

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting
September 26, 2017

Attending: Commissioner Evans (Chair); and Commissioners White, Hallmark, and Adams (arrived 5:54PM).

Parent Representative: Toyin Anderson

Community Representatives: Larry Marx, Executive Director of The Children's Agenda
Eamonn Scanlon, Education Policy Analyst with The Children's
Agenda

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Evans called the meeting to order at 5:30PM.

I. Review Minutes of the July 20, 2017 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner White to approve the minutes of the July 20, 2017 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting. **Adopted 3-0.**

**II. Discuss the Role and Work of The Children's Agenda:
Larry Marx, Executive Director
Eamonn Scanlon, Education Policy Analyst**

Larry Marx described the role of The Children's Agenda as dedicated to changing policies and obtaining funding for evidence-based programs that promote the health, education, and success of children in Monroe County. More specifically, the organization focuses on children who are most vulnerable due to poverty, race, health disparities, and trauma. He emphasized that the organization is non-partisan, examining the entire continuum of services and supports from prenatal care to adulthood.

Mr. Marx explained that The Children's Agenda was founded as a result of an 18-month study conducted by the Rochester Area Community Foundation (RACF) to identify gaps and oversights in supports for children in the community. The RACF collaborated with United Way, Hillside Children's Center, and all major children's service providers and funders in Rochester. The findings from this investigation revealed three key areas that needed to be addressed to effectively support children in the community:

1. **Advocacy:** At the time of the study, advocacy efforts were primarily conducted by individual service providers and therefore were quite fragmented. A much more comprehensive and systematic approach was needed for advocacy to be effective.

The Children's Agenda is not a service provider and does not receive any government funding, ensuring its independence and impartiality in terms of promoting evidence-based programs and policies.

2. Evidence-based expertise to provide objective, rigorous analysis and recommendations regarding effective policies and programs.
3. Examination of the entire continuum of services and supports for children, from prenatal care to young adulthood. When the study was conducted, information about the well-being of children was based on the services being provided, which resulted in a narrow and fragmented perspective in terms of recognizing the needs of children and families.

By focusing on the entire spectrum of child and family needs from conception to adulthood, The Children's Agenda facilitates transitions between different agencies and service providers and enhances integration of services and supports.

Some of the most recent accomplishments of The Children's Agenda's advocacy efforts are:

- Securing \$4.75M to assist 1100 families in the Beechwood and Marketview Heights neighborhoods as part of the Leadership Team of the Rochester – Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative:
 - » 115 high-quality home visitation slots;
 - » 300 child care subsidies;
 - » High quality summer learning programs for 300 four-year-old children in these neighborhoods. Plan to expand these programs to include three-year-old children in summer 2018.
- Paid Family Leave for all residents of the State of New York, in light of evidence that early bonding between parent and child is a significant predictor of the child's lifelong success. New York now has the best family leave program in the country, which will benefit an estimated 6.4M families in the state.
- Raise The Age legislation to de-criminalize charges against children under the age of 18.

Mr. Marx presented statistics reflecting the current status of children in Rochester:

- Poverty:
 - » Rochester is the 2nd most impoverished city in the U.S., with the worst rate of childhood poverty of any comparably sized city in the country (52% of children in the City live in poverty)
- Health Care:
 - » Only 71% of women in the City of Rochester receive prenatal care;
 - » 40% of infants born to City residents are of an unhealthy weight; and
 - » There are 6.8 infant deaths before the age of one per 1,000 live births.
- Education:
 - » Only 53% of children in the City are considered ready for school when entering kindergarten;
 - » 8.2% are considered proficient in reading by 3rd grade;
 - » 6% are considered proficient in math by 8th grade;
 - » 51% of RCSD students graduate from high school; and
 - » Only 15% of RCSD graduates are considered ready for college.

- Mental Health:
 - » 13-20% of Rochester children aged 2-18 experience a *diagnosable* mental health issue, but only 20% of these children actually receive care.
 - » A recent Youth Behavior Risk Survey showed that 27% of RCSD secondary students reported feeling so hopeless that they are unable to engage in normal daily activities two days or more out of the week.

Mr. Marx pointed out that the general response to these severe conditions has been to assign blame, which has impeded any group from assuming responsibility. He explained that The Children's Agenda attempts to shift this paradigm by focusing on the context and conditions affecting children: in the family, schools, and community. The organization acts to bring various groups together to maximize their collective impact through shared goals, common outcome measures, and mutual responsibility. Mr. Marx referred to the annual Report Card regarding outcomes from cradle to career as an example of this collaborative approach. He noted that the 2017 Report Card will be presented at a conference on October 17th.

Mr. Marx noted that there is representation at the annual conference from a broad range of government and community leaders, such as United Way, RACF, Monroe County Executive, Mayor of Rochester, and Superintendent of the Rochester City School District. He stated that this representation reflects the shared mutual responsibility and commitment to improving the quality of life and prospects for children. Mr. Marx noted that the annual Report Card promotes shared responsibility by evaluating the status of children across the entire community, rather than focusing on the performance of one particular organization or entity.

Another example of shared responsibility and the effective advocacy of The Children's Agenda is the adoption of a new budget structure by the City of Rochester. For four years, The Children's Agenda urged the City to provide a Children's Impact Statement prior to making funding decisions. The City responded by organizing their budget according to the priorities established by the community-wide alliance ROC The Future to promote the well-being of children in Rochester.

Mr. Marx discussed eight advocacy strategies employed by The Children's Agenda:

1. Budget analysis: City, County, State, and RCSD annual budgets
2. Insider: behind the scenes meetings with policymakers
3. Grassroots & online advocacy: over 3,000 members of online advocacy network
4. Grasstops advocacy: mobilizing key influential groups/stakeholders to contact elected officials
5. Collective impact tables: cross-sector shared goals, common agendas, mutually reinforcing activities, etc.
6. Voter and candidate engagement on a non-partisan basis
7. Media
8. Organizing collective parent influence

Examples of the effectiveness of budget analysis and the impact in benefiting children:

- Growth of the Monroe County Nurse Family Partnership program from serving 100 families in 2006 to over 1500 families since that time. The Partnership program provides a nurse to inform and prepare first-time parents of their child's needs and development for the first two years of life.

- Expansion of the Summer Meals Partnership with the City of Rochester by serving breakfast to an additional 3,000 children.
- Increased funding each year from 2015-2017 in the City of Rochester budget for the Department of Recreation & Youth Services.

Mr. Marx also discussed the collective impact arising from ROC The Future, which is staffed by The Children's Agenda and issues the annual Report Card. ROC The Future is a community collaborative dedicated to ensuring that children receive the supports and opportunities needed to develop and thrive.

Recent successes of ROC The Future include:

- Establishing a new early screening process for three-year-old children by bringing separate evaluations together through the GROW program. Participation doubled in this 2nd year of the program to 1180 children. Currently, efforts are focused on obtaining Medicaid coverage for some of these costs for families.
- Since January 2017, over 800 families have enrolled in the "Ready Rosie" smart phone application, which offers ideas/videos to parents of ways to incorporate learning into daily activities with their preschool children.
- A 54% increase in the number of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) filings for 2016-17, reflecting a major increase in the number of students from low- and moderate-income families considering college.

Mr. Marx reported on the following new initiatives at The Children's Agenda:

- Expansion of the Rochester Model for Early Childhood to other areas of the City beyond the Beechwood and Marketview Heights neighborhoods. Provide early childhood screening and intervention and quality PreK programs to create a system of supports from birth through early childhood. The Children's Agenda is currently engaged in discussions with the NYS Education Department and Medicaid to obtain Medicaid coverage for some of the early childhood screening and intervention programs.
- Annual analysis of the RCSD budget, which was just initiated this year;
- Increased parent advocacy in the Rochester City School District;
- Promoting strategies in collective impact tables to benefit both children and adults to help families thrive;
- Identifying innovative financing mechanisms, particularly for early childhood;
- Assuming a leadership role in state-wide coalitions related to child care and home visitation.

Analysis of Annual RCSD Budget:

Eamonn Scanlon presented an analysis of the District's annual budget, reporting that parents have expressed concern that the District has a great deal of funding but does not spend it wisely. He added that there is deep distrust among parents and community leaders toward the District, without much real understanding of the budget, budget process, revenue streams and requirements, or the basis for funding decisions. Mr. Scanlon noted that The Children's Agenda can play an important role as an independent, impartial third party with expertise in budget analysis by de-mystifying the budget and clearly identifying District needs, unique challenges, and requirements regarding funding and expenditures. He stated that the intent is to engage a greater number of community members in the budget process. Mr. Scanlon acknowledged that this process will take time, given the complexity of the various factors and mandates affecting the District's budget. He added that greater parental and community involvement in the budget process will lead to greater understanding and support with regard to decision-making in the District.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about the current status of The Children's Agenda preparing an explanation of the District's budget. Mr. Scanlon responded that the organization is in the beginning stages, and emphasized the importance of shifting the focus of the debate to identifying programs/practices that are effective and finding ways to expand or replicate them. He noted that the deep skepticism within the community makes it difficult to build momentum toward this goal.

Mr. Marx announced that The Children's Agenda needs the assistance of the Board and District particularly by:

- Attending the upcoming ROC The Future "State of Our Children" address on October 17th
- Registering their faith community for the annual Children's Sabbath from October 20-22
- Assisting with advocacy efforts to increase the number of Child Protective Services workers in Monroe County
- Becoming involved with ROC The Future
- Providing guidance to assist in analysis of the RCSD budget
- Joining the online advocacy network

Commissioner Evans asked about the Children's Sabbath, and the ways in which this benefits children in the community. Mr. Marx explained that the Children's Sabbath has been held for the last five years, and involves 75-100 congregations focusing on the moral imperative in their faith tradition to make positive changes for children, and includes Christian, Jewish, and Muslim congregations. As part of this effort, signatures are obtained from congregants on letters to elected officials regarding pressing issues affecting children.

Mr. Marx reported that Monroe County has had close to 10,000 cases of child abuse and neglect so far this year (i.e. 27 cases per day). He stated that the County is ranked the 40th worst in New York State in terms of the number of caseloads per caseworker, and 54th out of 64 counties in terms of overdue investigations. The Children's Agenda has identified this as a critical priority, and is advocating for an increase of at least 10 Child Protective Services (CPS) workers; effective recruitment and retention strategies for CPS workers; and enhanced County investment in preventive programs to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect (e.g. home visitation and child care).

Commissioner Hallmark asked about other budget analyses performed by the staff of The Children's Agenda. Mr. Scanlon replied that the budgets of the City of Rochester, Monroe County, and the State of New York are also analyzed on an annual basis.

Commissioner Evans commented that he would appreciate advocacy efforts to promote employment opportunities for youth in Rochester. He noted that RCSD does not have as large a funding stream for this purpose as the City, but efforts have been made to hire students in the District. Commissioner Evans cited research indicating that young people who have been employed are more likely to obtain a job after graduation and to earn more over their lifetime. He added that these students tend to have better grades because of their awareness that satisfactory academic performance is essential for retaining their job.

Commissioner Hallmark stated that youth employment was a topic of discussion in the most recent 3-on-3-on-3 meeting between the District, City and County, and a commitment was made to continue working on this issue over the next year.

Members of the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee agreed to work with their colleagues to prepare and submit a letter from the Rochester Board of Education to Monroe County in support of The Children's Agenda's advocacy efforts to increase the number of Child Protective Services workers and to provide additional funding for child care subsidies to assist low-income families.

Meeting adjourned at 6:36PM.