

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting
March 17, 2016

Attending: Malik Evans (Chair); Commissioners Hallmark, Elliott, Adams and White.

Parent Representative: Toyin Anderson

District Staff: Dr. Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning; Michele Alberti, Executive Director of the Office of School Innovation; Paul Conrow, Science Teacher at East High School; Ruth Turner, Director of School Counseling & Social Work; Chris Suriano, Director of Special Education; Dr. Ray Giamartino, Chief of School Transformation; Cheryl Wheeler, Title I Coordinator; Kelly Bauman, Director of the Office of Expanded Learning; Keisha Morgan, Data Analyst/Special Assistant to the Deputy Superintendent.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Evans called the meeting to order at 6:57PM.

I. Review Minutes of February 18, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Elliott to approve the minutes of the February 18, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Hallmark. **Adopted 3-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

II. Discuss the Request for Proposal (RFP) for Contracts for Supplemental Academic Services and Expanded Learning Providers

Kelly Bauman discussed the variety of services for expanded learning to increase academic and enrichment opportunities for students. She reported that there are currently three cohorts in a total of 13 RCSD elementary schools that each offer 300 additional hours of instructional time; 12 secondary schools offering an additional 9th period of instruction; and 11 priority schools that may be required to provide at least 200 additional hours of instructional time in 2016-17.

Ms. Bauman stated that 22 vendors applied to contract with RCSD schools in 2014-15, and these community-based organizations were contacted to inquire about continued provision of services in 2015-16. She noted that all agreed to continue providing services this year, with the exception of Compeer. In addition to these 22 organizations, Ms. Bauman pointed out that the District has other community partners under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) arrangement. She presented information of the specific schools receiving services from each community partner in 2015-16:

School No. 3: Center for Youth, Generation 2, Time Collaborative Consultant, and the University of Rochester

School No. 4: Quad A

School No. 8: Center for Youth, Time Collaborative Consultant, and YMCA

School No. 9: Boys and Girls Club (Young Audiences), Time Collaborative Consultant, and Nazareth College

School No. 10: Center for Youth, EnCompass, Time Collaborative Consultant, and YMCA

School No. 16: Quad A

School No. 17: Hillside, Ibero, and Time Collaborative Consultant

School No. 22: Community Place, Time Collaborative Consultant

School No. 23: Rock Ventures, the Memorial Art Gallery, and Time Collaborative Consultant

School No. 29: Boys and Girls Club and Time Collaborative Consultant

School No. 33: EnCompass

School No. 34: EnCompass, Time Collaborative Consultant, and Quad A

School No. 41: Boys and Girls Club, EnCompass, and Time Collaborative Consultant

School No. 44: Time Collaborative Consultant and YMCA

School No. 45: Boys and Girls Club, Center for Youth, and Time Collaborative Consultant

School No. 46: Time Collaborative Consultant

Charlotte High School: Center for Youth and EnCompass

Leadership Academy for Young Men: Sylvan

LynCx Academy: EnCompass

Monroe High School: Center for Youth, Gandhi Institute for Non-Violence, SUNY Geneseo, MCC, and RAPA

Northeast College Preparatory Academy: Center for Youth, EnCompass, Partners in Restorative Initiatives

Northwest College Preparatory Academy: Center for Youth, Gandhi Institute for Non-Violence, and Partners in Restorative Initiatives

School of the Arts: Sylvan

Wilson Commencement Academy: Gandhi Institute for Non-Violence

Ms. Bauman discussed the evaluation process for the District's community partners to determine the extent to which their services have led to improvements in student achievement. She described using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), which is a low-stakes evaluation instrument used to identify specific areas in need of improvement and to inform planning. The community providers evaluated using this assessment also received professional development and coaching for all youth workers and site directors in the program (Quad A, Center for Youth, Charles Settlement House, Ibero-American Action League, YMCA, Baden

Street Settlement House, and Boys and Girls Club). Ms. Bauman stated that evaluations are also conducted twice per year through the National Center for Time & Learning, which examines progress based on seven essential elements: focused school-wide priorities, high quality instruction, targeted intervention and acceleration, frequent data cycles, teacher collaboration and professional development, engaging enrichment, and enhanced school culture. She explained that use of this evaluation has been scaled back because of the many state-mandated reviews performed in schools.

Ms. Bauman explained that the results from the state-mandated reviews conducted at expanded learning time (ELT) schools in the fall of 2015 were compared to the results of the National Center for Time & Learning Progress Monitoring Tool to indicate the gains achieved by students in each community partner program during the 2015-16 school year. She reported that two areas have been identified as in need of improvement: 1) providing greater continuity in programming to enable students to build skills over time; 2) improving assessments of enrichment activities to inform instruction and provide meaningful feedback to students and parents.

Commissioner Evans suggested conducting similar types of assessments with RCSD staff to foster awareness of specific areas in need of improvement and to receive feedback regarding their progress. He noted that many community partners excel at developing relationships with students, and suggested having them provide professional development to District staff. Commissioner Evans discussed the need to recognize and utilize the strengths and abilities of community partners.

Commissioner Hallmark observed that her experience in working at Charlotte High School involved many different community partners, but there were no opportunities for them to collaborate or exchange information about the services provided or the students being served. She suggested encouraging school leaders to promote this type of collaboration.

Commissioner Elliott discussed concerns among community partners regarding expectations to attain significant results in a 2-3 hour program, while the District is not producing results in an 8-hour day. Ms. Bauman concurred, reporting that community-based youth workers and partners are in the process of providing professional development to RCSD staff. She added that all partners in the ELT schools are encouraged to attend professional development offered by the District, particularly the half-day sessions and those conducted on the Superintendent's Conference Day.

Ms. Bauman stated that the development of contracts with community-based organizations includes a transition period because RCSD teachers have not understood the purpose of the services/program offered by community partners. She explained that this is in an effort to break down barriers between community-based organizations and school staff. Ms. Bauman reported that these types of barriers have also been substantiated in the state-mandated reviews conducted in schools. She asserted that efforts are being made to improve these relationships, and these concerns have also been discussed with school principals.

Ms. Bauman discussed the responses received to date for the 2016-17 Request for Proposal to provide services in schools. She stated that responses have been received from: ROOTS, LLC; the Center for Youth; Gandhi Center for Nonviolence; Catapult Learning; and the City of Rochester Department of Recreation & Youth Services. Ms. Bauman noted that a committee is

currently reviewing the proposals, some of which offer social and emotional supports to students. She reported that Catapult Learning is the only vendor so far that offers Supplemental Academic Services. Ms. Bauman stated that applications are expected from another three vendors, two of which are dance companies who would like to work with students at School Nos. 22 and 34. She added that the Center for Youth has expanded their services to include supports for summer learning.

Commissioner Evans stated that he is pleased to see the City of Rochester Youth & Recreation Department on the list of partners for 2016-17 because of the efforts made at recreation centers to reinforce learning and the importance of education, and their strategic location throughout the City.

Ms. Bauman reported that a different evaluation instrument is being considered in an effort to strengthen the assessment process and communications with community partners. She stated that contracts are discussed with community partners to ensure alignment of services with each School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP). Ms. Bauman reported that the final selection of community partners for 2016-17 will be presented to the Board in the April Business meeting.

III. Discussion regarding Neighborhood Schools

Commissioner Evans observed that there have been many conversations about promoting neighborhood schools in the District, particularly at the elementary level. He pointed out that everyone seems to support the concept of neighborhood schools, but the majority of RCSD students do not attend school in their neighborhood. Commissioner Evans explained that he wanted to devote this time to discuss the factors leading parents to select schools outside of their neighborhood and actions that can be taken to counteract this trend.

Dr. Otuwa reported that approximately 22% of RCSD students are attending their neighborhood school this year, but certain schools have a much higher percentage of students from the neighborhood (School Nos. 2, 7, 19, 34, 41, 44, and 45). She stated that the majority of students (over 60%) at School Nos. 34 and 41 walk to school.

Commissioner Evans asked whether the Administration has obtained information about the specific actions being taken by these schools to promote enrollment from the neighborhood. Dr. Otuwa replied that high-performing schools have higher percentages of students from the neighborhood enrolled. She discussed the benefits from students attending their neighborhood school: developing positive relationships with peers, access to recreational and fitness facilities, and improved security through the police and school security officers being better acquainted with neighborhood residents.

Commissioner Evans inquired about the students at School No. 9. Dr. Otuwa reported that all of the students attending this school are transported from other areas of the City.

Commissioner Adams pointed out that different data was presented in last night's Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee meeting regarding the number and percentage of students walking to school at School No. 9. She explained that a presentation was given in last night's meeting regarding transportation patterns, and there was a discussion about the number of students walking to School No. 9. Commissioner Adams suggested that perhaps this data was

extracted in a different way or for a different timeframe.

Action Item: Dr. Otuwa will provide the members of the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee with the most recent data available regarding the number and percentage of students who walk to each RCSD elementary school.

Commissioner Elliott focused on the importance of distinguishing between students riding the bus and those who receive rides to school from parents or other family members. She noted that the data regarding the total number of riders may be misinterpreted as indicating the number of students riding the bus.

Commissioner Evans stated that he would like to obtain parents' perspectives and asked about actions being taken in the District currently to promote enrollment in neighborhood schools.

Paul Conrow observed that the District's advertising to parents emphasizes school choice, which is misleading because parents' choices cannot be guaranteed. He asserted that there is an issue with perceptions, in that RCSD schools perceived as "successful" become so because more actively involved parents select them. Mr. Conrow contended that the actual student placement process is more like "school of chance" than "school of choice". He discussed the importance of neighborhood schools in building pride among residents and students, a sense of belonging and community, and the opportunity to participate in afterschool activities, and engage in family activities. Mr. Conrow recommended promoting these benefits from attending neighborhood schools, although he acknowledged the difficulties arising from the differences in the quality of schools across the District.

Toyin Anderson discussed the placement process and the selection process that parents have to undertake. She explained that parents first have to review a book with information about all RCSD schools, and then eliminate the schools that are low-performing. Ms. Anderson noted that this leads parents to select higher performing schools that are also located farther away. She also pointed to transportation as an issue for parents, especially those who are required to be at work before their child's school opens. Ms. Anderson maintained that neighborhood schools will not be a viable option until there is equity in the quality of all RCSD schools.

Commissioner White shared his own experience in selecting schools for his children, noting that he chose School No. 23 when his son began school because it was considered the "best" school at that time. This led him to move into an apartment in the neighborhood. Commissioner White reported that his family grew and they moved into a house in a location that would enable his children to attend School No. 12. He noted that many families in the District do not have the option of moving to the neighborhood where their school of choice is located. Commissioner White contended that the District cannot effectively promote neighborhood schools until all RCSD schools are of equal quality. Commissioner White noted that neighborhood safety is also a major concern, particularly in having children walk to school.

Commissioner Adams pointed out that fewer than half of RCSD families participate in the school choice process, so the student's placement is not necessarily an active decision being made by parents. She discussed the confusion involved in the placement process, noting that there often appears to be no rationale for the decisions that are made. She asserted that focusing on improving decision-making and the placement process would have a significant impact on students and families. Commissioner Adams recommended offering assistance to families who

want their child(ren) to attend neighborhood schools, and to reach out to those who have not participated in the school choice process. She observed that the low participation rate in the school choice process leads to chaos and confusion in student placement, and improvements will require time to yield results.

Mr. Conrow asserted that every neighborhood has children who are gifted academically, athletically, artistically, and in terms of leadership abilities. Although every student cannot attend the highest performing RCSD schools, he maintained that the District can offer additional supports and activities to improve the quality of schools and to meet the needs of children and families in each neighborhood. Mr. Conrow discussed the loss of time for homework and assignments due to the time children spend riding the bus to and from school. He urged District staff to stop the negative narrative about safety concerns and failing schools, and focus on addressing the factors that concern parents. Mr. Conrow gave an example regarding safety issues, suggesting recruiting members of the community and of faith-based organizations to volunteer to walk children to school.

Commissioner Evans referred to a report regarding RCSD transportation that was issued several years ago. He stated that this analysis showed that use of neighborhood schools would enable the District to expand transportation services, while yielding cost savings in addition to all of the other benefits to students, families, and the community.

Action Item: The report regarding potential cost savings from increased use of neighborhood schools will be provided to members of the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee.

Commissioner Elliott discussed the historic context of school choice, noting that it was intended to reduce segregation and enhance equity in accessing quality education. She contended that providing the services and supports that students need will lead to improvements in school quality. Commissioner Elliott observed that charter schools have proliferated in areas of the City that do not have quality schools, and the District has not yet effectively responded to these issues. She stated that she is a staunch supporter of neighborhood schools, but asserted that resources and supports must be targeted to address student needs in their neighborhood school. Commissioner Elliott emphasized the importance of investing in neighborhoods that have been struggling.

Commissioner Adams recalled that some of the School Improvement Grants (SIG) focused on early childhood education (e.g. School No. 44). She discussed developing partnerships with the County and the Rochester Childcare Council to offer child care services at schools, which would provide much-needed support for families and encourage the use of neighborhood schools. Commissioner Adams pointed out that some child care providers already provide transportation from their site to the neighborhood school, so there are opportunities to build on the networks that already exist. Commissioner Elliott added that School No. 9 has day care available across the street at the Baden Street Settlement House, which also offers an afterschool program. She noted that these supports enable families to remain in the area.

Ms. Anderson emphasized that the District has to promote neighborhood schools based on the fact that families have already made an investment to reside in a particular community, and should be encouraged to make the further investment of placing their child in their neighborhood

school. She stated that the benefits of attending neighborhood schools should be highlighted in the District's advertising: knowing your child's peers and friends and developing support networks with other families in the neighborhood.

Dr. Otuwa observed that RCSD has not considered school choice from parents' perspective or focused on meeting the needs of families within the neighborhood.

Commissioner Elliott contended that School No. 33 is successful because of Northeast Area Development (NEAD) and the community's involvement in the school. She stated that similar efforts need to be made in other neighborhoods, and strategies have to be developed for engaging community groups.

Commissioner White discussed the philosophy of former Superintendent Vargas in improving the performance of all RCSD schools, and announced that he is proposing to establish a Managed School Choice Advisory Committee created by the Board to examine these issues in depth, particularly in light of the complexity and ramifications involved. He expressed concern about announcing changes in the placement process before improving school performance and providing necessary resources, asserting that this would only escalate the exodus to charter schools. Commissioner White underscored the importance of carefully considering the timing of changes in placement practices to promote neighborhood schools.

Commissioner Evans inquired about placement of students whose families do not participate in the school choice process. Ruth Turner responded that school counselors and social workers have been reaching out to parents this year to discuss the lottery process and school selection. Adele Bovard added that the Placement Office has focused over the last year on placing students in their neighborhood school if their parents did not participate in the lottery, but this is also affected by the high rates of mobility among RCSD families.

Ms. Anderson shared her own personal experience in considering schools for her son as he entered 7th grade. She stated that she selected five schools, some of which were in her neighborhood – yet her son was placed in a school way across town. Ms. Anderson reported that the school in which her son was placed was not among her five choices, and expressed frustration about the decision-making involved in the placement process.

Ms. Turner asserted that the District does not focus communications on families within school neighborhoods, while charter schools constantly advertise and promote their programs. Ms. Turner noted that the District has not engaged parents as meaningful partners, but too often treats them as an interference in conducting business. She acknowledged that systemic issues exist, but basic commonsense approaches also have not been adopted throughout the District. Ms. Turner maintained that if a family feels as though the school and District are invested in their wellbeing, they will remain steadfast in their support. She noted that parents are often treated as adversaries rather than partners, and fostering meaningful partnerships with parents and families is the only way that positive change can materialize. Ms. Turner emphasized that these attitudinal changes can be initiated now, offering examples of ways in which schools can invest in their community (e.g. food and clothing drives, assisting in obtaining needed services)

Mr. Conrow suggested that every RCSD elementary school develop a partnership with a neighborhood bank or credit union to help promote home ownership and permanent residency.

He stated that this would enhance communities throughout the City and create greater stability for students and their families.

Commissioner Elliott emphasized the need to take action, rather than continuing to engage in discussions and theorizing about the problems. She stated that the NYS Education Commissioner is examining the District, and work has to begin to change systems.

Commissioner Evans maintained that a plan should be developed before the beginning of the 2016-17 school year regarding the choices currently offered in schools, the extent to which the Parent Preference/Managed Choice policy is being carried out with fidelity, and the actions being taken by school principals to connect with the community. He also requested an analysis of the schools that have a low percentage of students from the neighborhood enrolled to identify where these students are attending school.

Action Item: The following information will be provided to the members of the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee:

- **A plan regarding the services/programs/activities offered in RCSD schools and methods for improving communication of this information to parents and families, particularly within the neighborhood.**

The Plan must also address the extent to which the current Parent Preference/Managed Choice Policy (5153) is being implemented with fidelity, as well as the actions being taken by school principals to connect with families in the neighborhood.

- **Analysis of schools with a low percentage of students enrolled from the neighborhood to identify where these students are attending school.**
- **Assessment of the extent to which families chose their neighborhood school, but their child(ren) were ultimately placed elsewhere.**

Ms. Anderson discussed the importance of tapping into existing community resources. She noted that afterschool care is an important consideration for parents, and reported that School No. 53 partners with the Community Place for afterschool care, offering assistance with school assignments, and providing a hot meal to students.

Mr. Conrow discussed the importance of providing factual information to the public to counteract claims made by charter schools. He stated that charter schools have excelled at their promotional efforts, while the District has remained silent. He also requested a graph illustrating the extent to which school performance is related to the percentage of students whose parents participated in the school choice process. Mr. Conrow postulated that lower performing schools also have a smaller percentage of parents participating in this process.

Commissioner Evans expressed interest in continuing this discussion, even after the Managed School Choice Committee has been established.

IV. Additional Business Items

1. Commissioner White discussed the serious implications of the District failing to respond to the concerns raised by the NYS Education Department and NYS Education Commissioner, noting that the Commissioner has commented on an apparent lack of urgency in the District in making necessary improvements. He requested that the Superintendent share the NYS Education Commissioner's specific recommendations with the Board, which will fully support the actions necessary for implementation. Superintendent Cimusz reported that Commissioner Elia expressed two major concerns, which focused on School No. 9: 1) the District's failure to fill three positions at the school that had been previously recommended; 2) the number of homeless students at the school. The Superintendent stated that this was exacerbated by an erroneous report by an RCSD staff member that five days are required to obtain transportation for homeless students to enable them to attend school.

Commissioner White read an email message that he plans to send to Commissioner Elia, apologizing for the District's apparent unresponsiveness to the concerns of the NYS Education Department and to the needs of students. He added that the Rochester Board of Education will ensure that this situation will not be repeated, and requested the Commissioner to contact the Board whenever their intervention is needed or it appears that they are not fully informed of critical facts.

2. Commissioner Adams observed that there are a number of different layers and departments involved in school improvement in the District, and requested that consideration be given to opportunities for streamlining and providing more direct supports for struggling schools.
3. Commissioner Elliott reported that she recently visited the Career Pathways to Public Safety program, which enables RCSD students to enter into a career in the Fire Department, Police Department, or as an Emergency Medical Technician. She stated that this is an impressive program and should be promoted, particularly in light of the exceptional performance of the students and the fact that there are still openings. Commissioner Elliott asserted that this type of program provides a clear career pathway, opportunities, and future quality of life. Ms. Bovard noted that the District is currently recruiting students for this program.

Motion by Commissioner Elliott to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Hallmark. **Adopted 3-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:29PM.