

# ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

## Special Meeting

July 7, 2015

### MINUTES

**Attending:** Board President Van White; Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott; and Commissioners Adams, Campos (arrived 6:04PM), Cruz, Evans and Powell (arrived 6:06PM). Acting Board Clerk: Debra Flanagan.

**I. Call to Order:** Board President White called the meeting to order at 6:02PM.

**Motion** by Commissioner Evans to appoint Debra Flanagan as Acting Board Clerk until Shanai Lee's return to the office. Seconded by Commissioner Adams. **Adopted 7-0.**

**II. Speakers Addressing an Agenda Item:** Erica Simmons, President of the District-wide Parent Advisory Council; Kerry Coleman, Parent and Representative of the 9<sup>th</sup> Christian Ministries.

Ms. Simmons expressed the concerns of the members of the District-wide Parent Advisory Council regarding the proposed contract with the Rochester Greater Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA) because of the additional costs involved to transport fewer students. She discussed the possibility of contracting with another transit company to transport students in the upcoming school year, and also suggested amending the proposed contract so that the cost would align with the number of students served.

Mr. Coleman objected to budgetary decisions that do not take into account students' needs, and to the overall lack of accountability in the District.

**III. Consideration of Resolution No. 2014-15: 745:** Proposed Agreement with Rochester Greater Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA) to provide transportation to RCSD students for the 2015-16 school year.

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to discuss Resolution No. 2014-15: 745. Seconded by Commissioner Evans. **Adopted 7-0.**

Commissioner Adams explained the change in her position with regard to this proposed contract, emphasizing that she remains dissatisfied with RGRTA and the proposed terms of the contract. She noted that she had initially intended to block this proposal to open the contract to be re-bid.

Commissioner Adams stated that she has decided to approve the RGRTA contract for the following reasons:

- The lack of time to re-bid the contract and the urgency of arranging for student transportation for the upcoming school year;
- Research of other school districts indicate that the likelihood of obtaining lower costs with a different vendor (especially a private firm) is quite remote;
- Knowledge that private firms/vendors are always seeking bus drivers, and this would be an issue with a private contractor;
- Subsidizing the cost for additional bus drivers to increase the number of students served would be cost-prohibitive for the District.

Commissioner Powell concurred with Commissioner Adams' assessment, particularly given the timeframe.

Commissioner Evans pointed out that school basically begins in one month and student transportation must be addressed. He stated that he is supporting the proposed contract with RGRTA because of the tight timeframe for arranging for student transportation and the fact that the contract is only for one year.

Commissioner Evans urged the District to begin working on student transportation for the 2016-17 school year immediately. He emphasized the importance of establishing measures to control transportation costs because these costs are unsustainable for the District. He objected to the way in which RGRTA handled contract negotiations, noting that any student has the right to board a public bus if they are able to pay the fare.

Board President White reflected that none of the Board members make this decision easily because of the need to provide safe transportation to District students. He emphasized that RGRTA will be providing less service at a greater cost under the proposed contract, and contended that viable alternatives are available. Board President White asserted that the Board was given inadequate counsel approximately two months ago, when told that the proposed contract could not be re-bid. He contended that he has since learned that the contract could have been re-bid at that point and there would have been adequate time to arrange for student transportation with a different vendor.

Board President White discussed the challenge for the Administration to identify an additional \$10.6M to cover these additional transportation costs, which were not included in the approved 2015-16 RCSD budget. He noted that the Administration has established a Position Control Committee to identify positions and cost-cutting options. Board President White stated that he would like information of the specific

## **DRAFT: NOT APPROVED BY BOARD OF EDUCATION**

positions that are being considered for elimination, noting that he has already requested this information and received an incomplete/insufficient response.

Board President White concurred with Commissioner Evans regarding the need to examine the costs for student transportation in the District comprehensively, and to begin the search for other vendors immediately.

Superintendent Vargas announced that there will be no staff layoffs or cuts to services to students and families as a result of the additional costs under the student transportation contract with RGRTA. He asserted that these costs will be managed within the approved 2015-16 RCSD budget.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern about the Superintendent's assertions, stating that the ability to absorb an additional \$11M in the approved 2015-16 RCSD budget implies that this budget is padded with excess funding or unnecessary expenditures.

Commissioner Adams reiterated the concerns expressed by Board President White regarding the specific decisions of the Position Control Committee. She pointed to problems that arose in the 2014-15 school year with teaching vacancies, which were sometimes covered by unqualified or rotating substitute teachers. Commissioner Adams emphasized the need for enhanced visibility and accountability regarding coverage for teaching vacancies, noting that she has requested a report to the Board on a regular basis with this information.

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to call to question Resolution No. 2014-15: 745. Seconded by Commissioner Evans. **Adopted 7-0.**

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to approve Resolution No. 2014-15: 745. Seconded by Commissioner Evans. **Adopted 6-1, with Board President White dissenting.**

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Evans. **Adopted 7-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 6:35PM.