

EXCELLENCE IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

August 14, 2018

Attending: Commissioner Sheppard (Chair); Commissioners Elliott, Hallmark (arrived 5:37PM), and White (arrived 5:56PM).

Parent Representative: Toyin Anderson

District Staff: Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams; Dr. Cecilia Golden, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning; Harry Kennedy, Chief of Human Capital Initiatives (HCI); Toyia Wilson, School Chief; Shirley Green, School Chief; Carmine Peluso, School Chief; Amy Schiavi, Chief of School Leadership; Ruth Turner, Executive Director of School Counseling and Social Work

Community Representatives: Morris Moore, Director of the Life Support Program; Ashley Cross, Founder and CEO of the Care Portal

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Sheppard convened the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting of the Whole at 5:32PM.

I. Review Minutes of July 10, 2018 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Elliott to approve the minutes of the July 10, 2018 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting. **Adopted 2-0.**

II. Presentation regarding the Care Portal and the Life Support Program

Ashley Cross discussed the Care Portal, a national platform in which organizations serving children can identify needs and distribute this information to participating churches. Members of church communities offer care and assistance to children and families in crisis.

Ms. Cross explained that the organizations serving children (e.g. social service agencies, preschool programs, school districts) are in a position to recognize their needs and when the family may be in crisis. A staff person with the agency or school district would complete a simple form describing the need, which would be sent to local participating churches through the Care Portal.

Identified needs can be physical (resources needed to stabilize the child's or family's environment), or relational (social/emotional supports, relationship).

Mr. Morris noted that the longer term plan is to integrate the Care Portal with the Life Support program, which assists students in defining their interests into career goals and plans. He asserted that students are much more motivated to graduate if they have a clear direction and plan with a map of how to attain their goals. Mr. Morris described three main phases of career and education planning through the Life Support program:

- Assessment
- Goal creation and career education
- Graduation, life skills, tutoring, and mentorship

Through this process, students engage in a comprehensive and cohesive process for career, education, and life planning. Each plan contains the specific steps needed to attain the goal, with timeframes for each step. By delineating the specific steps and timeframes involved, students sense that the ultimate goal is attainable, which builds hope, motivation, and engagement in school.

Cecilia Golden expressed concern about the small sample size and the resulting statistics from a recent study comparing the success of individuals with and without a plan for attaining their goals. Mr. Moore replied that a similar study was also conducted with the University of Virginia, and similar results were obtained.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about the organizations working with the Life Support program. Mr. Moore stated that the program has a contract with City Recreation Centers to serve approximately 150 children in grades 8-10 beginning in September 2018. He also discussed his previous experience with career planning for mid-level professionals in the program.

Toyin Anderson asked about parent involvement in the Life Support program. Mr. Moore responded that parents are involved in assessment, career goal development and planning with their child. He added that parents provide valuable information for consideration throughout this process.

III. Discuss Efforts to Raise August Graduation Rates

Toyia Wilson explained that an overview will be presented of data for the 2014 cohort as a whole and by school, including the number of courses and Regents exams students need to graduate in August. She stated that information will also be presented of the interventions and supports provided to students over the summer and planned for the 2018-19 school year for 5- and 6-year graduates.

Data was presented for the District and for each school of:

- the total number of students in the 2014 cohort (2046)
- the percentage of students graduating in June 2018 (1082); and
- the projected August graduation rate, assuming that *all* students in the 2014 cohort attending summer school fulfill the requirements necessary to graduate by the end of summer school.

Ms. Wilson cautioned that these figures are subject to fluctuation because staff from All City High School continue to reach out to students who have dropped out to encourage them to re-enroll in school. She pointed out that efforts continue to encourage and support students to recover credits and pass the Regents exams necessary to graduate. Ms. Wilson reported that 343 students in the 2014 cohort are expected to graduate in five or six years.

Carmin Peluso provided data for the 2014 cohort of students attending summer school. Further analysis showed the percentage of students in need of additional credits or passing scores on Regents exams for the District and for each school:

Students in 2014 Cohort Attending Summer School

Total Number of Students:	Number Attending Summer School:	% w/ 11.0-15.5 Credits:	% w/ 16.0+ Credits:	% w/ 0 Passing Regents Exams:	% w/ 1 Passing Regents Exam:	% w/ 2 Passing Regents Exams:	% w/ 3 Passing Regents Exams:	% w/ 4 Passing Regents Exams:	% w/ 5 Passing Regents Exams:
2046	257	5.8%	94.2%	5.8%	14.0%	23.3%	22.2%	21.4%	13.2%

From this data and from the School Chiefs’ report, it is apparent that most RCSD students struggle more with passing Regents exams than with earning sufficient credits to graduate.

Shirley Green described a number of interventions that have been made to raise graduation rates over the summer:

- Early registration for students in the 2014 cohort to ensure a place in summer school;
- Home School Assistants and Social Workers on site, and conducting outreach by going to students’ homes to address attendance issues;
- School counselors on site at each school to ensure availability to students and to improve communication between the summer school program and the student’s home school;
- Hand delivery of the Regents exam schedule to every student’s home
- Review of every student on a weekly basis with regard to:
 - Attendance
 - Academic progress
 - Additional supports needed
- Collaboration between approximately 25 staff members in weekly reviews, including teachers, the summer school administrator, and the home school principal
- Online credit recovery staff located on site and also offer flexibility in meeting with students at other locations (e.g. public libraries) and at other times outside of the traditional school day
- Use of a centralized team from each Executive Director’s subject area to score Regents exams to improve consistency

Commissioner Elliott questioned the rationale for students to attend summer school when they need to pass five Regents exams, since it is unlikely that they will be able to fulfill this requirement in such a short period of time. Ms. Wilson explained the importance of sustained learning for students to prevent backsliding over the summer and to encourage students to progress. She stated that students may pass some of the Regents exams in the summer, which

offers encouragement to continue progress during the school year. Ms. Wilson reported that many of these students can then go on to pass the remaining Regents exams to graduate in January.

Commissioner Elliott asserted that a different strategy should be used with students who have passed four Regents exams than with those who have only passed one or two exams. She asked about plans for students who have only passed one or two Regents exams as of the end of summer school, and how these students are engaged during the school year. Ms. Wilson replied that this topic will be discussed in the next segment of this evening's presentation, which focuses on the supports to be provided to students who need five to six years to graduate.

Commissioner Elliott requested data of the percentage of RCSD students that take five or six years to graduate.

ACTION ITEM: Data will be provided to the Board of the number/percentage of students that graduate in five or six years.

Amy Schiavi stated that there are 343 students at this point who do not have enough credits and need to pass multiple Regents exams to graduate. Even if these students do not meet all of the requirements to graduate in August, attending summer school increases their opportunities of fulfilling these requirements by January. Ms. Schiavi also emphasized that the data is subject to change because of ongoing efforts to support students, including taking the Skills USA exam instead of one of the Regents exams. Additional supports include having students make up a portion of a course for which all other requirements have been met, rather than repeating the entire course. In addition, school counselors have customized students' schedules to accommodate their needs. District staff are continuing to explore alternatives to Regents exams, and customized learning approaches have been initiated for students who will be graduating in five or six years. Ms. Schiavi emphasized that the positive aspect of summer school and provision of supports is that these students have continued to be engaged in school.

Ms. Wilson stated that it is possible for a student to pass all five Regents exams and graduate at the end of the summer, if they work hard.

Commissioner Elliott asked whether students are given examples of their peers being able to fulfill so many requirements in such a short period of time. She emphasized the importance of conveying hope and possibility to students by letting them know that others who had fallen behind academically were able to advance and graduate. Commissioner Elliott asserted that a consistent message of hope and encouragement that hard work will yield results is critical to keeping students motivated and engaged.

Commissioner Sheppard observed that the data indicate that approximately 590 students in the 2014 cohort were still enrolled at the end of the 2017-18 school year, and in need of additional credits and/or Regents exams. She asked about plans for the 343 students who are *not* enrolled in summer school. Ms. Wilson explained that the 257 summer school students include students expected to graduate in five or six years.

Commissioner Sheppard requested data regarding the number of summer school students in the 2014 cohort who are planning to graduate in five or six years.

ACTION ITEM: Data will be provided to the Board of the number of summer school students in the 2014 cohort who are planning to graduate in five or six years.

Commissioner Sheppard inquired about summer school attendance for students in the 2014 cohort. Ms. Wilson explained that a biweekly attendance report is generated for the Franklin campus, and a snapshot is provided for each summer school program of attendance for students in the 2014 cohort and for all students. She pointed out that the attendance history for each summer school program is examined to identify ways to assist those with low attendance rates. Ms. Wilson described identifying and sharing best practices from programs with high levels of student attendance, studying the impact of attendance at a student's home school, and exploring the possibility of combining programs or efforts to maximize attendance.

Commissioner Sheppard requested summer school attendance data specifically for students in the 2014 cohort.

ACTION ITEM: Attendance data will be provided to the Board for students in the 2014 cohort attending summer school.

Commissioner White pointed out that all of the data that has been presented refers to a "best case" scenario in which all of the students in the 2014 cohort attending summer school attain all of the requirements necessary to graduate this month. He stated that past experience indicates that this will not happen, and that it would be much more useful to have data based on the most likely outcome. Superintendent Deane-Williams discussed the use of predictive analytics from last year and having staff gather data on the same variables (e.g. attendance, specific Regents exams students need to pass, and summer school program attended). She explained that data for these multiple variables will be used to develop a model that will be used to make projections in the future. The Superintendent asked the School Chiefs to submit all of the summer school data by Friday, August 17th, so that this information can be provided to the Board of Education.

Superintendent Deane-Williams explained that she has requested the predictive analytics analysis at this time because of anticipated funding reductions in the upcoming budget cycle. To keep schools intact during the school year, the extra cost of summer school and extended day programs will have to be scrutinized. The Superintendent reported that some research indicates that offering twilight academies during the school year and enabling students to make up work every ten weeks leads to a minimum of students having to enroll in summer school, specifically those who need learning recovery for the last ten weeks of the school year. She noted that this approach would allow summer school programs to be collapsed and/or consolidated. At the same time, consideration needs to be given to the impact of students attending their home school over the summer for learning recovery.

Commissioner White commended the work that has been done by the Administration, noting that this is the first time that he has seen a coordinated presentation regarding students' current status and needs in advancing toward graduation. He pointed out that while

information about the best case scenario may be useful, the difficult work lies in the predictive analytics and generating accurate projections of student academic progress and graduation rates. Commissioner White requested the predictive analytics data as soon as possible.

Dr. Golden noted that students have not yet taken the Regents exams this summer, and asked about providing the predictive analytic data before or after the exams. Superintendent Deane-Williams stated that the analysis should be provided *before* the Regents exams are administered next week to allow comparison with actual results. This comparison will indicate the accuracy of the predictive analytics model being used by the District at this point.

Commissioner White contended that the “best case scenario” graduation rate will most likely decrease according to the number of students who only need to pass one or two Regents exams to graduate.

The Superintendent pointed out that staff are examining the progress of each student because some high schools have a higher number of students who are English language learners. There is greater variability in meeting graduation requirements in schools with larger cohorts of English language learners, particularly in light of the level of proficiency required to pass the NYS ELA Regents exam. Superintendent Deane-Williams explained that the School Chiefs are needed to study the progress of students who are English language learners and/or have disabilities, which requires extensive experience and knowledge of students and curriculum development.

Carmine Peluso noted that School Chiefs, principals, and school staff have reviewed each student’s status repeatedly, and now have to make a best estimate of their likelihood of passing the necessary Regents exams based on past performance.

Superintendent Deane-Williams reported that she has asked the School Chiefs to perform an item analysis of each Regents exam, review each student’s performance on past exams, and create individual educational plans to assess internal capacity to perform this work in each school. The intent is to test the quality of the item analysis by question and by student, as this has a significant impact on predictive analytics.

The Superintendent also asserted that she does not want to continue to focus on standardized assessments of students, but would rather use a much richer and deeper evaluation of their abilities. Although the current focus is on learning recovery and graduation, the hope is that the District will not have to continue examining student achievement through this narrow lens. She noted that the District has begun to collect data with a longer term perspective, specifically in ensuring that students have at least six credits by the end of 9th grade. The School Chiefs have identified the students who have not met this minimum level of credits, and ensured their enrollment in summer school. Students who have not earned at least 6 credits by the end of summer school will have to be placed in the Learning Recovery Twilight Program at the beginning of the school year.

Commissioner Elliott asserted that students and parents also need to be informed of informal resources available to assist in passing Regents exams (e.g. tutoring on YouTube).

Commissioner White observed that predictive analytics are valuable not only in estimating graduation rates, but in differentiating instruction and interventions, identifying students most likely to benefit from specific programs or services, and in decision-making regarding resource allocation. Ms. Schiavi pointed out that predictive analytics have been used over the last two years to determine the site for summer school, director of the program, and the particular teachers providing instruction. She noted that the impact of these strategies will continue to be analyzed.

Commissioner Sheppard asked about the number of students in the 2014 cohort that need services outside of summer school (e.g. tutoring, mentoring), expressing concern that the teachers are not selected on the basis of their connection with students but only on seniority.

Commissioner Elliott discussed staff mobility in the District, which causes a lack of stability and continuity in relationships for students. She emphasized the importance of finding effective ways to address this issue to prevent it from undermining student and school performance goals. Commissioner Elliott suggested using predictive analytics to anticipate and prepare for staff turnover, and to ensure that the staff members are placed where they are able to have the greatest impact on student achievement.

Commissioner Sheppard inquired about the specific methods used by School Chiefs to hold school administrators and staff members accountable for student performance. Ms. Green noted that visits with school principals every five weeks begin with review of the Data Dashboard to identify the students who are not meeting standards. The status of each student is reviewed, as well as the interventions and supports that have been provided. The frequency of intervention/support is documented and monitored every five weeks to examine the impact on student progress.

Commissioner Sheppard clarified that her concern pertains to situations in which students have not made progress over the course of a number of reviews, so that they are in the same or worse position by the middle of the school year. She asked about the next steps that would be taken to hold principals accountable in these situations. Ms. Wilson described using an individual coaching approach to encourage professional growth, noting that principals have reported receiving more support and feedback over the last year than ever before. She listed a number of ways in which School Chiefs have coached principals to improve performance: refining Response to Intervention (RtI) plans; connecting RtI to common formative assessments; and using NWEA and Regents data in conjunction with classroom observation to support teachers and students in the classroom.

Commissioner Elliott acknowledged that she has been critical of the School Chiefs because of their pivotal role in ensuring that school administrators and staff are effectively supporting and serving students to help them progress academically. She inquired at what point the School Chiefs develop an exit strategy for principals or school staff when coaching and other approaches have failed. Commissioner Elliott expressed concern that School Chiefs have not been willing to address these issues and to hold principals accountable.

Commissioner Sheppard stated that she shares these concerns, and asked at what point a decision is made that coaching and other approaches have failed and the principal should be let

go. She emphasized that the District cannot afford to continue investing time and effort in providing supports without yielding results. Ms. Wilson replied that the School Chiefs have been extensively involved with school principals, which has led to these difficult conversations. Ms. Green added that the School Chiefs have provided honest feedback to principals on an ongoing basis, which has enabled these conversations to take place outside of their performance evaluation.

Commissioner Sheppard inquired whether principals' performance issues are documented in writing. Ms. Schiavi replied that if a school's performance metrics are not being met and students are not progressing, these critical conversations are taking place with principals and the issues are documented in writing.

Toyin Anderson observed that the tendency in the District has been to delay taking corrective action, while more and more students are lost in the meantime. She asserted that the District cannot keep postponing the critical actions needed to support students.

Cecilia Golden declared that the focus has to be on examining what will be different in the upcoming school year, in terms of the school environment and climate and fostering student engagement. She pointed out that students in the District are affected by many different societal issues, which are not acknowledged or discussed in school (e.g. race, law enforcement). By ignoring these realities, schools fail to engage students. Dr. Golden asserted that having these critical conversations with students imparts a sense of safety and willingness to teach ways to navigate in a world that is not necessarily supportive of them. She stated that school staff should begin by asking children what they already know about a particular topic, instead of making assumptions about their knowledge base. Engaging students in these types of conversations also fosters understanding and relationship.

Dr. Golden stated that specific indicators are needed for accountability to have real meaning in terms of expectations. She directed the School Chiefs to identify five to seven items for which school principals will be held accountable in the upcoming school year.

ACTION ITEM: The five to seven items for which School Chiefs will hold school principals accountable in the 2018-19 school year will be presented in an upcoming Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting.

Ms. Anderson suggested that every teacher have one action that they will perform in the upcoming school year to ensure that every student feels welcome.

IV. Update regarding Diversity Recruitment and Hiring Initiative

Harry Kennedy provided an overview of efforts that have been made since July 10, 2018 to increase diversity in the District's workforce:

- Restructured the Senior Team in the Human Capital Initiatives Department to focus on diversity: designated Maurice Snipe as the Diversity Recruitment Specialist to ensure that applicants of diverse backgrounds are given adequate attention and consideration. Several other staff members are involved in bilingual recruitment, which Mr. Snipes supervises.

- Created a campaign with Ibero American Action League on social media to recruit candidates from Puerto Rico.
- Implemented aggressive community outreach to change the perception of the District:
 - » Recruitment event planned for the Black Young Professionals with the Urban League in October 2018;
 - » Job Fairs scheduled with the Urban League Employment Services and Action for A Better Community Employment Services;
 - » Preliminary meetings with Baden Street Settlement Executive Team and with Catholic Family Services Employment Division
 - » Conducting recruitment at a number of community festivals: Puerto Rican Festival, Clarissa Street Reunion

Mr. Kennedy emphasized the importance of sustaining these efforts over time to demonstrate commitment to these communities, and raise awareness of the District’s presence and opportunities.

- Continued collaboration with the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), which invited the District to attend a recruitment event on July 29th. Mr. Snipe attended and met with some distinguished students interested in pursuing a career in education.

Commissioner Elliott asked about students’ concerns in coming to Rochester. Mr. Kennedy replied that students’ main concern was about the weather in Rochester. He pointed out that states will often offer tax incentives to colleges and universities to keep graduates in the state. Mr. Kennedy acknowledged that while these incentives present a challenge because many historically black colleges and universities are located in southern states, staff do not hesitate to point out the advantages of working in the District:

- Retirement system that is one of the best in the country;
- Excellent health care benefits;
- Tuition reimbursement;
- Financial incentives for purchasing a home in the City of Rochester

Mr. Kennedy stated that these students are in great demand and have many opportunities for jobs and relocating. He reported that the UNCF has invited the District to return for their next recruitment event.

Other recruitment strategies include:

- Collaborating with United Way to discuss strategies for recruiting individuals from the Latino and African American leadership programs;
- Exploring the possibility of expanding the Teaching & Learning Institute at East High School to encourage and support students to enter a career in education;

- Working with SUNY and colleges/universities to create a cost-free tuition plan to develop and retain teachers of color; and
- Reaching out to private industry to assist students of color to attend college and return to contribute to the community, as has been done in other districts.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about efforts to reach out to individuals interested in teaching as a second career. Mr. Kennedy replied that the District is collaborating with Rochester Works to identify and recruit individuals who are currently unemployed and interested in a career in education.

Commissioner Elliott asked about recruiting retirees from the private sector, who may be interested in a second career in education. Mr. Kennedy replied that the District has been in regular contact with networking groups that have been established by larger corporations to identify individuals with an interest in education.

Mr. Kennedy presented data with a demographic breakdown of the approximately 7600 employees in the District. He pointed out that historic data shows that 55% of the District's workforce has been Caucasian and 45% from diverse backgrounds. Among RCSD teachers, 75% are Caucasian and 25% are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Mr. Kennedy contrasted the District's data with the national average for teachers, which is 82% Caucasian and 18% from other backgrounds. He noted that the national average has not changed in over ten years, indicating that the lack of diversity among teachers is an issue at the national level. Mr. Kennedy added that the disparity in the demographic composition of teachers is becoming worse each year because many students of color are not entering the teaching profession.

Commissioner Sheppard inquired about efforts to help RCSD employees enter the teaching profession, and requested statistics of the number of employees who have expressed interest in this opportunity. Mr. Kennedy replied that he will have more definitive data by the end of September, explaining that data has been extracted of the number of Teaching Assistants, Paraprofessionals, and per diem substitute teachers that have advanced to higher level positions in the District.

ACTION ITEM: Information will be provided to the Board of efforts made to support District staff to pursue a career in teaching, particularly for Teaching Assistants, Paraprofessionals, and Per Diem Substitute Teachers.

Mr. Kennedy concluded by stating that the data presented is subject to fluctuation because the District is still hiring for the upcoming school year.

V. Discuss Proposed *High School to Higher Education Institutions Policy*

Commissioner Sheppard noted that the proposed *High School to Higher Education Institutions Policy* was presented in the last Excellence in Student Achievement Committee meeting, but she wanted to offer additional opportunities for input. She stated that the policy proposal has been circulated to Board members, the Superintendent and her team, school counselors, and representatives from community organizations. Commissioner Sheppard explained that the impetus for developing the policy was to ensure that students have a clear plan after high school graduation in pursuing a college education and career.

Commissioner Elliott commended the concepts contained in the policy, but expressed concern about establishing requirements for organizations outside of the District's purview (i.e. community organizations and partners). She also pointed to a number of provisions in the policy in need of specificity to ensure that expectations are clear to those responsible for its implementation.

Commissioner Sheppard pointed out that there is a fine line between policy developed by the Board and the regulations promulgated by the Superintendent. She explained that the proposed policy could not be made more specific because a realistic assessment has to be made by the Administration of the additional work that can be performed at current staffing levels for school counselors. She stated that the existing *School to Work Transition Initiative Policy* (4314.2) pertains to the transition from school to the workforce, but not college or career preparation. Commissioner Sheppard noted that this is the reason that a separate policy is needed.

Commissioner Sheppard added that many school counselors currently assist students in developing a college and career plan, and the proposed policy is intended to support these efforts. She stated that she also intends to use the policy to advocate at the state level for increased funding for school counselors because the District is understaffed as compared to the national average of the number of students per counselor. Commissioner Sheppard noted that effective advocacy depends on the District demonstrating a commitment to establishing college and career plans for students, which is indicated by adopting a policy for this purpose.

Commissioner Sheppard explained that commitment and approval for the policy proposal was sought from the Superintendent and the Chief supervising school counselors. In addition, feedback was obtained from community partners because of their significant contribution and support for students as the District seeks additional funding to increase staffing for school counselors.

Commissioner Hallmark inquired about the length of time that annual review of students' college plans would be conducted, since the policy states that this begins at the end of 9th grade and each year thereafter. Commissioner Sheppard clarified that the purpose of this provision in the policy is to ensure that guidance and planning begins early enough to support students effectively. The college and career guide referenced in the policy describes initiating this process in 7th grade, but Commissioner Sheppard stated that she wanted to allow staff the time to develop plans for each student and therefore a requirement was established to prepare the college and career plans by the end of 9th grade.

Dr. Golden emphasized the importance of ensuring that the proposed policy is consistent with NYS law and regulation for compliance. She pointed out that job descriptions for school counselors will need to be reviewed in light of the proposed policy, and recommended that collective bargaining units not be given responsibilities for updating their members about policy implementation.

Commissioner Sheppard announced that she will revise the proposed policy based on the feedback received, and present the revised proposal in next week's Policy Committee meeting.

VI. Follow-Up Items

Commissioner Sheppard pointed to the follow-up review and discussion of the barriers created by the National Teachers Exam for prospective teachers of color.

Dr. Golden stated that she plans to discuss these issues with Harry Kennedy, Chief of Human Capital Initiatives. She added that the intent would be to identify a local population that could benefit from the District's support in passing this exam.

Meeting adjourned at 7:40PM.