

Call to Arms

*Report of the
Blue Ribbon Task Force
To Assess the
Rochester City School District's Financial Practices
and their
Relationship to Educational Outcomes*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2004, Dr. Manuel J. Rivera, Superintendent of the Rochester City School District (RCSD), appointed a Blue Ribbon Task Force to review the RCSD's fiscal management, budget processes, and educational outcomes as they related to finance and budget. The Task force completed its work in August 2005.

The findings of the Task Force start with the recognition of a need for a culture change within the RCSD and the community-at-large. There must be a passionate belief, by both the internal and external communities of the RCSD, in the capability and worth of the RCSD K-12 student body. Everyone – students, parents, administration, teachers, staff, and the community-at-large – must hold high expectations for the academic and life success of RCSD students.

Leadership, particularly at the Superintendent, cabinet, and School Principals levels, is critical – nothing is more important – to effect this culture change. The Task Force believes that Superintendent Rivera and several School Principals are providing this leadership. Their leadership efforts need to be encouraged and benchmarked, and other leaders need to be developed throughout the RCSD.

There are important examples of excellence within the RCSD. Moreover, important improvements in educational performance have occurred recently. However, additional improvements in test scores and graduation rates need to occur.

While increases in the financial support of the RCSD are required in certain areas, the keys to significant educational performance lie in:

- Effecting a culture change.
- Creating expectations for student success.
- Leadership, particularly at the School Principal level.
- Efficient fiscal management.
- Community involvement.

We have just spoken to culture change, expectations, and leadership. With regard to fiscal management, we find that most of the recommendations made in previous fiscal reviews of the RCSD have been addressed. Thirty of the 63 recommendations in this report relate directly to opportunities to improve further the fiscal management, the budget operations, and the efficiency and accountability of the financial aspects of the RCSD.

Finally, the RCSD functions as an integral part of the community. The RCSD impacts the community and the community in turn influences the RCSD in very substantive ways. For this reason, we urge the greater Rochester community to become engaged in a very personal fashion with the RCSD.

Specifically, we issue a **Call to Arms**. We seek 10,000 community volunteers, over a 10-year period, to be mentors and advocates, on a one-on-one basis, for RCSD students. Rochester already has a good start in such an effort with programs such as the success-proven Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection.

By following the 63 recommendations in this report that relate to expectations, leadership, educational outcomes, and fiscal management, the RCSD can make significant improvements in student performance. By adopting our **Call to Arms** and the final 11 recommendations, Rochester can be a national model for urban schools.

INTRODUCTION

Blue Ribbon Task Force

On September 21, 2004, Rochester City School District (RCSD) Superintendent Dr. Manuel J. Rivera charged a Blue Ribbon Task Force to assess the RCSD's financial practices. The Task Force membership is:

Dr. Albert J. Simone, Chairperson
President, Rochester Institute of Technology

Mr. R. Carlos Carballada
Chairman, M&T Charitable Foundation Rochester Fund
Former Chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents

Ms. Joan Roby-Davison
Executive Director, Group 14621

Mr. Paul Haney, CPA
Former City Council Member

Dr. Stephen Jones
Superintendent, Norfolk Public Schools, Norfolk, Virginia
Former Superintendent, Syracuse City Schools

Dr. Emeterio Otero
Executive Dean, Damon City Campus, Monroe Community College

Ms. Sandy Parker
President and CEO, Rochester Business Alliance

Reverend John Walker
Pastor, Christian Friendship Missionary Baptist Church Henrietta

Dr. Arthur Walton
Dean, School of Education, St. John Fisher College

Charge

Dr. Rivera's specific charge to the Task Force is:

- Assess the extent to which the RCSD has improved its budgeting practices and responded to concerns and recommendations in the 2001 Deloitte & Touche report on the RCSD's financial management.
- Assess the extent to which the RCSD has addressed and responded to the recommendations in the 2002 Office of the New York State Comptroller Report on the RCSD's financial projections and trends.
- Assess the extent to which the RCSD has addressed and responded to the recommendations in the Center for Governmental Research Reports on the RCSD's facilities and financial management.
- Identify and examine fiscal trends and major factors influencing the RCSD's revenues and expenditures.
- Examine the relationship between (1) the RCSD's Strategic Plan, its goals, and desired performance outcomes and (2) the resource allocation decisions and the adequacy/inadequacy of resources to achieve its stated performance targets.

The Task Force recognizes that, in the final analysis, the RCSD's fiscal practices and performance must be assessed in relationship to the educational outcomes of the RCSD. That is to say, given the RCSD Strategic Plan and goals, and given the demographic and social environment in which the RCSD functions, is the RCSD utilizing its financial resources in the most optimal manner in pursuit of desired educational outcomes? Are existing financial resources adequate to achieve desired educational outcomes?

To answer these questions, we examined actual educational outcomes, developed understanding of the existing budget, and identified relevant regional and national trends and benchmarks. This report will present our findings in these areas. These findings are the basis of our conclusions and recommendations.

In finalizing this report, the Task Force decided to present a concise and pithy statement of results rather than a lengthy and voluminous opus. Our rationale is that we want various constituencies to read, comprehend, and act on our recommendations, and a brief report is more conducive to that goal. Hundreds of pages of consulting reports, research papers, and Task Force minutes provide the foundation for this report.

Organization and Process

The Task Force as a whole met 18 times, for two hours each time, from October 2004 through August 2005. It also held a half-day retreat in May 2005.

In addition to these meetings, four committees of the Task Force met independently of the full Task Force throughout this period. The four committees are:

- RCSD Response to Reports from the State Government and the Community (P. Haney, Chair; S. Jones; J. Roby-Davison).
- Trends, Factors, and Benchmarks Influencing Revenues and Expenditures (S. Parker, Chair; P. Otero; J. Walker).
- Relationships Among : a. RCSD Strategic Plan/Goals/Desired Outcomes, b. Resource Allocation Decisions, c. Adequacy of Resources, and d. Progress Towards Achieving Desired Outcomes (C. Carballada, Chair; A. Simone; A. Walton).
- Leadership Issues (S. Parker, Chair; S. Jones; A. Walton).

The RCSD retained two consultant organizations to support the deliberations of the Task Force. These consultants are:

- Altreya.
- Education Resource Strategies.

Each consultant met with the Task Force several times and provided extensive written reports and detailed data analysis, responding to specific questions raised by the Task Force.

The Task Force visited three grade K-6 City schools and three grade 7-12 City schools, meeting with the principals, faculty, and students while touring the facilities.

The Task Force also met at its regular meetings with:

- Maria Behncke, Campaign for Fiscal Equity.
- Joanne Guiffrida, Director of Human Resources, RCSD.
- Principals from three City Schools.
- Adam Urbanski, President, Rochester Teachers Association/AFT.
- Danny Wegman, Founder of Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, and President, Wegmans Food Markets, Inc.

Finally, the Task Force was staffed fully and professionally by Jana Carlisle, Chief Planning Officer for the RCSD. Ms. Carlisle was at each meeting and provided insight and information to the Task Force on a timely basis. Karen Barrows, Administrative Assistant to the President of Rochester Institute of Technology, coordinated and scheduled the activities of the Task Force, and prepared comprehensive minutes for each meeting. The Task Force was able to function smoothly and efficiently, in large part, because of her efforts.

FINDINGS

Our findings relate to:

- Passion, belief, and expectations.
- Leadership.
- Educational outcomes.
- Fiscal management.
- Budget adequacy.
- Environmental context.
- Community response.

We shall discuss each of these findings in this section.

Passion, Belief, and Expectations

The RCSD leadership, teachers, and staff must have a passion for their educational mission. They must believe that, through hard work and a creative and bold approach, the goals they have set for their students can be realized.

Parents must have a passion for the value of education. They must believe that education can open the doors for a happy and satisfying life for their children. They must instill in their children the value and importance of education and school.

The community at large must understand and believe in a passionate way that a strong school system makes a stronger community. The community has to be committed to being a partner in improving the education for our students.

Finally, the students must realize the high expectations that teachers, parents, and the community have for them. They must want to live up to these expectations. They must believe they can achieve them.

In short, school should be a desired and productive destination for our students. This is our wish. This is our dream.

The journey is a long one. It requires a culture change. We must be sure we are on the proper path to make this journey. We should take pride in celebrating the victories along the way.

The Task force believes we are now on the early segment of this long path. We have some victories to celebrate and some big challenges to meet. We look forward to both.

Leadership

As we stated in the Introduction, our task is to determine the effectiveness of the RCSD in exercising its financial responsibility in order to achieve desired educational outcomes, and to make recommendations for improvement if that is warranted.

We have concluded that leadership is the most important driver in achieving desired performance. Leadership starts at the top of the RCSD with the Superintendent. Without outstanding leadership at that level:

- Existing resources cannot be effectively allocated, reallocated, and utilized.
- The *status quo* and culture of the RCSD cannot be changed, and we believe they need to be changed.
- Arguments and rationale for increases in budget – if warranted – cannot be successfully presented to City and State government and to business and foundations.
- Top faculty and staff cannot be recruited, developed, and retained.
- Students cannot be motivated to learn and taught how to learn.
- Parents cannot be made effective partners in the learning process.
- Community support – not only dollars but in terms of effort, entrées, jobs for students, and mentoring – cannot be enlisted.

We believe Dr. Rivera is the leader we need. His record to date is consistent with the leadership requirements just outlined. However, he will need strong support as he continues to effect the significant changes we believe are necessary.

In particular, he will need a team of leaders throughout the RCSD who can provide vital support through the leadership of their respective units. The key leaders are the School Principals. They are the leaders who directly affect the quality of education for the students.

We observed the overwhelming impact that competent, vigorous, and dedicated School Principals have on student achievement. The impact of physical facilities and spending levels was minor in comparison to stellar leadership. We observed that good principals, with the ability and willingness to manage their buildings and staffs, result in good schools.

Accordingly, it must be clear that the School Principals serve at the pleasure of the Superintendent, and are integral members of the Superintendent's team. The Superintendent must have the authority to remove nonperforming School Principals

through a timely and objective process. The Superintendent must also have the authority to reward outstanding School Principals.

At the present time, School Principals are members of the administrators union and as such have tenure rights. This affiliation is totally inconsistent, in principle and practice, with the requirements outlined in the preceding paragraph. Therefore, one of our recommendations will be to remove School Principals from any union affiliation and the associated tenure.

Similarly, the members of the RCSD who most affect the day-to-day learning of students are the teachers and counselors. School Principals must have the authority to remove teachers, counselors, or other staff within the schools for lack of performance. This authority must be exercised in a timely and noncumbersome manner. Due process must be followed in concert with the union contract. We have heard directly from some School Principals that it is not possible to remove inadequate teachers in a timely or efficient fashion. It is not acceptable to have students under the tutelage of inadequate teachers and counselors. The President of the Union agrees. Therefore, the current policy for removal of teachers and counselors must be more effectively implemented, on the part of both the Superintendent's cabinet and the Union, or the current policy, and/or the State law governing tenure for teachers, must be changed in order to achieve this purpose.

The RCSD has some outstanding School Principals at all levels. They are leading desired change and achieving remarkable educational outcomes. These School Principals are a critical training, as well as implementation, resource. They should be the benchmark for all School Principals. They should use their own expertise to help other School Principals improve. Accordingly, those School Principals who are judged to be outstanding should be charged with leading a training effort for all School Principals not yet at the desired benchmark.

Educational Outcomes

Some of our schools are performing in exemplary fashion. The most recent data show marked improvement in general. For example, reports issued in May 2005 show that:

- Wilson Magnet High School was ranked 27th in *Newsweek's* list of the Top 100 high schools in the country. Pittsford Mendon was ranked 39, Brighton 47, and Pittsford Sutherland 78.
- With regard to English Language Arts tests for the fourth grade:
 - RCSD has three of the 100 most improved schools in the State. School No. 20 is the most improved school in the State, with a 64% increase in its passing rate since 2003.

- Ninety-two percent (36 of 39 schools testing students) increased their passing rates, so that 57% of fourth graders overall are passing. The 57% number is obviously too low; but the improvement, from 42% in 2004, is significant.
- The improvement in scoring in the top two levels (levels 3 and 4) is greater than the State average and the improvement in each of the “Big Four” (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers).
- Seventy-two percent of the fourth-grade schools increased the percentage of their students scoring at level 4.
- All ethnic groups increased their passing rates, and the gap among ethnic groups was significantly reduced.
- On the eighth grade English Language Arts exam, compared to last year, more students (84.5%) are scoring in the top three levels (Level 4 is above standards, Level 3 is meeting standards, and Level 2 is approaching standards).
- Fewer students (15.4%) this year are scoring in Level 1 (far below standards).
- In the 2004 school year, compared to the 2003 school year, there were increases in the number of students passing the:
 - Grade 4 Math Exam, from 57% to 64% (preliminary results for 2005 show 72%).
 - Grade 4 Science Exam, from 51% to 67% (preliminary results for 2005 show 69%).
 - Grade 5 Social Studies Exam, from 61% to 68% (preliminary results for 2005 show 68%).
 - Grade 8 Math Exam, from 12% to 17% (preliminary results for 2005 show 19%).
 - Grade 8 English Language Arts Exam, from 17% to 18% (preliminary results for 2005 show 17%).
- In the 2004 school year, compared to the 2003 school year, the number of students passing the Regents Exams (using a 55% pass standard) increased:
 - Regents Math A Exam (from 50% to 91%).
 - Regents Comprehensive English Exam (from 74% to 76%).
 - Regents Global History and Geography Exam (from 62% to 70%).
 - Regents Chemistry Exam (from 58% to 72%).

These most recent data demonstrate that there are victories to celebrate. Momentum in the proper direction is underway.

However, as we said earlier, the journey is a long one. We can understand the challenges better if we review where we are and where we have been over the last few years:

- Approximately 50% of incoming ninth-graders do not graduate in four years, the lowest of the State's "Big Four" urban districts outside of New York City.
- The State has declared Rochester as one of twelve districts outside of New York City as "a district in need of improvement," which is the lowest district rating.
- Eighty-two percent of RCSD eighth-graders failed to meet State standards in math and in English Language Arts.
- Thirty-seven percent of kindergarten through fourth-grade students have been held back in a grade at least once. One estimate shows 43% of kindergarten through fifth-grade students have been held back in a grade at least once.
- Nineteen percent of RCSD graduates received Regents diplomas in 2002-03, one-half the rate of Syracuse and Utica, the lowest percentage of any "Big Four" districts. In 2003-04, although still the lowest percentage of the "Big Four," the percentage of graduates receiving Regents diploma increased to 29%.
- Ten percent of RCSD students dropped out of school in 2000-01, compared to 2% in Buffalo, Yonkers, and Syracuse.
- Eighteen percent of RCSD eighth-grade students met State standards in English Language Arts in 2003-04, approximately one-half the rate in Buffalo and New York City. Seventeen percent met the standard in 2004-05, the lowest of the "Big Four."
- Fifty-seven percent of RCSD fourth-graders met State standards in math in 2002-03, compared to 69% in Syracuse and 83% in Utica. In 2003-04, 64% met the standards, compared to 63% in Syracuse, 63% in Buffalo, and 77% in Yonkers.
- Ten percent of RCSD eighth-graders met State standards in math in 2002-03, compared to 31% in Buffalo and 53% in Utica. In 2003-04, 19% met the standards, compared to 33% in Buffalo, 25% in Syracuse, and 39% in Yonkers.
- RCSD has the highest dropout rate of any of the "Big Four," four times higher than Syracuse and five times higher than Buffalo.

Teachers make all the difference in a student's learning. Often substantial individual attention by the teacher to the student is required. Such attention can be a significant challenge in the secondary grades.

For example, in the elementary grades, teachers generally teach multiple subjects to the same class of students. As a result, each teacher, on average, has 19 students to whom individual attention can be given. This is a good ratio.

On the other hand, in the secondary grades, teachers tend to specialize in one or two subject areas, with different groups of students cycling through their classes. As a consequence, teachers in grades 7 – 9 work with 153 different students, on average, and teachers in grades 10 – 12 work with 134 different students. The result is that it is very difficult to give sufficient individual attention in a particular subject matter to students in grades 7 – 12.

Fiscal Management

Extensive problems in fiscal management were identified, prior to Dr. Rivera's current tenure, in the Deloitte & Touche report of 2001, the State Comptroller's report of 2002, and the Center for Governmental Research report of 2002. More than 100 separate recommendations for improvement in the fiscal and management organization of the RCSD were offered in these reports.

Since the issuance of these reports, we find that most of these recommendations were satisfactorily addressed; some of them are in process; and a few are not completed, some of these because they were not deemed applicable. Discussion in the "Appendix – Specific Recommendations" will document the several recommendations in these prior reports that have yet to be fully implemented. In that Appendix, we also shall introduce additional recommendations for fiscal and management implementation.

The RCSD has documented and demonstrated that it has, and is actively using, a clearly defined strategic plan, an aligned set of Major Initiatives, a cabinet-level annual planning process, and annually developed School Improvement Plans and student performance targets. Collectively, these documents, processes, and plans drive the RCSD's resource allocation decisions at least in the areas over which it has control.

However, the RCSD has not fully developed its evaluation system to effectively assess the achievement of certain student outcomes in the context of its goals and objectives. We shall discuss this further in the Appendix.

Budget Adequacy

From a previous discussion, we know that a significant gap exists between actual and desired educational outcomes viewing the RCSD as a whole. Is the RCSD budget adequate to achieve the desired educational outcomes? To answer this fundamental question, we must first answer two other questions:

- Is the existing budget being efficiently and effectively utilized, so that full value is being received for the dollars currently expended?
- If the existing budget is being efficiently and effectively utilized, now or in the near-term future, are budget increases required to meet desired educational outcomes?

Answering these two questions is difficult for a volunteer task force such as ours. However, answers are required and we shall provide them, using our best collective judgment. Our answers derive from the following 12 considerations:

- First, we note that New York State has the second highest per capita expenditure on K-12 public education among the 50 states.
- Second, from 1997 to 2001, the RCSD per-student spending increased 39% while the student population decreased by 4%. Buffalo was worse (spending up 43% and students down 4%). Syracuse was better (spending up 27% and students down 3%). Yonkers was much better (spending up 34% while students increased by 11%).

If we compare, for the same time period, the RCSD to the other 17 Monroe County public school systems, we find that seven of them had increased per-student expenditures while student population decreased; the RCSD expenditure per student increased more than any of these schools, and the student population decrease was the second largest. Of the remaining 10 schools, one had no student population change and nine had student population increases; all 10 schools had spending increases, but the RCSD was larger than any of them. We should note that comparisons between the RCSD and the suburban districts are complicated because of differences in State regulations, funding sources, and socioeconomic attributes.

- Third, the average school district in the United States has a student-faculty ratio of 17. In the 2001-2 school year, the RCSD ratio was 11.7. This ratio is the lowest among all New York State urban school districts and among all other public school districts in Monroe County.
- Fourth, among the 18 public schools in Monroe County in the school year 2000-1, RCSD expenditures per student was the second highest, behind only Rush-Henrietta. RCSD per-student expenditures are on a par with the “Big Four”.
- Fifth, there is the ability to free up additional resources by bringing certain programs to full capacity. Having said this, we first need to distinguish the K-12 Operating Budget from the Total Budget. In the school year 2004-5, the total RCSD budget is \$583 million. Eighty-five million dollars goes to non-operating

items such as debt service, charter schools, retiree health benefits, capital outlays, and Medicaid reimbursements. Another \$44 million dollars is distributed to such non-operating items such as special education outplacements, pre-K, adult education, private school nurse payment, and the homeless shelter program. This leaves \$454 million for the K-12 Operating Budget.

If you look at the Total Budget, the cost per student is \$17,453. If you look at the Operating Budget, which is where the K-12 budgeting discretion primarily lies, the cost per student is \$13,592.

The K-12 Operating Budget per-student cost (\$13,592) averages all 33,403 students in the RCSD. However, the costs vary significantly if we look at different student groupings. For example, there are:

- 25,298 (76%) “regular education” students for whom expenditures per student are \$11,000.
- 2,423 (7%) “special education – consultant” students for whom expenditures per student are \$20,500. These students spend most of their time in a regular classroom with support provided by additional consultant teachers who visit the classroom or take students to a resource room for part of the day.
- 1,070 (3%) “special education – inclusion” students for whom expenditures per student are \$34,300. These students are in a classroom for the entire day with regular education students, a regular education teacher, and a second (special education) teacher.
- 2,278 (7%) “special education – self-contained” students for whom expenditures per student are \$22,500. These students are in separate, self-contained (i.e., no regular education students) classrooms.
- 2,334 (7%) “limited English proficiency” students for whom expenditures per student are \$16,300. These students are additionally taught by English-As-A-Second-Language teachers.

Because the per-student cost varies so widely among the five groups, it is important to review how teachers and students are assigned to the various groups, to determine whether different assignments can lead to lower costs with no diminishment in the quality of instruction. For example, “special education – self-contained” classrooms are operating at 65-70% of capacity. Since State-mandated student-faculty ratios are particularly low in these classrooms, if we brought these classrooms up to 100% capacity and reduced the number of special education teachers, the Task Force estimates that the annual savings could be \$4,000,000 - \$6,000,000. This is a core strategy the RCSD forwarded in balancing its budget for the 2005-2006 budget, and its implementation in

classrooms is being rolled out this coming academic year. The challenge in effecting this change is that, in order to achieve the maximum allowable student/faculty ratio, it may be necessary to consolidate school settings so that busing may be required for some students, placement policies may have to change, and/or compliance with federal and state regulations evaluated.

- Sixth, there does not appear to be a direct relationship between spending per student and student outcomes. For example, School 7, which has had outstanding success in improving student test scores, improving the passing rate in fourth grade English Language Arts from 63% in 2004 to 88% in 2005, has the second lowest per-student cost among all RCSD elementary and secondary schools at \$11,700. Four of the nine highest performing elementary schools have per-student costs below the median of all 19 elementary schools and one of the nine is at the median. The highest cost elementary school has a per-student cost (\$16,600) that is 59% higher than that of the lowest per-student cost elementary school (\$10,500), with no demonstrable effect on student performance.
- Seventh, at the individual school (elementary and secondary) level (aside from central administration), the ratio of:
 - students per teacher is 12.
 - students per teacher plus teaching assistant (TA) is 10.
 - students per teacher, TA, and professional (e.g., librarians and counselors) is 9.
 - students per teacher, TA, professional, and all other staff (e.g., secretaries and custodians) is 7.

On the face of it, these ratios appear generous. Can these resources be reallocated in ways that provide enhanced learning outcomes?

- Eighth, 28% or 692 of the elementary school staff (2,439) included in the District's 40 elementary buildings are not teachers or teaching assistants, and, therefore, not directly involved in instruction. Thirteen percent or 323.5 of the elementary school staff positions represent leadership and/or administrative duties within the building. These consist of 92.1 administrative staff, 99 clerical support positions, and 131.4 Instructional Specialist and Program/Project Support staff, including a full-time Business Support position. Pupil Services accounts for 8% or 186.7 of all elementary staff, with the majority of positions providing supportive services in areas such as libraries (33.0), speech services (73.4), social work (29.8), and psychology (30.6). The remaining 7% or 182 elementary positions are associated with basic school operations such as custodial (117.8), food services (59.7), and security and paraprofessional positions (4.5). Is there an opportunity to reallocate some of the non-teaching resources into teaching?

- Ninth, the State Aid distribution is unfair. This system produces a situation in which few districts are receiving their justified level of State aid. This inequity is attributable to caps and floors on aid adjustments that have been created by the Legislature for primarily political and not educational purposes. If the State Aid formula was allowed to function as intended, millions of additional dollars would flow to the RCSD each year.
- Tenth, the most recent findings of the Courts and the analysis provided by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity cannot be ignored. They conclude that poverty-stricken districts, such as the RCSD, are inadequately and unfairly funded.
- Eleventh, we cannot neglect the fact that the RCSD's student population is largely minority and is significantly impoverished. This combination poses challenges to the RCSD as it strives to educate all students to high standards.
- Twelfth, there are State and Federal mandates which disproportionately and unfairly impact poor districts with high needs, such as the RCSD.

Based on these 12 considerations, we conclude that:

- Further improvements can be made in the efficiency and effectiveness with which the RCSD utilizes its budget. Some of these improvements are underway and others need to be initiated. We identify some of these in the Appendix. We charge the RCSD administration to identify and implement other possibilities for improved efficiency and effectiveness.
- Given that the improvements alluded to directly above are implemented, we believe additional funding is needed in the areas of pre-K and full-day kindergarten education in order to assure a solid educational core for all RCSD children. In addition, additional funding is required to meet major health issues, such as lead poisoning, to pursue the benefits offered by the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, and to provide after hours programming. These programs will have a positive impact on later educational achievement. We believe that relying on potential reallocation of existing funds to meet these needs will not satisfy the proactive position the RCSD needs to take in these areas.

There may be other areas in which additional funds can be justified. If so, the RCSD should be encouraged to make such a case. In presenting such a case, the RCSD must show that it has addressed (is addressing) aggressively the opportunities for attaining enhanced efficiency and effectiveness, and is making substantial progress in achieving defined educational outcomes

Finally, we are encouraged by the cost allocation work that Educational Resource Strategies is doing. This work should yield definitive answers to funding and program cost questions long raised in the community. This work should be continued.

Environmental Context *

Education does not occur in a vacuum. The RCSD cannot be observed independently of the community environment in which it exists. In this context, RCSD faces formidable challenges. For example, factors such as poverty, poor health and wellness, lead poisoning, violence and a concern for personal safety, low levels of school readiness, illiteracy and limited English language proficiency, lack of parental involvement, high unemployment, and inadequate housing – considered individually and collectively – can work against desired educational outcomes for many RCSD students. We shall discuss some of these factors in what follows.

Northeast Rochester. In Rochester, the Northeast area of the City of Rochester is home to approximately 4,300 students – who attend schools No. 6, 8, 9, 22, 36, 45, and Freddie Thomas Learning Center – representing approximately 12% of the RCSD’s total elementary school population. These schools and this area of the City of Rochester have the City’s highest rates of illiteracy and student mobility; have experienced 58% of the city’s homicides in 2004; have a median household income of \$8,628; record the highest concentrations of asthma, diabetes, and hypertension; represent extremely high rates of lead poisoning, STDs and AIDS cases; have the lowest rates of doctor’s visits; and have traditionally lagged behind the rest of the RCSD in academic performance.

Rochester. Rochester is the state’s third largest city. It has a city population of approximately 220,000 with a median income of \$31,257 and with African Americans or Hispanics comprising 60% of its residents. The metropolitan population is approximately one million.

The RCSD in 2004 served approximately 34,000 K-12 students, 1,600 Pre-K students, and 11,600 adult students, utilizing 40 elementary schools, 19 secondary schools, 64 Pre-Kindergarten sites, one adult/family learning center, and one program for young mothers.

The current ethnic composition of the student population is 64 percent African American, 20 percent Hispanic, 14 percent white, and 2 percent Native American, Asian, and other minorities. More than 2,200 RCSD children come from 28 countries speaking nearly 35 languages.

Poverty. Pervasive poverty is the biggest challenge faced by Rochester and its national counterparts. While the RCSD is ranked 73rd in the nation in size, the City of Rochester is 12th in the nation in child poverty – higher than New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, or Los Angeles. Eighty-six percent of RCSD students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch based on family income. Fifty percent of Rochester schools register their student poverty population at 90 percent or higher. In

* The motivation for this section is drawn from a “white” paper authored by Reverend John Walker.

2003, 57 percent of RCSD first through fourth grade classrooms were classified as 100 percent minority and 100 percent poverty.

Illiteracy. Rochester parents work hard to support their children's education. However, 43 percent of parents of incoming kindergartners each year did not initially graduate from high school themselves. Rochester has one of the highest rates of illiteracy in New York State. Twenty-nine percent of our adult population functions at the lowest proficiency level based on national adult literacy standards. Not surprisingly, many City kindergartners, primarily those who have not benefited from high quality early childhood experience, arrive at school without the most basic of skills such as being able to recite the alphabet, count to ten, or read simple words.

Parental involvement. Parental involvement – both formal and informal – is critical to the success of children in school. There are a number of strategies for involving parents, including the use of parent liaisons in schools to reach out and respond to parents, and to coordinate various events. In addition, some schools have formal parent organizations, and all are required to have parent representation on school based planning teams. However, it is critical for *each* child to have a parent, guardian, or other involved adult closely connected with their learning. When this is not possible, the role of mentors and advocates becomes critical.

Health issues. Health issues are also a major concern for City students, for many of whom the school nurse is the only regular source of medical attention they receive. Thirty-eight percent of City students have problems with vision, hearing, motor skills, language or cognition that seriously impede their ability to learn; 11 percent have a health problem that requires ongoing medical supervision. For example, in 2003, approximately 3,410 students had asthma, many in its most serious form; 2,314 were diagnosed with hyper kinesis (ADD/ADHD); 556 had allergies of some kind; 201 had neurological conditions; 146 had seizure disorders; 112 had chronic health conditions; and 81 had cardiac conditions. School nurses administered more than 104,000 doses of medication last year – one in 11 of our students require prescription medication during the school day. School nurses provide required, ongoing medical attention to 15 percent of our students, and to the 10 percent of students whose conditions limit their physical activity.

Lead poisoning is also a health factor most prevalent in city homes and among students from low-income families. More than 10 percent of Rochester children under age six tested by the Monroe County Health Department have elevated blood-lead levels, which can have long-lasting effects on children's speech, language, and motor skills development, memory, attention span, and IQ.

Mobility. Mobility is also a concern. Every year, 20 percent of our students move at least once and hundreds move multiple times during the year, often changing schools as they move. Numerous studies, including one done on Rochester by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), confirm that mobility lowers student achievement.

Safety and violence. In terms of school safety and violence, one indicator is the incidence of suspensions. RCSD suspensions in recent years had been on the decline; however, it appears that both short and long term suspensions are on the increase in 2004-2005. Grades 7, 8, and 9 are the most active in assigning student suspensions, with Grade 7 having had the highest number of student suspensions over the last three years.

The most common reasons for all suspensions (short and long term and in-school), over the last three years, have been: Defiance of Authority, Disruption of the Educational Process, Fighting, Intentional Assault on Student(s), and Reckless Endangerment. The most often reason cited for Short-Term student suspension is “Defiance of Authority”; this accounts for a total of 10,959 student suspensions over the past three years. The most often reason cited for Long-term student suspension is “Intentional Assault on Student or Staff”; this accounts for a total of 1,123 student suspensions over the past three years.

Students can receive multiple suspensions in a given year, with some students being suspended ten or more times in one semester. The average student who is suspended ten or more times in 2004-2005 is African-American, male, and is suspended for 36 days for Defiance of Authority. Students with Disabilities represent a higher percentage of those suspended than general education students.

Research shows that students, who do not spend time in school, do not learn and do not remain on grade level. These are the students most likely to drop out, become involved with drugs and other crimes, and end up incarcerated. Seventy percent of young males in the Monroe County jail do not possess a high school diploma.

It is important to recognize that what happens in the schools with regard to safety and violence is a reflection and symptom of systemic problems in the community in which these schools are located. Many students are exposed in the community to violence (including murder), abandoned buildings, drug activity, and other factors that seriously impact negatively the ability of these students to focus their energy on school and academics.

Special Education placement. Students of color from high poverty households are disproportionately referred for Special Education placement. While the goal of Special Education is to provide a safety net to students who otherwise might become frustrated or be unable to succeed in a traditional classroom, such placement can become a dead end if students are not eventually transitioned out of Special Education settings. This issue must be addressed as these students have no less potential than their general education peers from city schools or students from middle-class or wealthy families. However, tapping this potential will require more focused attention in the classroom compared to other students and additional help and community support outside the classroom.

Community Response

Given the environmental context just described, what can be done to improve the findings reported in an earlier section? The answer needs to be community focused. The answer is not to be found through the RCSD acting in isolation. It is true that the RCSD is necessarily the pivotal and most substantive influence in student performance. However, the RCSD is an integral part of the wider community, and the community as a whole must be part of the solution. In this sense, the community includes parents; churches; local, state, and federal government; business; academia; foundations; not-for-profit organizations; and the suburbs surrounding the city.

Moreover, the primary solution is not to ask for significantly more financial resources. The Federal, State, City, and County governments are already financially hard-pressed on many other fronts. Taxpayers (property, sales, and income) are in near-revolt. Foundations do not have adequate resources. The business community will not provide on-going subsidies. In the view of the Task Force, while additional financial resources from these sources are needed in some areas, additional financial resources are only part of the solution.

Rather, the Task Force issues a “**Call to Arms**”. The Task Force calls for 10,000 community volunteers to serve as mentors and advisors to students and as consultants to RCSD administration and teachers. The students served would be from pre-K through high school. The volunteer force would be built up over time, with 1,000 in place the first year.

The Task Force recognizes that this is a bold, an aggressive, and out-of-the-box initiative. There will be the challenges of organization, coordination, recruiting, and accountability. In the metaphor of “It takes a village to raise a child”, we note that the Rochester community has bonded together year after year to raise more dollars per capita for the United Way than any other community in the country. Why not lead the nation again in this community initiative?

Rochesterians have heart, will, and “arms”. So we issue this “**Call to Arms**”.

Already we have a strong start. For example, the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection (HWSC) currently has 230 students engaged. The RUMP group and the Rochester Business Alliance Board of Directors have committed to 100 additional jobs and 300 students by December 2005. These groups have set a target of 980 by 2009.

The HWSC, initiated almost 20 years ago by Wegman’s Food Markets, Inc., assigns a mentor to a 9th or 10th grade student. The mentor attends a training workshop, has weekly contact (by phone) with a Hillside or school Youth Advocate for a progress report, and has monthly or bi-monthly in-person meetings with the Youth Advocate.

Each student is provided a minimum of 500 hours of employment during the year. At least 10 hours per week after school or on weekends, at the minimum wage or better, are

required. The mentor assists the student in learning about the organization and workplace norms, and motivates and counsels the student to achieve academic success.

A recent study compared educational outcomes for more than a thousand RCSD students who participated in the HWSC to a similar-sized group of nonparticipating students. The two groups were similar in backgrounds and grades. Twice as many students from the HWSC graduated from high school (over 60%) compared to the nonparticipating students. Between 75% and 80% of the graduating students from the HWSC went on to post-secondary education.

The HWSC is a splendid illustration of how the RCSD, the business community, and the community-at-large can collaborate to foster student success. Academia can also play a role.

For example, four years ago, RIT started with two high school students from the RCSD and today it has four. These students are high school juniors and seniors. RIT provides a mentor for the students. The students work four to twelve hours a week during the school year and 40 hours a week over the summer. They work a minimum of 1200 hours over two years at an hourly rate above the minimum wage. RIT will also commit to an additional four students, for the coming year, as part of the HWSC.

In addition, for several years, RIT has made available yearly \$450,000 in scholarships for students graduating through the HWSC. These scholarships can support 40 students a year and are available for four years to students admitted directly from high school and for two years to students who attend Monroe Community College first. This scholarship, together with other available funds, makes it totally affordable for HWSC students who are admissible to attend RIT.

There are other examples of churches, neighborhood organizations, businesses, and philanthropic organizations reaching out and mentoring individual students. Rochester has a strong start in community support for urban education, but more of our churches, neighborhood organizations, businesses, and philanthropic organizations must become engaged in this effort.

In particular, we support the concept, formation, and funding of the Rochester Children's Zone. The mission of this program is to initiate a coordinated and targeted approach, utilizing established outcome assessment metrics, to improve the health, wellness, education, livelihoods, and living conditions of students and families in the Northeast section of the City.

RECOMMENDATION THEMES

Our recommendations are derived from the **FINDINGS** just discussed. Underlying these recommendations is the fundamental need for a Culture Change at the RCSD.

Our first recommendations, therefore, pertain to this culture change. The recommendations which follow the culture change recommendations relate to the themes presented in the **FINDINGS** section of this report. Accordingly, our recommendations are grouped under the following categories:

- Culture change.
- Leadership.
- Educational Outcomes.
- Fiscal Management.
- Community Response.

The 63 recommendations which are distributed over these five categories are presented in the Appendix at the end of this report.

CONCLUSION

The RCSD has made improvements in its fiscal, organizational, planning, and operational systems over the past three years. More remains to be done.

Educational outcomes for K-12 students have improved, and there are exciting examples of excellence. However, again much remains to be done, as significant gaps exist between actual and desired student performance. These gaps are characteristic of urban schools around the nation.

Financial enhancements clearly are justified in certain areas, and, upon subsequent analysis, may be called for in other areas. However, while financial enhancements certainly will help, increased budget is not the only instrument of desired change. Rather, top flight leadership, especially at the level of School Principal and Superintendent's cabinet, is the key. Proven leaders must be given the authority and flexibility to manage their resources under a system of research-based and metric-measured accountability. Outcomes must meet strategic goals and objectives, and there must be an effective incentive system of rewards and penalties.

Leadership starts at the top, and we believe Superintendent Rivera is providing, and is capable of providing in the future, this essential top-level leadership. However, he cannot be successful operating in isolation from the community-at-large.

The social, economic, civil, political, familial, wellness, faith, and neighborhood communities within which the RCSD functions have a tremendous effect on the operations and performance of the RCSD. These external communities, as well as the internal community of students, administrators, teachers, and staff, must hold high expectations for our students, believe that these expectations can be realized, and be passionate about these beliefs.

Since the external community has so much influence on the performance of the RCSD, it stands to reason that the external community should be part of the solution to the change we seek. Research and experience demonstrate that the engagement of an adult as a long-term, continuing mentor to and advocate for a student has tremendous impact on the academic and life success of the student.

*Accordingly, we issue a **Call for Arms**. Specifically, we call for 10,000 community volunteers over the next 10 years to serve as mentors for RCSD K-12 students. We already have a start on this bold initiative through the several community-based volunteer programs that currently exist, such as the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection.*

Implementing the 63 recommendations offered in this report will achieve a path-breaking culture change within the RCSD and its surrounding communities that will position the RCSD for the progress and improvement we all envision.

EPILOGUE

We will offer one caveat. The RCSD currently has many worthwhile initiatives under way. However, we are concerned that focusing on too many initiatives at once may dilute the overall effort. We believe that priorities should be established and, rather than attempting many initiatives in parallel, that concentration and resources should be focused on fewer, high priority initiatives, with other still very important initiatives undertaken in sequence over time. We leave it to the RCSD to set these priorities.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force would like to receive an informal progress report after six months – on the reaction to, priorities established for, and progress made on implementing our recommendations – to determine whether we can be of further assistance. After twelve months, we would like to receive a more formal report, to which we shall respond briefly in writing as a final attempt to be as helpful to the Superintendent and the RCSD as possible.

APPENDIX – SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Culture Change

Dr. Rivera and his team have recognized the need for culture change within the RCSD and have planted the seeds for this change over the past two years. These seeds must be nurtured and the change they connote must flower over the next several years. Yes – we say “next several years” because changing culture is not easy. It takes persistence, tenacity, resolve, courage, and discipline – and it takes time.

It is noteworthy that the RCSD was awarded a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant (\$5 million dollars over 18 months) to address high school redesign and leadership and culture changes to best support teaching and learning throughout the RCSD. The Superintendent has dedicated a staff person to overseeing Leadership and Diversity and his Chief of Staff to addressing organizational development and central office culture change.

The community must give Dr. Rivera the time he needs, and must support his efforts in every way possible in order to shorten the time for the required change as much as possible. Our K-12 children deserve no less.

What are the elements of the required culture change? We have discussed them in the previous section on **FINDINGS**.

***Culture Change Recommendation 1.** RCSD communications – formal and informal, verbal and written, individual and group – must state a **belief** in the ability of our students to achieve academic and life success.*

***Culture Change Recommendation 2.** RCSD administrators, teachers, and staff – in everything they say and do – must convey their **expectations** that our students can and will succeed academically and in life.*

***Culture Change Recommendation 3.** RCSD administrators, teachers, and staff must demonstrate **passion** as they carry out the above two recommendations.*

***Culture Change Recommendation 4.** Victories and successes of K-12 students must be celebrated privately and publicly at every opportunity, so that “good news” can provide an objective and valid balance to “bad news”.*

***Culture Change Recommendation 5.** Surveys must be conducted – and metrics developed to interpret survey results – annually among RCSD administrators, teachers, and staff, and among students, parents, and the community-at-large to assess progress on the four previous recommendations.*

Culture Change Recommendation 6. *The seeds of culture change imbedded in the following recommendations relating to leadership, educational outcomes, fiscal management, and community response must be nurtured aggressively.*

Leadership

Leadership is the most important factor in achieving the required culture change just described, as well as the desired educational outcomes, fiscal management, and community response recommendations that will be presented later.

Leadership Recommendation 1. *The Superintendent must have the authority to remove nonperforming School Principals through a timely and objective process.*

Leadership Recommendation 2. *The Superintendent must have the authority to reward outstanding School Principals.*

Leadership Recommendation 3. *The current policy for removal of ineffective teachers and counselors must be more efficiently implemented, on the part of both the Superintendent's cabinet and the union, or the current policy, and/or State law governing tenure for teachers, must be changed in order to achieve this purpose.*

Leadership Recommendation 4. *Those School Principals who are judged to be outstanding should be charged with leading a training effort for all School Principals not yet at the desired benchmark.*

Leadership Recommendation 5. *School Principals should have the flexibility and autonomy to strategically manage school-level resources, particularly as those relate to curriculum, assessment, scheduling, staffing, governance, class size, and time.*

Leadership Recommendation 6. *The RCSD should establish a system of recruitment, promotion, succession planning, and professional development that supports the growth and improvement of administrators, principals, teachers, and staff, and that is well coordinated, well aligned, and consistently applied.*

Leadership Recommendation 7. *Teacher salary and career structure should be constructed to recognize greater expertise and attract and retain the highest quality teachers. Goals should be established and the achievement of these goals should be acknowledged and rewarded.*

Leadership Recommendation 8. *The system for developing and evaluating leaders (Central Office, School Principals, and teachers) should be connected to explicit school and student performance outcomes.*

Leadership Recommendation 9. *Leadership development programs (certificate or degree) which focus on the urban school setting, such as the Urban Administration Program at St. John Fisher College, should be utilized.*

Leadership Recommendation 10. *School Principals should be removed from membership in the administrators union or any other union, and should not have tenure in that position.*

Educational Outcomes

Positive educational outcomes for RCSD K-12 students are the ultimate *raison d'être* for the work of the Task Force. As outlined in the **FINDINGS** section, there are points of excellence within the RCSD and important improvements are being made. Yet, a significant gap exists, in general, between where we are and where we want to be.

Educational Outcome Recommendation 1. *The RCSD should seek teachers who are comfortable and effective within an urban school setting by virtue of their prior teaching experience, formal educational training, or personal/social background.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 2. *The expenditure of \$11 million per year for two or three instructional specialists per school should be evaluated to determine whether that is the most effective utilization of resources.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 3. *Effective use of common planning times aligned with prescribed best practices – at all elementary and secondary schools – should be implemented.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 4. *Increased opportunities for individual attention in specific subject matter areas for students in grades 7-12 should be provided.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 5. *More effort and time, especially in secondary schools, should be allocated to literacy and math.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 6. *The RCSD's Secondary Redesign initiative, supported in large part with a \$5 million, 18-month planning grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, should be diligently pursued.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 7. *Since students need a strong start when they begin their formal K-12 education, avenues for funding Pre-K education, and making it universally available to all children, should be vigorously explored, as should after school programs.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 8. *The Superintendent's plan for the Rochester Children's Zone is a unique proposal for cultural redesign and should be implemented.*

Educational Outcome Recommendation 9. Lengthening the school day and school year are concepts that need to be explored.

Fiscal Management

Our work began with a review of the extent to which the RCSD had complied with the recommendations of previous studies of its fiscal and management operations. We concluded that over the past two years, most of the recommendations have been addressed and significant progress has been made. In order to maintain momentum going forward, we offer the following recommendations. These recommendations are grouped under the categories of:

Audit.
Budget.
State Formula.
Evaluation and Accountability.
Operations.

Audit

The State Legislature recently enacted legislation whose aim is to strengthen the fiscal management of school districts. Although the legislation does not apply to the five fiscally dependent school districts in the State, we believe that the RCSD's Board should voluntarily adopt its provisions. Accordingly, we make the following eight recommendations.

***Fiscal Management Recommendation 1.** The Board of Education should establish an Audit Committee to monitor the RCSD's financial operations.*

***Fiscal Management Recommendation 2.** The Audit Committee should include, in addition to members of the Board of Education, community members from the accounting and auditing professions.*

***Fiscal Management Recommendation 3.** All School Board members should undergo six hours of fiscal training in a program designed by the State Comptroller.*

***Fiscal Management Recommendation 4.** No employees of the RCSD should serve on the Audit Committee.*

***Fiscal Management Recommendation 5.** The Audit Committee should oversee and report on the annual audit to the School Board.*

***Fiscal Management Recommendation 6.** The RCSD's Internal Audit Group, which recently has had its reporting transferred from the RCSD's Chief Financial Officer to the Superintendent (which is a good move), should become independent.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 7. *The Internal Audit Group should:*

- *Develop and annually update a risk assessment of the RCSD's operations.*
- *Review financial policies and procedures.*
- *Test and evaluate internal controls.*
- *Suggest changes for strengthening internal controls.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 8. *The School Board Audit Committee should:*

- *Oversee the Internal Audit function, including the appointment of the Internal Auditor.*
- *Review the Internal Auditor's findings and recommendations, and monitor their implementation.*
- *Evaluate the performance of the Internal Audit Group.*

Budget

Fiscal Management Recommendation 9. *The RCSD should continue to develop a Budget Format that is:*

- *Consistent with the City of Rochester's budget.*
- *Readily understandable by constituents.*
- *Of high quality in both form and content.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 10. *The School Board and RCSD officials should monitor closely actual results of operations against estimates in the adopted budget, and be prepared to take corrective action as necessary.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 11. *The RCSD, as recommended by the State Comptroller, should eliminate the fund balance "Designated for Unused Portion of Appropriation Authority" and the associated receivable, or fully disclose in the notes to the financial statements the nature of the accrual.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 12. *The School Board and RCSD officials, also as recommended by the State Comptroller, should review all final balance designations to ensure that they represent the actual intentions of the School Board, with the understanding that the School Board may wish to review the use of designations and consider establishing reserve funds.*

State Formula

Fiscal Management Recommendation 13. *The School Board and RCSD should work with the Governor, State Legislature, and business and community leaders on a concerted strategy for changing the New York State funding formula for the large urban school districts so that funding for high needs districts is adequate and fair.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 14. *The RCSD should follow closely the activity of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity to assure that the RCSD receives an equitable share of the State funding for public education.*

Evaluation and Accountability

Fiscal Management Recommendation 15. *The RCSD should develop and implement a coordinated evaluation system that includes quantifiable financial, program, and student performance measures which are linked to RCSD goals, objectives, and key policies.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 16. *Common accountability rubrics and systems for School and District performance should be established.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 17. *An independent outside consultant should be engaged, on a periodic basis, to assess whether the School planning process is appropriately linked to the budgetary process to ensure that the proposed budgets match the highest priority strategies and needs, and that the funds are being used effectively and efficiently.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 18. *RCSD practices and outcomes should be benchmarked on a regular basis against other successful school districts.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 19. *The Special Education delivery system and Comprehensive School Reform models should be evaluated and, where appropriate, redesigned.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 20. *The performance of the “contract school”, which the RCSD is piloting in the 2006-7 school year, should be carefully studied in order to determine the effect of providing greater authority, flexibility, and accountability to individual schools.*

Operations

Fiscal Management Recommendation 21. *Several additional modules to the RCSD’s management accounting software still need to be implemented (or the rationale for not doing so needs to be stated), including:*

- *The “Requisition to Pay Module” (to maximize control and efficiency in the purchasing area.)*
- *The “Project Management Module” (to integrate accounting for capital projects with the general accounting system.)*

- The “Expense Module” (to maximize efficiency and control in the area of travel expenses.)
- The “Time and Labor Module” (to improve control over payroll expenditures by School and Department managers.)

Fiscal Management Recommendation 22. *A single system for coding employees should be established so that the number and location of employees by department and school, and the real cost of programs and activities, can be determined.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 23. *Data systems should be improved so that the analysis of per pupil expenditures across programs and schools can be determined on an ongoing basis.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 24. *The Student Information System should be updated with the Chancery Student Management System.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 25. *Efforts should be increased to seek private sector and foundation funding, to improve grant management, and to evaluate the effectiveness of a federally tax exempt Section 501(c)3 organization to facilitate grant solicitation and management.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 26. *Health care benefit costs should be reduced by:*

- *Negotiating with the unions to have employees absorb a greater portion of health care costs for both current and future employees.*
- *Strongly consider experience-rated health insurance, particularly as part of a consortium of other school districts in Monroe County.*

Fiscal Management Recommendation 27. *The RCSD should review the cost/benefit of the \$35 million it spends on teacher professional development, which is significantly higher (7.8% of the total operating budget) than benchmark districts, to determine whether these dollars are being effectively used and whether some of these dollars might be reallocated to different value-added endeavors.*

Community Response

As stated earlier, we believe that the community as a whole must work with the RCSD to achieve the fiscal efficacy and, especially, the educational outcomes we all seek. We issue a **Call to Arms** in which the many “arms” of the community are joined in a cohesive and productive fashion.

Community Response Recommendation 1. *The Mayor of the City of Rochester should appoint an “Arms Task Force” whose membership will come from the RCSD, business, higher education, and the community-at-large.*

Community Response Recommendation 2. *The charge of the Arms Task force will be to propose an organizational structure (personnel and budget) which will have responsibility, over a 10 year period, for recruiting, training, coordinating, and monitoring 10,000 volunteers who will work one-on-one with K-12 students.*

Community Response Recommendation 3. *The Arms Task Force will develop policies, guidelines, and criteria under which the newly formed organizational structure will operate and be evaluated.*

Community Response Recommendation 4. *The Arms Task Force will identify existing community organizations and programs which can be ready partners in the **Call to Arms** endeavor.*

Community Response Recommendation 5. *Models such as The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection should be supported and expanded by the RCSD as part of the **Call to Arms**.*

There are models around the country in which a community surrounding a school or several schools in a fixed geographical area adopts a coordinated and targeted approach to deliver services to school children and their families, inside and outside of the school setting, to improve in integrated fashion the health, wellness, education, and livelihoods of students and their families. These models take a number of years to fully implement. Outcome measures and evaluation methods are established to monitor progress. The RCSD is forming such a community, called the “Rochester Children’s Zone”, initially in the Northeast section of the City.

Community Response Recommendation 6. *The RCSD should fully implement the Rochester Children’s Zone initiative as part of the **Call to Arms**.*

Community Response Recommendation 7. *Consistent with the Rochester Children’s Zone initiative, the RCSD should collaborate with service providers, the faith community, the County, and the City to design and deliver training and development opportunities for parents of RCSD children.*

Community Response Recommendation 8. *The RCSD should continue its efforts to involve parents at all levels of education.*

Community Response Recommendation 9. *The RCSD should continue to partner with the community to establish school-based Health Clinics and School-based Student and Family Support Centers to provide support for students around such issues as emotional trauma, medication use, obesity, asthma, and teen pregnancy.*

Community Response Recommendation 10. *In order to increase trust in and understanding and support of the budget process and allocation decisions, the RCSD should conduct public forums several times a year for key stakeholder groups.*

Community Response Recommendation 11. *The City and County governments, with support from the State and Federal governments, must declare war on lead paint poisoning and strive to eliminate it in our children within ten years.*