

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: REVIEW OF THE 2019-2020 ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

April 2019

Introduction

The purpose of The Children's Agenda's review of the RCSD budget, along with our annual reviews of the City and County budgets, is to break open the budget process in a way that increases transparency, accountability and parent empowerment. We present information about RCSD revenue and expenditures, including changes proposed in the budget currently under consideration. We offer a detailed look at four areas that are prominent in parents' concerns: **special education, English language learners, school climate, and early childhood education.**

We hope our annual review will act as a catalyst for change, leading to more effective and evidence-based use of RCSD funds and a brighter future for its students.

We are especially dedicated to empowering parents to become advocates for their children in the RCSD budget process. Because residents do not vote on their school budget in the City of Rochester, parents have limited influence in the decision-making process. To that end, we continue to recommend that District leadership take steps to make the budget process more transparent to parent and community input.

This report is about how resources impact children's lives and is not an overall assessment of the RCSD or its leadership. Rather than search for easy answers, The Children's Agenda aims to provide the clarity and political will for improving outcomes.

Transparency

Information is power. To empower parents the budget document must be readable and accessible.

Positive Steps for 2019-2020

- The budget book was released a full 10 days earlier in 2019;
- The 2019-20 proposed budget was balanced;
- Community input sessions were held prior to the release of the proposed budget.

Concerns for 2019-2020

- The steep drop in fund balance usage has led to so many cuts that it will be difficult to evaluate the impact of every change;
- Districtwide staff changes are not adequately summarized with sufficient detail;
- Department and school budgets still do not include a column for changes to FTEs or a summary of FTE changes;
- The use of non-standard favorable/unfavorable labeling for changes in the budget creates confusion about negative and positive numbers.

Recommendations - Transparency

- ❖ **Position Code Summary**
- ❖ **Use Normal Accounting Practices**
- ❖ **Add Column for School-Based Position Changes**

School Climate

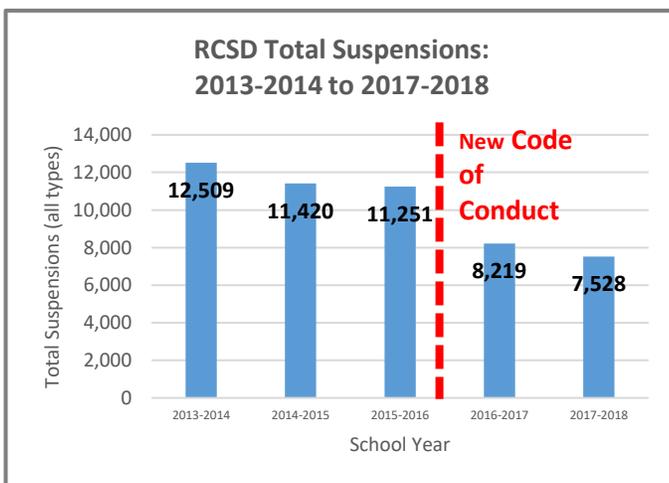
A welcoming and supportive school climate is essential for children to learn and grow, both academically and socially.

Positive Steps for 2019-2020

- 39 schools have participated in restorative practices trainings and more will join them in 2019-2020 if the Roc Restorative Team is restored to the adopted budget;
- Suspensions have decreased 40 percent in 5 years and are on pace to decrease further in the 2018-2019 school year;
- Roc3D Dashboard was launched this school year that displays unduplicated suspension rates, however the numbers have not been updated for several months.

Concerns for 2019-2020

- 10 Restorative Coaches cut from the Roc Restorative Team (Teachers on Assignment);
- \$3.5 million reduction in Professional Technical Services, affecting contracts with Center for Youth, The Gandhi Institute, and Partners in Restorative Initiatives;
- \$250K cut from staffing help zones, will result in 5 help zones being closed;
- \$110K cut from contracts with Partners in Restorative Initiatives and The Gandhi Institute;
- \$25K cut from contract with the Center for Dispute Settlement that runs peer mediation services;
- Staffing for the long-term elementary suspension program is being cut because of the low number of students using the program. This could be a positive development, however, the alternative plan for elementary long-term suspensions has not been made public, raising concerns about where students will be placed.



Recommendations – School Climate

- ❖ **Restore the 10 Teachers on Assignment**
- ❖ **Restore Funding For Help Zones and Other Building Supports**
- ❖ **Ban Suspensions for Grades K-2**
- ❖ **Limit Long-Term Suspensions to 20 Days**
- ❖ **Approve Robust Data Sharing Agreement and Quarterly Public Data Reports**
- ❖ **Adopt the School Climate Advisory Committee Recommendations**
- ❖ **Train All Staff on the Code of Conduct**

Special Education

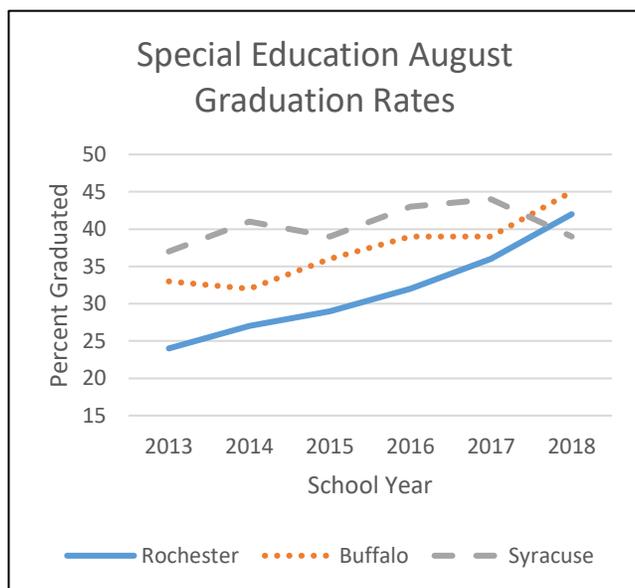
A thriving school district supports every child's developmental, physical, and academic needs.

Positive Steps for 2019-2020

- Reestablishing integrated co-teaching in high schools;
- Expanding bilingual options for students with disabilities;
- All Committee on Special Education meetings held at central office except for annual reviews;
- Assistant principals will gradually take responsibility for annual reviews with embedded professional development from the centralized evaluation team.

Concerns for 2019-2020

- 40 Coordinating Administrators of Special Education replaced by centralized evaluation team of 16 teachers and administrators;
- The size of the centralized evaluation team (administrators and teachers) is currently budgeted for 16 positions but requires an additional 12 positions to manage their caseloads (28 total);
- There has not been sufficient time to incorporate the recommendations in the new consent decree for special education into the 2019-2020 budget, as well as the recommendations from the New York Attorney General's report, and Distinguished Educator's report.



Recommendations – Special Education

- ❖ **Adequate Staffing for Centralizing CSE**
- ❖ **Designate Assistant Principals for CSE who also Handle Discipline**
- ❖ **Consistent Mandatory Professional Development**
- ❖ **Align Continuum of Special Education Services**

English Language Learners

Cultural and linguistic diversity is something unique to Rochester that should be celebrated and deepened.

Positive Steps for 2019-2020

- The Bilingual and Language Literacy Academy has increased its enrollment to 145 students and has dedicated space at 30 Hart Street for the next 3 years;
- The creation of an ESOL Director position that will have more authority to direct best practices for ESOL teachers than the current ESOL coaches.;

- Edison Career and Technology High School’s bilingual program for 9-12 graders has been staffed for 2018-19 and will continue in 2019-20.

Concerns for 2019-2020

- 64 bilingual staff are serving as long-term substitutes because they lack teacher certifications;
- A comprehensive plan for English Language Learners and Bilingual Education has yet to be developed;
- Lack of centralized decision-making about what bilingual programs are used across the district (building-level decision).

Recommendations - English Language Learners

- ❖ *Permanent Location for Bilingual Language and Literacy Academy*
- ❖ *Strategic Plan for English Language Learner Achievement and Alignment*
- ❖ *Path to Certification for Uncertified Bilingual Staff*

Early Childhood Education

RCSD has a thriving preschool education system that demonstrates what this school district can achieve with the right systems in place.

Positive Steps for 2019-2020

- Rochester Preschool Parent Program (RPPP) positions are moved from buildings to the Early Childhood Office, which may provide for more consistency in those roles.
- The District received \$2.1 M in December 2018 to fund up to 164 additional 3-year-old EPK spots. This was the second-highest award given by New York State – only New York City received more;
- The District’s high performing Pre-K program is stable amidst many other changes within RCSD. This allows a consistent approach to high-quality early childhood education.

Concerns for 2019-2020

- Preschool Special Education is moved to K-12 Specialized Services because of the severe shortage of professionals available for evaluations and services like occupational and physical therapy, speech-language pathology, and teachers of the blind and deaf. This is particularly concerning with all Coordinating Administrator of Special Education positions being eliminated in the budget;
- The UPK and EPK programs might lose experienced PreK teachers who take advantage of the retirement bonus being offered by the district;
- Teachers with little PreK experience might be moved into those vacated positions based on seniority, threatening the quality of the program;

Recommendations - Early Childhood Education

- ❖ *Evaluate Effectiveness of Moving Preschool Special Education into Specialized Services*
- ❖ *Professional Development for Specialized Services Staff in Preschool Education*
- ❖ *Consider Creative Approaches for Developmental Services*
- ❖ *Improve Pre-K to Kindergarten Transition*