



*Testimony Before The New York Senate Finance Committee,
Assembly Ways and Means Committee,
Senate Education Committee, and
Assembly Education Committee*

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Presented By:
Terry J. Dade
Superintendent of Schools
Rochester City School District

Introduction

My name is Terry Dade, the Superintendent of the Rochester City School District. I am pleased to join you today to share some of the steps my team and I have taken to ensure the District's financial stability. Unfortunately, it is no secret that my team and I have been dealing with a massive budget deficit since September of 2019. Our combined 2018-19 and 2019-20 budget deficit was \$64.8M. Upon discovering this in September, we took immediate steps to close this gap and made more than \$30M reductions mid-year. These cuts included staff reductions. And I don't have to tell you how difficult it was to cut teachers, mid school year. Many of our students returned from winter break to a different teacher. No Superintendent willingly takes such drastic steps as these, but I felt I had no option.

It's important for our state lawmakers to understand the current state of the RCSD; the significance of the financial crisis we have been addressing, and one which has already impacted our students.

District Overview

Rochester is one of the highest needs school districts in New York State.

- More than 20 percent of our student population includes Students with Disabilities.
- Rochester is one of the poorest cities in the state and in fact the entire nation.
- According to ACT Rochester, an initiative of the Rochester Area Community Foundation, more than 50 percent of children living in the City of Rochester live in poverty, and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 32 percent of the city's entire population lives in poverty.
- According to a youth risk behavior survey conducted on RCSD high school students; 5 percent of students had attempted suicide in the past year in 2017. That percentage increased to 17% in 2019.
- That same youth risk behavior survey showed that more than 89% of RCSD students said they had seen violence in their neighborhood.

Rochester's Foundation Aid allocation for 2020-21 is \$479.2M, which is only a 1.5% increase over last year's aid, while the statewide average Foundation Aid increase is close to 2.4%. This Foundation Aid allocation is further inflated because it now includes all of the monies from the consolidated aid categories, most notably special services aid and charter school conversion aid, which were once broken out as separate aid allocations.

On behalf of the children of Rochester, I am here today with an urgent ask. Rochester has an alarming poverty rate and disturbing youth risk behavior. It is critical that the State provide funding that recognizes the significant needs of our over 25,000 students that I have the honor and privilege of serving each day.

District Goals

Rochester City School District continues to make progress toward its academic goals

Despite Rochester having some of the highest needs students in the state, and a city with an alarming poverty rate, more Rochester City School District students are crossing the finish line to graduation. The District has achieved its highest graduation rate in more than a decade. The New York State Education Department has data which shows Rochester's four-year graduation rate was 63 percent in August 2019, a 3.7 percentage point increase from the previous year.

This continues a trend of a steady increase in graduation rates. Also of note:

- 15.9% increase for English Language Learners, from 26.7% to 42.6%
- 5.3% increase for Students with Disabilities (SWD), from 41.7% to 47.0%
- 7.6% increase for Hispanic students, from 55.0% to 62.6%

The ability to improve the District's graduation rate with limited resources is a testament to the work done in schools to make sure children succeed. The improved graduation rates are one of six goals I identified when first arriving in Rochester in July of 2019. The six goals include:

- Achieve a 5% increase in the graduation rate between August 2019 and August 2020.
- Increase student proficiency in ELA and math by 7% by August 2020.
- Reduce the disproportionate special education classification of students of color and the disproportionate suspension of students of color by 1.5% by 2020; and increase the enrollment of students of color in advanced coursework by 5% by June 2020.
- Reduce chronic absenteeism by 5% by June 2020.
- In order to better define parent/family engagement by June 2020, we will ensure there is an active Student Leadership Group in all high schools and that all schools will meaningfully engage families in the School-Based Planning Team process, in accordance with the School-Based Planning Team manual.
- Achieve and maintain fiscal stability by implementing a plan that will put the District on secure financial footing.

We need the necessary funding to continue our progress toward these academic goals and ensure success for our children.

Budget

Despite significant mid-year cuts, the District still faces a \$35 million deficit for this school year

The findings from a recent NYS State Comptroller's report indicated that if the District had not taken immediate action to close its fiscal deficit, RCSE would be ending the current 2019 – 2020 school year with a \$60 to \$70 million deficit. My administration worked diligently to make \$31 million in mid-year budgetary reductions. This is not how I envisioned my first months in Rochester, but it was necessary to ensure fiscal stability for the District.

So that is why, the children of Rochester need your help today. As I mentioned, a staggering number of Rochester's children live in poverty; one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. Without adequate funding to support both the academic and social emotional needs of our students, we will struggle to provide the supports our students need to succeed and to have a chance to rise out of poverty. Education is the primary path that will allow this to happen. Our students deserve this chance.

At this stage in our budget process, and despite significant mid-year reductions, we still have a \$35-million-dollar budget gap to close for this school year. If we are able to close this remaining gap, we are still projecting a budget shortfall of \$55 to \$60 million dollars next school year, even after factoring in the Foundation Aid increase proposed in the Executive Budget. I am asking for the State's support in closing our 2019-20 budget deficit and I recognize that any potential fiscal support that may be provided will require a level of additional oversight. I welcome an independent fiscal monitor to assist us in developing a plan which ensures long term fiscal stability for the RCSD. We have demonstrated that we have taken immediate steps to embrace our fiscal challenges this year and, with the State's support, we will continue to do so.

Closing

In summary, I deeply appreciate the relationships I have been able to build with our Albany delegation since arriving in Rochester. I know all lawmakers across the state care deeply about meeting the ever-growing needs of the students we have the honor and privilege of serving. I am fully aware of the needs of students, families, teachers, and the Rochester community as we emerge from our budget crisis as an even stronger Rochester family. Our students deserve a brighter future. Thank you for your time and consideration.