



Putting Our Children First



# ROCHESTER'S SCHOOLS

## COMMUNITY INPUT SESSIONS

# FINAL REPORT

## January 23, 2019



Dear Friends,

**Over the past five years, it has been my priority to create more jobs, foster safer and more vibrant neighborhoods and provide better schools and educational opportunities for all of our residents.** Alongside our many community partners, we've celebrated great successes, like bolstering Pre-K enrollment by 1,200% and implementing the community school model at Enrico Fermi School #17 to help turn around a school that had been underperforming. None of these successes could have happened without our community partners and a student-centered approach.

**The release of the Distinguished Educator's Report by Dr. Jaime Aquino revealed much of what we already knew about the Rochester City School District.** The report highlighted the serious challenges we face, but it also provided us with some direction and the beginning elements of an action plan for improvement.

**Throughout December, knowing how important community partnerships have been, I invited parents, teachers, students and many other community and neighborhood leaders to join me in a series of community input sessions.** At these sessions, attendees shared their thoughts on the topics covered by the Distinguished Educator's report and shared with me how they think the schools, the community and City Hall can best partner to bring about the change we want to see.

**The conversations we had were thoughtful and productive** and upon the conclusion of each event, the community left with greater clarity on the future we want for our schools and the ways in which we can each contribute to reaching our goals. This report summarizes some of the key themes that emerged from our discussions.

**Frederick Douglass once said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."** After these community forums, I can proudly say that this community has resolved to focus our energies, talents and resources to rebuild our City's education system. When we leverage the full force of our community through thoughtful partnerships, we can empower each other to truly make a long-lasting difference.

I look forward to working with you as we build strong children together.

Sincerely,



Lovely A. Warren  
Mayor







## INTRODUCTION

Throughout December 2018, Mayor Lovely Warren hosted a series of forums to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing Rochester's schools. The decision to host these forums was prompted by the release of the Distinguished Educator's Report by Dr. Jaime Aquino dated November 14, 2018. The goal was to identify areas for future community partnerships that will promote our children's success and learning.

Date	Event
December 13, 2018	Parent Input Session at City Hall
December 17, 2018	Community Stakeholder Input Session at City Hall
December 17, 2018	Parent Input Session at City Hall
December 18, 2018	Telephone Town Hall Meeting
December 27, 2018	Youth Input Session at Danforth Community Center





## Youth Input Session

Knowing that any potential changes at our schools will most directly impact the thousands of students attending the District, Mayor Warren wanted to ensure she directly heard from students all the way from elementary school through high school.

Mayor Warren joined the members of her Youth Advisory Council, students from the Center for Teen Empowerment and other students from the Rochester City School District at Danforth Community Center on December 27. The Youth Advisory Council is comprised of a leadership team of 30 students. The Council's Executive Committee works closely with the Mayor and City officials on policies affecting the city's youth. The Center for Teen Empowerment helps low-income youth hone their understanding of the social problems they face and use their talents and skills to create change in their own lives and in their communities.

More than 100 youth ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade and representing schools from across the District attended the session to provide feedback to the Mayor. The Mayor welcomed them to Danforth Community Center and emphasized how important it is that they are involved with the ongoing community conversation, given that they are the ones who are most directly impacted by community partnerships in the District.





There was a marked difference in how younger students and older students described their schools. They showed that school climate worsens as kids progress through the system. Older students emphasized a climate of negativity, disrespect and unfair suspicion.

- *"When I get to school they make me take my boots off to go through a metal detector and my socks get wet and I have to sit through class with soaked feet."*
- *"The metal detectors, police offices, hall sweeps and cafeteria food all make me feel like I'm in a prison."*
- *"I don't think all my teachers see the potential in me."*
- *"My teachers can't relate to me."*
- *"My counselor doesn't believe in me or tell me about opportunities."*
- *"Schools do not feel safe."*
- *"I don't feel safe when I'm leaving school."*
- *"I feel targeted and stereotyped."*

The students were well-versed in the challenges and strengths of their schools and they offered smart and creative suggestions for addressing some of the issues in our education system. The students were elated to be asked to be a part of the discussion and they said they hoped to be a part of future meetings of a similar nature. They expressed that they have a right to be at the table to discuss their own future and they proved that their feedback is invaluable to deciding the District's next steps.



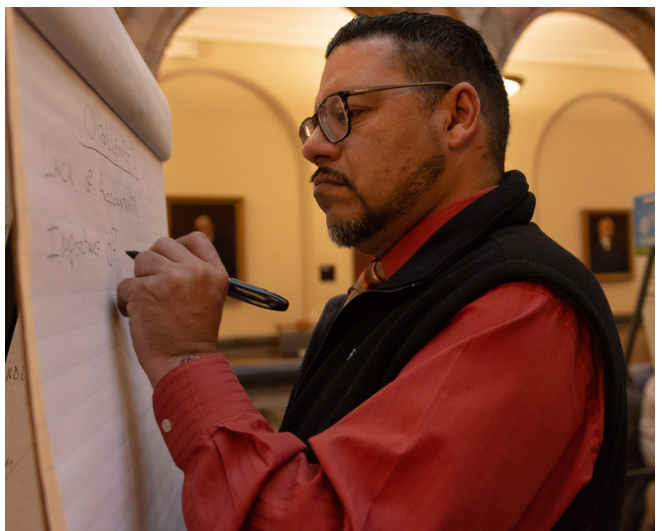
## Parent Input Sessions

The Parent Input Sessions were held at City Hall on the evenings of December 13 and 17. The first Parent Input Session focused on parents of preschool and elementary school children, while the second event was geared more towards parents of middle and high school-aged children. Both sessions were open to the public and featured diverse groups of parents from across the city.

Mayor Warren opened the events by welcoming parents and sharing a few words on the importance of creating better educational opportunities and addressing the findings from the Distinguished Educator's Report. Participants then joined breakout groups to discuss four distinct topics:

- The strengths of Rochester schools
- The challenges facing Rochester schools
- The role of the community in improving our schools
- The role of City Hall in improving our schools

Participants were invited to rotate between discussion topics and upon the conclusion of the discussion period, the full group reassembled to report on the main themes around each topic.







## Community Stakeholders Input Session

The Community Stakeholders Input Session took place in the afternoon of December 17 at City Hall. Over 100 community stakeholders and organizations such as social workers, support groups, advocacy organizations, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood leaders, business leaders, members of the faith community, RCSD employees and others attended.

Like with the Parent Input Sessions, the Mayor welcomed participants and expressed the importance of creating better educational opportunities and addressing the findings from the Distinguished Educator's Report. Participants joined the same breakout groups, rotated topics and reported to the full group at the event's conclusion on the major themes from their discussions.

## Telephone Town Hall

On December 18, a total of 13,780 households in the city of Rochester were directly called and invited to participate in the Telephone Town Hall hosted by Mayor Warren. A total of 2,691 individuals took part in the call, 42% of which had at least one child enrolled in the Rochester City School District.

Mayor Warren welcomed listeners and emphasized the importance of bringing better educational opportunities to the city through community partnerships. The call was formatted to allow participants to directly ask the Mayor questions and it also asked listeners to answer polling questions in return by dialing into their phones.

## Other Correspondence

This report also makes use of information provided in personal correspondence sent to the Mayor at City Hall through the Mayor's Chief of Staff and Office of Constituent Services.

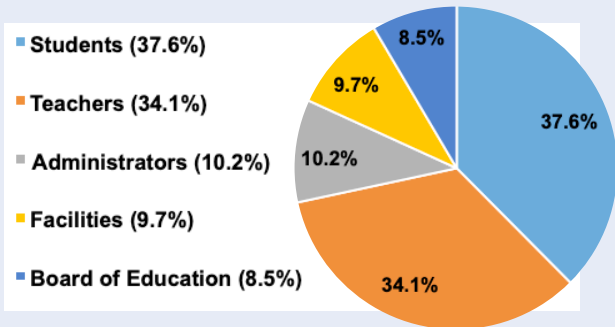
## TOPIC ONE: THE STRENGTHS OF ROCHESTER SCHOOLS

### Purpose

The purpose of this discussion was to highlight what is going well at the School District, celebrate community partnerships that have previously been successful and identify the best practices happening in our schools that we can replicate across the District. The participants were surveyed on their overall opinions about the District's greatest strengths and then they also provided key verbal feedback.

When surveyed, more than two-thirds of respondents expressed their feelings that students and teachers are the greatest assets in the School District.

### What is the greatest strength of Rochester's schools?



### Key Theme: Students Are Resilient and Hopeful

Community members expressed that any analysis and plan for the Rochester City School District must start and end by recognizing that the students are our single greatest asset and the reason why these conversations are so important.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- "Kids are very resilient."
- "Kids are hopeful and have drive."
- "Students are remarkably resilient."
- "Student population is diverse and talented."
- "There are a lot of students who want to learn more but aren't offered all the opportunities for advanced learning that are offered in the suburbs."

### Key Theme: Caring Teachers and Exceptional Pre-K

Another critically important strength recognized by the community is the dedicated and caring teaching staff working hard throughout the District to offer children engaging and fun instruction. Many noted, however, that it often feels like teachers are asked to do it all and that there needs to be more partners involved in order to relieve teachers of some of the burden they shoulder. Many respondents noted that the diversity of the teaching staff does not fully reflect the diversity of the students they serve.

Attendees specifically noted the success in teaching at the early education level, which was also recognized by the Distinguished Educator. The expansion of funding for preschool through the Mayor's 3-to-3 Initiative has resulted in an exponential increase in Pre-K enrollment.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- "There are many dedicated teachers, both working and retired."
- "Teaching has been extremely effective at the preschool level."
- "Teachers and staff care about the kids and are willing to go the extra mile."
- "Teachers are great at teaching, but they are currently tasked with managing behaviors constantly, especially in the mid-elementary grades."
- "There are caring teachers who are student-oriented."
- "My teachers at School #17 are good."
- "Teachers and staff are educated and empathetic to the children and families they serve."
- "Recent efforts made to expand access to preschool should continue. Early childhood development is key to future success."



### Key Theme: Community Schools Model and Community Partnerships

Following in line with the observation that teachers are too often asked to do it all on their own, participants remarked that it is important that the community and neighborhoods reengage in the development of children. Attendees said they would like to see more community involvement in schools as well as more services available to kids and families. They held up community schools in the District as prime examples of how they would like to see other schools operate.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"There are strong, school-specific partnerships with community organizations and businesses."*
- *"Some schools have student support centers."*
- *"There is a positive influence when mentors and volunteers are in the schools."*
- *"Schools that partner with nonprofits and the community appear to be more successful."*
- *"Corporate collaborations have opened up new opportunities to students."*

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### Key Theme: High Quality Facilities Resulting from Modernization Program

Through a partnership between the State, City, School District and others in the community, more than three quarters of a billion dollars have been invested in modernizing the school facilities across the Rochester City School District.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"The new school buildings are amazing."*
- *"Facilities modernization is going well."*
- *"Modernization program has improved facilities."*
- *"The new facilities have more technology resources available."*
- *"New technology as a result of the modernization program."*
- *"Upkeep on older facilities has also been good."*
- *"The modernization program should serve as a model."*
- *"Facilities are the greatest strength but are poorly utilized."*

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### Key Theme: Size of Budget

The Rochester City School District has a budget of \$883 million. The City of Rochester annually provides RCSD with \$119.1 million as required by New York State's Maintenance of Effort mandate.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"There is a high level of budget funding."*
- *"There are a lot of resources available."*
- *"There's a lot of money invested in the schools, but it is not always used most efficiently."*
- *"We are able to provide a public school education to every child."*



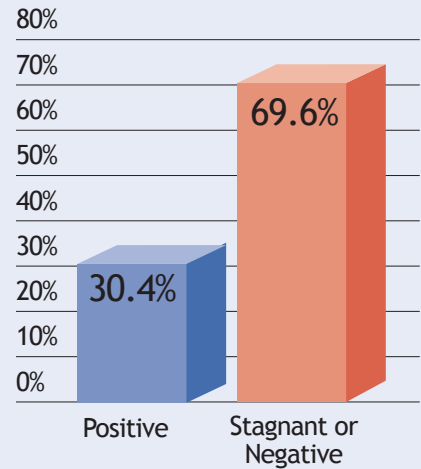
## TOPIC TWO: THE CHALLENGES FACING ROCHESTER SCHOOLS

### Purpose

The purpose of this discussion was to understand the areas where the community needs to focus its attention on improvement. It also allowed participants to bring up specific problems they have faced when interacting with the School District. When surveyed, a majority of both in-person attendees and the Telephone Town Hall participants thought the direction of the School District was either negative or stagnant, demonstrating that there are obvious challenges that need to be addressed.

By identifying challenges, participants gained a better conception of where they would like to see the School District go from here.

**How do you feel about the direction of the District?**



### Key Theme: Not Enough Wrap-around Services for Families

Participants agreed that there must be a focus on entire families, not just the kids. So much of what influences a student's learning starts in the home. Everyone felt that the District would see better learning outcomes if wrap-around services like mental health services and counseling were readily available to help address issues that may start outside the classroom.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- "There are not enough wraparound services available in schools such as social workers and mental health services."
- "There is a lack of services for children who are left behind."
- "There lacks programs and considerations for each child."
- "Availability of wrap-around services is insufficient, particularly mental health."
- "Wrap-around services should be more like at School #17."
- "Mental health services are only used reactively, rarely proactively."
- "We need support services for both children and families."
- "Poverty is at the root of all these other issues and must be addressed."

### Key Theme: Frequent Turnover in Leadership and School Board Misunderstands Its Role

Participants did not feel that they could articulate an overall strategy in the District. They felt that this resulted from a lack of stability in leadership, particularly Superintendent turnover. There was also concern about the School Board taking too active a role in day-to-day management and not just focusing on matters of governance and policy. They advocated for a student-centered approach to school governance.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- "There is no stability in leadership."
- "There is inconsistency in leadership, particularly Superintendent turnover."
- "The Board does not seem to understand what a board's responsibilities are. They are in the weeds. They should not be micromanaging the day-to-day operations of the district."
- "There are leadership silos throughout the District."
- "Too much politics in the School Board."
- "The Board does not know its role."
- "School Board is paid way more than anywhere else. Should be volunteers."
- "The Board does not really know what is going on in the classrooms."
- "The Board does not allocate resources effectively."



## Key Theme: City, Parents and Community Are Not Thought of as Partners

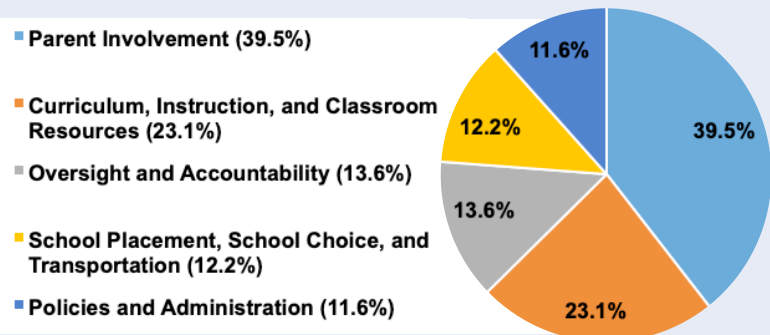
Many community members surveyed felt that the greatest challenge facing the District was a lack of parent involvement. Students, especially elementary kids, said they would like to see their parents at school more, especially to pick them up and drop them off. Community members felt that there could be improvement on both the District's and the parents' side. They thought that the District needs to change how it views and approaches parent engagement and parents need to take some of their own initiative to get involved, but attendees acknowledged that external factors like poverty make this difficult. Many spoke of community partnerships in which parents help other parents take on a meaningful role in their schools and their children's education.

Furthermore, those at the Community Stakeholders Input Session expressed that their organizations and others were standing by ready to help achieve the District's goals, but the District did not seem to prioritize leveraging these partnerships. They called this a major missed opportunity.

### Community Input Session Comments

- "There is an overall lack of partnership."
- "Parents need to be met where they are at."
- "The Mayor is not involved enough in direct partnership with the schools."
- "There is a lack of a parent-teacher relationship."
- "There is a lack of partnership between community, family and school."
- "Trust needs to be built with the population you are serving."
- "More parents need to join the existing parent groups."
- "There are not enough community schools."
- "There is a lack of unity between the City, District and Board."
- "The voice of the family is not represented in decision-making."
- "Engagement with parents is only ever about disciplining their children."

### What is the greatest challenge facing our schools?



### Key Theme: Structural Racism and Negative School Climate

Participants felt it was time to have a serious conversation about race and cultural competence. It was stated that the problems the District faces cannot be addressed without first acknowledging the presence and the effects of structural and institutional racism. They said they would like to see a District strategy in place with a plan to develop and hire talent rooted in the community and to educate current teachers and staff about race, culture and the community.

A negative school climate was also cited as a concern by many. Parents said they often felt anxious about their kids' safety after dropping them off at school. Students themselves talked about bullying and sometimes feeling concerned about their physical safety. Additionally, students and parents took issue with the disciplinary system and suspension process, saying schools are too quick to suspend students and in-school suspension does little to focus on learning.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"It is impossible to promote and ensure a culture of respect without seriously addressing individual, institutional, and structural racism."*
- *"There is a culturally appropriate communication breakdown."*
- *"There is a culture of negativity in schools."*
- *"There are low expectations of students and low student morale."*
- *"Schools are not welcoming environments."*
- *"The curriculum does not value African history."*
- *"As students, we want to see ourselves in the curriculum."*
- *"Teachers are rarely rooted in the community."*
- *"There has to be more involvement with kids who suffer bullying."*
- *"There have not been appropriate interventions made when my child has been physically and verbally bullied."*
- *"The disruption in the classroom is so high that children with great potential cannot focus enough to be successful. There must be zero tolerance for bullying."*
- *"ISS rooms should not look like jail."*

### Key Theme: Communication Breakdowns and Lack of Accountability

Many expressed frustrations relating to communication breakdowns in the District. They told stories of a directory that is difficult to navigate, unreturned phone calls and an overall unwillingness to share data and information. Moreover, participants felt that when commitments were made at public meetings, there were rarely any entities in place to hold anyone accountable. Important to also note, it was generally felt that successful practices in the District are rarely circulated to leadership and replicated in other schools.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"There is poor communication with parents and lack of transparency."*
- *"There is no follow through on commitments made."*
- *"There is poor communication and customer service."*
- *"Lack of transparency in communication with parents."*
- *"The District holds too many meetings and does not inform parents in a timely manner."*
- *"Things that are working are not elevated and spread."*
- *"Lack of communication and coordination."*
- *"Lack of ability to communicate with parents that do not speak English."*
- *"Disconnect in the system and a lack of data sharing."*
- *"There is a lack in communication."*
- *"Leadership doesn't have skin in the game."*





## TOPIC THREE: THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY IN IMPROVING OUR SCHOOLS

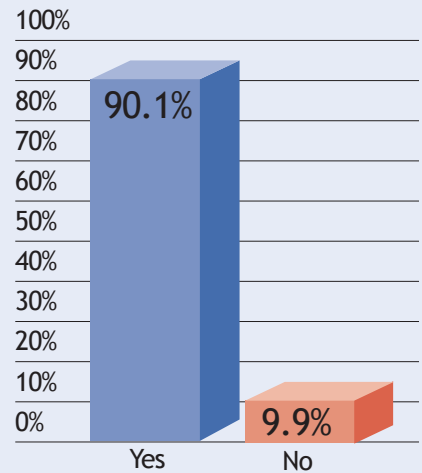
### Purpose

The purpose of this discussion was to provide participants with actionable steps they could take upon the conclusion of the meeting to make a difference in the direction of our school system. Participants recognized that “it takes a village,” and that it would require the dedicated efforts of all in the community and a commitment to partnership to see the future we want for our children.

### Key Theme: Support Community Schools

In the community schools model, the school serves as the neighborhood center, offering wrap-around services to families such as childcare, mental health services, counseling services and more. As a result of a partnership with the Mayor, the community school model was implemented at Enrico Fermi School #17 and yielded positive results for students and the neighborhood. When asked whether they would support more community schools throughout the District, 90% of respondents answered in the affirmative.

Do you support a community schools model?



### Community Input Session Comments

- “Advocate for community schools.”
- “Work to improve ease of access to schools.”
- “Create neighborhood schools.”
- “Parents at School #17 walk their kids to school and drop them off; that practice needs to be spread elsewhere.”
- “Schools are too isolated and need to get back to being a part of the community.”
- “We need the neighborhood to become the community. Involve the agencies located in that area.”
- “Make parents feel welcome in schools.”
- “We need community-focused solutions.”
- “We need more tutoring and access in our schools.”
- “Schools should be primarily community-based.”
- “Provide programs and services at the schools, not just at libraries and R-Centers. Kids are already at school. Have programs that parents will attend with their kids. It’s all about presentation—make the schools more welcoming.”
- “Make services more accessible through community schools.”
- “Our children need more guidance and counseling when they can’t get it at home. Bring back mentors!”
- “Invest more in mental and emotional supports for children.”
- “The other students in my school need more support from counselors.”
- “We need more one-on-one interventions with students who are struggling.”

### Key Theme: Engage Parents

Participants felt that if a lack of parent involvement is the issue, then a community-wide effort to engage parents is the answer. They spoke of neighbors helping neighbors and the need for parents to see each other as partners in the future of public education. They spoke of shifting away from a mindset of “my kid” to “our kids.” They recognized that when one parent’s child benefits, everyone’s child benefits.

### Community Input Session Comments

- “We need strong parental involvement, active PTAs and more opportunities to give input.”
- “Parents can carpool to PTA and School Board meetings and find other strategies to increase the ease of parent involvement.”
- “Build up resources and partnerships for families.”
- “Educate parents on how education laws affect students.”

### Key Theme: Engage Parents (con't)

- *"Devote more of our resources to parent engagement."*
  - *"There should be mechanisms for parents to evaluate teachers and administrators."*
  - *"Inform and educate parents, focus on the whole family."*
  - *"Teachers should make home visits in conjunction with community-based organizations."*
  - *"Show parents that they are important."*
  - *"Help parents get kids to schools and keep schools safe and secure."*
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### Key Theme: Share Information and Cultural Knowledge

The community recognized that there is a lot of information and knowledge that it already possesses, but it is not always widely shared. They also recognized that everybody could stand to benefit from sharing more about culture and working to create more inclusive environments in schools and throughout the community.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"Hold more open conversations as a group with teachers, parents and community members."*
  - *"Study best practices and benchmarks from peer cities."*
  - *"Hold more community meetings like this one and focus on specifics."*
  - *"Create a catalog of community-based organizations and their missions."*
  - *"Create a centralized, local education database."*
  - *"Help train teachers on the demographics of their schools."*
  - *"We need a more global mindset."*
  - *"Bring new educators to the table to discuss culture."*
  - *"We need engagement regardless of race, there cannot be an 'us versus them' mentality."*
  - *"Parity matters, bring in people of shared backgrounds and color."*
  - *"Engage the faith-based community on culture sharing initiatives."*
  - *"We need to reach out to refugee parents and families and meet their needs."*
  - *"Tell other parents what it means to have a student with special needs."*
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### Key Theme: Engage Youth with Mentorship and Career Opportunities

Many thought that kids would have better outcomes if they were provided with more role models and mentors in the community. They talked about how "you can't be what you can't see," and just being able to relate with someone from a similar background who finished high school and experienced successes afterward would change students' perspectives on the value of education.

Furthermore, attendees thought that adults should stop trying to fit every student into a box that tells them that the only acceptable step after high school is college. One caller during the Telephone Town Hall told a story of how he had been forced to try college after graduating from RCSD and did not feel that it was right for him. He went on to learn a trade and now successfully runs his own business. He felt that finding out what students are truly interested in doing and providing them with more vocational training options was critical. The Mayor expressed her agreement that preparing students with technical skills for jobs in fields like advanced manufacturing and coding were all necessary components of a long-term strategy for education in Rochester.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"Create more mentorship programs."*
- *"Help teach conflict resolution to children."*
- *"Support kids' social and emotional health."*
- *"I'd like to see a career day at my school."*
- *"It would be nice to have more guest speakers from the community at my school."*
- *"Provide incentives for the business sector to provide job opportunities for youth completing high school."*
- *"We need more work-based programs."*
- *"Engage youth in the conversations about the future of schools."*



### Key Theme: Engage Youth with Mentorship and Career Opportunities (con't)

- *"Listen to students, they truly have answers and solutions."*
- *"Reinforce to kids that their community cares and loves them."*
- *"Invite retirees to work with young kids."*
- *"Make kids feel safe."*

### Key Theme: Hold Leaders Accountable

More than three quarters of respondents felt that the leaders in the District need to be held more accountable and that it would be most favorable if the future of leadership in our School District involved a mixed partnership model that includes some elected members of a School Board, a strong and independent Superintendent and formal community partnerships involving teachers, parents and City Hall.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"The community needs to hold the School District and Board accountable."*
- *"Find a way to select and keep high-quality School Board Members and Superintendent."*
- *"Demand accountability for City funds in the RCSD budget."*
- *"Make sure we get out and vote."*
- *"The community must come together and no longer be complacent about holding the School Board accountable."*
- *"Let's make a community plan and stick with it. And 100% change the way our current School Board functions."*

Which do you see as the best model for the future of our schools?	Percent Response
Leadership guided by an elected board	8.5%
Leadership guided by a stronger and more independent Superintendent	13.3%
Leadership by a variation of both of those along with a community partnership between the School Board, teachers, parents and City Hall	78.2%



## TOPIC FOUR: THE ROLE OF CITY HALL IN IMPROVING OUR SCHOOLS

### Purpose

The purpose of this discussion was to allow participants the opportunity to share how they think City Hall can best attain the Mayor's goal of providing better schools and educational opportunities. The discussion focused on how to scale up the kinds of mayoral partnerships that have yielded positive results like the community school model at School #17 and the investments that have been made in early education.

### Key Theme: Provide Greater Oversight during the Budget Process

Many felt that although the District has a large budget, resources are not always allocated efficiently. They said they would like to see the Mayor help identify cost-savings opportunities through economies of scale between the School District and the City. They advocated that the Mayor and City Council use the budget approval process to hold the School District more accountable for achievement.

### Community Input Session Comments

- "No one knows what's in the RCSD budget. The City needs to empower residents with information and data."
- "We need open government and greater transparency of the RCSD budget"
- "The Council and Mayor should educate the public on the RCSD budget by publishing an annual analysis."
- "The City does not take a firm enough position with the RCSD to improve—it needs to use the power of the budget approval."
- "RCSD's budget is salary heavy, which the City should change."
- "Get schools to be more transparent and put the budget in a readable format."
- "City Council needs expertise on schools and school budgets to ask questions and create accountability."
- "There is a lack of faith in the School Board's fiscal choices."
- "I want the Mayor and Council to use the power they have now to inform us of the budget's strengths, weaknesses and inconsistencies. Share best budgeting practices."

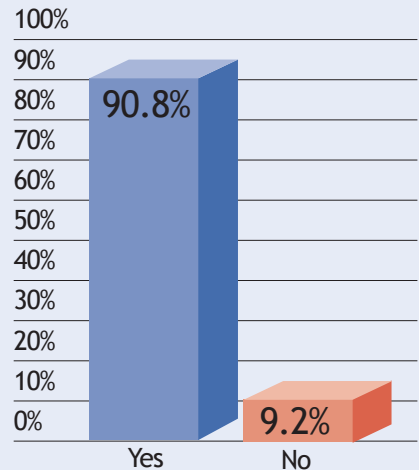
### Key Theme: Introduce a More Formal Relationship between the City and RCSD

More than 90% of survey respondents said they would like to see the Mayor enter into a formal partnership with the Rochester City School District to allow a closer working relationship. Attendees felt that the Mayor could play a leadership role by using her platform to call for change, leveraging the budget process to hold the District accountable for certain performance measures and providing her support in the establishment of community schools.

### Community Input Session Comments

- "We should have a more definitive relationship with the City and RCSD—an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) that defines the roles."
- "City Hall should work with the school principals, not just with Central Office, to make things happen."
- "The Mayor needs to have a greater role in holding the Board accountable—change the City Charter if needed."
- "We should have a bigger role for the Mayor. Help RCSD right away to bring in parents, families and community groups to the table. Get everyone's attention and effort."
- "The Mayor should steward a long-term, community-driven plan for education that lasts past individual leaders."
- "I do not want one-sided leadership by either the District or the City—we need a governance change that is more sustainable and includes more voices."

Would you like to see the Mayor work in a closer, more formal partnership with our schools?







### Key Theme: Introduce a More Formal Relationship between the City and RCSD (con't)

- *"Not only is the Mayor not allowed enough of a role in RCSD governance—she isn't given any role."*
- *"Look at other cities for models of governance and leadership approaches."*
- *"We need greater collaboration in education governance."*
- *"The Mayor said it best, we need to all work together, there are a lot of folks who want to be part of something helpful and we need to find a way to let them."*
- *"The Mayor should work closely with schools but can't do it alone, the community needs to be empowered to help."*

### Key Theme: Connect Students to Opportunities that Interest Them

Participants thought that one way low attendance rates could be combatted is by providing more compelling and engaging instruction. They also thought if students were involved in programs specific to their interests they would be more likely to attend school.

#### Community Input Session Comments

- *"The City could put together paid apprenticeships, with students going to school for just part of the day. Youth could learn practical skills, the ability to earn and this could motivate the youth to keep learning as they work towards a future they can actually see. Connect the kids to real-world instruction in the schools—home repair, personal finance, trades."*
- *"Local businesses need employees, RCSD is not seen as easy to work with. The City could help facilitate connecting students to employers."*
- *"The kids in my school who know they aren't going to college don't have opportunities to learn a trade or develop job skills."*
- *"RCSD is not offering enough practical programs and skill building. Kids are not aware of opportunities in the trades. The City should spread awareness."*

### Key Theme: Support Communication and Engagement with Parents and Community

The participants were pleased that the City was providing a forum for parents and other community members to join the conversation about the future of the District. They thought more opportunities for engagement were important and that the City could be a leader on convening such conversations.

Many also had the shared experience of trying to communicate and engage with the District but not ever getting a response back. They thought the City could help connect the community to information about the District.

#### Community Input Sessions Comments

- *"The city should create clear priorities and then create clusters of community members and educators to come together for solutions."*
- *"When families move into a new neighborhood in the city, they don't know what their school options are, or what their local neighborhood school is. The City should provide this information."*
- *"City can provide better information to help neighborhoods know about their community's schools rather than busing kids."*
- *"Parents get inconsistent information from the schools depending on who they ask. The City could help provide information, especially on placement. It could be provided as part of zoning information."*
- *"I get different information from the City versus RCSD. The City is sometimes more responsive and receptive to my ideas for new programming. They should work together on communication."*

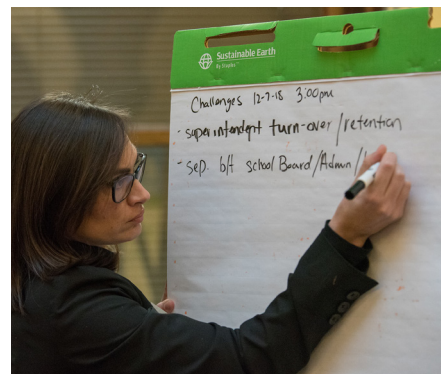


## CONCLUSION

**Hundreds of parents, students and community members took the time to come together and emphasize the urgency of confronting the challenges in our schools.** In doing so, they recognized that so much of one's future life experiences—from health to wellbeing to income—depends on the acquisition of a quality education. Attendees committed to continue the conversation and bring more parents and community members into the fold.

**The future of Rochester's schools requires collaboration and partnership.** Generally, there was consensus that parents and the community must be more frequently engaged and involved, that the community schools model should be more widely implemented and that City Hall should engage in more formal partnerships with the Rochester City School District to allow for increased accountability and communication.

**It is incumbent upon all of us to not lose sight of the reason for action: each of our kids is entitled to the opportunity to achieve their highest potential.** While the challenge may seem daunting at times, building strong children today is far easier than repairing the broken men of tomorrow. With a student-centered agenda and a holistic, community-wide plan for action, Rochester can offer every child a first-rate education. Change will not happen overnight, but with a sustained effort leveraging the full force of our community, progress will come.





## APPENDIX

Listed below are the questions that were presented to the five input session participants and a break down of their responses.

**Question 1.** How do you feel about the direction of the Rochester City School District?

A. Strongly Positive	13.8%
B. Somewhat Positive	16.6%
C. Neutral	14.3%
D. Somewhat Negative	36.3%
E. Very Negative	19.0%
TOTAL	100.0%

**Question 2.** What is the greatest strength or positive attribute of Rochester's schools?

A. Students	37.6%
B. Teachers	34.1%
C. Administrators	10.2%
D. Board of Education	8.5%
E. Facilities	9.7%
TOTAL	100.0%

**Question 3.** What is the greatest challenge facing our schools?

A. Parent Involvement	39.5%
B. Curriculum/Classroom Instruction	23.1%
C. Policies/Administration	11.6%
D. School Placement/School Choice/Transportation	12.2%
E. Oversight/Accountability	13.6%
TOTAL	100.0%

**Question 4.** Would you like to see the Mayor work in closer, more formal partnership with our schools?

A. Yes	90.8%
B. No	9.2%
TOTAL	100.0%

**Question 5.** Which of the following do you see as the best model for the future of our schools?

A. Leadership guided by only an elected board	8.5%
B. Leadership guided by a stronger and more independent superintendent	13.3%
C. Leadership by a variation of both of those along with a community partnership between the School Board, teachers, parents and City Hall	78.2%
TOTAL	100.0%

**Question 6.** Do you support a community schools model, where schools serve as neighborhood centers that offer wrap-around services for families? (Question only asked of Telephone Town Hall participants.)

A. Yes	90.1%
B. No	9.9%
TOTAL	100.0%

**Question 7.** Do you have a child or children enrolled in the Rochester City School District? (Question only asked of Telephone Town Hall participants.)

A. Yes	41.9%
B. No	58.1%
TOTAL	100.0%



For more information call 311. Outside the city call (585) 428-5990.  
Or contact Lovely A. Warren, Mayor of Rochester, 585-428-7045  
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