

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Policy Committee Meeting
February 9, 2012

Attending: Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioners Powell and Campos. Parent Representative: Victoria Robertson. District staff: Dr. Deasure Matthew, Zone Director – South Zone; Karl Kania, Office of Accountability; Charles Johnson, General Counsel; Bethany Centrone, Associate Counsel. Board staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 6:31PM.

I. Review and Approve Minutes of January 19, 2012 Policy Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve the minutes of the January 19th Policy Committee meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Campos. **Adopted 3-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

II. Presentation on Student Promotion and Retention Practices

Dr. Deasure Matthew explained that the criteria for student promotion in grades 9-12 were revised last year, and the criteria for grades K-8 have been examined recently for revision. She reported an overall retention rate in the District of 11.1% (3122 students) at the end of the 2010-11 school year, which does not include kindergarten or students with disabilities who are in an ungraded program. She stated that the revised criteria would be contained in a new Superintendent regulation and in the Administrative Guidelines for Academic Standards and Assessment.

Dr. Matthew noted that the highest retention rate is for first grade at the elementary level, and for 9th grade at the secondary level. The large percentage of students held back in these grades led the District to re-evaluate retention practices, according to Dr. Matthew. She asserted that the former guidelines were detrimental to students by holding them back a grade for failing only one class.

Commissioner Campos inquired whether the reported 38% rate represents the percentage of 9th-grade students who were held back at the end of the 2010-11 school year. Dr. Matthew confirmed this statement.

Given the high retention rate for 7th and 8th grade combined, Commissioner Powell asked about the extent to which students are retained at these grade levels and again in 9th grade. Karl Kania replied that statistics are available of students who have *ever* been held back a grade. He reported that by the time students reach higher grade levels, approximately 60% have been retained at least once.

Commissioner Cruz asked whether a student would still be considered a 9th-grader if they failed algebra and had to take the course again. Dr. Matthew replied that the changes approved last year in student promotion guidelines for grades 9-12 allow advancement to 10th grade if a

minimum of five credits have been earned. Under the former guidelines, she reported that students would have been held back until they had passed all required courses, which had a negative impact on their social and emotional development.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern that students will have to take two years of a subject at the same time if it is required each year to graduate (e.g. English). Mr. Kania explained that ELA is not a sequential subject, so that students do not have to pass 9th-grade ELA to understand 10th-grade ELA. He stated that this should enable students to make up the required courses in one year.

Commissioner Cruz pointed out that summer school also offers opportunities for students to catch up on required courses. Dr. Matthew replied that the former academic guidelines required a student to be held back a grade – even if they were able to catch up during summer school.

Dr. Matthew noted that the Academic Standards and Assessment Manual has not been updated since 2005, despite the fact that it provides the guidelines for all academic decisions. Given the overall retention rate for the District, she stated that re-examination of promotion and retention practices was essential to determine the extent to which these practices were creating unnecessary barriers or facilitating student success.

By reviewing transcripts and applying the revised criteria retrospectively, Dr. Matthew reported that the retention rate for 9th-grade students at East High School would have dropped from 57% in June 2010 to 1.2% in June 2011, and from 30.7% of 10th-grade students in June 2010 to 0.4% in June 2011.

Parent Representative Victoria Robertson asked about typical course loads and credits earned in 9th grade. Dr. Matthew responded that students typically earn 7-8 credits by the end of 9th grade.

Dr. Matthew described the major changes in the student retention and promotion guidelines for K-8 grades:

- Early identification of student needs to develop an intervention plan
- Documentation of interventions and services provided to the student, as well as supporting data to ensure proper provision of needed supports
- Greater collaboration with the Youth & Family Services Division and with the Special Education Department in providing services
- Greater parent involvement in developing and monitoring the intervention plan, as well as in making the final determination regarding student retention
- Retention is to be used only if determined to be in the best interest of the student

She stated that the proposed Superintendent regulation delineates criteria for student promotion for kindergarten, grades 1-6, and grades 7-8. Dr. Matthew stated that the criteria include performance toward common core learning standards, ELA and math assessments, social and emotional development, response to documented research-based interventions, attendance, and age. She noted that adherence to the promotional guidelines will be monitored by school principals and School-Based Planning Teams.

Ms. Robertson inquired whether parents were involved in the process of revising the criteria in the Academic Standards and Assessment Manual. Dr. Matthew responded that parents were not involved in developing changes to the guidelines, but will be more involved in the process of developing and monitoring intervention plans and making decisions about student retention.

Ms. Robertson expressed concern that the guidelines do not allow students to be retained in kindergarten. She noted that some children may enter kindergarten at a younger age (e.g. December babies) because they have exceeded the age limit for enrollment in pre-K, but may not be ready to move on to first grade. Ms. Robertson noted that prohibiting children from remaining in kindergarten may lead to retention in later grades, thereby undermining their motivation and confidence in their learning ability. Dr. Matthew replied that NYS law does not require students to be retained in kindergarten.

Commissioner Powell asserted that the high percentage of students retained in first grade may indicate that many children were not ready developmentally to advance and should not have been compelled to do so. She suggested revising the Academic Standards and Assessment Manual to allow student retention in kindergarten at the request or recommendation of the parent or guardian.

Action Item: The Academic Standards and Assessment Manual will be revised to allow students to be retained in kindergarten if requested by the parent or guardian.

Commissioner Powell noted that historically approximately 50% of students have been retained in 7th or 8th grade based on ELA and math performance, although the current figures indicate only 7.8% retained at these grade levels at the end of the 2010-11 school year. She stated that performance on NYS assessments reveals that many more of these students are not ready to advance, and this may account for the high retention rates in 9th grade. Commissioner Powell expressed concern that students are being set up for failure by being promoted to 9th grade before they are ready, particularly since it is increasingly difficult to help them catch up as they advance to higher grade levels – even with intervention and support. Dr. Matthew replied that the revised guidelines address this issue because the criteria for grade promotion include performance on NYS assessments, whereas the previous guidelines were only based on report card grades.

III. Discuss Information to be Provided with Tenure Recommendation Resolutions

Bethany Centrone reviewed a matrix containing sample data to illustrate the way in which information can be presented to Board members in reviewing tenure recommendations. She noted that the matrix includes numerical ratings based on the new performance evaluations (composite scores and scores for each component), status of teaching certification, number of days of unexcused absences, and disciplinary counseling.

She stated that the matrix will be useful for staff in Human Capital Initiatives (HCI), who can compile the information early in the process for the Board to review.

IV. Discussion of Possible Employee Incentives for Residing in the District

Chuck Johnson presented a draft Recruiting and Hiring policy which contains several incentives for RCSD employees to reside in the District. He discussed giving preference in hiring decisions to candidates who have had “urban experience”. Mr. Johnson stated that this policy proposal was reviewed by the members of the Diversity Committee in last night’s meeting, and revisions were made to increase the number of hours of service that would qualify as “urban experience”: from 20 to 30 hours per week of paid employment, and from 10 to 15 hours per week of volunteer experience over a minimum of three years in an urban environment. He reported that the members of the Diversity Committee also decided to reduce the size of the city from a population of 125,000 to 110,000 to qualify as “urban experience”.

Mr. Johnson described another incentive offered under the proposed policy to expand on the existing Employer-Assisted Housing Initiative through the City of Rochester. He explained that the City will match up to \$3,000 offered by employers to their employees to purchase a home in the City. Mr. Johnson stated that a mortgage lien is established against the property for five years to ensure that employees retain homeownership for that period of time. To manage costs for budgetary purposes, he stated that the policy could specify the number of employees to be given this incentive each year on a first come, first served basis.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that Board members are legally considered employees of the District, despite the fact that they had to live in the District to be elected. She stated that Board members could simply sell their homes and obtain the monetary incentive to purchase property elsewhere in the City. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that the policy prevents abuses such as moving from one location to another within the City. Mr. Johnson stated that he will obtain further information to determine whether this program only applies to first-time homebuyers in the City.

Commissioner Cruz requested that Mr. Johnson obtain information from the City regarding ways to prevent abuse and to monitor adherence to program requirements.

Action Item: Mr. Johnson will obtain greater detail about the City of Rochester Employer-Assisted Housing Initiative to determine mechanisms for preventing abuse and for monitoring adherence to program requirements.

Commissioner Powell asked about the additional weight to be awarded to candidates for “urban experience”, questioning the extent to which this should influence hiring decisions. She noted that veterans are given five additional points to their score on civil service exams. Mr. Johnson pointed out that “urban experience” can vary greatly, and the applicant’s passion and commitment to working with children in the City School District is difficult to quantify.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern that an individual working as a substitute teacher for many years would not qualify because they would not meet the required minimum number of hours per week. Mr. Johnson replied that another option would be to give preference to hiring an RCSD graduate or a graduate of an urban school district. He noted that this would be a more

objective criterion, since “urban experience” could include those who are quite affluent, reside on East Avenue and have attended exclusive private schools.

Commissioner Campos noted that preference should be given to graduates of an urban teaching and learning institute or program dedicated to urban education.

Commissioner Powell responded that this seems to be an appealing option, but 9th-grade students are often compelled to follow a certain track in high school that does not necessarily correspond to their later career path. She stated that a teacher may have graduated high school from a program not directly related to teaching.

V. Follow-up Discussion of Transportation Policy

Debra Flanagan reported submitting a memo to Commissioner Elliott, Chair of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee, to request that Committee to consider amending NYS Education law in the legislative agenda this year. She explained that the current law allows all school districts, except large city school districts, to be reimbursed by the State for additional transportation costs deemed necessary to protect student safety.

Ms. Flanagan also stated that she has not yet composed the letter to the Office of the Big Five School Districts or to the New York State School Boards Association on this issue.

Commissioner Cruz noted that a meeting is planned with Lori Baldwin, Maria Mello-Dupre, and the crime analyst with RPD to discuss specific data needed to develop criteria for expanding transportation services for student safety.

VI. Review Audit Policy Proposals

Ms. Flanagan explained that the Audit Committee just approved four policy proposals, which have been referred back to the Policy Committee for review: Audit Committee policy, External Audit policy, Internal Auditor policy, and Claims Audit policy.

Commissioner Cruz suggested that these policy proposals be included in the agenda for the March Policy Committee meeting to allow time for review and consideration.

VII. Status of Current Policies

Ms. Flanagan reported that 22 policy proposals related to Special Education will be presented in the February 16th Board meeting for adoption. She stated that no other policies are currently in process.

VIII. New Business

Commissioner Powell emphasized the importance of providing guidance to the Administration about any changes in transportation services for the 2012-13 school year. She stated that this guidance is critical to provide while the budget is in the development phase, and to notify

families well in advance of the lottery deadline for student placement. She stated that the members of the Policy Committee have received information about different transportation scenarios and corresponding cost estimates, based on strengthening the zone boundaries and transporting additional students within the 1 ½-mile distance limit. Commissioner Powell requested that Jerome Underwood attend the next Policy Committee meeting to discuss timelines and next steps.

Commissioner Cruz directed this issue to be included in the agenda for the March Policy Committee meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Campos. **Adopted 3-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:30PM.

Next Policy Committee Meeting: March 13th at 5:00PM