

# ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

## Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee Meeting

January 13, 2015

### MINUTES

**Attending:** Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott (Chair); Commissioners Adams and Campos (arrived 6:06PM).

Parent Representatives: Felix Jacobs

District Staff: Adele Bovard, Deputy Superintendent for Administration; Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning; Ed Lopez-Soto, General Counsel (arrived 6:38PM)

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Board Vice President Elliott called the meeting to order at 6:00PM.

#### **I. Review of the Minutes of the October 14, 2014 CIGR Meeting and the November 15, 2014 Legislative Breakfast**

**Motion** by Commissioner Adams to approve the minutes of the October 14, 2014 CIGR meeting and the November 15, 2014 Legislative Breakfast. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

#### **II. Feedback from the November 15, 2014 Legislative Breakfast**

Commissioner Elliott requested feedback from the members of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee regarding the Legislative Breakfast held on November 15, 2014.

Commissioner Adams commented that she thought the Legislative Breakfast went well and involved a productive discussion.

Felix Jacobs asserted that too much time was spent discussing early childhood education at the expense of other important issues, such as students who are over age and under-credited. He noted that he has scheduled meetings with NYS Assemblyman Gantt and NYS Senator Robach to discuss these concerns. Mr. Jacobs emphasized the importance of involving young people on a career track if their future plans do not consist of attending college. He pointed out the serious problems that arise in the Rochester community when these young people are not engaged in working toward a goal or purpose.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she would like to review the discussion from the Legislative Breakfast in terms of informing possible updates to the Legislative Agenda.

## **Federal:**

1. Monitor the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and advocate as appropriate for features and elements of concern to the District (e.g., accountability, performance management).

Commissioner Elliott reported discussing reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) with representatives from U.S. Congresswoman Slaughter's office and U.S. Senator Gillibrand's office at the Legislative Breakfast. She stated that ESEA reauthorization may not be beneficial to the District, since Republicans now control both houses of the legislature. Commissioner Elliott asserted that legislation introduced in Congress to reauthorize ESEA will have to be monitored closely to examine the potential impact at the state and local level.

2. Revisions to NCLB should allow more time for instruction of English-Language Learner (ELL) students before being required to take mandatory ELA exams.

Commissioner Elliott stated that the Legislative Breakfast included discussion of obtaining a waiver to federal ESEA requirements to allow English-language learners in New York to have additional time before being mandated to take ELA assessments. In addition, the waiver would allow these students to take an alternative assessment to measure English-language development, rather than being required to take the standard ELA exam. She added that the representative from Senator Gillibrand's office offered to assist the District in navigating the federal waiver process.

### **Action Item: Debra Flanagan will prepare a list of items from the November 15, 2014 Legislative Breakfast that require follow-up action.**

3. Advocate for federal education grants to New York State and to the Rochester City School District.

Commissioner Elliott noted that the representative from Congresswoman Slaughter's office had discussed the "All Children Are Equal" bill, which would provide federal funding to schools. She inquired whether the funding under this legislation is the same as the \$1.9M per school provided to promote school integration. Adele Bovard confirmed that the "All Children Are Equal" legislation has been approved and a series of grants has been issued. She explained that the Act provides federal funding to promote school integration, specifically for building a system in a school to attract suburban students. Ms. Bovard notes that this is a competitive grant award available for up to \$1.9M per school for three schools in the Rochester City School District. She stated that the federal grant funds are funneled through the state, and the NYS Education Department has not yet issued guidelines for the grant applications. Ms. Bovard reported that meetings have been held in the District to discuss options for use of the grant funds and to identify the three schools to participate.

In terms of advocacy at the federal level, Commissioner Campos reported that Commissioners Evans, Powell and White will attend the National School Board Association conference and Federal Relations Network meeting at the end of January.

## **New York State:**

### 1. Increase funding for Universal Pre-Kindergarten programs:

- Provide the flexibility to increase the program to full-day services for three-year-old children; and
- Continue to advocate for permanent, stable funding for full-day pre-kindergarten.

Commissioner Elliott stated that the discussion in the Legislative Breakfast supported advocating for sustained funding for PreK programs and promoting early childhood education, particularly the inclusion of three-year-old children in these programs. She reported that considerable focus was on the significance of early childhood education from birth, and ongoing communication with the Mayor's office will be important to learn how this initiative will be implemented.

Commissioner Elliott described the report on the Mayor's Early Childhood Initiative as indicating that children in Rochester are already significantly behind their peers when entering PreK programs. She explained that the report indicates that delays are so substantial that these children are not prepared for primary or secondary education, even after completing the PreK program. Commissioner Elliott pointed out that RCSD data seem to contradict these findings, indicating that the children completing the District's PreK program are on target and ready for primary education.

Dr. Otuwa stated that the Brigance Screening Tool was used at the beginning of the year to assess the readiness of children having completed the District PreK program to enter kindergarten. She reported that this screening showed that children had made good use of the PreK program and were performing better than expected upon entry into kindergarten.

Commissioner Elliott commented that this is the reason for confusion about the apparent discrepancy between the District's data and the findings of the Mayor's report.

Dr. Otuwa clarified that the students entering kindergarten who have completed the RCSD PreK program are performing better than expected based on her experience, although they are not performing on grade level. She stated that the results of the NWEA assessment will be more informative because it is much more detailed and comprehensive than the Brigance Screening Tool.

Commissioner Campos reported that RECAP data from the Children's Institute from last year note that children completing the RCSD PreK program are realizing tremendous gains, but only 42-48% are ready for kindergarten in terms of their social/emotional and academic development.

Dr. Otuwa noted that the trajectory in terms of developmental and academic achievement from PreK to kindergarten is relatively flat, but reminded the Committee that the universal PreK program just began one year ago.

Mr. Jacobs pointed out that the Director of Early Childhood Education has made a distinction between social/emotional readiness and academic readiness to advance at the

PreK and kindergarten level. He contended that more detailed, precise data is needed to pinpoint the specific deficits for students at this level.

Dr. Otuwa stated that the District is considering creating a transition period between PreK and kindergarten to assist and support young students.

Commissioner Adams noted that rich data is provided through RECAP, including social/emotional and academic readiness to advance into the primary grades. She reported that one of the staff members in the Accountability Office (Andy McGowan) has a depth of knowledge about this system and the data, including specific indicators that are highly correlated to later educational performance and achievement (e.g. incarceration of a parent).

Commissioner Adams contended that while it is critical to continue the momentum with students from PreK to kindergarten, it is also critical to continue to support parents through this transition. Commissioner Adams advocated for continuing the Parent Group Leader Program from PreK into kindergarten and the early grades. She discussed the importance of this program in supporting and assisting parents to become strong advocates for their children and to establish a sense of community, thereby also promoting engagement in their child's education. Commissioner Adams stated that the District performs well in the PreK program, but this does not continue into kindergarten and elementary grades. She also pointed out that an evaluation should be conducted to examine the degree of continuity between PreK and kindergarten, particularly with regard to the supports provided.

Commissioner Elliott noted that she discussed this issue with the Executive Director of the Baden Street Settlement, who stated that the PreK students served in the program are ready for kindergarten in the District. She stated that she doesn't know the extent to which the difference in the Baden Street Settlement is due to wraparound services, which may enhance student performance and attainment in PreK. Commissioner Elliott emphasized the need to support parent choice and allow greater flexibility in programming.

Dr. Otuwa reported that the District will conduct a School Choice Expo for PreK and kindergarten students on Saturday, February 7, 2015.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether the Board should advocate for funding for universal PreK (UPK) or for early childhood education for children prior to the age of three, particularly in light of the apparent delays that children continue to experience after completing the PreK program.

Ms. Bovard discussed the importance of beginning education before the age of four to help children develop on grade level. She explained that beginning education earlier in a child's life makes later transitions much easier and boosts the child's confidence in learning. Ms. Bovard recommended advocating for increased funding from the County, particularly for Special Education preschool because existing funding is inadequate. She added that United Way is currently developing a blueprint for their funding priorities, which include after-school, summer school, and innovative programming. Ms. Bovard reported that she contacted the United Way to discuss the possibility of supporting early intervention and

parent support, emphasizing the importance of conducting these types of community conversations.

Commissioner Elliott recommended changing this item on the Legislative Agenda to state that funding for UPK should be sustainable, since the State has provided additional funding for these programs in recent years.

Commissioner Adams reported that the PreK program that the District had for three-year-old children has been dismantled. Dr. Otuwa confirmed that this program has been discontinued, except for at the Montessori School No. 53.

Commissioner Campos inquired whether the rationale for discontinuing the program for younger children was to ensure space and opportunity for four-year-old children. Dr. Otuwa responded that this decision was based on funding and consideration of the way in which District resources should be allocated. She stated that development of the 2015-16 RCSD budget will focus on maintaining the existing PreK program and the District's successes, while ensuring accountability.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the possibility of obtaining funding for PreK programs from the County. Ms. Bovard replied that the State provides these funds, but the County supports early intervention programs for children with special needs. She pointed out that the early intervention program is excellent, but under-funded.

Commissioner Elliott asserted that the District's reduction in PreK programs seems to argue for financial support from the County, but the County Executive has reduced funding for preschool and child care subsidies. She noted that this issue may need to be discussed in the 3-on-3-on-3 meetings with County representatives. Ms. Bovard commented that this is a community conversation with respect to funding from one source being replaced with support from another source, as these programs are critical for children in Rochester.

Commissioner Campos pointed out that this discussion seems to reflect a decision to prioritize funding for 4-year-old children to obtain at least some PreK exposure, rather than extending PreK to 3-year-old children to have two years of PreK experience. Dr. Otuwa confirmed that these are the priorities in the District, given current resource constraints.

## 2. Provide additional funding for K-3 reading teachers.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the possibility of obtaining additional NYS funding to support more reading teachers in the District, which is a critical priority. Ms. Bovard replied that the State allows the District to use some federal Title I funding for reading teachers, but advocacy efforts can certainly focus on increasing the amount of NYS Foundation Aid to fund District priorities. She reported that RCSD currently has 16.0FTE of reading teachers, and would like a minimum of 1.0FTE in each of the K-8 schools. Dr. Otuwa added that consideration is also being given to having reading teachers at the secondary level, particularly in priority schools.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether 1.0FTE for reading teachers per school would be sufficient to realize the substantial gains in literacy needed among RCSD students. Dr. Otuwa responded that this level of staffing for reading teachers is not enough, and 3-4FTE are actually needed per school. She stated that 1.0FTE for reading teachers is a minimal level given the need to balance among funding priorities.

Ms. Bovard elaborated that the draft proposed 2015-16 RCSD budget includes \$15M for the Superintendent's priorities, which includes 1.0FTE for reading teachers in each of the K-6 and K-8 schools, additional instruction time, and improving instruction in the District. Dr. Otuwa reported that adding 1.0FTE to the current 16.0 of reading teachers would result in a total of over 40FTE in the District, representing a substantial increase.

Commissioner Elliott contended that more reading teachers are needed in order to be effective in assisting students to read on grade level and to promote literacy in the District.

Mr. Jacobs inquired whether consideration has been given to utilizing student teachers from local colleges and universities to assist in this literacy effort. Dr. Otuwa reported that the District is coordinating with local colleges and universities to offer opportunities for student teachers to gain experience and to assist in the classroom in all RCSD schools.

Commissioner Elliott requested information of the number of teachers in the District who are certified reading teachers, but are not currently teaching in this capacity.

**Action Item: Ms. Bovard and Dr. Otuwa will provide data to the members of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee of the number of District teachers who are certified reading teachers, but not currently working in this capacity.**

3. Increase the District's school year calendar from 180 to 200 days and provide necessary funding increases.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether the item regarding increasing the school year from 180 to 200 days should be retained on the Legislative Agenda.

Commissioner Adams stated that she thought that there had been a consensus to support current efforts for extended day programs and summer school, rather than to support a longer school year.

**Action Item: Ms. Flanagan will remove the item regarding lengthening the school year from 180 to 200 days from the Legislative Agenda.**

4. Raise the age for compulsory education to 18 in the Rochester City School District and state-wide.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she would like to continue to advocate for raising the age to 18 for compulsory education in New York. She emphasized the importance of ensuring the maximum effort and exposure to education for students before they are allowed to drop out of school.

Commissioner Elliott recalled that at the Legislative Breakfast, City Council Vice President Dana Miller discussed the importance of career and technical education programs (CTE) in engaging and preparing students for career pathways other than college. She expressed the hope that the consolidation of the Edison campus and enhanced CTE programming in the District will help reduce the number of students dropping out of school.

5. Obtain permanent, adequate funding for school health services; permanent ability to access, partner with, and/or contract with the full range of health care providers, insurers, and technological assets of the community, expressly including, but not limited to BOCES.

Commissioner Elliott noted that NYS Assemblyman Gantt sponsored the “Integrated Health Services for Fiscally Dependent School Districts Act”, and inquired whether this is the same as the item on the Legislative Agenda to provide permanent, adequate funding for school health services. Ed Lopez-Soto confirmed that this bill would provide a permanent and adequate source of funding for school health services, noting that NYS Assemblyman Gantt was instrumental in obtaining an additional \$1.2M for RCSD to cover the shortfall last year due to the State’s failure to increase funding on an annual basis. He reported that this legislation would provide a permanent basis for annual increases in funding for student health services to keep pace with these rising costs.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that subsidies would be provided to RCSD for the cost of school health services retroactive to 2004, and asked for an estimate of this funding. Mr. Lopez-Soto explained that the County decided to discontinue funding for RCSD school health services in 2004, and the Rochester Area Community Foundation provided financial support for these services for one year. He added that the State then determined to provide the funding that had been discontinued by Monroe County, but these funding levels remained static over the years and failed to cover the rising cost of health care services. Mr. Lopez-Soto estimated that the District would receive a total of \$1-2M in subsidies to cover these funding gaps from 2004 to the present.

6. Restore the original NYS Foundation Aid formula to increase funding to enable school districts to meet the needs of high-need students. Funding under the Contract for Excellence has been frozen at the same level for years, and the Deficit Reduction Assessment (DRA) has reduced funding even further.

Commissioner Elliott asked for recommendations regarding advocating to restore the original NYS Foundation Aid formula, particularly in light of the additional funding available to the State at this point. Ms. Bovard replied that the focus should be on the way in which NYS funds are allowed to be used by school districts. She asserted that the Governor has a way of presenting information to make it appear as though school districts will receive additional funding, but typically the funding is in the form of categorical grants that must be used for specific purposes and/or competitive grants that are only awarded to successful applicants. Ms. Bovard noted that these forms of funding are limited and unsustainable. For these reasons, she supported advocating for increased NYS Foundation Aid, which is sustainable.

7. Advocate for the District to obtain additional NYS grant funding.
8. Flexible NYS Transportation Aid to allow the District to obtain reimbursement for transporting students residing within 0.5 miles of their school, particularly for students in the earlier grades.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the status of the transportation bill to allow RCSD to obtain reimbursement for transporting students who live more than 0.5 miles from their school. Ms. Flanagan pointed out that the bill introduced this month in the NYS legislature is different from the proposed legislation in the previous session. She noted that the current bill before the legislature is to allow RCSD to increase transportation services on a pilot basis for five years, beginning with students in grades K-3 in the 2016-17 school year and expanding to grades K-6 in the 2017-18 school year.

Mr. Lopez-Soto noted that previous bills have been supported by one of the two State legislative bodies, but not by both at the same time. He stated that despite approval by the NYS Senate last year, the bill was held up because of the controversy surrounding the Facilities Modernization Program (FMP) legislation. Mr. Lopez-Soto reported that NYS Assemblyman Gantt is prepared to advocate wholeheartedly for this transportation legislation.

Mr. Lopez-Soto explained that the intent of the current bill is to begin with one school and provide bus loops through the neighborhood to encourage parents to choose their neighborhood school. He noted that the pilot project at one school will be used to demonstrate to the State that this transportation plan will actually realize a cost savings. Mr. Lopez-Soto added that at least 50% of the parents in the District will need to choose their neighborhood school to realize these cost savings.

Commissioner Elliott inquired as to how these anticipated cost savings will be accounted for in the 2015-16 RCSD budget. Mr. Lopez-Soto replied that the legislation has not yet been approved to conduct the pilot project, so any anticipated savings will not be included in the 2015-16 budget.

Commissioner Adams contended that significant improvements are needed in student placement because she personally has had to counsel quite a few families who have been disrupted by placement decisions. Ms. Bovard advised Commissioner Adams to meet with her and the Director of Student Placement, Barbara Goldammer, to discuss these concerns.

Commissioner Elliott discussed the importance of focusing on infrastructure issues in terms of student placement, school choice and transportation to improve internal coordination of these functions and to simplify processes for parents. Mr. Lopez-Soto replied that the District has been planning for these improvements, noting that all of the modernization efforts under the FMP are based on parents choosing neighborhood schools. He asserted that increased selection of neighborhood schools will not only result in transportation cost savings, but also improve services to students and families. Mr. Lopez-Soto also encouraged Committee members to report concerns to RCSD staff to enable action to be taken before the problem escalates.

Commissioner Campos expressed concern that students attending RCSD PreK programs are given preference for entry into kindergarten over students who reside in the neighborhood. She stated that she has heard of numerous problems with student placement in the District since the departure of the previous director, Vicky Ramos.

Commissioner Adams contended that the problems regarding student placement predate Vicky Ramos' directorship, and have been an ongoing concern throughout her tenure on the Board.

Commissioner Elliott asserted that these issues have to be addressed and priority given to parents and students in District practices – not just on paper. She stated that she would give the District a D- in this regard.

Commissioner Elliott reported that she will attend a 3-on-3-on-3 meeting tomorrow with City Council and members of the Monroe County legislature. She stated that additional meetings may need to be held with County legislators regarding ways to promote the Legislative Agenda at this level.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the specific schools to be renovated in Phase 2 of the FMP. Mr. Lopez-Soto explained that the Phase 2 plan could not be developed until the legislation was approved and the Board and the City had elected their leaders. Now that this has been accomplished, he stated that a Request for Proposal (RFP) can be prepared to develop the plan for Phase 2, specifying the sequence of work on schools and projects. Mr. Lopez-Soto offered to provide a list of the schools to be renovated in Phase 2 to the Committee members.

**Action Item: Mr. Lopez-Soto will provide a list of the schools to be modernized in Phase 2 of the Facilities Modernization Program (FMP) to the members of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee.**

Mr. Lopez-Soto briefly discussed planning for the Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire a Project Manager for Phase 2 of the FMP and for preparation of the comprehensive plan for this phase. He noted that the selection of the Project Manager must be approved by the Mayor and the Superintendent, or a new RFP will have to be issued. Given the implications of a significant delay in initiating Phase 2, Mr. Lopez-Soto stated that there is pressure to ensure that this selection process proceeds carefully.

9. Provide NYS funding to ensure the sustainability of expanded day and summer school programs.
10. Eliminate high-stakes testing.

**Monroe County:**

1. Support the work and goals of the 3-on-3-on-3 Task Force collaboration of RCSD, Monroe County, and the City of Rochester:
  - Collaborative approach to youth intervention;

- Research options for information-sharing;
- Develop indicators to alert District, County and City staff to potential problems; and
- Recommend paths for intervention.

2. Use of Telemedicine, Benefits and Potential Impact on Student Attendance

3. Public Assistance Benefits: eligibility for benefits and student attendance in the District

**City of Rochester:**

1. District – City collaboration on appropriate initiatives, including:

- The Facilities Modernization Program
- The Truancy Program
- Early Childhood Education Initiative
- Additional items as determined or developed by the 3-on-3-on-3 Task Force

2. Work to ensure that the Maintenance of Effort by New York State is enacted as envisioned at \$119.1 million per year.

**Action Item: Ms. Flanagan will revise the Legislative Agenda based on the recommendations presented in this meeting. The revised Legislative Agenda will be presented in the February 17, 2015 CIGR meeting for review, with the intent to advance to the full Board for approval.**

**III. Discuss goals for the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee for 2015**

Commissioner Elliott requested Committee members to consider goals for 2015 to present and discuss in the February 17, 2015 CIGR meeting. She proposed that one of the goals be to develop a Community Action Plan to improve communications with parents and the larger Rochester community with respect to issues important to education (e.g. early childhood education).

**IV. Miscellaneous**

Commissioner Elliott announced that she will speak with staff in the Spencerport School District about the Urban – Suburban program. She stated that she plans to discuss data indicating that RCSD students perform as well as students in suburban districts when given the opportunity.

Mr. Lopez-Soto reported that Rochester Police Chief Ciminelli would like to address the members of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee regarding his concerns about the proposed agreement for School Resource Officers (SROs). He stated that if there is no agreement by the next CIGR meeting on February 17<sup>th</sup>, the Police Chief would like to attend the meeting to present his concerns.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she spoke with the Police Chief earlier today to learn of his specific concerns regarding this agreement.

**Motion** by Commissioner Campos to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Adams.

Meeting adjourned at 7:05PM.

**Next CIGR Meeting: Tuesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00PM**