

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Policy Committee Meeting
March 13, 2012

Attending: Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioner Campos. Commissioner Powell absent. Parent Representative: Victoria Robertson absent. District staff: Charles Johnson, General Counsel; Jerome Underwood, Senior Director of Operations; Vicky Ramos, Director of Student Placement; Lori Baldwin, Director of Safety & Security; Maria Mello-Dupre, Director of Transportation. Board staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 5:09PM.

I. Review and Approve Minutes of February 9, 2012 Policy Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Campos to approve the minutes of the February 9th Policy Committee meeting. **Adopted 2-0.**

II. Discuss Incentives to Encourage Employees to Reside in the District

Chuck Johnson noted that the Hiring and Recruiting policy proposal was discussed in last month's Policy Committee meeting. He explained that the two main components of this proposed policy are: 1) to give preference to hiring candidates with urban experience; 2) to participate in the City of Rochester Employer-Sponsored Homeownership Program. Mr. Johnson pointed out that Xerox, RIT, and the University of Rochester already participate in this program through the City. He stated that concern was expressed in the last Policy Committee meeting about the potential for abuse of the Homeownership Program from employees moving from one part of the City to another. Mr. Johnson reported that a number of revisions have been made to address these concerns: to exempt Board members from participating in the Homeownership Program, and to make these incentives available only to employees who are first-time homebuyers.

Debra Flanagan pointed out that the City's Homeownership Program already restricts eligibility to employees who are first-time homebuyers in the City. She stated that this provision would prevent abuse of the Program and allow participation by employees who may already own a home, but would like to purchase for the first time in the City.

Mr. Johnson discussed the incentive regarding giving preference to candidates with urban experience, noting that "urban experience" has been defined as a minimum of three years of working (at least 30 hours per week) or volunteering (at least 15 hours per week) in a city with a minimum 110K population. He described the difficulty in defining "urban experience" and administering this aspect of an incentive program. He suggested that a clearer and more straightforward approach would be to give preference to RCSD graduates, or to graduates of a public high school in a city of at least 110K population.

Commissioner Campos suggested using a tiered approach by giving the greatest preference to RCSD graduates, and secondarily to graduates of other urban districts. She commended the

urban Teaching and Learning Institute at East High School and emphasized the importance of promoting District students.

Commissioner Cruz expressed concern that the suggestions for the proposed policy are straying from the original intent to increase incentives for RCSD employees to reside in the District.

Commissioner Campos contended that a policy can be adopted that accomplishes both goals: to encourage employees to reside in the District and to diversify the RCSD workforce.

Mr. Johnson pointed out that defining “urban experience” is problematic, particularly in gauging a candidate’s degree of commitment to the City School District. He stated that the proposed policy is dependent upon the priorities to be advanced at this point.

Commissioner Cruz suggested crafting the proposed policy to address incentives for employees to reside in the City and to encourage diversity in the RCSD workforce.

Action Item: Mr. Johnson will draft a policy proposal to present in the next Policy Committee meeting to provide incentives for employees to reside in the District and to diversify the RCSD workforce.

III. Discuss Transportation Options

Commissioner Cruz requested an overview of transportation options at this point. Mr. Underwood stated that several options were presented in the November 2011 Policy Committee meeting to expand transportation services to protect student safety, particularly for younger students. He recalled that crime data was obtained from the Rochester Police Department (RPD), which did not reveal any surprises in terms of the specific areas with higher crime and risk to safety. He noted that Ms. Flanagan explored opportunities to obtain additional reimbursement from the State to expand transportation to protect students. Mr. Underwood reported that the State apparently will not provide additional reimbursement to assure safe passage for students in the Big Five districts.

Mr. Underwood stated that the options and corresponding cost estimates still stand, and costs can be reduced by strengthening zone boundaries and moving more students to neighborhood schools. He stated that changes in the transportation structure would have a significant impact on student placement, and this is the reason that a decision had to be made by December 31, 2011 to implement changes for the 2012-13 school year.

Commissioner Cruz noted that several meetings have been held with an RPD crime analyst, but advocating for increased State reimbursement may not be feasible. He stated that including the Big Five urban districts in the law to establish child safety zones and obtain additional reimbursement would amount to a huge expenditure on the State’s part. Commissioner Cruz noted the difficulty in presenting a case to State officials on the basis of crime data because of implications for other sectors of the community. For these reasons, he stated that transportation options have to be re-considered without anticipating any additional NYS reimbursement to cover the cost.

Mr. Underwood asserted that student placement must be given substantial consideration in any discussion regarding proposed changes in transportation or strengthening of zone boundaries. He reported that 53-54% of the District's buses currently cross zone boundaries and are under-filled because of the long distances and time involved. He stated that strengthening the zone boundaries would eliminate buses, which would reduce costs and enable the District to transport more students. Mr. Underwood also emphasized the impact of transportation changes on families and school choice.

Vicky Ramos stated that the high mobility rate of families within the District complicates student placement and efforts to strengthen zone boundaries. She noted that the overriding consideration in placement is to prevent students from changing schools in the middle of the school year. However, she identified a number of options that could begin to be implemented on an incremental basis: restrict sibling preference in school choice to students at the 4th grade level or below; require families to re-enroll and re-certify their address each summer to encourage selection of a school within their zone; and only offer schools within the zone for voluntary transfers. Ms. Ramos pointed out that these options can begin to be implemented, but direction is needed from the Board in terms of how strictly to enforce the existing Parent Preference/Managed Choice policy at this point. She also emphasized the importance of timing to allow sufficient notification of parents.

Ms. Ramos described current placement efforts to monitor families' residence and choice of schools: following up whenever a family member requests a change of address, re-certifying addresses when families move, and encouraging families to select a school within their zone.

Mr. Underwood acknowledged that the District has been too liberal in granting exceptions to the Parent Preference/Managed Choice policy by allowing families to choose schools outside of their zone. He stated that the District is now experiencing the unintended consequences of lax enforcement of this policy, which represents a significant cost.

Ms. Ramos asserted that the new teacher evaluation system (APPR) will have the greatest impact on student placement in the near future because students will have to begin and end the school year in the same school for the sake of teacher accountability.

Commissioner Cruz outlined the following plan for considering transportation options:

1. Review existing policies regarding transportation, zone boundaries, and school choice
2. Discuss items necessary to implement zone boundaries for the 2013-14 school year
3. Examine the budgetary implications of transportation options

He identified October 2012 as the target date by which a decision would be made regarding the transportation structure for the 2013-14 school year.

Action Item: Ms. Flanagan will include review of policies regarding transportation, zone boundaries, and school choice in the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting.

IV. Review Proposed Audit Policies

Ms. Flanagan noted that the Audit Committee reviewed and approved four proposed policies, which have been advanced to the Policy Committee. She stated that each of the four policy proposals essentially describes different audit functions of the Board to exercise oversight: Audit Committee, External Auditor, Internal Auditor, and Claims Auditor.

Motion by Commissioner Campos to address all four policy proposals referred by the Audit Committee as a group. **Adopted 2-0.**

Motion by Commissioner Campos to approve the four policy proposals referred by the Audit Committee, and advance them to the full Board. **Adopted 2-0.**

V. Current Policy Status

Ms. Flanagan reported that no policies are currently under review by the Board, but the four proposed policies related to audit functions will now be advanced in the March 22nd Board meeting as Information Items.

Commissioner Cruz inquired about the next set of priorities in updating the Policy Manual. Ms. Flanagan replied that since all of the mandated policies have been addressed, the next priority is policies requiring deliverables or a routine review.

Action Item: Ms. Flanagan will include the next level of priorities for updating the Policy Manual in the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Campos to adjourn. **Adopted 2-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 5:51PM.

Next Policy Committee Meeting: TBD