

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting
December 8, 2016

Attending: Malik Evans (Chair); Commissioners Hallmark (left at 6:41PM), Adams, White, Powell and Elliott (arrived at 6:23PM).

District Staff: Dr. Kendra March, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning; Ruth Turner, Executive Director of School Counseling & Social Work; Kisha Morgan, Data Administrator

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Evans called the meeting to order at 6:20PM.

I. Review Minutes of the November 10, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner White to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Hallmark. **Adopted 2-0, with support of other four Board members in attendance.**

II. Update on School Counseling Services

Commissioner Evans explained that he requested this update because of the numerous questions received from community members about the functions of school counselors in the District, and the ways in which counselors prepare students for college and/or career entry.

Dr. March reviewed the standards established by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), which address three main areas of responsibility: academic development, career development, and personal/social development. In terms of academic development, school counselors are to assist students in acquiring the attitudes and skills for effective learning in school and life; choosing from a wide range of post-secondary options, including college; and understanding the relationship of academics to career, home and community life.

With respect to career development, school counselors are to assist students with career exploration to make informed decisions; strategies for attaining career goals; and understanding the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and the workplace.

According to the ASCA standards, counselors are to aid students with interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect themselves and others; understand safety and survival skills; and make decisions, establish goals, and take action to attain goals.

Dr. March noted that the District is currently working to train school counselors in each of these areas, and she plans to monitor the impact of their work on student outcomes. Counselors are expected to monitor academic and social/emotional development as part of developing a personalized educational and career plan for each student. Dr. March discussed the wide range of services provided through

school counseling services: individual and group counseling; managing organizational assessment tools; providing services to families and community members based on students' needs; using data to inform programs, such as attendance, academics and behavior.

Dr. March reported that the New York State Education Department (NYSED) mandates school counseling be provided in each 7-12 school; academic and social/emotional skills of each student be monitored to develop personalized learning and career plans. She stated that NYSED guidelines establish a maximum ratio of 250 students per school counselor, but best practice is to provide one counselor for every 100 students. Dr. March reported that NYSED has made some changes that are to be implemented in the 2019-20 school year:

- Establishing a comprehensive School Counseling/Guidance program for K-12, with an annual review and report of student outcomes; and
- Ensure access of all K-12 students to a certified school counselor.

Dr. March noted that the ratios in the District are currently one counselor for every 214 elementary students, and one for every 201 secondary students. The overall ratio for the entire District is 1:204. Dr. March reviewed caseloads for each school, pointing out that School No. 9 is an outlier in terms of the percentage of the student population receiving school counseling services (38%) because these services are supported with grant funding for the school. She explained that School No. 12 and 16 share 1.0FTE for a school counselor.

Commissioner Hallmark questioned the variation in the caseloads for school counselors among different District schools.

Commissioner White observed that the ratios of counselors to students in their caseload is significantly higher than the ratio recommended by national standards. He inquired about the correlation between counselor caseloads and school performance, pointing out that more counselors should be allocated to lower performing schools. Ruth Turner replied that this is their recommendation for inclusion in the 2017-18 RCSD budget.

Commissioner Evans asked about the opportunity for school counselors to form in-depth relationships with students, given the size of their caseloads. Ms. Turner responded that counselors' ability to establish in-depth relationships with students depends on the particular needs of those in their caseload and the extent to which their services are needed to support discipline in the school. She stated that disciplinary actions can consume quite a bit of additional time for counselors.

Commissioner White stated that he has received reports that school counselors are primarily preparing students for college and career, but not addressing the needs of those who are struggling or who have other types of problems. He questioned the extent to which counselors are assisting students who need other types of assistance, particularly given the size of their caseloads. Ms. Turner replied that there has been a history of high-achieving students seeking out school counselors for college and/or career planning, but the District is trying to shift this culture to make school counseling available to all students. As part of this effort, she explained that counselors are now required to meet with each student on a one-to-one basis at least twice per year to review transcripts to ensure that students are on track toward attaining specified goals.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about accountability for supervising school counselors, and the barriers to providing counseling to all students. She emphasized that counselors have to engage with each student to develop an educational plan.

Commissioner Powell noted that the District has not had these types of benchmarks for school counselors in the past. She stated that requiring a meeting with each student at least twice a year would provide incentives for counselors to reach out to students who have not been attending school.

Commissioner Elliott contended that school counselors should not be expected to go out and find students who have not been attending school. She stated that Parent Liaisons and Home School Assistants are responsible for bridging between school and home, and should follow up on students who have been absent. Commissioner Elliott asserted that counselors should continuously review the academic progress of the students on their caseloads to be able to address their academic needs.

Commissioner Hallmark questioned whether the national ASCA recommends a greater number of counselors per student in environments with higher levels of poverty, stress, violence and trauma. Ms. Turner replied that ASCA does not address these issues directly, but these factors affect the majority of District students and therefore the ratio of one counselor for every 150 students is recommended. She stated that school counselors need to focus on college and career readiness, but are also called upon to assist with discipline and provide counseling to address trauma, social/emotional and mental health issues.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether every school counselor has had a performance evaluation at this point. Ms. Turner responded that counselors are evaluated by building administrators and all were evaluated in 2015-16.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the role of school counselors in elementary schools. Ms. Turner replied that there aren't many school counselors in elementary schools, where their role is primarily to monitor and address student attendance concerns, conduct student workshops, and assist students in short-term and long-term goal planning. Dr. March added that school counselors are promoting academic achievement, particularly through course scheduling and ensuring that the course registration process is better aligned to students' needs.

Commissioner White commented that the work of school counselors reflects the core work that needs to be done in the District. He stated that students have not been coached regarding course selection, establishing goals, or preparing for college and career. Commissioner White asserted that advancing this work by school counselors is imperative to improve student outcomes. He added that the standards of a national organization cannot be applied to the District because these children have so many issues at home, in the community, and in school. Ms. Turner acknowledged that there are some counselors who should not be working in the District, but many are dedicated and work long hours in an effort to meet students' needs.

Commissioner Elliott expressed concern that students with behavioral issues may be penalized academically, thereby jeopardizing opportunities for future success. She stated that she is considering developing a policy to address these concerns.

Action Item: Commissioner Elliott will draft a policy to address concerns about penalizing students academically when they have behavioral issues. The draft policy will be presented to the members of the Policy Committee for review.

Dr. March discussed other ways in which school counselors promote academic achievement: meeting with parents and families; ensuring courses are assigned appropriately; collaborating with outside agencies to provide wraparound services. She also reported an increase in school counselors' use of the Naviance system, which assists students in exploring career goals. She stated that she will provide greater detail in the future about ways in which this system is meeting students' needs.

Dr. March reported that to attain the recommended ratio of one counselor for every 150 students, the District would need to add 26.0FTE for school counselors. She stated that this increase in staffing will be included in the proposed 2017-18 RCSD budget.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the ideal number of students per school counselor. Dr. March responded that this figure would vary according to the particular needs of the students in each school.

III. Update on School Climate and Student Suspensions

Commissioner Evans discussed the extensive work done by the Task Force on School Climate, and stated that he would like to check on school climate conditions at least twice a year.

Dr. March presented student suspension data from 2013-14 to date for 2016-17, with detail regarding the number of incidents, short-term and long-term suspensions. She reported that the number of suspensions has decreased in each of the first three months of the school year over the last four years, with a comparison below of the changes over the last year:

	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>% Change</u>
September:	495	535	-7%
October:	776	1276	-39%
November:	634	1262	-50%

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that while this may be an improvement in terms of the number of suspensions, consideration must still be given to the length of time for which students are being suspended. She added that students are not given adequate instruction while on suspension (i.e. one hour per day).

Commissioner Adams asked about student arrest data, noting that there has been a history of reducing penalties in one area only to have it increase in another. She pointed out that an overall reduction in all forms of student discipline would reflect a meaningful improvement in school climate, compared to one single measure.

Action Item: In future reports regarding student suspension, data will be included of the number/percentage of students arrested.

Dr. March reviewed data indicating the percentage of student suspensions for the most common categories of offenses. She noted that extrapolating the data for the first three months of the 2016-17

school year indicates ~1800 minor altercations, as compared to 2642 in 2015-16, 2541 in 2014-15, and 2445 in 2013-14. Dr. March added that this is one of the most common categories of offenses.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the definition of “minor altercations” and the specific types of behaviors that would constitute this category. Dr. March explained that “minor altercations” refers to conflicts that generally do not include physical contact, such as arguments and name-calling. She emphasized the importance of using the same definition among all of the District schools.

Commissioner Elliott requested information about the number of weapons that have been brought to school. Dr. March reported that 14 weapons have been found and another 30 confiscated so far this school year. She stated that 99 weapons were confiscated and 55 were found in the 2015-16 school year.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern about bullying and the potential to misconstrue situations in which the victim finally stands up for themselves against the bully, only to be punished. She stated that she would like to find some way to prevent these situations from occurring. Dr. March responded that she will discuss this issue with school staff, but it is difficult to identify and address these situations.

Commissioner Elliott asked about schools around the nation that have experienced serious incidents of violence (e.g. Sandy Hook, Columbine) and whether these schools later installed metal detectors. Dr. March replied that installation of scanning devices in schools has become a common trend nationwide.

Commissioner White commented that it would be great to have a vision of having at least one school in the District without metal detectors one day.

Commissioner Evans described a number of violent incidents that occurred when he was a student. He declared that while having schools without metal detectors is a laudable goal, the school environment must be secured to ensure safety.

Dr. March reviewed data showing that the majority of incidents involving student suspension occurred in classrooms, and then in school hallways. She also presented data from 2012-13 to date in 2016-17 of the percentage of suspensions that included general education students and students with disabilities.

Commissioner Elliott contended that there has to be some latitude in discipline of students with disabilities. Dr. March asserted that NYS law and the established process provide latitude for these students.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out the high number and percentage of suspensions involving students with disabilities, even with the latitude that has been provided. Ms. Turner stated that if the behavior of a student with disabilities escalates to the level of harming another person, they are subject to suspension.

Debra Flanagan pointed out that an assessment is required before imposing disciplinary measures to determine the extent to which the student’s behavior was due to their disability. Ms. Turner replied

that even if the behavior was found to be due to the student's disability, they will be suspended if harm has been done to another person. Kisha Morgan added that more work remains to be done to improve disciplinary approaches for students with disabilities, who are disproportionately suspended.

Commissioner Elliott stated that she would like to include Dr. Omar Johnson in this discussion, as he is a school psychologist who specializes in working with students with disabilities in Philadelphia. She suggested examining his work online for further information and guidance.

Commissioner Elliott expressed concern about the fidelity of the data reported by schools, noting that this has been an issue in the past. Dr. March replied that she will investigate and include her findings in the next report regarding student suspension.

Dr. March provided an overview of the social emotional support system for students, and of the actions that have been taken to improve school climate and reduce the suspension rate. Specifically, the District has substantially revised the Code of Conduct, adopted restorative practices, created Help Zones in schools, established a practice of meeting with every student at least every five weeks, and provided professional development to school staff on these initiatives. Dr. March reported that 14 schools have been trained in the use of restorative practices, and the next cohort of 13 schools will be trained this year.

Ms. Flanagan observed that certain schools still have a large number of suspensions, with a high percentage of out of school suspension. She asked about the extent to which this is correlated with more serious incidents occurring in these schools and/or the implementation of restorative practices in these schools. Dr. March replied that she has been discussing this issue with the School Chiefs, and will look into this further.

Commissioner Adams expressed concern about students being referred to alternative programs such as LynCx, but a lack of coordination in assisting with their entry into the program and their transition back to their home school.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30PM.