

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting of the Whole
November 18, 2013 at 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Attending: Commissioners: Van White (Chair), President Malik Evans, Mary Adams (Skype), Commissioner Jose Cruz, Commissioner Melisza Campos and Commissioner Cynthia Elliott. District Staff: Superintendent Bolgen Vargas, Beverly Burrell-Moore, Ray Giamartino, Brenda Pacheco and Juliette Pennyman. Parent Representative: Craig Cypher. Board Staff: Kimberly Turner

Absent: Commissioner Willa Powell.

I. Motion made by Commissioner White to approve the October 7, 2013 minutes from the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee (ESAC) meeting. President Malik Evans, Mr. Cypher concurred. Adopted 3-0.

Improving Student Achievement with a Sense of Urgency:

Presentation by Bolgen Vargas, Superintendent of Schools.

Dr. Vargas outlined a plan to address several key issues facing the District.

The key issues are:

- 1) Annual budget crisis
- 2) Student Achievement, low performing schools that are hard to manage
- 3) Lack of viable alternative opportunities for students – i.e CTE
- 4) Student behavior creates barrier to achieve and additional district expenses

Dr. Vargas stated that he will finalize and deliver three action plans, by March 2014. The first is a District Action Plan to address the key issues he outlined in his presentation. The second plan is a Student Achievement Action Plan, addressing the low achievement rates in the district. A Budget Plan will be created to address the current budget crisis.

He discussed the use of outside resources such as the Money Smart Project tool that helps to provide optimal allocation of District resources and local colleges to help manage “some schools”. Local colleges manages our schools is an innovative approach to combat issues in the District.

Dr. Vargas plans to update the CTE program, which provides career alternatives to our students. He plans to create a new student code of conduct; and enhance the summer enrichment programs for pre-k to 3rd grades.

Questions/Comments:

President Evans: Pointed out that the information presented from Dr. Vargas is in line with what the Board has articulated, the goals and the direction of the District. President Evans also stated that the CTE programs are very important and community members and parents should continue to talk to Legislators to address the reason why RSCD students are not offered the same opportunities as suburban students. Its crucial that we offer multiple pathways for our students to talk advantage of. President Evans stated that as we review the discipline actions presented tonight that we capture good ideas and plans that have been implemented by some RCSD schools. President Evans stated that some schools are doing a great job; school number 9 is has great programs for African American Males. Dr. Vargas agreed with looking at the schools that have been successful.

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Commissioner Elliott stated that she is concerned about the number of programs that have been presented as the solution to RCSD problems in the past. She asked what would make this proposal different. She stated that she is convinced that the problem is in the implementation of different solutions. She stated that there are barriers (Human Resources and infrastructure) that prevent our community partners from being successful. She does not want the colleges that Dr. Vargas , to partner with, to be discouraged in the red tape. The social emotional connection is extremely important as children may not be getting it any other place but school. Commissioner Elliott also stated that resources have not been allocated to meet the student's needs. Commissioner Elliott also stated what RCSD policy will govern this relationship. Commissioner Elliott stated what is the sense of urgency, stated in the buildings and the District, – what is the strategy to move this forward? Providing the information to the parents and community is crucial.

Dr. Vargas responded that the proposal to place local colleges management of schools will need to be flexible and they are have goals and rules that they will follow that may be different from what have been in the past. There are also state laws that set parameters. He also stated that the District is moving forward and offering teachers help to make certain that the message is clear. He also stated that this is the last chance to turn the District around; this is the sense of urgency message that is being conveyed.

Mr. Cyphers stated that communication and engagement of parents is crucial for the success of any proposals. It is crucial to meet with families in natural occurrence environments (picnics, PTA Meetings, open houses). Creativity in engagement is crucial. Mr. Cyphers also asked what would be the value of having colleges run the school. Dr Vargas stated that stability in leadership, accountability –streamline, less bureaucracy, certain expertise, less policies, are a few items of value that the colleges bring to the table. Commissioner White also stated that bringing fine schools into deteriorating neighborhoods will add value back to the neighborhood.

Commissioner Campos stated that the mental health of students is not addressed and need to be included in the plan. Will this be the next step? What is the end goal – this will let people know that we have reached the goal.

Commissioner Adams stated that the framework should be addressed to all the RSCD community, not just to improve students and student's behavior. It should be stated clear what are the expectations of all. Commissioner White also concurred with this statement. He stated that this is not just a student based problem. Dr. Vargas acknowledged that this is the intent and opportunities to improve is there and will take advantage of.

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner White at 8:30 p.m.; seconded by President Evans.