

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting
August 18, 2015
Following the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee
Meeting

Attending: Malik Evans (Chair); Commissioner Adams and Commissioner Elliott.

Parent Representative: Toyin Anderson.

District Staff: Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning; Dr. Jennifer Gkourlias, Chief of School Programs and Curriculum; Steve Carling, Labor Relations Attorney; Mary Andrecolich-Diaz, Principal of the Rochester International Academy.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

I. Review Minutes of July 14, 2015 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Adams to approve the July 14, 2015 minutes of the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting. Commissioner Elliott pointed out that the meeting minutes require correction to reflect the fact that she did not attend this meeting. **Adopted 2-0, with the condition that the minutes be corrected to reflect the fact that Commissioner Elliott was not in attendance at the July 14, 2015 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting.**

II. Review School Comprehensive Education Plans (SCEPs) for Monroe High School and School No. 9

Commissioner Evans noted that review of the Comprehensive Education Plans for Monroe High School and School No. 9 were originally included in the agenda for this evening's meeting, but the Superintendent has confirmed that these plans have not yet been finalized.

Commissioner Evans inquired when these SCEP plans will be available to present to the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting. Dr. Otuwa replied that she does not have this information, and requested that the Commissioners discuss this further with Dr. Vargas.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the timeframe for submitting the SCEP plans for Monroe High School and School No. 9 to the NYS Education Department. Dr. Gkourlias noted that the plans are due to the State Education Department by September 30, 2015 and should be ready soon.

III. Presentation regarding RCSD APPR Plan

Commissioner Evans asked several of the attendees to introduce themselves to Committee members.

Dr. Gkourlias stated that she is the new Chief of School Programs and Curriculum. In this capacity, she will be supervising the LynCx program, All City High School, Youth & Justice programs, and all alternative education programs in the District and the directors in the Teaching & Learning Division. Dr. Gkourlias reported that at least 80% of her time this last year has been spent on the APPR Implementation Plan and ensuring District compliance with the Plan.

Steve Carling explained that he is Associate Counsel in the Law Department, and has been involved in labor relations and in developing the APPR Implementation Plan for the District. He discussed his collaboration with Meghan Abate, Director of Labor Relations with the Law Department, in preparing the Plan and conducting negotiations with collective bargaining units.

Dr. Otuwa presented the District's APPR Implementation Plan, which has been approved by the NYS Education Department. She discussed the cross-functional team that was convened to develop the plan, which included representatives from ASAR, RTA, Teaching & Learning, Information Management & Technology, and Human Capital Initiatives (HCI). Dr. Otuwa explained that the Teaching & Learning Division managed the APPR assessments, while the Deputy Superintendent for Administration, Law Department, and HCI have handled the logistics of implementation.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the role of HCI in the APPR process. Mr. Carling replied that he and Meghan Abate have been collaborating on the APPR Plan, negotiating the agreement with collective bargaining units, and addressing the legal requirements of the process, while the Teaching & Learning Division has provided the standards for instruction, specific targets to be met, and aligned the assessments with instructional content.

Dr. Otuwa added that the APPR process is based on instruction, which is the reason that the Teaching & Learning Division has spearheaded this effort. She noted that efforts have been made this year to expand representation in the cross-functional team to include members from ASAR, RTA and HCI. Dr. Otuwa stated that making the team more inclusive ensures that input received from stakeholders is thoroughly discussed and that there is a common understanding of the basis for decision-making.

In addition to the cross-functional team charged with developing the District's APPR Implementation Plan, Dr. Otuwa stated that an internal group was formed to ensure adherence to timelines and compliance with NYS Education Department guidelines. The internal group consisted of staff members from the Law Department, Human Capital Initiatives, Teaching & Learning, Administration, and the Accountability/Student Placement Office.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the rationale for including staff from the Accountability and Student Placement Office in the APPR process. Dr. Otuwa explained that these departments are involved with the collection and reporting of data, and these staff members therefore need to

know the specific courses being taught by each teacher and whether Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are required.

Highlights of APPR Presentation:

1. K-2 Assessments (supported through the “Teaching is the Core” grant):

- Assessment processes and procedures have been communicated to parents
- Workshops regarding K-2 assessments have been conducted for administrators in the Teaching & Learning Division
- A cross-representative team of K-2 teachers has been involved in creating improved assessments for these grade levels (i.e. Bilingual, Special Education, and General Education teachers)
- Advance test blueprints have enabled the team to identify potential problems with proposed assessments, streamline the assessment process, and reduce the amount of testing time for students in these early grade levels to ensure that they have the opportunity to complete the test.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the types of assessments that are conducted at the K-2 grade level. Dr. Otuwa responded that these assessments are aligned to Common Core standards and focus on specific areas of student learning necessary to be successful. She pointed out that a shorter test is now being administered to students in these grade levels to ensure that they have ample time to complete it.

Dr. Otuwa also noted that the advance test blueprints have been given to teachers to give them an opportunity to provide feedback, and this has facilitated agreement over the specific items for which students are being tested.

Commissioner Elliott observed that there has been controversy over testing young children, but she asserted that this is necessary to identify the specific areas in which students may need additional instruction and support to ensure that they are prepared for successive grades.

2. EDOCTRINA (Implemented in Fall 2014):

- Software that enables learning targets to be entered into the system and assessment data collected to compare against targets
- Increases the efficiency and transparency of calculating APPR scores
- Professional development has been provided to teachers at school sites to familiarize them with the software and to support development of student learning targets. Training was conducted by a team from the Teaching & Learning Division and Information Management & Technology Department.

Mr. Carling pointed out that prior to the use of EDOCTRINA software, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and information of the extent to which each student had met the targets had to be entered manually into the system, which required the use of two full-time data entry clerks over an eight-month period. He stated that the system also had not been very transparent in terms of the learning objectives and basis upon which teachers were evaluated, leading to concerns about the equity and integrity of the system. Mr. Carling explained that EDOCTRINA has enabled learning targets to be established more systematically and has also facilitated collection of assessment data, improving the efficiency and transparency of evaluation results.

3. Examination Development:

- Student Learning Objectives and assessments have been developed for all courses that are not linked to K-2 or 3-8 Math, ELA or Regents exams
- The exams for all other courses were designed by Teaching & Learning Directors, with teachers' input
- Validity and reliability were considered in preparing the assessments for all other courses
- Blueprints of the assessments were accessible for teachers to review

Dr. Gkourlias pointed out that teachers now know in advance about the specific components of the assessment, alignment with the course content being taught, and the way in which each component is weighted, so that they are aware of the basis on which they are to be evaluated. She reported that only the students that comprise the largest group for the Student Learning Objective (SLO) in the course are tested in an effort to minimize overall student testing.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the practice of testing only a percentage of the students taught by a particular teacher. Dr. Gkourlias noted that this practice is intended to prevent over-testing students and is based on NYS Education Department guidelines. She clarified that the section or grade level that comprises the majority of students instructed by a particular teacher will be tested. Dr. Gkourlias added that a student must be linked to a teacher at least 60% of the time for the APPR score to be considered valid, according to NYS Education Department guidelines.

Commissioner Adams contended that all student learning objectives developed in the APPR process focus on teacher evaluation rather than education of students. Dr. Gkourlias replied that this is an important consideration in identifying ways to make the assessments more useful in terms of student learning. She discussed the importance of having a reliable curriculum and mapping to align content and standards to the assessments.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the number of tests required for students in grades K-2. Dr. Gkourlias replied that K-2 students are tested in Math and ELA, but can also be tested in music or physical education if their section/grade comprises the majority of students taught by the Music Teacher or Physical Education Teacher.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the use of testing in music and physical education, since Math and ELA achievement is much more significant to a student's academic success. Dr. Gkourlias explained that metrics have to be developed to assess every teacher under APPR – not only Math

and ELA teachers. She stated that testing ideally should be used to advance student learning and should be conducted on an ongoing basis, but these assessments are typically administered at the end of the year to indicate student growth.

4. Lead Evaluator Training:

- All Lead and Peer Evaluators have been trained in accordance with APPR regulations and the RCSD APPR Plan
- Training in the Danielson rubric:
 - ❖ School Chiefs trained by Deputy Superintendents
 - ❖ Principals and other Lead Evaluators trained on multiple occasions throughout the year
 - ❖ 3 cohorts of Lead Evaluators participated in in-depth training
 - ❖ Peer Reviewers trained by the CIT group

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the use of observation in the APPR evaluation and the subjectivity of measures based on observation. Dr. Otuwa reported that 60 points on the Danielson rubric are based on teacher observation, and the rubric guides the observation. She explained that the training included use of the Danielson rubric, examples of highly effective teaching practice, and scoring based on observation of the specific components of teaching practice.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether teachers are aware of expectations when hired by the District. Dr. Otuwa replied that the APPR expectations are reviewed with teachers at the beginning of the school year, and new teachers participate in the Careers in Teaching program for support and mentoring. She stated that field guidance and videos regarding the APPR process are posted on the District website to be accessible at any time.

5. District-Wide Evaluation Statistics:

- ❖ 97.56% of RCSD teachers have had assessment data completed
- ❖ 98.14% of RCSD teachers have had observations completed

Commissioner Elliott inquired about teachers' and principals' response to the APPR process at this point. Mr. Carling reported that the District has been trying to streamline the process, particularly since it was not designed to be friendly toward teachers or principals. He stated that the use of software has made the entire process more manageable. Dr. Gkourlias noted that aligning measures to student growth and identifying specific instructional needs would make the APPR assessments a more useful tool, and the District is currently working toward this goal.

Commissioner Adams contended that it is important for policy-makers to keep in mind that the current APPR evaluation system is not valid or reliable, citing objections raised in the scientific and statistician community about the way in which the current system is constructed. She pointed out that the difference between a rating of "highly effective" and "ineffective" is only 8 points. She noted that the full 60-point span cannot be used to differentiate among teachers'

performance because a score below 52 in even one area leads to a rating of “ineffective” – even if the teacher is fully competent in all other areas. Commissioner Adams asserted that the system as currently constructed leads to overstating teachers’ performance.

Commissioner Elliott asked about changes in APPR over the last three years. Dr. Otuwa replied that the assessments are now more valid, accurate and reliable and students are not being over-tested.

6. Next Steps for Student Learning Objectives:

- ❖ Continue to follow up on missing scores
- ❖ Finish reviewing the scores for grade 3-8 NYS assessments
- ❖ Load and review results of NYS English Language Assessment (NYSESLAT) for ELL students
- ❖ Obtain conversion scale from NYS Education Department to determine progress made by teachers of ELL students
- ❖ Complete review of all Student Learning Objectives
- ❖ Obtain teacher growth scores from NYS Education Department, combine with the growth scores for teachers of courses with Student Learning Objectives, and identify teachers missing growth scores at that point.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the rationale for not having Student Learning Objectives for all students. Mr. Carling explained that Student Learning Objectives are established if the NYS Education Department does not provide a score for the teacher. He stated that NYS Education Department scores are based on the results of NYS grade 3-8 assessments and Regents exams.

Dr. Gkourlias added that a conversion chart for the NYSESLAT assessment is necessary to translate the scores from last year into the new scale being used this year for testing ELL students. Without the conversion chart, student growth on this assessment and teacher performance cannot be measured.

Commissioner Evans inquired about responsibility within the District for ensuring that all teachers are evaluated. Dr. Otuwa responded that she shares this responsibility with Adele Bovard, Deputy Superintendent for Administration. She added that all RCSD principals have been evaluated under APPR, in addition to 97.56% of RCSD teachers.

Commissioner Adams asked whether program administrators are evaluated. Mr. Carling replied that this is not required under APPR regulations or guidelines. Dr. Otuwa reported that the District is currently working to establish metrics for evaluating program administrators.

Commissioner Evans emphasized the importance of regular evaluation and feedback for all

District staff members at every level. He discussed the difficulty of eliminating positions and/or employees if there is no documentation regarding performance and no apparent rationale for making these decisions. Commissioner Evans also discussed the value of providing feedback to employees on a regular basis, so that they are aware of ways in which their work performance can be improved.

Commissioner Elliott discussed problems in the District with providing a glowing evaluation of an employee because of their connections, even though this was not warranted by their performance. She emphasized the importance of upholding the integrity of the process to ensure that only competent and qualified employees are retained.

Ms. Toyin Anderson inquired about the specific actions taken by the District with regard to teachers or principals whose performance has been found to be inadequate. Dr. Otuwa noted that teachers/principals are placed on a Performance Improvement Plan and given support to assist in enhancing their performance. She discussed the importance of the integrity of the process and of identifying the specific areas in which an employee's performance is lagging.

Commissioner Elliott reported that she has heard from teachers and principals about being notified by the Department of Human Capital Initiatives that they are being let go for no apparent reason and with no documentation of performance problems. She stated that District staff have not been treated fairly or respectfully when they are let go or transferred for no apparent reason. Commissioner Elliott asserted that this is part of the rationale for her advocating for the Board to have a Human Resources Committee.

Dr. Otuwa acknowledged the difficulty for the Department of Human Capital Initiatives in dealing with situations in which staff members are being let go or transferred because the performance concerns originate elsewhere, yet the Department has to address the situation after the fact.

IV. Follow-Up Items

Commissioner Evans asked about the projected graduation rates for June 2015 and August 2015. Dr. Otuwa reported that the figures are currently being examined.

Dr. Otuwa provided handout information in response to each of the Follow-Up Items below:

1. Graduation and Drop-Out Data for the Rochester International Academy

Mary Andrecolich-Diaz reported that a total of 567 students in grades 1-12 have enrolled in the Rochester International Academy (RIA) since its inception in the 2011-12 school year. She noted that students arrive at RIA with little to no language acquisition, often illiterate in their native language and without formal education.

Ms. Diaz stated that a total of 97 students have reached their graduation year at this point, but 33 have moved out of the district/county/state/country. Of the remaining 64 students in their graduation year, 25 have graduated and another 4 students have the potential to graduate this

month. Ms. Diaz reported that this yields a graduation rate of 39%, with the potential to increase to 45% if all four students graduate this month.

Ms. Diaz pointed out that some of the students are entering the District in later years (i.e. age 17 or older) and therefore are not be able to graduate. Ms. Diaz discussed additional supports and placements offered to these students, such as employment assistance and Job Corps. She noted that it is unfortunate that the NYS Education Department considers these students to be “drop-outs”, despite the fact that they had no opportunity to pursue formal education until age 17 or older. Ms. Diaz stated that the graduation rate is expected to rise with the 5th and 6th years of the 2011 cohort because of the additional time provided to these students, which enables them to meet graduation requirements.

Dr. Otuwa discussed efforts to make RIA a school and not just a program in the District, stating that the NYS Education Department has been consulted about ways in which the Academy has to be restructured to become a school.

Ms. Diaz announced that the U.S. State Department has given notification that an additional 250 refugee families will be entering the District in November 2015. She briefly discussed a very successful program used by a group of schools serving refugee children in New York City, using a project-based model similar to that at the School Without Walls.

What are the top three language categories of students classified as ELL?
How are students grouped into categories to identify the percentage of ELL students?
(Concern regarding duplicate counting of students, such as Hispanic and LEP)

2. Predominant Languages of RCSD Students Classified as English-Language Learners (ELL)

The overwhelming majority of students classified as English-Language Learners in the Rochester City School District have Spanish as their native language (3,104 students), followed by Nepali (480 students), Somali (274 students), Arabic (211 students), and Karen (209 students).

Hispanic students are grouped into two categories because not all of these students are considered English-Language Learners: Hispanic students and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Hispanic students. A student’s English proficiency is determined by their score on the NYS Identification Tool for English Language Learners.

3. Anticipated impact of change in leadership at Rochester Early College High School

Dr. Otuwa provided information of the indicators to be used to evaluate the preconditions for promoting student learning and of the overall efficacy of the school. The precondition indicators include student and teacher attendance; disciplinary incidents; assessment data; and teacher, student and parent surveys.

Overall efficacy of the school system at Rochester Early College High School will include monthly meetings to review:

- The Action Plan for instructional success, based on data
- Clarity and specificity of goals, steps and timelines for all staff
- System to implement data-driven instruction on a regular basis
- System to collect, analyze, and utilize data on a regular basis to inform instruction
- Evidence of teacher observation and walk-through, with feedback loops
- Adherence to a cycle of data analysis by providing staff with the time and resources to implement data-driven instruction

Dr. Otuwa stated that monthly site visits will also be conducted to provide active assistance to staff at the school.

Commissioner Elliott asked about actions that would be taken if the new leadership at Rochester Early College High School is not effective. Dr. Otuwa replied that efforts will be made to implement changes quickly to prevent jeopardizing students' academic achievement.

Motion by Commissioner Adams to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Elliott. **Adopted 3-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:09PM.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 22nd, at 5:30PM