

**ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting**  
**June 9, 2016**

Attending: Malik Evans (Chair); Commissioners Hallmark, Elliott (arrived 8:12PM), and Powell (arrived 8:21PM).

Parent Representative: Toyin Anderson

District Staff: Superintendent Linda Cimusz; Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning; Jeff Mikols, Director of Math Education; Mayra Ortiz, Director of Bilingual Programs; Dr. Robin Hooper, Executive Director of Early Childhood Education; Andrew MacGowan, Project Administrator.

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Evans called the meeting to order at 7:57PM.

**I. Review Minutes of May 19, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting**

**Motion** by Commissioner Hallmark to approve the minutes of the May 19, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of the Parent Representative.**

**II. Discuss Proposed Adoption of Financial Algebra Textbook**

**Adopt new textbook published by Cengage for new Financial Algebra elective to be offered to RCSD secondary students: Resolution No. 2015-16: 849**

Jeff Mikols described plans for offering a new Financial Algebra elective to secondary students who have earned at least two math credits and passed the Regents exam. He emphasized the importance of this type of course in enhancing students' understanding of personal and business finance to improve their ability to manage money and become fiscally responsible. Mr. Mikols reported that students have expressed an interest in learning these practical life skills, which will also make math more relevant and engaging. He noted that the District previously offered a course in business math, but at a low level of academic rigor. He explained that the Financial Algebra elective would use real-world application of algebra and geometry concepts, such as estimating business costs and revenue, interest compounding, budgeting, and debt management.

Compared to other core subjects, Mr. Mikols reported that the greatest percentage of students have completed Math Regents requirements, but the smallest percentage of students have earned Math credits. He stated that these findings are based on data for the 2012 cohort, expected to graduate this month. Mr. Mikols attributed these findings to the existing limited selection of Math courses in the District, which are not pertinent or engaging for students.

Mr. Mikols discussed the three vendors considered by the Textbook Selection Committee: Houghton

Mifflin Harcourt; Pearson; and Cengage. He pointed out that the proposals submitted by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and by Pearson were at a level just above Algebra I, and not of sufficient academic rigor. Mr. Mikols reported that the textbook developed by Cengage has been piloted at All City High School, and was positively received by students and members of the Textbook Selection Committee. Specifically, appreciation was expressed for the textbook's clarity in explaining how complex financial concepts apply to real world situations in business and personal finance. He noted that the author of the textbook is a NYS teacher who has taught the Financial Algebra course, and he has offered to provide professional development to RCSD teachers.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about the number of teachers conducting the Financial Algebra course. Mr. Mikols replied that approximately 450 students have already registered for this course, so approximately 15-20 teachers will be needed.

Mr. Mikols stated that the Cengage textbook does not come in Spanish, so he is currently collaborating with the Director of Bilingual Education to make the material accessible to Spanish-speaking students.

Commissioner Hallmark asked how the text is being modified to make it accessible to Spanish speakers. Mayra Ortiz responded that materials are being developed that rely heavily on visual and graphic representation to avoid being too dependent on language to convey the content.

Commissioner Evans suggested reaching out to Consumer Credit Counseling for real world application of financial concepts (e.g. taxes, budgeting, money management). He noted that it is imperative to demonstrate the use of these concepts in a variety of life situations to engage students (e.g. buying a car, bank accounts, compounding interest). Commissioner Evans added that many adults do not understand these financial concepts, which is one of the reasons that so many Americans have significant financial problems.

Ms. Ortiz reported on a study that found that African Americans and Latinos typically receive less information about personal money management, budgeting, debt, and strategies for accumulating wealth than other groups. She noted that the need for knowledge about financial management is even greater among African Americans and Latinos because of their economic vulnerability and disproportionate rate of poverty.

**Motion** by Commissioner Hallmark to approve above resolution to adopt the textbook published by Cengage for the new Financial Algebra elective course. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of Parent Representative.**

### **III. Update on Early Childhood Education**

Dr. Robin Hooper gave an update in four areas of early childhood education: 1) NYS funding; 2) PreK students' attending programs outside of their zone; 3) Rochester Preschool Parent Survey results; and 4) Parent Perspective/Satisfaction Survey.

Dr. Hooper reported that the NYS Education Department and NYS Education Commissioner have proposed consolidating PreK grants to provide a flat rate of \$10K per child. She stated that this proposal would be devastating to the RCSD PreK program because per pupil funding would be cut by 30% (i.e. reduction from \$13K per pupil to \$10K per pupil). Dr. Hooper noted that the District has

received additional funding due to the high rate of concentrated poverty in Rochester.

Commissioner Evans suggested that this issue be referred to the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee for consideration and legislative advocacy.

**Action Item: Board staff will refer the issue of the proposed 30% reduction in per pupil funding for RCSD PreK programs to the Community & Intergovernmental Relations Committee.**

Andrew MacGowan reported that approximately 34% of PreK children in community-based programs and 25% in District programs attend from outside the zone. He noted that 22% of students in RCSD programs are from their home school zone. Dr. Hooper stated that while the majority of PreK students in District programs are not attending their neighborhood school, not all RCSD schools have PreK programs because of space constraints.

Commissioner Hallmark questioned how the capacity issues in the PreK program arose. Dr. Hooper replied that the District has had to place PreK programs where space could be found, pointing out that the incremental way in which grant funding was provided to the District prevented development of a comprehensive plan. She explained that after the first few years, PreK funding was provided for a full-day program and several years later, the funds supported expanding the program to include three-year-old children. Dr. Hooper noted that these substantive programmatic changes were made piecemeal and could not be anticipated, which prevented development of a district-wide comprehensive plan for PreK student placement.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that she is the Board representative to the Rochester Joint Schools Construction Board, and that she has been discussing issues regarding accommodating early PreK students as part of the Facilities Modernization Program.

Mr. MacGowan noted that parents tend to select PreK programs based on their schedule, proximity to work or child care, and previous relationships with the school, teacher, or principal. Mr. MacGowan asserted that the District's school choice approach has maximized PreK enrollment.

Commissioner Evans emphasized the importance of parents recognizing the significance of PreK education and of maximizing enrollment at this level. Dr. Hooper reported that the District identified specific schools in which space was available for a PreK program, and then issued Requests for Proposal based on additional locations needed to make the program accessible to families throughout the City.

Commissioner Elliott inquired whether the early PreK program will be sustained in the future. Dr. Hooper replied that she believes that the program will continue, particularly in light of numerous research studies demonstrating the critical importance of early education and the \$22M included in the NYS budget for education at this level. She added that the District could apply for additional grant funding, but there is an issue with available space and capacity at this point.

Commissioner Evans observed that PreK attendance follows a different pattern than that for K-12, which is reflected in the data. He stated that parents seem to prefer having their younger children in close proximity to either work or child care providers. Commissioner Evans asserted that an issue arises when parents would like their child to remain in the same school after PreK because a

large percentage of PreK students are attending schools/programs outside the zone in which they live. He noted that many parents and families develop relationships with teachers and staff members in PreK programs, and prefer to keep their child in the same location for kindergarten and early elementary grades.

Commissioner Hallmark commented that this is an issue because allowing parent preference in selecting PreK programs maximizes enrollment at this level, but enabling children to continue attending a school far from their residence leads to increasing transportation costs. She pointed out that RCSD transportation costs are already quite high, and reduce the amount of funding available for classrooms and instruction.

Commissioner Elliott questioned whether a greater number of students would attend schools/programs within their zone if the PreK program was offered in a greater number of schools throughout the District.

Commissioner Hallmark observed that the current pattern of PreK enrollment in schools/programs outside of their zone seems to be due to the piecemeal fashion in which grant funding has been provided, which has impeded development of a comprehensive plan for the District.

Dr. Hooper stated that the most significant factor in PreK student placement is parents' preference in placing their young children in programs that coincide with their work schedule and are in close proximity to their workplace or child care provider.

Mr. MacGowan discussed the results of the Rochester Preschool Parent Survey, noting that teachers and paraprofessionals identified the following areas in need of improvement:

- Enhanced integration of PreK programs into schools
- Improve principals' and assistant principals' understanding of the importance of PreK education and best practices

Mr. MacGowan reported that 50% of principals and 72% of assistant principals expressed little interest in PreK, and 70% of principals and 79% of assistant principals demonstrated little knowledge about early childhood education.

Commissioner Evans voiced concern about these survey results, noting the importance of school leaders being aware that PreK is a priority for the Board and the District. He added that PreK is the level at which parents/families develop impressions and expectations of the school system, which affects continued parent engagement. He stated that these results indicate an opportunity for professional development for principals and assistant principals.

Mr. MacGowan discussed the Transition to Kindergarten Fair that was held on April 30, 2016, which celebrated its 7<sup>th</sup> year and included approximately 658 attendees. He reported that 132 parents completed the Parent Perspective Survey that was offered at the Fair, and the results revealed two areas of concern: 1) parents would like more Parent – Teacher conferences (13%); 2) a significant number of parents (17%) stated that they do not have anyone to speak with about their problems. Mr. MacGowan emphasized the importance of engaging parents at the PreK level to encourage involvement in their child's education for the long term.

Toyin Anderson described her own personal experience as a parent in the school system, noting that there is a marked difference between the way parents are treated in PreK programs and in Kindergarten and successive grades. She told of being welcomed and encouraged to participate in PreK programs, but being discouraged from becoming involved after her child advanced to kindergarten. Ms. Anderson stated that her child's kindergarten teacher was not present at Orientation and she was denied access to speak with the teacher on the first day of school. She reported having to be quite assertive and expending considerable effort to participate in her child's education after PreK.

Commissioner Powell affirmed Ms. Anderson's statements, emphasizing the importance of school administrators understanding the profound impact of school culture on parent engagement. She added that parents who demand consideration for themselves and their child can have a great impact in changing the school culture and climate.

Mr. MacGowan reported that the RCSD PreK program has consistently received very positive feedback from parents, particularly in meeting their child's needs, quality of teachers and books/materials, and overall program quality. He stated that overall 98% of parents reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the RCSD PreK program.

Commissioner Evans observed that these positive attributes need to be transferred from PreK to successive grade levels (e.g. positive school environment and culture, parent engagement, positive home/school relationships). Dr. Hooper discussed sustained efforts to bring PreK and Kindergarten teachers and administrators together to assist families and students with the transition from PreK to Kindergarten. She stated that this is a prime opportunity for affecting school climate and parent engagement.

Commissioner Evans noted that community-based organizations play an important role in the PreK program and in influencing parents' and students' choice of schools. He stated that this is one aspect of the importance of fostering positive relationships with community organizations.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the use of culturally relevant materials in the PreK program to reflect the heritage of the children participating. Dr. Hooper responded that she has made efforts to obtain culturally responsive books, but has had difficulty in finding M/WBE firms that have materials at the PreK level. She stated that this led to a development of a lending library approach. Dr. Hooper reported that she also tries to obtain books in multiple languages, and is constantly searching for sources for these types of materials. Commissioner Elliott suggested contacting the principal at the Rochester International Academy for information about possible sources of multi-lingual and multi-cultural materials.

Commissioner Powell asked about the possibility of limiting PreK attendance to a school or program within the zone in which the child resides. Dr. Hooper replied that these restrictions could only be put in place if applied across the entire District, and current capacity is not sufficient to accommodate all of the students within each zone.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that community-based organizations provide additional capacity to accommodate PreK students. Dr. Hooper responded that restricting PreK placement within each zone would fundamentally change enrollment and the nature of the programs offered by community-based

organizations. She added that some families have had their child with the same provider since infancy, and requiring them to change placements at the PreK level would be quite disruptive.

Commissioner Powell focused on School No. 33, questioning the apparent discrepancy between student placement at the PreK level and at the K-6 level. She pointed out that 77% of PreK students attend the school from *within* the zone, while 67% of the students in grades K-6 are from *outside* the zone. Further discussion revealed that a bilingual PreK class has been discontinued, which raised more concerns about the impact of programmatic changes on student placement.

Commissioner Evans suggested that the issue of PreK student placement across zones be explored further by the Managed Choice Task Force, including the impact of programmatic changes in schools such as the discontinuation of the PreK bilingual classroom at School No. 33.

**Action Item: Board staff will refer the issue of PreK student placement outside of the zone of the child’s residence to the Managed Choice Task Force for further examination. This examination should include the impact of substantive programmatic changes at the school on student placement, such as the discontinuation of the PreK bilingual classroom at School No. 33.**

#### **IV. Presentation regarding Student Suspension in RCSD Secondary Schools**

Debra Flanagan explained that Commissioner Evans had requested an analysis of student suspension in RCSD secondary schools last month, but the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting was quite lengthy and this item was postponed until this evening. She stated that the data were updated and extracted from the RCSD SPA Data Warehouse on June 6, 2016.

Ms. Flanagan reported examining suspension data in each RCSD secondary school using three indicators: 1) percentage of students suspended per year (i.e. unduplicated number of suspensions compared to total student enrollment); 2) total suspension rate (i.e. the total number of suspensions compared to total student enrollment); 3) the percentage of incidents reported as “Other Disruptive Incidents”. Ms. Flanagan explained that “Other Disruptive Incidents” are violations of the Code of Conduct that result in suspension, legal involvement, referral for treatment, alternate placement, or removal from class or activities. Due to the fact that these incidents are not defined by specific student behaviors, Ms. Flanagan stated that they offer the greatest opportunity for school staff to exercise discretion and subjectivity in student discipline.

In terms of the percentage of students suspended, Ms. Flanagan noted that five of the eleven secondary schools have suspended over 25% of their students so far this year (2015-16):

- *Vanguard Collegiate High School (36.3%)*
- *Wilson Commencement Academy (30.8%)*
- *Leadership Academy for Young Men (29.9%)*
- *NE College Preparatory Academy (26.8%)*
- *Monroe High School (25.6%)*

Ms. Flanagan reported that Rochester Early College High School and the School Without Walls Commencement Academy have had the lowest percentage of students suspended not only in the current

school year, but for the entire five-year time period that was examined.

Commissioner Elliott questioned whether the rates would be higher if the total number of suspensions were examined. Ms. Flanagan replied that the next set of data regarding the average number of suspensions per student at each school should address this question. She reported that Vanguard Collegiate High School has had just over one suspension per student (1.03) to date this year (544 total suspensions with 529 students enrolled). Ms. Flanagan added that the next highest rates were:

- *Wilson Commencement Academy (0.73)*
- *Leadership Academy for Young Men (0.7)*
- *NE College Preparatory Academy (0.65)*

In considering the impact of student suspension, Ms. Flanagan observed that the 192 students at Vanguard Collegiate High School who have been suspended this year have each had an average of 2.83 suspensions.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about the period of time for which students had been suspended. Joe Baldino explained that the suspensions included in the “Discipline Analysis” section of the Data Warehouse are from 1-5 days. He added that the data reflects in-school and out-of-school suspension, and it would be helpful to have the data disaggregated.

Commissioner Evans stated that the data is concerning because it reflects the overall prevalence of suspension and adoption of a punitive approach to student discipline.

Commissioner Elliott noted that there were problems with student suspension at Dr. Freddie Thomas High School in penalizing students for the slightest apparent infraction (e.g. wearing a school uniform, but the incorrect uniform). She observed that these problems have continued with the transfer of staff to Vanguard Collegiate High School.

Ms. Flanagan stated that concern regarding potential misuse of suspension for minor infractions led her to examine “Other Disruptive Incidents” because of the high degree of discretion involved, particularly since these incidents are not defined by specific student behaviors. She stated that the extent to which these incidents reflect serious or minor violations is not known.

Superintendent Cimusz emphasized that extensive information is available because schools are required to file detailed reports about each incident.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether this data is in the Data Warehouse system. Mr. Baldino confirmed that more detailed information about each reported incident is contained in the Data Warehouse. Ms. Flanagan asked about the specific location of this information in the Data Warehouse.

Commissioner Hallmark expressed interest in obtaining a breakdown of in-school suspension compared to out-of-school suspension for each RCSD secondary school.

Ms. Flanagan requested information regarding the specific location in the Data Warehouse of the detail underlying “Other Disruptive Incidents”. Mr. Baldino stated that obtaining information of the specific behaviors that led to these incidents would be quite time-consuming because each incident report would have to be reviewed. Dr. Otuwa offered to have a staff member work with Ms. Flanagan to show her

where this information is contained in the Data Warehouse.

Ms. Flanagan reported that “Other Disruptive Incidents” accounted for the majority of incidents reported by 7 out of 11 RCSD secondary schools in 2015-16.

In conclusion, Ms. Flanagan presented the following recommendations for addressing issues related to student suspension:

- Ongoing monitoring of each school’s use of student suspension, specifically the percentage of students suspended and the average number of suspensions per student.
- Greater specificity in guidelines provided to school staff about the behaviors that warrant student suspension.
- Additional detail regarding the particular student behaviors that led to reporting “Other Disruptive Incidents”, and the extent to which these incidents resulted in suspension or to other outcomes.

Commissioner Elliott requested an update from the Administration about efforts to reduce student suspension. Dr. Otuwa acknowledged that suspension rates tend to increase toward the end of the school year, but rates have decreased overall in the last two years.

Commissioner Elliott inquired whether student suspension is included in teachers’ performance evaluations. Dr. Otuwa replied that school principals are primarily in charge of student suspension, which is a component of their performance evaluation.

Commissioner Evans observed that the information provided in the presentation confirms the need for a change to the Code of Conduct and to school culture. He discussed skilled teachers and administrators only utilizing suspension for the most serious offenses, and employing a variety of other strategies to set the tone, climate and expectations for students.

Meeting adjourned at 9:13PM.