



Serving Children and Parents First

Implementing Mayoral Accountability

Mayor Robert J. Duffy
City of Rochester, NY
March 15, 2010

“The district must reform itself – now – or
relinquish forever any claim to autonomy.
If the district demonstrates no will to reform
itself, the Governor and legislature will have no
choice but to transfer its control to City Hall.
We can – and we will – do the job.”

Mayor William A. Johnson, Jr.
State of the City Address
March 3, 2003



To Rochester Parents and Taxpayers:

In anticipation of draft State legislation coming out soon, I would like to begin sharing with you some components of our upcoming draft plan on how a change in school governance would look.

As evidenced by the quote on the opposite page from Mayor William Johnson's State of the City Address of 2003, the time for talking about change has ended. Our community has had these discussions and studies over the past two decades. The time is now to institute changes which will benefit both children and their parents and caregivers. Changes are needed now to ensure that the focus of our resources and energy is put where it belongs – in the classroom. It is irrefutable that the priorities of the current system revolve around adults more than children. We intend to change this.

This is the second of several documents concerning school governance. The first, entitled "Putting Children First" described suggestions for a framework for a new system for Rochester that includes mayoral accountability. It laid out the reasons why we need change – namely, the decades-long record of unacceptable student performance levels and graduation rates. This document will begin to lay out how we can improve conditions within the first two years of our proposed five-year trial period of City versus School Board governance.

On March 9, 2010 the State Education Department released the 2009 graduation rates for the Rochester City School District. Our students' chance of graduating has plummeted from 52% in 2008 to an abysmal 46%. Rochester's graduation rate is the second worst in New York State. This is not acceptable and it is obvious that the current system is failing our children. It is also failing our taxpayers who invest \$119 million dollars each year into the City School District. We will demand fiscal accountability and results that match our taxpayers' investment.

In addition, we must work to ensure that those who do graduate are ready for college or a vocation. Of the 346 graduates from City Schools who matriculated at Monroe Community College in 2006, only 30 received an Associate Degree or certificate in the two year period. Less than 9% were able to successfully graduate. This is not acceptable by any standard and the time for a change is now. We will much more effectively track post-graduation data to ensure that we are preparing our children for their future.

As we go through the process of trying to change systems for the benefit of Rochester's children, I welcome, value and need your input. I pledge to you that children and parents will be treated like partners and our customers who we are paid to serve and that every resource at our disposal will be coordinated to achieve the changes that are so necessary. We will also ask teachers and staff for their input, suggestions and support to create schools and environments that support learning and success.

I believe it is important to share some of the policy actions that will be part of the City's final plan. Our current vision is to provide true neighborhood schools, true guarantees for parents that their children can attend their neighborhood schools, flexible transportation choices and adequate school safety for our students, staff and teachers. These are just some of the things that we will discuss in this document. I plan on releasing additional documents in the coming days and weeks and will continue to share the changes we envision for a brighter future.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Duffy
Mayor, City of Rochester

NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

PARENTAL CHOICE

All parents who want their elementary-age children to attend their neighborhood schools will receive a 100% guarantee that this will happen. The only exception will be if the student needs intense services that are not available at the school.

Parents who choose not to have their child remain in their neighborhood school will be given one or two alternative choices. The portfolio of school choices will include programs for parents who desire a stronger focus on structure/discipline, including school uniforms, and some with available child care in certain elementary schools in each quadrant from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Parents who want their child enrolled in other special programs, such as MAP, will also be given the choice of their two top alternatives.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Each school can potentially be staffed from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. to accommodate the needs of parents, based on input from our parents and following good customer service principles. School hours will be built around the needs of parents and their work schedules.

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Rochester will strive to have the best after-school programs in the country. City Hall will give priority to community use of school facilities after hours, on weekends and in the summer and will institute collaborative use of schools, City Recreation Centers, City Libraries, non-profit buildings and resources.

We will collaborate with all of our outstanding not-for-profits and agencies to focus on our children. Community organization partners will identify adult mentors for every child who needs one. I will use my bully pulpit and clout to raise dollars from government sources, corporations, foundations and philanthropists. We will encourage neighborhood organizations to establish a presence in our schools.



OTHER MAYORAL ACCOUNTABILITY CHANGES



SAFETY

There will be a renewed and strengthened presence with a combination of the Rochester Police Department (RPD) patrol, City Security, Sentries, School Resource Officers, and Crossing Guards, monitoring safety around the perimeter of, and on routes to and from schools and within buildings, before, during and after school hours.

The Police Chief will assign RPD Command Officers to be directly accountable for assigned groups of schools. They will be responsible for developing plans that provide the safest environment possible in, around and outside of the schools. Schools' safety data will be tracked and evaluated during joint RPD-RCSD weekly crime-stat meetings

We will form collaborative teams of parents, grandparents, neighbors and school employees who will help ensure student protection on a daily basis. We will enlist parent volunteers to be actively engaged in their children's safety. This is everyone's responsibility and we will work earnestly to take this to a higher level.

This also includes the safety of students and teachers in the classroom. We will assign disruptive

students to another learning environment. We will work to provide the best behavioral and psychological support for the disruptive students by enlisting assistance from our medical community and health-care providers.

We will take every possible step to ensure that students, staff and teachers are safe so that teachers can teach and children can learn. Order and discipline go hand-in-hand with student success.





TRANSPORTATION

We will guarantee transportation to all parents for their elementary school children regardless of their proximity to their neighborhood schools if they require and need this assistance.

We will seek a waiver from the State Education Department to do away with the 1.5 mile requirements that currently exist. If we are not successful in changing State requirements, we will still guarantee transportation. We will ask parents who live less than

1.5 miles from the school to justify their request, but we will not refuse any reasonable request. We will use the considerable savings from the current practice of cross-town busing and use it to safely transport our children and to give concerned parents peace of mind. The focus on neighborhood schools will reduce transportation costs, but we will be sensitive to the needs and priorities of parents and children.

ATTENDANCE – THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS BROKEN

At any given time hundreds and potentially thousands of students are not in school – this is unacceptable. Students cannot learn if they are not in the classroom. While these children are on the streets they are subject to becoming victims or perpetrators of crime. We will hold parents and RCSD leadership accountable for taking steps to support and implement the changes that will be instituted with the transformation of school governance. We will evaluate and change the current attendance and truancy system.

The anti-truancy program will be expanded to include RPD, City Security and non-profit organizations. Truants will be assigned to teams who will go to the child's home, locate them and bring them to school. Members of the team will meet with the parents of chronic truants. These students will be diverted for early intense intervention similar to the system that has been implemented by the Honorable Craig Doran, Supervising Judge of the Family Courts of the 7th Judicial District.

We will critically examine the practices of the current Truancy Center and ensure that it has the capacity and resources to drastically reduce absenteeism. If the parents of chronically truant students are advised of the problem and do not or refuse to take action, we will take every necessary legal step to address the situation. If the parents cooperate and the chronically truant students continue their behaviors, we will use legal intervention to ensure that the children receive the proper resources. We will seek to change the current system that requires children of families on public assistance to be required to attend school only one in twenty days in order to receive their benefits and for the schools to receive their funding. This is fundamentally wrong and reinforces poor attendance. We will seek to change this requirement.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Greater focus on improvements to student achievement is imperative given the School District's 46% graduation rate and the fact that more than 90% of City school graduates attending our Community College fail to receive their degree in two years.

We will guarantee that the Panel for Education Policy, which would be appointed by the Mayor and City Council, will set policies designed to improve attendance and student success. All of our collective resources must be focused on helping our children to graduate and on making sure they are prepared for college or a skilled trade.

We will provide for intense treatment for students with behavioral problems. They will not just be released into the community without adequate supervision. We will provide continuity of instruction through the use of standard reading and math series so that if students move during the school year they will be able to pick up their curriculum in their new school exactly where they left off.

The City and the Rochester City School District will develop a state-of-the-art computerized database that tracks every child from K through 12. It will include information on attendance, physical and mental health, behavior incidents, academic performance and graduation data. This data will be tracked and measured. Staff and resources will be assigned to allow for early intervention with problems that might negatively impact learning and to address the children's overall needs. Support services will be assigned for those at-risk students. We will work to systematically "close the cracks" that far too many children fall through.

Every Principal will be provided with a document that outlines the status of every student on a monthly basis to ensure accountability of assignments and continuity of wrap-around care and services. Annual report cards will be created for every school, using composites of student data/performance. Each Principal will be accountable for problem identification and resolution. The Principal's supervisor will be responsible for providing the Principal with the resources required.



For more information call 311.
Outside the city call (585) 428-5990.
Or contact Robert J. Duffy,
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