

Rochester Board of Education
Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole
May 1, 2006
5:30 p.m.

Minutes

Present: Commissioners Brennan, Elliott, Henley, Powell and Thompson. Commissioner Evans arrived at 5:40 p.m. Superintendent Manuel Rivera, Susan Tripi, and Vernon Connors.

Absent: President Garcia (out of town).

Chairwoman Willa Powell convened the meeting at 5:35 p.m. and announced that the Special Meeting would follow the Finance Committee meeting. Commissioner Elliott said she would not be able to stay for the Special Meeting, which had been scheduled for 5:15 p.m.

Chairwoman Powell asked Superintendent Manuel Rivera to begin his presentation on the final 2006-07 budget proposal (attached).

Additional points from Superintendent Rivera:

- The budget process included an intensive lobbying effort by the district.
- Late last week he received formal communication from Mayor Robert Duffy that the City of Rochester would not be providing the additional \$2.5 million the district anticipated. Funding from the City is flat again for about the 12th consecutive year.
- An increase in federal Title 1 money will spur the expansion of pre-kindergarten.
- Assemblyman David Gantt and other members of the local delegation drove additional funding for health services to the district; it will be used to cover the cost of school nursing services and additional mandated health services.
- Although adjustments and postponements have been made in new/expanded educational services originally proposed in March, the essential instructional initiatives are in place. The new/expanded services will stay on the table in the event additional grant funding is identified and received.
- We've had much more difficult budget process years. This is a budget that moves us forward.

Chairwoman Powell asked Commissioners for questions on the presentation.

Commissioner Thompson questions/comments

Regarding the savings to be realized (4 ftes) by eliminating bumping rights of Principals on Assignment at Central Office -- the principals may shift permanently to Central Office, but will no longer have the option of going back to a building?

DR. RIVERA: If they elect to stay at Central Office long-term, they will give up the right to bump a principal with less seniority out of a position in the event of future budget reductions. Going forward, the district will

have no “principals on assignment” for more than one year. It was not a good practice and will be done in the future on a short-term basis only.

Is additional grant funding anticipated before August/September?

DR. RIVERA: Specific grants have not been identified.

Academic Specialists will be used more to help standardize mid-term exams among buildings?

DR. RIVERA: Academic specialists meet regularly and receive training on Fridays. There should be an opportunity for them to discuss midterm exams. It will not be with the rigor planned through funding in the original March budget proposal, but at the very least there will be some attention to all exams meeting district standards.

Cheryl Holloway added that teachers who participate in training by Academic Specialists on midterm exam development would earn Professional Development credit.

Commissioner Henley questions/comments

Have the four additional (instead of six) schools for the Clearwater alternative to suspension model been identified?

DR. RIVERA: The schools haven't selected yet; the district needed to see if the expansion survived the budget process.

There will be 106 RTA retirements. Are any more anticipated even though the date to commit to the retirement incentive has passed?

Susan Tripi: No

Chairwoman Powell noted that although there could be more retirement announcements, these employees would not be part of the retirement incentive.

What is the actual shortfall? The numbers sum to \$4.9 million.

DR. RIVERA: The figures were rounded.

Commissioner Elliott questions/comments

What are the dollar amounts for union contracts for 2006-07?

DR. RIVERA: \$4.3 million for RTA, \$3.9 million for ASAR. The total additional amount is \$8 million.

Does this include healthcare and fringe benefits?

DR. RIVERA: In teacher salaries, the district ranks 10th out of 18 in Monroe County.

We can't be concerned about the other districts. We've got a budget to stay within.

DR. RIVERA: I disagree ...

Those kind of decisions are why we're in the position we're in now. We have to work more together. The union contracts were passed before I got here; let's put that on the table. All of us have to bear the cost of this. Everybody has to feel the pinch. I don't feel we were frugal.

On what basis did you assume we'd get \$2.5 million more from the city?

DR. RIVERA: The projection was based on initial discussions with the Mayor. There was not a direct response; we were all waiting for final state revenue figures. My belief is that the city needs to step up to the plate and contribute its fair share so that we do not become a completely state-dependent district.

CE: Did you receive something in writing?

DR. RIVERA: No.

My concern is they also had to go to the state; for us to put it in our budget, that seems somewhat irresponsible.

DR. RIVERA: I'd like to continue my earlier comments. This is why it is important to compare our salaries to others in Monroe County. These are the same districts we are competing with for the very best teachers. They can top us by several thousand dollars.

CE: I'd think people would want to work in our district because of the challenge.

DR. RIVERA: For young people and families money is an important factor.

Chairwoman Powell: We have gotten somewhat off-topic. I'll give you (Commissioner Elliott) the last word on this and then let's move on to the next question.

The averages of other school districts ... they're getting results. In my mind we have to give salary increases based on performances.

Commissioner Brennan questions/comments

I'm troubled by getting this volume of information this late. We can't be sure of the impact on Central Office. Anybody who was paying attention certainly knew we would not get an increase from the City. We should have a Plan B to the Board sooner. I say that with appreciation and understanding. There are an awful lot of questions I still have. That troubles me. This prevents us from doing what we need to do.

DR. RIVERA: I would be happy to provide all of you with a spreadsheet that shows the actual positions identified. I'll make myself available to answer detailed questions. In a budget of this size, I make decisions on reorganization; this is within my authority and prerogative. I will show those and the impacts; I will lay that out and get to everyone tomorrow.

Chairwoman Powell: The additional revenue was a reasonable expectation given some of the campaign promises. Regarding STAR funding -- in theory this is a rebate to property owners, but the City has kept and used it for themselves, not for taxes or school funding. They have benefitted over the last 10 years considerably without passing on any of that benefit. Taken as a whole, the original placement of additional funds is not entirely out of the blue. It is debatable how often we should receive updates on changes between

the original and final budget. If a 'Plan B' is provided early on will that discourage those who can help from delivering funding? If we show we could do with less, we are guaranteed to have to do with less.

DR. RIVERA: The city revenue was based on campaign promises. President Garcia had a direct conversation with the Mayor. The Mayor was at least very open to an increase. On Friday (April 29) we received an actual letter. The \$26 million Excel grant -- intended by our local legislators to give us flexibility and help balance the budget -- the actual legislation language stipulated we couldn't use it for that. There were elements up in the air at the time; otherwise, we would not be coming back with these adjustments.

TB: It is not my intent to apportion blame. This is a shared escape. I'm a lot less naïve about campaign statements. The City School District is the whipping boy; I'm tired of that. It's time we pushed back a little on that. We have to increase the public's understanding of what we're wrestling with.

Commissioner Thompson: The \$2.5 million in additional revenue is a 'philosophical pushback'. It may have seemed to be, but we are making significant decisions at the final hour. Regarding the city, this has been known for more than a month from the comments of City Council members. It is inconceivable to me that we wouldn't have had some idea that the city was not going to be generous. We are a lot closer on this than it may seem. We need to factor in the Board's need for timely information.

Chairwoman Powell: We are not voting on the budget tonight. We have time to ask more questions and get more comfortable with answers to date.

Commissioner Evans questions/comments:

There was an expectation that the city would make a contribution because they need to. In some way, shape, or form are going to have to. They need to come to the table. There were various meetings with the city that they were open to the idea of additional funding. We just can't expect the state to continue to come back and rescue us. STAR is being misused. Darryl Porter was a big champion of the STAR funding.

Please expanded on the additional Pre-Kindergarten funding.

Vernon Connors: There is \$732,000 in additional aid. We have to increase the pre-k budget by that amount. If we choose not to expand the program with the additional aid we will have to lower revenue.

The budget is always a fluid situation. One thing I'm against is alarming the public prematurely. We want to have substantial discussions, not respond to scare tactics.

Chairwoman Powell: One thought -- the city will fund extensive truancy work but doesn't want to provide additional funding we could use for the Attendance Initiative. We are beyond the point of making recommendations. Political standpoint is a give and take that can be clearly articulated.

DR. RIVERA: I was hoping to see increased funding or funds that could be used for truancy, the Hillside Work Scholarship Program, the Attendance Initiative, dropout prevention, and more. We were never told no. I think that there is potentially grant funding for the Attendance Initiative. We want to see that restored fully in the budget.

Commissioner Elliott: So I will get the information I requested?

DR. RIVERA: It will be provided to all Board members in a special packet tomorrow afternoon.

Adjournment:

Motion by Commissioner Evans, second by Commissioner Thompson. Approved 6-0 at 6:40 p.m. with President Garcia absent.