

# ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

## Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee Meeting

March 11, 2014

### MINUTES

**Attending:** Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott (Chair); Commissioner Mary Adams; Commissioner Melisza Campos absent. Parent Representative: Felix Jacobs.

District Staff: Ed Lopez-Soto, General Counsel; Walter Larkin, Executive Director of the LyncX Academy; Bryant Cromartie, Assistant Principal; Megan Brady, Program Administrator; Jacob Scott, Counselor; Dr. Gaither, Teacher on Assignment; Norm Strothers, Home School Assistant; Lawanda Brown, Science Teacher; Bakahri Hymes-Young, PM School Teacher; Roxanne Carey, Special Education Teacher; and four students currently enrolled in the LyncX Academy.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Board Vice President Elliott convened the meeting at 6:29PM.

#### **I. Review and Approve Minutes of December 10, 2013 and January 14, 2014 Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee Meetings**

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2013 Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Adams. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to approve the minutes of the January 14, 2014 Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Adams. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

#### **II. Presentation regarding the LyncX Academy**

Commissioner Elliott noted that the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee has been examining student suspension policies and practices, and the impact on students in terms of their academic achievement and ability to compete in a global economy. She stated that the Committee has found that some students have been suspended inappropriately and kept out of school for lengthy periods of time, which has compromised their educational progress.

Commissioner Elliott explained that the members of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee invited staff from the LyncX Academy to this evening's meeting, and expressed interest in learning about the ways in which this program is supporting students' growth and development.

Mr. Cromartie reported that the LyncX Academy currently has 242 students enrolled, but enrollment fluctuates according to referrals and discharges from the five different programs at the Academy:

- Youth in Transition
- NorthSTAR
- Long-Term Suspension
- PM School
- AM School (LyncX Academy)

Mr. Cromartie recalled that the LyncX Academy began the 2013-14 school year with 150 students, including students who were continuing on long-term suspension from the previous year.

Mr. Larkin stated that the NorthSTAR program has 39 students enrolled, and these students typically stay in the program throughout the school year. He explained that the Youth in Transition program serves students being discharged from a variety of facilities, including Hillside and the School of Hope, to assist with their return to school and to provide needed supports to these students. Mr. Larkin reported that approximately 700 students have been in the long-term suspension program at the LyncX Academy so far this school year. He noted that the number of students in long-term suspension this year will exceed that for 2012-13, in which a total of 729 students were retained.

Commissioner Elliott requested additional information regarding the history, rationale, and inception of the LyncX Academy. Mr. Larkin replied that a district-wide committee was formed to design an alternative long-term suspension program because of the poor performance of the I'M READY program. He emphasized the importance of offering multiple pathways to meet students' needs and to promote their success. Mr. Larkin noted that the LyncX Academy was initiated in the current school year.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the capacity of the LyncX program. Mr. Larkin responded that a maximum of 300 students can be accommodated in the program.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the number of days for which the Academy has been at full capacity. Mr. Larkin stated that enrollment hovers at about 270 students, but the attendance rate is 50-60%, so approximately 150 students are actually present at any given time. The attendance rate also reflects a lag between the time that a student is placed on long-term suspension and the date that they actually begin attending the program.

Ms. Brady explained that the resources from the I'M READY and NorthSTAR programs were combined, and other funds were added to support the LyncX Academy. She stated that the Academy has three counselors, one School Psychologist, two Social Workers, and two Teachers on Assignment who manage orientations, transitions, and attendance issues.

Commissioner Elliott requested information about the way in which instruction is provided to students in the LyncX Academy, the length of time that students attend the Academy, and methods for preventing gaps in instruction upon students' return to their home school. Mr.

Larkin responded that students are in the long-term suspension program and the Youth in Transition program for one marking period, which is typically 30 days to a full year. He stated that students in the NorthSTAR program remain for the entire school year.

Commissioner Elliott asked about methods used by the LyncX Academy to ensure that students are not losing instruction time or content while away from their home school. Mr. Cromartie replied that the registrar at the LyncX Academy obtains the course schedule and syllabus from the student's home school to provide continuity in instruction for students while in the Academy.

Mr. Jacobs expressed concern about students who are over-age and under-credited, inquiring about the number of these students in the LyncX Academy. Dr. Gaither noted that students who are over-age and under-credited are offered alternatives such as Job Corps and REOC to prevent them from dropping out of school. She described LyncX staff networking with other community agencies such as Youth Build and the Urban League to locate youths when assigned to the LyncX Academy and after their discharge.

Commissioner Elliott commented on the 30-40% absentee rate in the Academy, and asked about the number of students that return. Mr. Strothers reported that some students are in a program by court order and others have voluntarily chosen to participate. He provided an overview of the intake and orientation process with students:

- Explain the specific program, schedule, and transportation arrangements
- Provide a tour of the LyncX Academy and introduce the student to key staff members
- Provide consent forms to parents and update the student's contact information

Commissioner Elliott inquired about parents' response to the LyncX Academy. Mr. Strothers replied that parents are often concerned about safety, their child's ability to complete academic work in a timely manner, and their child's successful return to their home school.

Mr. Scott stated that the student's schedule at the LyncX Academy is matched to the classes that they had been taking in their home school, and Academy staff follow up to ensure that students are actually attending their classes. He asserted that the key component is assisting students with the transition back to their home school. Mr. Scott described meeting with the parents, Principal, Assistant Principal, and teachers to discuss the student's progress while in the LyncX Academy and to prepare for their return to their home school. He pointed out that students are mandated to attend weekly meetings to discuss their progress, coping strategies, options, and supports that have been beneficial to them. Mr. Scott stated that many students choose to remain at LyncX Academy because of the small student population, the individual support provided, and the positive relationships that are formed. He noted that some students have returned to their home school, only to request to return to the LyncX Academy.

Commissioner Adams asked whether any patterns have been discerned in terms of the types of students that choose to remain in the LyncX Academy. Mr. Scott replied that he has not detected any particular pattern because many of the students elect to remain.

Mr. Jacobs inquired about the types of occupational opportunities offered to students who are over-age and under-credited. Mr. Cromartie replied that attempts were made initially to collaborate with OACES to assist these students in obtaining a GED and Career & Technical Education. He stated that this approach was not successful because of a lack of instructional staff with GED certification. Mr. Larkin reported that a staff person was recently hired to coordinate with GED Programs in the community to re-institute the program in the 2014-15 school year.

Mr. Scott pointed out that the loss of service coordinators at RCSD Student Resource Centers has made it much more difficult to connect students to various services while in the LyncX Academy and after return to their home school. He stated that LyncX staff follow up with students after transition to their home school, and continue to offer support.

Ms. Holloman discussed the Youth in Transition program, in which students are discharged from a residential placement and participate in the program for six weeks. She stated that this is the minimum amount of time for transition, during which students discuss their future and return to their home school. Ms. Holloman described the LyncX program's use of restorative practices; focus on re-orienting students to being with their family and peers; and provision of social/emotional support.

Mr. Larkin noted that a community closet is utilized to meet the basic needs of students and their families, which also eliminates excuses for not attending the Academy.

Mr. Hymes-Young described the process of reviewing rules and expectations with students and offering them an opportunity to discuss the reasons for their enrollment in the program. He noted that the primary focus is on academics, and encouraging students to consider their choices and goals from this point forward. Mr. Hymes-Young explained that students attend the PM School for 1-15 days while awaiting a long-term suspension hearing, while those who are on long-term suspension attend the AM Program (LynCx Academy). He stated that the PM School operates from 2:45-5:45PM on weekdays, with a campus at Marshall and at East High School.

Ms. Carey discussed the NorthSTAR program, emphasizing the importance of creating a safe, comfortable environment for these students and assisting them in passing Regents exams.

Ms. Brown described the science classes and labs available to students to assist in passing Regents exams. She stated that teachers are required to use common pacing charts to prepare students academically for return to their home school.

A student who participated in the LyncX Academy described the ways in which he has changed, noting that he has earned many more academic credits with the assistance provided at the Academy than he was able to earn in his home school.

Another student reported receiving a great deal of support and guidance from Mr. Larkin, and pointed out that the Academy has offered him a lot of options. He stated that he is looking forward to remaining at the LyncX Academy for another year.

A student from the Youth in Transition program reported being discharged from a residential placement after one year and having difficulty adjusting to the school environment. He described receiving considerable support from Academy staff, and stated that he currently attends the Work Experience Program for automotive mechanics.

Another student discussed the assistance she has received from teachers and staff at the Academy: their willingness to listen, take students seriously, provide individual attention, and develop relationships with students. She emphasized the personal attention, relationships and support provided at the LyncX Academy, noting that she is valued as an individual and not just perceived as one member of a large crowd as in her home school.

Commissioner Adams asked the students about how they will continue to be leaders from this point forward.

Two of the students reported that they plan to remain at the LyncX Academy for another year because they can benefit from the assistance that is provided.

Two other students stated that they are ready to return to their home school, with the skills that they have acquired in the LyncX Academy and the knowledge that they can continue to receive support from Academy staff.

Commissioner Adams requested information regarding indicators of the success of the Academy at this point. Mr. Larkin reported that he is collaborating with the Information Management & Technology Department to obtain data regarding the academic performance of the students who have attended the Academy. He commented that while the absentee rate at the Academy may be high, the focus is on the 60-70% of the students who have been in attendance. He pointed out that the most significant factor affecting the Academy's success is retaining staff members who are truly dedicated and care about students who may have made some mistakes in the past. Mr. Larkin also discussed the importance of celebrating small victories in recognizing students' accomplishments.

Mr. Larkin noted that the LyncX Academy currently has the following needs:

- Staffing for all courses, including foreign languages
- Vocational and Career & Technical Education programs
- GED and certificate programs
- Compliance with Special Education requirements

Mr. Jacobs pointed out that the specific electives offered at the LyncX Academy need to be considered, particularly since some of the students attend for more than one year. He also asserted that the Academy needs to establish a parent organization.

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Adams. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:32PM.