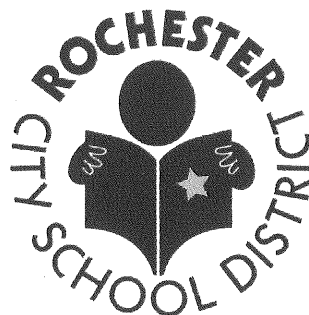


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*Testimony Before The New York Senate Finance Committee,  
Assembly Ways and Means Committee,  
Senate Education Committee,  
and  
Assembly Education Committee*

February 3, 2015

Presented By:  
Bolgen Vargas, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Rochester City School District

## **Introduction**

It's a privilege to testify before you a fourth time. My message today is simple.

- Rochester schools are using the District's budget process to find efficiencies and shift resources to the services and supports that benefit students most directly.
- Our district has an Action Plan that is driving improvements in student achievement. In my written testimony I will request increased state support for the priorities defined in our plan.
- However, no amount of money can overcome the administrative barriers that handcuff my ability to drive the changes we need to make. So today I am requesting the tools to improve my district's management system. I ask for the same authority to manage the District that most private and public sector CEOs have.

A focus on management will allow Superintendents like me to lead by example. In this year's budget discussions, the state will consider changes to the system for granting tenure to teachers. As a Superintendent who would be required to implement these changes, I need tools to fix the system that manages the work of teachers.

Specifically, I propose that you amend the law so that school administrators earn tenure after seven years, and renew tenure every three years based on performance. As part of this change, we need a more timely and objective process to remove nonperforming school administrators—and greater flexibility to reward those who achieve outstanding results.

At Central Office, now is also the time to remove people in management positions from union affiliation and the associated tenure. As Superintendent, I need a team of leaders throughout the district who can provide vital support through the leadership of their respective units.

As I speak, fewer than 40 of the nearly 6,000 employees in the Rochester City School District serve at the pleasure of the Superintendent. Compare this with Mayor Warren of Rochester, who has appointing authority over all department, bureau and division heads—a total of more than 350 employees who oversee a staff that is roughly half the size of the school district.

As committee members who focus on education, you know as well as I do that competent, vigorous, and dedicated administrators have enormous impact on student achievement. In particular, good principals and assistant principals—those able and willing to

manage their staffs and buildings effectively—are essential to creating good schools. Currently, I can't even place principals and assistant principals due to contractual constraints. Inflexible rules and contractual constraints prevent the kind of evidence-based educational reform we need to improve outcomes for Rochester students, a commitment I know you share.

Let me explain how the changes I am proposing would help our students succeed. First, current rules do not give us enough time for effective administrators to do their jobs. The work rules and extra pay requirements are old-fashioned. They do not reflect current thinking about the key role of school and Central Office administrators as professional leaders and managers.

Here are a few examples: If an administrator in my district is required to work on a snow day or cold-weather day when the school is closed for students, we must provide the administrator a personal day as a reward. Similarly, if administrators work more than 90 minutes after the instructional day ends or on Saturday, we must reward them with extra pay.

Then, there are provisions such as an agreement made in 2009, before I became superintendent. At that time, the district negotiated a provision that required all building administrators to change from an 11-month work year to a 12 month work year. When this change was negotiated, the district increased administrator salaries by \$2000 and granted them each 25 to 30 days of vacation. This effectively gave administrators more time off at higher salary than they had when working an 11-month school year. Amazingly, the agreement also allowed for unlimited cash-out of vacation. Last academic year, the average vacation cash out by an administrator was 21 days, costing our District more than two million dollars just to pay administrators for unused vacation.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate my confidence that our Action Plan can drive a significant breakthrough in student achievement in Rochester. Let me also be clear that many exceptional administrators serve Rochester students in our schools and Central Office. I respect and appreciate their work to treat every Rochester child like one of their own children.

However, we need every possible tool to improve and enhance our schools. The superintendent must have the authority to drive change and effectively oversee every District employee in the district. This authority does not exist when the vast majority of District administrators serve simultaneously as management and labor.

I believe that the success we must deliver for Rochester children requires us to make significant changes in the administrative governance of the Rochester district. I ask your support in making the necessary legislative changes this session.

### **State Support for Rochester Students**

Before providing more detail on our District's priorities and needs, I would like to thank the committees—along with Gov. Cuomo, and your colleagues in the Assembly and Senate—for your ongoing support of public education.

I would especially like to thank you for supporting full-day Pre-Kindergarten. At the beginning of the 2014 school year, less than 30 percent of our 1,900 Pre-Kindergarten students had a full-day schedule. This school year more than 90 percent of Rochester's Pre-K students attend full-day programs, and we are serving about 200 more students overall. Half of our Pre-K students attend District schools, and half are served by community organizations that provide Pre-K instruction to District students. There are many other examples of community partnerships that allow us to serve students more efficiently and effectively.

The conversion to full-day Pre-K is an essential component of our strategy to help Rochester students to read on grade level by third grade, which is one of our District's three academic priorities. The others are providing more and better learning time—which includes major increases in summer learning opportunities, and “expanded day” schools that provide more time for instruction and support as part of the daily schedule—and instructional excellence to help our children meet Common Core standards. We are aligning District resources to support these priorities, and we appreciate the help we receive from all our state leaders.

I also want to thank the legislature and Governor for enacting Phase 2 of our Facilities Modernization Plan. Ten Rochester schools have been modernized or have renovations underway as part of Phase 1 of our facilities plan. In December, the Governor signed legislation authorizing \$435 million for up to 26 additional projects in Phase 2. We appreciate the support of our local delegation and other state leaders, which will help us to provide students, families, and neighborhoods with facilities that are modern and conducive to learning.



## **Management Efficiency**

As I said at the outset, the Rochester City School District takes very seriously its responsibility to be a careful steward of public funding. We are working hard to manage our operations efficiency and effectively. From a budget standpoint, efficiencies help us to improve financial stability and to shift resources where they can have the biggest impact on student achievement. During my first three years in the Superintendent's role, our team achieved more than \$50 million in management efficiencies. Rochester became one of four districts in 2013 to receive a management efficiency grant from the State Education Department. We have also been recognized nationally, as one of four Districts chosen by the Gates Foundation to participate in its Spending Money Smartly initiative. Both grants have created a virtuous cycle in Rochester, where efficiencies have been recognized with funds that allow us to further improve and shift more resources to the classroom.

The District's current-year budget demonstrates our continued progress. We closed a projected gap of \$42 million and increased funding for the District's academic priorities by \$15 million. A generous increase in state aid, \$11.5 million over the Governor's original budget proposal, was the largest single contributor to this achievement. Efficiencies of \$10.2 million were the second-largest contributor. The steps we took to spend more efficiently included:

- Alignment of compensation to revenue growth and limiting vacation cash-out
- Reductions in Central Office and central services staffing
- Improved opportunities for middle grades students
- Vendor contract reductions

## **District Action Plan**

It pains me to tell you again that Rochester is the poorest urban school district in New York, and also the lowest performing district in nearly every measure of student achievement. It is even more painful to let you know that Rochester's poverty is growing worse.

An analysis released last month by the Rochester Area Community Foundation and ACT Rochester finds that:

- The city's poverty rate continues to rise, and is now at 32.9 percent
- The childhood poverty rate is 50.1 percent, ranking highest among 18 benchmark cities

- Rochester also has the highest rate of extreme poverty, at 16.2 percent

Poverty presents terrible challenges, but it cannot be an excuse for educational failure. We have a five-year Action Plan to drive student achievement in Rochester. It is based on the theory that our children can and will succeed if we mitigate poverty by giving them the extra time and support they need.

I believe firmly that Rochester students are as smart and talented as children anywhere in the world, with just as much potential. I am including copies of the Action Plan with my testimony, which describes the priorities, strategies, and measures on which we are focused to help Rochester children succeed.

Though we have a long way to go, I am pleased to see signs of progress. For example, Rochester's four-year graduation rate as of August 2014—which remains far too low—was the highest it has been in five years, despite more rigorous standards for earning a diploma. Two of our schools this year improved achievement significantly enough to be removed from the state's Priority list. We also are beginning to see improved student achievement in our schools that offer expanded learning time. Two years ago, five Rochester schools have expanded their schedules by 300 hours as part of the national TIME Collaborative. The school communities have planned together to reconfigure the daily schedule for everyone, with a variety of extra services for students and teachers. This year five more schools have begun expanded day schedules, and we hope to add four in 2015-16 for a total of 14 next year.

### **Our 2015-16 Budget Challenge**

We face significant challenges due to growing operational costs and the expansion and establishment of charter schools in Rochester. Last month, I presented to the Board of Education on our projected \$66 million budget challenge in 2015-16.

This includes a \$41 million budget gap driven by the expansion of charter schools, contractual salary increases, employee benefit costs, and rising transportation costs. In addition to this \$41 million gap, we recognize a need to shift an additional \$25 million in resources to improve student achievement.

- \$10 million is needed to fund a new management plan for East High School submitted by the University of Rochester. Our Action Plan calls for help from Educational Partnership Organizations to take over management of failing

schools; we are grateful that the University has agreed to take on the challenge at our District's largest high school.

- \$15 million will allow us to continue investing in the District's academic priorities of early literacy, more and better learning time and instructional excellence

### **Funding Request to State**

Our financial projection assumed a 3 percent increase in Foundation Aid. This would require a minimum year-to-year increase of \$10.9 million in order to avoid undesired budget cuts. Given our urgent need to improve student achievement, I am also seeking additional support for our academic priorities:

- \$10.1 million will fund the additional educational and transportation needs for East High School, which include extending the school day by 1.5 hours, providing professional development and additional instructional support to promote student achievement at East
- \$4.6 million will help us to expand instructional time at up to four additional schools, and sustain expanded learning time at 18 schools
- \$2.4 million will fund a reading teacher in every school to support third-grade literacy
- \$8.0 million will fund additional program needs to improve student achievement, which include:
  - Expand participation in summer learning programs from 10,000 to 12,500 students
  - Increase career and technical education opportunities for students by making the Edison Technology Campus a single school with multiple career pathways
  - Support academic progress at Joseph C. Wilson Magnet High by expanding the current International Baccalaureate track to an "IB for All" program

I also want to mention a separate piece of legislation that is revenue neutral. It is a request I initiated two years ago, to support neighborhood schools with a more flexible policy on transportation aid. Currently, the state pays for students who travel more than 1.5 miles to

school. If Rochester had the flexibility to bus students less than 1.5 miles, more families will choose neighborhood schools, without increasing our transportation budget. Last year the Senate passed a waiver that would support a pilot program for this concept. This year we hope that both houses will approve a waiver so that we can begin the pilot in the 2015-16 school year.

### **Conclusion**

Altogether, I am requesting an increase of \$36 million to improve the quantity and quality of services we provide Rochester students. That is a big “ask,” I know. But I would not request these funds if I did not deem them necessary to serve our children. I assure you that we will continue to drive efficiencies within the District budget. Every additional dollar the state can provide will benefit students in the classroom, or in enrichment activities and support outside the regular school day.

The Rochester City School District is working to improve with relentless focus and a strong sense of urgency. We are shifting resources to the classroom instruction and student support that will deliver results for Rochester families. I appreciate the chance today to report on our efforts and express the needs of the children in my district.



# *Advancing Our Priorities*



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## **KEY ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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August 2014



# 1 **Student Achievement and Growth**

## **READING ON GRADE LEVEL BY THIRD GRADE**

### **Full-day Pre-Kindergarten**

For 90% of students—over 1,200 more full-day Pre-K seats compared to September 2013.

### **Eliminating Summer Learning Loss**

Summer literacy opportunities for every Pre-K–2 student during the summer of 2014.

More than 11,000 students attended various summer school programs in 2014, all with a focus on improving literacy.

### **Thousands of Students Are Reading At Home**

More than 100,000 books were sent home with students to read in the summer of 2014.

Parent mailings, RocRead, community awareness campaigns, and literacy partnerships support reading outside school.

## **MORE AND BETTER LEARNING TIME**

### **Ten Expanded-Day Schools**

All students get 300+ more hours of instruction, support, and enrichment. Early results indicate higher academic growth.

### **15 Extended-Day Schools**

Offer students up to 200 more hours for academic support and services.

### **More Art, Music, PE, AP and Extra-Curriculars**

These positive engagement opportunities will increase again in 2014-2015.

### **New Sports Programs**

New lacrosse and football programs will start in the fall of 2015.

The District has added 56 new sports programs in the past two years.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE**

### **Career and Technical Education**

The first-ever Chief has been hired to lead Career and Technical learning for RCSD students.

### **Professional Learning**

District teachers, administrators and staff members engaged in 87,780 seat hours of Professional Development workshops and learning opportunities, along with 70,000 hours of instructional coaching support.

### **More Students Took and Passed June English Regents**

English: 2,750 tested (+234\*); 57.4% Passed (+13.9%)

(\*2013-2014 Regents Results Compared to 2012-2013)

### **Innovation Greenhouse**

“Innovation Greenhouse” was a test kitchen for instructional improvement at summer school and will be rolled out in 2014-15 to illustrate best practices across five proven approaches to implement Common Core teaching.



## 2 **Effective, Efficient Allocation of Resources**

### **More Services for Students & Staff in 2014-15**

\$5.9 million for More and Better Learning Time • \$8.9 million for Reading by Third Grade • \$0.3 million more for Instructional Excellence • \$1.2 million more for parent/family involvement • \$0.25 million more for athletics • \$1.25 million more for expansion of social emotional support

### **10.2 Million in Operational Efficiencies**

Closed the \$42 million gap to help us fund our priorities.

### **School-Based Tutoring**

Serves more than twice as many students as before, with more learning time while saving more than \$1 million annually.

### **State and National Foundation Recognition**

Recognized by NYSED, national foundations and the Harvard Fellows program based on our past management efficiencies.

### **Stable Finances**

Included a 5-year plan for reducing annual budget gaps and providing financial stability.

## 3 **Communication and Customer Service**

### **Coordinator for Customer Service Improvements**

"Ombudsman" added to the 2014-15 budget for improved customer service.

### **Back-to-School Orientation Events**

At every school in 2014-15 with increased promotion and with more informative programs for parents.

### **48-Hour Response Time to Questions/Concerns**

Our standard for helping all customers.

### **Weekly School Visits / Monthly Coffee and Conversation Meetings**

Keeps the Superintendent in touch with students, staff, and families.

### **Wegmans Customer Service**

We have begun to roll-out the Wegmans customer service model and cascade it throughout the organization.

## 4 **Parent, Family and Community Involvement**

### **Community Attendance Initiative**

Has expanded from 8 to 12 target schools, supported in 2014-15 by a community impact campaign.

### **Reserved Parent Parking is Standard**

At Central Office and all schools.

### **Neighborhood Schools**

Will become the norm, with in-school Kindergarten registration in 2014-15 and a transportation pilot at School 17.

## 5 **Management Systems**

### **Rigorous Staff Feedback & Support**

RCSD is the only large district to fully comply with APPR law; we are working to extend the same rigor in all staff evaluations to drive continuous improvement.

### **Ended Phase-In & Phase-Out of Schools**

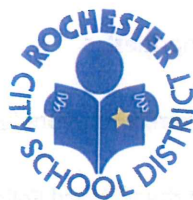
To increase stability for students, families, and staff.

### **School Modernization in Progress**

Four school renovations complete in 2013, four more complete in the summer of 2014 plus completion of the Franklin auditorium and the East High football field and School 58 complete by November. Phase II legislation passed in 2014 calls for \$435 million to fund 25 new school projects and a system-wide technology upgrade.

### **Educational Partnership Organization**

The University of Rochester is our educational partner developing a plan to manage East High School which is in process with New York State.



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**ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**131 WEST BROAD STREET**  
**ROCHESTER, NY 14614**  
**[WWW.RCSDK12.ORG](http://WWW.RCSDK12.ORG)**

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**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE FOR 2014-2015**

**UNIQUE FAIR**

***Superintendent of Schools***

**BOLGEN VARGAS, Ed.D.**



# *We Will Treat Every Child Like One of Our Own*



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## **AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 2014-2018**

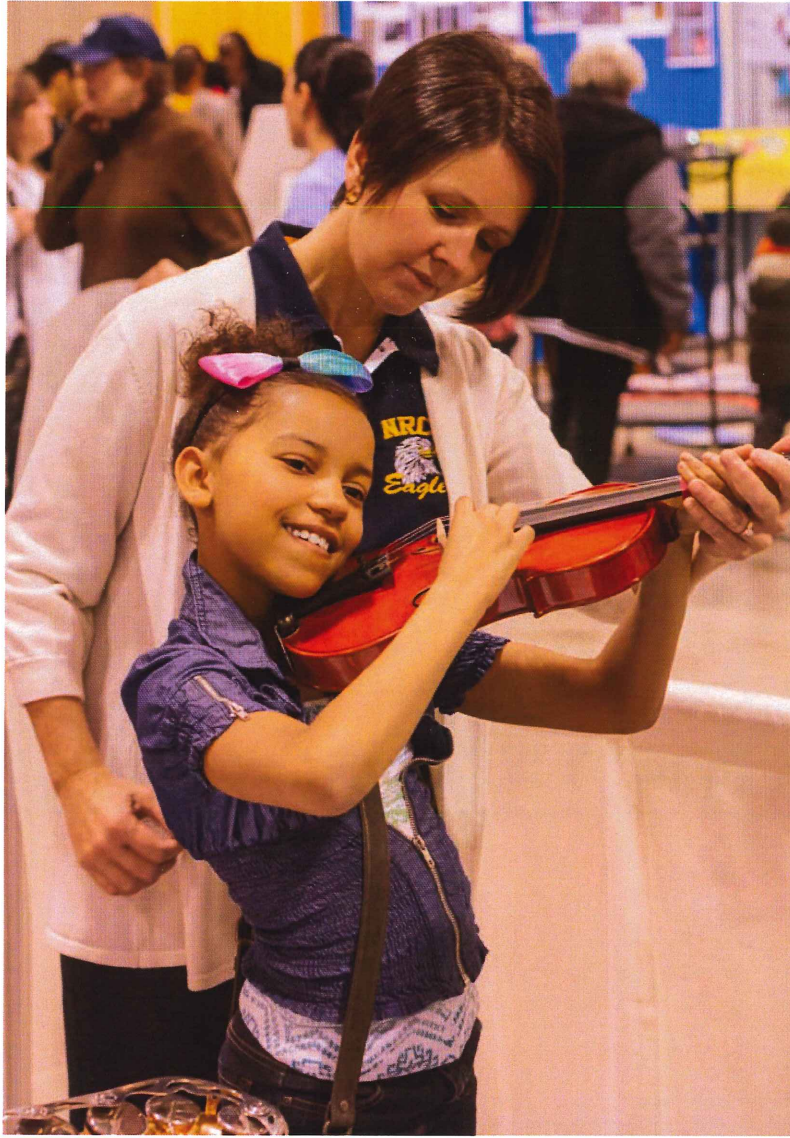
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March 2014





# WE ARE THE ROCHESTER



## *Our Mission*

To provide a quality education that ensures our students graduate with the skills to be successful in the global economy.

## *Our Challenge*

We know that every child has the desire and potential to succeed. We cannot provide all of our students a stable home or supportive neighborhood. But we can provide schools where they are surrounded by caring adults who give them the time, love, and support they need. We will treat every child like one of our own.

# CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

## *Our Vision*

Every child is a work of art.  
Create a masterpiece.

## *Our Priorities*

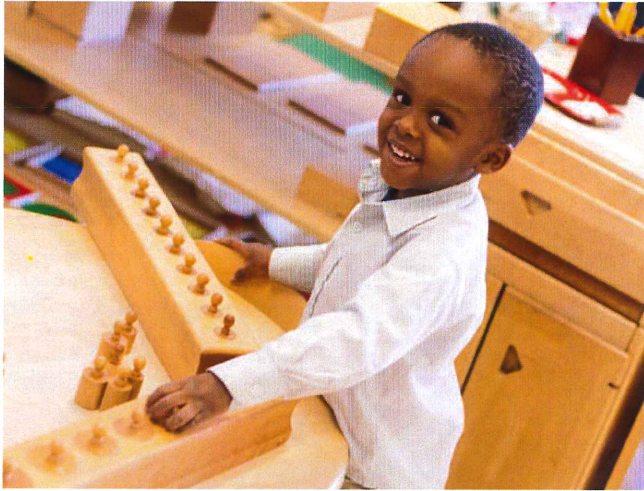
- Student Achievement and Growth
- Effective and Efficient Allocation of Resources
- Communication and Customer Service
- Parent, Family, and Community Involvement
- Management Systems



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## Introduction

Rochester's students and families urgently need better educational outcomes. Our district ranks at or near the bottom statewide in student achievement, with some of the lowest test scores and graduation rates. Yet we have excellent staff members, many students who persevere and succeed, and some excellent schools. Our challenge is to make success more widespread and immediate. All of our schools must provide a certain path out of poverty for our children and serve as an asset to our city's vitality.

Over the past 25 years, under seven different Superintendents, billions of dollars have been spent on different approaches to improving student achievement and school performance. We have tried creating middle schools, then eliminating them, shifting grade configurations, opening schools with specific themes, creating small schools-within-schools, phasing out low-performing schools and creating new schools in their place. We have used six different curricular programs to support English Language Arts instruction in the past 12 years.

**These past reforms have caused instability and upheaval for students, families and staff. Unfortunately, none of them has improved outcomes.** Rochester students fail to perform as well as students in New York's other "Big 5" districts with similar demographics. Of our 54 schools, 35 are designated as Priority or Focus schools in 2013-14—the lowest 5 or 10 percent statewide in student achievement. As a result, city families seek alternatives to District schools for their children. Some relocate to the suburbs. Others choose charter schools. Since 2006-07, the number of students enrolling in charter schools has more than quadrupled to more than 3,200, or 11% of our total enrollment. Three new charter schools will open in 2014-15, increasing the enrollment loss to 4,110 students. Our community is running out of patience, and we are running out of time before the state will enforce its own solutions.

Poverty presents terrible challenges, but it cannot be an excuse. Rochester students are as smart and talented as students anywhere in the world, with just as much potential. We must use the District's resources to mitigate poverty, giving our students the time and support they need to succeed.

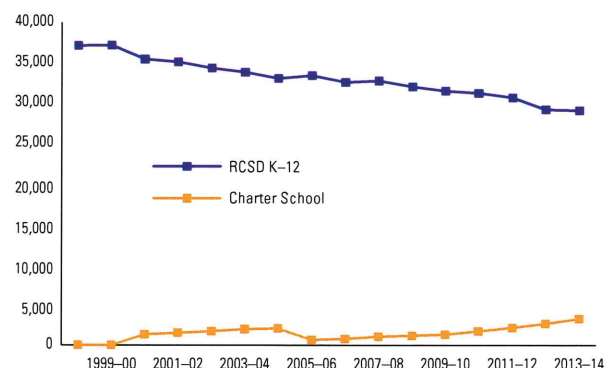
The answer is not to develop a new strategic plan at this time, replacing the 2008-2013 document through a process that would delay progress and create instability. Rather, it is imperative to focus and finish execution of the key strategies we have identified. We have laid out worthwhile strategies to improve our schools. They focus on the fundamentals, such as getting children to read on grade level by 3rd grade, making sure they attend school every day, and closing the opportunity gap. These fundamental strategies are supported by our key District priorities:

- Student Achievement and Growth
- Effective, Efficient Allocation of Resources
- Communication and Customer Service
- Parent, Family, and Community Involvement
- Management Systems

Our Superintendent is accountable to the Board of Education for achieving measurable progress in each of these priority areas. They provide a manageable list to guide the work of our organization, derived from the strategic plan's 14 objectives, 40 sub-strategies and 199 tactical recommendations. This Action Plan, developed through three years of consultation with the community, parents, the Board of Education, teachers and administrative leaders, outlines the focused actions that will allow our District to advance these priorities and provide the quality schools our community needs.

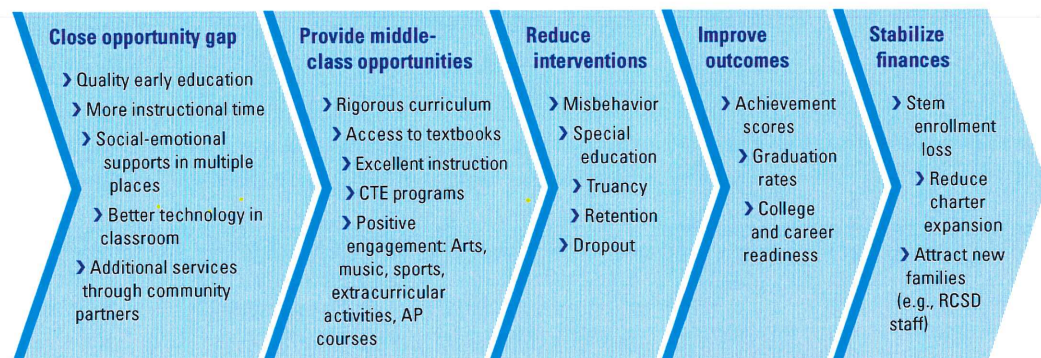
While recognizing an urgent need to improve, **we must work to maintain stability for students, families, and staff** to the great-

**Over the past 15 years, RCSD K-12 enrollment has decreased by 8,002 students (-22%)**





## A Focused Theory of Action for Student Success



Our theory of action is grounded in the belief that all children can succeed if we give students and staff the time, opportunities and support they need.

est extent possible. That is why we have stopped phasing out low-performing schools and slowed the conversion to K-8 schools. Equity requires us to focus on providing students in all schools a better experience—creating a District of continuous improvement, rather than a few islands of opportunity.

The time to act is now. We must stop believing that poverty makes our mission impossible, or waiting for increased government funding to get the job done. Using the resources we have, **we must transform our District culture to one of setting and achieving high expectations.** Adults in the Rochester City School District must treat our students as they would want their own children to be treated.

## Our Theory of Action

Poverty is a fact for most of the families we serve. A December 2013 report from the Rochester Area Community Foundation found that Rochester has the fifth highest poverty level in the nation. We rank third among the top 100 cities for the concentration of extremely poor neighborhoods. As a result, too many of our children come to school hungry, troubled and unprepared.

Poverty presents terrible challenges, but it cannot be an excuse. Rochester students are as smart and talented as students anywhere in the world, with just as much potential. We must use the District's resources to mitigate poverty, giving our students the time and support they need to succeed.

We cannot give every student a stable, nurturing home or a safe, supportive neighborhood. However, we can provide schools that use every available tool to engage students in positive activities and supportive relationships with caring adults. We must create a climate where students treat their peers and the adults at school with respect. This will allow far greater numbers of children to learn at high levels. More students will graduate ready to be productive citizens, with the skills to succeed in college and careers.

We can close the opportunity gap that puts low-income students at such a disadvantage, through key initiatives including:

- Quality early education
- Increased instructional time
- Effective social-emotional supports in multiple places in schools and the community

Then, we provide our students the same educational opportunities available to many middle-class families:

- Rigorous curriculum
- Access to quality textbooks, literature, manipulatives and other supplies
- Excellent instruction
- Positive engagement opportunities, including arts, music, sports and other extracurricular activities.

Economically, providing middle-class engagement opportunities is a matter of social justice. Strategically, it is part of our **prevention strategy**. Art, music, and sports provide essential physical and emotional outlets for children.

## Positive Engagement Is a Priority

**We are spending more for arts, music, sports, and extracurricular activities despite annual budget gaps**



**Including**

**59** new sports programs

**6** more music teachers

**5** more art teachers

**In 2013–14 compared to last year**





Our successful students often tell us that participating in the activities they love—whether it’s a football team, school play, science club, or choral group—gives them the motivation to attend school and work hard in their classes. Providing these activities helps us to meet the social and emotional needs of every student.

As part of our strategy, each school will have a student support team to identify and serve children who need additional social or emotional support. **In the 2014-15 budget, we will invest an additional \$1.3 million to ensure that every school has at least one full-time social worker, along with the many other in-school supports already in place.** A small percentage of students need more intensive services than schools alone can provide. Our support teams will provide case management to connect these students to the outside services they need and track their progress.

What is the payback on positive engagement?

In 2013-14, our District will spend \$7.7 million on safety and security in schools, \$11 million on grade retention, and \$24.2 million on school programs for students who need an alternative to traditional high school. Security costs have more than doubled since 2004-05, and alternative program costs are three times higher—while music, art and sports were being cut over the same period. The prevention strategy is an investment in reversing these trends, allowing our District to shift resources from retention and intervention services to classroom education and positive outlets for our children.

## *How We Must Work Differently*

Success requires a new way of doing business, from school receptionists and principals’ offices to classrooms to Central Office. It requires us to be more focused on our customers—students, families, District colleagues and the broader community—and more proactive rather than reactive about meeting their needs. We are working daily to change the culture of our district to one that is responsive, accountable and disciplined.

**Responsive:** We expect staff members to respond to requests or concerns from our customers within 48 hours. Wegmans’ world-renowned approach to excellent customer service is being shared with our staff through a formal training program.

**Accountable:** Staff members at all levels must be accountable for performing their jobs well and for improving student achievement. Everyone can play a role—from the cafeteria worker whose smile can brighten a child’s day, to the painter who can make teachers and students feel proud of their surroundings, to the service center workers who provide teachers textbooks and printed materials to do their crucial work. Accountability means rigorous evaluations not only for teachers and principals, but for every employee. It also requires us to shift resources to fund our priorities through the budget process.

**Disciplined:** Rather than flip-flopping names and themes and grade configurations, we must maintain focus on improving the schools we have. Between 2008 and 2011, the District started the phase-out of eight high schools and one elementary school; started the phase-in of five new high schools and one elementary school; and redesigned six schools by grade level or program. Instead of constantly changing school structures, we must maintain stability and continuity as much as possible. With relentless focus on our priorities, we can improve educational outcomes for children throughout our City.

## *District Priorities and Strategies*

### *Student Achievement*

In 2012-13, just 5% of our 3rd-through-8th graders demonstrated proficiency in the Common Core-based assessment in English Language Arts and Math. Our four-year graduation rate stands at 49%. Performance is especially low among African American students, Hispanic students, males, and English Language Learners. For the 2008 cohort, the graduation rate for students with disabilities was a shockingly low 19%. We face no more urgent task than to improve programs and services so that more students learn at higher levels.

How do we do it? First, by focusing our efforts. In the summer and fall of 2013, we convened dozens of the District’s top instructional leaders in a facilitated process to determine which academic priorities provide the greatest promise for driving significant, lasting improvement in our top District priority—student achievement and growth. We then created cross-functional teams to support each priority—more and better learning time, reading by 3rd grade, and instructional excellence. These teams are led by district and school personnel with support from community partners. **These teams are accountable for setting and achieving improvement targets. Through the budget process, we are purposefully shifting resources to support them.**



## Spotlight ◀ Summer Learning Loss

**Goal:** Prevent our youngest students from losing critical skills and knowledge over the summer by offering enriched, literacy-focused programs.

**Timetable:** Extend program to all pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade students by summer 2014.

**Status:** Program and funding requirements will be included in 2014-15 budget

### Our Top Three Academic Priorities to Drive Improved Achievement

**1. More and Better Learning Time:** The traditional school calendar (180 days of instruction, 6.3 hours per day) holds time constant and leaves the amount of learning as a variable. In high-poverty districts like Rochester, students need more time and support than students in higher-income districts, where most families are able to provide higher levels of support at home. Yet before the 2013-14 school year, Rochester students received the least instructional time of any group of students in Monroe County and were among the lowest in the nation.

To improve achievement, we are varying time in school to make student learning and growth a constant. We are increasing instructional time in multiple ways.

- This year, the District eliminated the 50-year practice of early dismissal on Wednesdays, which adds more than 29 hours of instructional time—nearly a full week of school—for all students over the course of a year.
- Buses are now required to arrive at least 15 minutes before bell time, so that students can be ready for instruction when the day begins.
- We've also added 200 hours of optional instruction time at 13 extended learning schools. Funded primarily by School Improvement Grants, these schools provide extra academic support to students who sign up, along with extracurricular activities.
- We've added 300 hours of instructional time at five expanded learning schools (Schools 9, 10, 23, 45, 46). These communities engaged in a collaborative, year-long process to rethink their schedules around a longer school day. They provide more development and planning time for teachers, with more academic support and enrichment activities for students, delivered in partnership with community-based organizations.

Taken together, these changes are increasing learning time by 18% to 30%. In the 2014-15 school year, we intend to provide expanded schedules at up to seven more schools. We are seeing evidence that expanded learning time boosts achievement. Early results indicate higher student growth, improved attendance, better student/teacher relationships, and fewer behavior problems at our expanded learning schools. In the 2012-13 school year, our first school with an expanded schedule—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School No. 9—achieved academic growth among the highest in the district, despite serving a student population that is among the most challenged.

We are also working aggressively to reduce summer learning loss. This problem is well-documented in studies and especially harmful to low-income students, who lose about a month's worth of math skills and two months in reading every July and August. **We served more than 10,000 students last summer, and we intend to make Rochester a leader at reducing summer learning loss through multiple efforts.**

- We are increasing summer enrichment activities to accelerate achievement. That means offering city children the same kinds of fun, safe, and educational group activities that middle-class families take for granted in the summer. One example is the Horizons Summer Enrichment Program, which has provided best-practice support to students for more than 20 years, with help from businesses and the broader community. Another is the Summer Scholars program funded by the Wallace Foundation, which will provide enriched learning for about 700 rising fourth-graders this summer as part of a national study on ways to curb learning loss. More than 2,000 District students received summer enrichment through programs like these in 2013, and we intend to grow this number in future years.
- In July and August of 2014, we will offer additional summer reading opportunities to every student who will be entering kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade next year. This is an investment in achieving the goal of helping students read on grade level by 3rd grade.







- Expanded partnerships with City government to increase summer reading. In 2013, 11 high-achieving juniors and seniors had summer jobs as literacy aides, working in city libraries to help younger children enjoy books and sharpen their literacy skills. We plan to expand that program and collaborate with the City in other ways to promote reading during summer break.

**2. Reading by 3rd Grade:** A critical factor in successful completion of high school is being able to read proficiently by 3rd grade. Why? Repeated research has shown that students must learn to read well by grade 3 in order to shift from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. **Students who cannot read on grade level by 3rd grade are four times less likely to graduate; if they are poor, that rises to 13 times less likely.**

We are pursuing a four-part strategy to increase the numbers of 3rd graders who can read well:

- Enroll all four-year-olds in quality pre-kindergarten, with full-day programs for as many students as possible. In February 2014, more than 820 students shifted from a half-day to a full-day program thanks to a \$5.9 million state expansion grant. More than 70% of pre-kindergarten students now attend for a full day, and our intent is to grow that percentage.
- Provide summer programs to reverse the historic pattern of learning loss for all students in pre-k through 3rd grades. We will continue to strengthen our relationship with Horizons and other community partnerships for expanded summer learning opportunities.
- Work with teachers to improve delivery of the Common Core literacy curriculum. Smart Notebooks are supporting K-2 ELA teachers with interactive lessons in English and Spanish.

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We will get children ready for college and careers when we achieve our goal of teaching them to read on grade level by third grade.

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- Increase the capacity of educators to use assessment data to target instruction to the skills students are struggling to master.

**3. Instructional Excellence:** Classroom instruction is the heart of what we do, and the poor achievement of our students requires us to do better. The Common Core instructional program provides an opportunity. Teachers, administrators and families must collaborate to help students learn new material and achieve higher expectations. We have invested significantly in professional learning to begin the process, sending hundreds of staff members to intensive workshops in Albany and providing more than 16,000 hours of professional learning devoted to Common Core instruction before fully implementing the curriculum in 2013-14. We also invested in more than 100 instructional and technology coaches this year to support roll-out of the curriculum.

Our cross-functional team is focused on sharing best practices in the classroom and using data to target instruction. We are identifying demonstration classrooms. We are also training Principals in how to recognize excellent instruction and guide teacher development towards that goal. In addition, linked to the Reading by 3rd Grade team, we are working to help teachers across the district use formative assessment data to guide their instruction. We are beginning to see signs that focusing on Common Core instruction will improve student learning. **In the January 2014 Regents examinations, more students took the Comprehensive English and Integrated Algebra exams than the previous year, and pass rates were higher.**

### Additional Strategies to Improve Student Achievement

**Arts, music, sports and extracurricular activities:** In the past, these offerings were viewed as “extras” that were often first on the chopping block when budgets were cut. We have shifted our thinking to one that recognizes them as essential investments in closing the opportunity gap. These activities help keep students positively engaged in school and with their peers. They also contribute to parent engagement, providing positive reasons for parents to visit and participate in their child’s school. We’ve added opportunities in all these areas, including the creation of 59 new sports programs.

**Consistent time for core instruction:** No matter where a student attends school in our district, he or she should



## Spotlight ◀ Career and Technical Education

**Goal:** Successfully prepare high school students for technical careers by restoring the quality and prominence of CTE programs, particularly at the Edison campus.

**Timetable:** Begin making improvements in fall 2014.

**Status:** We are moving immediately to implement industry assessments and accelerate state approval of CTE programs. Leadership and governance changes are under consideration.

count on receiving the same quality and time for instruction in core academic subjects, along with CTE, art, music and physical education. To make that a reality, we instituted a new master schedule District-wide in the 2013-14 school year. The implementation wasn't perfect, but we needed a new approach to address inconsistencies and shortfalls in previous scheduling at the school level.

- Many elementary schools offered little or no instruction in science and social studies.
- Some elementary schools offered music instruction but no art; others offered art with no music.
- Hundreds of high-school courses were not aligned with the rigor of the state Regents curriculum.

The new schedule ensures consistent instructional time in all subjects at every elementary school. **In the next school year, we will build on this foundation by ensuring every school has at least one full-time music teacher, and by maintaining all extra-curricular music programs.** At the high school level, we will ensure that all classes meet Regents requirements and work to increase the availability of Advanced Placement courses. Our five expanded-day schools manage their schedules internally, meeting or exceeding the time requirements of the master schedule. Our goal is to return more scheduling flexibility and control to the school level District-wide over time.

**Career and technical education:** Over the next five years, employers in our region will need to fill about 15,000 jobs in career paths that don't require a four-year college degree. Opportunities for these jobs are being promoted by the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council, representing major local employers in Rochester. Rochester was once a leader in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to help students obtain jobs like these, particularly at the renowned Edison Tech High School.

Unfortunately, we now offer city school students fewer career education opportunities than suburban students receive through BOCES. Only 7 of our 18 CTE programs are approved by the New York State Education Department. Graduates of approved programs get a technical endorsement on their diplomas that can help them to land a job. Rochester students who graduate from one of our CTE-focused high schools, on the Edison campus, typically receive 200 hours less career instruction than their counterparts in BOCES programs. None of our students last year took the technical assessments that should be routine at the completion of a CTE program. In fact, it appears that many students who take part in CTE programs may not even be properly recorded as doing so.

A thorough evaluation of District CTE offerings by the Career and Technical Education Technical Assistance Center of New York State is complete. We are moving immediately on some recommendations and exploring longer-term solutions to provide CTE programs that are once again as good or better as any in the community.

**Special education:** Similarly, we plan to overhaul our approach to educating children with disabilities. Just 19% of students with disabilities in the 2008 cohort graduated from high school with their class (by August of 2012), compared to 47% statewide. Only 3% graduated with a Regents diploma. Another 38% of the class dropped out, and the same proportion was still in school. These results reflect an outdated approach to providing special education services that is not meeting the needs of our students and families. We are moving aggressively to implement the practices that are achieving far better results in other "Big 5" districts and suburban schools. This requires us to change the way students are evaluated and classified, along with the way we deliver services.

## Effective, Efficient Allocation of Resources

We must use resources wisely to fund our priorities in a time of declining revenues. We also need a budget process that provides stability—ending the tradition of yo-yo budgeting, laying off and rehiring staff every summer, which has created uncertainty for students, families, staff members and the entire community every year. We have made progress finding efficiencies throughout the organization—identifying \$51.8 million in operational efficiencies over the past three years. An example is our shift to school-based tutoring, which is serving twice as many students with more learning time at lower cost. The Spending Money Smartly project, funded through the Gates Foundation and a New York State Efficiency Grant, is greatly improving our ability to produce sophisticated, long-term budget forecasts and target resources to priorities.

**Effective, Efficient Management Team:** This ongoing, cross-functional team will work to prioritize expenditures that benefit students and reduce or eliminate those that don't.





Two areas where we have found efficiencies away from the classroom are health care and facilities. By becoming self-insured for health care in 2011, we have saved more than \$7 million every year. We also must match our physical space to declining enrollment. As part of the Facilities Modernization Plan, we have closed some school buildings that are no longer needed and reduced the use of leased space. Over time, we will generate significant savings by aligning the space we use with our needs.

**Neighborhood School pilot program:** In 2013-14, we will spend \$52.4 million on transportation, 7% of our entire budget. Our school choice policy is a factor. Many parents choose schools further away from home in order to get bus service.

Having children attend high-quality neighborhood schools will help us to reduce transportation costs while improving instructional systems. **Neighborhood schools serve as lighthouses—they help families connect with each other in the neighborhood, raise property values and instill community pride.**

If most children attend schools close to where they live, we can afford to bus more students to school without increasing transportation costs. To demonstrate this, we are planning a pilot program in 2014-15 that will bus most or all students from one neighborhood to their neighborhood school. In the following year, we hope to expand the pilot with the passage of state legislation that supports transportation to neighborhood schools.

### Communication and Customer Service

We must instill throughout our district the notion that students and families are our customers. Our District exists to serve them. We must engage them and the broader community meaningfully and respectfully in the important work we do together.

**School orientation:** The start of a school year is a critical time to establish expectations and begin to build or reinforce relationships. Back-to-school orientation events

are standard in most districts but they were a rarity in Rochester until we began requiring them in 2012. We must continually improve these events and look for other ways to engage families with school.

**Listening and responding to stakeholders:** We have set expectations in several ways for effective, two-way communication. They include a 48-hour response to questions and concerns from parents, and twice-a-month Coffee & Conversation meetings where parents and community members can bring issues directly to the Superintendent. Beginning in 2013, we used new methods to gather input on the proposed budget, including a dedicated phone line and email account. We now hold Budget Open House events where top leaders explain District finances and listen to feedback that, in turn, will influence budget decisions. In the future, we will experiment with more ideas using technology to make participation easier.

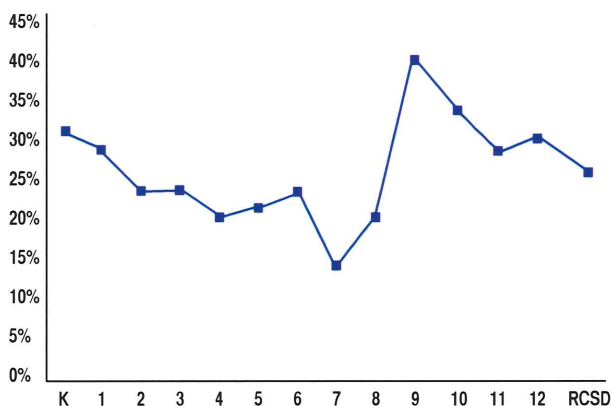
**Customer service:** We are learning from the best: Wegmans has trained our top leaders in their approach to working with customers, and they are passing it on to employees throughout the district. School secretaries are just one of the key groups that are learning to “be the very best at serving the needs of our customers,” as Wegmans puts it. We are indebted to the Wegmans organization for sharing their expertise and human resources to support our efforts.

### Parent, Family and Community Involvement

Students cannot excel without the support and active engagement of families and the broader community. All adults can help to educate our children in a variety of ways.

**Student attendance:** On any given day, about 3,000 city students are absent from school. More than 7,000 students are chronically absent—missing 18 or more days, or 10% of the school year or higher. Research shows a direct

**More than 7,500 District students are chronically absent. Students who miss 18 or more days (10% of the school year) are far more likely to struggle and drop out.**





link between attendance and achievement. Students with good or excellent attendance are likely to achieve well and graduate. Chronically absent students are far more likely to struggle academically, engage in misbehavior and drop out.

Attendance habits are formed at an early age, which is why we are targeting our improvement efforts on elementary schools. When a kindergartner or 2nd grader regularly misses school, it's not the student's problem—it's a community issue that requires us to better engage parents. We have led a community response to this critical issue, bringing the City of Rochester, the United Way, Monroe County and many other community resources together with an outside consultant. Most significantly, we are appealing to families and other adults in the lives of our students to help us in this effort. We are implementing best practices for getting more children to school.

We are training staff in how to carefully monitor attendance, intervene quickly and follow through, linking students and families to needed community services. Community volunteers, including employees at Central Office, make home visits to students not attending school. When we began in 2012-13 with 4 schools, average daily attendance increased from 88% to 90%, even as we improved record-keeping of attendance so that students were no longer automatically recorded as "present." We are now focusing on 8 schools and will focus on improved attendance as an essential goal.

**Student conduct:** It's a sad fact that most young people in Rochester have been affected by violence. Too often we read headlines about students or former students who have been seriously hurt or killed by violent crimes.

Tragedies like these have multiple victims—the families and friends who lose a loved one, the community that feels less safe, and the perpetrators. They have lost the hope that education should provide, succumbing to life on the streets. **We need a community-wide initiative to combat youth violence and other forms of misbehavior.** That is why we are convening a task force setting community-wide standards for how we expect young people to behave.

Similar to efforts in Denver, Buffalo and Baltimore, this group—coordinated by an experienced facilitator—will recommend improvements to our disciplinary approach

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Student violence and disrespectful behavior does not occur in schools alone and cannot be solved by schools independently. Our entire community, starting with students and parents, must agree on what constitutes proper behavior. Then we must work together to ensure those standards of behavior are met.

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## Spotlight ◀ Community Task Force on Student Behavior

**Goal:** Develop a community-wide approach to combating violence, disrespect and misbehavior by youth.

**Timetable:** Task force will work for a year to develop solutions by spring 2015

**Status:** Task force members will be appointed in March.

and help set a new code of conduct for young people. This process will be led by the Board of Education and we will engage all stakeholders—including students, parents, social service organizations, law enforcement, the faith community, teachers and administrators.

**Supporting literacy:** Parents and the community are essential parts of our reading-by-third-grade strategy. We promote aggressively the importance of reading outside of school—30 minutes, every child, every day. With leadership from the Roc the Future initiative, student literacy is a community-wide effort. They help us to coordinate school-based literacy with city libraries and recreation centers, the Rochester Education Foundation, local businesses and the RocRead partners who promote student reading and engage thousands of students over school breaks. Together, we are taking a community approach to instill a love of reading in every Rochester child.

**Parent engagement:** Parents are their children's first and most important teachers, and we need their full support as partners in education. For District staff, this means we must treat parents as respected partners. Parents must do their







part by getting their children to school, enforcing rules of conduct, reading together, ensuring that homework gets done, and encouraging children to give their best effort. We are taking steps wherever we can to increase the respect shown to parents. This includes relatively simple steps, like setting aside parking spots designated for parents outside schools and Central Office. We also have assigned at least one parent liaison to every school building. We will review their roles and responsibilities with the goal of achieving continuous, measurable improvement in parent support and participation.

## Management Systems

If good intentions were the key to academic achievement, Rochester would be performing among the best districts in the state. Our schools and Central Office are filled with talented, well-educated professionals. We've had no shortage of ideas to help students improve. What we've lacked is the strong management system and discipline to execute on ideas and hold people accountable for achieving results.

**Rigorous evaluations of all staff:** The Annual Professional Performance Review process required by New York is a step toward greater accountability. We are committed to helping Principals and other instructional leaders to improve their ability to assess classroom practice fairly and accurately, and to coach teachers on needed improvements. Effective evaluation and meaningful coaching of new teachers is particularly critical.

In addition, we are working to implement more rigorous evaluations of all employees, based on relevant student performance metrics. The Superintendent reviews evaluation results for all departments to ensure that they reflect high standards. In addition, new teachers and administrators can no longer expect to automatically receive tenure. Tenure must be earned through demonstrated contributions to student achievement and growth, plus advancement of other District priorities.

Before APPR, we had an evaluation system where virtually all adults were told they are doing a good job while students had the lowest performance in New York State. We intend to use the evaluations as a ladder to drive continuous improvement—the goal of every profession—and not as a hammer to threaten poor performers.

**High ethical standards:** As educators, we are entrusted with the community's most valuable resources—our children. That requires us to maintain the highest ethical standards as we do our jobs each day. Through internal education and enforcement, we will ensure that staff members at all levels observe the New York State educator's code of ethical conduct.

**New school managers:** While we work to become a more accountable and disciplined organization, some of our schools could benefit from the leadership of external managers. Colleges and other organizations offer proven management expertise that could quickly enhance an individual school, building confidence among families. That school would be an incubator for fresh management ideas that could be applied to other schools. We will explore the feasibility of turning some of our schools over not only to colleges or universities, but also to groups of parents and teachers or other qualified and committed organizations. Bold, experimental ideas must be considered given the low performance we are achieving now.

**Ensuring students have access to textbooks:** For too many years, our district has not been able to provide all students all the textbooks they need. The issue isn't money, it's management. We are implementing a new system to fix this problem, ensuring that teachers have the texts and materials they need before the school year begins. Students can take textbooks home, and we will provide low-cost classics they can make notes in and keep for independent reading or class assignments. We will also provide teachers of Common Core subject areas with classroom libraries of materials to support instruction.

## Spotlight ◀ Externally Managed Schools

**Goal:** Recruit qualified, external organizations to manage some schools.

**Timetable:** Turn over management of one school in fall 2015

**Status:** Several organizations are considering or developing proposals by May 2014





## *Yes, We Can!*

Every action described in this document requires careful planning, disciplined execution, and accountability for achieving results. The challenges are complex; the need to improve is urgent. This is the time to focus and finish.

In short, the road to success will not be easy. But we will get there. We have a compass to guide our work as simple as the Golden Rule. Every day, in every interaction and decision, the adults of the Rochester City School District must treat our students as we would want our own children to be treated. If we do that, success is inevitable.

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Our staff is highly trained and talented. Our students have the desire and potential to succeed. We have the support of a generous community. Working together, we can make Rochester the best city in urban America to teach, work in or attend a school.

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## *How We Will Assess Progress*

The 2008-2013 strategic plan identified more than 40 measures for tracking progress. Many of these were never actually tracked, because the baseline data was not collected and targets were never set.

We believe that a few key measures can provide the leading indicators of our improvement as an organization. Through the performance review process, we can rigorously assess the contribution of individual employees to achieving District priorities and help them to continuously improve.

TARGETS	BASELINE (2012-13)	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Attendance <sup>1</sup>	91%	91%	92%	93%	94%	95%
3rd Grade Reading <sup>2</sup>	5%	10%	15%	25%	50%	60%
Graduation <sup>3</sup>	48%	50%	60%	65%	70%	70%
College Readiness <sup>4</sup>	5%	7%	10%	20%	25%	30%
Grade 3-8 ELA	5%	10%	15%	25%	50%	60%
Grade 3-8 Math	5%	10%	15%	25%	50%	60%
Growth Scores <sup>5</sup>	4.6	6	8	9	11	13

<sup>1</sup> Average daily attendance District-wide. We also will track the percentage of chronically absent students

<sup>2</sup> ELA test data for grade 3, AIMS web assessment for K-2

<sup>3</sup> Graduation cohorts include all active and inactive students

<sup>4</sup> Students who score 75% on Regents ELA and 80% on Regents math exams or better

<sup>5</sup> Mean Growth Scores for District teachers calculated by NYSED and converted to "HEDI" scores for APPR. A "9" is the state average for student growth.





## How to Support Us

## What Parents Can Do

## What the Community Can Do

### Attendance

Require children to attend school every day

Attend truancy outreach events  
 Help families address barriers that interfere with attendance  
 Monitor attendance  
 Ask students why they aren't in school, don't serve them in your business during school hours

### Reading

Read to or with your children

- Every child
- At least 30 minutes outside of school
- Every single day

Ask children what they are reading  
 Tell them about your favorite books and stories  
 Purchase books to donate to schools and families

### Proper behavior

Insist that children treat teachers, staff members, and classmates with respect  
 Teach them that violence is never acceptable

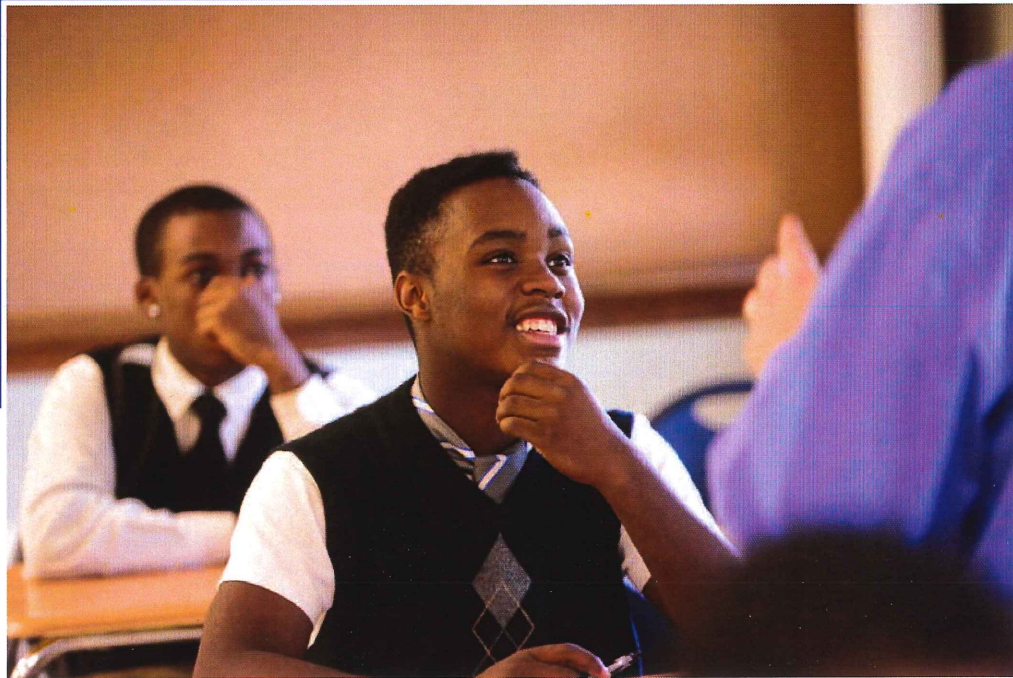
Engage in a community review of the district code of conduct  
 Mentor students

### Effort

Provide a quiet place and consistent time for study  
 Ensure they get enough sleep  
 Make homework a requirement

- Expect about 10 minutes per day, per grade level

Talk to students about how they are doing in school  
 Engage in friendly competitions for higher grades, attendance  
 Tutor students



*Life's greatest gift  
is the opportunity to throw oneself into a job  
that puts meaning and hope into the lives  
of other people.*

*Seizing this opportunity is the surest way  
to put meaning and hope into one's own life.*

- Martin Haberman  
Star Teachers of Children in Poverty



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