

RCSD budget would cut 194 teacher jobs, eliminate 326 total positions

Proposal ignores mayor's demand for \$15.7M spent on community schools

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After years of increased funding for academic priorities, the Rochester City School District on Tuesday proposed a \$925 million budget that closes a funding gap by eliminating 326 positions — including 194 teachers — and cutting money from nearly every aspect of the organization.

For the last several years the district has doubled down on supports for students, hiring extra teachers in special education, reading and English language learning even in the face of a mounting structural budget deficit. It has papered over the difference in large part with sizable chunks of fund balance, but that account is nearly depleted.

“It was needed funds; it was for the students and all that,” interim Superintendent Daniel Lowengard said. “But that’s what a structural deficit looks like. We have to be on a trend from now on where our expenditures will always be under our revenues.”

Lowengard proposed a general fund spending increase of \$5 million for 2019-20; that would be the smallest increase since 2012-13. In the last two years, by contrast, spending went up a combined \$69 million.

The most prominent reduction would be the elimination of all 40 of the district’s coordinating administrators of special education, a supervisory position in special education that is being redesigned. Some of their duties would be taken on by seven new “associate directors,” while school assistant principals would take on more duties.

There is no additional funding associated with the pending special education consent decree that will have mandatory benchmarks for improvement. “Most of it we think we can fund with existing resources,” Lowengard said.

The budget presentation document does not attempt to sugarcoat the potential detrimental effects on students.

School Board President Van White said he welcomed Warren’s input, but added: “If the city wants to be part of the conversation on community schools, they have to be part of the conversation on resourcing it.”

The lost teaching positions would be spread across all departments. Rochester Teachers Association President Adam Urbanski had suggested the district offer its most senior teachers a buyout; the budget document makes no reference to that, and it is not clear how many of the lost positions would be covered through attrition.

Enrollment in the district is projected to fall to 25,273 students in 2019-20, down from 31,511 a decade earlier.

Charter school enrollment is projected to grow to 6,101, but that would be the smallest increase in more than a decade. One charter school, ROC Achieve, is closing in June, and while another is opening, several existing charter schools have completed their grow-out and are not adding more students.

The district in December had floated the idea of closing some schools or programs to save money. That does not appear to be part of the spending plan, but Rochester Early College International High School — an academic bright spot that has never found a permanent building to call home — would lose one grade of students at the downtown Monroe Community College campus. Only 12th-graders would be there under the draft budget plan, with the rest returning to the full-to-capacity Wilson Foundation Academy building on Genesee Street.

East High School, which budgets separately from the general district budget, proposed a \$22 million budget that is down about 10 percent from 2018-19, mostly in eliminated salaries and contracts.

Public budget hearings — “the part where it gets really exciting,” Sewell said — are scheduled for April 2 and April 11. The board will vote to approve May 7 and City Council will consider it June 18.

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I School days in some buildings would be shortened by an hour.

I Fourteen positions that had been dedicated to combating chronic absenteeism would be cut. I Fifteen positions in academic intervention services — tutoring and support outside the classroom — would be cut, as well as 3.5 counselors and social workers.

I Alternative programs for the district’s most vulnerable students like LyncX Academy, Young Mothers and NorthSTAR are having a combined 36 positions cut from them.

“These are not easy cuts to be made,” Chief Financial Officer Everton Sewell said. “But we knew we had to do it.”

Budget ignores Warren’s demand

The budget ignores Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren’s demand for \$15.7 million in additional spending for community schools. On the contrary, it does not replace \$4 million in expired grant funding for certain contract services at several of those schools.



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