

**Rochester Board of Education
Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole
April 21, 2009**

MINUTES

Attendance: Willa Powell, Chair; Commissioners Elliott, Evans, Brennan, and White. Commissioners Williams and Campos absent.

District staff: John Scanlan; Joyce Martelli; Vern Connors; Gladys Pedraza Burgos; Marilynn Patterson-Grant; Michelle Hancock; Jeannette Silvers; Kim Dyce.

Board staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Powell convened the meeting at 6:42 p.m.

Commissioner Powell noted that the previous Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole on April 7, 2009 had left review of the budget with the “All Schools” section and asked for questions regarding this section. She inquired as to whether the information in this section refers to expenses incurred in schools but not charged to the schools. Vern Connors confirmed this statement, and explained that this section essentially comprises the sum of the following four sections: School Support, NE Zone, NW Zone, and South Zone.

Section 4:

Commissioner Elliott stated that the budget does not contain information regarding the African American Studies curriculum, and requested an explanation as to where this fits into the line items for schools. Vern Connors replied that this is incorporated in the Teaching and Learning section of the budget. Marilynn Patterson-Grant explained that a separate African American curriculum is not being implemented, but all subject areas will be infused with this content. She stated that the primary focus at this point has been ELA and math for grades 5 through 9, and that grades 3 and 4 will be added this summer.

Commissioner Evans pointed out that there were no program profiles provided for the Montessori or Young Mothers programs. Mr. Connors stated that he did not know how Montessori was omitted and that Young Mothers is included in the Program Based Budgeting section of the Budget Book (Section 5); he assured that information for both of these programs would be included in the final budget book.

Commissioner White noted differences in the funding amounts for dropout prevention for each of the schools at Franklin, citing an example of the contrast in this funding for the Global Media and Bioscience High Schools. He inquired as to the way in which these funding levels were derived, particularly as drop out prevention is a very significant issue. Mr. Connors replied that the funding amounts vary according to staffing and the level of staff seniority in terms of compensation.

Commissioner White also asked about the way in which funding levels were determined for Student & Family Support at different schools. Gladys Pedraza Burgos explained that the Franklin campus houses one Student Support Center, one Health Center, mental health services, and all community agencies serving students on that campus. She stated that most of the community agencies provide their own funding, but costs are incurred from housing them on campus. Mr. Connors stated that differences in

funding levels for Student & Family Support among schools is also due to compensation rates for different levels of staff.

Commissioner White inquired as to where he could find an accounting of dollars invested in programming for student and family support, and for dropout prevention. He provided an example of funding levels being approximately equal between Dr. Freddie Thomas High School and the International Finance High School at Franklin, yet the dropout rate is quite different in each of these schools. Mr. Connors explained that the NYS Comptroller mandates the District's accounting structure, and this is not necessarily designed to respond to these questions. He asserted that program-based budgeting is an attempt to examine these equity issues; he stated that new mandates with the Contract for Excellence, federal stimulus package, and grant reporting will lead RCSD to go to a complete programmatic or cost accounting structure in the near future. Mr. Connors also discussed an upgrade to the new human resources system, which will associate every position with the program they support. Currently, when an individual transfers to a new position, the information regarding the programs they have supported does not always get updated. He also stated that there is a need to enhance the project cost accounting system to provide better linkage to programs.

Commissioner Elliott questioned whether differences in funding for specific programs among schools reflect the different priorities of their principals and needs of their students. Mr. Connors responded that each school might be allocated the same amount for one particular budget code, but there may be several categories within that code and information as to the specific use of funds within these categories would only be available at the school level. John Scanlan pointed out that the intent of school-based budgeting is to have specific funding levels vary according to the needs of students in different schools; he stated that this first year of school-based budgeting is more reflective of historic funding levels for programs in each school.

Commissioner White replied that this is a problem and reflects the difference between attaining equity and equality; he also highlighted the importance of providing equitable funding to ensure accountability, as school-level staff cannot be held accountable without having sufficient resources to meet their students' needs.

Commissioner Powell inquired as to how quickly school-based budgeting should evolve, and whether some mid-year amendments should be made to the budget. Mr. Scanlan emphasized the importance of developing the skills and capacity for budget management using the school-based approach for all staff, whether in Central Office or schools. He suggested proceeding systematically in this process so that greater budget management responsibility and funding devolves to the schools as additional data becomes available for analysis.

Commissioner Powell questioned how quickly data can be obtained, pointing out that some data will be available in six months and could be used to make mid-year amendments to the budget.

Commissioner Evans asked about the way in which DataCation will affect the school-based budgeting process in terms of indicating schools in greater need of assistance and responding by making financial adjustments based on this data. Mr. Scanlan replied that there would be limited flexibility in terms of financial adjustments because if additional funds are provided to one school, they would have to be taken away from other schools; he also expressed concern about establishing a precedent in which schools are given a budget and then making significant changes later in the year.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that \$20,433 has been allocated for dropout Prevention for School #3, which may not be necessary because there are rarely problems with students dropping out of elementary

school. Mr. Connors responded that he appreciates this point, and that future allocations under school-based budgeting will be based to a much greater extent on student needs and demographics.

Commissioner Elliott contended that the District is correct in adopting a slow methodical approach with school-based budgeting due to the increased level of expertise required, particularly at the school level, and to allow further examination of all of the implications.

Commissioner White inquired as to the rationale for providing higher levels of funding for dropout prevention in schools which already have high attendance rates. He provided a number of examples, such as School #30 receiving \$47,081 for dropout prevention with a 90.7% attendance rate and Charlotte High School receiving only \$21,426 for dropout prevention with an 87.9% attendance rate. Mr. Scanlan stated that the hope is to be able to analyze the extent to which funding versus other factors influence outcomes with greater use of school-based budgeting in the future.

Commissioner White contended that outcomes are influenced by the extent to which policies are being implemented, rather than by the content of the policy itself.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern that for schools in which dropout is not a significant issue, these funds will come to be viewed as “slush funds” and District goals will not be advanced.

Commissioner Evans agreed with the plan to roll out the school-based budgeting process gradually because principals may not be prepared or willing to assume financial management responsibilities. He noted that this may amount to a multi-million dollar budget for some schools. Michelle Hancock discussed establishing a Leadership Academy for school administrators, explaining that the focus was determined by the specific topics identified by principals as most important; she stated that school-based budgeting was the most commonly identified topic by principals. Ms. Hancock also described recruiting a team of financial experts to provide this training through the Leadership Academy this summer.

Commissioner Powell asked about the eventuality that a principal is not able to manage these responsibilities, and whether this would be included in their performance evaluation. Ms. Hancock stated that this would be incorporated as one aspect of principals’ performance evaluation. Mr. Scanlan added that the curriculum being designed by financial experts will include data from schools and therefore will be specific to the District.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to the impact of contract negotiations with RTA on the current proposed budget. Mr. Scanlan stated that the proposed budget is based on figures from the current year; he noted that contract negotiations have just begun, and the figures based on the outcome of the negotiations will be captured in the final budget.

Commissioner Powell voiced concern regarding staffing levels and teacher-student ratios, stating that it is not clear what drives these ratios (e.g. more special education or ELL students, or a smaller school unable to realize economies of scale). She noted that some of the schools which are performing well with higher teacher-student ratios are being asked to make further FTE reductions, providing an example from School #23 in which one section is to be eliminated and the art teacher will be reduced to 0.5 or less FTE. She stated that music or art may be significant factors in helping to make these schools successful despite high teacher-student ratios, and noted the inherent inequity in requesting further staff reductions. She inquired as to what the District can provide to these schools to encourage them to continue their success. Mr. Scanlan replied that the FTE reductions represent small changes, and that staffing adjustments had to be made across the board in all schools due to the deficit. Mr. Scanlan stated

that the FTE reductions and teacher-student ratios are based on historic staffing formulas, and expressed the hope that the District will gain a better understanding of school and student needs in budget allocations in the future under school-based budgeting.

Commissioner Powell also provided the example of School #16, which has one of the highest teacher-student ratios of all elementary schools in the District and relatively few students passing ELA (50%) and math (45.8%). She noted that this school has been asked to reduce FTE and further increase an already high teacher-student ratio when clearly they are in need of assistance. She inquired as to what assistance will be provided to prevent further failure. Mr. Scanlan responded that the budget is attempting to build a picture or starting point across the District and does not purport to solve all problems; he stated that he hopes this discussion will continue throughout the year to focus on what needs to be done to assist this school.

Action Item: Dr. Cheryl Holloway (South Zone Chief) will provide further information as to the assistance that will be provided to prevent further performance problems at School #16 and similar schools that have been struggling and already have high teacher-student ratios.

Section 5:

Commissioner White expressed concern that funding in this budget does not reflect an African American curriculum as a priority, so that this Board policy is not being implemented. He noted that the policy to infuse African American studies throughout the curriculum was established two years ago, yet the only action taken thus far has been to hire an administrator and provide a budget of only \$4,000. Commissioner White voiced concern regarding the future of this initiative specifically and implementation of Board policy generally. He discussed funding, staff, and legal authority as the bases for power, noting that the Administrator of African American studies has none of these resources. Marilyn Patterson Grant provided handout materials regarding all of the departmental allocations in the Teaching and Learning Division, as well as budget details for the Office of African American Studies. She explained that funding was provided at the time the administrator position was established, but that consideration of other resources that might be needed (e.g. clerical support, materials) was not part of the frame of reference at that time.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to why this was not within the frame of reference at the time. Marilyn Patterson Grant replied that there have been a number of transitions, and she was not part of the process at the time. She underscored grant funding as one of the significant differences between other offices and the African American Studies Office, which has enabled other departments to hire lead teachers and other staff. To compensate for the fact that the Office of African American Studies does not yet have grant funding, Ms. Patterson Grant explained that funds have been provided to this Office through DICA for a Community Read. Ms. Patterson Grant also explained that financial support has been provided for the Director to attend conferences, and that she shares clerical support with the other department directors.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to the difference between the \$145,725 and \$205,571 in funding for the Office of African American Studies. Ms. Patterson Grant pointed out that \$145,725 is the total budget for the Office in the current year, while \$205,571 is the level of funding proposed for 2009-10. Joyce Dunn acknowledged that the current budget format does not provide an accurate reflection of the amount for each department because many FTEs are included under School Support. Ms. Dunn noted that approximately \$30,000 has been allocated in the proposed budget for professional development for

the Director of the Office of African American Studies; she explained that the handout materials indicate only the funds for subject-specific areas.

Commissioner White contended that each department budget would be significantly greater than that of the Office of African American Studies, emphasizing the lack of a frame of reference because no detail has been provided regarding the other departments' budget allocations. He acknowledged that there may be state mandates governing the other departments (e.g. math, social studies, ELA), but Board policy must be made a priority. He asserted that all other departments have significantly greater funding to support staff. Commissioner White stated that funding dollars and FTE are needed to implement this Board policy, and suggested issuing a directive to require that FTE be moved to the Office of African American Studies from another department to implement this policy.

Commissioner Elliott also expressed concern that the District understand and appreciate the value and significance of infusing African American studies into the curriculum when over 70% of the student population is African American; she stressed the importance that students understand their heritage, identity, and place in society and the world. Commissioner Elliott emphasized this knowledge as critical in enhancing self esteem, motivation, and achievement, and as a buffer against racism. She also contended that if funds were put into an African American curriculum, in-school suspension rates would decline significantly, particularly since this overwhelmingly affects African American male students.

Commissioner Powell inquired as to whether the Board would like the Superintendent to amend the budget to reflect concern regarding implementing an African American curriculum.

Commissioner White stated that he would have to vote against a budget that does not reflect Board policy by making the African American curriculum a priority.

Commissioner Brennan agreed that there has been an overarching issue of Board policy not being taken seriously as a priority. He expressed concern regarding the current proposed budget in terms of implementing the African American curriculum, stating that he may not be able to vote for the budget as a result.

Commissioner Evans asserted that there is no need to reject the budget, as it can be amended by the Board. He expressed concern regarding infusion of an African American curriculum throughout all classes and grade levels, also pointing out the need for teachers to improve their education in this respect.

Ms. Patterson Grant stated that she is willing to consider adding to this aspect of the budget.

Commissioner Powell contended that it would be easier for the Superintendent to amend the budget, as the funding must be taken from other areas. Mr. Scanlan offered to discuss the concerns regarding the African American curriculum with the Superintendent with a view toward making some adjustments to the budget.

Action Item: John Scanlan will discuss with the Superintendent the Board members' concerns regarding funding levels for the Office of African American Studies and consider making budget adjustments for this Office.

Commissioner Powell stated that she has similar concerns regarding reductions in funding and staffing for the arts, but that it appears that most of her colleagues do not share the same level of concern and noted that a significantly greater amount of funding is involved.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to capital funding for Food Service, stating that she recently had a tour of the Central Kitchen and observed a need for renovation, reconfiguration of space, and substantial improvement of working conditions for staff. Mr. Scanlan stated that this is a priority and that a partnership with RIT is collaborating with Food Service staff members to identify workflow improvements. He explained that capital funds have been provided in the proposed 2009-10 budget, which will initiate a multi-year renovation process.

Commissioner Elliott commented that the \$14M allocated for Food Services seems a waste when the quality of food and nutrition is so poor, and that this has a significant impact on students' behavior and academic performance.

Commissioner Powell inquired as to when the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) will be presented. Mr. Scanlan replied that the CIP will be presented at the Finance Committee meeting on April 23rd. Commissioner Powell encouraged Board members to attend this meeting to raise questions regarding the CIP.

Commissioner Brennan requested an explanation as to why the final budget deliberations could not be conducted on May 5th, and expressed concern regarding the short timeframe for review and discussion of the budget. Mr. Scanlan stated that time is needed for compilation of information due to changes in federal funding, validation of data, and printing. Mr. Connors explained that the law requires the Board to conduct the final budget vote 33 days prior to submission to City Council, and that ten days have been allowed historically between final deliberations and the budget vote to enable staff to address any final concerns expressed by Board members.

Commissioner White asked about programs that were not included in the budget because of failure to demonstrate effectiveness in attaining goals, and the criteria used in making these determinations (e.g. based on programmatic goals, return on investment). Mr. Scanlan noted that three programs were eliminated this year because they did not meet metrics; he stated that many of the remaining programs in the budget were implemented only within the last year and more data is needed to evaluate their efficacy.

Commissioner Powell inquired as to whether the three programs eliminated were also in their first year of implementation. Mr. Connors described the three programs that were cut: 1) Franklin – Roberts Wesleyan College Partnership: this program was never actually implemented due to problems with Roberts Wesleyan College not upholding their responsibilities in the partnership; 2) Reading First: federal funds were significantly reduced for this program and national results have been poor; 3) Great Beginnings: initially the special education component was reduced, but later it was determined that sufficient program measures had not been put into place and the program was restored with additional funding through the federal stimulus package.

Commissioner Powell commented that the threshold for surviving budget cuts appears to be rather soft, as data has been available for three years to enable a more rigorous evaluation at this point. Mr. Connors responded that the remaining programs in the budget have shown enough gains to warrant continued funding.

Commissioner White asked about a number of funded programs that do not appear in the budget: Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, Iglesia Tutoring, Teaching by Design, and the Roots program. He urged District staff to include all programs in the budget to monitor their performance and to

advocate for additional funding for those that are successful. Mr. Scanlan stated that the District needs to further delineate the definition of programs and ensure inclusion in evaluation and in the budget.

Commissioner White expressed concern regarding the lack of staffing for the Incarcerated Youth Program, which currently has only one transitional worker to assist all students in the District to re-enter school from probation or incarceration. He inquired as to how the District's approach has changed with regard to assisting and investing in these students; despite increased funding over the last few years, staffing levels remain stagnant. He asserted that the information provided in the budget does not indicate whether there is an increased investment in these programs or simply a larger population being served. Commissioner White also emphasized the importance of support for these students as critical in reducing the drop out rate and improving the graduation rate in the District. Mr. Connors replied that the current budget format is not designed to provide information as to the District's increased investment in these programs, but offered to provide this information at a later date. Mr. Scanlan responded that 3-4 additional metrics could be included to more clearly illustrate the outcomes of these programs, acknowledging that graduation rate for this student population would certainly be a critical measure to include. He also stated that additional work remains to be done in terms of developing and refining metrics for each program to clearly illustrate outcomes.

Action Item: Mr. Connors will provide data regarding the performance of programs for assisting incarcerated youth with their re-entry into school, as well as further detail of the District's level of investment in these programs.

Commissioner Powell inquired as to information regarding Supplemental Educational Services (SES) providers to assess their efficacy in attaining programmatic goals. She also noted that the District's evaluation of their performance could be submitted to the State to question whether the provider should remain on their list, thereby also serving the broader community. Jeannette Silvers replied that the Office of Accountability can provide data regarding the performance of SES providers.

Action Item: Ms. Silvers will provide data regarding the performance of each SES provider for the District.

Commissioner Powell referred to handout materials regarding staffing adjustments, noting a reduction from 6.0 to 4.5 FTE for JROTC instructors; she questioned whether the 1.5 FTE reduction was to be spread across all three sites receiving JROTC instruction.

Action Item: Mr. Connors will provide further information as to the impact of the 1.5 FTE reduction in JROTC instruction for each of the three sites.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to the current status of the budget deficit. Mr. Scanlan replied that the District continues to have a structural deficit, which has imposed significant funding cuts in all aspects of operations. Commissioner Elliott suggested prioritizing among the concerns raised by Board members in consideration of current budget constraints.

Adjourn - Motion made by Commissioner Elliott to adjourn; seconded by Commissioner Brennan.
Adopted 5-0

Meeting adjourned at 8:55PM.

Next Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole: April 28th at 5:00 PM to continue review of Budget (beginning with Section 6 – School Support Profiles and Budgets)