

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

Name	Affiliation	Topic	Comment
Erin Lewis	Parent	Adult Family Educator for the UPK	Hello, my name is Erin Lewis, and I am a parent within the RCSD community. It has been brought to my attention that the district wishes to remove the Adult Family Educator position, and I would like to voice my reasoning why they should not. The school year of 2018-2019 was when I first became apart of the district as a parent of a Pre-K child. As a result of late enrollment, my child was placed at #2 School housed at the International School within the old Jefferson HS. She also had to be dropped off/picked up daily as there was no more space for busing her. That is where I was introduced to Ms. Racheal Washington, the Adult Family Educator. From initial contact, Ms. Washington had a very outgoing aura, was personable & professional. We exchanged greetings, and she then explained what her position was. From that day forward, she has always been extremely hands-on & informative! As the school days carried on, I watched how she (Ms. Washington) conducted herself with all the parents & myself. She always was warm welcoming, and there if u needed her on the days she was at the school for face-to-face conversation/concerns. She even gave other ways for contacting her depending on the urgency of your need for feedback. As a first time parent, I still had much to learn, and she was there along with the help of the teacher and paraprofessionals. On top of always encouraging parental/child interaction using her weekly class activities, she introduced me to the

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			Rochester Area Parent Program. The program was very informative and has helped me to better parent, as well as co-parent. Ms. Washington always reached out to me about different giveaways, such as the Moving Up Pre-K giveaway held at #33 school for children going on to Kindergarten. She was there to help guide me through selecting a school best suitable for my child. On field trips, she joined to help with chaperoning, as well as another outlet for parents if they needed to speak with her. Being that I am a hairstylist, you can tell Ms. Washington loves her job. Her caring heart exudes from her. And that from the heart, reaches the heart. As the step daughter of a social worker, and having dealt with social workers in the past; they are not always easy to get in contact with. Whereas, with the Adult Family Educator position, they are an open-door away to give the parents the feedback needed in a timely fashion. Removing this position would be devastating to the many parents among the district because some are dealing with crisis that need to be dealt with promptly, and not placed on an appointment book to be handled at a later date. Even now, as my child has gone on to a different school, Ms. Washington is still there to answer any questions/concerns that I may have. There are even days where my child has come home with a huge smile saying she saw Ms. Washington that day. The AFE's seem to leave a lasting impression on the children, and that is extremely important which in return, gives that parent a sense of trust with that individual.
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			I pray that hearing my reasoning in this letter, the district does not choose to move forward with this position removal. Because of her position, it has led me to be a better parent, and become more involved with my child's schooling. I thank the school board for their time that they put in away from their families to ensure the district is running smoothly. I just feel this removal would be a mistake.
Takeshia Avery	Parent	Adult Family Educator for the UPK	I met Mrs. Vaccaro in September 2017. She was the Adult Family Educator for the UPK program at Andrew J. Townson School # 39, where my daughter Taylor was a student. I looked forward to seeing her on Friday's for parent meetings, wether she had a guest with her or just passing out materials for the students she was always very welcoming and kind. If you had any questions or concerns if she didn't have the answer right then she would contact someone who could give her the answer. In January 2018 Mrs. Vaccaro accompanied my family to URMK Kirsh as support when my daughter Taylor was tested and diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. That was a very rough day for my family and I however, Mrs. Vaccaro was a tremendous help, she asked questions that I couldn't think of and gave hugs to everyone being that it was an emotional time for my family. I truly appreciate Mrs. Vaccaro for all she has done for my family and continues to do for Pre-K families. Taking her away from this position would be a huge loss for the Pre-K program.

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

Johanna Gefell-Wofford	Parent	2020-21 RCSD Budget	As a parent of two children at World of Inquiry School and RCSD graduate, I am deeply troubled as we move through this budget season. I understand that we have an insurmountable budget deficit to close and difficult decisions to make, particularly in light of the recent announcement of an additional \$20 million short fall. As a parent I want for my children, for all children, a safe and nurturing environment, a place where their voice is heard and matters, a place where they are honored for who they are and how they identify, a place where they are supported and celebrated in both their failures and successes, a place where they intentionally build community with their friends and classmates and come together to peacefully resolve harm. Our school communities need the professionals that are an integral part of what I see as important pieces of school: School Social Workers. During this extremely difficult time for our community, I plead that you do not cut School Social Workers. An alternative to the proposed cuts to school social workers I suggest eliminating the SRO contract and renegotiate the transportation contracts. I am gravely concerned about the future of the RCSD.
James Davis III Susan Schiavi	Parents at RISE COMMUNITY	AFE/RPPP Parent Group Leader Budget Cut	Ms. Bonita has been an incredible help for us from the beginning with our son Hunter. She has kept us updated and informed about everything going on. She organized special events with our sons class and invited us to participate. At a time when our son needed her most she was there for him. This was when his teacher ms. Session was replaced. She talked him through the transition to a new teacher. She was also a really big help to me as well during the enrollment process of registering not only Hunter, but also our 2

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			year old for school next year. She is a dedicated woman that cares very much for the students and families that she works with. During this COVID 19 pandemic she has given us activities to do with Hunter and helped us with different projects to keep him going with his school work. She calls to check up on him and offers help and encouragement. We could not find a more caring and dedicated family educator. She is the best.
Paula Hansen	Community	Arts Education	I write to you today as a city resident and a retired special education teacher, I will be brief. I am sure you have read the research and heard the stories about how important Art education is to students. Please do not cut these positions. I get it, you're between a rock and a hard place and do not see anyway forward other than to cut these jobs. There is another choice. Keep the positions as is. Rally the community around the issue of adequate and fair funding for the school district. Implore our community to call their Representatives in Albany to demand full funding. Meet with these Representatives and ask them why students from Brighton, Pittsford etc. deserve more than city children. Do not let them off the hook, do not let them get away with putting the blame on you. Make peace with the Mayor. You can not do it without her help. Talk to Citizen Action - they are in this fight with you. There is a way forward, but cutting these positions now will only make things worse.

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

Aaron C. Banks	Community	Adult Family Educator	My name is Aaron Banks, son of Sharlene Banks, and I would like to share with you my perspective of my mother's profession as an Adult Family Educator over the past two decades. Like most honorable citizens, her days began early in the morning, having her out the door even before my siblings and I left for school. However, at home in the evening, we would find her surrounded by stacks of packets and papers, or on the phone planning for the next day or upcoming event. I remember thinking how impossible it must be, never having an end in sight to your work; when one deadline ends, another begins, when one her parents has a parenting breakthrough, there were dozens of more needing guidance. How exhausting it must be giving individuals the tools to parent, not knowing whether or not a difference will be made. In the summers, she did her recruiting home visits, worked tents at any and every local festival, and would spend countless hours organizing information to disperse among the young parents of Rochester. I remember her not having time to eat at the table most nights, not having time to relax and decompress, not able to recharge how one typically does, but every morning she was up and out doing it again. When one is willing to work for free, it is fair to say they are expressing that they are indeed passionate about the matter. My mother has a passion for aiding families in this city, willing to sacrifice time with her husband, children, and grandchildren too assure that her families have a constant support system, not just eight to three on Mondays through Fridays. Today, I am a senior Preceptor/Teacher at Vertus high school, with a Bachelors in English Literature with a Concentration in Creative Writing from the University of Rochester. I recently have been accepted into the Warren
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			Wilson MFA writing program on a full scholarship. Witnessing my mother's efforts in working with families in the Rochester education system has encouraged me to pursue my higher education and do my part to continue the tradition of working with students and parents. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, I was helping the freshman Preceptors do a meet-and-greet with their parents and students. A woman and her son came up to me, asking if my last name was Banks. She went on to tell me that her son, a freshman now at Vertus high school, was once a student of my mother's a few years back. She spoke of the impression my mother had on both her and her son. This interaction is not shocking, and as a member of the Banks family, it was not a new experience. It's impossible to go anywhere in this city without running into one of Sharlene's former parents or students. We joke, as a family, that she knows all of Rochester, and I would argue that it is true.
Arlene Schenker	Community	Removal of grades k-5 from the Rochester International Academy	I am a community volunteer at the Rochester International Academy. I was in my second year helping out in Ms. Castellon's kindergarten class when the schools closed because of Covid-19. I have since learned that, due to the RCSD budget crisis, K-5 classes may be dropped from RIA. This would be a travesty and a tragedy for both the immigrant children who are presently enrolled in RIA and for the children, yet to immigrate here, who will lose out on the opportunity to begin their American education through this stellar program. Though I am a former New York City primary grade teacher and teacher of English as a Second Language, I have never been in such a joyful classroom. These children thrive in a way that they never could if they were

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			mainstreamed in a kindergarten class in one of the other RCSD schools. Some of them come to kindergarten speaking no English at all. Their dress may be different from American children and their cultures are different. At RIA, all of this is celebrated. Each child is made to feel that he or she has something special to contribute to our American culture. The many different languages are shared, and you can see the pride in the kids' eyes and manner when their language is acknowledged. They become confident in their identity. This makes them comfortable and eager to adopt an American identity. And they do learn English and American ways very quickly. They are eager to learn about our national holidays, sing our songs, read our stories, while we also read stories about the people and the lands they are from. I can't imagine how much these children would lose if they were to lose RIA. It is how every immigrant child in America should be introduced into our educational system. This school is a jewel in the Rochester City School District. Please do not deprive these children of this immense opportunity to get a fantastic start to their education—which will surely lead to greater successes for them down the road.
Nancy Westendorf	Community	2020-21 RCSD Budget	Please do not cut elementary art, music or library teachers. Do not cut social workers. These teachers are vital to the well-being and academic success of the whole child. Instead, please look to cuts as far away from students as possible. Ask yourself, if person X is no longer in that position, will students notice? Too many positions in this district are there to support the collection of data for the state and federal government. Be brave! Cut away from the students. Take a stand in favor of students.

**Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020**

Larissa Cholach	Staff	RIA	My name is Larissa Cholach. I have been an ENL teacher at the Rochester International Academy for six years. I am writing this letter to implore you to vote NO for the budget proposal submitted on March 26, 2020. On February 27, 2020, my colleagues and I personally attended the RCSD school board meeting after reading a news article in the Democrat and Chronicle indicating that, due to the significant budget deficit facing the district, programs such as RIA may be closed. At that board meeting, the staff of RIA were reassured by President White, who stated, “There is no, absolutely no initiative, policy or intention to remove or close down....I am here to tell you, and Terry is here to tell you there is no intention.” He continued with, “If you think you are going to convince us to not close down RIA, you are wasting your time, as you are speaking to the choir. There is no intention to do that. Not tonight or in the future.” The future is now, and while the district budget proposal released on March 26, 2020 does not call for RIA to close completely, the changes proposed (which include cutting our staff by more than half, removing the K-5 classrooms, and significantly limit enrollment for grades 6-12) will have a significantly detrimental effect on the students we serve. This extremely vulnerable population is not coming into our program solely lacking the ability to communicate in the English language. Many of our students have never set foot in a school before. Some of them have suffered trauma due to war, political unrest, and other violent circumstances that we can only imagine. Some are coming alone, without any immediate family for support.

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			When these children come to RIA, they not only receive academic instruction, but they are nurtured and given emotional support in, for some of them, the safest environment they have ever been. Supported by not only the dedicated RIA staff, but by a classroom full of peers who have shared like experiences in a way that no one else in this district, staff or student, can. Being able to glean that support from peers greatly breaks down emotional walls that these students have erected, which leads to a more successful teaching environment for all students. Your proposal to remove the K-5 students will still most likely have a negative impact on all of the RIA students. When a family is able to arrive together, they must depend on each other. Expecting a newly arriving family consisting of several children to understand why some children will go to School A, while others will go to Schools B and/or C, especially when some of them are coming from countries where separation of family members result in never seeing them again, is a lot to ask. The emotional trauma of younger students being separated from their older siblings and vice versa, regardless of the explanation, will cause an increase in stress and anxiety that will surely impact their ability to feel safe within their classroom, and in turn, affect their ability to learn new material. For the younger students, this would be further impacted by their lack of peer support, should they be thrust in classrooms that consist primarily of local children who have not experienced the same life events. One current RIA high school student, when told of the potential cuts, posted the following, “The beauty of RIA is (that) my little brother and sisters (are here with me). If you take them away from us, our house will turn to a disaster. Also, you are taking a part of our (family) tree.”
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			I encourage you to recall the statements made at that meeting on February 27, 2020. The meeting where students and staff were told that there were no plans to close this program. Current and former students spoke about the importance of the Rochester International Academy. You heard statements expressing the high level of support both academically and emotionally provided by the dedicated staff, as well as how important it has been for students to be with peers who have had shared life experiences. A former student spoke about being moved to another school, no longer having that support system, and being on the verge of dropping out. He returned to RIA, where he not only graduated, but became a United States citizen, and is a full-time employee of this school district. There are other students who have followed on this similar path. One student stated, "RIA is our home." Rochester International Academy was created to provide these newcomers with a safe, low stress means of adapting to the academic, social, and cultural transition to the United States. The changes outlined in the current budget proposal will severely limit our ability to do this for all of these students. Please do not take this away from them. Vote NO. Thank you for your time.
Christina Pelletier	Staff	RIA	Good evening board members and Superintendent Dade. My name is Christina Pelletier, and I am an ESOL teacher at the Rochester International Academy. I am imploring you tonight to vote no against the current budget proposal to cut grades K-5 from RIA and reduce enrollment to 160 students. This proposal directly affects some of our district's most vulnerable students - the refugee population. The negative impacts that cutting grades K-5 would

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			have on these newcomer students would be catastrophic, and even more so in these troubling times of pandemic school closures. Our community needs RIA as a transitional program for newly arrived students to the United States. The proposed enrollment of only 160 students for grades 6-12 does not allow for a true transitional program. The enrollment would be full by September. To give you an example of why additional enrollment spots should be included in your proposal, in September I began my year with just 5 newcomer students in my ESOL class. By the time school closed three weeks ago, I had 22 newcomer students, which is a 17-student increase in just 6 months. Under your proposal, where would newcomer students who arrive in December go? Where would they get the true support and resources that they need? After listening to your interview, Mr. Dade, with WXXI News on March 30, you seem to be of the mindset that “full immersion” of ELL students will be most effective. I ask you, Mr. Dade, why do you think RIA exists? The RCSD tried full immersion in years past, when RIA was known as Jefferson High School, and ELL students were fully immersed with American born English speaking students. Did full immersion work in that situation? Did ELL students have all of their needs met? You said in your interview that it is not acceptable to say other schools are not equipped to deal with refugee students. You’re right, that is unacceptable. But unfortunately, it is a hard truth to accept and it is the absolute reality of our district at this current moment. How do you plan to prepare schools for this drastic change when all schools are currently closed? How do you plan to prepare schools for this drastic change while you are facing a multi-million dollar budget deficit? In a
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			perfect world, every single school should be fully prepared to accept refugee students. However, that is not our reality. I will tell you one school that is fully prepared to accept these vulnerable students right now, with no additional change or action necessary - the Rochester International Academy. Board members, I once again implore you to vote no against this devastating proposal. Thank you for your time.
Kim Taylor	Staff	RCSD 2020-21 Budget	We are writing to express our concerns about the proposed cuts being made to special education for 2020-2021 school year. We are concerned about taking resources away from our students who have speech and language needs. One of the proposed cuts refers to the LEAD program. This program was developed for language impaired students who require a high level of language support to access the general education curriculum. Language impairments have a severe impact on all academic areas. Students need to be able to understand the concepts being taught, express what they know, and use their language to gain information. The LEAD program allows student to remain in their classroom to receive instruction by the general education teacher and speech pathologist. Their speech goals are addressed all day within each academic area. Without LEAD, these students will likely receive pull-out speech services a few times a week forcing them to miss time in their classroom and come back to connect the dots. This program was working! 76%-78% of LEAD students completed the program with language skills within the normal range or just mildly delayed. The LEAD program is not only essential to the students identified as language impaired but it effectively impacts every single student within the classroom. LEAD provides:

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			• A co-teaching model where small and leveled group learning is constantly happening with every student. • A decrease in CSE referrals because of the embedded learning that all students in the program are receiving. • High quality social emotional programs and language programs that are paired with the general education curriculum seamlessly. • Speech-Language Pathologists in the classroom throughout each academic subject to explicitly teach phonemic awareness (crucial to early reading), vocabulary and sentence structure (crucial to reading and writing), narrative skills (crucial to relaying personal, social and academic information), as well as concept development (crucial to all subject areas). • Daily Carry- over of learned strategies that minimize the delay in academic growth. • A co-teaching model that allows for additional opportunities to implement strategies from Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy for the benefit of students. We are asking that the Board consider continuing the LEAD program for the upcoming school year 2020-2021 grades K-2. Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sarah Carlson	Staff	RCSD 2020-21 Budget	I am writing this letter on behalf of some of the most vulnerable students in our district. The Interact Model is a much needed therapeutic approach which has been rolled out to increase inclusivity for students in ASD and NYSAA classrooms. Education teams have been working to support service

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			delivery for students with severe disabilities and profoundly impacted communication skills. Based on a guiding document from the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs for Persons with Severe Disabilities, the ideal speech-language intervention for students with these learning profiles would be intensive, encompassing 30 or more hours of direct instruction, per week. There is no way SLPs can accomplish this, unless teachers and paras are included as partners. For too long, speech-language services have been provided in isolation, resulting in minimal generalization. Although our students were making gains during speech sessions, the highly controlled context of the therapy room often served as a significant barrier in the carryover of skills into other settings. Our teachers need the direct support from SL staff through explicit models, guidance, and collaboration. Other staff including para-educators and specials teachers who work with these students throughout the day also require support to become partners who can effectively communicate utilizing high-tech software as an alternative means to vocal exchanges. The Interact Model has led to more inclusive SL recommendations with an emphasis on providing students with services in the least restrictive environment possible. It has yielded opportunities for our students to utilize Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) in natural settings, and it has significantly expanded the capacity of this necessary skill set in educational teams throughout the district. This close partnership has ultimately impacted the quality of life for students who would be unable to communicate otherwise. This is an ongoing process
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**Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020**

			which requires continued training opportunities and support from speech-language staff during inclusive therapy sessions, and during ‘coachable moments’ in between sessions. I strongly support the continuation of the Interact Therapy Model, and encourage you to join in advocating for the communicative rights of our students. Any cuts to the Speech Department, as proposed in the 20-21 Budget proposal jeopardizes the continuation of this program. Thank you for your time.
Bonita Williams	Staff	Adult Family Educator	My name is Bonita Williams. I am an Adult Family Educator, also known as RPPP Parent Group Leader in the budget (pg. 194). I would like to explain why the job title of the Parent Group Leader is now Adult Family Educator and why this role is essential to the students, families, and educators of Pre School. In 2014 the PGL’s were tasked to reevaluate our job title so that it aligned with our certification. All PGL’s at the time and currently must hold a certification in Adult Education. Our NYS certification is Adult Ed/GED Literacy. Because our work centered on engaging and educating the parents and caregivers of Pre School students, we saw that the title Adult Family Educator encompassed our education, certification, and front-line work with families. Now to answer the question what is unique about Adult Family Educators, how does this role incorporate, inhabit the goals of the Board and Superintendent Dade to encourage, advocate, and assist the parents of our great district.

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			We reach that goal in several ways and I have attached a summary of the support we offer however I would like to highlight a specific content area in this letter, creation of curriculum. In 2015 the Pre-k programs went from half day to full day. We were left to create curriculum to engage parents for this new paradigm. My colleagues embarked on this untraveled road. Out of our collaboration was birthed Parent Child Activities...activities designed by us and are implemented and led by us in the classroom. The activities are based on ELA, Math, Science, Nutrition, and Social Emotional skills. Parents or an adult caregiver remain in the classroom with their student at the start of class or at the end of class...the adult and child then participate in and complete an activity. For example, a balloon science experiment that teaches about carbon dioxide. Another activity may have parents reading a story to their student and then extending that learning by have the parent and child draw a picture to retell the story. Parents benefit from the PCA's...parents get to know and interact with classroom staff, parents get to see teachers model language, problem solving, and social skills that they are able to add to their parent tool boxes. Parents also experience the daily routine that their students experience each day. This exposure epitomizes the Superintendent and the Board's family engagement goals and philosophy. The Parent Child Activity curriculum is part of the foundation of the bridge that fills the gap between school and home and has been rated highly effective. I thank you for your time and consideration in reading this letter and viewing the attachment.
Cheryl Cady	Staff	Adult Family Educators in the UPK program	The RCSD Pre-K program is rated in the top 5% in the country. Many components work together to create this successful and high quality

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			program. One essential piece of the program is the Adult Family Educator position that is in jeopardy of being cut next year. AFE's are integral in creating strong partnerships with families which contribute to positive and lasting change for our children. They build on a shared commitment to the child's well-being and success while supporting each family. Eliminating the Adult Family Educator position will be detrimental to the families we serve. They are leaders in meeting the diverse and individual needs of every Pre-K family. Please vote no on May 7th.
Alicia Castellon	Staff	RIA	I have been at RIA since the opening year and have taught, 5th, 6th, 1st, 2nd, and now kindergarten the past 4 years. It doesn't matter the number grade, the newcomer population needs the most basic academic and social skills the first few years of their education and time that a regular school cannot provide. RIA is needed because we have the time to make all children who are in their silent period feel comfortable enough to speak. We have training to create lessons using the SIOP model to best instruct our children. The basic teaching of students and vocabulary is second nature to teachers and learners in a general education school. At RIA we have to consider every word that comes out of our mouth and assume they may not understand it. Our children are instructed using engage NY standards at their proficiency level, not the grade level we teach. We speak and teach at a different pace. We create smart notebooks and google slide lesson plans for each lesson, every day. These lessons are catered to our children's needs. Eliminating the elementary K-5 from RIA would mean that the basic building blocks of learning and social skills would be missing from the beginning of their education. There would be not time to acclimate, taking in to

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			consideration their comfort level, trauma from war, fleeing their country and losing family members along the way. Teaching teeth brushing, sharing, how to sit in a chair or on the carpet, and even how to use a bathroom would be lost. The silent period will be much longer. School is closed, possibly indefinitely. Some students right now are losing their English just a few weeks out of school. Imagine the loss of English between now and when they may possibly be put in a new school without explanation, before they are ready or comfortable. A new form of PTSD or silent period may occur, along with a regression in their learning. Notice the emphasis on the word “time” throughout this letter, as it is the most important element we provide for newcomer students at RIA. Please do not make the decision to eliminate our youngest learner’s needs at RIA.
Erin Cole	Staff	2020-21 RCSD Budget	I am a social worker with RCSD. I understand the severity of the budget deficit we are facing. I know every role is critical to our students success but I want to highlight the crucial role of social workers. We work with a lot of students in our buildings, not just those who get IEP counseling. We assess students who make suicidal and homicidal statements. We talk to students who have traumas including house fires and family incarceration. We assess for child abuse, make reports as appropriate, and then interface with CPS for the teachers so they can focus on teaching. We do restorative meetings between students having conflicts with peers and sometimes with their teachers. We empower students to find their voice and communicate their needs through words, not behaviors. But we don't just serve students, we work with families. We often explain systems to families

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

		that are overwhelmed and act as a family advocate as they interact with systems, including special education. We mediate meetings between parents and teachers when the parent doesn't feel heard and disengages. We assess attendance issues to identify barriers and then support the families in breaking them down. Again though... we do more than just work with students and families; we support our staff. With the teacher layoffs earlier this year, we ran circles for staff so their voices were heard, validated, and supported. We strategized how to talk with students about the changes and helped plan activities for goodbyes. We supported all the new teachers coming to our schools after being displaced. As a member of the district's TIG team we also support all staff (and students) when we are faced with loss. On a daily basis we brainstorm with staff how to handle particular students/situations, how to have difficult conversations, and how to address challenging behaviors in a strengths based, solution focused, student centered way. We become confidantes for our administrative staff and champions for self care and good attitudes. We do so much every day that is beyond our IEP mandated counseling. Cutting social workers means our caseloads increase and we won't have time to do the previously mentioned things and as a result I would expect to see ripples across schools with impacts in attendance, suspensions, teacher burn out, and parent disengagement to name a few. As I said before, I understand the severity of the situation at hand so telling you how important social workers are isn't really enough. I understand that no one wants to make cuts to our department. So what can be done instead?
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			I would propose making cuts to school safety officers instead of social work. I see the SSOs remove children, use inappropriate and unnecessary restraints that often escalate the child, and get into power struggles that all lead to increased behaviors and more time out of class... I'd even be confident saying increased suspensions! The ripple effect of losing SSOs is not as wide reaching as losing social workers and instead of reacting to a situation, social workers assess it, identify the root cause, and do work with the student to prevent it from happening again. SSOs remove children and take them for consequences with other staff. Next years proposal for school #33 will have more SSOs than social workers. I know RTA is strong and has repeatedly dug in their heels on negotiations. This is upsetting to me because it feels like a power play more than a negotiation. I would be willing to give up my annual raise to keep social workers, teachers, speech therapists, etc employed. I would give up my PD incentive. I would give up that \$600 health benefit we get. I know the union surveyed staff earlier this year but honestly, there was no transparency on the results. As we ask for transparency from you all, I'd encourage you to push for transparency from RTA on their memberships wants/needs/suggestions. The best solution comes from working together, not against each other. My last suggestion is to consider changing reimbursements for licensure/certification. As a social worker I love that my license renewal is reimbursed through the district but I don't know of any other places in this
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			community (outside of schools) that do that. I would give that up to save social work jobs and better staff our schools. We owe it to our students. I thank you for taking the time to read this email. I had hoped to speak at the board meeting but I am on maternity leave with our one month old baby so scheduling things is still a challenge. I would be happy to talk more with anyone interested.
Greta Davis	Staff	2020-21 School Budget Proposal	Our School Social Workers proudly participated in the advocacy efforts to secure school funding for the remaining academic year through letters, emails, and calls to our state legislators. Although relieved to see no additional cuts for this year, we are concerned that the proposed budget cuts for next year will yield disastrous consequences, wiping out the hard fought gains achieved by our students. The Superintendent has proposed a devastating cut of 32-School Social Work positions (26% of the department) for the 20-21 school year. School Social Workers are, in many respects, the very heart of our elementary and secondary schools. As the "safe" person in each school, they perform a mediating influence, which releases pressure from classroom conflicts that could otherwise endanger the academic performance and safety of a classroom. As the vital link between schools and the community, they allow schools to engage parents who might otherwise remain alienated. We are the best public relations vehicle, a bridge between school, home and the community.

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			As highly trained practitioners, School Social Workers diagnose and document mental health pathologies that aid in the CSE process. This skilled intervention is critical during the formative years. Which is very important because research indicates that untreated mental health issues are the cause of many behaviors that result in later incarceration. The interventions provided by School Social Workers save millions in later costs to the community. Whether addressing chronic absenteeism or dealing with the increasing number of students who are homeless, in foster care, or witnessing neighborhood or domestic violence, we are often the safety valve for the school district. As the effects of this pandemic continue to compound, social workers will become even more essential to public health. School Social Workers are Masters trained clinicians who are professionally licensed that represents hours of training and professional development. We perform home visits, ESS team meetings, prepare psychosocial reports, and arrange team meetings with outside mental health agencies. School Social Workers also run special groups on topics such as coping skills, anger management, grief counseling, bullying, and gender identity. We maintain compliance with state and federal special education mandates. The elimination of 32 social workers will jeopardize the ability of the school district to fulfill the basic legal requirements of the state and federal government. Rochester is the highest need district in New York State; these cuts will not help the district to improve. In addition, these cuts will endanger our ability to meet the legal requirements of the CSE process.
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			It is vital that we keep the 32 School Social Work positions to ensure our students have the level of social and emotional support necessary to maintain a climate that is conducive to learning. Our children deserve it! We welcome your support, so vital to the welfare of our students.
Kimberly Levitt	Staff	2020-21 RCSD Budget	My name is Kimberly Levitt and I am an art teacher at School #4. I have worked in the district since 2006, and I have seen many changes to our art department during this time. The arts department is strongest today, committed to the children of the Rochester City School District. We work hard to give them opportunities outside of school. We value our relationships with our families. We love our jobs. I know this deficit is causing difficult decisions, but please do not cut 14 art teachers. These cuts would be devastating to our students. As it is proposed now, our elementary students only receive a half year of art on a four day rotation. This is not equivalent to our suburban neighbors, where all students receive a full year of art, every year. Making these cuts will not help to create equal time in arts learning. As an art teacher, I plan my units to integrate with what children are learning in the classroom. Connecting though hands on experiences expands their understanding of content. I work closely with classroom teachers to plan relevant, engaging lessons that motivate students to persevere in school. I believe our students benefit greatly from art. It has been proven that their overall academic performance is improved when enriched with art. I know you have very difficult decisions to make to balance the budget, however cutting nearly 20 percent of our art teachers seems

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			disproportionate to other subject areas. I request that you revisit these proposed cuts to see where some restorations can be made.
Regina (Neri) Maier	Staff	Budget Concerns	I am writing today to express my concerns for the drastic cuts and position reductions to our Visual Arts Department. Currently our department has 80 full time visual art teachers and 1 part time sub contract position. Our district has roughly 60 schools and programs, with buildings like East Upper and Lower, School of the Arts and Edison having 14 Visual Art Teachers alone. If the budget proposal is passed as is this leaves 53 teachers to service the remaining 57 schools and programs, and many of those schools have well over 500 students in them resulting in a need for 1 or more art teachers. Yet, the proposal is to eliminate 14 art teachers and drastically reduce many of the positions remaining for the upcoming school year. Visual art teachers service the entire school the same as their other special subject colleagues, yet this proposal targets visual art specifically. Since the last massive cuts to our department we have been streamlined and the staffing numbers show that we are not grossly over staffed based on student enrollment. We have run this department without excess for nearly 10 years; to lose 14 positions we will be cutting seasoned teachers who have been dedicated to our district and department for upwards of 5 years. These teachers work tirelessly for our students, their school families as well as volunteering their time to help with many art department initiatives. These teachers are value added to the Rochester City School District. On top of possibly losing these 14 positions nearly every single remaining position is being reduced to some degree making a large majority of the remaining teachers itinerant between multiple buildings. Our small department is now being spread even thinner, if that is

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			possible. One teacher will be traveling between two or more buildings every other day. Being in the district for 9 years myself, at my current building for the last 3 years, my position is being reduced from 1.2 down to a .5, I am now involuntarily displaced and will have to move between buildings next year. I have done this before, and though I can do it again, I am devastated and overwhelmed to be put back in the position of needing to split my time and trying to give my all to multiple school families. Being itinerant absolutely makes the art teacher an outsider in a school family. Itinerant teachers are constantly running between buildings trying their best to add to the school culture and community, hanging artwork, holding art clubs, working on school yearbooks and newspapers, giving kids a safe, relaxing environment for lunch when they need extra support or attention, helping with family fun nights and attending parent/guarding conferences - - which are often on the same night as well as missing important things that happen on days they are not in the building. These cuts and reductions are heartbreaking for our students, they are the ones who have the most to lose. I understand how dire the budget situation is and I know that we all will be making sacrifices, what I do not understand is how cutting nearly 1/5 almost 20% of our visual art department and reducing many of the remaining positions is what is best for our children. Art is absolutely essential when educating the whole child. In many cases their electives class is the best part of the day, art is a chance for students to explore, experiment and develop in ways they cannot in their other classes. At the very least visual art should be of equal staffing to all the other electives, yet it has always been the lowest and now even lower with this budget proposal. These cuts are the exact opposite of cutting as far from the classrooms as possible. I beg you to
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			reconsider these staffing reductions and position cuts in the visual art department.
Libby Trausch	Staff	2020-21 RCSD Budget	I wish I had the opportunity to stand before you in person to express my feelings towards the proposed teacher cuts for next school year. I am a 4th year art teacher and I am in the group of 14 art teachers you are planning to lay off this summer. I am here asking you to reconsider the massive cut to our department. I did not expect to be fearful of finding work during this pandemic. This news is the icing on the cake of an already stressful situation. I suddenly feel that all my hard work, passion, and care for my students and families is for nothing. I feel as though the RCSD has failed me as a teacher and professional and is continuing to fail students. I understand you have limited options and closing this deficit is dire. I am frustrated that the board continued to approve hires across many subject areas when enrollment was going down. Why wasn't this noticed or addressed earlier? I understand art is not a mandated subject and the cutting of some positions is inevitable with the closure of schools and consolidation of classrooms, but 17% of our department is in jeopardy. Children need art. Children from trauma need art. I am frustrated that a group of people's errors to keep a balanced book is resulting in this domino effect and effecting hundreds of teachers livelihoods which in turn effects thousands of RCSD students. I am frustrated that I will most likely not get to teach another art class this school year and will not get the chance to see my students to explain why this is happening, why I won't be their art teacher next year, or even just say goodbye to them. I did not

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			know that March 13th could have been my last day teaching art in the RCSD. I am heartbroken and scared for what my future holds as a teacher and for the kids I have gotten to know and love over my past few years here. Please try to find another way.
Sharlene Banks	Staff	Cuts to Adult-Family Educator position	My name is Sharlene Banks and I work for the RCSD in the Early Childhood Department. Currently, my position has been removed from the 2020-2021 budget. Historically, my position was known as Rochester Preschool Parent Program-Parent Group Leader (RPPP-PGL) and is presently referred to as Adult-Family Educator (AFE) to align with our NYS teaching certification. The work of a PGL/AFE was founded on research based on best practices of educating families of young children and facilitating adult/parent learning. In the area of preschool, this occurs through intentional and meaningful interactions created to build rapports and to engage families. We do this from a strength-based approach. Unique to our role of PGL/AFE is the distinct skill set that allows us to encourage a culture of respect, trust, and partnership between families and schools. In our interactions, we recognize the strengths in the parent, the child and the family as a whole. As much as it is within our power, we refrain from judging parents and making judgmental remarks to families. We have willingly adopted this philosophy and we share it with our colleagues as a practice. Interpreting curriculum and creating parent-friendly curriculum that can be easily done at home, not only engages parents to participate but it helps to formulate those partnerships that are so vitally necessary for successful results. Partnerships that retain families in our school district. Successful

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			partnerships translate in to successful schools and successful schools can transform a community. A successful community means thriving schools and businesses. Thriving schools and businesses mean a community of families that function and flourish! The attention we deliberately give to parents is not without motive. No child enters 131 W. Broad Street and say, "Sign me up for Pre-K!" Each child has a parent or a guardian when registering for Pre-K. Parents deserve proper support from professionals that center on them and their need to be their child's first and best teacher. They will not get this from a position that has divided obligations and responsibilities. PGL/AFE are front-line family advocates who directly interface with new families, established families, and potential families looking for a preschool experience in the RCSD. I propose that you reinstate the RPPP Parent Group Leader/Adult Family Educator into the 2020-2021 budget. Furthermore, I propose that you explore the idea of expanding the position beyond preschool to assist in retaining families in this school district. Along with my proposals, I would like to add that you reassess positions that have significantly less impact on students and families. Consider eliminating indirect service positions with salaries above \$70k.
Donald Benedict	Staff	2020-21 RCSD Budget	As a member of this community of incredible teachers in the city of Rochester, I feel that among the many responsibilities I have as an educator in this district, that one truly important duty is to share my opinion on matters that will impact the future of my students and my students that I have yet to have in my room, namely about the proposed budget cuts that you are voting on tonight.

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			I do not choose to address the major cuts happening across the district, however I do wish to share my opinion regarding the cuts in the art department. There are few things in the school day that my students look forward to. They are great kids with a bright future but the motivation to complete academic work is not something my class excels in. They do however love to color, create, paint, and mold in a seemingly non-academic setting. Whenever there is free choice in our recess period, the majority of my students wish to create. Limiting their access to quality art instruction would be a travesty to this district. There is already too much learned helplessness in this district. Students look to me to tie their shoes for them, tell them what to write about, or complete their math assignments with me checking every minute step of the way. Children gain confidence and explore their own imaginations when they are allowed to create in a setting created in an art classroom. I am not speaking to the remainder of the district but to the art education in my building specifically. Libby Trausch has been our art teacher in School #25 for 3 years. I have been at #25 for 5 years. In the first two years at School #25, art was not something my students were looking forward to. Now our hallways are alive with color. They are alive with the incredible work displayed by Miss Trausch's art students. It is incredible to watch students walk by their work or the work of their classmates and see the joy and pride on their faces when they say "yes,
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			that is mine". I have had the fortune to sit in on a lunch (Miss Trausch's own personal time) that Miss Trausch has with her prospective SOTA students. The connection they have made in the 3 years with Miss Trausch is like something out of a movie and it is a thing of beauty. I for one, when I reminisce about why I became a teacher, will reflect on the connection I had with my own art teacher nearly 20 years ago. Mr. Clark was my idol. He is one of the main reasons I became a teacher. We might be missing that same impact on our students should we take away their access to the arts and quality art instruction. To lose art positions and limit our students' access to an art education would be detrimental to the development of their creativity and imagination. As we catapult into the 21st century, creative thinking and imagination will be the vehicles in which our world will improve. Confidence is the road that our students will drive on. I fear that if we show students that the arts are not available, we are showing them that they are not important by the adults paving the roads that will travel on. Please reconsider. Please find a way to keep the arts in our schools.
Tracy Pakusch	Staff	2020-21 RCSD Budget	I am writing to express my concerns about the proposed cuts to the visual arts department. My name is Tracy Pakusch. I have been teaching in the district for 7 years, many of those years as an itinerant art teacher and now as a full time building art teacher. What I have learned from this experience is that already we have the fewest resources and the least amount of time with our students in the greater Rochester area. We have worked in musty

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			basements, in up to 3 schools at a time, and without the materials we need for a more spectacular arts education experience. Students who have itinerant art teachers have some of the most passionate and loving art teachers, ones who work tirelessly and who spend their personal money to create the best experience they can. Despite their itinerant teachers working so hard for them, these teachers get shifted around year after year, never allowing for that sense of community to develop and for a more developed art program to take shape. How can teachers invest in their school and creating a solid program when they know they will be moved over and over? This movement is a direct result of our arts department already being underfunded. We are working bare bones as it is, how can we possibly provide more... “change the narrative” and “have a laser like focus on instruction” when we keep getting cut???? When we are scrambling to survive we cannot provide the best. There will be no one left. I know that our district would be more successful if we had at least 1 full time art teacher in each elementary building, especially the small schools. We could do so much more with that time. I have heard students on a daily basis tell me that art is their favorite class, and that the only reason they come to school is for arts programs. The visual arts provide a real world, hands on experience that students are not always getting in other subjects. It’s often the only place they feel safe to express themselves.
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			It feels an awful lot like you are trying to dissolve this district, and it's just another serious blow with the cuts to the arts department. No wonder parents want to leave when they know the quality of their child's education is so much better elsewhere. And that quality of education comes directly from decisions the board of education is making. We as educators are right here, we know what's best for our students and the thing holding us back is poor decisions from up top. Please go advocate for more money, from the state, from the federal government, beyond the 35 million that was a given. Make decisions that make sense for schools and students, and listen to your teachers.
Adam Reinhardt	Staff	2020-21 RCSD Budget	In the 2018-2019 school year, the Speech Department adopted a new and exciting therapy model called INTERACT Immersive Service Delivery and rolled it out to the RCSD's high needs ASD and NYSAA classes. This program allows the Speech/Language Pathologist to provide all mandated-IEP services within the classroom, while providing additional support to the teacher and paraprofessional in assisting students with their functional communication within the classroom setting. For the 2019-2020 school year the program is being provided to 33 of our highest needs NYSAA and ASD classes across the district. This model-which places a Speech/Language Pathologist in every high needs NYSAA and ASD classroom for 4 half days a week with a 5th half day being allocated for consultation with students, teachers, and parents (allowing for one SLP to provide service to 2 full NYSAA/ASD classrooms)-was driven by the research that states that students with significant communication deficits require specialized programming in order to best meet their needs. An intensive push-in speech/language program that

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			promotes communication in a variety of functional and generalized settings has been found to help this population of students achieve better and lasting results compared with the more traditional speech/language programs offered to students in the general education program. Since beginning INTERACT a little more than a year ago (February 2019), our NYSAA speech and language team at School #4 has been able to work more closely with the students on goals/tasks that matter to these students with academic and real-world implications. We have been able to assist students in the cafeteria to facilitate peer to peer interactions and to use real-life scenarios to promote the use of communication strategies learned in the classroom. We have been able to go to special subjects (e.g., art, music, PE, etc.) with students and collaborate with specials teachers to adapt lessons ahead of time and on the fly with these students' needs and abilities in mind. All of this made possible because of the amount of dedicated time we can provide to each class through INTERACT. Many of the students in our NYSAA classrooms require augmented or alternative modes of communication (AAC) such as picture cards, speech generating devices, or sign language due to significant impairments in their abilities to use traditional voice and speech for communication. Students learning these modes of communication need just as much time with a communication partner who is knowledgeable about their communication method as traditional language learners need when they begin communicating for the first time. This means that these students need to see hundreds of successful models as they are learning to use their AAC
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			communication forms. The INTERACT model of speech/language delivery allows us, as Speech/Language Pathologists and Communication specialists, to provide more real-world models and training to students. Furthermore, being in the classroom for large chunks of the day allows us to provide more in-depth, hands on training to other communication partners such as teachers and TAs. Doing this allows the carry-over of learning to continue more fluidly throughout the students' day even when we are not in the classroom. Finally, because of the amount of time we are allowed to spend in the classroom and spend consulting with the classroom teachers, we are able to more fully incorporate communication into every lesson, activity, and student interaction. As Speech and Language Pathologists working with students who have such significant communication needs, we believe that moving to the immersive INTERACT model last year has been one of the most impactful changes that could have been made for students in this population. Unfortunately, the proposed cuts to the Speech Department jeopardize the continuation of this program and the many gains that have been made by some of the neediest students in our district. We understand that this is a trying time for the district, the state, and the nation, but we believe that the INTERACT model has been one of the bright spots in our district and would hate to lose it due to budget cuts. Hopefully, soon we will all be back in school doing what we love and when that day comes, we would like to invite the board members to come visit the program in action. Thank you for your consideration.
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

Amy Schramm	Staff	Reductions to our Visual Arts Department	I am writing today to express my concerns for the drastic cuts and position reductions to our Visual Arts Department. Currently our department has 80 full time visual art teachers and 1 part time sub contract position. Our district has roughly 60 schools and programs, with buildings like East Upper and Lower, School of the Arts and Edison having 14 Visual Art Teachers alone. If the budget proposal is passed as this leaves 53 teachers to service the remaining 57 schools and programs, and many of those schools have well over 500 students in them resulting in a need for 1 or more art teachers. Yet, the proposal is to eliminate 14 art teachers and drastically reduce many of the positions remaining for the upcoming school year. Visual art teachers service the entire school the same as their other special subject colleagues, yet this proposal targets visual art specifically. Since the last massive cuts to our department we have been streamlined and the staffing numbers show that we are not grossly over staffed based on student enrollment. We have run this department without excess for nearly 10 years; to lose 14 positions we will be cutting seasoned teachers who have been dedicated to our district and department for upwards of 5 years. These teachers work tirelessly for our students, their school families as well as volunteering their time to help with many art department initiatives. These teachers are value
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			added to the Rochester City School District. On top of possibly losing these 14 positions nearly every single remaining position is being reduced to some degree making a large majority of the remaining teachers itinerant between multiple buildings. Our small department is now being spread even thinner, if that is possible. One teacher will be traveling between two or more buildings every other day. , I am now involuntarily displaced and will have to move between buildings next year. I have done this before, and though I can do it again, I am devastated and overwhelmed to be put back in the position of needing to split my time and trying to give my all to multiple school families. Being itinerant absolutely makes the art teacher an outsider in a school family. Itinerant teachers are constantly running between buildings trying their best to add to the school culture and community, hanging artwork, holding art clubs, working on school yearbooks and newspapers, giving kids a safe, relaxing environment for lunch when they need extra support or attention, helping with family fun nights and attending parent/guarding conferences - - which are often on the same night as well as missing important things that happen on days they are not in the building. These cuts and reductions are heartbreaking for our students, they are the ones who have the most to lose.
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Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			I understand how dire the budget situation is and I know that we all will be making sacrifices, what I do not understand is how cutting nearly 1/5 almost 20% of our visual art department and reducing many of the remaining positions is what is best for our children. Art is absolutely essential when educating the whole child. In many cases their electives class is the best part of the day, art is a chance for students to explore, experiment and develop in ways they cannot in their other classes. At the very least visual art should be of equal staffing to all the other electives, yet it has always been the lowest and now even lower with this budget proposal. These cuts are the exact opposite of cutting as far from the classrooms as possible. I beg you to reconsider these staffing reductions and position cuts in the visual art department.
Sydney Friedrich	Staff	Cuts to the RCSD's Visual Arts Department	I am writing today to address the drastic cuts that have been proposed for RCSD's Visual Arts Department. I have taught at three different high schools in the district within the last two years. I have a BFA in Art and Design Education and the district is supporting the completion of my Masters in Educational Technology through SUNY Oneonta. During my education, I have learned that the two things employers look for when hiring are creative problem-solving skills and the ability to adapt to change. When we cut the art department, we are stifling the opportunity for students to develop these skills. Art isn't just about developing fine artists. Art helps students express themselves, make a plan and execute it, learn from failures, and, more recently, develop 21st-century skills.

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			Cutting positions in our department jeopardizes the evolution of our district. As art and technology become more intertwined with digital arts, media arts, 3D printing, laser cutting, circuits, coding, as well as things that have yet to be developed, we are providing opportunities for children to learn through making and find what drives their curiosity. Some of the most meaningful conversations I have had with students sprout from discussing art history. Teaching students about the history of art opens a safe space to talk about social justice issues, self-expression, and identity in a nonjudgement context. Students need to see people like themselves succeeding in a variety of roles. As we sit home and socially distance ourselves, consider the books you read, the shows you watch, the puzzles you assemble, the music you listen to, and the games you play. All of these wouldn't be possible without the skills of artists. Furthermore, young makers around the country are designing tools to help those in the frontlines: 3D printing face shields, designing surgical mask straps to relieve ear pressure for those working long hours, sewing masks, and making gadgets to reduce touching things like doorknobs and elevator buttons. To create a better future for our children and generations to come, please consider the possibilities that come from the development and growth of RCSD's art department.
Judy Via-Wolff	Staff	Reductions to Art Department	As a veteran art teacher in this district for many years I am writing this to advocate for our Art department specifically. I have been through many years where the arts were on the chopping block and I can say I have seen schools and students deprived due to so many changes. Our schools are

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			families and Art teachers are a significant part of that school family. We bring the joy of creativity, we decorate the halls, and the walls of schools and central office. We need to keep an art teacher as much as possible all in one building. Please reconsider any cuts to arts department. Our students will be underserved and our teachers will be spread too thin and unable to make those student, parent , teacher connections that are so valuable to each and every child. I am not sure why visual arts was chosen for such a large number of cuts but I sincerely hope you reconsider and put our students and families first by keeping our art teachers.
Elizabeth Turri	Staff	Proposed Budget cuts in the RCSD Arts program	I am writing about my concern for your current proposed budget cuts in the RCSD Arts program. I have been an Art teacher in the RCSD for 18 years. The Arts have always been a valued part of our students education in our community. However, I have seen the value of the Arts decline within our district. A 20% cut in our already very small department would be devastating for our students. Currently our k-6 students receive about 35 minutes of Art instruction once every four days for half a school year.....that is it! For my students I urge you to reconsider your proposed cuts and save our program!
Kristen French	Staff	Remote Learning	The energy, resources, and time our district has invested in remote learning instead of the general welfare and emotional well-being of our students, families, and staff over the past three weeks indicates that this District prioritizes:

Speakers Public Comment
Special Meeting April 7, 2020

			-technology over humanity -companies over classrooms -privatization and charter schools over public education -racism over equitable education -exclusion over inclusion Instead this time could be spending working collaboratively with our colleagues and families to generate a plan of going back in May or June or September. We do not need to go back to the same educational system with inadequately staffed classrooms, poor selection of coursework for students, lack of basic protocols to help our students and staff be safe and healthy, and several other poor learning conditions. We can spend this time right now reinforcing the importance of time with families, that self-care is critical, space to be creative and play is necessary, and managing the best we can through this international epidemic. This is not business as usual.
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