

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee
October 15, 2009 at 5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

Attendance: Commissioner Van White (Chair), Commissioner Melisza Campos, District Staff: David Baez, Brandon Keaveny, Marilyn Patterson-Grant, Demond Meeks, Glenny Williams, Board Staff: Jacqueline Morgan

Absent: Commissioner Allen Williams

Commissioner White called the meeting to order at 5:37 p.m.

I. Minutes

Motion to approve September minutes was made by Commissioner Campos; seconded by Commissioner White. **Adopted 2-0 with Commissioner Williams absent.**

II. Foreign Language Study in the Rochester City School District

Mrs. Patterson-Grant addressed the committee in French which she began studying in third grade; after which, Mr. Baez, the Director of Languages Other Than English, shared the state of foreign language study in the District.

Mr. Baez noted that there is a need for commitment from the district to embark on foreign language study in every school; and that a focus should be placed on better foreign language skills. Not all schools in the district offer the full spectrum of the 16 languages that are offered in the district schools which sometimes impedes graduation and articulation in the languages. Mr. Baez further noted that foreign language learners promote cultural awareness and competency along with career opportunities.

The benefits of foreign language study are that more achievement gains, better listening skills, greater problem solving and higher levels of cognitive skills.

Mr. Baez recommended that Latin be offered to 5th and 6th grade students; and that foreign language be offered as a core subject.

Commissioner Campos inquired as to whether or not there would be opportunities for Latin study following 5th and 6th grade. Mr. Baez stated that he would like to see the program continue. Mrs. Patterson-Grant noted that Latin would serve as a good foundation for the study of other languages.

III. Graduation Cohort

One of the action items from the September ESA Committee meeting was to have the administration provide graduation data with relation to class size. As a result, a report was shared that outlined graduation rates grouped by schools with graduation rates less than 50% and those with rates greater than or equal to 50% for the total 2004 cohort through August 2008.

Mr. Brandan Keaveny summarized the report by stating that there are some higher graduation rates for some smaller class sizes, but that there is a similar range in each grouping of the schools.

Commissioner White noted that students who graduated during in August are included in the report which creates a different classroom dynamic; and as a result of this that the student-teacher ratio is much better. Commissioner White requested that the data be run again without the August graduates being included to see if there would be any change in the results. Commissioner White also requested that data be provided on the 2002 and 2003 cohorts; excluding the month of August to see if there is any pattern.

IV. Class Size/Student Performance Presentation (Alliance for Quality Education)

Demond Meeks and Glenn Williams of the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) provided a presentation regarding the impact of class and student performance. Mr. Meeks noted that 2,000 Rochester parents and community members that are in favor of small class sizes, as they feel that small class sizes is one of the best strategies for better student performance.

Mr. Meeks cited data from the Tennessee Project STAR in his presentation that indicated that small classes produced the most dramatic gains for African-American students and students from the inner-city. The project also indicated that reducing class sizes resulted in more benefits than adding teacher aides. The indication of long term benefits included higher grade to grade retention rate, higher graduation rates and higher SAT scores.

Mr. Meeks noted that as a result of the district's Contract for Excellence investment, the class sizes have gotten smaller, but have not decreased enough. AQE idea of small classes is 15-17 students in a classroom. Mr. Meeks stated that as a result of the class sizes decreasing overall Regents scores have increased in Rochester faster than other areas in English and Math from 2005-2008, and on-time graduation rates have gone up much faster in Rochester than in other areas as well.

Commissioner White wanted to know how it could be concluded that the conditions were controlled enough to know that the gains are a direct result of the reduction in class size. Mr. Meeks stated that noted that smaller class sizes may not be the only variable for the improvement, but that it's the only variable that has been constant over the past three years. There was no notice of a district-wide training take place during the three year period; what was seen was a reduction in class size.

Glenny Williams noted that the three year trend seems to indicate that the smaller class sized in Rochester, NY seems to have made a difference.

Commissioner White questioned where the funding would come from to support the smaller class sizes. Mr. Williams stated that according the superintendent's budget the teachers are already available to support small class sizes by shuffling the teachers around.

Mr. Williams summarized by stating that he realizes that class sizes is not the only bullet in town, but that it is an important bullet to improve student performance.

Action Items:

- ▶ Brandon Keaveny will provide additional graduation data related to the 2004 cohort, excluding the August graduates.
- ▶ Brandon Keaveny will provide graduation data related to the 2002 and 2003 cohorts, without factoring in the August graduates for those cohorts.

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Campos at 7:05 p.m.; seconded by Commissioner White. **Adopted 2-0 with Commissioner Williams absent.**

The next meeting is a committee meeting of the whole that is scheduled for November 12, 2009 at 5:30 p.m.