



**Bolgen Vargas, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent of Schools  
Rochester City School District  
131 West Broad Street  
Rochester, New York 14614

March 3, 2015

The Honorable Joseph E. Robach  
New York State Senate  
Room 803, Legislative Office Building  
Albany, New York 12247

Dear Senator Robach:

I am writing to you in your capacity as a longtime friend of our District who represents more city students than any other member of the Senate. I ask support from you and your colleagues to ensure that the 2015 State budget adequately funds the needs of Rochester students.

First, I want to thank you and your legislative colleagues for your tremendous past efforts for our students. Our District has a five-year Action Plan to improve achievement for Rochester children that is beginning to show significant progress. Through the steadfast and generous support of the Legislature and the Governor—combined with an internal effort to shift resources where they are most needed—our district has been able to steadily increase the quality and quantity of time and support that Rochester students receive in city schools, while minimizing the disruption caused by a shift of enrollment to charter schools.

To continue our progress, we face a budget challenge of \$66 million in 2015-16. This includes a \$41 million gap driven by the expansion of charter schools, employee benefit costs, and rising transportation costs. It adds \$25 million in resources that we will shift to instruction and student support that drives achievement.

To address our \$66 million challenge, **I respectfully request an aid increase of \$36 million for Rochester schools in the 2015 State budget.** This will allow us to provide students the \$25 million we have budgeted to continue driving student achievement as part of the District's Action Plan.

- \$10.1 million to transform East High School through a new partnership with the University of Rochester, which has submitted a plan to manage the school as an Educational Partnership Organization that was approved by the State Education Department last month.
- \$4.6 million to expand the instructional day at up to 4 additional schools, making a total of 14 “expanded day” schools that have re-engineered their daily schedules to provide more than 300 hours of extra time for instruction, support, extra-curricular activities and staff planning.
- \$2.9 million for reading teachers in every elementary school to support 3rd grade literacy, and in every secondary school to help older students who read below grade level to catch up.
- \$1.0 million to increase online credit recovery opportunities for secondary students.
- \$1.2 million to expand the International Baccalaureate program at Joseph C. Wilson Magnet High School to an “IB for All” program.

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- \$1.2 million for additional summer learning programs to serve 12,500 pupils this year, a 25 percent increase
- \$0.4 million for the District to provide jobs for 100 students as part of the City's 2015 Summer of Opportunity.
- \$3.6 million for other initiatives, including:
  - Improve career education pathways at the Edison Technology Campus, which will again be a single school
  - Enhancements targeted for our students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs)
  - Expand social and emotional support for our students
  - Increase professional development to promote instructional excellence

The additional \$11 million in state aid I have requested will help our District to address the \$41 million budget gap. We intend to close the gap primarily through efficiencies, plus alignment of space and staffing to the decline in student enrollment at District schools.

There is one additional program you have supported in the past, and for which I ask your help again with appreciation and respect. **Please continue to provide the \$1.2 million in annual funding for school nurses in Rochester schools.** This will allow our District to continue providing highly trained nurses in each school to support the health and well-being of our students.

Finally, I would like to ask your continued support for a separate piece of legislation that is revenue neutral. We would like to begin a pilot project to bus students who live less than 1.5 miles from Enrico Fermi School No. 17. This will support our efforts to make School 17 a community school, while demonstrating the financial feasibility of waiving the 1.5-mile requirement for transportation to other schools. We greatly appreciate the Senate's passage of this waiver last year, and with your help we are hopeful it will pass the full legislature so that we can begin our pilot project in the 2015-16 school year.

I am attaching a copy of the Action Plan that describes the priorities, strategies, and measures on which we are focused to help Rochester children succeed. My staff and I are available at any time to answer questions about the plan and the request for \$36 million in additional state aid this year.

In the meantime, I thank you and your colleagues for your past and future support of our work to treat every Rochester child like one of our own.

Sincerely,



Bolgen Vargas, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

Cc: The Honorable Van Henri White, President, Rochester Board of Education  
The Honorable Cynthia Elliott, Vice President, Rochester Board of Education  
The Honorable Jose Cruz, Chair, Finance Committee, Rochester Board of Education