

Rochester Board of Education
Policy Committee
July 26, 2011
5:30PM

Attendance: Commissioner Cruz (Chair) and Commissioners Campos, Elliott (arrived 5:35PM), Powell and White. District staff: Charles Johnson, Bethany Centrone, Gladys Pedraza-Burgos, Jeanette Silvers, Deasure Matthew, and Jerome Underwood. Board staff: Ms. Shanai Lee.

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 5:30PM.

I. Review and Approve May 2011 Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Campos to approve the May 17, 2011 Policy Committee Meeting minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Powell. **Adopted 3-0.**

II. Review input from the Audit Committee regarding proposed Internal Audit Reports Policy

Commissioner Cruz asked whether input has been received from the Audit Committee regarding the proposed Internal Audit Reports Policy. Ms. Lee confirmed that no input has been received to date from the Audit Committee about this proposed policy.

III. Review recommendations from the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee Health Forum regarding policy development for HIV/STD Prevention

Commissioner Cruz emphasized the importance of obtaining community input from a wide range of perspectives in developing a policy governing sex education and prevention of STD/HIV infection.

Gladys Pedraza-Burgos noted that the impetus for developing a policy stems from a recent report by Dr. Doniger, Director of the Monroe County Health Department, of the alarming increase in the rate of STD/HIV infection in the community. She described approaches used in other school districts to address this public health issue, reporting that New York City created a condom availability program in 1991.

Ms. Pedraza-Burgos presented data from the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is based on self-reports of adolescents. She stated that the preliminary survey results for 2011 for RCSD students showed: 58% reporting being sexually active; 14% reporting being sexually active with multiple partners; and 21% reporting that they do not use a condom. Ms. Pedraza-Burgos attested to strong community support for schools to address this issue and to establish a condom availability program, citing letters of support received from the Monroe County Health Department, Metro Council on Teen Potential, Monroe County Medical Society, Center for Community Health, Society for Adolescent Medicine, Ibero-American Action League, Puerto Rican Youth Development, and District School-Based Health Centers. She described key components of the program as: offering a broad array of options to students, including information that abstinence is the only definite way to prevent infection; enhancing the health education curriculum at the high school level; providing training for health professionals; creating health education campaigns in the schools; and ensuring that health professionals conduct a psycho-emotional readiness assessment of each student and referral to appropriate community agencies. Ms. Pedraza-Burgos stated

that there is no evidence to indicate that providing education and protection (i.e. condoms) leads to an increase in sexual activity among young people.

Bethany Centrone added that the proposed policy would allow parents to choose not to have their child participate in the condom availability program. She stated that this opt-out provision and training for health professionals are required under NYS regulations for school districts offering such programs.

Commissioner Elliott urged District staff to pay special attention to the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases among homosexual and heterosexual students, particularly given the significant increase in incidence among young males.

Commissioner White described the inherent conflict surrounding this issue: the proper role of parents and of the school system, as well as the moral values involved in teaching children about sexuality. He expressed concern about the schools assuming responsibility not only for providing this education, but also the means of contraception – particularly since this is done outside of the moral context of the family. He also conveyed concern about removing responsibility from parents to discuss and address sensitive issues with their children, such as sexuality and moral choices.

Commissioner Campos asked whether there is data to indicate that condom availability reduces the incidence of teen-age pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases. She also expressed concern about schools providing direct care and contraception, as this is not their role. She stated that she would like more detailed information as to the type of education that would be provided to students through this program.

Action Item: Ms. Pedraza-Burgos will provide data to the Policy Committee regarding the impact of condom availability programs in reducing the incidence of teen-age pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

Community Input:

Tiana Mannon, Youth Leader with Safe Sex, Inc., described strong community support for the District to establish an education and prevention program given the significant increase in unplanned pregnancies and STD infection in the community.

Katie Keber, Adult Advisor with Safe Sex, Inc., reported that over 1,000 signatures have been obtained since December 2010 on a petition urging the Board to establish a policy to address this public health issue. Ms. Keber presented the petition and a sample policy based on the programs in New York City and Washington, DC. She reported that over twenty different community organizations have submitted letters of support for this change in school board policy.

Thaddeus Price, Community Health Educator with Highland Family Planning, reported that Rochester ranks #1 in the incidence of chlamydia and of gonorrhea infection in New York State. He stated that STD infection is associated with increased risk for contracting HIV, and over 45% of new cases of HIV diagnosed in 2010 were among those under 24 years of age.

Ms. Abraham, Youth Leader with Safe Sex, Inc., reported that Rochester has five of the fifteen zip code areas in New York State with the highest rate of teen pregnancy. She asserted that when parents enroll their child in school-based health services, they expect comprehensive care - including reproductive

health care. By not providing this care, she contended that the District is failing these students, parents, and the community. She described some of the barriers to obtaining contraception when a student is only provided with a prescription: availability of health insurance and/or financial means to pay, transportation, and access to a pharmacy.

Action Item: Commissioner Cruz suggested that the Board organize a roundtable event with members of Safe Sex, Inc., area youth, and members of the District's Parent Council to continue discussion of condom availability for District students.

IV. Review and Discuss the Draft Fund Balance Policy

Commissioner Powell stated that the intent of the Fund Balance Policy is to respond to recent changes approved by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB). She noted that the Finance Committee reviewed the draft policy and found that it conforms to the GASB standards. She stated that external auditors will examine the District's financial practices in September, including compliance with these standards. For this reason, it is important to adopt the proposed policy by September.

Chuck Johnson explained that the draft Fund Balance policy will establish an unrestricted fund balance of 5-15% to cover any unforeseen expenses in the future. He stated that if the balance dropped below the 5% minimum, the District would be required to add 1% per year until the minimum level has been attained.

Motion by Commissioner Campos to approve the proposed Fund Balance policy to advance to the Board in the July 2011 Business Meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Powell. **Adopted 3-0.**

V. Review and Discuss Data Regarding Transportation Options

Mr. Underwood presented information regarding the estimated cost of providing transportation to all elementary students (Kindergarten through 8th grade). Based on an estimate of 5,000 students walking to school and phasing this change in over three years, he projected \$6m in cost to the District.

Mr. Underwood stated that options were examined to strengthen zone boundaries to improve operational efficiency while increasing the number of elementary students receiving transportation services:

1. Continuing the current practice of transporting students residing 1.5 miles or more from their school and improving enforcement of existing zone boundaries:

Mr. Underwood reported an estimated \$10m in cost savings with this option due to reducing the number of buses needed. He stated that the District currently uses 273 buses, with the majority crossing zone boundaries. If students attended schools in their zone or a city-wide school, the District would only need 94 buses.

2. Provide transportation to students living 0.75 miles or more from their school:

Even though the District would not receive reimbursement from the State for students transported less than 1.5 miles from their school, Mr. Underwood stated that a projected \$5m in cost savings could be realized from this option because the District would still need far fewer buses than currently utilized.

3. Transport students who live 0.5 miles or more from school:

Under this option, Mr. Underwood stated that the District would incur an additional \$1.3m in cost.

Mr. Underwood pointed out that any potential cost savings would only be realized in the first year because the State would reduce the reimbursement in subsequent years based on the District's costs.

Commissioner Powell commented that the data support the original plans of the Board in defining neighborhood schools as those within a 0.75-mile radius of a student's residence. She explained that the Administration chose to define neighborhood schools as those within a 0.5-mile radius of the student's home because of differences in the geographic distribution of schools in the District which would allow some students to choose from as many as five schools in their neighborhood, while other students only had one school in their neighborhood.

Mr. Underwood reported that the data regarding the different transportation options has been shared with colleagues in the Teaching & Learning Division and the Placement Office, as any changes in transportation practices would have significant implications in each of these areas. For this reason, he recommended that implementation be postponed until the 2012-13 school year if the policy is changed by December 2011.

Commissioner Elliott stated that her primary concern is for the safety of children, and expressed concern that this has not yet been included in the discussion. She proposed that the District provide transportation to all elementary students (Kindergarten – grade 8), regardless of distance to ensure their safety in light of high crime and violence in City neighborhoods. Commissioner Elliott also advocated a return to neighborhood schools in the long term, when differences among schools in terms of educational quality have been eliminated.

Commissioner Powell requested that discussions to amend Transportation policy include other policies that would be affected (i.e. Parent Preference/Managed Choice).

Mr. Underwood suggested that these discussions also include staff from the Placement Office and Teaching & Learning Division.

VI. Review and Discussion of Policies Related to Accountability

Dr. Silvers and Dr. Matthew presented a new Superintendent Regulation (4000-R) "Grade Designation Criteria for Grades 9-12". Dr. Silvers explained that the intent of this regulation is to designate grades based on the number of credits earned, rather than the specific courses completed. She pointed out that the largest number of students drop out of school in 9th grade and this change in the way in which grades are defined may help students continue the path toward graduation. Dr. Silvers noted that the State has been moving away from traditional grade designations and focusing on cohorts, which is reflected in this regulation. She stated that designating grade level by credits earned also corresponds more with the District's new online systems and courses offered in school. As an example, Dr. Silvers reported that 8th-grade students in three different schools took Regents exams in integrated algebra, living science and U.S. history, and 95% of passed these exams. As a result, these students will begin 9th grade with three credits earned and will only have to complete two more credits during the year to be on track for graduation. In addition to promoting students' motivation and accomplishment, Dr. Silvers stated that this change in

grade designation will also provide more opportunity for students to take Advanced Placement classes and become college-ready.

Commissioner White inquired whether the new system will be viewed as an attempt at social promotion of students. Dr. Silvers replied that social promotion will not be allowed because the types of courses and the number of credits will be examined when the student reaches 10th- and 11th-grade.

Commissioner White asked whether other districts have used this approach and the impact on student retention and dropout rates. Dr. Silvers reported that RCSD has been much more stringent than other districts in course-based requirements for grade promotion. Dr. Matthew stated that students have many more requirements for graduation beyond the four core subjects (e.g. computer science and foreign language). She commented that a student will need to complete all of these requirements and it should not matter whether a credit in computer science was earned in 9th grade or 11th grade.

Dr. Silvers informed the members of the Policy Committee that a new regulation is being developed to provide privacy protection for Special Education, particularly in light of increasing interaction between new systems.

Motion by Commissioner Campos to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Powell. **Adopted 3-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

Next Policy Committee Meeting: August 18th at 5:30PM