

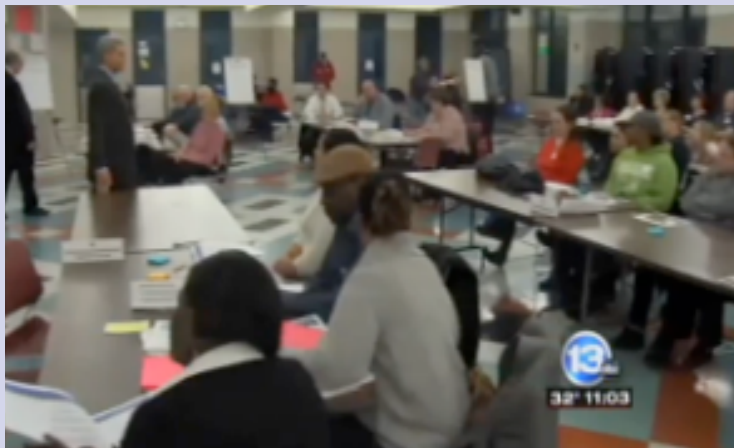


2013-14 Budget Planning Process:
**Report on Community
Feedback**

March 13, 2013

Presented by:

Bill Ansbro, Chief Financial Officer
Rochester City School District



2013-14 Budget Planning Process:

Report on Community Feedback from the School Choice Expo and the Budget Open House

The Rochester City School District is committed to listening to parents, students and other members of our community throughout the development of the budget for the 2013-14 school year. We highly value all input offered by our stakeholders and the members of the community we serve.

This report summarizes input we received at the School Choice Expo, Budget Open House events, and feedback into our dedicated phone line and e-mail account. We estimate that we received input from over 200 individuals through these various sources. It should be noted that the ideas and views reflected in this report are not the result of a survey and do not represent a statistically significant sample of the parents and community members that the District serves. Rather, participants at these events are a self-selected group of individuals who attended. The forums were open-ended, and we documented the opinions that the individuals in attendance chose to express.

We appreciate everyone who participated in these events, and we welcome continuing engagement. Those who wish to provide additional input or were unable to attend these events are invited to e-mail their suggestions and feedback to **balancedbudget@rcsdk12.org**, or call **262-8682**. In addition, parents are invited to informally discuss their viewpoints and suggestions with Superintendent Vargas at the "Coffee and Conversation" sessions that are held twice each month at the Central Office.

School Choice Expo

The 2013 School Choice Expo was held on Saturday, January 12 at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. The primary purpose of this event was to share information about the programs and services offered by each school to help each parent make an informed choice about which school is the best fit for their child. Parents also completed questionnaires that allowed them to offer suggestions on ways to improve the schools.

Budget Open House

As part of our organization's attempt to gather feedback and new ideas on how to improve our students' educational achievement, this year we initiated a new event called the "Budget Open House."

The Budget Open House consisted of three evening sessions open to the public:

- February 4 at the Rochester International Academy
- February 12 at the District's Central Office
- February 26 at Dr. Freddie Thomas High School

Each event began with a brief presentation by Superintendent Bolgen Vargas and Chief of Staff Patricia Malgieri introducing the event and explaining the District's goals and priorities. Chief Financial Officer William Ansbro discussed our current fiscal outlook and described where we get our funding and how we allocate resources to educational programs and operations. However, we spent most of the session listening to suggestions and insights of the community members in attendance. In order to systematically collect and organize the participants' thoughts, District staff facilitated small-group discussions on seven "table topics":

- Elementary Education (Grades K-6)
- Secondary Education (Grades 7-12)
- Facilities and Transportation
- Athletics
- Extracurricular Activities and Expanded Learning
- Organizational Efficiencies
- Other Topics

Following these discussions, each group facilitator reported the general themes and specific suggestions that were raised at his or her table to the larger group.

Themes

Four themes emerged from these events that will help guide our efforts to better serve our students and the community:

- 1) Student Achievement: The participants' highest priority is to improve student achievement and prepare our students for college and careers. To achieve this goal, they wished us to expand and improve programs that keep students interested in school and engaged in learning. There was significant discussion of athletic programs, instrumental music, CTE, and elective courses. Parents also felt strongly about making expanded learning engaging, interactive, and fun.
- 2) Neighborhood Schools: Parents are generally supportive of their children attending school closer to their homes. While there were questions raised about services and choices that might be gained or lost in the transition toward neighborhood schools, most participants agreed that the benefits

of shorter transit times and accessibility for parents make the implementation of neighborhood schools worthwhile.

- 3) Customer Service and Accountability: Information transparency, open communication, and a welcoming school environment are very important to parents. The Central Office and the schools need to improve customer service practices and ensure that all employees are welcoming to parents and promptly responsive to their communications. Parents suggested that these efforts would encourage their collective engagement. Parents expressed concern that some employees are not at work when they should be.
- 4) Opportunities for Efficiency: Participants identified various areas of District operations that they believe are not as efficient as they could be. Some opined that moving toward neighborhood schools and optimizing the use of facilities would generate significant efficiencies. Participants also suggested identifying areas of service overlap between the District and the City or County, and between the various departments within the District.

The specific suggestions and concerns we heard are categorized by topic and described below. These themes and suggested action items will each be given thoughtful consideration by Superintendent Vargas and the Board of Education as we continue with the development of the 2013-14 Budget.

Elementary Education

Enrichment: Some participants expressed a desire for schools to provide more enrichment opportunities, including in the arts. These help ensure that students who are learning at grade level or excelling continue to be engaged and challenged in the classroom.

Intervention: Participants expressed that we need to continue to support our neediest students through intervention programs. Furthermore, schools should communicate to parents early on that their children are not doing well in school to allow more time for intervention.

Instructional Methods: Some parents emphasized a desire for more hands-on learning instead of a focus on textbooks. For example, SMART Boards should be used interactively to expose students to experiences outside the classroom. The importance of teaching basic foundation skills such as cursive writing was also raised.

Transparency in School Choice: District and school leaders should be transparent about the quality of each school so that parents are well-informed when choosing their child's school. It was noted that parents are interested in test scores, but they also heavily consider school safety and the record of parent engagement in the decision process.

Instrumental Music: Some participants expressed an interest in making sure instrumental music is offered at all K-8 schools. However, it was also suggested that instrumental music should be offered beginning in 5th grade instead of 4th grade due to concerns about students' care of their instruments.

Bilingual Education: We heard concerns about the need to improve the education of English language learners, including by having Spanish-speaking teachers in the appropriate classrooms.

Secondary Education

School Choice: Participants offered several good suggestions on how to improve school selection at the secondary level. These include informing parents more comprehensively about the programs offered at various schools, allowing 7th and 8th graders enrolled in Grades 7-12 schools to apply elsewhere for 9th grade, and designing true Honors programs at certain schools.

Electives: Many individuals expressed an interest in the availability of elective courses such as art, music and technology in Grades 7-12. It was suggested that the master schedule be designed to encourage students to take these courses.

Foreign Language: Some people feel that all schools should emphasize Spanish because it is the second most common language in the United States, and not offer French, Italian or other languages. Meanwhile, others were supportive of offering various languages.

Career and Technical Education: Participants were interested in making vocational programs, or CTE, available to all students at all schools.

Support Services: Some participants opined that school counselors should play a greater role in helping students prepare for an effective transition to college. It was also discussed that Social Services should intervene to improve attendance.

Class Size: We received comments that noted that class sizes in the secondary schools are unusually small and could be increased.

Facilities and Student Transportation

Neighborhood Schools: Participants were generally supportive of neighborhood schools. They recognized that neighborhood schools would reduce the time children spend on the bus and the financial impact on the District. It would also facilitate the use of buildings as community assets, not just for school functions. Some concerns were expressed about the potential impact on parents' priorities in choosing their child's school, for example, the availability of before- and after-school programs. One good suggestion that we heard is to we research and model our program after other cities that have achieved academic success with neighborhood schools, such as New Haven, Connecticut.

School Choice: Some concerns were expressed about the current school choice process. For example, it sometimes leads families to be split amongst different schools. Participants also expressed concerns about the mixture of grade configurations, and the fact that persistent poor student behavior influences parents' perceptions about which schools are most desirable.

School Location and Renovation: Participants expressed concerns and preferences about the location and maintenance of specific schools. For instance, some attendants want to School 10 to be renovated. Also, some participants feel that School 16 should be moved back to the 19th Ward, while others want to keep it located at Freddie Thomas High School to save space. Some people feel strongly that School 30 should remain open.

Optimizing Space: Some participants believe that the District could operate more efficiently and free up resources for instruction by closing some school buildings. For example, we received a comment suggesting that the District consolidate its programs into District-owned facilities, and discontinue leasing privately owned space. It was also suggested that there are District-owned buildings that are under-utilized, and some facilities could be sold or leased out to increase revenue if we were to consolidate schools and programs into fewer buildings.

Transportation: Some participants expressed concern about student safety in transit and dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of the Transportation Department.

Athletics

Athletic Facilities: Participants discussed a need to modernize school athletic facilities. For example, there is some interest in building an indoor track for use during the winter season to address a concern about safety when the track

team is practicing in the hallways. Others expressed various desires to have two new turf football fields, new baseball fields, and eight-lane pools.

Modified Programs: We observed a strong interest in continuing to expand athletic programs at the modified or elementary level, because the Junior Varsity and Varsity teams would benefit from student athletes who are exposed to school sports beginning in elementary school. Some participants expressed an interest in adding programs for particular sports, such as a wrestling program at the elementary level or 7th and 8th grade football teams.

Extracurricular Activities and Expanded Learning

Extracurricular Activities: Participants expressed interest in expanding extracurricular options, especially for 6th, 7th and 8th graders. One table discussed the potential for using partnerships with the United Way and the YMCA to expand after-school activities in the schools that are not implementing Expanded Learning.

Expanded Learning: It was suggested that the District include summer in the Expanded Day business model, and stagger employees' work schedules to cover the additional hours and days. Some participants emphasized that expanded learning should be fun, educational and interactive. Many participants also support discontinuing early dismissal on Wednesdays.

Organizational Efficiency

Shared Services: It was suggested that the District investigate where our resources and services overlap with the City of Rochester and Monroe County, and leverage the City's and County's resources to reduce this overlap.

Procurement and Contracts: The District may be able to obtain more favorable pricing by using reverse auctions and by collaborating with other buyers. It was also suggested that the District use variable contracts, review contracts based on evidence to avoid overpaying for services, and identify outsourcing opportunities within existing District departments.

Strategic Management: Participants discussed right-sizing the District to reflect the growing enrollment in local charter schools. They also discussed the need to evaluate progress based on benchmarks.

Administrative Cost Savings: Some participants voiced their ideas for reducing non-personnel administrative costs. Examples include reducing the use of air conditioning in administrative buildings, reducing the use of color printing, and

targeting mailings more effectively to reduce redundant or unnecessary communications.

Other Topics

Security: Two parents delivered a stack of petitions about the need for a School Safety Officer at School 42. The staff has difficulty with disruptive students with whom other security resources are either not sufficiently equipped to handle or take too long to respond.

Parent Engagement: Parents suggested that the District could encourage their collective engagement by providing a welcoming atmosphere in the schools and by being responsive to their communications. They also suggested that providing daycare, improving communication methods, and differentiating the topics of workshops would increase parent attendance at events. We learned that accessibility also plays a role, and it might be easier for parents to attend events and volunteer for activities if their child attends a school closer to their home.

Charter Schools: Some participants asked how the District was competing with the growing number of charter schools in the area. They suggested more outreach to parents on this topic – both to discover what charter schools were doing differently, and to encourage parents of charter school students to return their children to its schools.

Budget Process: Participants were appreciative of the opportunity to share their views about the District budget, but some suggested that the intended community engagement could be further improved by making the Budget Book more understandable and accessible to the general public.

Volunteers

We would like to thank the Commissioners from the Board of Education who joined us at these events and the Rochester City School District employees who volunteered their time to assist with the Budget Open House.

Presenters

Dr. Bolgen Vargas, Superintendent

Patricia Malgieri, Chief of Staff

William Ansbrow, Chief Financial Officer

Volunteers and Facilitators

Michele Alberti

Lori Baldwin

Daniel Betancourt

Maureen Bisnett

Patrick Brannan

Samone Bruce

Damian Camacho

Sally Combs

Vernon Connors

Carlos Cotto

Daryl Cranston

Patricia Cruz

Cerri Cupples

Beverly Gushue

Stephanie Harris

Karen Jacobs

Jason Johnson

Christina Jones

Tiffany Lee

John Mahaney

Jennifer Monroe-Dewitz

Glendine Miller

Tom Moughan

Rhonda Neal

Brian Pack

Chip Partner

Catherine Peets

Juliette Pennyman

Michael Schmidt

Everton Sewell

Corey Skinner

Gary Smith

Deborah Solomon

Jerome Underwood

Sheila Wall

Chanta Willis

Catherine Wilson

Kathryn Yarlett

A special thank you to our hosts:

Rochester International Academy

Mary Andrecolich-Diaz, Principal

Liz Vazquez, Senior School Secretary

Ron Johnson, Custodian

Montessori Academy

Shirley Green, Principal

Rachel Martinez, Senior School Secretary

Bud DeFisher, Custodian