

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Community & Intergovernmental Relations
Committee Meeting

June 16, 2015

MINUTES

Attending: Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott (Chair); Commissioners Adams and Campos (arrived 6:13PM).

District Staff: Barbara Goldammer, Director of Student Placement; Lori Baldwin, Director of Safety & Security; Adele Bovard, Deputy Superintendent of Administration; Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Board Vice President Elliott called the meeting to order at 6:03PM.

I. Update on RTS Student Transportation and Impact on Student Placement and Safety & Security

Commissioner Elliott discussed recent changes in the RTS contract regarding student transportation, which will lead to fewer students traveling downtown and improved safety at the Transit Center. She stated that the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee would like to learn more about the implications of these changes in terms of student placement.

Barbara Goldammer stated that students have a choice of schools through the lottery process, which took place earlier this year. She reported that approximately 300-400 students are currently being placed and the District is mimicking the lottery by examining the schools located closest to their residence, their academic history, schools attended by siblings, and the student's interests. Ms. Goldammer stated that the placement process is changing from focusing on available seats to more thoughtful planning in considering these factors to increase students' stability and continued enrollment at the same school.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the number of secondary students that have been placed to date for the 2015-16 school year. Ms. Goldammer replied that 1500-1700 secondary students have been placed so far, and another 350 students still need placements for 7th and 9th grade next year.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the reasons given when a parent or student requests placement in a specific school. Ms. Goldammer reported that an Open House is held in each RCSD school to enable parents and students to learn about each school and the programs that are offered. She noted that Placement Counselors are available at the Open Houses to assist with the school selection process. Ms. Goldammer added that actively involved

parents typically attend 3-4 Open Houses at different schools to gather information for selecting a school for their child. She stated that the Placement Office is reaching out to parents who may be less involved in the process, discussing school placement options based on proximity to the student's home, academic profile, and interests.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the Student Placement Office and Safety & Security Office intervening when students become involved in altercations. Ms. Goldammer replied that the District's practice has been to offer transfer options to students who have been victimized, and a team from the Placement Office and Safety & Security Department meet to determine the best setting for the student, particularly in terms of school climate. She explained that students involved in altercations would be reported to the school by RTS personnel and the school staff would determine the most appropriate disciplinary approach.

Commissioner Adams asked about relocating All City High School in the North Clinton Avenue location, noting that \$2.5M was allocated in the 2015-16 RCSD budget to renovate this facility. She expressed concern about All City High School being located in close proximity to the Transit Center, and the potential for this to lead to an increase in incidents downtown. Dr. Otuwa pointed out that the schedule for All City High School has been expanded to 7AM to 7PM to prevent a large influx of students into the area at any one time. She explained that small groups of students will attend the school for a few periods at a time, since the main purpose of the school's program is for credit recovery.

Commissioner Elliott noted that the North Clinton Avenue site is a good location in terms of enhancing students' accessibility to a variety of programs and activities. Dr. Otuwa reported that she has toured the facility and noted the importance of monitoring students' activities in the area.

Commissioner Elliott recalled that there is an upcoming meeting of the Downtown Business Development group, and she requested input from Lori Baldwin regarding the current safety/security status of the downtown Transit Center. Ms. Baldwin reported visiting the Transit Center several days in the last week and noticing significant safety improvements. She stated that much fewer students are traveling through the Transit Center since charter school students have been removed from these routes. Ms. Baldwin pointed out that students creating disturbances will now be more apparent and prominent, facilitating intervention by the police and security personnel.

Commissioner Elliott inquired whether there has been an increase in the number of disruptive incidents with the approaching end of the school year. Ms. Baldwin replied that Friday, June 12th, and Monday, June 15th, have been the most challenging to date because these were the last two full days of classes for high school students. She reported students being involved in balloon fights and senior pranks, with the most serious incidents being pulling alarms in school buildings. Ms. Baldwin stated that this created somewhat chaotic situations in evacuating schools every time an alarm was pulled, but the District traditionally has not experienced any problems after the last full day of classes and with the beginning of Regents testing. Deputy Superintendent Bovard pointed out problems with

news reports regarding incidents at East High School, which contributed to some “copycat” behavior, with students in other schools wanting similar media attention.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she would like to address this with the media to minimize coverage of disturbances, particularly of the students involved. She stated that minimizing media attention is necessary to discourage students from engaging in these types of behaviors. Dr. Otuwa reported that a plan has been developed to address potential problems with the last day of classes for elementary and middle school students.

Commissioner Elliott asked how situations were managed in which a student pulled the alarm in the school building. Ms. Baldwin responded that she has been working with the Fire Department, requesting that the alarms be taken offline for a brief period. She reported that the Fire Department declined to take this action.

Commissioner Adams requested information about transportation plans for summer school programs, noting that problems have arisen in the past between Eastside and Westside students. Ms. Goldammer replied that high school seniors will attend summer school at the School of the Arts, and the other high school students will attend the Edison campus.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the estimated number of high school seniors attending summer school this year. Ms. Goldammer replied that approximately 800 high school seniors are expected to attend summer school.

Commissioner Elliott asked for data regarding the total number of high school students anticipated to attend summer school this year. Ms. Goldammer estimated that approximately 2600 high school students will attend summer school, and stated that the District’s goal for PreK through 12th grade is to have 12,500 students in summer school this year. She emphasized the need for a variety of programs to be offered to reduce summer learning loss.

Commissioner Adams requested a briefing on potential safety/security issues that could arise during the summer. Ms. Baldwin replied that historically the District has had concerns between Eastside and Westside students, and additional Safety & Security staff will be deployed to campuses with higher concentrations of students.

Commissioner Adams inquired about plans for middle school students attending summer school programs. Ms. Goldammer reported that middle school students will attend summer school at East High School.

Commissioner Adams questioned whether the summer school program at East High School has the capacity to accommodate all middle school students. Ms. Goldammer replied that Monroe High School, NE College Preparatory Academy, and NW College Preparatory Academy each have special summer programs for their students. She offered to provide a summary/overview of the various programs offered in the District this summer.

Action Item: Ms. Goldammer will provide a summary or overview to CIGR Committee members of the various programs offered to students this summer.

Ms. Flanagan inquired about the possibility of offering alternate placements to students who have caused incidents downtown in schools that do not have routes traveling through downtown or that are within walking distance of the student's residence. Ms. Goldammer emphasized the importance of stability and retaining these students in the same school with staff who know them, can intervene effectively, and provide necessary supports. She discussed the option of arranging alternate transportation for these students for a period of time. Ms. Goldammer pointed out that transferring students under these circumstances would be complicated because of NYS laws/regulations governing District-initiated transfers.

Ms. Flanagan reported attending a recent Finance Committee meeting that involved discussion of an additional \$11M in District transportation costs because of students' disruptive behavior downtown, noting that these funds could be much better spent in the classroom. Ms. Goldammer reiterated the importance of promoting and preserving connections for these students by keeping them in the same school with the same staff.

Commissioner Adams questioned whether families could choose to transfer their child to a school in their neighborhood. Ms. Goldammer replied that parents can request a voluntary transfer beginning June 1st for the upcoming school year, but this process will end after the beginning of September to avoid creating instability for students. She stated that the Placement Office gives first priority to placing a student in a school attended by their siblings. Ms. Goldammer observed that many students in the District attend the same school for a few years in the early grades, and then their family moves outside the zone. She noted that the importance of providing academic stability for District students leads to increased expenditures for cross-zone transportation. Ms. Goldammer commented that this is the result of the District making students' stability in school the higher priority.

II. Discuss Goals for the CIGR Committee and Development of Communications Plan

Commissioner Elliott requested feedback from Committee members on the proposed Communications Plan.

Commissioner Campos suggested scheduling trips to Albany to ensure that the time is on Board members' calendars and to plan strategically for legislative advocacy. She added that letters of thanks to legislators sponsoring or supporting bills benefitting the District would also be helpful in fostering relationships.

Commissioner Adams stated that she has focused more on the Board's communication with constituents to highlight critical issues in education, such as students' transition into 9th grade.

Commissioner Elliott proposed that Committee members identify other topics/issues to address with parents and community members (e.g. credit recovery for graduation). She cited an example of the Superintendent's editorial in the newspaper recently emphasizing early literacy. Commissioner Elliott also referred to other modes of communication (e.g.

radio, television, public service announcements) that the Board could use to inform the community of critical issues in education and strategies for supporting student achievement. She asserted that the Committee needs to develop a framework for communications to parents and the larger community.

Commissioner Elliott recalled the reachout forums conducted in the past when Commissioner Campos was chair of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee. She inquired about the number of parents attending these forums.

Commissioner Campos reported that approximately 50-100 parents attended these reachout events, in which representatives from each of the key departments offered information to help navigate the options and processes in the District.

Commissioner Adams emphasized the need to communicate with parents and the larger community about the recent changes in NYS law regarding receivership schools. She contended that an outside receiver will be appointed and involvement of parents and community members is essential to promote improvements in these schools. Commissioner Adams pointed out that the model for receivership schools is a community school with wraparound services, and the District should be implementing this now with parent and community participation. She advocated for a parent and community empowerment approach in implementing the Communications Plan, since their activism drives school improvement.

Commissioner Elliott proposed focusing on critical topics and priorities to inform parents and community members and discuss ways in which they can become involved and have an impact on children. She stated that school staff may not have the leverage or influence on stakeholders that Board members have, so it is incumbent upon the Board to assume these responsibilities. Commissioner Elliott advocated for providing information that parents can use to make different decisions in their lives. She also discussed the importance of developing a communications framework to identify the modes of communication, presentation of data/information, specific types of public forums, frequency, and responsibilities for organizing/coordinating these efforts.

Commissioner Adams asserted that parent empowerment is essential to foster school improvement, and this is the communication that should be provided by the Board as elected officials representing District families.

Commissioner Campos discussed her experience with her son's entry into kindergarten this year, noting that it took some time for her to identify ways to reinforce his learning at school. She suggested that school staff provide an orientation/forum for parents to discuss specific activities that would support their child's learning and reinforce the instruction given at school.

Commissioner Elliott acknowledged the potential benefits of empowering parents and community members, but expressed concern about the intensive effort involved and the myriad of factors affecting parent and community activism. She stated that the Board cannot control all of these dynamics, but can offer information of effective strategies for

parents to support their child's education and to strengthen the bridge between home and school. Commissioner Elliott noted that many young parents don't know how to reinforce their child's development and education. She contended that providing this type of information will assist in enhancing children's readiness to learn and alleviate the significant delays that children often have upon entering the school system in the District.

Commissioner Campos reported that a key focus of the Wellness Task Force has been to promote consistency in Health Education to ensure that the same messages regarding nutrition and physical activity are being conveyed District-wide. She discussed strategies for integrating physical activity into academic instruction and student discipline (e.g. run around the table ten times, counting each lap). Commissioner Campos asked whether health and wellness topics could also be included in the CIGR Communications Plan.

Commissioner Elliott agreed that health and wellness topics are entirely appropriate to incorporate into the Communications Plan, particularly in promoting children's readiness to learn and in aiding families' understanding of the prevalence of childhood obesity and its impact on learning and on chronic lifelong disease.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she would like the messages from the Board to be aligned with the Strategic Plan and mission to reinforce these priorities and provide a unified voice on behalf of the District. She proposed that the Committee's next step be to invite the Deputy Superintendents and the Communications Chief to the next meeting to obtain their input about the Communications Plan and effective strategies for implementation.

Action Item: Ms. Flanagan will invite Deputy Superintendent Bovard, Deputy Superintendent Otuwa, and Communications Chief Chip Partner to the July 16th meeting of the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee.

Commissioner Campos stated that she would be interested in learning from the deputy superintendents and the Communications Chief about current efforts to inform families and community members of critical issues in education.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she has heard communications from the District about the importance of Universal Pre-K, but not of other factors affecting student achievement.

Commissioner Adams reiterated the importance of focusing on strengthening the leadership among parents and the school community to drive the changes needed at the school level, particularly in the event of having an external receiver appointed. She acknowledged that this would be a much more complex approach than providing information, but emphasized the necessity in light of the Board and Superintendent no longer governing schools under receivership.

Dr. Otuwa suggested scheduling student performances before public meetings/forums to maximize family and community attendance.

Motion by Commissioner Adams to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Campos.
Adopted 3-0.

Meeting adjourned at 6:46PM.