

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee Meeting
October 13, 2015

MINUTES

Attending

Commissioners - Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott (Chair), Commissioner Mary Adams, President Van White – 6:04PM, and Commissioner Malik Evans – n.t.

CIGR Parent Representative – Felix Jacobs

Presenters – Rosemary Rivera (Organizing Director, Citizen Action of New York and Member of Community Task Force), Adele Bovard (Deputy Superintendent of Administration), Dr. Christiana Otuwa (Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning)

Board Staff – Mia Johnson

Board Vice President Elliott called the meeting to order at 6:02PM.

I. Review the Minutes of August 18, 2015 and September 15, 2015 CIGR Meetings

Motion by Vice President Elliott to approve the minutes of August 18, 2015 and September 15, 2015 of the CIGR Meetings. Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of the Parent Representative.

II. Community Task Force – Code of Conduct Update

Vice President Elliott announced the purpose of the committee meeting was to provide an overview and update of the code of conduct process. Commissioner Adams described this process as not just a document, but a shift in school climate. She further described that offering a new code of conduct is only one piece of the process, but also securing the supports and having commitment from parents, community, teachers, and more. She stated that her impression of the process is that it is hard work, people have been committed to going through the process, proud to be on the team, and appreciate what is occurring.

Vice President Elliott thanked the members and those involved in the process. She stated that the code of conduct can not just be a document, but it has to be a part of changing school climate. She stated that based on research, it take years for school climate to change and requires leadership to ensure that the code of conduct will be adhered to, She further stated that there is a need for change in school climate in order to stop the suspension of students for extremely minor incidents.

Ms. Rivera stated that the Community Task Force (CTF) is a collective unit of various stakeholders and have committed five years to this process. She highlighted the efforts and accomplishments of the CTF: a new drafted code that is in the process of being finalized;

gathered feedback for the draft code on the District's website; 15 schools this year have become restorative justice schools; all counselors, social workers, and psychologists have been trained in restorative justice practices; no longer suspensions for cell phone and dress violations; Dr. Otuwa has helped review long term suspensions and getting students back to school with supports; lowered suspension rates; and Dr. Joy DeGruy trained 16 members of the CTF on implicit bias. Ms. Rivera stated that the CTF is having an impact on suspension.

Ms. Rivera described that the CTF is currently in the engagement process with all the unions – Board of Education Non-teaching Employees (BENTE), Rochester Association of Paraprofessionals (RAP), Rochester Teacher Association (RTA), and Association of Supervisors and Administrators of Rochester (ASAR) – to gain as much feedback from them as possible on what type of supports are needed and what it takes to transform schools.

Ms. Rivera asked if there is a process to work to with the Board of Education to create a parent forum to engage parents and community members in order to gain feedback from them. Vice President Elliott suggested utilizing time on WDKX as an effective way to gain feedback.

Ms. Rivera stated that the CTF, Teen Empowerment, Metro Justice and the District have sponsored a play focused on breaking the school-to-prison pipeline developed and written by youth. She invited every school board member to attend and hear from the students how they think and feel about the school-to-prison pipeline. President White stated that his agenda goes beyond students doing well academically in this District. He suggested that a board member conduct a welcome at the play due to the Board's policy making role.

Vice President Elliott asked questions based on the third version of the draft code of conduct. She asked why there is an intervention for unintentional contact with staff. Ms. Rivera stated that unintentional contact is one of the points under review and discussion on the matrix. She described that one teacher in the feedback stated that if a student places on only one finger on them, the teacher would call the police. She stated the CTF is really fighting to change the way of thinking and culture within the school system. Vice President Elliott inquired if this was a current teacher within the District and such an approach creates tension between the student and child impacting student performance. Ms. Rivera agreed that such thinking will cause some conflict and tension. She stated that goal is to try to move away from zero tolerance policies. Vice President Elliott stated that the unintentional contact needs to be removed from the matrix.

Dr. Otuwa stated that the conversation around the code of conduct started out negatively and people's thinking has started to change. She stated that there has to be more engagement and conversation around school climate. She further described that school climate is made by the adults and the choices they make for students. She also described that there is an opposition that focuses on the teacher's need to protect one's self and other students.

Commissioner Adams stated that is useful to switch the thinking from what is currently happening in the school buildings to what is needed systemically at every level. There is a tension between those who want zero tolerance and those who want a relationship based,

restorative approach. She stated that there is a need to address systemic issues and fix the condition.

Dr. Otuwa stated that the District is missing programs for students who do not need to be in the regular classroom, but need a different structure and environment. Dr. Otuwa stated that she is working on developing programs that provide socio-emotional support.

Vice President Elliott asked if students with special needs benefited more by being mainstreamed into general education classrooms. Dr. Otuwa responded that the students she is referring to have not been identified as special needs students, but need a structured environment with boundaries and socio-emotional support.

Vice President Elliott asked about the draft code of conduct's process in which parents receive documentation at their request. Vice President Elliott upheld that parents should receive documentation regardless. Ms. Rivera responded that there is an internal debate among members of the CTF regarding informing parents of searches in school: if the schools have the capacity to inform parents of school searches in the moment it occurs. She further responded that there are points and details such as the school searches that are currently under review.

Vice President Elliott stated that she receives input from parents who receive phone calls daily from teachers about disciplinary actions that they feel the teacher can handle. She further elaborated that if a teacher can call on minor things, then providing parents with documentation should not be an issue. Ms. Rivera responded that Hispanic parents also want notices in their native language.

President White thanked the CTF for their intensive work. President White asked about the long term plan for professional development around the code of conduct and its matrix. He commended the details of the escalating interventions and details. He stated that if the code of conduct is to work, there must be professional development for principals and teachers.

Dr. Otuwa responded that after the Board approves the policy, the administration has the obligation to create guidelines so that the schools have a sense of how it looks in practice. Dr. Otuwa stated that the current Student Resource Manual, rolled out in March 2015, contains a similar matrix and the teachers have been trained. Dr. Otuwa stated that she and the School Chiefs go into every school to monitor and ensure the implementation. She stated that some schools are having some challenges with the implementation and as a leader with her team, they are planning and providing the supports for schools. There is a need for a support plan and socio-emotional programs for students. Dr. Otuwa is looking into creating a crisis zone to address students' needs.

Ms. Rivera described a restorative practice conference she attended in Buffalo. She stated that unlike Buffalo, she wants to see the Rochester train all the teachers on restorative justice and the code of conduct. She stated that there needs to be a real push for the code of conduct to be read by teachers and principals.

Ms. Bovard further elaborated that the work towards changing school climate has already begun. She stated that that Edison can be used as good case study because on Superintendent's Conference Day, the whole staff was engaged on discussing the issues, efforts to address the issues, restorative practices, and student support.

Vice President Elliott asked about the next step after the code of conduct is in its final form. Ms. Rivera responded that the CTF is currently engaged in the 7 week intensive engagement process with the unions to create buy-in and will analyze the feedback and its impact on the code of conduct. Ms. Rivera stated that she is hopeful that document will be ready by the New Year.

Dr. Otuwa described how she was charged with long-term suspension and developed a parent and student sub-group to make decisions about developing a process to student conduct. She stressed a need for more programs and supports for students who are not doing well in traditional classrooms. Dr. Otuwa stated that last year this time, there were 1,752 short-term suspensions and 324 long-term suspensions and this year, there have been 762 short-term suspension and 43 long-term suspensions.

Vice President Elliott added that the District needs to revisit who is hired and the types of skills sets and experience they have. Vice President Elliott commended Dr. Otuwa for her leadership.

III. Safety Summit

Ms. Bovard described safety as an important support role to teaching and learning. The Safety Summit engaged the Rochester Police Department, School Safety Team, and the Administration about clarifying the roles of safety personnel in the schools. The conversations focused on what was working best, restorative practices, and each building's top concerns for safety. She stated that the Commander of the Safety Resource Officers (SROs) said that SROs were operating differently than they were last year by becoming more restorative and building relationships. She emphasized the need to work for the SROs and School Safety Officers (SSOs) to work as a team in order to promote safety.

Vice President Elliott described an incident at Vanguard High School where an SRO was called to speak with a student after an exchange of words with another student. She questioned why an SRO was summoned instead of a teacher or school leadership. She further stated that the school's leadership and teachers should have handled such an issue instead of the SRO. Ms. Bovard responded that the SROs should not be involved in student disciplinary issues.

Ms. Bovard stated that SSOs had not been trained in several years and that she is working with the Professional Learning Department in the District. She explained that the SSOs had two weeks of training in crisis intervention, active supervision, mediation, crisis management, and restorative practices. She emphasized the need for SSOs to be trained on how to build relationships with students and adults in the school.

Vice President Elliott asked if such training is required for every SRO and SSO. Ms. Bovard responded that the SROs receive training in restorative practices and therapeutic crises mediation. She further explained that there are plans to train new safety team members as they on-board. Vice President Elliott inquired if the trainings like Gangs 101 are superficial or deep trainings. Ms. Bovard responded that most time was spent on therapeutic crises intervention and situational awareness. Vice President Elliott strongly suggested that trauma be included in the trainings. Dr. Otuwa responded that training in trauma is needed to address the socio-emotional needs of student.

Commissioner Adams stated that the following needs: redefining the role of SROs – emphasis on restorative approaches; shift resources for more counseling and providing better training and pay to SSOs. She explained that models codes throughout the nation recommend moving away from law enforcement in schools and this is the approach that Commissioner Adams supports.

Vice President Elliott stated that if the SSOs are paid at a high rate, there will be higher quality candidates who has the skill sets already.

President White emphasized the importance of staying the course despite obstacles because he has witnessed initiatives and people come and go. He further elaborated that school climate work will not work if it is only connected to a particular person.

IV. Legislative Agenda

Vice President Elliott stated that the legislative agenda will be discussed at executive session.

V. Development of the Board Communication Plan

Vice President Elliott thanked Dr. Otuwa, Mr. Chip Partner, and Mr. Lopez for attending the meeting to discuss the development of the Board Communication Plan.

VI. Miscellaneous: Receivership Forum

Vice President Elliott announced that there will be a Receivership Forum in November. The Forum will provide an example of communicating and informing the community about receivership. President White stated that tomorrow Commissioner Willa Powell and the Director of the Big 5 Conference will be testifying before the education committee on receivership. President White thanked Board Staff Debra Flannigan for providing an update on the performance indicators of schools in receivership. President White stated that a 1% increase requirement in the performance indicators after a year will not create dramatic changes. He stated that he foresees the legislation ending in two years. Vice President Elliott stated that one of the benefits of receivership is the community engagement piece by including parents and community members in a significant role. Commissioner Adams agreed that the community engagement rules are specified, but expressed concern that the schools are following the rules and guidelines. President White explained that people need the time to engage, collaborate, and plan to create something meaning. He furthered explained that school receivership would not work because districts and schools did not

have meaningful time to plan and engage the community in order to create a transformative project. Commissioner Adams agreed that it was an unreasonable timeline and most of the schools do not have comprehensive plans, because the state commissioner of education has not approved them. Commissioner Adams further explained that due to the comprehensive plans not being approved in most schools, that superintendent receivership is not in effect yet in most schools and the Board is still responsible. She stated that there is much confusion regarding school receivership.

Motion by Vice President Elliott to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Adams. **Adopted 4-0.** Meeting adjourned at 7:15PM.