

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Policy Committee Meeting
November 14, 2013

Attending: Commissioner Cruz (Chair) – absent due to out-of-town conference; Commissioners Powell, Campos, Adams, and White (arrived at 6:27PM). Parent Representative: Barbara Van Kerkhove. District staff: Ed Lopez-Soto, Chief Counsel. Parent Advisory Council: Mr. Felix Jacobs and Mr. Giancarlo Giannini. Board staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Powell convened the meeting at 6:06PM.

I. Review and Approve Minutes of October 17, 2013 Policy Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Campos to approve the minutes of the October 17, 2013 Policy Committee meeting. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

II. Discuss Proposed Revisions to the Parent & Family Engagement Policy (1900)

Mr. Giannini stated that the most recent revisions to the Parent & Family Engagement policy (1900) address the concerns of the Parent Advisory Council by strengthening parents' role in decision-making and enhancing accountability. He highlighted the major changes proposed: conducting an annual evaluation of District parent involvement activities, and auditing District practices at least every three years. Parents are to be notified when the annual evaluation report and the audit findings are available, and informed of ways in which these reports can be accessed. Mr. Giannini also pointed out that the proposed policy requires parents to be given an opportunity to provide input prior to collective bargaining negotiations.

Mr. Jacobs emphasized that the proposed policy revisions are comprehensive in terms of parent involvement activities and practices in the District, but the issue is that the policy has not been implemented. He described parents becoming disengaged from schools, which ultimately undermines initiatives and reforms in the District.

Mr. Giannini underscored the importance of oversight and accountability to ensure that parent engagement activities are implemented with fidelity.

Commissioner Adams expressed concern about the proposed policy specifying a timeframe (i.e. at least every three years) for the Auditor General to audit parent involvement in the District. She emphasized the importance of the independence of the Auditor General in determining specific District processes/functions to audit based on their annual risk assessment. Commissioner Adams suggested that parents be offered a role in the risk assessment process.

Mr. Jacobs replied that implementation and accountability regarding parent involvement have been significant concerns of the Parent Advisory Council. He gave an example of parent input being sought about plans for reforming schools under a School Improvement Grant (SIG) only one day before the grant application was due.

Commissioner Powell suggested revising the language in the proposed policy to state that an audit of parent involvement will be placed on the Auditor General’s calendar every three years.

Commissioner Adams explained that an annual audit plan is developed based on the risk assessment performed by the Auditor General. The annual risk assessment indicates the specific areas/functions within the District in need of investigation and/or that have the most severe consequences. She suggested developing a role for parents in this process so that there is an opportunity to advocate for including parent engagement activities in the annual audit plan.

Mr. Giannini expressed concern that parent engagement would not be considered a priority in the annual risk assessment, particularly since it has not been a priority in terms of District implementation. He emphasized the need for ongoing, routine monitoring to provide accountability, which requires a specified timeframe.

Ms. Flanagan suggested that the Parent Advisory Council have a role in providing input into the criteria used for evaluating risk in the annual risk assessment, so that their concerns can automatically be considered each year in performing this assessment. In this way, the concerns of parents can be evaluated against other risk criteria to determine priorities in developing the audit plan for the year.

Action Item: Commissioner Adams will provide information to the Parent Advisory Council regarding the criteria and the process currently used in conducting annual risk assessments and developing the annual audit plan.

Ms. Van Kerkhove noted that there are some redundancies in the proposed policy, specifically section (k) under 1900.4 “District Responsibilities regarding Parent Involvement” and section 1900.10 “Policy Implementation and Evaluation”.

Action Item: Ms. Flanagan will revise the proposed Parent & Family Engagement policy to eliminate redundancies between different sections (e.g. 1900.4 (k) and 1900.10).

III. Review and Discuss Proposed Revision of Values Education Policy (4311.2)

Mr. Lopez-Soto reported that he met with Superintendent Vargas, Commissioner Cruz, and Bill Benet to review the proposed changes to the Values Education policy and to discuss ways in which it could be integrated into instruction. He stated that the Superintendent wanted to strike the specific language stating that these values will form the basis by which educational programs are evaluated.

Mr. Lopez-Soto discussed different ways to provide information about District values to students, parents, and staff, as well as providing awards at the end of the school year for exemplifying these values.

Mr. Lopez-Soto also reported that Mr. Benet suggested meeting with different groups of stakeholders to discuss implementation of the values within the polarities framework.

Commissioner Campos stated that the polarities framework is based on a great deal of thought and consideration, but is quite abstract and difficult to apply. She expressed concern about the ability of

school staff to take the time to consider each polarity and determine the appropriate balance between different values to apply the policy. She emphasized the need to simplify the policy and provide a clearer focus in terms of the values considered most important in the District.

Commissioner Powell suggested creating an acronym to help remember the values in the policy.

Mr. Lopez-Soto replied that Superintendent Vargas shared these same concerns with regard to implementing the polarities framework, but he understood the value after further explanation and consideration. He suggested developing Superintendent regulations to clarify and provide necessary guidelines for implementation of the proposed policy.

Commissioner Campos stated that she would like the policy to contain definitions for each value and polarity.

Action Item: Mr. Lopez-Soto will convey the concerns and suggestions of the Policy Committee members to Bill Benet, collaborate with Mr. Benet in making further revisions to the policy, and develop Superintendent regulations to provide guidelines for implementing the values polarities.

III. Review and Discuss Arts Education Policy (4320)

Commissioner Powell suggested modifying the Arts Education policy to provide guidance for the District. She recommended benchmarking RCSD levels of art education with those offered in other local districts in Monroe County.

Commissioner Campos expressed concern about rescinding the current Arts Education policy because it would indicate that arts education is not a priority in the District.

Commissioner White asserted that while the current policy may simply reiterate the provisions of NYS law, many parents and community members do not trust the actions of the District and would interpret rescinding the policy as abandoning a stated commitment to arts education. He stated that this is an opportunity to evaluate District arts education beyond the requirements in the law.

Commissioner Powell voiced concern about retaining the Arts Education policy simply for the sake of appearances, but agreed with modifying the policy to establish minimum standards beyond NYS requirements. She emphasized that the proposed policy explicitly state expectations of the Administration.

Commissioner Adams recommended that the proposed policy include integration of the arts into all aspects of the curriculum, as recommended in the U.S. Department of Education study of Multiple Year Integration of Arts Education.

Mr. Lopez-Soto described his recent visit to a school in which art was incorporated into every subject, enhancing student engagement and achievement.

Ms. Van Kerkhove stated that she would like information as to the way in which this school was able to develop an integrated arts curriculum with the Common Core.

Commissioner White pointed out that integrating the arts into every subject does not supplant the Common Core curriculum, but provides a mechanism for implementing the curriculum in a way that is dynamic and captivating for students.

Commissioner Powell noted that benchmarking the District's arts education against suburban districts and examining the costs involved would also lend support to the pending lawsuit regarding inequities in the provision of education throughout the State.

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:03PM.