



# 2015-16 Budget Report on Stakeholder Input



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Chief Financial Officer

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The Rochester City School District is committed to listening to parents, students, principals, teachers, and other members of our community throughout the development of the budget each year. We highly value all input offered by our stakeholders and the members of the community we serve. Anyone is welcome to provide feedback or suggestions to save costs on a continuing basis by e-mailing [budget@rcsdk12.org](mailto:budget@rcsdk12.org), or by calling (585) 324-2424.

This report summarizes the input of participants at several events held during the 2015-16 Budget planning process, listed below.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location/Event</b>	<b>Target Group</b>
December 12, 2014	Central Office	RCSD Employees
December 30, 2014	Montessori Academy (Freddie Thomas)	Principals
January 7, 2015	Central Office	Student Leadership Congress
January 9, 2015	Hart Street Building	Principals
January 10, 2015	RCSD School Expo	Parents and general public
January 14, 2015	Hart Street Building	Assistant Principals and School Administrators
January 20, 2015	Central Office (Coffee and Conversation with the Superintendent)	Parents and general public
January 20, 2015	Hart Street Building	Assistant Principals and School Administrators
January 26, 2015	School #33	Parent Advisory Council
January 28, 2015	Montessori Academy (Freddie Thomas)	Parents and general public
February 5, 2015	Jefferson Campus	Parents and general public
February 5, 2015	Central Office	Coordinating Administrators of Special Education
February 7, 2015	UPK Registration	Pre-K parents

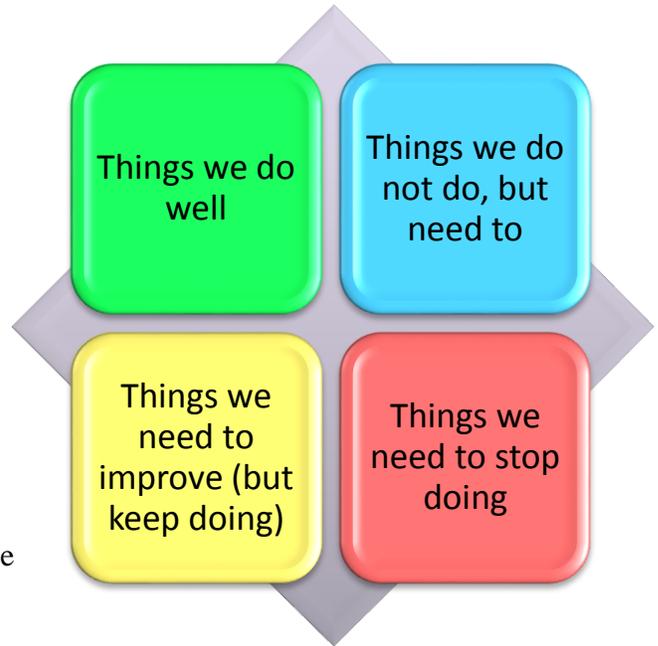
The budget was also discussed at several Coffee and Conversation with the Superintendent meetings on January 15, February 5 and 10, and March 12.

In most cases, these events featured a presentation by the Chief Financial Officer and/or Director of Budget, which examined trends in revenue and cost drivers, as well as the financial assumptions underlying the \$65.9 million budget challenge for the 2015-16 fiscal year (This figure represents a \$40.5 million projected budget gap and an additional \$25.4 million for investments in our academic priorities, including the East High School EPO.) Following the presentation, we opened the floor to the various stakeholder groups and the public at large to engage in discussions centered on four questions about the District's operations:

1. What things does the District do well?
2. What things does the District need to improve?
3. What things does the District not currently do, but needs to?
4. What things does the District need to stop doing?

This series of events continues and expands an existing tradition of engaging parents, employees, and other interested parties on the direction the District should take to better serve our students. Input from similar events in 2013-14 and 2014-15 was taken into consideration during the prior year budget processes. Examples of ongoing initiatives based on public input include:

- Providing at least one social worker in every school
- Funding a City-wide Marching Band and Show Choir
- Providing new music equipment
- Developing customer service training for the entire organization with support from Wegmans
- Installing hybrid kitchens in elementary schools



Eight topic areas emerged from the engagement sessions this year.

1. Enrollment Planning and Management
2. Elementary Schools
3. Secondary Schools
4. School Support
5. Special Education
6. Capital Infrastructure
7. Staff Management
8. Financial Management and Budget Process

### **Enrollment Planning and Management**

The measurement and projection of the number of students who are enrolled or will be enrolled in our schools are critical aspects of the District's operations. Various stakeholders suggested ways the administration could more effectively plan for changes in enrollment, manage enrollment, monitor enrollment data, and communicate enrollment data and related matters.

The trend of students and families choosing charter schools is of particular concern. One participant asked whether efforts have been made to find out why our students are leaving to attend charter schools. Another noted that students tend to leave after the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and wondered if teachers and students were adequately informed about high school options. It was suggested by a number of participants that we survey families who have chosen charter schools and otherwise investigate the specific aspects of charter schools that appeal to families. However, one District parent attributed the small class size to the loss of students to charter schools and was appreciative of the child's small class size. Another participant at the public session stated that some students were returning from charter schools to District schools and suggested that we

should be celebrating this as a signal of our schools' success. Some participants expressed interest in the cost of charter school tuition and services and how these compare to the District's cost per student.

The Urban-Suburban transfer program also impacts enrollment as City residents opt to attend suburban schools. One participant inquired about the cost of this program.

Principals suggested a portion of their operating funds be held back at the beginning of the year if the Finance Department was going to adjust for actual school enrollment versus the enrollment used for budget planning.

Finally, some participants recognized the need for political will to close low-performing schools and buildings due to the trend of declining enrollment.

### **Elementary Schools**

Some participants focused on issues related to improving the content and programs in our elementary schools. Examples include:

- Reading by Third Grade – Some participants highlighted the effort to have all of our students reading at grade level by the third grade as a strength of our program. To this end, they were supportive of additional reading teachers in the schools but also interested in seeing data that would demonstrate our progress toward this goal. One suggestion we received was to expand the initiative up to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade because some students are still not reading at grade level in the higher grades. Additional related suggestions were to push speech teachers into the K-2 classrooms to increase students' language development.
- Neighborhood Schools – Many participants, including parents and principals, expressed support for the neighborhood schools, recognizing that this model would reduce student transportation costs, build community, and drive parent engagement. On a related note, some participants wanted the school schedules and wrap-around services to be aligned to the needs of families in the neighborhood.

### **Secondary Schools**

Several themes emerged in discussions of issues that generally pertain to secondary schools. Examples include:

- Master Schedule – Various opportunities for improving the relatively new District master schedule process were identified in the public budget discussions. One participant stated that there was inconsistency in the class sizes throughout the District, and that we could work to smooth out the class sizes through more efficient placement of students and scheduling. Another suggested additional training was needed because scheduling nuances were being missed by the District's registrars, such as the difference between Band and Orchestra. Students expressed concern about having to wait out in the rain and cold due to the time it takes to go through metal detectors.

- East High School – Some participants were critical of the \$10.1 million budget request from the University of Rochester for the East High School EPO, especially given that the U of R has a significant endowment. They also expressed concern that District resources should not be redirected from other schools to finance the East High School EPO. Other concerns raised about East High School were the long-term sustainability of the EPO, what happens if the educational results are not positive, and what the impact will be on other schools as students are shifted out of East High School.
- Music and Art – Some participants, including students, highlighted the role that music and art courses and programs play in students’ educational experience. They were generally supportive of the recent increases in music and art teaching staff but also expressed an interest in updating the instructional equipment, such as musical instruments. Some pointed to School of the Arts as a model to replicate in other schools’ music and art programs.

### **School Support**

Some feedback in the budget planning meetings related to ways the District could better serve our students through increasing teacher capacity and improving support services. Examples include:

- Professional Development – Some parents expressed a desire to have more professional development resources specifically to our unique educational models, such as Montessori Academy, Expeditionary Learning, and the IB program at Wilson Commencement, to ensure that these models are implemented effectively over the long term. More generally, some participants suggested the current centralized model of instructional coaching could be improved and should be redesigned to maximize our professional development resources.
- Health Services – Some participants believe the nurses’ offices are unable to effectively treat students and may need more and better resources.
- Social Emotional Support – Some parents suggested that we need to stop suspending students because they fall behind in the classroom, and that social workers should work more collaboratively with teachers before and during each student suspension. Some questioned the efficacy of the In-School Suspension (ISS) model. Separately, we received a few suggestions at one event to reduce the Social Worker allocations in the schools, as these resources could be redirected to programmatic needs.
- School Food Service – The provision of free school lunches to students through the Community Eligibility program was identified as one of the things the District does well; however, we could improve the program by taking steps to reduce waste

## Special Education

Some attendees at these events expressed concerns about the phasing out of Integrated Co-Teaching (ICOT) classrooms and about what will happen to the students and teachers as a result of this change. Parents identified that they were receiving information in the schools that the ICOT model was better than the Consultant Teacher model. Parent participants suggested a fact sheet be sent to parents and that we provide additional information sessions to parents with



students in special education. Special Education administrators offered suggestions such as promoting the Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities for special education students, using intervention at the secondary level to prevent classification, and matching special education services with needs in Expanded Learning schools. It should also be noted that the Integrated Autism model was identified by parents as a program that is working well.

## Capital Infrastructure

We received a few suggestions that relate to the acquisition and use of the District's capital infrastructure. For instance, some participants including students recommended that technology hardware and software be updated more frequently and more systematically to avoid the use of outdated systems. Similarly, some individuals perceived a need for more and newer musical instruments. On the other hand, one participant suggested eliminating the purchase of new office furniture. Additionally, one student expressed that security measures, such as metal detectors, are used excessively and send the wrong message to students. Students suggested we provide some shelter for them while they wait out in the rain or snow to enter the building.

## Staff Management

Feedback from the employee input sessions identified several ways that the District could improve its internal management. Some stressed the need for greater accountability and for strategic management of staff. For instance, it was suggested from employee input that the Information Management & Technology Department and the Finance Department are struggling to manage an increasing workload with insufficient staff.

Furthermore, there is a perception that the desire to manage by attrition and the labor relations considerations interfere with the proper management of our human resources. For example, some participants stated that positions should be more fungible and that the nuances of multiple union contracts produce inefficiencies.

On a related note, some employees suggested ways the District could modify its existing processes to make operations more efficient. These include:

- Continuing to automate reports
- Maintaining records but archiving electronically
- Eliminating unnecessary reporting
- Eliminating manual data entry
- Improving the Resolution process

Various stakeholders suggested ways school staff, including substitutes, could be more efficiently managed to enable them to serve our students better. For instance, it was suggested that full-time teachers in each school are preferable to itinerant teachers who split their time between multiple schools because they are more able to connect with students. Others pointed to increasing the enforcement of employee leave policies as a tool to control substitute costs. Another suggestion was to eliminate the use of substitute teachers for planning periods. Some participants expressed their perception that many substitutes are not qualified in the content areas they are teaching and are less effective than full-time teachers.

Finally, some community members and employees suggested negotiating with the collective bargaining units to reduce the benefits and drive the cost savings to the classroom. They noted that the District offers more generous benefits than the typical private sector employer.

### **Financial Management and Budget Process**

It was suggested that students and parents should be represented more thoroughly in the budget process; for instance, one participant suggested including a parent representative on the budget team or conducting a “PTA road trip” to engage the parents at each school.

Some participants suggested that seeking corporate support could help mitigate budgetary shortfalls. Others opined that the \$119 million in annual support from the City of Rochester is insufficient.

Another area identified for improvement is grant utilization. Administrative delays in grant implementation cost the District money, and simplification of the grant closing process may enable better use of resources.

### **Conclusion and Budget Timeline**

We would like to thank all of the staff, parents, students, and other members of our community who volunteered their time to participate in the 2015-16 Budget events. We welcome your feedback on a continuing basis throughout the budget process. Please e-mail your comments to [budget@rcsdk12.org](mailto:budget@rcsdk12.org), or call (585) 324-2424.

Please also note the following upcoming dates for additional opportunities to stay informed and provide input on the Rochester City School District budget.

- **Monday, March 23** (6:00 PM): Superintendent presents draft 2015-16 RCSD Budget to the Board
- **Tuesday, April 7** (6:00 PM): 1st Budget Deliberation Session
- **Thursday, April 9** (6:00 PM): 1st Public Budget Hearing

- **Tuesday, April 21** (6:00 PM): 2nd Budget Deliberation Session
- **Tuesday, April 28** (6:00 PM): 2nd Public Budget Hearing
- **Thursday, April 30** (6:00 PM): 3rd Budget Deliberation Session
- **Thursday, May 7** (6:00 PM): Special Board Meeting for Budget Adoption
- **Wednesday, June 10** (4:30 PM): Joint Budget Hearing with City Council
- **Tuesday, June 16** (7:30 PM): City Council Budget Adoption

## **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 these events.

### Presenters

William Ansbro, Chief Financial Officer  
 Everton Sewell, Director of Budget

### Volunteers and Facilitators

Maureen Bisnett  
 Damian Camacho  
 Sally Combs  
 Joanna Gadson  
 Patricia Malgieri  
 Glendine Miller  
 Tom Moughan  
 Brian Pack  
 Cathy Peets  
 Willie Robinson  
 Mike Sausa  
 Kathleen Saville  
 Tim Schmandt  
 Chris Suriano  
 Jerome Underwood

A special thank you to our hosts:

### Jefferson Campus – Rochester International Academy and School #12

Michele Liguori-Alampi, Principal, School #12  
 Mary Andrecolich-Diaz, Principal, RIA

### School #33 – John James Audubon

Larry Ellison, Principal

### Montessori Academy

Shirley Green, Principal

The Office of Professional Learning