

**ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee Meeting**  
**August 18, 2015**

**MINUTES**

**Attending**

Commissioners - Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott (Chair), Commissioner Mary Adams, Commissioner Melisza Campos, and Commissioner Malik Evans

CIGR Parent Representative – Felix Jacobs

District Staff - Dr. Christiana Otuwa (Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning) and Chip Partner (Chief Communications Officer)

Board Staff –Debra Flanagan and Mia Johnson

Board Vice President Elliott called the meeting to order at 6:01PM.

**I. Review Minutes of May 19, 2015 and June 16, 2015 CIGR Meetings**

Motion by Vice President Elliott to approve the minutes of May 19, 2015 and June 16, 2015 of the CIGR Meetings. Adopted 3-0, with concurrence of the Parent Representative.

**II. Discuss Developing a Framework for Implementing a Communications Plan**

Vice President Elliott discussed the need for a formalized communications plan on the Board level in order for the Board to be more into and able to inform the community. She described a role of the Board is to explain education issues and changes in common ways for the community to understand in order to transform the children and the community.

Vice President Elliott commended Board Staff Debra Flanagan for drafting a Rochester Board of Education Communications Plan. As the plan is developed and finalized, it is hoped that this plan can be utilized by future Rochester Boards of Education.

Vice President Elliott suggested programming on local access television or radio to discuss various issues to inform the community in order to help them make the right decisions on behalf of the children. Vice President Elliott stated that she will be doing the welcome for the August graduation and will be contacting Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning Dr. Christiana Otuwa to fill in the data regarding what is needed to be career and college ready. Vice President Elliott asserted that the community needs to have such information to help make decisions for their children and the District has not done a good job in that. She stated that because the Board is elected by the people, the Board can help relay such messages; however, understanding that the members of the Board is not equipped to

address all stakeholders in the plan and will need the assistance of the District's departments and offices, including the Office of Parent Engagement.

Chief Communications Officer Chip Partner stated that the District is doing great work but could do more to explain the Action Plan, policies, expectations, and priorities in simple terms and home languages. Mr. Partner described a need to create simpler tools that could be used by both the District staff and the Board. Mr. Partner suggested creating simple one page documents. Vice President Elliott suggested posters in the barbershops and beauty salons. Mr. Partner stated the Board can express a need to disseminate information on a topic to the community funneled through the Superintendent, and his office would create a tool that can be used by the Administration and the Board so there would be common talking points on the topics.

Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning Dr. Otuwa described meetings with the Office of Parent Engagement Coordinator Willie Robinson and Parent Advisory Council Chair Ericka Simmons about ways to engage parents as partners into the curriculum and what is happening in the classroom in terms of teaching and learning. Dr. Otuwa stated that she would ask the members of the curriculum council if parents can be involved. Dr. Otuwa also stressed the importance of providing parents with the information they need in languages they can understand. She suggested sending letters homes in simple language and terms written on a 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade level to ensure that they are understandable to all.

CIGR Parent Representative Felix Jacobs commented that the Parent Connect system is underutilized and expressed concern about not having access to his son's last report card through the Parent Connect system thus limiting his ability to take steps to improve his child's academic performance or to enroll him in a summer program. He stated that Parent Connect is not utilized as an effective means to communicate with parents and the need to add additional features to the Parent Connect system. Dr. Otuwa responded that there have been brainstorming sessions to strategize ways to use Parent Connect as a tool to engage schools.

Commissioner Campos stated that the draft Rochester Board of Education Communications Plan is a comprehensive plan and suggested selecting two activities per a stakeholder group as a good start. Mr. Partner responded that that approach is a good idea. He questioned how such a plan integrates with what the Administration is currently doing and if both the Administration and the Board's Communications Plans are aligned with common tools. Vice President Elliott expressed a concern about this approach, and desires to address and respond to the needs of the community which may be different from what the District may want to communicate. She stated that she wanted to ensure that the community's needs are addressed in the Communications Plan because the Commissioners and the Parent Representative are in the community hearing from various stakeholders about their issues.

Mr. Partner asked if there is a formal channel including emailing the Superintendent if a community need arises or if there needs to be a more formal structure. Vice President Elliott stated that there needs to be a more formal structure to ensure that all are on the same page and there is an increase of the impact when it is done collectively with the ultimate outcome of giving parents the information they need to make better decisions for our students. She

suggested that the formation of work groups to flush out the work plan. She provided the examples of talking about Common Core or graduating from high school career and college ready on local access television. She stated that it is important for the Board to have such conversations with the people because they are who the community trusts. She expressed that the Board has not done a good job communicating with the community collectively and effectively, but there is a need to do it proactively and as a strategic plan to ensure that the community understands what is occurring.

Mr. Partner offered the resources of the Communications Department including the television studio, the capability to record videos and vignettes, video on demand, and the YouTube channel. He suggested segments including ways to explain what third grade math is. Vice President Elliott concurred and agreed that it was a great idea. She stated that most parents do not know the curriculum to help their children. Mr. Partner did not want to overpromise or commit other District staff to create additional curricula resources and materials, but stated that they have the resources of the studio, the creation of the Commissioner's Corner, and can create access to Kahn Academy and EngageNY. Vice President Elliott stated that the City Council has a television format and that the Board may want to consider doing something similar.

Vice President Elliott stated that she would like to create sub-groups to plan how and what they want to do for the upcoming school year. She expressed that there is a need to get information about receivership into the community, what that means, and what is the role of the community engagement team. She stated that if the Communications Plan is done right and create ways to explain issues that are more understandable, then more students and parents will become involved.

Mr. Partner stated that the audiences that are important to reach include parents and alumni, but the focus on staff, students, and direct family communication impacts that communication about changes and information to those audiences.

Commissioner Adams expressed that it would be useful for the Board could convey to parents and the community the Board's value for parents, community members, older students, and alumni to drive changes and have full recognition of the potential power that have that is not asserted based on the history of the lack of trust, information, access, and knowledge. She expressed that Vice President Elliott brining the Communications Plan up would be a great opportunity to demonstrate the Board's valuing and to convey the sense of importance for parents taking it to the next level. She described the Office of Parent Engagement's role is to make sure that school based planning teams are constituted properly and meeting, but not to recognize their full power. Vice President Elliott expressed her lack of confidence in school based planning teams and Commissioner Adams concurred stating that only one or two school based planning teams in the District may be working correlating with the high achieving schools. Commissioner Adams asked if the Communications Plan can focus on promoting student and parent leadership. Vice President Elliott expressed a need to talk offline with Commissioner Adams because she did not understand how the concept would work with the Board going into the community.

Vice President Elliott asked Mr. Partner how his office could support the type of endeavors that were brainstormed on the plan. Using the Public Information Program policy

deliverable required by the Policy Committee, Mr. Partner described the Communications Office staffing and the role of the office to support every schools' media and marketing with no budget. He also described advertising schools and programs through grants. Vice President Elliott asked if such advertising makes a difference. Mr. Partner responded that it does make a difference and described the free/earned media that Board President Van White receives from WDKX creates phone calls and reaches a large audience. Vice President Elliott asked how effective the Pre-K advertising has been since it is played so often. Mr. Partner responded that there is a requirement of the grant to spend a certain amount on marketing and the full day Pre-K option markets itself.

Vice President Elliott expressed an experience of constant change within the District and questioned how the Communications Plan could stay on top what is occurring internally within the District. Vice President Elliott stated that the Board could be relaying information to the community not realizing it had changed. Mr. Partner stated the intersection point between the Board, Superintendent, and Deputy Superintendents who attend these forums. Mr. Partner described how with principal announcements and policy announcements he tries to make sure that there is a structure where the Board hears it first. Vice President Elliott provided the example of Charlotte High School closing and not closing, and the receivership funding allocated to Charlotte High School. Vice President Elliott asked for advice on how the Board could be prepared to reposition with issues as such. Mr. Partner stated the position of the Administration and the Superintendent has been consistent that there is a two year plan to close outlined in a confidential memo from the Superintendent to the Board and that with receivership it is not closing immediately and will be open with a small group of student at Charlotte High School. Vice President Elliott stated that information switches and not communicated effectively even to the Board so the Board can communicate it to the community. Vice President Elliott suggested having subsequent meetings to talk about if there are changes, how can the Board communicate it to the community. Mr. Partner suggested that the topic of Charlotte High School may be best discussed in an Executive Session with the Superintendent. Vice President Elliott questioned that if the Board does not have the clear information or it is unknown, should they send parents to the Superintendent. Vice President Elliott further inquired for other topics including changes on the state level, how can the Board ensure that the community is informed of such changes. Vice President Elliott requested a meeting offline with Mr. Partner as the work groups form to develop this plan. Mr. Partner agreed to meet offline and stated that the Board should also be receiving the letters sent home regarding receivership or other changes. Vice President Elliott expressed that she would like the information to go beyond the Board to informing the community in places and venues where they gather.

Vice President Elliott provided an example of a community outreach event hosted by Commissioner Campos. Vice President Elliott would like to conduct similar events twice a year. Commissioner Campos stated that 75 people attended the three events, and it was recommended to have student performances or recognitions simultaneously to have parents in attendance to make it a place of information and celebration.

Commissioner Campos asked what will be two main vehicles for each stakeholders and what will be the key messages for this year. Commissioner Campos commended the Communications Office for the announcement of the principal at School #23. Commissioner Campos suggested the use of Facebook for all the schools to put information on because it is

an easy way to inform parents. Commissioner Campos asked Mr. Partner if there is an audit of what schools are using social media to inform parents. Mr. Partner stated that they do not audit Facebook use and he described in his response to the Policy Committee that they are most behind in leveraging social media and the that policy states that employees do not use social media. He also stated that there are District Twitter and Facebook accounts and that every principal is authorized to have one. Vice President Elliott stated that she is friends with the District on Facebook and believes she does not receive as many posts as she should be receiving. Commissioner Campos responded that Facebook's newsfeed is based on whose information the user looks at the most. Mr. Partner stated that they are posting more than once a week. Vice President Elliott suggested that the information on career and college readiness and similar topics should be posted on the Facebook page. Dr. Otuwa suggested simplifying the issues that teaching and learning face and sharing information where people are.

Vice President Elliott invited Mr. Partner to participate in planning sessions on the Communications Plan. Mr. Partner agreed and suggested identifying 2-3 topics and talking points to explain for parents including attendance, behavior, course completion, and reading at home

Mr. Jacobs asked Mr. Partner if he could share Public Information Program policy deliverable with the Parent Advisory Council. Mr. Partner stated that he was not sure if it had to be approved by the Policy Committee first.

Vice President Elliott stated that she will work with Board Staff Mia Johnson to discuss follow-up steps.

### **III. Receivership Forums**

Vice President Elliott suggested conducting forums on receivership in the community. Commissioner Adams stated that she conducted a receivership forum for the Southwest Common Council and the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward's Schools Committee at the Arnett Library with a small turnout of 12 people in attendance. The attendees thought it was helpful and they were concerned about the community engagement component at School #44 and how the community can help boost a formal parent teacher organization that is connected to the receivership process. Vice President Elliott asked if the attendees understood what receivership meant and what it hopes to accomplish. Commissioner Adams believed the group understood better after the meeting based on the feedback.

Vice President Elliott stated that she wants to do more planning on receivership forums at another meeting through email because there will not be a CIGR meeting next month because of the special meeting.

### **IV. Miscellaneous**

Vice President Elliott reminded the Commissioners to think about what the Legislative Agenda will be for the next school year and to note areas to advocate on the state level. She stated that some of the Commissioners will be attending a conference and the lobbying effort in February. She stated that the Code of Conduct will be discussed at the August Policy

Committee, but hope to have the Code of Conduct presented in its draft format at the CIGR meeting in October. She stated that the legislative updates are attached to the agenda for review and asked if there are any on federal or state level to advocate.

**Motion** by Vice President Elliott to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Adams. **Adopted 3-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 6:45PM.