

**ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting**  
**October 19, 2010 at 6:00 p.m.**

**MINUTES**

Attendance: Commissioner V. White (chair) Commissioners C. Elliott and A. Williams; District Staff: Dr. Jennifer Gkourlias, Brandan Keaveny, Beth Mascitti-Miller, Djinga St. Louis, and Dr. Jeanette Silvers; CETF Members: Mary Adams, Howard Eagle and Christopher Tillman; Board Staff: Jacqueline Morgan

Absent: Commissioner W. Powell  
Parent Representative: Jodi Maurer

Commissioner White called the meeting to order at 6:11 p.m.

**I. Minutes**

Commissioner Elliott asked that instead of using the phrase “it was noted” to indicate that a statement was made that the name of the individual be used instead to make it easier for parents and members of the community to be able to identify the speaker. It was noted by Commissioner White that the minutes should reflect this change; and going forward the minutes will identify the speakers.

**Motion** to approve September minutes with the amendments was made by Commissioner Elliott; seconded by Commissioner White.

**II. Community Education Task Force Presentation**

Mr. Howard Eagle spoke regarding the Teaching American History Professional Development Grant. He stated that it is a general concern there is a huge problem that many school districts do not know whether or not the money that is being spent on professional development is effective.

As it relates to the history that is being taught, Mr. Eagle stated that historically across this nation, not only in Rochester and the State of New York, history has been Eurocentric; while down playing and distorting the culture, contributions and achievements of all others, particularly African Americans, Latinos, Native American, and others.

He stated that this professional development grants presents an opportunity to address these kinds of issues.

Mr. Eagle noted that there is a need for standards to be laid out to determine whether or not the District is being culturally responsive. He also stated that from what he has seen of the plan for this grant; parents, students and the community has been left out. He also noted that there is a lack of African center scholars and institutions involved in the process.

Mr. Christopher Tillman shared the Community on Education Task Force (CETF) philosophy and proposed remedy for increasing the likelihood of success. A central tenant of the philosophy includes the principle that parents, grandparents, guardians, students, educators, concerned taxpayers of the Rochester City School District and the general Rochester community, along with their allies and supporters have both the right and responsibility to be involved in every major decision making process designed to produce much needed, widespread, effective fundamental change improvement and success for our students.

The following recommendations are offered for the Teaching American History Grant for the K-2 professional development process:

- Ms. Susan Goodwin, along with other scholars and experts, i.e. Dr. John Mara, Dr. John Walker, Dr. Juanita Pitts, Dr. David Anderson, Dr. Andrew Ray, Mr. Mason Dix, Minister Franklin Florence, Mr. Raymond Scott, Mr. Wallace Smith, and Dr. Cordova are involved in the professional development grant process.
- Mr. Tillman went on to point out some agencies who, it was felt, should also be involved in the process. They are as follows: Frederick Douglass Institute (U of R), Africana Black Studies Program (SUNY Geneseo), Frederick Douglass Resource Center, First Community Interfaith Institute, Rochester Freedom School, Rochester Community Television, the Minority Reporter Newspaper, the Challenger Newspaper (Buffalo, NY) and the Eltrex Corporation.

Mr. Tillman stated that it is hoped that the Excellence on Student Achievement Committee the Rochester City School District will take serious considering in including the named individuals and institutions in developing the grant in order to allow for a holistic, truthful representation of what it means to learn American History being a melting pot of many contributions from many varied ethnic groups.

Ms. Mary Adams spoke about parent involvement around the Teaching American History Professional Development Grant. She began by

speaking on the Rochester City School District's parents and families involvement. CETF proposes establishing a process including District parents and families. Such participation would include opportunities whereby parents could effectively help, transfer and expand knowledge among students and the general community.

They propose establishing a process that would include a total of ten RCSD parents, grandparents or others with close connections with students in the District.

Participation by parents, grandparents and connected individuals should also include the stipend that is available to the teachers.

Criteria for selecting parents could include the following:

1. Parents of RCSD students would add weight
2. Parents, grandparents and connected person of students who qualify for free or reduced meals would add weight
3. A parent, grandparent or connected person who is not white would add weight.

They propose that these requirements and weight system be implemented by a selection committee consisting of Dr. Susan Goodwin (Rochester Teacher Center), one of the college or university partners and a RCSD History teacher.

Parents should be used as teachers. A small cadre of parent-teachers should be offered the same type of preparation as teachers who volunteer for the professional development. Parents would attend the same workshops and field trips, etc. as the teachers do; and participate in dialog, discussion and planning.

Parents should be part of a collaborative evaluation team. They propose collaboration among college professors, the District's Social Studies Department, the Rochester Teacher Center and parent participants to develop study of classroom outcomes.

Commissioner Elliott expressed concern that there are barriers that prohibit teachers from being able to tailor curriculum to encompass the African/African-American curriculum; and suggested working with Mr. Urbanski and the RTA to come up with ways to overcome these barriers.

### **III. Teaching American History Professional Development Grant**

Dr. Jennifer Gkourlias, Director of Social Studies, noted that the program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, specifically, The Office of Renovation and Improvement.

The partners for this program are Strong Museum, Genesee Country Village and Museum, Nazareth College, Rochester Museum and Science Center and the University of Rochester. Dr. Gkourlias noted that she also took the names of the individuals suggested by CETF to be included to partner on this grant. She will reach out to these individuals and have them present to the teachers so that teachers will have that history.

Commissioner White stated that he didn't understand why it's always said that the suggested partners can be added as an afterthought instead of being a first thought in the process. He stated that this is a concern for him.

Dr. Gkourlias stated that because of the way the grant is written, they will be able to reach out to other scholars and agencies.

Ms. Mascitti-Miller noted that the Social Studies Department is very serious about how the curriculum is looked and cultural responsiveness.

Commissioner White asked if the Board would receive the proposal on how the grant money will be spent.

Dr. Gkourlias responded that the bulk of the money will go towards paying the teachers who will implement the program. However, there are opportunities to bring in guest scholars. There is an opportunity to develop a summer institute and bring in guest scholars.

Ms. Mascitti-Miller noted that there are parameters that have to be followed when you apply for a federal grant. Dr. Gkourlias reminded the Committee that this particular federal grant is a teacher development grant.

Commissioner White wanted to know if there is money available to be utilized for parents to be trained as teachers. Dr. Gkourlias stated that she is not sure, but would find out if any of the grant money can be used for that purpose. However, she is sure that some of the money can be used to bring in guest scholars.

Dr. Gkourlias noted that before funding can be obtained, teachers have to produce work, which has to be reviewed and accepted. They have to show that they've completed the project before a resolution for payment can be presented to the Board.

Commissioner Williams asked how the training would be measured to determine whether or not it is working both for teachers and students. Dr. Gkourlias stated that there is no student evaluation in this plan because this is a teacher grant. Teachers will be asked to self-report as to how the training has affected them. They are also asked on the application what are they seeking from this professional development.

Djinga St. Louis was provided with text and materials that would be used by teachers in the project to be reviewed to ensure that the literature is culturally responsive. She has met with the partners from Brockport and the U of R. She stated that she is available to speak regarding meeting the needs of students of color, the community, parents and all of the stakeholders who are involved in the education of our students.

Commissioner Elliott asked if the cultural responsive literature would include a book on Barack Obama. Dr. Gkourlias responded that a book related to Barack Obama could be used when students are being taught identity. Ms. Mascitti-Miller added that a book on Barack Obama will be included in the curriculum.

Commissioner Elliott noted that the RMSC has the Howard Coles Papers, and wondered if there is a way that the papers can be included in the Teaching American History Grant.

Dr. Gkourlias will create an action plan regarding the CETF suggestions.

#### **IV. African/African-American Curriculum Update**

Commissioner White asked what Ms. St. Louis' plan is for the Department of African/African-American Studies. Ms. St. Louis replied that she has been reviewing the Rochester Curriculum. Commissioner White then wanted to know when the review of grades 3-6 of the Rochester Curriculum would be completed. Ms. St. Louis stated that she was not able to provide a timeframe at this time, but would investigate it and provide that information. Commissioner White requested that Ms. St. Louis come back to the November meeting with timeframe for the completion of the review of the 3-6 Rochester Curriculum.

Ms. Mascitti-Miller suggested that periodic updates on the A/AA Studies Department be brought to the Committee more often in order to keep the Committee apprised of the work that is being done. Commissioner White agreed and determined that the first 15 minutes of each meeting be dedicated to the updates.

V. **Schott Report Discussion**

It was agreed that this report will be discussed at the November meeting.

**Motion** to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m. was moved by Commissioner Elliott.

The next Excellence in Student Achievement Committee is scheduled to meet on November 2, 2010 at 6:00 p.m. in 3A/3B.