

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting
May 19, 2016

Attending: Malik Evans (Chair); Commissioners White, Powell, and Elliott (arrived 6:34PM)

Parent Representative: Toyin Anderson

District Staff: Adele Bovard, Deputy Superintendent of Administration; Dr. Jennifer Gkourlias, Chief of Curriculum & Special Programs; Dr. Christiana Otuwa, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning; Superintendent Linda Cimusz; Mayra Ortiz, Director of Bilingual Programs; Dr. Shaun Nelms, Superintendent of East High School; Dr. Larry Ellison, Principal of School No. 33

Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Members of the Special Military Academy Advisory Committee: Todd Baxter, Co-Chair; Lt. Colonel Ulises Miranda, Co-Chair; Mary Courtney; Colonel Andraé Evans; Captain Joseph Geiger

Community Members: Dave Bob; Jaysah Peguero, student at Integrated Arts & Technology High School; LaShunda Leslie-Smith, Executive Director of Connected Communities, Inc.; Holly Budd, Chair of the Board of Connected Communities, Inc.

Commissioner Evans called the meeting to order at 6:28PM.

I. Review Minutes of April 21, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner White to approve the minutes of the April 21, 2016 Excellence in Student Achievement Committee Meeting. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of the Parent Representative.**

II. Report and Recommendations of the Special Military Academy Advisory Committee

Mr. Dave Bob shared his experience in military service, noting that there were few opportunities when he was in high school to explore this career path or to prepare for service. He also discussed the impact that the JROTC program has had on his son, describing the benefits of the structure, discipline, and camaraderie provided through the program. Mr. Bob reported that his son was able to overcome significant behavioral problems to rise to the highest level of cadet in the JROTC program, and is now preparing to serve in the National Guard. He urged the members of the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee to consider establishing a military school in the District to serve students like his son and to expand opportunities for all.

Jaysah Peguero, a student at the Integrated Arts & Technology High School, also discussed the benefits of having a military academy in the District. She reported the results of a survey that she conducted at her school, which found that 85% of students support establishing a JROTC program at the school. Jaysah added that many parents and students would appreciate the more rigorous and disciplined environment of a military school.

Todd Baxter described the charge to the Special Advisory Committee, and the process by which the work was performed. The Advisory Committee consisted of active and retired military personnel, researchers, educators, and community members, who met bi-weekly over a 60-day period. Mr. Baxter noted that subcommittees were created to expedite the feasibility study and to focus on specific considerations involved in establishing a military academy in the District: Legal, Community Input, Curriculum and School Type, and Budget subcommittees.

Colonel Andraé Evans discussed the governing rules for the Special Advisory Committee, noting that the feasibility study was based on surveys, community forums, and outreach to the minority community in Rochester. He stated that further outreach efforts to the African American and Hispanic community were needed because of their under-representation among survey respondents. Colonel Evans reported that the Spanish version of the survey was re-opened, and members of the clergy were contacted in the African American and Hispanic community.

The members of the Special Advisory Committee recommended:

- Establishing a stand-alone, co-ed, public military academy in the Rochester City School District
- Allowing students to be admitted from Monroe County, but with the majority from the Rochester City School District
- Opening the school with a small cohort of students (75) in 9th grade and adding another cohort in each successive year, until the school has cohorts in grades 7-12 with a total of 450 students

Mary Courtney explained that a standalone program school was recommended to facilitate approval by the NYS Education Department; allow students to have connections to a home school; and enable students to participate in extracurricular activities in the District. She reported that a majority of survey respondents supported a co-educational and regional approach, as well as drawing the majority of students from the Rochester City School District.

Lt. Colonel Ulises Miranda discussed recommendations regarding leadership of the proposed military school, specifically the role of the commandant in establishing the Code of Conduct, overall discipline within the school, and supervising disciplinary interventions. In addition to the commandant, he stated that the leadership of the proposed military school would include a middle school principal and high school principal who would primarily be responsible for academics. Lt. Colonel Miranda explained that the principals and commandant would report to an Academy Director, who would have ultimate authority and responsibility over the school.

Colonel Andraé Evans discussed student discipline as one of the crucial aspects to be addressed

in establishing a military school. He reported that the Special Advisory Committee recommends using a model created at Cornell University, which involves differentiating interventions according to the needs of the individual student. Colonel Evans described the model as tiered crisis intervention:

- Prevention
- De-Escalation
- Effective management of acute crises
- Minimize potential and actual injury
- Learn constructive ways to handle stressful situations
- Develop a learning circle within the organization

Dr. Jennifer Gkourlias reviewed the recommended curriculum for the school, pointing out that the focus would be on academic rigor to prepare students for college. She stated that a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) 4+1 diploma pathway would be offered to facilitate students' entry into promising career paths. Below are the Special Advisory Committee's recommended requirements for graduation:

- Math: 4 years; pass 2 Regents exams
- Science: 4 years; pass 2 Regents exams
- English: 4 years; pass Regents exam
- Social Studies: 4 years; pass Global History and U.S. History Regents exams
- Language other than English: 4 years
- Health/Physical Education
- Arts and Technology
- Service Learning

Colonel Evans discussed the core elements of the proposed military academy, emphasizing the importance of promoting student leadership by enabling students to develop activities, assume increasing responsibility, and discipline themselves through a student court (with adult guidance). He stated that the school would have a Medal of Honor Society, which includes a curriculum for teaching students how to develop discipline, leadership, and self-improvement to attain goals. Colonel Evans stressed that the purpose of the proposed military academy would be to create leaders to serve their communities, rather than to promote entry into military service. He added that less than 10% of students who attend a military school go on to enter military service.

Ms. Courtney reviewed performance data from public military schools throughout the country in comparison to the district in which the school is located. She noted that graduation rates were significantly higher in public military schools than for their constituent districts. Ms. Courtney asserted that students achieve at higher levels in military-type schools than in other types of schools. She pointed out that these results can only be obtained if military school is an option chosen by students. She emphasized that a military academy cannot be used as a disciplinary measure, punishment, or strictly to remediate students with behavioral problems.

Lt. Colonel Miranda reported a number of research studies demonstrating the positive effects of

military school on student attitudes, attendance, skill acquisition, and self-discipline in preparation for post-secondary education and future success in life. He discussed the findings from his own doctoral dissertation, which revealed many misconceptions among school administrators about JROTC programs and military academies. Lt. Colonel Miranda found that administrators with some experience or exposure to military service tended to be more supportive, perceiving JROTC programs as providing opportunities for youth to gain life skills. He discussed the implications of these findings in terms of the District conducting a public education campaign to inform parents, students, and community members of the essential elements and benefits of a military school.

Commissioner Evans announced that the final report of the Special Military Academy Advisory Committee will be forwarded to the members of the Finance Committee for review and consideration. He asked whether the feasibility study only included public military schools. Ms. Courtney replied that the military academies in Philadelphia and Chicago are district public schools, but Buffalo has a charter military school.

Commissioner Powell questioned the rationale for creating a military academy, rather than expanding the JROTC program to additional schools in the District. Lt. Colonel Miranda responded that students' behavior and expectations are markedly different while in the JROTC program, as compared to the remainder of the school day. He stated that a military academy would affect student conduct and expectations throughout the day for all students, yielding greater benefits. Lt. Colonel Miranda explained that while the JROTC program can be expanded to additional RCSD schools, it will not have as great an impact as a military school.

Commissioner Evans inquired whether any of the military schools studied had a residential component. Lt. Colonel Miranda confirmed that residential military schools were included in the study, and one argument is that a boarding requirement is essential for a true military academy. He pointed out that the Special Advisory Committee had to consider the best fit for the Rochester community, and a residential military school would present a substantial cost to the District. Lt. Colonel Miranda added that this option could certainly be considered in the future. Ms. Courtney reported that a number of survey respondents and focus group participants expressed interest in a residential option.

Commissioner Elliott expressed concern that the survey results may not be representative of the Rochester community, particularly in light of under-representation of African Americans and Hispanics among survey respondents. She asked about the rationale for reaching out to the entire county, when the military school would be located in the City School District. Colonel Evans replied that the Special Advisory Committee viewed the option of a military academy as an opportunity to reverse the flight out of the City by drawing students and families from the suburbs. He noted that additional efforts were made by the Special Advisory Committee to reach out to the African American and Hispanic community.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that military service has been one of the few career options available to African Americans throughout U.S. history, but African Americans have often been sent to combat to fight for others' rights without obtaining their own freedom. She noted that many African American families may support military schools because they perceive military

service as one of the last options available to their children to attain quality of life in this country. Commissioner Elliott emphasized the importance of understanding that some resistance to a military school may be encountered in the black community because of this history.

Colonel Evans discussed his own personal history in military service, having worked his way up the ranks from a private to a colonel. He acknowledged the ambivalence within the African American community regarding military service. Colonel Evans pointed out that approximately 25% of African Americans live in poverty, and questioned the rationale for denying these children a pathway to success by denying them an opportunity to attend a school focusing on STEM and leading technology (e.g. robotics, cybertech, and security). He emphasized that the structure of the military enables African American officers to assume authority and impart knowledge to those who would not otherwise be aware of their talents and abilities, thereby helping to overcome racial stereotypes and misconceptions.

Commissioner White commented that the District has experienced a significant outflow of families to the suburbs, and the views/attitudes of county residents must be considered in studying the feasibility of a new school. He underscored the importance of focusing on opportunities to reverse this historic trend.

Commissioner Powell noted that she has supported JROTC programs in the past, confirming that students participating in JROTC programs are not more likely to enter into military service. She explained that she has opposed sharing students' personal information with military recruiters because of the military's previous "don't ask, don't tell" policy, which has since been found to be discriminatory.

Commissioner Powell discussed her participation in a recent cultural competence workshop conducted by Dr. DeGruy. She reported that in response to her inquiry, Dr. DeGruy expressed opposition to a military school because of the focus on military culture and discipline instead of honoring the individual's cultural heritage. Commissioner Powell expressed concern about the implications of a military school supplanting the cultural heritage of the family and thereby denying the child a sense of identity and belonging.

Colonel Evans contended that military culture teaches honor, discipline, and service, which is directly drawn from the African American church and culture. He discussed the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in emphasizing moral courage and selfless service.

Commissioner Elliott underscored the importance of appreciating an individual's culture because it is inherent to their identity and self-worth, and the diversity of cultures has enriched this country.

Commissioner White commented on his own personal experience with his father-in-law, who has a military background and has not abandoned his African American culture. He noted that it is not necessary to abandon one's own culture to adopt military culture. Captain Joseph Geiger reported that the most heartbreaking aspect of serving as a military recruiter is seeing that so many youth in the Rochester community are not qualified to pursue this opportunity. He

stated that the higher standards adopted by the military have resulted in only one in eight young people to be considered eligible for service.

Parent Representative Toyin Anderson observed that the report of the Special Advisory Committee indicated a lower level of support for a military academy in the District than in the suburbs, yet the majority of students are to come from the District. She asked how this dilemma would be addressed. Ms. Courtney replied that the members of the Special Advisory Committee recommend that the military school not be comprised of a majority of suburban students, and the actual mechanism for admissions would have to be developed with the Board and the District.

Commissioner Evans noted that several Board members were unable to attend this evening's meeting, but have submitted questions and comments about the feasibility study. He asked Board staff to contact all of the commissioners to request their questions and comments to submit to members of the Special Advisory Committee.

Action Item: Board staff will contact all commissioners to request their questions and comments regarding the military academy feasibility study, which will be forwarded to the members of the Special Advisory Committee.

III. Discuss Proposed Textbook Adoption for 60 Bilingual Classes

Mayra Ortiz explained that a new textbook is needed for bilingual classes because currently available materials do not contain culturally relevant content, and therefore deny an equal education to these students. She emphasized the importance of utilizing students' native language as a bridge to English language acquisition, which existing materials do not provide. Ms. Ortiz also reported that the materials currently used in bilingual classes lack academic rigor and do not enable students to progress sufficiently.

Ms. Ortiz noted that four vendors responded to the District's Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new textbook: Pearson, Santillana, McGraw Hill, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. She stated that the Textbook Selection Committee did not favor the proposal presented by Pearson because the writing component was too limited, and the Santillana proposal was also withdrawn from consideration because the materials were only available in Spanish. Ms. Ortiz reported that the Textbook Selection Committee chose Houghton Mifflin Harcourt because this proposal offered greater opportunity for differentiation of instruction and Response to Intervention, an online component, and a greater variety of student resources. She added that the publisher has also offered support for the period of time that the District adopts the textbook.

IV. Presentation regarding Connected Communities and Proposed Partnership between School No. 33 and East High School

LaShunda Leslie-Smith, Executive Director of Connected Communities, provided an overview of the proposed partnership between School No. 33 and East High School. She reported that the partnership has been initiated by the Beechwood and Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Associations, and has aligned with the Anti-Poverty Task Force. Ms. Leslie-Smith explained

that Connected Communities are holistic models of community development that include:

- Cradle to Career Education
- Economic and Workforce Development
- A Mix of Low- and Middle-Income Housing
- A combination of support services and facilities to promote community health, reflect priorities of neighborhood residents, promote healthy lifestyles, reduce crime, and create jobs

Dr. Shaun Nelms pointed out that one of the key components of the educational partnership between the District and the University of Rochester for East High School is to create a neighborhood community. He noted that East High School and School No. 33 are located in the Beechwood neighborhood. Dr. Nelms asserted that School No. 33 would be a natural partner for East High School in creating a cradle to career pipeline in this community, providing stability and continuity for resident families and students. He reported that 21% of the students attending School No. 33 reside in the neighborhood and 5% of neighborhood residents attend East High School. Dr. Nelms explained that East High School would accept fewer 6th-grade students in the future to focus on supporting students in grades 4-6 at School No. 33 to provide a smooth transition between schools. He asserted that a robust design and process between the two schools would lead students from the neighborhood to choose East High School for their secondary education.

Dr. Nelms stated that he and School No. 33 Principal Larry Ellison share the same goals in developing a community school, which would offer health, dental, and wellness services to students and their families in the neighborhood. He added that the two schools plan to leverage support from the Farash Foundation to establish the partnership.

Principal Ellison reported that he has long expanding the reach of School No. 33 and addressing the dispersion of students throughout the District after 6th grade. He stated that 6th grade students at School No. 33 visit the University of Rochester to encourage rigor and discipline to advance academically.

Dr. Nelms discussed SAT test results, noting that only seven East High School students scored the minimum of 1000 to qualify for a scholarship to the University of Rochester. He contended that students in suburban schools have a sense of belonging to a larger community because they know in advance which high school they will attend. Dr. Nelms pointed out that this proposed partnership could also be replicated elsewhere in the District. He stated that this is an opportune time because of the support of the East High School educational partnership and the Farash Foundation.

Holly Budd explained that the premise underlying the proposed partnership to develop a purpose-built community is to help transform neighborhoods and address intergenerational poverty through quality education. She stated that a cradle-to-college plan must be presented for approval by the Purpose-Built Communities organization to obtain their support and assistance in this transformation. Ms. Budd referred to a number of innovative models that have been supported by the Farash Foundation, such as the partnership with School No. 17 to convert to a community school. She stated that the Foundation has been working with East High School

on the proposed partnership, and is prepared to commit to the project for ten years.

Commissioner Evans noted that he has advocated for these types of partnerships in neighborhoods for quite some time. He expressed concern about not keeping PreK students in the same school when they enter kindergarten and elementary school. Commissioner Evans asked about the response of neighborhood organizations to the proposed partnership between School No. 33 and East High School. Ms. Leslie-Smith replied that the neighborhood organizations are strongly in support of neighborhood schools and eager to proceed with this partnership.

Commissioner Evans inquired about the capacity of School No. 33 and East High School to serve all of the students in the neighborhood. Principal Ellison responded that he does not have the data at this point, but suspected that all of the students in the neighborhood could be accommodated.

Commissioner Powell recalled that before the Parent Preference/Managed Choice policy was established, the boundaries for School No. 33 had to be extended to obtain enough students to fill such a large school. She asked for clarification about the specific request being made with respect to the proposed partnership between schools. Commissioner Powell pointed out that half of the District's parents do not participate in the school choice lottery, and the administrators of School No. 33 and East High School could reach out to residents to promote neighborhood schools without approval by the Board of Education. She stated that Parent Liaisons/Home School Assistants can canvass the school catchment area to actively recruit children from the neighborhood.

A volunteer at School No. 33 reported that the school already reaches out to neighborhood residents, provides registration packets to parents, and assists parents with the registration process. She contended that keeping PreK children in the same school upon entry into kindergarten is essential to encourage parents to select School No. 33.

Commissioner Powell noted that many of the children attending the PreK program at School No. 33 are not from the neighborhood, adding that recent data shows that 43% of the students attending the school do not even reside in the NE zone.

Commissioner White asked why PreK students cannot be placed in their neighborhood school, particularly since only 50% of parents are participating in the school choice process.

Commissioner Powell responded that NYS law requires that selection of schools/programs at the PreK level be based on parent preference. Adele Bovard confirmed that there is a discrepancy between the State's rules at the PreK and Kindergarten/Elementary levels regarding school choice and student placement.

Commissioner White questioned why a student couldn't be placed in a neighborhood school if their parents have not participated in the school choice process. Ms. Bovard replied that the practice of placing students in their neighborhood school was put in place last year. She explained that it will take time to correct past practices, which did not focus on placing students

in their neighborhood school when parents did not express a preference.

Commissioner Elliott observed that many members of the African American community believe that the school choice policy was established to gentrify the District. She pointed out that school renovations have not been conducted in the most impoverished areas of the District, which has contributed to this perception. Commissioner Elliott reported that there is considerable concern about upgrading other areas of the City as part of a gentrification initiative to supplant African American communities and undermine the education of African American children. She noted that the educational partnership for East High School has not been in place for very long, and asked about the school's readiness and capacity to undertake new initiatives at this point. Dr. Nelms replied that the educational partnership supports a community school to provide greater stability and continuity for students and families. Dr. Nelms added that the long-term plan would involve changing School No. 33 to a K-5 school, and creating a 6-12 school at East High School. He emphasized the importance of making the most of this opportunity, since East High School has only one more year left to obtain receivership funding from the State.

Commissioner Evans inquired about actions that can be taken now, emphasizing the importance of promoting neighborhood schools to reduce the District's transportation costs. Dr. Nelms responded that the proposed community school partnership would begin in the 2016-17 school year. Superintendent Cimusz added that a plan is already in place.

Ms. Budd stated that a commitment is needed from the District to designate School No. 33 and East High School as community schools to obtain support as a purpose-built community.

Commissioner Evans pointed out that the Excellence in Student Achievement Committee is not yet voting on this proposal, but offered to disseminate the information to the entire Board of Education for consideration. He stated that additional presentations and discussion will be held about the proposed School No. 33 and East High School partnership.

Commissioner Elliott inquired about the success of purpose-built communities in other parts of the country. Ms. Leslie-Smith replied that a purpose-built community has been operating effectively since 2000 in the East Lake section of Atlanta.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that the East Lake section of Atlanta is relatively affluent, and questioned the applicability to the City of Rochester and the Rochester City School District.

Commissioner Powell asserted that one of two approaches could be adopted under current NYS law and District school choice policy: 1) Offer opportunities for UPK students to remain in the same school for Kindergarten and Elementary School; or 2) Only open Kindergarten classrooms to children who reside in the neighborhood. Commissioner Powell noted that establishing a neighborhood school at School No. 33 beginning at the PreK level would require a substantial reduction in the number of PreK students at the school, and placing the remaining students in other RCSD schools that do not currently have a PreK program. She stated that either PreK or neighborhood parents would be able to have their preference of programs/schools because NYS law does not allow the District to place PreK children in programs/schools based on

neighborhood residence.

Action Item: Board staff will request legal advice the General Counsel regarding NYS law governing PreK school choice and student placement.

Dr. Nelms emphasized that parents would continue to exercise school choice, but the partnership is intended to encourage neighborhood residents to choose East High School for their child's secondary education.

Commissioner Elliott requested information regarding students' scores on standardized NYS exams. Principal Ellison reported that students at School No. 33 scored slightly above average for the District on the NYS ELA exam, and significantly above the average on the NYS Math exam. He pointed out that using NYS standardized test scores makes it appear as though students are failing, but NWEA results indicate that an increasing number of students are meeting targets.

Commissioner Elliott questioned the intent underlying the proposed partnership and involvement of the Farash Foundation. Ms. Budd replied that the Foundation is aware of the challenges in the District and wants to provide opportunities for children to succeed. She explained that the Farash Foundation is focusing on a holistic approach with children and families to help transform neighborhoods within the City.

V. Presentation and Discussion of Student Suspension in RCSD Secondary Schools

In view of the length of this evening's Committee meeting, Commissioner Evans announced that the presentation and discussion of student suspension will be postponed until next month's meeting. He instructed Board staff to share the student suspension presentation with Superintendent Cimusz.

Action Item: Board staff will provide a copy of the presentation regarding student suspension in RCSD secondary schools to Superintendent Cimusz.

Meeting adjourned at 9:13PM.