



DESIGNING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER:

A 100-DAY PLAN FOR LISTENING, LEARNING
AND CREATING FOCUS FOR 2016-2017

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Rochester city schools educate students who have the potential to achieve great things. All of them deserve schools that provide a rich array of opportunities and supports to help each child achieve his or her fullest potential.

Our District has thousands of teachers, administrators and staff members who are experienced and dedicated to helping them succeed. We have many highly engaged families, generous support from our community and funding from the local, state and federal levels to serve students.

Despite these resources, our District fails to consistently deliver on the promise of public education—to help every child achieve, and prepare every student for success in later life. There are many bright spots of success in schools and programs, some encouraging trends in recent years. But as a system Rochester schools are not consistently performing as well as our students and families deserve. For too long, our assessment results, graduation rates and other basic measures of achievement have lagged behind other communities, including urban districts that serve families who face challenges similar to those in Rochester.

How can we do better?

Rochester needs more than a new Superintendent who comes in with a ready-made plan, designed to solve existing problems in isolation. If there were models of success in other urban districts we could simply copy, Rochester schools would already be higher-performing. While we need to understand best practices for urban schools—trauma-informed models of care, the power of community schools, rigorous and engaging curriculum and instruction, culturally informed and evidenced-based professional learning practice and more—imposing a plan from the outside in won't work.

It is time to try a different approach—something more agile, that enables us to identify challenges more clearly, then develop innovative solutions that respond more effectively to the needs of Rochester youth.

That is what our 100-day listening and learning plans are all about.

The process is designed to unleash the thinking, problem-solving and fresh ideas of the people who work in, support and attend Rochester schools. It requires us to listen to and learn from those who use District services—students, Principals, teachers, parents, employees, faith-based partners, governance partners, community residents and everyone who cares deeply about Rochester's youth. Then we will collaborate on solutions that match our specific challenges. We will act quickly but have the assurance that we are tackling the right problems with well-researched and properly planned solutions.

Reports and Recommendations from Five Project Teams

Members of the Superintendent's Cabinet will lead five Listening and Learning project teams that engage constituents, study best practices and bring forth recommendations for implementation this school year. The teams will produce plans that target improvement objectives in five critical areas of the system.

INSTRUCTION—Improving the quality of data dashboards to provide clear and actionable representations of student progress

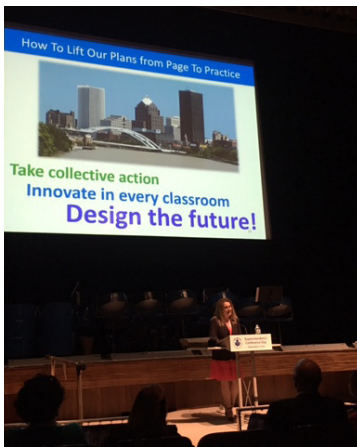
FINANCE—Focusing and aligning resources for results

CENTRAL OFFICE—Providing central services and support matched to school, student and customer needs

SCHOOL CLIMATE—Ensuring safe, healthy and welcoming schools where every student is personally supported to achieve

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT—Ensuring timely communication and quality engagement opportunities to build community understanding and involvement





“All students should achieve graduation. One hundred percent of them. I believe that providing all children with a high-quality education, along with supports to achieve graduation, is the great civil rights challenge of our time.”

*Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams on prioritizing equity
September 6, 2016 - Superintendent's Conference Day*

Innovation and customization are essential for the Listening and Learning plans to succeed. The teams will employ “Design Thinking” to achieve both goals. It’s a process of creating innovative ideas to solve problems by carefully listening to customer needs before designing a solution—then building prototypes, testing and refining them to meet those needs more effectively and efficiently. Design Thinking is being used to improve everything from Netflix user engagement, to the business model of Airbnb, to the health of babies in third-world countries—and in many school districts that are models of improvement. We will use it in the Listening and Learning process to attack longstanding Rochester challenges with fresh approaches developed through a focused, research-based process.

Listening and Learning teams will report their plans to the Board of Education and community in January, 2017 (see timeline on page 4). Each plan will include recommendations for immediate actions that improve focus, reduce fragmentation and strengthen support for our schools. The work is expected to combine a deep analysis of the District’s current situation with research on what works elsewhere. It will align with District and school improvement plans submitted to the State Education Department for 2016-17, and lay the foundation for a three-year strategic plan to guide us from 2017-18 through 2019-20.



Superintendent’s Focus Areas and Immediate Actions

Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams will coach each project team, provide research expertise and support implementation of the plans. She has laid out four areas of focus that guide this process and her work as Superintendent.

1. **Prioritizing educational equity:** “It is critical that we create a District where every person, in every department, is responsible and accountable for the education of all students at every school. We must be devoted to eliminating the opportunity and education achievement gaps for urban youth. We can do this by adhering to a theory of action that ensures strong dynamic interaction between great educators, rigorous and cognitively demanding content, engaged students and families, and community partners that bring coherent supports matched to the specific needs of Rochester children.”
2. **Building relational capacity:** “By building shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect, we will improve learning. We will increase engagement and motivation. Recognizing every person’s experience as unique, we can connect to each other through a deep understanding and acknowledgement of race, ethnicity, and culture. This will ensure that we are mindful, respectful, and inclusive.”
3. **Nurturing innovation:** “We need to consider fresh ideas, and help our schools, leaders, teachers, and students customize solutions for their unique needs. Innovation and customization are essential to ensure that every student gets to grade level, that we accelerate their learning, and get them to graduation.”
4. **Creating coherence:** “Fragmentation gets in the way of serving our children, our parents, our teachers, our schools or our community. The “system” needs to be coherent and user-friendly. Coherence does not mean we all must do the same things. It does mean that our work must produce powerful learning for all youth, with equitable and strong outcomes.”

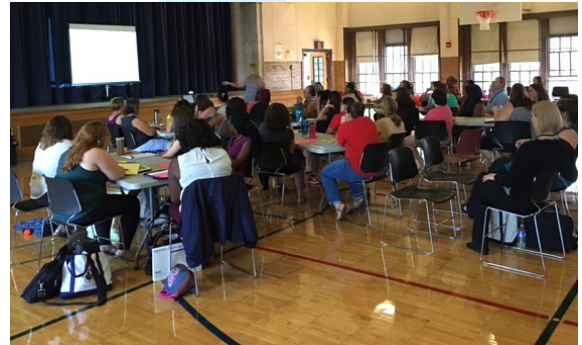
Accountability for action to achieve these guiding principles is a critical role Barbara Deane-Williams has identified for herself as leader of the process. Noting that the District must work with a strong sense of urgency, the Superintendent has taken immediate steps that set the stage for improvement while the Listening and Learning teams do their work. Some of the key actions include:

- **Realign the School Chiefs** so that Principals and school teams have more direct access to the Superintendent
- **Add a Chief of Schools** to provide focused support for receivership schools
- **Appoint a Chief Accountability Officer** to help compile, analyze and disseminate data in ways that help school leaders assess the progress of every student by face and name
- Begin publication of **“Leadership Link,”** a weekly round-up of essential information for school administrators
- **Create “At Your Service,”** a dedicated resource in the Superintendent’s office to ensure responses within 24 hours to concerns that schools or District departments have not addressed in a timely way

How You Can Help

Please help us to improve Rochester schools through collective thinking and collaborative problem-solving.

- **Serve on a Listening and Learning project team if you are asked**
- **Respond to surveys and participate in focus groups**
- **If you have ideas, comments or questions, please share them at: ListenLearn@rcsdk12.org.**



TIMELINE

Week	Beginning	Key Activities and Milestones
1	8.8	Listening and learning begins
2	8.15	Leadership Summit with school administrators sets direction and expectation
3	8.22	Listening and learning with CO staff, community
4	8.29	Training and planning sessions for Superintendent's Cabinet
5	9.6	Start of school year; outlines mission and focus; intensive school visits
6	9.12	Projects and leaders defined, design teams formed
7	9.19	First 100-Day Listening and Learning team meetings; review national research and District data
8	9.26	Second design team meetings; finalize project plans
9	10.3	Focused listening and learning: design, administer surveys
10	10.11	Focused listening and learning: focus groups, input meetings
11	10.17	Focused listening and learning: focus groups, input meetings
12	10.24	Continue listening and learning, begin to analyze stakeholder input
13	10.31	Complete analysis, begin draft of project reports
14	11.7	Review / refine report drafts with project design team
15	11.14	Initial findings as reflections showed in Cabinet team session
16	11.21	Additional data gathering/analysis, reviews with Listening and Learning project team
17	11.28	Additional data gathering/analysis, reviews with Listening and Learning project team
18	12.5	All project design report components finalized
19	12.12	Final reports reviewed with Executive Cabinet team members
20	12.19	Final project design reports submitted to Superintendent for analysis

Week of January 12, 2017:

Listening and Learning team members and Superintendent Deane-Williams present 100-day Listening and Learning Project Reports to Board and community