

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Board Governance Committee Meeting of the Whole

October 18, 2016

Attending: Commissioner Hallmark (Chair); Commissioners Adams, Powell, Elliott, Cruz, and White.

District Staff: Fatimat Reid, Chief of Staff

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Hallmark called the meeting to order at 7:25PM.

I. Review Minutes of the September 13, 2016 Board Governance Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Cruz to approve the minutes of the September 13, 2016 Board Governance Committee meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Powell. **Adopted 6-0, with concurrence of the Parent Representative.**

II. Discuss Board Committees and Meetings

Commissioner Hallmark explained that she convened a Meeting of the Whole to discuss the existing structure of Board committees, and the process of coordinating the work of the committees on behalf of the full Board and in conjunction with the Superintendent to advance mutual goals and priorities. She recalled that the Board Governance Committee was charged with streamlining and simplifying the work of the Board, as discussed in the Board Retreat held in September.

Commissioner Hallmark noted that the Superintendent requested an annual plan from each Board committee to facilitate coordinated planning and work processes with the Administration. She referred to a chart provided by Superintendent Deane-Williams of the various committees, subcommittees, and task forces in which the Board has been involved. Fatimat Reid explained that the summary chart was created to gain a comprehensive view of the groups with which the Board has been involved, their meetings and commitments.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that the 3-on-3-on-3 Task Force has not been included in the chart, and this group consists of Board members and representatives from City Council and the Monroe County legislature. Ms. Reid replied that she will add the 3-on-3-on-3 Task Force and the Curriculum Committee to the chart.

Commissioner Cruz discussed the "Preview" meetings conducted monthly with the liaisons from the Administration to the Board Finance Committee. He explained that these meetings enable him to review critical information with the responsible District staff members prior to the public meeting, raise questions, and point out issues/concerns that may arise. Commissioner Cruz emphasized that this process engenders trust and helps develop a working relationship between Board committee chairs and the members of the

Administration who serve as a liaison to the committee. He recommended that all committee chairs focus on fostering this type of relationship with the liaisons to their committee.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about discussions that Board members may have had in the past with other boards of education to compare the ways in which work is performed and committee structure.

Commissioner Powell reported that the Syracuse Board of Education conducts all of their committee meetings as Meetings of the Whole, in which all Board members are to attend. She surmised that this approach is similar to the Rochester Board of Education conducting Work Sessions to address particular issues.

Commissioner White observed that some of the smaller school districts don't break up the work of the board of education to be assigned to committees, but these districts may not have a need for this type of delegation of work.

Commissioner Hallmark noted that the way in which the work of boards of education is managed is not necessarily related to the size of the district. She reported attending a National School Boards Association conference in April 2016, in which the board of education of a larger school district in Georgia performed their work through 1-2 committees. Commissioner Hallmark pointed out that school boards throughout the country have an average of 3-5 standing committees, so the Rochester Board of Education is an outlier in this respect.

Commissioner Cruz noted that the Rochester Board of Education is also subject to mandates that may not exist in other states (e.g. Audit Committee, Internal Auditor, Claims Auditor).

Commissioner White asserted that the Rochester Board of Education needs each of the six existing standing committees to carry out the work of the Board.

Commissioner Hallmark clarified that she is not necessarily suggesting eliminating committees, but exploring options for streamlining work (e.g. combining some of the existing committees, such as Audit and Finance).

Commissioner Powell provided a historic context for the development of the current Board committee structure. She explained that the current structure was created in 1998, and included the Finance Committee, Policy Committee, Quality Assurance Committee, and two ad hoc committees (Government Relations and Community Engagement). These two ad hoc committees were combined into the standing Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee, which emphasized community engagement and conducted quarterly public forums for many years.

Commissioner Elliott noted that the Rochester Board of Education is currently short-staffed, so the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee has not conducted much community outreach. She stated that she plans to hold a number of public forums in the future on topics such as school climate.

Commissioner Hallmark commented that the purpose of the Governance Committee is only partially served by a three member committee. In many cases, it is better conducted as a Committee of the Whole (COW) so as to facilitate discussions on board functionality and structure.

Commissioner Adams pointed out that the Board Governance Committee has managed the annual performance review of the Superintendent, and a smaller group is valuable for coordinating this process.

Commissioner White noted that having standing committees perform the bulk of the work for the Board allows some “breathing room” by minimizing the number of meetings that Board members are required to attend.

Commissioner Elliott concurred with Commissioner White in terms of retaining the existing Board committee structure. She discussed the importance of aligning the Board’s work with the Superintendent’s 100 Day Plan.

Commissioner Hallmark observed that the Superintendent requested an annual plan for each Board committee of the topics to be covered each month for 2016-17. She described considering the items she considered essential to cover over the next year as Chair of the Board Governance Committee, and expressed concern about developing committee plans without input from other Board members or the Superintendent. Commissioner Hallmark asked how the Board’s ideas, initiatives and work is coordinated amongst the different committees and with the Superintendent.

Commissioner Adams reported that she responded to the Superintendent’s request as Chair of the Audit Committee, noting that this Committee functions relatively autonomously and is based on the work performed by the Internal Auditor. She stated that the Finance Committee primarily reviews financial requests and transactions in the District, as well as managing the budget process. Commissioner Adams indicated that the Policy Committee follows a cycle for reviewing Board policies, and the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee conducts public forums and the Legislative Breakfast to advocate for items on the approved Legislative Agenda. She stated that the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee probably has the most discretion in terms of the topics selected to address throughout the year.

Commissioner Cruz suggested that each Board committee consider ways to structure their meetings and deliberations, so that each committee can provide input to the Finance Committee by the beginning of the school year of key priorities and associated costs. The Finance Committee can then advocate to incorporate these priorities into the budget for the upcoming year. He noted that this advance planning would enable the Board to promote their priorities more effectively.

Commissioner Powell commented that this issue arose in the October 13th Policy Committee meeting. She discussed the need to identify policies with specific fiscal implications and for the Board to make a determination regarding continuing support for these items. Commissioner Powell reported that some policies are in effect that have not been followed or

supported with funding for years, such as the Day Care policy (4324.1). She stated that the District stopped funding for day care in 1996, yet the policy remains in effect.

Commissioner Cruz stated that cost estimates are needed for each identified priority, so that Board priorities can be incorporated into the budget. He observed that the Board is often attempting to make budget modifications late in the process to advance priorities, which creates unnecessary disruption in the District. Commissioner Cruz cited the example of attempting to restore funding for at least some of the OACES programs after the 2016-17 budget had been approved because Board members did not realize the implications until after the fact.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about how Board members can prevent this from recurring, particularly in not having the necessary information within the timeframe needed before approving the District budget. She asserted that Board members often do not receive the necessary information in advance to know the right questions to ask.

Commissioner Hallmark noted that prioritizing Board concerns will enable Board staff to focus their work more effectively and alert Board members when issues or problems arise.

Commissioner White reflected on comments made earlier regarding establishing relationships with District liaisons to Board committees, pointing out that these relationships would also lead to improved communication and notification of potential issues or problems. He observed that the chairs of Board committees typically have not engaged in much advance planning or communication with their liaisons.

Commissioner Elliott discussed the difficulty of only being able to be in the District for a few hours and having to rely on staff members for information. She reported that often the information was inadequate or not in a comprehensible format, which compounded the ability to ask the most pertinent questions or make truly informed decisions.

Commissioner Adams concurred, noting that she has been frustrated in having no alternative but to accept the information presented by the Administration. She discussed this in terms of serving on the Board and as a parent.

Commissioner Elliott stated that there have been considerable limitations in the past, between Board members and between the Board and Administration. She expressed the hope that the situation will improve and opportunities will be available to align the work of the Board with that of the Superintendent, particularly since the current Superintendent is focused on building working relationships.

Commissioner Hallmark also expressed the hope that improved alignment of the Board's work and priorities with those of the Superintendent will advance progress toward goals, more effectively focus staff time and efforts, and reduce the number of ongoing meetings. She stated that it may be possible with this alignment to shift from monthly Board committee meetings to meeting once per quarter.

Commissioner Cruz observed the amount of staff time expended in preparing for each monthly meeting, gathering necessary materials, following up on action items, and recording

meeting minutes. He surmised that by the time Board staff have completed this process, they have to prepare for the next month's meetings.

Commissioner Powell stated that the meeting schedule for the Policy Committee could be made lighter, once the extraneous requirements and deliverables have been removed from Board policies.

Commissioner Hallmark stated that she would like to explore these issues further, particularly with the Superintendent present to engage in the discussion.

Commissioner Cruz pointed out that this discussion does not have to take place in a formal context (e.g. retreat), but could be an informal meeting on a Saturday morning over coffee.

Commissioner Elliott suggested continuing with the current Board committee meeting schedule, and exploring options after the Board has had an opportunity to align with the Superintendent's plans and goals.

Meeting adjourned at 8:18PM.