissioner Williams noted that the budget has increased by \$12,613,271 but there is a net addition of only 26 FTE. Superintendent Brizard responded that some of the additional funding is being used for capital projects and improvements.

Commissioner Williams questioned the consequences of restoring staff in this proposed budget, given the time limit on the availability of stabilization and federal stimulus funds. The Superintendent emphasized the importance of planning staff reductions strategically and that the additional time afforded by these funds will allow greater opportunity for rightsizing through attrition.

Commissioner Williams asked about the right size for RCSD in terms of staffing. Superintendent Brizard discussed collaboration with ERS to examine positions and determine where to make strategic reductions, noting that New York secondary schools have 4-5 times the number of mid-level managers as other states. He cautioned against making hasty assumptions regarding cutting these positions without determining ways to operate differently.

Commissioner Williams expressed concern that staffing reductions are being made in the wrong areas, such as ELA, math, and social studies. He questioned how competency can be improved in these areas with the proposed staff reductions. Superintendent Brizard emphasized the importance of evaluating the distribution and quality of teachers and of considering the planned staffing levels at each school rather than focusing on FTE reductions. He also pointed out critical areas that have been underfunded historically, such as ESOL and systemic literacy, which are to receive FTE increases. The

Superintendent also underscored the importance of highly effective teachers in improving educational outcomes, rather than focusing on the sheer number of staff. He also noted that the consequent increases in class size resulting from staff reductions are very small and do not even approach the contractual maximum; even with the increased class size, RCSD will continue to have one of the lowest teacher-student ratios in New York State and the country. The Superintendent also explained that administrative staff reductions were made last summer, so that every type of staff is subject to reductions due to budget constraints. The Superintendent offered to provide information as to the way in which these staffing decisions have been made.

Action Item: Superintendent Brizard will provide information as to the way in which staffing reduction decisions have been made.

Section 6:

Commissioner Evans asked whether instructional supplies are handled centrally or by each school, and whether these funds would be reflected in this section of the budget. Vern Connors explained that all schools currently receive: 1) a staffing allocation, in which the principal can determine the distribution of allocated staff; and 2) TAPU allocation, which is an operating budget based on student enrollment and can be used for instructional supplies.

Commissioner Evans inquired whether a school running out of office supplies would be indicative of a principal's lack of ability to manage allocations or that the allocation to the school was insufficient. Mr. Connors commented that from his experience, small and large schools have been quite adept in managing allocations but middle-sized schools (i.e. with 400-500 students) have the most difficulty.

Commissioner Evans asked about possible penalties through reductions in future allocations for schools that have been resourceful and efficient in their use of funds. Mr. Connors replied that rewards and penalties are not imposed on schools, and that failure to utilize all of the allocation in one year will not lead necessarily to decreased allocations for future years.

Commissioner Powell voiced concern about a situation in which funds are exhausted before the end of the school year due to poor budget management, and inquired as to whether a monitoring and investigation system is in place to address these situations. Mr. Connors responded that this situation has not arisen because staff collaborate with principals and zone Chiefs to monitor funds throughout the year and guidance is offered to schools regarding the effective use of funds.

Commissioner Williams asked whether the TAPU allocation per student is the same for each school. Mr. Connors stated that the per student allocation is the same for each school, but greater for students in special education. He also explained that the minimum TAPU allocation is equivalent to the amount for a school of 350 students, in recognition that each school has certain fixed overhead costs.

Commissioner White questioned the variations in funds for academic support for each school, and the way in which these determinations were made. Mr. Connors replied that this reflects the size of each school's pre-K program. Commissioner Elliott requested a key or footnote to explain the codes used in the Budget Book.

Action Item: Vern Connors will provide a key or footnote for reference to decipher codes used in the Budget Book.

Section 7:

Commissioner White reported that a recent news broadcast had indicated that RCSD has quite exorbitant expenses for food purchases for meetings, and inquired as to checks and balances that have been established to ensure that these funds are being used appropriately. Superintendent Brizard stated that this news report was misleading, in that the data was from several years ago and is no longer relevant because these types of expenditures have been reduced substantially since that time. Ms. Martelli replied that these expenditures have always been monitored through reports, specifying a per diem rate, and requiring department and/or zone Chief approval prior to incurring the expense.

Commissioner Williams pointed out a correction needed to the Board of Education budget to reflect a total of 17 FTE rather than 21 FTE.

Action Item: Ms. Martelli offered to look into this further and provide information as to the specific positions included in the 21 FTE for the Board of Education.

Commissioner Williams inquired as to whether the \$18K that had been reduced from the Board of Education budget has been reinstated as authorized by President Evans.

Action Item: Superintendent Brizard will restore \$18K to the budget for the Board of Education.

Commissioner White expressed concern that the proposed budget only has one transition worker to assist over 400 students with re-entry into school after probation or incarceration, emphasizing that the lack of staffing and support impedes attainment of goals for these students and for the District. Superintendent Brizard stated that he has spoken with Margaret Porter about the Board's concerns regarding the Incarcerated Youth Program, and that Ms. Porter has offered to make some changes.

Action Item: Margaret Porter will provide further information as to changes planned to the Incarcerated Youth Program to enhance these transition services for students.

Motion by Commissioner Elliott to recess until after the Board Business meeting. Seconded by Commissioner White. **Adopted 6-0**

Meeting recessed at 6:29PM.

Meeting recalled to order by Commissioner Powell at 9:43PM, with continued review and discussion of Section 7 of the Budget Book.

Commissioner White voiced concern that professional services contracts through the Law Department have not been including firms with staff of color, and inquired as to the progress being made in this regard. Rachna Vaid offered to provide this information, and noted that an increasing volume of work is being handled in-house.

Action Item: Rachna Vaid will provide information as to progress to date in terms of contracting with law firms with staff of color.

Commissioner White also inquired as to the effort made by RCSD to recruit teachers of color. Superintendent Brizard enumerated programs with local colleges to increase the diversity of teaching staff: Urban Program at Nazareth College, program at St. John Fisher College for teaching assistants and paraprofessionals, and Urban Institute at the University of Rochester. He stated that this is a

significant effort and suggested expanding recruitment efforts to a wider geographic area, noting that the most recent graduating class in teacher education from SUNY Brockport consisted of only one Latina and no African Americans.

Commissioner White asked about funding provided in the proposed budget for travel to recruit teachers of color from a broader geographic area. Michele Hancock replied that the budget does provide funding for this purpose, and described recruiting efforts to enhance the diversity of teachers and to target more African American colleges than ever before.

Commissioner Powell requested each Board member to consider the one to two programs or concerns of greatest import to bring to the Superintendent's attention.

Commissioner Brennan stated that he would like more specific information regarding the particular items that have been cut from the budget. He also expressed concern regarding advertising costs for the District, which he noted are three times greater than for Syracuse and Buffalo. He also inquired as to plans for closing the Rochester Integrated Science Center (RISE). Superintendent Brizard stated that the plan is to continue supporting RISE in-house, and that schools will purchase lab supplies directly from vendors according to their specific needs.

Action Item: The Superintendent offered to look into advertising costs for the District.

Commissioner Elliott emphasized concern regarding the African American Studies Department and the infusion of an African American curriculum throughout the District. Superintendent Brizard responded that he has discussed these concerns with Marilynn Patterson Grant, and plans to meet with the Director of the Office of African American Studies to identify specific needs to facilitate successful implementation of this Board policy. Commissioner Elliott cited a number of model programs for developing such a curriculum, and suggested use of a consultant to assist in this development process.

Action Item: Superintendent Brizard will meet with the Director of the Office of African American Studies to identify specific needs to be addressed to effectively implement Board policy to infuse an African American curriculum throughout all grades and subjects throughout the District.

Commissioner White expressed his primary concerns as infusion of the African American curriculum in all grades and subjects, and increasing staffing to enhance transition services for students who have been on probation or incarcerated.

Commissioner Evans focused on the importance of enhancing student achievement and strengthening leadership in schools to motivate staff and students toward success. The Superintendent discussed the Leadership Academy planned for principals and school administrators this summer, contending that principals' leadership is one of the biggest issues confronted by RCSD.

Commissioner Williams voiced concern regarding providing adequate funding for robotic teams to encourage students to apply science and technology in their education; he stated that corporate funding for robotics has been declining. Superintendent Brizard expressed support for robotics, stating that he has wanted to pay teachers and coaches to engage in this endeavor, but that this has to be negotiated with RTA. He also emphasized the importance of offering opportunities for participation in robotics to all high school students.

Commissioner Williams also focused on the impact of staffing reductions on the District's performance, while acknowledging the need to rightsize in the face of declining student enrollment. He pointed out

the need to address excess building capacity in the future as a result of downsizing. Superintendent Brizard emphasized the importance of retaining quality staff and rightsizing RCSD to reduce costs, and of adopting an incremental approach in reducing building capacity to ensure adequate facilities for students.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern regarding funding and staffing reductions for the arts to the point where RCSD is meeting only the minimum standards established by New York State.

Commissioner Powell also advocated for increased support for zone improvement teams to implement this aspect of Board policy regarding school choice. Commissioner Powell noted that one of the barriers lies with the current structure of zone chiefs having a balanced workload, but not necessarily supervision of all of the schools in their geographic zone. She contended that this leads to a situation in which some schools do not receive adequate attention, support, and advocacy within the zone improvement teams.

Another concern raised by Commissioner Powell regarded the processes that need to be addressed in rightsizing the District: management of placement offices, voluntary wait lists, special education, class size caps, and stranding. She emphasized the importance of incorporating these factors into an integrated plan and system to realize greater efficiency. She explained that ignoring voluntary wait lists has led to classes not being filled in preferred high-performing schools and has impeded closure of sections in other underperforming schools. Superintendent Brizard acknowledged that considerable work remains to be done to address teacher allocation and distribution, class sizes, and placement issues – all of which are systemic issues.

Action Item: Superintendent Brizard will re-examine funding for arts and music to ensure that programs are not being eliminated.

Commissioner Evans stated that he would like substitute teacher costs reduced substantially (e.g. by 50%). Superintendent Brizard commented that absenteeism in RCSD has been appalling, and that a number of initiatives are being considered to offer incentives and improve accountability.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Commissioner Williams commented that the CIP seemed to be missing funding for improvements to Food Service and the Central Kitchen, noting the poor condition of the facility and quality of the food. Jim Fenton explained that \$750K to \$1M is to be incorporated into the plan, which would allow purchase of the most critical items (e.g. an oven, cooler). He also described efforts in partnership with RIT to perform a six sigma analysis to apply manufacturing principles to food service and identify necessary workflow improvements. He also stated that the Facilities Dept. is collaborating with the Grants Dept. to identify funding sources, and that a multi-year plan will be involved to implement all of the necessary improvements. Commissioner Williams stated that upgrades are not only needed in the Central Kitchen, but also in each of the schools. As an example, he cited the lack of ability of schools to provide fresh fruit because there are no three-base sinks. He encouraged the Superintendent to reconsider the decision to invest in upgrades only if funds are available because of the extremely poor conditions and the impact in terms of the quality of food provided to students.

Commissioner Brennan questioned the extent to which these conditions are the result of contracting out for Food Services, contending that the inability to provide nutritious food to students with a budget this size is unacceptable.

Commissioner Powell emphasized the need for creativity, inquiring as to the possibility of washing fresh fruit at the Central Kitchen and shrink wrapping it for transport to schools rather than incurring the sizeable cost of installing three-base sinks in each school.

Superintendent Brizard described a proposal presented to Danny Wegman to provide fresh organic food to the District. He also noted that funding for Food Service has been inadequate for a long time, which has led to the current conditions.

Commissioner Elliott commented that upgrades to the Central Kitchen and substantial improvements in Food Services should be a very high priority within the District, particularly as this may be the only meal provided to many children. Superintendent Brizard suggested meeting with Food Service managers and staff to identify barriers and improvements needed.

Commissioner Powell emphasized the need for regulations to implement Board Student Wellness policy.

Motion by Commissioner Evans to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner White. **Adopted 6-0**

Adjourned at 11:00PM.