

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting
April 21, 2016

Attending: Malik Evans (Chair); Commissioners Adams, Hallmark, and Elliott (arrived 7:01PM)

District Staff: Dr. Jennifer Gkourlias, Chief of Curriculum & Special Programs; Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning; Rob Ulliman, Director of Planning

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Community Members: Members of ROC the Future School Readiness Collaborative Action Network K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee: Lois Geiss, Sarah Fitts-Romig, and Dirk Hightower

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 Hallmark to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting. **Adopted 2-0.**

II. Report and Recommendations of the ROC the Future School Readiness Collaborative Action Network K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee

Lois Geiss reported that the members of the K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee included academics, early childhood educators, school volunteers, school board members and researchers who have met biweekly for nine months to examine ways to enhance learning in the early grades, improve early literacy and reading by the third grade. She stated that the Subcommittee has begun meeting with Dr. Otuwa and Dr. Gkourlias to discuss implementation of recommendations and share resources.

Sarah Fitts-Romig announced that the final plan will be presented to the Board by May 15th, and described the process undertaken by the Subcommittee in exploring alternatives to the Core Knowledge/EngageNY curriculum:

- Characteristics of a high-quality curricula were identified to serve as a basis for evaluating alternatives
- Research of the curricula used by other local school districts
- Review of published curricula
- Online research regarding best practices
- Examination of publications dedicated to early childhood education and the needs of young children
- Review of DVDs of successful urban practices

Ms. Fitts-Romig explained that the K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee not only considered curriculum alternatives, but also District needs for professional development, assessment, culturally responsive educational practice, and parent engagement. She pointed out that other local school districts are shifting away from the Core Knowledge/EngageNY curriculum and creating their own by piecing together the best in each domain (e.g. combining a standalone writing program with phonics and guided reading).

Ms. Fitts-Romig added that the Core Knowledge/EngageNY curriculum is not culturally relevant for the majority of students in the District, and also contains elements that are developmentally inappropriate. For these reasons, the Subcommittee recommends rewriting the Rochester Curriculum, which could become a model for urban education with additional funding and technical support. Ms. Fitts-Romig pointed out that the original Rochester curriculum was not piloted or implemented adequately, but can serve as a useful foundation. The Subcommittee recommends piloting the *revised* Rochester curriculum in up to five schools in September 2016. Ms. Fitts-Romig emphasized the importance of teacher involvement and empowerment in meeting students' needs and enhancing educational quality, and recommended that teacher teams be involved in developing the Rochester curriculum.

Ms. Fitts-Romig reported that the Subcommittee recommends the use of a guided reading approach, and that each school have a rich library of levelled readers to promote early literacy. She noted that an inventory of each school will have to be conducted to identify schools in need of additional materials.

To enhance and support the revised curriculum, Ms. Fitts-Romig reported that the K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee recommends *The Essential Skills Inventory* created by the Early Learning Foundation. She stated that this resource has been discussed with RCSD leadership, who have agreed to jointly sponsor a visit and presentation in May from the developer, Dr. Bob Sornson.

Ms. Fitts-Romig discussed the Subcommittee's recommendation for the District to utilize an evaluation feedback system such as the Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership (RECAP) model. She explained that this model involves low-stakes observation, testing and feedback to inform professional development and drive continuous improvement. Ms. Fitts-Romig asserted that a minimum of a five-year commitment to the professional development plan would be necessary to successfully navigate through this model. She also pointed out the importance of incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices and parent engagement strategies in professional development provided to teachers and administrators. Ms. Fitts-Romig contended that these elements are essential for any new curriculum to be effective.

Below are the recommendations of the ROC the Future School Readiness Collaborative Action Network K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee:

1. Rewrite the Rochester K-2 curriculum using a team of teachers:
 - Replace the listening and learning strands for a limited pilot in up to five schools in the fall 2016, if possible, but no later than January 2017.

- Incorporate opportunities for play, music, movement, creative expression, self-initiated learning, small and large groups, consistent with NAEYC standards.
 - Work with the Teacher Center to ensure the revised curriculum meets a culturally competent framework.
 - Fund extensive technical support to ensure the Rochester curriculum is user friendly and that the on line materials are presented with graphically professional online support.
 - Implement the pilot in up to five schools; fully implement the revised curriculum within three years.
2. Acquire comprehensive collections of levelled readers for each school, after an inventory of existing supply.
 3. Provide families with opportunities to become partners in planning and decision making with regard to the new curriculum.
 4. Jointly with ROC the Future Curriculum Committee, research and evaluate the Essential Skills Inventory created by the Early Learning Foundation.
 5. Implement an evaluation/feedback model like the Pre K RECAP model, using low stakes observation, testing and feedback, to inform professional development and drive continuous improvement.
 6. Provide comprehensive related professional development for teachers and administrators before implementation
 - A.) New Curriculum
 - B.) Parent Engagement
 - C.) Essential Skills Inventory, if adopted
 - D.) Elements of the RECAP K-2 Model

Dirk Hightower discussed the Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Project (RECAP), which was developed by Action for A Better Community Head Start Program, RCSD, Center for Governmental Research (CGR), and the Children’s Institute. He noted that the focus has been on improving the quality of programs and of outcomes for children, which tend to be aligned. Dr. Hightower reported that outcomes for children are significantly affected by “non-cognitive” factors (i.e. social and emotional development), which tend to be overlooked and/or not measured.

Dr. Hightower noted that another important aspect of RECAP has been to improve parents’ experience with their child’s life at school, since parent participation is critical throughout the child’s education. He discussed the importance of program quality in terms of teaching, instruction, and effective implementation of curriculum. Dr. Hightower stated that student outcomes must be examined to identify the specific programs best suited for each individual child.

Dr. Hightower emphasized the need to utilize low-stakes assessment systems to prevent “teaching to the test” or undermining the assessment process. He pointed out that low-stakes testing provides constructive feedback to teachers to inform instruction and illustrate ways to improve. Dr. Hightower asserted that feedback must be provided in real time to be useful to parents, teachers, and policymakers, and students must be tracked over time to identify strengths and specific areas in need of improvement.

Dr. Hightower discussed general principles regarding improving program quality: using the highest standards available nationally; sustaining effective programs/approaches over time; and utilizing evidence-based programs on a repeated basis for at least 2-3 years before making modifications. He suggested that the District adopt the revised Rochester curriculum for at least three years, continuously testing and examining outcomes because this process is critical for realizing improvement over time. Dr. Hightower added that aspects of a program that are obviously failing should be discarded, but the overall program/approach should be sustained over time to allow opportunity to realize results. He described a continuous improvement cycle involving a one-year pilot, with continued piloting and revision in the second year. By the third year, the program/initiative can be expanded, but the planning, implementation, and assessment must be continued on an ongoing basis. Dr. Hightower stated that a collaborative system among service providers (i.e. teachers) and data analysts (i.e. administrators) enables the District to address questions about maximizing outcomes for children, parents, programs, and schools.

Commissioner Evans commended the K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee for their efforts, noting that the District’s graduation rate cannot increase unless early childhood education and reading by third grade have been addressed. He pointed out that many students enter the school system already significantly behind, and expressed the hope that the recommended curriculum will address these developmental issues while also being age-appropriate in terms of expectations of children.

Commissioner Hallmark commented that she is eager to review the final report of the K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee, and thanked Commissioner Adams for initiating this effort with the Ad Hoc Committee. Commissioner Hallmark requested the definition of “levelled readers”, and the District’s current status with respect to these resources. Ms. Fitts-Romig explained that each book has a sticker indicating the reading level to enable teachers to tailor assignments and individualize instruction for each child. She asserted that the current EngageNY curriculum is not flexible enough to adapt to the learning needs of the individual child, which discourages those who are struggling and leaves them behind. Ms. Fitts-Romig also described guided reading, in which the class reads a passage aloud together and then instruction is provided in small groups that are tailored to students’ reading level. She stated that this approach facilitates differentiated instruction based on the child’s current ability and fosters the specific skills necessary to assist in attaining the next level.

Commissioner Adams commended the work of the ROC K-2 Curriculum Subcommittee, Dr. Hallmark and others who have advanced early childhood education. She stated that she is particularly interested in applying the Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership

(RECAP) to initiative promoting reading by the third grade, as she has witnessed the benefits for her own children. Commissioner Adams asked about the possibility of implementing RECAP within the District's tight budget constraints. Dr. Hightower replied that he does not have specific cost figures for implementing RECAP, but noted that RCSD already has many of the components of the program in place. He reported that the entire RECAP model at the PreK level amounts to 1.6% of the total PreK budget. He discussed the use of independent observers to provide feedback directly to the teacher, which amounts to a cost of approximately \$175 per classroom. Dr. Hightower stated that additional efforts would be needed to assist teachers in understanding the data and evaluation methods, suggesting that a central staff member in each building be identified to explain this information to teachers. He emphasized that use of the RECAP model represents a fundamental philosophical shift from a punitive to a supportive approach with teachers.

Commissioner Adams inquired whether the full report will include indicators that can be used for evaluation. Dr. Hightower replied that this information will be in the full report, citing the NWEA as an example of one of the indicators. He emphasized that the critical factor is in the way in which indicators and assessments are used. Dr. Hightower noted that RCSD does not have "non-cognitive" indicators in place (i.e. social and emotional development). He reported that a predictive analysis of student outcomes was recently performed for a suburban school district. Dr. Hightower stated that grade-point average (GPA) was the most significant indicator, followed by social and emotional development. He noted that social and emotional development was assessed on the basis of teacher observation.

Commissioner Hallmark referred to the recommendation to utilize the Rochester curriculum for the early grades, and inquired about the time and resources involved for revision. Dr. Gkourlias responded that rewriting the Rochester curriculum will require five full-time curriculum writers, who will be based in schools to develop lessons, immediately implement, and test in the classroom. She emphasized the value of the Rochester curriculum as a foundation, since it was developed by RCSD teachers and extensively vetted by external experts. Dr. Gkourlias noted that the problems that occurred were primarily due to implementation (e.g. failure to pilot the curriculum *before* district-wide implementation and rapidly replaced by the Core Knowledge NY curriculum). She expressed appreciation for the recommendation to provide "just in time" professional development for teachers during planning times, when teachers have an opportunity to discuss their practice, make modifications, and try new approaches. Dr. Gkourlias pointed out that a three-year implementation timeframe is reasonable because the intent is not only to change the curriculum, but also to change teaching practices.

Commissioner Hallmark requested additional information regarding plans for Dr. Bob Sornson of the Early Learning Foundation to visit Rochester in May, the target audience, and the specific information to be covered. Dr. Gkourlias reported that she has met with ROC the Future and is currently reading two of his seminal works, "Over-Tested and Under-Prepared" and "Fanatically Formative". She added that Dr. Sornson is willing to meet with the RCSD curriculum development team to discuss milestones and implementation of his work. Dr. Gkourlias stated that he is also willing to meet with teachers to discuss his work, and to participate in a community event to discuss the key components of early childhood education. In addition, the Rochester Teachers' Center is sponsoring a culturally responsive pedagogy institute for one

week with Dr. Noma LeMoines, an African American home language and linguistics expert. Dr. Molefi Asante and Dr. Joyce King will also visit Rochester in the first week in May. Dr. Gkourlias stated that the District is conducting a full intensive review of the research, literature and scholarship regarding early childhood education and culturally responsive pedagogy.

III. Discussion of Plans for Closure of Charlotte High School (Resolution No. 2015-16: 694)

Dr. Otuwa reported on the current status of the 87 students enrolled at Charlotte High School:

- 18 students are located on the Charlotte High School campus, with 16 of these students scheduled to graduate in June
- 54 students are located at the All City High School campus
- 8 students currently attend Youth & Justice programs, two of whom are scheduled to graduate in June
- 5 students attend the Rochester International Academy, two of whom are to graduate in June
- 1 student attends the Interim Health Academy & Young Mothers' program
- 1 student attends the NorthSTAR program
- 15 students are likely to be considered dropouts due to lack of attendance or having attained the age of majority (21)

Based on this data, Dr. Otuwa noted that 25 students are expected to graduate in June (29%) and 47 students (54%) are likely to remain or transition to All City High School or the Rochester International Academy. She stated that placement of Charlotte High School students in other RCSD schools in 2016-17 was based on considering the impact on total cohort membership for 2008-2014 cohorts; the 4-year graduation rate; the 5-year graduation rate; and the 2017-18 accountability status of the receiving school. Dr. Otuwa pointed out that receivership schools were removed from consideration.

Dr. Otuwa provided a breakdown of student placement for each cohort at Charlotte High School:

- 2008 cohort: 1 student, who will attend Wilson Commencement Academy
- 2009 cohort: 3 students:
 - » 2 will attend the Leadership Academy for Young Men
 - » 1 student will attend the School of the Arts

Dr. Otuwa reported that the Leadership Academy for Young Men has not yet had a graduating class, so the addition of these two students from Charlotte High School will not affect the graduation rate. In addition, the student transitioning to the School of the Arts will not affect the school's graduation rate.

- 2010 cohort: 10 students:
 - » 2 to attend the Leadership Academy for Young Men
 - » 2 to attend the Rochester Early College High School
 - » 1 to attend the School of the Arts
 - » 1 to attend the School Without Walls Commencement Academy
 - » 2 to attend Wilson Commencement Academy, but both students expected to graduate in June
 - » 2 to attend Vanguard Collegiate High School, with one student expected to graduate in June and the other student expected to drop out before June

- 2011 cohort: 16 students

Dr. Otuwa recommended that all of these students be transferred to the Integrated Arts & Technology High School because three of these students are projected to graduate after June, which would raise the graduation rate for the school.

- 2012 cohort: 29 students
 - » 3 students to attend Integrated Arts & Technology High School, all of whom are expected to graduate.
 - » 3 students to attend the Leadership Academy for Young Men, all of whom are expected to graduate.
 - » 3 students to attend Vanguard Collegiate High School, all of whom are expected to graduate.
 - » Total of 18 students to attend All City High School, 2 of whom are expected to drop out before June 2016. Home schools:
 - Rochester Early College High School: 5 students
 - School of the Arts: 5 students
 - School Without Walls: 4 students, with one projected to drop out
 - World of Inquiry School No. 58: 4 students, with one expected to drop out

- 2013 cohort: 26 students:
 - » 3 at Integrated Arts & Technology High School, all of whom are expected to graduate
 - » 1 at the Leadership Academy for Young Men, who is also expected to graduate
 - » 4 at Rochester Early College High School, with 3 attending All City High School and 1 student projected to drop out before June 2016
 - » 4 at School of the Arts, with 3 attending All City High School and 1 student projected to drop out before June 2016

- » 4 at the School Without Walls, with 3 attending All City High School and 1 student projected to drop out before June 2016
 - » 4 at Wilson Commencement Academy, all of whom are expected to attend All City High School
 - » 4 at World of Inquiry School No. 58, with 3 attending All City High School and 1 student projected to drop out before June 2016
 - » 2 students at Vanguard Collegiate High School, both of whom are expected to graduate before June 2016
- 2014 cohort: 2 students, both of whom are expected to attend the Rochester International Academy, with Wilson Commencement Academy as their home school.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the reason for World of Inquiry School No. 58 being identified as a focus school rather than a school in good standing. Dr. Otuwa replied that School No. 58 had a high opt-out rate on NYS standardized tests, which may have led to a change in their accountability status.

Rob Ulliman reviewed the accountability status of the schools receiving students from Charlotte High School. Dr. Otuwa reported that three students from Charlotte High School are expected to graduate in June 2016, which will benefit the Integrated Arts & Technology High School because the graduation rate at that school is zero.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the possibility of closing the Integrated Arts & Technology High School, since it has not led a single student to graduate. Mr. Ulliman explained that the 2012 cohort was the first in 12th grade at the school, and only included five students.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about the extent to which school counselors have been consulted in terms of each student's learning style and identifying the school best suited for each student. Dr. Otuwa replied that the plans for placement of students from Charlotte High School are based purely on the numbers and the impact on the receiving school's accountability status.

Commissioner Evans appreciated the consideration given to student placement and the impact on the receiving schools, noting the advantages from placing students in a variety of schools rather than concentrating in only one. He asked about plans for the staff currently at Charlotte High School. Dr. Otuwa reported that two Assistant Principals are listed on staff at Charlotte High School, but one is actually assigned to Edison High School and the other to All City High School. She stated that Charlotte High School currently has 18 staff members, and many of the Food Services personnel have also been supporting the Leadership Academy for Young Men since it is located on the same campus. Dr. Otuwa noted that the staff have been notified of the school closure and assured that they will retain their seniority in the District, but no specific transfer information has been provided yet.

Motion by Commissioner Hallmark to approve the above resolution regarding closure of Charlotte High School. Seconded by Commissioner Elliott. **Adopted 3-0.**

IV. Follow-Up Items

Commissioner Evans instructed Board staff member Debra Flanagan to forward the outstanding follow-up items regarding neighborhood schools to the Chair of the Managed Choice Task Force for consideration.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30PM.