

# **Rochester Board of Education**

## **Finance Committee Meeting of the Whole**

### **April 28, 2005 at 6:00 p.m.**

#### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Commissioners Bowers, Brown, Evans, Garcia, Porter, Powell and Thompson; Ms. Rohring; Dr. Rivera, Mr. Marini, Mr. Connors, Mr. Robinson, Ms. Carlisle, Ms. Cianca

Commissioner Powell called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

#### **I. Budget Deliberations**

Commissioner Powell stated the purpose of this meeting was to discuss aspects of the program sections of the proposed budget to include Title 1 – revenue side, but she believed the Superintendent had a presentation to start the meeting.

Dr. Rivera said that there was to be no presentation this evening, but there were staff available at the meeting to answer questions regarding Title 1 or about any information that his staff had provided. Information regarding Title 1 was referenced on page 11 of the document provided.

Commissioner Powell said that because there was no specific presentation, she would invite questions from members, going around the room from left to right. She mentioned that in the document received, there were some follow-up questions that the Board anticipated getting written answers for in the next couple of days.

Commissioner Powell noted that there is a third scheduled meeting to deliberate the proposed budget; there will be an additional opportunity for all alibi questions from any part of the proposed budget.

#### **II. BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

Commissioner Garcia asked a question about bilingual education. He asked how particular schools account for expenditures specifically related to bilingual education and materials and could the process be clarified?

Mr. Connors explained that Bilingual Education is largely funded in two ways: It is funded through Title 3 Bilingual Education Grant and there is also some funding in Title 1 which accounts for most spending directed by bilingual education.

Commissioner Evans asked how the District makes the determination what schools receive particular programs, such as the MAP, PAL (Primary Approach to Language) and HOLA programs?

Dr. Rivera stated that one of the things that the Managed Choice Parent Preference Policy called for was not just providing choice for students coming into schools, but that the District would look at providing equity in terms of program availability across zones. His staff has been looking at the different kinds of programs that are in each zone. Every zone will have a MAP center and there should be a two-way Bilingual program in every zone in the city. The District does not currently have one in the Northwest Zone. Part of the District's plan, but not part of this year's budget, calls for the establishment of a two-way Bilingual program in the Northwest zone. The District is working to build equity even as we look at Magnet resources as part of our budget. The Budget Summary provides a description of how those Magnet resources are going to be allocated. The District is looking, for example, to create in each zone Music Centers, so different schools would offer instrumental music. As far as which schools actually get designated as a Music Center, that's a process that sometimes largely depends on percentage of children who might be interested in Music, or availability of space, it could be a program that evolved in a seedling form at a particular school that the District now wants to enhance. There are no hard and fast rules as to which schools are determined for programs.

Mr. Silver replied that in terms of Bilingual programs, next year the District will open a Bilingual Program in the Northwest for transitional students who have not registered in the three in the NE. The District is going to phase one out and move one to the Northwest, so that families can be better served in that zone. He continued by saying that there is a program need for our non-Spanish students who come from other countries in each of our zones. Many of the District's programs that you speak of are programs of legacy, at one time, someone got a grant that did something. For example, the last couple of years, the District has been very successful in getting grants, which provide instruments to some schools. Those schools which now have wonderful new instruments. The same thing happened in some of the bilingual programs where there wasn't one at one time, there was unusual funding and then the funding went away, and the legacy remained. So, sometimes, when you look at the issue right now, it doesn't look like there's a rhyme or reason, but at the time there was.

Commissioner Evans asked as a follow-up to his question, whether there is a long waiting list for the HOLA program.

David Silver responded by saying that Commissioner Powell led a group this year who looked at the popularity of that program and tried to discern whether families were interested in the foreign language offering, sought to just have a foreign language teacher, or wanted a dual language program or wanted to be part of a bilingual program. Three will be available in each zone next year.

Dual-language will be available in 06-07, but there will be foreign language teacher offering in every zone next year, there will be a transitional program in every zone and of course, there is ESOL in every building where there are ESOL children.

Commissioner Evans emphasized that it is his belief that every student should learn another language.

### **III. TEXTBOOKS**

Commissioner Thompson stated that on Page 9 of the initial responses, question 20 says the goal of the initiative for textbooks is to provide a sufficient level of current textbooks for all students. She asked what do we mean by sufficient? Is the expectation of plan to provide one textbook for each student? And then the next paragraph states that it is up to the discretion of the school how they are to allocate those books. What does sufficient mean?

Mr. Robinson stated well, I assume this question is primarily on the secondary level? At least, I'll answer it on the secondary level. On the secondary level, the direction that the principals get is that if the student needs the textbook in order to complete homework or needs the textbook in order to make up work, the principal is directed to buy enough textbooks for that to occur. In some cases, the textbook is not the primary vehicle from which the student is learning the subject, and a teacher uses supplemental resources. In the three years that I have been in this position, I have never had a principal call and ask for an additional allocation for textbooks.

Commissioner Thompson responded by saying that's because they don't hear the parents come to us complaining that their children don't have textbooks to bring home.

Mr. Robinson restated that he has not gotten a lot of phone calls personally nor had a request from a principal. We do have a contingency budget, so if the District receives a phone call from a principal requesting funds for more textbooks, the District complies.

Commissioner Thompson said that it just seems like a matter of course that students should have a textbook to take home rather than it being an exception to the rule and it should be standard procedure. Parents should not have to notify the school that their child needs a textbook. I understand that there are supplemental documents and sources that students use, but if the District is paying money for the textbook, then it seems like that should be or would be the primary source of reference. She continued by saying that it was really hard for her to accept that the District could not make a textbook available and that it's the exception rather than the rule that a student would have one to take home and only when a special request has been made. She mentioned that the QA committee was going to be getting information at the meeting in June that will share best practices across the schools about how they manage to track textbooks and hold the students and families accountable.

Commissioner Thompson summarized by saying that her understanding is that it's optional as to whether or not they even want to provide the textbook.

Dr. Rivera responded by saying all the questions that Commissioner Thompson raised were questions that we've been talking about as we've been gearing up for the QA meeting. It was there where we knew we would have to address what was current practice, what would we do, what could we do going forward and I think we're going to gear up to do that. He continued by saying that we want to get on a regular routine cycle where we are actually replacing books not when it's two or three years too late, but when it's appropriate to replace them and make certain that we have those committees being consistent with the process that we've established for the selection of different textbooks and make sure that we fund sufficient textbooks for all of our schools as a part of that replacement cycle.

Commissioner Thompson emphasized that her question was will there be enough textbooks for each student to take their textbooks home and the response said that there would be sufficient. So that was her question, what does sufficient mean. She said that she was hearing that it doesn't mean that each student will have a book to take home.

Mr. Robinson replied that is not currently the District's policy that every student receive a textbook in every single subject to take home. If that were the policy in secondary schools, we would have to triple, quadruple the allocation for textbooks.

Commissioner Thompson asked do we know how we compare to other school districts? Is that not a relatively common practice for students to have the textbook in each subject or at least each core subject to take home. She concluded by saying that it seems peculiar that the District does not have this policy in place.

Commissioner Garcia added that he was in agreement with Commissioner Thompson, to some degree. He said that it was his understanding after talking to some of the teachers in the district, that they finally got Spanish materials last month and we are only a couple of months from year end. The previous explanation given to him was that some of the materials were actually printed or duplicated internally and that department has slowed down and the materials were delayed. Commissioner Garcia asked if the District was doing anything to make sure that for the next school year teachers who need Spanish or other language materials for students actually are going to have it at the beginning of the school year when they are actually using the material rather than at the end of the school year when they probably no longer need it.

Mr. Robinson asked Commissioner Garcia if he was referring to the Investigations Math adoption? He said the District did have that problem this year and it has been corrected at least for that particular series. He said that it was unique this year because of the new adoption.

Dr. Rivera mentioned that the District also has other textbook selection processes that have been completed or are being completed so that orders can be filled so that we can get the books in by the end of August.

Mr. Robinson responded by saying that those are for Spanish Instruction. He added that he thought some of those that you are referring to are for normal subjects, history, science, social studies, math, that means we instruct in Spanish for our students. Part of our District protocol is that, absolutely, when we adopt a text, the text must be available in Spanish. He emphasized that the District will not adopt a text unless it is available in Spanish. When principals are ordering the numbers of texts that are required for their buildings, they are ordering the text in the language that the child needs.

Commissioner Garcia asked what process does the District have in place for availability on a timely basis, like before the start of school?

Mr. Connors answered by saying that the District started a year ago what we call the Early Bird Special, where we allow principals to spend money in advance in order to purchase books, and will again this year.

Commissioner Garcia added another question related to this issue, to what degree are the individual schools responsible for making sure that this information is available?

Dr. Rivera responded by saying that schools are given a budget based upon the number of students in the building, Principals/schools are responsible for ordering enough supplies to deliver their programs. It is also expected that if they exhaust that money and need extra money, they call one of the SDOs to access money. We have a new doctrine, one textbook per student in that school to take home.

Commissioner Garcia asked who is responsible for making sure that principals have, in fact, requested sufficient material for all students, not just the English-speaking students?

Mr. Robinson said It's mine.

Commissioner Bowers said that the idea that we are now actually planning for textbook replacement is obviously a good thing. But that doesn't dismiss the core of Commissioner Thompson's question, which he wholeheartedly agrees with. If each Principal is given enough money to buy enough books for his or her building, then that ought to translate into books that children can take home. If there are 300 people taking Participation in Government, there's got to be 300 books that can be taken home. The perception does matter here because we're the ones that face our constituents whose assessment of the school is tied to whether their children have books to take home. The District spends millions upon millions of dollars on consultants. He suggested that the District quit spending that money on consultants and put it into textbooks, put it into the children who deserve it. There has to be a rule that says that every child has a book to take home, every Principal will be instructed to provide a

book for every child to take home and if those books have to be replaced then we have to provide that money. Plain and simple-that has to be the priority.

Dr. Rivera responded that the Board can either continue this discussion now or at the Quality Assurance Committee, but it's clearly something that will cause us to revisit our policy and practice. He added that practices have been put in place to try to deal with costs and if the Board were looking at increasing our allocations or reallocating resources or taking away from elsewhere, then it was his opinion that we should continue this discussion at the Quality Assurance meeting.

Commissioner Thompson said that the Committee would have to look at the QA agenda because right now textbooks are scheduled to come to our agenda after the Budget.

Commissioner Porter addressed the issue by saying that first of all what he needed to be able to understand and see is what it would cost for every child to receive a textbook and be able to take it home and then to have a set of books for the classroom. He needed to know what that number is, how much money are we budgeting now? Are we \$500,000 short, or do we need another \$250,000? We need to understand that we are going to need that amount of money. He added that we need to, along with the Superintendent, look at where do we cut costs to cover that if that's going to be a top priority because for years, ever since he's been on this Board, and prior to him being on the Board, there have been complaints in the community from parents that their children don't have enough books. He is running for re-election now and just came from a Committee Meeting. At that Committee meeting, the first thing that came up was why should we give the School District any more money when they can't even buy books for our children? He said that those comments come up at the weirdest venues that one might not hear about, but the Board Members do. He emphasized that the District needs to find out what the cost is going to be to make sure that students have a classroom set of textbooks and a set to take home. He added that the District needs to look at what policies need to be put in place for reimbursement for books that don't come back from students and that we need to find out where we will cut from if this is going to be a priority. This issue needs to be taken care of.

Mr. Robinson stated it would not be a difficult policy to implement in terms of here's the amount you need to make sure that every child has a textbook for every subject, here's your allocation and expenditure for that purpose. We, right now, do not give the schools enough money to do that.

Commissioner Porter was asked to clarify if he meant that every child should have 2 books, one for the classroom and one to take home?

Commissioner Porter said no; each child should have a book to use both at home and in the classroom, but be responsible to ensure it is where it needs to be.

Commissioner Thompson added that maybe it is a few extra in the classroom for the student who forgets it but they don't get to take that second one home.

Marie Cianca replied that at the elementary level, it was easier because you have one class but there was an initial problem this year because of the Math Investigations. Typically elementary schools have plenty of resources for textbooks and principals should have resources available and if they don't, it will be taken care. She concluded by saying that the Committee may really want to change the policy on the secondary level because the elementary level is pretty consistent.

It was noted that textbooks are centrally purchased. Principals are only required to purchase replacement texts.

Commissioner Powell asked as a final follow-up, Dr. Rivera, we're going to receive some figures on what the cost will be and then we can have additional dialogue before we actually act on the Budget.

Dr. Rivera said yes, the District has got a lot a homework to do to look at what those costs are going to be and then, with such a policy or major change we would have to make sure that there is sufficient amount of textbooks available for lost books and books that are not returned, etc. So we've got some homework to do on this one.

Commissioner Powell mentioned that she was not sure that the Committee should do anymore connected with the Budget then to possibly build a larger contingency fund for cases like what Mr. Robinson described—a Principal has an immediate need for textbook replacement and has no more money in his budget. Her observation was that the first year that books are issued, it's a non-issue, there's enough books to go around, but what happens is when the children don't return the books so they get lost. She said that someone referred to a discussion or study about Best Practices and what are principals and teachers doing to recover those books. She added that before we start wholesale replacing missing books, we need to find out how diligent are teachers and principals at getting them back, what remedies are and if its working for one group, why is it not being employed by all groups. She cautioned against a very large expansion of textbook budget at this stage—just food for thought for those who have to make the decision.

Commission Brown said that he suspects that this issue is also made a lot more complex by the fact that scheduling can change the number of books that you need. For example, if you have two English classes that are doing two novels, if they do the novels in different semesters and then switch, it means you only need half as many books and so it is an extraordinarily subtle problem to manage the whole process, and it might be that it's a meat ax approach to buy three times as many books so he agreed with Commissioner Powell in that if our goal is to keep the parents from whining at us about this, which he thinks has been the Board's goal for a long time, we need to apply a much more sophisticated analysis to the problem as to simply buying three times as many books.

Commissioner Thompson urged the Administration to think through all of the scenarios and give thought to the subtleties and the difficulties and the complexities of this issue. The Board is not saying right here and now that we want to have one of each textbook for everybody, which might be what we do wind up saying so do not dismiss it as impossible, but said that's not the decision being made now, the Board is simply asking for more information.

Ms. Carlisle asked if this information was to be presented at QA meeting in June, not in the next three days.

Commissioner Thompson replied that the Board needs this information before the Budget which they vote on May 12<sup>th</sup>. The QA committee was to receive information on the Best Practices that schools employ to track and monitor books and hold students and families accountable.

Ms. Carlisle said that it was their understanding that we are also to provide or propose a district-wide policy on what we would alter to protect textbooks. So there is just a sequencing issue here in conducting the QA that you're asking for which we had already wanted to do in the summer and have moved it up several times and now you would like it moved up prior to May 12<sup>th</sup>?

**ACTION ITEM:**

Dr. Rivera stated that given the discussion here and knowing that there is a desire to potentially impact this year's budget, he'll work offline with his staff. I'll meet with staff and will get together as much information as possible to try to deal with this issue as best we can in the course of the budget. Provide data to BOE re costs and proposal to respond to BOE concerns.

Commissioner Garcia agreed with Commissioner Brown as to the complexity of the issue. He wanted to make clear that his questions were only related to teaching materials provided to teachers so that they could teach the courses. The whole question of textbooks is something that needs to be studied further.

Commissioner Evans departed at 6:38 p.m.

Commissioner Bowers said as an observation that if what he heard is in effect that the Board is being asked to consider approving a budget that does not guarantee a textbook in every subject for every child? But he's sure it's full of a lot of other pet projects that are less fundamental than textbooks. Right now, if what he heard, is indeed correct, that we are not adequately funding our schools so that every student has a full set of textbooks, that will help determine his position on the budget vote. He has to face his constituents. Even though he is not running again, he has six more months to face them. He stressed the importance to have at least some information before the May 12<sup>th</sup> vote.

#### **IV. REVENUE ASSUMPTIONS BACK-UP PLAN**

Commissioner Porter stated that we have three legislative agendas out there that we have already assumed into the budget (Revenue Assumptions) and one of the things that he personally wanted to make sure that's clear is that there must be a backup plan in case those assumptions don't come through. We should have that backup plan ready in case those Revenue Assumptions do not come through in time enough before this budget has to be passed.

Mr. Marini responded by saying that NYS aid is \$2.4 million dollars over what the District assumed in its proposed budget. It does not include the assumption that EPE will be approved. He added that the Superintendent recommends we spend only that \$2.4 million dollar amount, not the \$2.4 plus \$2.1 plus \$1.2. So there is no back up plan because if those bills get passed that will be additional revenue, resources that we are not contemplating spending. Mr. Marini said that they probably won't be approved until end of session, toward the end of June.

Dr. Rivera stated that the question is have we already spent the \$2.something million in EPE that we haven't received yet or the \$1.25M from Nurse reimbursement that we haven't received yet or the Transportation aid and the answer is that the District has not spent that money in the budget. He said that those are revenues that we are not anticipating at this point in time. If they do come in, those monies will be available as a fund balance. What the District is proposing is that the additional spend of 2 million represents the increase that we received in state funding when the budget passed March 31, 2005. Correct?

Mr. Marini confirmed Dr. Rivera's statement.

Dr. Rivera added that he has actually prepared amendments to the Budget. We've talked about Montessori, there have been concerns expressed by this Board about grant writers, about technology, about other areas. He is about 90% completed with the proposed amendment to the budget which he wants to transmit to the Board tomorrow. Dr. Rivera said that what he wants to do now is to dig much deeper into this textbook issue because that may well be another amendment that he might look at advancing early next week.

Commissioner Powell confirmed that the Board is going to see Dr. Rivera's amendments in tomorrow's packet.

Dr. Rivera confirmed that they will be completed by noon and they will be hand delivered to everyone tomorrow evening and that the Board will have them in ample time before May 3<sup>rd</sup>. He added that the one thing that he may not have ready is the textbook discussion which he needs some time with his staff to work on.

#### **Action Item:**

Dr. Rivera to transmit proposed amendments Friday, April 29, 2005.

## **V. ROTC INSTRUCTOR SALARY**

Commissioner Thompson asked if the District is required to pay the salary for the ROTC staff person?

Mr. Connors answered that an agreement was made with the Air Force that they agree to reimburse the District 50% of a base salary. For example, let's say that they consider the base salary for an ROTC Officer to be \$50,000. They will then reimburse the District 50% of that, \$25,000. If our own salary schedule says that the ROTC instructor makes \$60,000, they are still only going to reimburse the District \$25,000.

Commissioner Thompson replied that we are not required to pay except by the agreement that we have reached with the Department of Defense.

Mr. Connors confirmed that yes, we're going to operate the program the way the program is operated by the Department of Defense.

Commissioner Thompson said if we decide not to operate the program, and therefore don't have an agreement, then we don't pay any money for a staff person because we wouldn't have a program in place.

Mr. Robinson replied that those teachers, right now, teach five sections of students. So, if you remove the JROTC program, those students still have to take some class and the District would have to pay for the teacher who teaches that class. If the District eliminated the JROTC Program, we would save about 50% of the cost, but we would still have to make up classes for those students.

Mr. Looby noted that Dr. Bowers asked the question and I researched it several years ago with regards to the agreement with the Department of Defense. If the District were to discontinue the program, it must provide written notice one year in advance of canceling the program.

Commissioner Thompson said that when she raised the question previously she remembers there being a discussion on this issue but it was never revisited in order to decide if we wanted to end the agreement and the practice so that we could then put things in motion to do just that. We never revisited it.

Commissioner Powell said that it is a decision that we should not be making at budget time. It is a decision that should be made well in advance of the Budget cycle.

Commissioner Thompson agreed but added that since it part of the budget and one of the deliberations, it needed to be asked.

Commissioner Porter departed at 6:48 p.m.

**Action Item:**

Follow up discussion on the JROTC program.

**VI. STUDENT SUSPENSIONS**

Commissioner Powell that at the QA committee suspensions were discussed, out of school suspension, with some staff feeling in school suspensions are better than out of school suspensions. She asked Mike Robinson was it in the Budget and the answer was no, there is no FTE set aside specifically for In School Suspension even though we know that's a better option than out of school suspension. She wanted to recap for the Board that there is a statistic of the ratio of how many teachers are issuing the bulk of the suspensions that Mike Robinson shared.

Mike Robinson stated they looked at teacher referrals to the Principal's office, and found that close to 80% of the referrals are coming from 10% of the staff.

Commissioner Powell said that the reason she brought this up in the context of the budget discussion was because she was looking for a specific budget answer but finding none, she found it an interesting topic worthy of our attention that perhaps there are a specific subset of teachers that need some In Service on Classroom Management in order to bring those suspension issues under control. If they are coming from specific teachers, there is a limit to how often it can be an issue of personality conflict before it becomes a classroom management issue and could we not reduce our suspensions dramatically by giving a specific subset of our teachers a bigger tool kit.

Mr. Robinson replied that we have increased focus in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. We have had very good conversations with the Principals because if we can reduce our rate of suspensions in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, we can reduce significantly our suspension rate district-wide. What we are finding is a great conversation with the principals in that when you are in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and you go to school the student basically spends most of the day with one adult whereas in 7<sup>th</sup> grade you start changing classes, and spending time with 7 to 8 different adults. Maybe the District needs to really think about whether we can go from that environment to the other environment after July and August. It's not only a matter of helping staff, it's a matter of helping students in working with a single adult in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 7-8 different adults in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. So its both staff as well as working with transition activity. The Superintendent asked us to look at having a two week orientation for all seventh graders before they actually start the school year.

Commissioner Powell added that if its not too late to influence the budget, that's one area she would like us to focus on and it may not require additional resources but the idea of focusing some in service.

Commissioner Bowers said that it's how we use our current resources whether it be mentors assigned from CIT or professional development and how we target

where the need is when we know the data is right in front of us telling us what the problems are.

Commissioner Garcia added that he was under the impression that the whole suspension issue particularly the high number of 7<sup>th</sup> grade suspensions was going to be studied by someone and that the Board was going to receive a report of some sort.

Ms. Carlisle replied that we distributed the report to Quality Assurance committee because it was requested by QA and that's when you were a QA member. Commissioner Powell has since asked for the report. I will provide reports to all members.

Commissioner Thompson added that as a part of the Program Evaluation Report that we received last night there is an interest and a need in looking at interventions that may not actually be programs but those also need to be evaluated like the in-school suspension, mentoring, etc.

Commissioner Garcia made a comment that some sort of Orientation for 6<sup>th</sup> graders going into 7<sup>th</sup> grade is a good idea and should be implemented as soon as possible.

Commissioner Powell added that we shouldn't pinpoint one school or another if this is a program that makes sense then we should do it with every incoming 7<sup>th</sup> grader.

Commissioner Thompson commented that she was very interested to hear that statistic about 80% of the suspensions may be by 10% of the teachers because last night one of the items that we read in the report was about questions that still need to be pursued; one has to do with whether there are any common characteristics among those teachers who are doing the suspending. She did not think that we had any data to address that but was glad to hear that someone is collecting it and probably it will be further studied in identifying and looking at common characteristics so that we can put together something to help address this.

Commissioner Thompson added that it shouldn't be assumed that because you can identify the 10% of the teachers that they have common characteristics.

Commissioner Powell answered that it could be, it could not. She added that for those of you who were not in the QA meeting we also talked about Time Outs as an alternative to suspensions. It's not that in-school suspensions don't happen, it's just that they are dealt with and accounted for differently. I applaud some of the solutions that are coming up.

Ms. Cianca stated that the District is seeking to move to a more student-centered environments where they expect responsibility not just from students but from adults and students as well. She said that will help to start the

process for Professional Development and not only address Classroom Management but environment and just the whole culture being more responsive to children. She thought that the issue of a number of steps before you reach suspension is always much more helpful. When a student is in in-school suspension or out of school suspension it is really just sort of a holding pattern and so if we have counseling sessions or time out where there is something going on that is trying to relieve the problem which is much more interactive and more effective.

## **VII. Next Meeting – May 3, 2005 at 6:00 p.m.**

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Brown, Seconded by Commissioner Bowers. Adopted 5-0 with Commissioners Evans and Porter absent at 7:02 p.m.