



Putting Children First. A Framework for Change in School Governance.

Mayor Robert J. Duffy
City of Rochester, NY
January 2010

"My First Books"
ABC
HEAD START

DRAFT

Parental comments:

What parents tell me and expect me to do something about as Mayor.

Outline

1. **Parental comments:** What parents tell me and expect me to do something about as Mayor.
2. **Community comments:** What other customers regularly say about the District.
3. **Change will happen:** What I promise will be different with Mayoral Accountability for Rochester's schools.
4. **The buck stops here:** I welcome accountability.
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This document is the first in a series that will comprise School Governance Reform.

- "I live right down the street from an elementary school, but the District won't give me a 100% guarantee that my daughter can go to that school. And I won't even hear about her placement until summer. I can't wait. I'm moving out of the city."
- "I didn't get my 1st choice, 2nd choice, or 3rd choice of school for my son. Instead, he's bused all the way across the city. Because he gets good grades, the District wants him to help pull up the grades of that school. So he has no friends anywhere around our neighborhood."
- "At night, on weekends and in the summer, I see gangs of boys out my window, getting into trouble just because they're bored. Why can't the school next door be open, to get them into safety, with adults they can look up to?"
- "Teachers in my daughter's school say they don't get enough money for classroom supplies, so our PTO has to donate pencils, crayons and paper for our kids."
- "My son really likes science and wants to bring his textbook home to do extra studying, but his teacher says that's not possible."
- "My daughter is scared of some troublemakers in her school. Some of her teachers seem scared too. How can she be expected to learn in that situation?"
- "I work and can't afford to pay for an education-based after-school program for my son. I worry every afternoon starting at 3 p.m. about whether he's on the street in trouble."
- "My daughter used to get really good grades, but when she went to middle school she started cutting out of school. The District doesn't always call me, or they leave messages on my home answering machine even though I'm at work. And if the District had truancy officers like they used to, they'd have picked her up and warned me. Now she's fallen so far behind in math that she's failing and wants to drop out."
- "My daughter regresses every summer. She forgets what she learned in school. I wish her school library was open in summer, or at least that they had a Summer Reading List like I did."
- "My grandfather, father and I all went to Edison Tech. We learned a skilled trade. Didn't make a lot of money, but we're proud of our work. What happened to that school?"
- "I had questions about my daughter's grades. So I tried to call Central Office, but there are so many layers, I just got bounced around. So I went to a School Board meeting. It was all about where principals would be assigned, whether we should allow the Army to recruit in schools, and other adult talk. I just want them to care about my daughter."

Neighborhood Leaders:

- “We want the school in our neighborhood to be a beacon to draw us together. We need community use of the gym, library, computer lab, multi-purpose room, and pool. We need more Ryan Centers.”
- “Our elementary schools must be neighborhood schools again. Families looking to move into our neighborhood need to know that their children are absolutely guaranteed a spot in that school down the block. And we want the principal, teachers and staff to have a stake in our community and to work with us to make it better.”
- “We didn’t know that the Mayor and City Council are forced by the state to send so much of the property tax revenue to schools, and that you guys don’t get a say in how it’s spent. We thought a mayor was responsible for quality of life and schools are part of that. It doesn’t make sense.”

Employers and Colleges:

- “Half of our students graduating on time is unacceptable. “
- “Too many students who do graduate still need remedial training or education before they can do college assignments or job duties.”
- “And the District’s standards for success aren’t nearly challenging enough. Our students need to compete not only against kids from NYS, but those from China and Germany.”



Thomas P. Ryan, Jr.
Community Center

**Community
comments:**

What other
customers
regularly say
about the district.

Change will happen:

What I promise
will be different
with Mayoral
Accountability for
Rochester's schools.

"I have the utmost faith in Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard. We'll partner with him to make every decision based only on what's in the best interest of our children."

- We'll have neighborhood elementary schools again. Families wanting to go to that neighborhood school will have a 100% guaranteed placement— no exceptions. And I'll push for changes in state reimbursement to allow all elementary children to be bused if their parents request it.
- Schools will be opened more hours at night, on weekends, and in the summer—no more excuses that "janitors control the keys and building hours." Schools will coordinate hours and programming with City libraries, recreation centers and nearby facilities owned by non-profits and churches, giving community groups and families maximum access. We'll use our state Joint Schools Construction funding to have a Ryan Center in every quadrant. We don't need more buildings—we just need to share with our partners the abundant facilities we have.
- I'll insist that the City, schools and our partners break down bureaucratic barriers to coordinate programming to help kids succeed—including truancy prevention, innovative suspension and after-school programming. Schools will talk live to parents if their child doesn't show up for class and every child who wants or needs an after-school program will get into one.
- Once children are in their seats, ready to learn, schools will be safe havens. As your former Chief of Police, I pledge that we will not have any tolerance for violence or intimidation in schools. No exceptions.
- By executive order, where appropriate, we'll consolidate administrative services between the City and schools, and shift more resources to the classroom. No more unnecessary duplication of offices like law, finance, labor relations, fleet and building maintenance. We'll expand 311 to make school services more responsive. We all serve the same customers—parents, students and taxpayers—and under my watch we'll be streamlined and cost-efficient. We don't need more money—we just need to be smarter about spending directly on our kids.
- How? I have the utmost faith in Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard. I pledge to give him maximum authority to implement his Strategic Plan, which will eliminate unnecessary spending and funnel as many dollars and staff to the classroom as possible. He is our expert on educating young people, and City Council and I won't micro-manage him. We'll partner with him to make every decision based only on what's in the best interest of our children.
- We'll let the Superintendent close schools that are failing, and replicate ones that are succeeding. If there's a waiting list for School of the Arts, that means we should have two. If Edison Tech isn't graduating students ready for a trade, we'll partner with trade unions, industry and Monroe Community College to improve our curriculum and training methods.
- Within five years, I pledge to improve our graduation rate from 46% to 65%. And those graduates will be ready for college and jobs, without needing excessive amounts of remediation. A Rochester City School diploma will mean what it used to mean.

The buck stops here:

I welcome accountability.

“We cannot be patient while waiting for more incremental progress.”

- We cannot reach our vision to be the best mid-sized city in the U.S. in which to live, work and raise a family without breakthrough improvements in education. Significant increases in student success will sustain our proven progress in public safety and economic development.
- Gov. Paterson and key members of our delegation understand our plight and are proposing a bill to give Rochester a unique opportunity—to shift the focus of accountability and responsibility for our schools to the City for a 5-year test period. I welcome the buck stopping with me and will work with City Council to make this a successful experiment for parents, children, neighborhood leaders and taxpayers.
- Half of our children failing to graduate on time is unacceptable and we're about to fall back to a graduation rate only in the mid-40's. No one would accept a less than 50% chance their plane would land safely, and we shouldn't accept a failed public school system for our kids either. Too many students who fail to graduate end up on our streets as victims or perpetrators of violence—our jails, prisons and cemeteries are filled with high school dropouts. Instead, all of our children deserve to—and can—graduate ready for a productive life.
- Contrary to statements by the School Board, we cannot be “patient” while waiting for more incremental progress. Parents, neighborhood leaders and employers aren't satisfied with the results the School Board has gotten for the last 30 years, and neither am I. I will no longer stand on the sidelines and concede the field to adults who accept failure. Instead, I will lead a charge for maximum accountability for improved attendance, test scores and graduation rates, so that another generation of our promising children is not lost.
- We have abundant resources for kids, but adults make decisions that block their optimum use. Schools aren't open at night, on weekends and in the summer because of adults' preferred work schedules. Schools, libraries, recreation centers and non-profit community centers don't collaborate because it might mean loss of adult jobs. Well, I care more about retention of kids than about the interests of adults in the system. I'll put children's interests first to create effective after-school programs, anti-truancy efforts, and early-intervention initiatives.
- In this time of severe economic strain, we also cannot afford to waste one dollar of taxpayer money. The state requires that 73% of the City's tax levy go to the District, yet the Mayor and Council have no say in how even one dollar is spent. We've proven that we're accountable for every dollar spent on City services and we'll do the same for school spending.
- Now let me get specific about why we need more accountability—for vastly improved student achievement, for wiser use of physical assets, and for financial management of our school system.

Failed student achievement:

Why now? The Board has had its chance to improve student outcomes.

"I'll let the Superintendent implement his bold and innovative Strategic Plan, to make sure our results improve exponentially and that we spend dollars in the classroom effectively."

- The State Education Department has just rated half of our high schools as failing under federal standards for graduation rates and Math/English scores. We must refuse to accept such abject failure anymore.
- Our graduation rates have fluctuated between 39% to 52%—and this year they will drop back to the mid-40's. That means more than half of our children emerge from the system marked as failures. We must refuse to accept this anymore.
- The average student misses at least one day of school every two weeks at Bioscience and Health Career School at Franklin, at Global Media Arts at Franklin, at Charlotte, at Freddie Thomas, at Marshall and at Monroe. If a 9th grader misses every other Friday, he will likely fall hopelessly behind in subjects requiring sequential learning, like math and science. We must refuse to accept this anymore.
- An astoundingly high percentage of our 8th graders fail proficiency in even the "basic skills" on NYS English tests. Examples: 85% at Global Media Arts School and 84% of Bioscience and Health Career School 8th graders did not attain "basic skills." And if you can't read by 8th grade, you won't succeed in high school, college or life. We must refuse to accept this anymore.
- A frightening percent of our 8th graders aren't proficient in even the "basic skills" on NYS Math tests. Examples: 87% at Monroe High and 81% at East High did not attain "basic skills." And if you can't do 8th grade Math, you will not succeed in high school Math or Science. And you probably won't get a job at McDonald's. We must refuse to accept this anymore.
- Our high level of poverty is no excuse. Several charter schools in the city, who use a lottery system and therefore have similar demographics to District schools, have shown outstanding results. Schools such as Eugenio Maria de Hostos and True North have reached 90–100% proficiency levels on these tests—better than Brighton or Pittsford. Why are the charter schools outperforming our City schools? These kinds of results debunk the myth that poor students can't be expected to succeed.
- Even District students who manage to attend school, and do well enough on tests to graduate, too frequently emerge less than prepared for college or work requirements. Monroe Community College must provide remedial courses for too many of our graduates who enroll before they're ready for college-level courses. Our graduates must be college ready. We must refuse to accept this anymore.
- Last year, the Superintendent announced that the District had over 200 more staff than necessary to provide classroom and administrative coverage. He asked the Board to let him cut those positions so that more resources could be funneled to the classroom. He was thwarted. This year, he is calling for closure of under-performing schools and replication of successful school models. Some on the Board are already pushing back. I'll let the Superintendent implement his bold and innovative Strategic Plan, to make sure our results improve exponentially and that we spend dollars in the classroom effectively.

Mayoral Accountability successes:

Why now? Districts
under City account-
ability are achieving
better results.

- New York City is thus far the only school district in New York State that the Governor and State Legislature have allowed to be fully under City responsibility. Their results on state tests since the inception of this governance change are irrefutably positive.
 - The percentage of grade 4 students passing state Math tests rose from 52% in 2001 to 80% in 2008.
 - The percentage of grade 4 students passing state English tests rose from 44% in 2001 to 61% in 2008.
 - The percentage of grade 8 students passing state English tests rose from 33% in 2001 to 43% in 2008.
 - The percentage of grade 8 students passing state Math tests rose from 23% in 2001 to 60% in 2008.
- Their 4-year cohort graduation rate has risen from 53% in 2005 to 62% in 2008.
- The national expert in this field, Dr. Kenneth Wong of Brown University, stated in a personal interview while visiting Rochester on 1/15/10 that, "My research attributes these results directly to the change in governance in NYC starting in 2002. And the biggest improvements in outcomes have been in student populations and schools that were the lowest performing."
- Similar outstanding improvements under city governance of schools have been documented in cities such as Chicago, Boston, Cleveland and Washington, D.C. Among many research documents, see especially "The Education Mayor: Improving America's Public Schools" by Dr. Wong, and "Mayors and Urban Schools: Governance Redesign" by the Broad Foundation.

Coordination:

Why now? We must coordinate our services to children and families.

“This community has tried for 30 years to get School Boards to tear down the walls that separate schools from neighborhoods, and to open doors to families and businesses.”

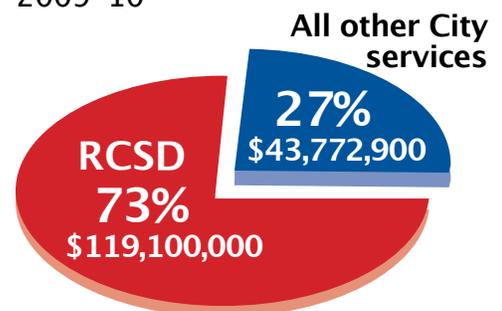
- Go to any neighborhood in the city and you'll notice how rich we are in physical resources. Within a few block radius in most areas, you'll find a school, a City recreation center, playgrounds and/or parks, a library, a few neighborhood outreach centers run by non-profits, and many churches. Trouble is, some adults tend to think first of protecting their own jobs and organizations and less about making these facilities work for families.
- So after 9 p.m., on weekends and in the summer, you'll see too many of these buildings dark and locked up, with unused libraries, computer labs, pools and gyms. Meanwhile, groups of youth are congregating on nearby corners, flirting with trouble.
- This community has tried for 30 years to get School Boards to tear down the walls that separate schools from neighborhoods and to open doors to families and businesses. We've all heard the answers ad nauseam: “The janitors hold the keys and won't stay after hours.” Or “School librarians are certified teachers who can't work with City librarians.” Or “The City and non-profits have to use, and pay overtime after 3 p.m. for, unionized teachers, teacher's aides and librarians for the Rochester After School Academy, instead of using non-unionized recreation staff or City librarians—even though they're still working until 5 p.m.” Adult issues all. No more—kids are going to come first under Mayoral Accountability.
- I pledge to use my bully pulpit and personal capital to convince all partners in the youth services business to collaborate on service delivery, from a physical facility, programmatic and staffing perspective. We have successfully launched this model at the Ryan Center, are moving it into North Street Recreation Center, and will do so in every quadrant of the city. For instance, we'll run collaborative after-school programs from 3–6 p.m., when teens (and increasingly pre-teens) are most likely to experiment with gangs, drugs and sexual activity. This model lends itself to case management of family issues that could involve more county and state agencies, and faith community involvement as well. My Mayor's Youth Advisory Council will help in program design.
- In direct opposition to the current School Board's adamant resistance, I'll make all elementary schools neighborhood schools again. If a family chooses a neighborhood school, they will have a 100% guarantee of placement. According to former School 17 principal Ralph Spezio, this one change will vastly increase the cohesiveness and commitment of all elements of city neighborhoods and, thus, the quality of life of residents and taxpaying businesses.
- This will make schools in our neighborhoods beacons of learning for adults, children and businesses and ultimately—true Children's Zones.

Efficiencies and consolidation:

Why now? We must use our scarce resources more cost efficiently.

- In Rochester, as in the other Big Five school districts, the City levies taxes for schools. So, although the School Board is elected, they have no responsibility for taxing or bonding. This has led to a lack of fiscal constraint on the Board's part over the last several decades. The District's budget was equal to the City's 15 years ago, and now it is twice the size. Last year, the City Council and I reduced our City budget by 6%. The District's budget grows by at least the cost of living every year.
- The state's imposition of the annual "Maintenance of Effort" (MOE) requirement in 2007, only exacerbated this disconnect between who pays and who spends. The City is now required to send \$119.1 M to the District, or 73% of our entire property tax levy, no questions asked. It doesn't matter if District enrollment falls, if we're hit by such a bad recession that we have to cut police officer or firefighter positions, or if the District gets \$30 M in federal stimulus aid. All these things happened in 2009, but we still had to send \$119.1 M to the District. And the City Council and I have absolutely no say in how even one dollar of that pot is spent.
- In its 2007 credit review, Standard and Poor's cited the MOE as the principal reason for lowering the City's bond rating. That has restricted our ability to borrow money at competitive rates and resulted in a direct negative impact on the City's budget and the City School District budget.
- In 2009, the Office of State Comptroller issued a scathing audit of the District's finances. It focused heavily on the School Board's lack of sufficient oversight of spending practices between July 2002 and September 2008. Such squandering of scarce resources led to unnecessary taxation of City residents, which inevitably leads to impaired home sales and loss of population.
- The City has just embarked on a 15-year Joint Schools Construction project with the District. Understandably, given the past and recent history of District finances, the City Council and I are concerned about decisions the School Board may make that may further negatively impact the City's bond rating, property valuation and quality of neighborhood life. This is just one instance of how consolidating City and District departments (e.g., facilities engineering and design, building maintenance, finance) could have immediate and long-term benefits.
- During his visit to Rochester this month, Dr. Kenneth Wong reiterated that research shows under Mayoral Accountability that, "Mayors shift limited resources to solve problems and increase those going to schools and classrooms in greatest need." He noted that Districts under Mayoral Accountability garner more financial support from the federal government and foundations, and establish more successful partnerships with higher education institutions.

Total Property Tax Levy 2009-10



Input:

What's next?

- The Governor expects to send a program bill on Mayoral Accountability for Rochester schools to the NYS Legislature in early February. It will reflect his priorities and we have not seen even a draft outline yet. We expect it to be based primarily on NYC's 2009 renewal legislation, which included prominent roles for the Mayor, City Council, an appointed Panel for Education Policy, parents and neighborhood leaders, in the governance of our schools. I have asked for a 5-year trial period—I deliver, or Mayoral Accountability sunsets.
- Based on successful designs in NYC, Chicago and Boston, the proposed legislation will likely increase the financial and staffing authority of principals as CEOs of their buildings. This model of increased autonomy is consistent with Superintendent Brizard's Strategic Plan, which I wholeheartedly support.
- I will personally sponsor "Voice of the Customer" public hearings to discuss the draft legislation in each of our four quadrants. I'll welcome any and all questions and suggestions at that time.
- I will visit neighborhoods, churches, community groups and parent/teacher organizations to explain my position and to listen to their issues and concerns.
- In addition, the Rochester Business Journal and City Newspaper are both planning panels of experts on the pros and cons of Mayoral Accountability in February. I will eagerly participate in those forums as well.
- If and when state legislation is proposed by the Governor, or the Legislature, we will initiate a comprehensive study by a third-party consultant, to help design the reorganization of functions that are candidates for consolidation across the City and District. These might include our departments of youth services and some of our administrative units. A timeline for that reorganization will be proposed at that time.
- We have a choice—we can do nothing and accept the consistent failure and under-performance or we can work together to change the future for our children.

Q. Isn't it undemocratic to take away our right to vote for School Board? Suburban voters vote for their School Boards.

A. School Board candidates in Rochester have traditionally had lower vote totals than the Mayor or At-Large Council Member candidates. Under Mayoral Accountability, you will have the right to register your satisfaction/dissatisfaction with school governance through your votes for Mayor and Council. Unlike in the suburbs, City voters have never been able to vote for their school budgets. So, since the Mayor and City Council are the ones who actually levy your school taxes and float school-related bonds, your vote will finally be a direct tie. If you don't think you're getting your money's worth, vote me out of office and school policy will immediately change.

Q. Won't this put too much power in the hands of one person? I have trouble enough getting through to any School Board member—how can I expect to get to the Mayor?

A. One of the reasons for lack of accountability now is that the Superintendent reports to seven Board members. Common sense says that if too many people are in charge, no one is in charge. Under Mayoral Accountability, I'll welcome being held accountable for all aspects of quality of life in Rochester—which obviously includes schools. During my first four years, through City Hall on the Road and my neighborhood walks, I've made being accessible my highest priority. That won't change. I'll meet with any parent on any concern as soon as I possibly can. Also, I expect the state legislation to provide for City Council oversight through, for instance, ratification of my appointments to the Panel for Education Policy.

Q. What about after Mayor Duffy, if I don't like the next Mayor's policy toward schools?

A. We expect the state legislation to include checks and balances on unfettered power, including roles for the Panel for Education Policy and parents. It will convert the schools to a status of a City department. In that way, City Council will have the same policy oversight over schools as it currently does over police, fire and other City services.

Q. We have to solve the concentration of poverty, racism and the unwillingness of the community to help poor minority kids, or who writes the check won't matter.

A. We have to solve our own problems and we have to start now with improving what we can control. That includes demanding higher expectations for our kids and the adults in the system, better fiscal management and more alignment of scarce resources in support of families. Only in that way will we retain the families we have, attract some middle income families back, and capitalize on support from our taxpayers.

Q. The Mayor said he wasn't for this change when he ran in 2005. And our numbers are improving so why now?

A. My four years in office have changed my mind. I always said that graduation rates must improve, but they will fall again, from 52% to the mid-40's this year. That's not good enough. And the recent state audit proves that the School Board does not provide proper financial oversight. As Mayor, taxpayers expect me to preserve quality of life and fiscal stability.

Frequently asked questions:

"I have seen first-hand the challenges, problems and impediments—the current system is the problem. It must change."



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