

**ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting**  
**January 19, 2017**

Attending: Malik Evans (Chair); Commissioners Powell, Elliott, and Hallmark (arrived at 6:17PM).

Parent Representative: Toyin Anderson

District Staff: Dr. Kendra March, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning; Dr. Robin Hooper, Executive Director of Early Childhood Education; Andrew MacGowan, Project Administrator

Community Members: Dr. Dirk Hightower, Executive Director of the Children's Institute; Dr. Charles Infurna, Information Analyst with the Children's Institute and Principal Author of the RECAP Report

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Evans called the meeting to order at 6:06PM.

**I. Review Minutes of the December 8, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting**

**Motion** by Commissioner Elliott to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting. **Adopted 2-0.**

**II. Findings from the 2015-16 Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership (RECAP) Report**

Dr. Robin Hooper provided copies of the full report from the Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership (RECAP) to the members of the Committee. She emphasized that RECAP is a genuine partnership between the District, Head Start, and representatives of numerous community-based PreK providers. Dr. Hooper explained that the mission of this alliance is to provide valid, accurate and reliable data that can be used for continuous improvement, and all partners review performance-related data in meetings every two weeks. Mr. Andrew MacGowan added that the RECAP partnership has been in existence for almost 25 years, with the purpose of examining early childhood education and its impact in the Rochester community.

Dr. Hooper reviewed the various evaluation tools used by RECAP to assess student and program performance, including the quality of the classroom environment; teacher – student interactions; student academic, motor, language and social/emotional/behavioral development; and parent involvement and satisfaction. She stated that the 2015-16 evaluation results indicate that the PreK program is of high quality, even with just three months' notice of approval by the NYS Education Department to expand the program to include three-year-old children. A total of 44 new classrooms were added to accommodate these younger children. Mr. MacGowan stated that the Early PreK program (EPK) currently serves 27% of all three-year-old children in Rochester, and the evaluation found slightly higher quality in this program than the program for four-year-old children (UPK).

Dr. Hooper stated that assessments of the District's PreK program have shown consistently high levels of quality and performance over the years on a number of measures. She reported that the District recently adopted a new Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-3) that many school districts have been reluctant to implement because of the level of rigor involved. Even on this quite stringent measure, RCSD PreK programs obtained an overall score of 5.2 on a 7-point scale. On the previous ECERS scale, the District consistently obtained a score of 6.1-6.2, while the national average has been 4.3.

In reviewing the subscale scores, Dr. Hooper pointed out that the EPK program for three-year-old children scored slightly higher in each domain than the UPK program for four-year old children. The subscales included classroom space, routine, language, activity, interaction, and program quality.

In terms of the quality of the classroom and teacher – student interaction, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) revealed that additional work is needed in the area of instructional support. Dr. Hooper noted that this has been an area in need of improvement for the last several years, and the Early Childhood Education Department plans to target professional development in this domain. Despite the relatively lower score for instructional supports, the RCSD PreK program scored more highly than the national Head Start program across all of the domains (emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support, and overall).

Dr. Hooper reviewed the results of the Brigance screening assessment, which examines a child's developmental readiness for school. She stated that the results showed that the three-year-old children entering the PreK program were more developmentally ready for school than the entering four-year-old children, reflecting the cumulative impact of significant delays experienced by young children in our community. Dr. Hooper pointed out that three-year-old children have experienced less in the way of developmental delays than four-year-old children in Rochester. Mr. MacGowan noted that 72-79% of three-year-old children entering PreK were found to be developmentally ready for school, as compared with only 64-67% of four-year-old children entering the program. He added that the findings have been consistent for four-year-old children over the last three years of RECAP assessments.

Parent Representative Toyin Anderson inquired about the number of four-year-old children who had also attended the Early PreK (EPK) program in the previous year, noting that this would affect the evaluation findings. Mr. MacGowan replied that only 659 children were in the EPK program last year and continued on to UPK this year. He added that these children only had half of a year in the EPK program because it was just launched in January 2016. Mr. MacGowan stated that the impact of two full years of participation in the PreK program can be assessed after this school year, as the first cohort prepares to enter kindergarten.

Commissioner Elliott emphasized the importance of communicating this data to parents to empower them as partners in their child's education. She remarked that the District has not done a good job in providing this type of clear and profound data to parents. Commissioner Elliott referred to another research study showing major gaps in vocabulary between children from affluent families and those from low-income families. She urged District staff to share this type of data with parents, requesting that the Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning explore ways to communicate simple, straightforward strategies to enable parents to aid their child's development, thereby encouraging their

engagement in education and empowering them as equal partners.

**Action Item: The Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning will explore ways to communicate critical data to parents, particularly strategies for empowering parents by informing them of ways to accelerate their child’s learning at home.**

Dr. Hooper discussed assessments of children’s growth in the PreK program by comparing their level of development and skill acquisition at the beginning and at the end of the school year. She explained that these assessments examine approaches to learning; social and emotional development; physical development; language, literacy and communication; math; creative arts; science and technology; and social studies. Dr. Hooper pointed out that students in the RCSD PreK program have consistently scored lowest in language, literacy and communication, followed by math and social studies.

Commissioner Elliott stated that many families in the District may not recognize that a child’s education begins even before entering the formal school system, and the importance of introducing language to a child even before birth. She discussed the various ways in which parents can enhance their child’s language skills, by engaging in conversation, reading, and singing. Commissioner Elliott asserted that this type of information can be quite powerful in enabling parents to more actively participate in their child’s learning and aiding their development. She noted that the District has tended to adopt a paternalistic approach with parents, instructing them to engage in certain activities with their young child (i.e. engaging in a discussion) without explaining the rationale or the profound effect on child development.

Dr. Hooper requested that further consideration be given to the most effective way to convey this information to parents, particularly since a great deal is already being done at the school level.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about current methods for reaching out and communicating with parents. Dr. Hooper explained that a great deal of parent outreach and communications is done at the site level because families with young children tend to be much more connected to the PreK program at their location, rather than district-wide.

Commissioner Hallmark asked whether communications mechanisms are in place for all PreK parents. Dr. Hooper replied that all PreK parents have parent participation plans, which could include strategies for aiding their child’s development.

Commissioner Elliott commented that the data and information about ways to foster child development and learning does not have to be communicated to parents in a formalized way, but simply through flyers, newsletters, posters on site, and/or discussions in parent – teacher conferences.

Commissioner Hallmark asked how the RCSD PreK students’ scores compare to national results, particularly for the new EPK program. Dr. Hightower reported that there are very few PreK programs for three-year-old children in the U.S., and no national statistics are available for this age group. He added that gains were consistently found from the beginning to the end of the school year in all aspects of development for the RCSD EPK students. Mr. MacGowan reported that the children attending the RCSD UPK program (for four-year-old children) gained an average of 20 months (1.7 years) in development during the school year.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the rationale for the previous superintendent to have claimed that the RCSD PreK program was not meeting children's needs, which apparently contradicts all of the evaluation findings. Dr. Hightower replied that RCSD Kindergarten teachers had expressed concern that many of the children entering kindergarten were not developmentally ready, even if they had completed the PreK program. He explained that even though children have been making substantial developmental gains in PreK (i.e. 1.7 years of growth), it has not been sufficient for them to be considered ready for kindergarten. Dr. Hightower stated that these findings reflect the impact of summer learning loss and the profound developmental delays experienced by children in poverty in Rochester, rather than any deficit in the PreK program.

Commissioner Elliott asked about teachers' responsibility for assisting children to overcome these developmental delays when they enter kindergarten. Dr. Hooper replied that kindergarten teachers are expected to assess students to determine their need for Academic Intervention Services; group students based on their abilities and needs; and provide individualized instruction.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about areas of improvement needed for kindergarten teachers generally. Dr. Hooper responded that kindergarten teachers need more support and have been requesting professional development in conjunction with PreK teachers. She acknowledged that she has not been able to provide this type of integrated training recently with the large expansion of the PreK program, particularly in finding a venue large enough to accommodate all of the participants. Mr. MacGowan clarified that students' scores must be quite high to be determined "developmentally ready" for kindergarten: 4.0 overall and at least 3.75 in each domain. He reported that PreK students overall scored above 4.0 and above 3.75 in each of the domains, but individual children scored below the target in a particular domain. Mr. MacGowan explained that this accounts for the average PreK score exceeding the targets, although only 53% of the PreK students were found to be ready for kindergarten. He noted that this is consistent with the RECAP findings from previous years. Mr. MacGowan stated that although 47% of PreK students scored a bit lower in the academic subjects (language/literacy, math, science), most of these students are very close to the threshold of being considered "developmentally ready" for kindergarten.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether parents know the level of development that their child should attain academically. Dr. Hooper responded that teachers are supposed to conduct conferences with parents periodically throughout the year to discuss their child's progress. She added that teachers can also generate reports for individual children based on the Child Observation Record (COR) to share with parents. She stated that her department encourages teachers to share these reports in meetings with parents to explain and discuss the results.

Mr. MacGowan discussed the Teacher – Child Rating Scale (TCRS), which is used to assess social and emotional learning along the following dimensions: task orientation, behavior control, assertiveness, and peer social skills. Dr. Hooper explained that task orientation includes organizing one's work, working independently, finishing assignments, and taking initiative. She stated that these skills are also sometimes referred to as "executive functioning", and are most highly predictive of later school success.

Commissioner Evans pointed out that he encourages parents to enroll their child in PreK not only for the academics, but to attain the skills associated with task orientation because these are critical in all aspects of life and future success.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about PreK students' scores on social/emotional development assessments, as compared to national results. Dr. Hightower replied that RCSD PreK students' scores are very similar to the national norms.

Commissioner Elliott observed that PreK students' skills in behavior control did not improve much during the school year, and asked whether restorative practices could be used with these young students. Dr. Hooper replied that the RCSD PreK program uses an approach similar to restorative practices by teaching conflict resolution skills.

Commissioner Elliott emphasized the importance of focusing on behavior control because of the potential for behavior problems to affect future outcomes for students. Mr. MacGowan noted that despite overall gains in this aspect of social/emotional learning among PreK students, the children who have social/emotional risks have not been growing out of the risk pool. Dr. Hooper added that several pilot programs are being conducted to address the needs of these children: 1) Play-based intervention to help develop an attachment with an adult; 2) Physician observation in the classroom to assist in creating behavior plans and in collaborating with parents; 3) Training in the pyramid model for all staff members and parents. She stated that children who have been unable to form an attachment with an adult have the greatest difficulty with behavior control.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether the scores for RCSD PreK students have always been lower in the realm of behavior control. She asserted that if this has been a persistent trend, a longitudinal study should be conducted to examine the extent to which these students go on to have higher disciplinary and/or suspension rates in later grades. Mr. MacGowan and Dr. Hooper replied that a longitudinal study of PreK students would be quite valuable in revealing the long-term effects of early childhood education, but costs are typically a factor in conducting these types of studies over a long period of time.

Dr. Hooper presented attendance data for RCSD PreK students, pointing out that greater numbers/percentages of students are determined to be developmentally ready for kindergarten as the PreK attendance rate increases. For example, only 42% of PreK students with attendance rates at or below 80% were found to be ready for kindergarten at the end of the year. In contrast, 60% of PreK students with an attendance rate of at least 90% were developmentally ready for kindergarten.

Ms. Toyin Anderson asserted that the data regarding the impact of PreK attendance on readiness for kindergarten should be shared with every District parent.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that sharing this data would be a powerful means of encouraging parents as partners in their child's education. Mr. MacGowan noted that parents are aware of the importance of attendance because the percentage of PreK children with attendance rates of at least 90% has doubled in the last year. Dr. Hooper added that the District is also using a parent compact for attendance that was developed in the Head Start program. In addition, the PreK program now has a dedicated attendance monitor.

Mr. MacGowan presented data from the SummerLEAP program, a privately funded effort to prevent summer learning loss for PreK students entering Kindergarten in the fall. He stated that PreK students typically lose approximately 25-30% of learning over the summer, so the first several months of the

school year are spent on review. After completing the SummerLEAP program, 76% of PreK students were found to be ready to enter kindergarten – compared to just 53% who were determined to be kindergarten-ready at the end of the school year.

In terms of parent satisfaction with the RCSD PreK program, Mr. MacGowan noted that parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction overall with the programs: 80% of EPK parents gave the program an “A” or “A-“, and 83.5% of UPK parents gave these scores to the program. He stated that the highest ratings were given to PreK teachers, with parents assigning 95% of teachers an “A” or “A-“ on surveys for the EPK and UPK programs.

Commissioner Elliott inquired whether the parent survey asked about family income. Dr. Hooper replied that this information was not requested in the survey, but all of the students in the EPK program were required to be eligible for free- and reduced-price meals because the grant for this program is for high-needs students.

Commissioner Elliott noted that some community groups did not want PreK or kindergarten students tested in the Common Core curriculum, but many in the African American community wanted this testing to know their children’s developmental status. Mr. MacGowan reported that the Child Observation Record (COR) is a Common Core measure.

Dr. Hooper reviewed the main findings and recommendations from the RECAP assessment:

- Baseline score of 5.2 on the new Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-3) for the RCSD PreK program (based on a 7-point scale)
- The RCSD PreK program strengths are in classroom interaction and programming
- Areas in need of improvement are: space, routine, language and activity
- In terms of PreK classrooms, social/emotional support and classroom organization have been strengths
- Instructional support of PreK teachers needs to improve, and has been identified as an area for professional development this year
- Attendance continues to be a concern for PreK children, with severely and chronically absent children showing gains but not enough to be considered ready for kindergarten – as compared with children who attend PreK regularly
- Children who attended SummerLEAP programs realized significant gains in development and readiness for kindergarten
- Family involvement in the PreK program has remained consistent over the last six years
- Parents continue to rate the UPK and EPK programs very highly in terms of quality and instruction, with the highest ratings given to PreK teachers

Based on these findings and recommendations, Dr. Hooper outlined the following plans and goals for the future:

- Ensure that all children aged three and four have programming;
- Establish a target of 80% of PreK students developmentally ready for Kindergarten by the end of the year, supplemented with the SummerLEAP program whenever possible

- Continue to focus on attendance
- Continue use of the Pyramid model to support students' social and emotional growth
- Maintain the high-quality professional development that has been instrumental to the PreK program's success
- Implement joint professional development with PreK and Kindergarten teachers
- Consider implementing the Chicago Parent Program and supporting the Roc the Future Parent Engagement Collaborative Action Network *Ready Rosie* program to improve parent engagement

Dr. Hooper added that the PreK program's future success also depends on quality professional development to support a culturally responsive curriculum, including the ability to build on a child's native language. She noted that quite a few teachers have been hired recently, making this training even more imperative.

Mr. MacGowan pointed out that conducting this comprehensive evaluation of the RCSD PreK program cost approximately 1.1% of the entire PreK budget. Dr. Hooper stated that the RECAP evaluation has provided the data necessary for the RCSD PreK program audit by the NYS Education Department this spring, thereby safeguarding program grant funding.

Commissioner Evans emphasized the importance of having the PreK program evaluated by an independent organization because the findings are much more credible and genuinely attest to program quality. He asserted that the findings should be communicated to the wider community, and the lessons/examples established at the PreK level need to be pushed up through each grade level in the District to improve quality and performance.

Ms. Toyin Anderson pointed out that the quality of the PreK program reflects the impact of individualized learning, which is not conducted in later grade levels.

Commissioner Powell asked about differences between PreK teachers and teachers in early grade levels, and the extent to which these differences may affect the findings in terms of program quality. Dr. Hooper pointed out that PreK teachers are not subject to the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), and all of the evaluations conducted at the PreK level are "low stakes" and designed to inform teachers of ways in which to improve instructional practices.

Commissioner Powell noted that the differences in PreK and early elementary program quality were found long before APPR was implemented. She asserted that the differences are due to teachers' attitudes and their approach to children and the subject matter.

Commissioner Evans announced that he would like to see PreK teachers provide instruction at the middle school or high school level because these older students may appear tough externally, but basically have the same needs for nurturing, understanding, and support as younger children. He observed that the tougher external appearance of older children may lead adults to adopt a punitive approach with them out of fear.

Mr. MacGowan emphasized that no significant differences were found between the PreK program as provided in RCSD schools and by community-based organizations. Dr. Hooper noted that the goal of

the PreK program is to provide consistent high-quality early childhood education to all children in all locations.

Commissioner Evans stated that the consistently high performance of the RCSD PreK program reflects the connections that the District has established in the community in raising and educating our children. He reiterated the importance of promoting these types of collaborative partnerships in later grades, and noted that this model could be used for many other District programs and initiatives. Dr. Hooper commented that the collaboration has not always been easy, but a sustained and shared focus on the children has brought the various parties together.

Commissioner Elliott noted that collaboration seems to have been instrumental to the success of the PreK program. Dr. Hooper concurred, adding that the structure for collaboration and for programming have also been critical to its success.

Dr. Hightower commented on the effects of “low stakes” testing, noting that PreK teachers have been told from the outset that evaluations will only be used to assist them. He pointed out that the evaluation results are shared only with the teachers, who are able to decide whether and with whom to share this information. In addition, the evaluation report provides guidance about specific ways a teacher can improve their teaching practice. For these reasons, the PreK evaluations are considered a support to teachers. Dr. Hightower added that the same evaluation instruments can be used throughout the elementary grades to support teachers at these levels. He emphasized that the specific feedback provided by these evaluation tools makes all the difference in providing meaningful support and enabling teachers to improve instruction, as compared with performance assessments that are used punitively.

Mr. MacGowan noted that the evaluation methods that have been used with PreK teachers under the RECAP partnership have reduced the amount of time needed to attain mastery from ten years to just six years.

Dr. Hightower acknowledged the expense involved in training qualified evaluators and conducting classroom observations, but asserted that this cost must be weighed against the cost of failing students by failing to provide guidance to enable teachers to improve instruction. Mr. MacGowan reported that the District has expended over \$1B over the last ten years for remediation.

To illustrate teachers’ efforts at continuous improvement, Dr. Hooper pointed out that a group of kindergarten teachers enrolled in the conflict resolution training offered to PreK teachers because they want to implement this model in their classrooms. Commissioner Hallmark noted that these kindergarten teachers should be recognized.

Dr. Hightower reported that the children entering the PreK program with the most significant delays realize the greatest gains over the course of the year. Mr. MacGowan stated that children in the lowest 15% of the population entering PreK gain approximately 2 years developmentally by the end of the school year, as compared with an average overall gain of 1.7 years for all PreK students.

Commissioner Elliott asked about ways that parents have been involved in the PreK program. Dr. Hooper replied that family participation plans have been developed; an Orientation/Open House is conducted at the beginning of the school year; family events are held throughout the year; and a

newsletter is sent to every household every few months.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about problems in the program due to families moving frequently. Dr. Hooper reported that approximately 30% of the families with PreK children move during the year, but these families primarily move within the City of Rochester and transfer to another PreK program. Mr. MacGowan explained that parents are able to choose any PreK program, regardless of geographic proximity to their home. He noted that this system accommodates parents' needs, increases program participation, and maximizes grant funding. Mr. MacGowan stated that the District is exploring the Chicago Parent Program and the Authentic Family Engagement model from Head Start to improve parent engagement in the RCSD PreK program. He added that in most areas of the country, school districts and Head Start have been at war with each other, which has been documented since 1965. Dr. Hooper reported that the District has good working relationships with Head Start and community-based organizations.

Commissioner Hallmark asked why there has been in-fighting between school districts and community-based organizations in other areas. Dr. Hooper attributed the successful partnerships in Rochester to the structures that have been put in place to support collaboration. She stated that RECAP designed evaluations to be fair to all providers, and collaborative forums are held to assess PreK program needs, and to offer professional development and other supports. Dr. Hightower reported that the unique collaborative partnership in Rochester is largely due to Dr. Hooper's approach in sharing decision-making and teaming with community-based organizations, rather than imposing requirements, curriculum, or staffing on them.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that the District has not had the capacity to serve all of the PreK children, so had to rely on collaboration with community-based organizations. She added that this collaboration was also a requirement in the NYS grant. Mr. MacGowan clarified that the grant requirement was for 10% participation by community-based organizations in the PreK program, but the District has had 50% participation.

Dr. Hightower underscored the importance of summer programming for PreK students to overcome summer learning loss. Without summer programs, he noted that the gains attained through the PreK program will not be apparent upon entry into kindergarten, which could lead to questioning the value of the entire program.

Commissioner Evans suggested the possibility of partnering with community-based organizations to provide summer programs for PreK students.

Dr. Hooper remarked that additional outreach needs to be done with the business community to obtain their support and aid their understanding of the importance of early childhood education and its profound impact on development and life prospects.

Meeting adjourned at 7:33PM.