

A Review of the Rochester City School District

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ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is made up of several sections. The first section is an Introduction. The second section describes the process that was used to conduct the review of the Rochester City School District (RCSD or “the District”). The third section summarizes the Distinguished Educator’s general findings regarding the District and provides the specific findings and recommendations for each of the following sections: Governance, Leadership, Teaching and Learning, Special Education, English Language Learners, Organizational Structure, Accountability, Human Capital, Finances, Parent and Community Engagement, School Climate and Operations. The final section outlines the next steps in a process of constructive change.

INTRODUCTION

The Rochester City School District is a system that has historically underperformed. It is in dire need of improvement. As a result, in August of 2018, New York State Education Department (NYSED or “the Department”) Commissioner MaryEllen Elia appointed a Distinguished Educator to provide support in improving the District’s systems, structures, and operations, as well as to address significant gaps in student services and academic performance. Some of the reasons cited by the Commissioner for the appointment of the Distinguished Educator included:

- RCSD had the second lowest 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year graduation rates of any district in New York State with 30-plus students in a cohort in 2017.
- RCSD had the lowest combined English language arts (ELA) and mathematics Performance Index in the state at the elementary and middle school levels (grades 3-8) in 2017. At the high school level, only one district performed at a lower level than Rochester on the combined ELA and Math Performance Index.
- RCSD had the highest percentage of schools identified as Priority (54 percent) of any district in the state in 2017.
- The District is one of only five in the state in which 20 percent or more of the schools have been placed in receivership, and one of only three school districts in which a school in receivership has failed to make demonstrable improvement.

- RCSD is currently classified as a District in Need of Intervention under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is required to implement a Corrective Action Plan because of its failure to provide appropriate services to students with disabilities.
- Issues have been identified regarding the provision of services to English Language Learners (ELLs), and as a result of a NYSED monitoring visit to the District the Department expects to issue a Corrective Action Plan.

Over the years, parents, staff, community organizations, and other stakeholders have expressed their frustrations with the school system and the continued lack of progress of its students. Though the District has responded by implementing a number of strategies and approaches aimed at improving student performance, most of these efforts have had only minimal impact. While the community's continued commitment and the District's efforts to improve are encouraging, if RCSD's schools are going to transform into places where all students thrive, the District must undertake a total reset of the way in which the District operates.

In addition, all stakeholders must understand the difficulties RCSD faces. To produce better student outcomes, administrators, staff, and parents will have to make tough decisions and implement reforms. This will require a fresh look at all current instructional and non-instructional systems and functions. All future decision-making must focus on bolstering student learning.

Section 100.17 of the Commissioner's regulations requires that the Distinguished Educator's action plan outline the goals and objectives for the District and the Distinguished Educator, including the goals and objectives the District is responsible for achieving and the technical assistance the Distinguished Educator will provide in order to support the District in achieving its goals and objectives. This report provides the RCSD Board of Education (Board) and Superintendent goals and objectives in the form of recommendations for specific steps to strengthen the District's capacity to improve the educational experience for students who attend Rochester schools. It also describes the support and technical assistance that will be offered by the Distinguished Educator.

This report is *not* intended to blame any particular group or individual for the District's lack of success. The purpose of this report is to help the system fulfill its obligations to its students. Every participant in the system must shoulder the burden and take responsibility for results. To turn Rochester's schools around will require all stakeholders to collaborate on systemic solutions to achieve better outcomes. Children and their families deserve that. This report challenges those in positions of responsibility to take urgent action to help every student reach his or her full potential.

PROCESS

From August 20 to October 8, 2018, an intensive review was conducted of District and school instructional systems, structures, and operations. The review’s aim was to determine the District’s capacity to provide equitable access to high-quality teaching and learning for all students. The review consisted of a series of interviews and focus groups with different stakeholders as listed below.

Stakeholders	Number of Interviewees	Stakeholders	Number of Interviewees
Board of Education Commissioners	7	Parents and Community Members	43*
Superintendent	1	District Parent Advisory Council	2
District Central Office Staff	44	Parent and Teacher Organization Presidents	11
School Administrators**	19	Board of Education Non-Teaching Employees President	1
Teachers**	27	Association of Supervisors and Administrators of Rochester President	1
Bilingual Education Council	2	Rochester Teacher Association President	1
Special Education Council	7	Business Community Members	13

*This number does not include the parents who are represented in the Parent Advisory Council, Bilingual Council, Special Education Council, and Parent Teach Organization (PTO) Presidents.

** Administrators and teachers were interviewed by the Distinguished Educator during his school visits. The presidents of their unions recommended some of them for interviews. There was also a focus group of teachers organized by the union president.

In addition to conducting site visits to 17 schools, including all Priority and Focus Schools, the Distinguished Educator also reviewed the following documents:

Student Achievement Data	District Comprehensive Improvement Plan	Sampling of School Comprehensive Education Plan
Council of Great City Schools Special Education Report (2009)	Tydings (2013) Special Education Report	Dr. Elliot (2017) Special Education Report
Evaluation of the School Food Service Operations by the Council of Great City Schools (2004)	Evaluation of the Transportation Operations of the Rochester Public Schools by the Council of Great City Schools (2004)	Evaluation of the Enterprise Business Systems in the Rochester City School District by the Council of Great City Schools (2003)
Report and Recommendations of the Special Advisory Committee on Special Education	Harris (2016) The Status of Latino/a Bilingual Secondary Students in the Rochester City School District	Sampling of School Comprehensive Education Plan
2018 Summer School Crisis – Report of Inquiry	Establishing Long-Term Financial Stability	Comptroller Audit Recommendations – Status Report
The Path Forward: Summary Reports	Review of the 2018-19 Rochester City School District Budget	Rochester City School District Payroll and Procurement Report
Efficiency Study of the Rochester City School District Pupil Transportation Program		

Finally, the Distinguished Educator was also embedded in the daily functions of the District for 45 days to observe firsthand how it operates.

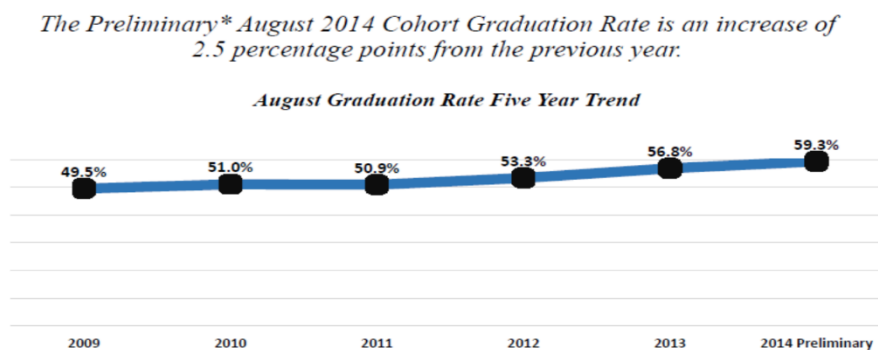
GENERAL FINDINGS

Though this historically underperforming school system continues to struggle in its efforts to deliver a high-quality education to its students, I would like to begin by recognizing some bright spots. Talented, hardworking, and committed staff members at the Board, central office, and in the schools, as well as committed community members, give this District the potential to become a high-functioning organization.

The bright spots include Rochester’s achievement of having one of the highest performing Pre-K systems in the United States, according to independent evaluations (Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership or RECAP). Rochester has held this honor since 2001. Using the internationally recognized classroom assessment tool, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale–Revised (ECERS-R), Rochester frequently achieved an average of 6.0 on a 7-point scale, compared to a United States average of approximately 4.3. No other Pre-K system has demonstrated such consistent excellence. Last year, 61% of the exiting Universal Prekindergarten students were ready for kindergarten as determined by the HighScope’s Child Observation Record — COR Advantage.

The overall English Language Arts (ELA) performance of students in grades 3-8 increased by 3.8% from 2016-17 to 2017-18. Math results also showed improvement District-wide in grades 3-8 performance with an increase of 2.8% from 2016-17 to 2017-18.¹ Graduation rates have trended slightly higher in the past five years as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Preliminary Graduation Rates
August Four-Year Graduation Rates including Preliminary 2014 Results Trend*



Source: NYSED School year Total Cohort Graduation rate and Enrollment Outcome Summary Report in combination with students confirmed as August graduates and enrollment data contained within the District’s Student Data Management. Students are reported based on their date of entry in grade 9 and their last enrollment status as reported in the SIRS.

¹ Because of the change from a three-day to a two-day the administration of Grades 3-to-8 English language arts and mathematics assessments between 2016-17 and 2017-18, results from the assessments given in these two years are not directly comparable.

Over the past year, the District has also increased enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses by 25%. New AP courses and subjects are being offered in classrooms across the District and through the virtual academy. The percentage of students taking AP courses who are Black and Hispanic increased from 66.6% to 72.8% from 2017 to 2018, while the percentage of females taking AP courses increased from 58.2% to 61.7%. Enrollment in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses has grown exponentially over the last five years, increasing from 70 students in 2012-2013 to 4,109 enrollees in 2016-2017. Student enrollment in CTE courses reflects the demographics of the District. In addition, the three-year trend shows a decrease in unduplicated suspension rates by three percentage points, from 16.5% to 13.5% from 2014 to 2017.

Two years ago, the District launched an effort to address racial biases through training in culturally relevant teaching. In another positive move, the Board of Education holds its weekly leadership meetings at Receivership and Priority Schools, using a Finish Line report to review data specific to the host school. Each report covers attendance, short-term and long-term suspensions, ELA and math achievement, and student growth.

However, despite these commendable accomplishments, these improvements are insufficient to address the most pressing issues the District faces. The District must commit itself to do far more if it is going to meet the needs of all students.

A recurring theme that surfaced during interviews with all stakeholder groups (parents, community members, staff) was that the District's decision-making seems driven more by the needs of administrators, teachers, and parents, with student concerns often taking a back seat to adult interests. To make fundamental changes, the system must shift its entire focus from the interests of adults to a student-centered agenda. The most common example provided by representatives from all stakeholder groups was the practice of nepotism. Numerous persons, in confidence, shared examples of nepotism.

The Rochester City School District has been plagued by high leadership turnover, with five superintendents in the last ten years.² This instability reduces the District's ability to focus on implementing educational reforms that would better prepare students for college and/or careers. Each superintendent brings a new vision and seeks to implement new programs, but when a superintendent exits, the system typically abandons initiatives just as they are beginning to take hold. All stakeholders expressed concerns that this uncertainty at the top creates a sense of complacency throughout the system. An administrator noted, "*The*

² Following the submission of this report to the Commissioner, the District's current superintendent announced that she will retire at the end of January 2019. While this report was written prior to such announcement, the recommendations, goals and objectives described in this report are not specific to any individual district leader; rather, they are actions that all District leaders – including any sitting superintendent – must implement to effectuate needed change in the District.

organization recreates itself every time it gets a new superintendent. The tone of the Board changes when the superintendent changes.” Without continuity of leadership, it will be almost impossible for the District to function at a high level. The Board must ask itself why it cannot retain its superintendents.

Many stakeholders interviewed noted that Board Commissioners could not clearly define their roles and responsibilities, which interfered with the Superintendent’s ability to lead effectively. This was expressed in the statement: *“The way the Board functions will ensure that any superintendent fails.”* Observers noted that, in some instances, Board Commissioners act as if they were the superintendent trying to manage the day-to-day operations of the District. Many in the community would like to see the Board President exercise greater leadership to make the Board’s governance more effective. Some interviewees went further, advocating mayoral control of the school system.

Stakeholders said Board Commissioners need to be reminded that the Board’s main responsibilities include making policy, overseeing the budget, and selecting and evaluating the superintendent. When Board Commissioners assume management responsibilities, that undermines the superintendent’s role. Day-to-day operations should be left to the superintendent.

These observations pertain not only to the current Board, but also to previous ones. The role the Board plays can support or hinder the work of the District. A 2014 report³ by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute concluded that school boards that prioritize improving student learning create more successful academic outcomes.

With the arrival of three new Commissioners in 2018, the current Board is changing, and next year four seats will be up for election. Most expect this to change the Board’s dynamics. As this change occurs, it is imperative for robust structures to be in place to ensure smooth transitions and maintained focus on improving student achievement. Current Board Commissioners have shown interest in improving their effectiveness and efficiency and have engaged in a series of retreats aimed at improving their working relationships.

About two years ago, the Superintendent launched Path Forward, a strategic process to develop a ten-year educational and facilities master plan to ensure coherence and equity within the system. The evidence described below shows that the process has failed to reach those goals and needs to be improved or replaced by a more robust process.

³ Shober, A. F. and Hartney, M. T. Arnold F. (2014). *Does School Board Leadership Matter?* Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Though many posters throughout the District display the plan’s vision and its four pillars, there is not a clear strategy on how the plan will improve student outcomes. Many staff members seemed unaware of the stated vision, goals, and initiatives. When asked about major initiatives, Board Commissioners’ and staffs’ most common response was “*I don’t know.*” Only a few persons interviewed could articulate the substance of any initiatives, and this led to multiple, and often conflicting, understandings of vision and goals.

This lack of common understanding was rife among Board commissioners, senior cabinet-level staff, principals, and teachers. Further fueling the problem was the lack of a coherent strategy for improvement that focused on the need to upgrade curriculum and classroom instruction and align the District operations to meet a shared set of goals.

One of the goals of Path Forward was to produce a strategic plan to guide the work of the District, but thus far no plan has been released. Examination of a draft reveals a plan that does not yet have the level of detail needed to promote effective District management. Last year’s District Comprehensive Improvement Plan does not describe the steps necessary to drive improvement throughout the system.

With no firm plan for action, the schools and central office departments lack a coherent vision. Principals and teachers look for guidance but find minimal direction. Without shared priorities, attempts to improve teaching and learning vary greatly from school to school. Many who were interviewed described approaches that seemed to be based on a “flavor of the month” or even a “flavor of the day.” One administrator stated, “*We have become a district of independent schools because of lack of coherence or guidance from Central Office.*” Many District educators work extremely hard, but due to this overall lack of focus, their efforts yield minimal results.

This chaos is compounded by the District’s frequent operational crises, sometimes expressed as “*crisis du jour.*” This exacerbates the systemic lack of direction and leads to the system’s distraction from what matters the most: the work teachers do in the classrooms with their students. For example, during the first week of school, Monroe 2 BOCES reported, “*We are having significant problems with students not being picked up before and after school and with drivers dropping off students, with no adults present creating unsafe situations.*”⁴

The District appears to have little capacity to effectively implement initiatives. The District does not strategically roll out initiatives or properly manage the process of change. In

⁴ See Appendix 21 for email from BOCES

one instance, the District tried to implement a recommendation from Dr. Judy Elliott's⁵ Special Education Report to repurpose the positions of school-based Coordinating Administrators of Special Education (CASEs). Though at the school level the recommendation had the potential to increase the sense of ownership among school level staff for improving achievement for students with disabilities, there was no strategic process to roll out the initiative, nor was there a project management plan. The District failed to describe the change process and never considered that the elimination of the CASEs would lead to a significant loss of expertise. School staffs were not prepared to assume their responsibilities and the implications for collective bargaining agreements (as well as other implications) were not addressed. As a result, the District had to reverse its decision to implement the initiative, wasting money and compromising support for students receiving special education services.

A community activist commented on the absence of vision and strategic thinking in the implementation of the Path Forward 10-Year Facilities plan, citing School 44 as an example. The activist referred the Distinguished Educator to a video of the January 25, 2018 Board Meeting.⁶ During this meeting, a Commissioner expressed her frustration about a situation from that same morning. According to the Commissioner, the School Chief had informed the staff that *"there will be no kindergarten next year and the school will close after the 2018-19 school year, and she does not know what the building will be used for."* Staff and parents had expressed their concerns to the Commissioner, as their Board liaison. Noting that the directive was completely contrary to the promises made to the Board about how the Path Forward would operate, the Commissioner passionately protested the move at the Board meeting. The Commissioner questioned the Superintendent, who claimed to be equally dismayed at the lack of communication. The Superintendent noted the school community should have been informed of three options: 1) maintaining the status quo, 2) housing the children in another school in the 19th Ward, or 3) re-growing the school after the Board decided about zones and placement. The Superintendent deferred to the School Chief, who took responsibility. The Board President then stated, *"It seems like what might have happened is... that you [School Chief] articulated one of the options. And you didn't explain option A, B, C, maybe because you didn't know what they would be."* The School Chief responded affirmatively. The Board President continued, *"I know you [the School Chief] are a person of integrity, but the message that has come from Barbara [Superintendent] and members of the Board was not accurately communicated and that accounted for the information the Commissioner received."*

In follow-up interviews, several staff members noted that the plan was reviewed at a Leadership Meeting on January 23, 2018. Among the schools recommended for potential

⁵ Dr. Judy Elliott was hired by the District in 2017 to review the district's services for students with disabilities and provide recommendations to improve support and systems and address the high rate of special education identification and the overall low performance of students with disabilities.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCBnHM4RDIA>

closure was School 44. During the meeting, the Superintendent directed the School Chief to go to the school the following day because the administration would be presenting its 10-year plan to the Board of Education at its monthly meeting on January 25th. It is important to note that the directive given to the School Chief was to inform the school community of only one option: that of the potential school closure. The Superintendent's subsequent failure to take responsibility for the miscommunication and be completely transparent about the decision-making process only serves to highlight systemic problems.

These examples are not isolated occurrences. They appear to reflect a pattern that has plagued the District for many years. One can only conclude that the District leaves supervision, school direction, and learning to chance. An interviewee reported, *"Too many things are left to chance in the District."*

All of the above show that the District is failing to meet the needs of its students. Though the proficiency rates in 2018 for grades 3-8 in ELA and math are 11.4% and 10.7% respectively, and the four-year graduation rate is only 59%, which is among the very lowest in the State, the District appears to approach the work with a lack of urgency. A teacher noted, *"There is a lot of movement but very little action."* An administrator commented, *"The District is always moving, but what action is coming out of that movement?"* Considering the district leadership's intense focus on the short-term, it is hardly surprising to see dismal student achievement and graduation rates. Without an ongoing mechanism to determine whether students are learning what they need to learn, these low numbers are inevitable.

The Distinguished Educator's findings, as described below, serve as illustrations of the lack of any real sense of urgency throughout the organization.

Two years ago, the District embarked on a process to develop what appears to be a K-2 literacy curriculum. In interviews conducted by the Distinguished Educator, it was clear that there is confusion as to whether it is a literacy curriculum, a listening and learning curriculum, or a culturally responsive curriculum. The District tasked the Rochester Teacher Center to lead the development of this curriculum and contracted with a consultant. The District hired five teachers, putting them on special assignment as curriculum writers to assist in the writing. The Executive Director (ED) of English Language Arts has been relegated to a secondary role under the guidance of the Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, even though the ED should be leading this effort. It is not clear why the curriculum writers report to the Executive Director of Professional Learning and not to the Executive Director of English Language Arts. With the development process now in its third year, the curriculum is still not completed. Considering that only 10.4% of third graders in 2018 are reading at-or-above their grade level, it is alarming that the adoption of a K-2 literacy curriculum would take three years. In a District with the stated goal of "Literacy for a Lifetime," the creation and adoption of a K-2 Literacy curriculum is essential. A preliminary review of the curriculum shows that it is designed to

ensure that the diversity within the District is reflected in the materials, but not necessarily the development of reading and writing skills. An additional review of the curriculum to determine if it is developmentally appropriate should be conducted.

On June 15, 2017, the Board of Education formed an Advisory Special Committee on School Climate. The members of the Special Committee included staff, parents, community members and individuals with expertise and/or interest in improving school climate. This committee was assigned to provide the Board with written recommendations on this issue. The committee completed its recommendations and presented them to the Board's Community and Intergovernmental Relations Committee and the Superintendent at a meeting on September 13, 2018. The School Climate Advisory Special Committee gave the Board of Education and the administration a December 2018 deadline to accept or reject its recommendations and develop a plan for implementation. This means the entire decision-and-planning process will take 18 months. Positive school climate is an essential support for academic achievement. Why must it take so long to begin the necessary systemic reforms aimed at improving the climate? The Committee is not at fault; their work has been commendable. The extended period for development of a plan is a reflection of two chronic District failures: a lack of urgency and poor systems management. These reforms can be accelerated in a thoughtful and systemic way, and some suggestions will be addressed in the Recommendations section of this report.

It should be noted that the above example of the Board creating an advisory committee might be seen as a strategy to bypass the Superintendent and assume management functions or the Board's frustration with the administration's inability to adequately address the challenges affecting the District. On August 20, 1998, the Board passed a resolution enabling it to appoint advisory bodies for advice and recommendations. The Board then considers these recommendations as it decides on the resolution of issues of significant impact.

The Teachers Union contract was once seen as promoting innovative reforms to benefit students, but now the majority of stakeholders interviewed feel that the Teachers Union and its contract are a major roadblock to improvement. This feedback was not an indictment of teachers; on the contrary, stakeholders stated that teachers were working extremely hard and needed more support. It should be noted that both the union and the District entered into the collective bargaining agreement, making the Board and administration responsible for its shortcomings.

In September 2018, the District began negotiating its contracts jointly with the Rochester Teachers Association and the Association of Supervisors and Administrators of Rochester (ASAR). All parties have agreed to open the entire agreement for negotiation. This negotiation presents a unique opportunity to develop contracts that will ensure quality education for all students, confront current and future District realities, and respond to the

needs of teachers and school and district leaders. The Superintendent should be commended for bringing the presidents of both unions to the same table to negotiate an agreement that will help all parties in their efforts to provide improved education throughout the District.

Interviewees were also concerned about a long-term culture of fear that they claim continues to this day. At the October 2018 Principals' Meeting, while discussing the topic on how to support students coping with trauma, a principal said, "*The organization continues to traumatize its people [staff]. It's the most toxic the culture has been in the last 20 years.*" This quote is supported by the Risk Assessment conducted by the District's Auditor General.⁷ On September 18, 2018 the District's Auditor General presented her assessment to the Board of Education's Audit Committee, stating that this culture problem starts at the top with the Board and Superintendent, and spreads down through Executive Cabinet, directors, and managers. This culture infects decision-making, spending, everyday actions, and communications, distracting educators from their real job of putting the students' needs first. This culture lowers staff morale, inhibits innovation, delays projects, and saps energy. Ultimately, it increases apathy from top to bottom.

Though many of the problems described here are long-standing and systemic, the District has failed to solve them. While all stakeholders interviewed were keenly aware of the problems – and some suggested ways to solve them – in most areas, action to address the problem remains a goal rather than a reality. The issues identified in this report have been described in numerous earlier reports. For example, at the District's request, there have been several reviews of services for students with disabilities (Council of Great City Schools in 2009, Tydings in 2013, and Dr. Elliot in 2017), yet only minimal progress has been made in this area. The inability of the organization to address these issues reflects a lack of urgency, a lack of capacity, a sense of complacency, or a combination of all three.

It is obvious that parents, community groups, and the business sector are all ready and eager to partner with the District, but the system does not make them feel welcome. Parents of students of color report discouraging experiences ranging from staff telling children that their clothes are dirty and smelly, to one instance where students were referred to as monkeys. Most parents interviewed shared examples of disheartening experiences. Parents felt there were no reports of serious consequences for when staff use inappropriate words or engage in inappropriate behaviors. It is important to note that the District is not allowed to disclose publicly disciplinary actions. Incidents like these are direct contradictions of any school system's mission to provide a safe and caring learning environment for all children. As a result, many parents attribute the District's long history of underperforming to a systemic perpetuation of individual, institutional, and structural racism. In addition, all stakeholders cited a culture of low expectations for students.

⁷ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor's PowerPoint presentation.

The above observations are supported by the findings from the Path Forward community engagement sessions. The District Ambassadors who facilitated the sessions found that:

“Of all topics, racial equity was a reoccurring theme. Overall, community members shared there often seems to be a disconnect with teachers and staff regarding racial equity. Community members nearly unanimously shared that they feel unwelcome and there seems to be prevalent racial bias within our school community. To achieve racial parity, the community would like to employ more teachers of color, either homegrown, nationally, or pulling from the recent crisis in Puerto Rico. Residents also spoke about the importance of offering incentives for recruitment, while students felt that racial inequity led to poorer outcomes for students.”⁸

Parents are not the only ones who have witnessed the District’s resistance to improvement. A business representative noted, *“There is no other organization in the city that is harder to establish a relationship with than the School District.”* Another business community member said that if the District were a business, it should declare bankruptcy. This insolvency would allow the District to create a new model better aligned with the mission of educating students and better equip the District to deliver results.

Though many stakeholders are losing faith in the system, they stand ready to be reengaged, and are eager to support the schools if the District will show itself to be a willing partner. The system’s failure to deliver high-quality education to all its students has resulted in teachers, principals, central office administrators, and even some Board Commissioners and the Mayor seeking alternative educational settings for their own children. The District’s goal must be nothing short of total transformation, so that everyone will be proud to send their own children to Rochester’s public schools.

⁸ The Path Forward: Summary Reports, p.18. See Appendix 9

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GOVERNANCE AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Effective governance and leadership are essential to a school district's most important function: preparing students to be productive citizens. Several researchers⁹ (including Shober & Hartney, 2014; Waters & Marzano, 2006) have found that in districts with higher levels of student achievement, board and district leadership were essential in creating the necessary conditions to improve student learning.

This section describes the findings of the Distinguished Educator's review relevant to governance and district leadership.

Findings:

1. The Board Commissioners frequently ask the administration tough but pertinent questions, but administrators are not always readily available to provide timely data to address their concerns.
2. The Board uses BoardDocs, an efficient online platform that gives the public access to relevant information related to Board business.
3. Though there are clear protocols to guide communication among Board Commissioners, the Superintendent, the Board's staff, District administration, and the community, these protocols are not followed consistently.
4. A report by the National School Boards Association has noted, "*Effective boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.*"¹⁰ However in the District, significant tensions have developed among Board Commissioners, and between the Board and the Superintendent. Though all of these participants have good intentions and want to do right by the students, the behavior of district leadership does not always match their stated values and beliefs. The Board acknowledges that there is a need to improve group dynamics and minimize the underlying racial tension that exists among the group and has engaged in two retreats to begin to address these issues.
5. The Board does not act as a unified body. As a result, superintendents have had to manage seven individual Board Commissioners, rather than work with a unified board to support student achievement. This has often led superintendents to concentrate on satisfying separate requests from individual Board Commissioners at the expense of the important work of the District.

⁹ Shober, A. F. and Hartney, M. T. Arnold F. (2014). *Does School Board Leadership Matter?* Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Waters, J. T. and Marzano, R. J. (2006). *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement.* Denver, CO: McREL.

¹⁰Devarics, C., & O'Brien, E. (2011). *Eight characteristics of effective school boards: Full report.* Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1k86k7c>

6. The Board has exerted pressure on staff hiring, retention, and promotion in areas where decision-making should remain under the purview of District administration. For example, it was reported by different stakeholders that some Board Commissioners advocated for a particular staff member to receive a raise. The Superintendent was influenced to promote this individual to a senior role so that the individual could receive increased compensation.
7. The Board has not effectively fulfilled its essential function of holding the Superintendent accountable for results. Though a process exists for evaluating the Superintendent, it is not consistently followed. For example, clear and measurable goals based on defined leading and lagging indicators are not always in place prior to the beginning of the school year. During the 2017-18 school year, the Superintendent's mid-year conference took place in May, which would traditionally take place in January. This timing precluded the Superintendent from addressing any concerns during the evaluation period. Also, rather than effectively evaluate the Superintendent, some Board Commissioners publicly express their dissatisfaction with the Superintendent. This can create doubt among stakeholders regarding the Superintendent's ability to lead the organization. After all, if the Board lacks confidence in its leader, why should parents feel confident when entrusting their children to the system?
8. The Board convenes monthly for a business meeting. There are six committees: Audit, Governance, Policy, Excellence in Student Achievement, Community and Intergovernmental Relations, and Finance. Each committee meets once a month, and each committee meeting is attended by three Commissioners. Members of the public rarely attend. In addition to these committees, there are special advisory committees such as the Special Education Committee and the School Climate Committee. These typically meet quarterly. Since the Board's primary responsibilities are in the areas of policy-making, governance, and fiscal oversight, these areas should be addressed at business meetings of the full Board. In addition to these meetings, there is a weekly Board Leadership meeting and the Board may call for additional special meetings and work sessions.¹¹ On average, there can be three meetings per week. The time spent preparing for and supporting meetings held with such frequency keeps the Superintendent and her Cabinet from focusing on improving student achievement, leads to stretched staff, and demonstrates micromanagement. While some Commissioners have tried to reduce the number of meetings, their efforts have largely failed.
9. New Board Commissioners do not undergo any system of induction. With three new Commissioners joining the Board this year, an onboarding program is essential. A new Commissioner will take office in January 2019, and four seats are up for election in the fall of 2019.

¹¹ See Appendix 3 for the calendars from October, 2017 to September, 2018, reflecting the number of meetings held by the Board during this period.

10. The Board only engages in limited professional learning. Current research¹² shows that boards that engage in meaningful professional development are better equipped to improve student outcomes. With a primary responsibility of the Board being fiscal oversight, and a District budget close to \$1 billion, it is imperative for Commissioners to receive ongoing professional development in this area.
11. The District's Auditor General 2018 Risk Assessment found that, "*The concern that was communicated most frequently across all levels of management was Leadership [in the areas of]: Stability, Accountability, Strategic Planning, Professional Development and Communication.*"¹³
12. The District has undergone a significant leadership turnover at the top: five superintendents in the last ten years. Other senior level leaders have come and gone quickly. For example, there have been five deputy superintendents for Teaching and Learning in the last seven years, including three in the last year. Principals report that, on average, they have changed school chiefs almost every year. This makes it difficult to sustain improvement efforts and creates a culture of complacency.
13. Though the District has developed strategic plans, they have varied in quality and failed to guide meaningful progress. The current strategic plan's development (Path Forward) began almost two years ago, but that plan has yet to be released. On close examination, a draft revealed a plan that lacks the details necessary for effective implementation. Based on a review of last year's District Comprehensive Improvement Plan, and a sampling of other school improvement plans, these plans do not appear to be effective tools for improving a broken system. It is not clear what is guiding the work of the schools and central office departments. District personnel repeatedly shared that programs, initiatives, and guidance for the system lack focus and alignment. At a focus group, one leader stated that, "*We are all over the place.*" The sentiment was shared by other leaders in the focus group. It is evident that this diversion of attention and energies in seemingly opposite directions distracts them from instructional priorities. As one administrator commented, "*How do we get everyone to coalesce around a common vision?*"
14. Path Forward was intended to be a dynamic strategic process providing comprehensive analysis to guide student assignment, placement, and long-range planning. After almost 16 months, the process has yet to generate a comprehensive plan for decisions on school closures and the use of facilities. As of this report, there is only a spreadsheet identifying the phase of each school. There is no implementation plan outlining action, steps, and timeline. The absence of a plan led to the confusion regarding the closure of School 44 described in the General Findings section of this report. Several interviewees expressed frustration that the process has not led to constructive change. As one interviewee summed it up, "*The process has produced nice brochures but not much else.*" While several of those

¹² See footnotes 5, 6, 7.

¹³ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor's PowerPoint presentation, Slide 6.

interviewed pointed out that there is now a consistent weekly review of data, interviewees indicated that this review of data does not lead to change in practices.

15. The lack of clarity in direction was also evident in the Information Management and Technology Department's (IMT) understanding of the purpose of ROC3D, a data dashboard system to support both internal data analytics requirements as well as promote transparency in communicating with the greater Rochester community. The IMT team was tasked with building an internal tool to be used by the Superintendent and Chiefs to ensure that the District was staying on track in meeting its goals. However, after the development process had started, the Superintendent shared with the media that this new tool would be available to the public. As a result, the team had to begin an entirely new implementation - one that allowed internal live data to be available externally. An entirely new infrastructure and security system had to be built to accommodate this request, thus delaying the rollout of the tool.
16. There is a lack of transparency in the decision-making process that leads to inefficiencies and confusion. For example, staff reported that the new Student Information System (SIS) implementation was delayed for one year because, although the request for proposals (RFP) process included all stakeholders and the selection of the PowerSchool system was unanimous, the Superintendent would not allow Executive Cabinet approval. Approval was delayed six months; the resolution was not submitted to the Board of Education for approval until six months after the RFP Committee made their selection, which did not allow sufficient time for implementation by the end of the 2017-18 school year. The implementation had to be delayed until the end of the 2018-19 school year because a SIS cannot be implemented mid-school year, and 12 months are needed for a complex SIS implementation.
17. Reports indicate that the Superintendent is not visible in schools. Without timely visits, a concern arises about whether she has her finger on the pulse of what goes on in District schools and classrooms. When she does visit schools, it is usually to attend Board Leadership meetings or special events.
18. The Superintendent and most supervisors rarely have one-on-one meetings to develop, support, coach, or receive direct reports from accountable sources. A group meeting is not the most appropriate setting for managing an individual's performance.
19. District leadership does not use a change model, protocol, or process to lead and facilitate change. This results in inconsistencies and uneven approaches in the implementation of initiatives. The lack of change management process has led to significant resistance from stakeholders.
20. The District suffers from lack of a communication strategy. Interviews with stakeholders at all levels revealed a wide range of opinions, perceptions, and incorrect information about the system, schools, policies, performance, allocation of resources, and initiatives. Communication with the staff and the community seems to be reactive. There are few concerted efforts to disseminate positive news about the District. Though the District is plagued with many failures, it is important that the staff and community continue to be

hopeful. Some promising things are happening throughout the organization and these should be highlighted to all stakeholders. Last year, for example, School 3 started a summer acceleration program for rising seventh graders, *Summer Scholars*. Over a period of 15 days, students were exposed to seventh and eighth grade math and science standards. These seventh graders were then enrolled in Regents Algebra and Living Environment. This resulted in 15 of 16 students passing the Algebra Regents and 15 of 15 passing the Living Environment Regents.

21. The District's leadership seems more focused on operational issues than on instruction.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure that the Board has a clear understanding of its role as a governing body.
 - a. Engage in ongoing professional development on the following topics:
 - Governance practices
 - Fiduciary responsibilities
 - Policymaking
 - Best practices for improving student achievement
 - Best practices for engaging parents and the community.
 - b. Develop written guidelines that define the Board's common understanding of *governance* as opposed to *management*. The Board President should remind all Commissioners whenever they do not adhere to these guidelines, while explaining distinctions between governance and management whenever these issues arise in Board discussions.
 - c. Implement a process to evaluate Board decisions and actions to ensure they are in accordance with the written guidelines defining roles and responsibilities and are supportive and respectful of the role of the Superintendent.
 - d. Implement a quarterly Board self-assessment to identify how the Board is functioning. This self-assessment should always ask whether the Board is focusing on what matters most: the students.
 - e. Give the District leadership the autonomy to meet goals for improving student achievement and to effectively manage day-to-day operations.
2. Ensure that the Board prioritizes its focus on improving student achievement by:
 - a. Giving responsibility to the Board President to focus all discussions and decisions on the achievement of a vision and strategy for improving student outcomes.
 - b. Having the Board and Superintendent develop a set of leading and lagging indicators to monitor student performance that align with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements. Progress in these should be monitored on regularly.
 - c. Having the Board make financial decisions that align with an adopted strategic plan supporting improvement of student outcomes.
3. Implement a system by which the Board holds the Superintendent accountable.

- a. Develop a clear written evaluation process for the Superintendent. The Board must set specific and measurable goals at the beginning of the year. These must be regularly monitored, with adherence to evaluation timelines.
 - b. Implement a process by which the Board President and the Superintendent have regular, formal, scheduled meetings to discuss District business and provide feedback and guidance regarding Board expectations.
4. Streamline the number of Board meetings.
 - a. Research how other boards operate to learn best practices.
 - b. Partner with the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) or similar entity to conduct a review of the Board's current organizational structure with the goal of improving decision-making while reducing the number of and time spent by staff and Board Commissioners participating in and preparing for such meetings.
5. Implement a system of induction for new Commissioners.
 - a. Develop a mentoring program for new Commissioners with the assistance of NYSSBA or a similar entity.
 - b. Task the Board President with monitoring this program and ensuring that all new Commissioners participate and meet all state requirements.
 - c. Have district leadership conduct orientation meetings for new Commissioners to brief them on the work of the District.
6. Ensure the Board President plays an active role in managing the Board as a whole by:
 - a. Leading the Board in developing a procedure for conducting a Board continuous improvement process.
 - b. Taking an active leadership role in guiding the Board as it chooses indicators as well as implements a Board self-assessment process.
 - c. Scheduling regular, formal, standing meetings with the Superintendent to discuss District business, including feedback and guidance regarding Board expectations.
 - d. Having regular one-on-one meetings with fellow Commissioners.
 - e. Ensuring that the Board receives proper professional development.
7. Have the Board reassess its policy pertaining to Advisory Committees and Task Forces and be encouraged whenever possible to have such committees and task forces report to and be overseen by the Superintendent.

8. Develop a comprehensive process by which the Board identifies the most qualified candidate when there is a transition in superintendents.¹⁴
 - a. Seek input from parents, staff, community groups, elected officials, and other community stakeholders about the qualities they would like to see in a new superintendent.
 - b. Develop candidate competencies and characteristics based on the specific needs of the District, with student achievement data as the main driver.
 - c. Be as transparent as possible when implementing this process.
9. Develop a multi-year strategic plan to serve as a road map guiding work throughout the system. Components of the plan should include: Teaching and Learning, Interventions, Support for Special Populations, Human Capital, Parent and Community Engagement, Socio-Emotional Support, Building System Capacity, Intelligent Accountability, Operations, Funding, and Sustainability.
 - a. Develop a detailed five-year strategic plan to drive the work of the District. Below is a process to consider while developing the strategic plan:
 - Have a small group of staff use data to develop a draft plan.
 - Assemble a representative group of all stakeholders (Board, school and District administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, community groups, business community, faith groups, elected officials, etc.) to provide feedback on the plan.
 - Have the Board approve plan.
 - Develop a communication plan to ensure the entire city understands and embraces the strategic plan.
 - Create an independent, citizen-based Community Alliance to serve as an advisory group to the Board and Superintendent. The Alliance will give feedback on implementation of the adopted plan. This Alliance will also advocate for District-level decisions, policies, and approaches to improve student achievement. A primary responsibility of this group will be to ensure that the District stays the course as set forth in the adopted plan through any changes that occur in Board and District leadership.
 - b. Have the Board focus on and support implementation of the plan as the Board also develops a mechanism to hold present and future superintendents responsible for implementation.
10. Develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan aimed at promoting the achievement of the District's goals.
 - a. Implement a communications strategy that encourages the presentation of facts, no matter how negative, while also sharing successes, and promoting stronger relationships with all stakeholders.

¹⁴ Following the submission of this report to the Commissioner, the District's current superintendent announced that she will retire at the end of January 2019. An addendum to the report was included to provide high-level recommendations for the hiring and onboarding a new superintendent. See Appendix 23.

- b. Include in the plan two strands focused on how to improve internal and external communications.
 - c. Include in the plan evaluation methods and a timeline for implementation.
11. Develop a system to support schools as they engage in a comprehensive process to write school improvement plans. These plans should go beyond mere compliance and aim for real improvement in student outcomes.
- a. Provide professional guidance to school planning committee teams as they implement a continuous improvement process. This process must provide clear direction for all efforts to improve conditions that support student learning.
 - b. Develop a peer feedback process where schools can learn from each other about how to better meet the needs of their students.
 - c. Ensure that school Chiefs play an active role in supporting, reviewing, approving, and monitoring the school plans.
12. Promote a culture of respect, trust, and collaboration that focuses on the students' best interest.
- a. Engage the Board in training to ensure collaborative relationships among themselves and with the Superintendent.¹⁵
 - b. Have the Superintendent and her leadership team engage in teambuilding training to foster collaborative relationships among themselves. This training should also be offered to all supervisors.
 - c. Ensure that the Board and the Superintendent are transparent in their communications with staff, acknowledging the long-term culture of fear, and outlining steps to end it.
 - d. Consider adopting a set of norms for collaboration between the Board and the District in order to develop and sustain productive group interactions.
 - e. Create a mechanism by which staff can provide the District leadership with open and honest critical feedback without fear of retaliation.
13. Build the superintendent's relational capital with school administrators and teachers, and increasing the superintendent's presence in the schools by having the superintendent:
- a. Establish a schedule ensuring that all schools are visited at least once a year. One primary focus of these visits should be to ensure that each school's work and vision aligns with District goals. The other primary focus should be to give school leaders effective support from the central office as they strive to improve student learning.
 - b. Shadow the School Chiefs and provide immediate feedback.
 - c. Establish a mechanism for receiving input directly from teachers. This might include hosting Teacher Town Halls or meeting with the faculty of each school. These meetings should focus on what is working well and what is not.

¹⁵ Note: The Board recognizes that this is an area of growth and has taken steps to address this by engaging an outside facilitator to conduct several retreats.

14. Provide professional development and support to the Superintendent and cabinet in the following areas:
- a. Establishing clear goals and keeping those goals in the forefront of all communications with stakeholders.
 - b. Creating an environment of openness, honesty, and trust.
 - c. Utilizing a performance management system to develop, support, coach, and hold direct reports accountable.
 - d. Leading for results.
 - e. Supervising curriculum and instruction and special populations.
 - f. Implementing project management skills.
 - g. Building and maintaining professional working relationships with staff.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Assist in the development of written guidelines defining the distinction between governance and management.
- Provide models of indicators to monitor student performance.
- Provide technical assistance in the development of the evaluation process for the Superintendent.
- Assist in researching how other boards operate.
- Assist the Board Clerk in the development of the Master Calendar of topics to be discussed during meetings.
- Provide technical assistance to the Superintendent's team on how to revise the strategic plan to incorporate recommendations from different reports.
- Provide samples of norms of collaboration and recommend training to the Board and Superintendent.
- Provide technical assistance to the District in adopting a direct protocol to develop staff and manage performance.
- Assist the Board in developing a superintendent's profile to be used during transitions to attract and retain qualified candidates.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A system's curriculum, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and intervention strategies should guide the work of all schools and their teachers and leaders.

This section describes the Distinguished Educator's findings and recommendations for Teaching and Learning.

Findings:

1. Teaching and learning are the core functions of every school district. However, the review found little evidence that the District focuses enough attention on instruction. An administrator shared, *"We don't have a laser-like focus on student achievement."*
2. The District's weak and disjointed instructional program does not appear to give all students access to a guaranteed and viable standards-based curriculum. Curriculum programs vary greatly across content areas and grade levels. As a result, teaching staff lack the necessary guidance about what to teach, when and how to teach it, and the best tools for assessing students' learning. For example, the English Language Arts program varies greatly from school to school. With a 25% rate of in-district student mobility, this is a serious issue. Similar situations occur in other subject areas with a similar degree of variance. The Mathematics Department has developed curriculum guidance resources that have the potential to provide meaningful guidance on how to improve the teaching of mathematics. However, they are not widely known or used. Though the District may have identified instructional priorities, there is no clear link to a cohesive theory of action or, if there is, few can identify or understand it. As one administrator shared, *"Schools are floundering with no curriculum, wrong curriculum, or a curriculum that is not culturally relevant."*
3. Each school has its own view of what constitutes good teaching and learning. During interviews, staff said they wanted greater guidance from the District to promote greater coherence and alignment system-wide.
4. Almost 90% of the student population in grades 3-8 requires academic intervention services, apparently due to a weak Tier I instructional program. This situation is a likely contributor to over-identification of students for special education. The review also found that students were not exposed to high-level tasks or higher-order thinking.
5. As part of Path Forward, District ambassadors facilitated a student summit attended by over 200 students. According to the report:

"Students expressed that teacher quality could either be the number one barrier to learning or the essential key to their success... Primarily, students expressed a desire for schools to be a positive, safe and welcoming environment. Students also shared their interest in the District expanding access to Advanced Placement courses and having relationships outside of schools which would provide opportunities for more in-depth learning experiences (i.e., internships,

externships, and work studies). Additionally, students shared the interest and need of the importance of having better supports at the elementary level to address achievement gaps before getting to secondary schools. They further reinforced the interest and need of ensuring culturally relevant curriculum.”¹⁶

6. There have been seven deputies for teaching and learning in the last ten years. This turnover has tended to destabilize the system, creating a sense of paralysis in the area of instruction.
7. There is no regular system to assess the effectiveness of programs and initiatives aimed at improving student learning.
8. The review found evidence of an absence of shared understanding of standards throughout the system.
9. The District does not have a process to vet and select instructional materials. In some cases, the District has delegated this responsibility to outside individuals or organizations.
10. Interventions are neither clearly defined nor integrated into a broader instructional framework.
11. The open-ended items on the state assessments are scored by an outside vendor. Not having teachers score the tests is a missed professional development opportunity.
12. Though school-based planning teams are in the schools, there is no visible concerted effort to focus them on improving student learning beyond being involved in the development of the School Comprehensive Education Plan.
13. Students are not provided with the necessary instructional materials to successfully engage in the learning process. In general, students are not afforded the opportunity to take books home. How can students become fluent readers if they are not provided books to read at home? When faced with this finding, the Superintendent was surprised. She said the issue had been raised and addressed before, and she did not understand why it had not been corrected.
14. There is no district-wide theory of action to define methods for supporting schools, especially low-performing schools. The apparent theory of action for Receivership Schools is to provide them with additional resources without a defined strategy on how these resources will improve student outcomes. During interviews, multiple stakeholders were not able to articulate the theory of action for improving struggling schools.
15. Many stakeholders said that the low student achievement rate is primarily due to low expectations. Parents and community members strongly believe that these low expectations are a direct result of a system infected by individual, institutional, and structural racism. At the January 25, 2018 Board meeting, the President of the District’s Parent Advisory Council shared with the Board, *“I have seen they have taken kids that were IB [International Baccalaureate] kids and they were not Black kids, who were actually caught skipping, who lied on teachers. And they are not suspended because they are afraid of the backlash from the white middle class parents. But what they do to our children is*

¹⁶ The Path Forward: Summary Reports, p.17. See Appendix 9

inexcusable. You are going to suspend my child because she is Black. I am tired of seeing it, hearing it. I get emails, calls, texts about the same thing. I am tired! You need to do something!”¹⁷

Recommendations:

1. Create and implement a vision of best first instruction, including differentiation, to support and enhance the learning of all students.
 - a. Develop an instructional framework that describes the District’s vision for quality instruction. This framework should include:
 - Setting high expectations for all students
 - Non-negotiables for teaching and learning in each subject area
 - Instructional strategies to support the vision.
 - b. Develop tools and processes principals and teachers can use to ensure that instruction for all students is aligned to state standards.
 - c. Ensure school master schedules support the instructional framework by providing for common planning time, opportunities for student progress monitoring, and curricular and instructional support.
 - d. Ensure instructional staff members provide research-based instruction that engages students cognitively and ensures that students master state standards.
 - e. Develop, consistently implement, and monitor an instructional process that clearly supports student learning and requires teachers to use engaging, high-yield instructional strategies.
 - f. Provide school leaders with professional development and tools to support the capacity of school leaders to supervise instructional programs.
2. Adopt a common curriculum in all subject areas, prioritizing literacy and mathematics, by implementing a rigorous curriculum selection process that includes:
 - a. Participation of stakeholders with expertise in the subject areas and knowledge of state standards.
 - b. Research-based criteria for selection of materials that embed proper Tier 1 interventions and formative assessments and require students to routinely address and engage with complex integrated problems.
 - c. A detailed implementation plan that includes an assurance that all teachers receive quality professional development and all necessary instructional materials.
 - d. A K-12 scope and sequence aligned to the standards and the selected curriculum program that defines system goals and specific strategies to insure a collective definition of academic rigor in classrooms system-wide.
 - e. A rigorous waiver process that includes a horizontal alignment to the District’s chosen curriculum.

¹⁷ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCBnHM4RDIA>).

3. Review the K-2 curriculum to determine its alignment to state standards, its quality, and the plan for implementation.
4. Develop a clear theory of action to show how the instructional vision and common curriculum will improve District-wide academic performance for all students.
5. Develop a tiered system of interventions for all schools (universal, strategic, and intensive). Use the same tiered system to differentiate support within Receivership Schools.
6. Develop a systematized process for curriculum selection and interventions by developing and implementing a coherent, aligned instructional framework.
7. Implement a system to ensure that students have all the materials needed to engage in the learning process. This system should include a checklist by grade level of all the materials required according to the prescribed curriculum and certifications by teachers and principals attesting that the school is in compliance in providing the required instructional materials. Students should be able to take books home so that learning can continue beyond school hours.
8. Clearly define what “culturally responsive teaching” looks like and how it will be monitored.
9. Establish Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) at each school.
 - a. Define the roles and responsibilities for the ILTs: improving instruction, supporting and leading teacher team meetings, and leading data-driven instruction cycles.
 - b. Create monitoring systems to track the work of ILTs.
 - c. Design year-long professional learning for ILTs.
10. Provide professional development on the use of data to inform instructional and leadership practices.
11. Have teachers score the open-ended items on the State tests. Professional dialogues should be held about what teachers learned about their students and the quality of the instruction and curriculum as a result of teachers scoring the items.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Provide technical assistance to the Teaching and Learning Department in the following areas:
 - ✓ Developing an instructional framework
 - ✓ Developing a process to adopt curriculum materials
 - ✓ Developing an accountability system to ensure schools have all needed materials
- Assist in the review of the K-2 curriculum.
- Provide technical assistance in the development of ILTs.
- Support district to make data-driven decisions about meeting the needs of students and teachers.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special Education has been a long-term concern. The District has commissioned many reports aimed at improvement but has failed to translate their findings into real progress. Special Education students represent 20% of the District's student population, making it essential for the District to improve delivery of education services to these learners.

In 2018, Special Education students in grades 3-8 continued to lag behind the rest of the student population, achieving proficiency on the English Language Arts exam at a rate of 1.6% as compared to 11.4% district-wide. In mathematics, there was a minimal increase of 0.3% in proficiency from 1.4% in 2017 to 1.7% in 2018. Though there was a 5% increase in the August preliminary graduation rate of Special Education students in 2018, the four-year graduation cohort rate for students with disabilities of 41.4% still lags the district-wide graduation rate of 59.3%.

This section describes the Distinguished Educator's findings and recommendations relevant to Special Education.

Findings:

1. On January 25, 2018, the Board of Education created a Special Committee to serve as an advisory body to the Board. The members of the Special Committee included parents of students with disabilities, advocates for students with disabilities, individuals with expertise in special education and English language learning, District staff, the Interim Executive Director of Special Education and an attorney from the Office of the District's General Counsel. Commissioner Melanie Funchess chaired the committee. Based on their review, the Special Committee concluded, *"There were widespread and very serious problems in virtually every aspect of the District's special education programs and services. These problems both lead to non-compliance with the District's legal obligations and perhaps, more importantly, to the predictable failure of students with disabilities to succeed to the extent to which they are capable."*¹⁸

Problems identified in the report¹⁹ include:

- a. Students with disabilities have very low levels of academic performance.
- b. Students with disabilities are suspended at disproportional rates and receive harsher penalties than non-classified students.
- c. Parents are not treated as full participants in all decisions involving special education for their children.

¹⁸ Report and Recommendations of the Special Advisory Committee on Special Education. April 30, 2018, p.2. See Appendix 4.

¹⁹ Report and Recommendations of the Special Advisory Committee on Special Education. April 30, 2018. See Appendix 4.

- d. Parents do not always receive written notices of Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings within the legally required time. This leads to rescheduling of CSE meetings and subsequent delays in decisions and provision of programs and services.
- e. Parents are not always provided with printed copies of fully completed Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and CSE minutes at the CSE meeting, or within a few days thereafter.
- f. Not enough trained staff are available for timely CSE meetings (including annual reviews and reevaluation reviews).
- g. There are not enough trained and certified staff to deliver programs and services for all qualifying students' IEPs. This creates a backlog of students awaiting placement, and many of these students fail to receive the services described in their IEPs.
- h. The district-wide failure to provide sufficient programs and services results in:
 - students with disabilities are unable to attend the school they would have attended had they not had a disability because the school lacks the programs and services required by the students' IEPs.
 - placement of special education students wherever there are openings, with little regard to student needs.
 - placement of students with disabilities in classes in which the number of students with disabilities in the class exceeds the maximum permitted by a student's IEP.
 - altering IEPs to provide those programs and services that are available, rather than those programs the CSE has identified as necessary.
- i. Some school leaders use inappropriate strategies to avoid manifestation determinations. These strategies include: repeated short-term suspensions totaling more than 10 days; telling parents to keep children at home or sending children home without formal suspension; and not determining whether students received all IEP services before making truancy referrals.
- j. The District's CSEs fail to follow state requirements for appropriate classification of students with regard to certain disabilities. This leads to inappropriate decisions, and sometimes racial inequities, concerning Special Education classification.
- k. The District fails to provide the required quarterly IEP Progress Reports, issued on the same schedule as report cards, to parents of all students with IEPs.
- l. Students with disabilities are not included to the fullest extent possible in instructional and extracurricular activities and opportunities at all schools.

- m. Understanding of and compliance with the District’s Section 504 process is highly variable from school to school, resulting in frequent violations of Section 504.²⁰
 - n. Across the district, the professional development needs of special education staff are not being met. Without this professional development, the District cannot provide the education to which all children are entitled.
 - o. The District suffers from a significant lack of accountability in special education. Much of the problem stems from badly defined roles and responsibilities and the constant turnover among supervisors.
2. Approximately half of RCSD’s students with disabilities are receiving their primary instruction in a special class.
 3. RCSD has not provided students with disabilities sufficient access to the Career Development and Occupational Studies graduation pathway. Specifically, students with disabilities have had little access to work-based learning opportunities and/or career and technical education.
 4. There is some question whether Coordinating Administrators of Special Education (CASEs) and high school counselors have adequate knowledge and training regarding graduation requirements and safety net options for students with disabilities.
 5. The District’s General Counsel is currently in negotiations with attorneys for a class of those in parental relation to a large number of special education students concerning areas where the District was found to not be in compliance with various laws, rules and regulations applicable to these students. The areas of noncompliance were outlined in a report received from a community-based committee convened by the District’s Board of Education (see Finding 1). These negotiations may ultimately result in a federal court consent decree.
 6. As a result of the District’s identification under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the district is required to submit a Special Education Strategic Action Plan to the New York State Education Department. A draft has been submitted to the Department for review and feedback.
 7. With seven Executive Directors in the last ten years — five since 2016 — and a current director who has been in the position for less than a year, leadership has been lacking. This disarray had led to an absence of effective support and coaching.
 8. At District and school levels, there is a sense that educating students with disabilities is the responsibility of special education administrators. The lack of a Chief of Special Education position in the Superintendent’s Cabinet has contributed to this divide.

²⁰ Though this finding is reported in this section, 504 students are not eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Section 504 is a broad federal civil rights law that protects all individuals with a handicap. IDEA only applies to students who require special education because they have one of the specified types of disabilities.

Recommendations:

1. Request that the New York State Education Department provide regular mentoring and coaching to the Executive Director of Special Education.
2. Have the Superintendent play a more active role in monitoring the Department.
3. Ensure that all staff take collective responsibility for educating special education students. The District should consider including specific accountability measures pertaining to students with disabilities in the goal-setting process for principals.
4. Ensure that the Special Education Department is supported, resourced, and held accountable for the district's implementation of the Special Education Strategic Action Plan and the Consent Decree if applicable.
5. Provide written guidelines and training to schools regarding when it is appropriate for a student to be assigned to a one-to-one bus.
6. Provide on-going professional development to the CSEs.
7. Consider creating a Chief of Special Education.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Serve as a liaison with the New York State Education Department to develop a support plan for the Special Education Department.
- Provide support in the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan.
- Provide technical assistance to the Superintendent to support close monitoring of the Special Education Department's progress in carrying out its responsibilities

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELLs)

The percentage of the district's enrollment who are English Language Learners continues to rise and is expected to increase for the foreseeable future. ELLs currently represent 15% of the District's student population, making it essential for the District to improve delivery of education services to these students.

ELLs continue to lag behind the rest of the student population, achieving proficiency on the English Language Arts exam at a rate of 2.6% as compared to 11.4% proficiency District-wide in 2018. Consistent with statewide trends, students designated as "Ever ELLs" (those students identified as English Language Learners who received ELL services prior to, but not during the 2017-18 school year, (i.e., former ELLs who have since exited ELL status) achieved proficiency on the ELA exam at higher levels than the total test-taking population, at a rate of 16.4%, compared with 11.4% for overall district-wide proficiency. In mathematics, ELLs achieved proficiency at a rate of 3.5% percent, a 1.5% increase from 2017. On the other hand, Ever ELLs achieved proficiency at higher levels than the total test-taking population, achieving proficiency at a rate of 13.7%, compared to 10.7% District-wide. Though there was a 5% increase in the August preliminary 4-year graduation rate of ELLs in 2018, the ELL graduation rate of 26.7% still significantly lags to the districtwide rate of 59.3%.

This section describes the Distinguished Educator's findings and recommendations in this area.

Findings:

1. The District launched the new Bilingual Language and Literacy Academy to serve students and families who recently relocated to Rochester from hurricane-affected areas. The Academy provides a language-sheltered environment as students develop English proficiency. The Academy strives to meet the academic and transitional needs of these newly arrived students and their families.
2. There is no comprehensive strategy guiding the education of ELLs.
3. Though the current Superintendent has focused more attention on this problem, the needs of ELLs continue to be an afterthought. Only the most limited attention and resources are dedicated to the unique needs of ELLs. Principals' meetings give little time to this issue.
4. The New York State Education Department conducted a monitoring site visit to the District to review how it delivers services to ELLs and has received a number of individual complaints from parents over the past few years. While each of these complaints were resolved satisfactorily, their repeated occurrence is concerning. Soon the Department will issue a report mandating correction of regulatory violations identified at the end of the 2017-18 school year, which will lead to imposition of a three-year Corrective Action Plan in the District.

5. The District's focus has been on compliance and remediation. The District needs to shift to a holistic approach that takes the academic and social needs of ELLs into account.
6. At Committee of Special Education meetings where the primary and preferred language of the parent and/or child is not English, the District does not always provide a qualified translator. This is especially true when the primary and preferred language is one other than Spanish.
7. The District does not translate all important documents into the primary languages of students and parents. This is especially true for students with disabilities and their parents. This prevents the District from obtaining informed consent and the parental participation required for shared decision-making.
8. The District does not have enough bilingual staff to fully conduct evaluations and deliver programs and services for all ELLs.
9. The District fails to provide adequately trained tutors or appropriate alternative services to ELL students with disabilities who have been suspended.
10. Some schools with bilingual programs have no bilingual administrators, creating huge challenges in the supervision of these programs.
11. It was reported that due to overwork, perceived neglect from above, and a lack of overall support, bilingual teachers are leaving the program to teach in other programs within the District.
12. There is no common curriculum for English as a New Language. The District has two pilot programs, but there are no clear criteria in place to evaluate these programs and make a recommendation on which, if either, to select.
13. There is a lack of coordinated professional development and other structures to ensure that all district schools, rather than just the targeted programs (e.g., the Rochester International Academy; the Bilingual Language and Literacy Academy; and other bilingual and ELL-specific programs, such as programs for Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education), provide ELLs with appropriate instructional supports and use methodologies tailored to the needs of ELLs.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a Master Plan (Handbook) for the education of ELLs.
 - a. The plan should include the following:
 - Guiding Principles for Educating ELLs
 - Instructional Program Options
 - Initial Identification, Parent Notification concerning Instructional Program Options, Assessment, Program Placement, and Reclassification
 - Instructional Services for English Learners
 - Family and Community Involvement
 - Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability
 - Meeting State and Federal Compliance Requirements
 - Parental Exception Waiver Appeal Process

- Accountability Systems and Progress Monitoring
 - Frequently Asked Questions for ELL Parents.
- b. Provide professional development for the plan's implementation.
 2. Ensure provision of proper interpretation and translation services.
 3. Set ambitious and achievable expectations for ELLs and monitor their academic progress.
 4. Provide a coherent, instructionally aligned curriculum system for ELLs.
 5. Assign bilingual administrators to schools with bilingual programs.
 6. Develop a coherent Corrective Action Plan to comply with the New York State Education Department's recommendations from its investigation report.
 7. Review data and share best practices on how to best serve ELLs and establish a network of schools focused on ELL needs.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Provide samples of ELL Master Plans.
- Provide technical assistance to support implementation of the Corrective Action Plan.
- Provide technical assistance in the selection of the ELL curriculum.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Effective organizational structure is critically important in any district's attainment of its goals. This section describes the Distinguished Educator's findings and recommendations on organizational structure.

Findings:

1. While the District continues to struggle in its efforts to become more customer-service oriented, over the last two years there has been improvement, mainly due to the "At Your Service" initiative. This initiative provides a hotline for staff and families to call when they encounter problems within the system. The system is designed to provide 24-hour response. However, some parents, who contacted the District via the hotline, stated that they never get a response from the District. This was the case reported by the President of the District's Parent Advisory Council during the Board meeting of January 25, 2018.²¹
2. Though the Superintendent says that central office's only function is to support schools, school-based staff report that the central office's organizational structure fails to meet this goal. Principals report that, to get their work done, they have to shield their schools from the influence and distractions of the central office.
3. It is not clear how the organizational structure, as currently developed, supports the goals of the District.
 - a. The Superintendent supervises 13 direct reports.
 - b. Five K-2 curriculum writers report to the Executive Director of Professional Learning instead of to the Executive Director of English Language Arts.
 - c. The Chief Communications Officer reports to the Chief of Staff, rather than to the superintendent.
 - d. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program reports to the Executive Director of Innovation instead of the Office of Teaching and Learning. This placement is due to the constant turnover of Deputy Superintendents of Teaching and Learning.
 - e. One administrator shared, "*There is no clear delineation of chain of command. The lines are blurred and with so many leadership changes, it leads to paralysis in decision-making.*"
4. Though there is a weekly cross-functional Path Forward meeting, there is little evidence from interviews that this structure has broken down barriers or increased staff collaboration. Nor is there any evidence that the process is encouraging the adoption of different strategies to solve problems. At a recent Path Forward meeting, the Executive Director of Special Education shared that last spring she started the process of changing the annual reviews of IEPs so that they are conducted on students' IEP anniversary dates. Schools were ready to implement the change during this school year. A snag developed, and

²¹ The Board meeting footage can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCBnHM4RDIA>

there was a discussion of the need for schools to halt this initiative due to lack of communication and the potential implications of implementation, such as those pertaining to written orders for Medicaid. Not all senior leaders seemed clear about whether the infrastructure was ready for this transition. After the Distinguished Educator pointed out this case as an example of the District rolling out an initiative without the necessary strategic planning or analysis of the implications throughout the system, the team regrouped and decided to proceed with the initiative.

5. Siloed decision-making has created operational inefficiencies and ineffectiveness. This siloed decision-making impacted last year's summer program. A report, entitled 2018 Summer School Crisis – Report of Inquiry, presented to the Board of Education on September 25, 2018, lists as a finding, *“There was a breakdown in communication and lack of coordination among all involved in summer school operations, staffing and finance. This breakdown affected: a) the amount of the summer school budget; b) the programs and costs included in that budget; and c) the programs and/or costs that should have been cut or reduced to fit under the budget cap.”*²²
6. The senior staff spends too much time attending meetings. These meetings are often unstructured, without defined processes or goals. This leads to long, unfocused gatherings that do little to further the improvement of student outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of each central office department.
 - a. Develop and conduct a quarterly customer service survey of each central office department to determine its effectiveness in supporting schools.
 - b. Publicize the results and hold each department accountable for improvement.
2. Reevaluate the organizational structure to encourage efficiency, collaboration, and accountability. This reevaluation should include:
 - a. Adopting protocols to increase collaboration among departments.
 - b. Reexamining the span of control of the Superintendent and eliminating unnecessary direct reports.
 - c. Consider Merging the structures and functions of the Deputy Superintendent of Administration, Chief of Operations, and/or Chief of Human Resources.
 - d. Creating systems to breakdown silos, improve communication, and improve transparency in the decision-making process.
 - e. Ensuring that the head of Special Education has a greater presence in the senior cabinet and greater access to the Superintendent. Consider creating a Chief of Special Education.

²² 2018 Summer School Crisis – Report of Inquiry. September 25, 2018, Slide 2. See Appendix 5.

- f. Consider having the position of Chief Communications Officer, as the primary District spokesperson, report directly to the Superintendent.
3. Improve meeting structures.
 - a. Reduce the number of meetings.
 - b. Engage in training on best practices for conducting meetings.
4. Provide professional development in project management. An administrator noted, *“There is a lack of project management expertise which leads to poor execution.”*

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Provide technical assistance in the development of central office customer service survey.
- Provide technical assistance to the Superintendent in revising the organizational structure to better meet the needs of the District.
- Provide models of meeting structures.
- Provide list of resources/organizations to provide technical assistance in creating systems to breakdown silos and improve communication.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is essential to the success of any organization. Accountability is a basic, ongoing practice, not a punitive measure. A well-defined system of accountability promotes trust and ownership and leads to highly efficient and productive teams.

This section describes the findings and recommendations of the Distinguished Educator's review relevant to accountability.

Findings:

1. The District lacks systems to hold its staff accountable for their accomplishment of identified goals, including any clear systems for monitoring and reporting progress. All stakeholders are ill-served by this absence. Accountability must start at the top. Goals are set, but there is no clear mechanism to provide the community, or the schools, with the data necessary for evaluating the progress of initiatives or the system as a whole. For example, the District's Auditor General 2018 Risk Assessment found that, *"Increased monitoring on evaluating student progress toward annual goals and graduation [is needed]... Accountability must exist for meeting student performance."*²³
2. There is no performance management system. Beginning at the superintendent level, most supervisors do not have one-on-one meetings to coach and manage the performance of their direct reports. Supervisors, including the Superintendent, are often not aware of the work of their direct reports.
3. An often heard complaint is that no one is held accountable for poor performance. On the contrary, it has been reported that the District rewards poor work by promoting staff that have not been successful, demoralizing those who work diligently. As one interviewee noted, *"We can hold students accountable, but we do not apply the same standard to the adults."* The District's Auditor General 2018 Risk Assessment found that, *"Accountability was the second most frequently occurring concern [in the areas of]: Leadership, Instructional Outcomes, Finances, Professional Development, and Communication."*²⁴
4. While the District is data rich, and appears to employ data for planning purposes, there is no systematic approach to identify, execute, and monitor strategies aimed at driving academic improvement. In addition, improvement strategies and their expected outcomes are often undefined or poorly defined. The review found no evidence that the District routinely uses data to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies it has implemented. The District's Auditor General 2018 Risk Assessment noted that, *"Data must be utilized to make informed student decisions throughout the organization."*²⁵

²³ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor's PowerPoint presentation, Slide 9.

²⁴ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor's PowerPoint presentation, Slide 7.

²⁵ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor's PowerPoint presentation, Slide 9.

5. The District has no clear framework, or research-based turnaround strategies, to help low-performing schools change their approach.
6. Some schools are viewing the completion of the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) as a compliance exercise and are not using the SCEP as a planning tool. It appears that some schools are copying and pasting their goals and activities from the previous year and most likely are not considering steps for improvement outside the SCEP process.

Recommendations:

1. Implement a protocol whereby all supervisors support, coach, and hold direct reports accountable for progress in meeting academic and department goals. Supervisors must provide regular, meaningful, clear, and timely feedback aligned with performance goals.
2. Create and implement a professional development plan to equip all District staff to use data to drive decisions.
3. Establish a process to communicate, implement, document, and monitor continuous improvement in conditions that support learning.
4. Provide principals with professional development on the school improvement process.
5. Ensure School Chiefs play an active role in supporting, reviewing, approving, and monitoring the school plans.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Provide samples of Direct Report Protocols.
- Provide technical assistance in the development of a continuous improvement process.
- Provide technical assistance in the development of a system of intervention for low performing schools.
- Provide technical assistance in the development of future School Comprehensive Education Plans (SCEP) to ensure that SCEPs are used as a planning tool and not merely a compliance exercise.

HUMAN CAPITAL

The most important asset of an organization is its human capital. The District's approach to how it manages human resources is vital to its success.

This section describes the findings and recommendations of the Distinguished Educator's review relevant to human capital.

Findings:

1. The District's Auditor General 2018 Risk Assessment noted the following concerns about Human Resources:
 - *"Hiring practices, diversity and proactively meeting staff requirements.*
 - *Systems and practices need improvement.*
 - *Improved monitoring systems and accountability required.*
 - *Timely discipline"*²⁶
2. There is no District-wide professional development plan or program. A piecemeal approach hampers efforts to build or enhance the capacity of central office and school-based staff. The District has a history of introducing initiatives poorly, with little or no provision for professional learning. For example, many interviewees reported that when ENGAGENY curriculum modules were introduced, efforts to help teachers understand the new standards were practically nonexistent.
3. Despite significant leadership turnover at all levels, the District lacks a system to ensure continuity and sustain the work. There is neither an apparent succession planning among senior staff nor any plan to develop a "bench" of qualified professionals to fill gaps as they appear.
4. The District's two-year-old focus on implicit bias training is commendable, but this initiative must better communicate how to change teaching strategies and behaviors in ways that improve student outcomes. It was reported that the training is helping staff identify their own bias but is not leading to change in practices.
5. There are multiple views regarding the process for selecting principals. As one interviewee noted, *"The process is evolving."*
6. There is no professional development program for assistant principals. This is a missed opportunity to develop a bench of experienced school leaders who could serve as future principals.
7. The professional development needs of paraprofessionals and teaching assistants receive little attention.
8. With help from external partners, including the New York City Leadership Academy, the District participated in an attempt to build a principal pipeline program. Though results are unclear, the District is pursuing funding from the New York State Education Department to

²⁶ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor's PowerPoint presentation, Slide 10.

partner with Bank Street College and the New York City Leadership Academy to develop a principal preparation program.

9. Hiring, retention, and promotion decisions are subject to external influences.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a comprehensive professional development program to help central office, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff to better meet the needs of students that includes:
 - a. Effective leadership and teaching practices;
 - b. Use of data to implement effective strategies for resource allocation and improvement of student learning;
 - c. Behavioral support;
 - d. Implicit bias training that leads to concrete strategies and actions that improve teaching and result in better student outcomes; and
 - e. Support for special populations.
2. Develop a coherent, year-long professional development program to help prepare principals and assistant principals lead for instruction. Principals should be seen as key change agents in the reform efforts, and there should be a more concerted, comprehensive, and organized effort to support and develop them.
3. Develop a clear, rigorous, and competency-based selection process for principals, placing final hiring authority with the Superintendent.
4. Establish a robust central office hiring process to produce the best candidates and select the most competent and qualified candidate based on pre-established criteria.
5. Reconsider the use of the 36-hour professional development requirement for teachers to ensure that this directly supports student learning. The District might require that 12 hours align with District priorities, 12 hours with individual School Improvement Plans, and 12 hours with specific teacher development needs.
6. Create a talent management plan to properly support and develop all staff, while focusing on succession planning, particularly for key leadership roles.
7. Create a leadership academy to prepare staff members throughout the District for key leadership positions at the central office.
8. Ensure that Professional Development Incentives are aligned to support students' needs.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Provide technical assistance in the development of the professional development plan.
- Provide samples of Direct Report Protocols.
- Provide technical assistance in developing a rigorous, competency-based selection process for principals.

FINANCES

The District is currently operating under an adopted budget of almost \$1 billion. This section describes the Distinguished Educator's findings and recommendations concerning the District's financial status.

Findings:

1. The Children's Agenda's Review of the 2018-19 Rochester City School District Budget notes, *"There is a wealth of information contained in the budget book. Unfortunately, it is not transparent if it is not understood by the reader. The budget is like an 800 page novel without a main character or a plot. The document should be more concise, coherent, and provide clear highlights of year-to-year changes and priorities."*²⁷
2. Without any clearly defined District strategy, the Chief Financial Officer cannot provide proper guidance on funding priorities. This discourages the formation of any real, ongoing financial plan.
3. Most stakeholders (Board, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members) lack any real understanding of the serious implications of the structural deficit. Some seem to believe that funding will always be available. The Chief Financial Officer has shared with the Board that *"If this continues, the District's finances will hit rock bottom within three-to-five years."* The District does not appear to have approached this challenge with a sense of urgency. On May 1, 2014 the Board received a presentation highlighting the following points:
 - a. *"Expenses are growing faster than revenues, driven by things such as growth in charter school costs and contractual obligations to our bargaining units."*
 - b. *"We need to proactively address these significant cost drivers. This will help provide greater stability for students, families and staff. This will help us sustain long-term growth in student achievement."*
 - c. *"If we do not address the structural gap, we risk greater instability in the future. Significant annual budget cuts would create uncertainty and eventually eliminate essential services."*²⁸Unfortunately, no significant actions have been taken to address these challenges.
4. Though financial consultants have been assigned to the Finance Department, there was limited input in the selection of the consultants from the head of the department. There was a similar pattern of hiring consultants without input from department heads across the organization.
5. The District does not collectively own the responsibility for financial monitoring, leaving the burden of addressing budget cuts on the Chief Financial Officer. The District's Auditor

²⁷ Review of the 2018-19 Rochester City School District Budget, April 2018, p.4. See Appendix 10.

²⁸ Establishing Long-Term Financial Stability. May 1, 2014, Slide 2. See Appendix 6.

General 2018 Risk Assessment found that, *“Fiscal monitoring is required in all departments, not just finance. Managers must be accountable for managing operating budgets and grant requirements.”*²⁹

6. The Board addresses financial issues through the Finance Committee, comprised of three commissioners.
7. Most schools appeared to be generously staffed, with little thought given to long-term sustainability. With no clear theory of action, there is no evidence that the additional staff improves student outcomes. As a school administrator expressed, *“Is the additional staffing making a difference? Sometimes running thinner is better.”*
8. In several instances, purchases/contracts exceeding \$35,000 have not been submitted to the Board for approval as stipulated by Board policy.
9. There is a disparity in the distribution of resources and services from school to school. The total school funding per pupil ranges from a low of \$17,414.20 to a high of \$36,103.35, with a mean of \$21,472.65. The District’s Auditor General 2018 Risk Assessment found that, *“Equity concerns were noted across buildings.”*³⁰ It is not clear as to whether the disparity is based on the diverse needs of the student population.
10. An audit report (April 2017) from the Office of the State Comptroller entitled Payroll and Procurement noted:
 - a. *“District employees’ payroll-related payments that we tested were often incorrect or unsupported. The District did not have written policies or procedures for the processing or monitoring of payroll payments. The process that was in place was disjointed, decentralized and not well documented. The complexities and size of the payroll, as well as the large number of people involved in various facets of the process, make it highly susceptible to errors.”*
 - b. *“The Board and District officials did not implement adequate monitoring procedures to ensure staff consistently complied with General Municipal Law or District purchasing policies and procedures when making purchases on the District’s behalf. Hundreds of staff routinely made purchases outside the normal requisition and purchase order process through the use of procurement cards (p-cards), significantly increasing the risk of unauthorized or overpriced purchases.”*
 - c. *“In addition, the District did not consistently comply with competitive bidding requirements for all applicable purchases made using the District’s regular purchase order process.”*
 - d. *There has been significant work performed to obtain a thorough understanding of the concerns identified, to validate them, and establish an appropriate response to remediate control weaknesses in the internal control structures for Payroll and*

²⁹ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor’s PowerPoint presentation, Slide 11.

³⁰ See Appendix 2 for the Auditor’s PowerPoint presentation, Slide 11.

*Purchasing.*³¹ See Appendix 7 for a status report on progress made in implementing the recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. Have the Board address District's finances as an entire body, not by committee.
2. Ensure that Board participates in training aimed at providing better fiscal oversight.
3. Establish clear, consistent criteria for selecting consultants. This should include input from department heads.
4. Have the Business Department collaborate more closely with other departments, and task all District leaders with responsibility for efforts to reduce the structural deficit. These leaders must apply the necessary fiscal due diligence to achieve efficiencies and costs in daily operations.
5. Have the Chief Financial Officer work with the Chief Communications Officer to prepare a clear, coherent presentation to show stakeholders what needs to be done to ensure the District's long-term financial health.
 - a. The Board and administration should hold town halls to inform the community of the fiscal situation of the District.
 - b. The Superintendent should share the presentation with principals and union leaders.
 - c. Principals should share the information with their staff.
6. Consider the implications of the structural deficit during contract negotiations.
7. Ensure all recommendations from the Office of the State Comptroller's April 2017 report are implemented.
8. Have the District conduct a careful review of utilization and allocation of resources to determine whether these are aligned to the goals of sustainability and increased student achievement.. As noted in District's Auditor General 2018 Risk Assessment presentation, *"True-up [adjust] of teacher staffing to student enrollment [is] needed."*³²
11. Develop a long-term financial plan aligned to District instructional priorities and fiscal reality.
12. Develop an addendum to the budget book that gives the community a concise, clear understanding of the budget.
13. Require Board Resolutions with potential significant fiscal implications be accompanied by a cost analysis.

³¹ Office of the State Comptroller (April, 2017). Rochester City School District Payroll and Procurement Report, pp. 2-3. See Appendix 11.

³² See Appendix 2 for the Auditor's PowerPoint presentation.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Recommend organizations that can provide training to the Board.
- Provide technical assistance in the development of the communication plan.
- Provide technical assistance in the development of cost analysis to resolutions.
- Provide technical assistance in developing the long-term financial plan.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“It takes village to raise a child.” This African proverb summarizes the importance of having parents and community members as true educational partners.

This section describes the findings and recommendations of the Distinguished Educator’s review relevant to parent and community engagement.

Findings:

1. The District has dedicated staff to perform outreach to parents and community members, but stakeholders are hindered by a lack of clearly stated expectations that a community should have for its schools. Many parents reported negative experiences with school staff whom parents felt had been rude in some interactions. This made parents feel unwelcome, resulting in their disengagement from the District.
2. Though each school has a parent liaison, the roles and responsibilities of this position varies greatly from school to school. In some cases, the engagement of parents does not seem to be the liaison’s primary focus. At the Board of Education Budget Deliberations of April 18, 2018,³³ it was noted by an individual on behalf of a Commissioner, *“The description as far as what they [parent liaisons] is very good in theory. There is a lot of potential for the parent liaisons to really engage parents in the day-to-day aspects of the school. In practice, what I have heard and what I’ve seen over the years is that it doesn’t live up to what we expect. They are usually pulled into other duties.”*
3. The operation of the District’s Parent Advisory Council (PAC) lacks transparency. Some parents reported that parents need to be interviewed to join the Council and that Council meetings were closed to the public. There were cases where parents were asked to leave the meeting. See Appendix 8 for a copy of an email from a parent sent to the Board, Superintendent, and the New York State Education Department. In addition, minutes of the meetings are not readily available to the public. These processes limit parental involvement.
4. A functioning and active Bilingual Council advocates for the needs of Latino students.
5. Parents and community members reported concerns about racial inequality. Some parents have felt unwelcome in schools and believe this stems from racial bias within the system. This finding aligns with feedback received by District ambassadors when they conducted 50 engagements in 2017 as part of the Path Forward process as described in the Overall Findings section of this report.
6. Though the District maintains a membership in the Chamber of Commerce, the Superintendent does not attend the Chamber’s Education Committee meetings.

³³ See video footage at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLKqJP9JfQ>

Recommendations:

1. Develop success metrics for the role of the parent liaison.
2. Set consistent expectations for and define the job responsibilities of parent liaisons. The liaison's work should be focused on improving family and community relations. School chiefs must monitor this work to ensure that parent liaisons are properly used.
3. Restructure the PAC to increase transparency and parent participation. Below is a process for consideration:
 - a. Establish a Parent and Teachers Organization (PTO) Presidents Council, which will comprise the elected president of each school's PTO. The Council should meet quarterly to discuss the District's priorities.
 - b. Have the PTO Presidents Council nominate members to serve as officers on the PAC and conduct an election. PTO Council will serve as an advisory body to PAC.
 - c. Have the PAC develop new bylaws, including term limits for its officers.
 - d. Post all minutes.
4. Create a subcommittee of the Bilingual Council to focus on the needs of non-Spanish speaking ELLs.
5. Develop a comprehensive parent engagement plan.
6. Have the Superintendent attend meetings of the Chamber of Commerce Education Committee. This will help establish a strong partnership with the business community, which can be leveraged to garner greater resources for the District.
7. Seek internship opportunities for students within the business community.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Provide technical assistance on restructuring the District Parent Advisory Council.
- Provide technical assistance on the development of the parent engagement plan.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

This section describes the findings and recommendations of the Distinguished Educator’s review relevant to school climate.

Findings:

1. In 2014, there was an outcry from District leaders and the community regarding the disproportionate number of African-American students who face extreme disciplinary consequences for minor offenses.
2. At the beginning of her tenure, the Superintendent initiated a 100-day listening and learning process to identify the challenges most important to Rochester students, families, staff, residents, and businesses. Part of the process included a School Climate Team as one of five listening and learning project teams. The School Climate Team reported the following findings:³⁴
 - a. *Two-thirds of Principals tagged “youth voice” and “physical environment” as the areas most in need of improvement for school climate.*
 - b. *The need for mental health services was a very strongly articulated need in some schools.*
 - c. *The majority of Principals and staff do not feel well-equipped to support students and build a positive school climate, within current levels of student need, resources, structures, and fragmented messaging of District supports. School climate varies greatly across schools.*
 - d. *The philosophical aspects of culture and race, and of institutional racism and implicit bias, have not been recognized and/or acknowledged, and therefore do not inform District and/or school practices.*
 - e. *Schools do not have a valid, consistent tool (e.g., climate survey, online referral system) to monitor and improve school climate.*
 - f. *Too often, our responses to trauma are inadequate.*
 - g. *School leaders’ reports and disciplinary data from the first quarter of the 2016-17 school year suggest that the work done thus far on restorative practices, and the momentum of the Code, are having a positive effect.*
 - h. *Triangulated school climate focus groups conducted with students, parents, and staff cite lack of respectful relationships as a core source of inequities. Systematic and institutionalized racism as well as individual racial and social conditioning are concrete barriers to respectful relationships. The foundation of creating equity within the District must therefore begin with addressing racism.*
3. On June 15, 2017, the Board of Education formed an Advisory Special Committee on School Climate. The committee was charged with providing recommendations for improving school

³⁴ 100-Day Plan: School Climate Recommendations to the Superintendent. January 12, 2017. See Appendix 20.

climate in the Rochester City School District within a year of formulation. Some of the Committee's recommendations³⁵ include to:

- *Establish a "Collaborative Engagement Policy" that fosters authentic dialogue and seeks out established networks/ associations/ partnerships, and interested community members to contribute to key educational decision making.*
 - *Implement collegial circles, multi-directional training and professional development for district staff, parents, students and community members on effective collaborative processes and civic engagement.*
 - *Include an assessment of "local student, parent, and community engagement" in all administrators' annual performance reviews.*
 - *Expand student success beyond academics through the emphasis of life skills and social-emotional learning.*
 - *Enhance the development of culturally responsive school environment.*
 - *Complement the data points tracked in the Roc 3D key performance indicator with a uniform referral process, extracurricular activities, attendance and restorative practices*
 - *Support accessibility, transparency and accountability in data collection and dissemination.*
4. The District has revised the Code of Conduct, implemented restorative practices, and conducted anti-bias training.
 5. The District volunteered to participate in the New York State Education Department's 2016-17 school climate testing pilot and the 2017-18 school climate pilot by administering the United States Department of Education evidenced-based school climate surveys to students, parents, instructional staff, and non-instructional staff. Results of the surveys were collected; however, it is unclear whether they were analyzed and reviewed by a Community Engagement Team. The final step in the New York State Education Department's process for promoting positive school climate is to establish a Community Engagement Team to review the results of the surveys, identify deficiencies, and create an action plan to address these deficiencies, as well as to review other data points such as, chronic absenteeism rates, Violent and Disruptive Incident Reports (VADIR), and Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) incidents in an effort to improve school climate, thus leading to improved student outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. Improve relationships among all stakeholders by establishing the Community Engagement Team to review pertinent data (e.g., school climate survey data, chronic absenteeism rates, incidents related to VADIR and DASA reporting) and develop an action plan to address any areas that need improvement. As stated in the 100-Day Plan: School Climate Report, *"The CTF's [Community Task Force on School Climate] overarching recommendation was simple,*

³⁵ School Climate Advisory Committee Recommendations. September 13, 2018. See Appendix 22.

yet nuanced—positive relationships must be restored and built between all members of the school community, within Central Office, and between Central Office and school buildings.”³⁶

2. Ensure that the resources, supports, structures, and practices that promote a restorative philosophy and positive school climate are in place in every school.
3. Develop a plan to implement the recommendations from the Advisory Special Committee on School Climate.
4. Continue with anti-bias training but ensure that it leads to specific changes in behavior and teaching and leadership practices.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Provide technical assistance in evaluating all programs that support the development of a positive school climate.

³⁶ 100-Day Plan: School Climate Recommendations to the Superintendent. January 12, 2017. See Appendix 20, p.8.

OPERATIONS

An organization's success depends on competent management of its operational systems. This section describes the Distinguished Educator's findings and recommendations of the review relevant to the District's operations.

Findings:

1. In 2017, at the request of the District, the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute conducted a review of the District's transportation program. The report addresses the issues and challenges surrounding the program and operation of the Transportation Department. The District has begun to implement some of the report's recommendations. The RCSD Transportation Department is currently developing a request for proposal for a new routing software system that will work in alignment with the new Student Information System. The report states: *"According to the five-year subsidy agreement between the Regional Transit Service Inc. and RCSD, the school district wishes to facilitate transportation of its pupils by subsidizing the student fares paid by the school District. While this consultant acknowledges that the subsidy agreement was properly negotiated by both parties, the amount of the subsidy is inappropriately high when compared to the fares paid for the general public."*³⁷
2. Over the course of the year, the District transports over 30,000 students. High rates of student mobility present challenges for efficient bus routing. As a result, the District usually faces transportation challenges at the beginning of the school year.
3. In the last two years, the District has successfully responded to multiple crises; however, it still lacks the necessary systems and structures to prevent such crises from occurring.
4. In many areas, standard District and school operating procedures are either not clearly understood or followed or entirely lacking.
5. The District is under a Facilities Modernization Program comprising a multi-phase capital initiative of the Rochester City School District in partnership with the City of Rochester. New York State has authorized up to \$435 million to renovate Rochester Schools as part of Phase 2 (from 2016 to 2021). Phase 2 is on track. Phase 3 is due to reach completion around 2026 at an estimated cost of \$560 million.

Recommendations:

1. Analyze the recommendations from the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute's report and decide which merit implementation.
2. Conduct an in-depth assessment to develop strategies to solve the student transportation problems that emerged at the beginning of the school year.
3. Put effective systems in place to prevent crises from occurring.
4. Ensure that standard operating procedures are clearly understood and followed. All departments and schools should document their standard operating procedures in writing

³⁷ Pupil Transportation Safety Institute. (Fall 2017). Efficiency Study of the Rochester City School District Pupil Transportation Program, p.7. See Appendix 12

and make them easily available. It is particularly important the schools have and follow procedures relating to daily arrival at, attendance in, and dismissal of students from school.

Distinguished Educator Support:

Based on the action plan developed by the District in response to this report, it is anticipated that the Distinguished Educator will provide appropriate and relevant technical assistance, including but not limited to the following:

- Serve as a thought partner to the Chief Operating Officer in finding solutions to the transportation challenges the District faces at the beginning of the year.
- Assist in the review of the District's standard operating procedures.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights serious concerns regarding the academic, operational, and fiscal health of the District. The gravity of the District's problems were summed up during a focus group with parents, when a grandmother passionately stated, *"We are bleeding! We cannot take another hit! Very soon we won't even have one good elementary school in the District."*

Left unsolved, the problems will continue to hinder the District's ability to improve student achievement. The implications of these findings might seem overwhelming, but these issues have plagued the District for decades. It will take time and a collective effort to address them.

The following concerns emerged as being of paramount importance to all stakeholders:

- The Board's lack of understanding of its role as a governing body and its consequent inability to act as unified body;
- A community with low expectations for its students, rooted in a deep history of institutional racism;
- A District that pays little attention to teaching and learning;
- A District crippled by a culture of fear and intimidation;
- A District that lacks a system of accountability; and
- A District facing a serious structural budget deficit.

As next steps, the District should revise its current District Comprehensive Improvement Plan and associated School Comprehensive Education Plans as well as its Comprehensive Application for Federal Funding to incorporate some of the recommendations in this report as appropriate and develop a multi-year plan to implement recommendations in a systematic and thoughtful manner. The Distinguished Educator will work closely with the District to engage in a process of prioritization of the recommendations and selection of high-leverage strategies to address the complex challenges outlined in the report. The plan should identify the timeline, responsible individuals, measures of success, and any additional support the district might need from the Distinguished Educator. Appendix 1 provides a sample prioritization of the recommendations for the District's consideration.

As the District re-envision itself, there is a useful model for improvement within its present system. As noted in the General Findings section at the beginning of this report, the District has one of the highest performing Pre-K systems in the United States. The leadership of the District's Early Childhood Department can take pride in the impact of their efforts in educating the system's youngest students in its Prekindergarten programs. As District leaders and all stakeholders reflect on the recommendations suggested in this report, they should consider some of the reasons for this continued success:

1. Strong and consistent leadership;

2. Continuity of teaching staff;
3. Strong professional development;
4. Adoption of a common curriculum (HighScope);
5. Common assessments;
6. A robust evaluation, RECAP, which provides parents, providers and policy-makers with reliable information for informed decision-making;
7. The adoption of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which focuses on the instructional program, teacher-child interactions, concept development, classroom climate, and other key areas; and
8. The use of data to monitor and improve the program.

The Distinguished Educator and the New York State Education Department are ready to assist the District in the process of the turning itself around to better serve its students and the community.

The Distinguished Educator extends his gratitude to the entire Rochester City School District Community for their candor. They have shown themselves willing to assist in the review by sharing insights, experiences, and relevant data. It was encouraging to see that despite all the challenges the District faces, stakeholders have not lost hope. They show a firm commitment to making a difference in the lives of Rochester's youth.

Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer, Children, Family, and Intergenerational Programs Director of the Religious Education Department wrote that, *"Among the most accomplished and fabled tribes of Africa, no tribe is considered to have warriors more fearsome or more intelligent than the mighty Masai. It is perhaps surprising, then, to learn the traditional greeting that passes between Masai warriors. 'Kasserian Ingera,' one always says to another. It means, 'How are the children?' This traditional greeting among the Masai acknowledges the high value that the Masai always place on their children's well-being... What would it be like if religious leaders began every worship service by answering the question, 'And how are the children?' If teachers began every class by answering the question, 'And how are the children?' If every town leader had to answer the same question at the beginning of every meeting: 'And how are the children?' If every business leader and corporate executive had to answer the same question at the beginning of every work day: 'And how are the children? Are they well?' wouldn't it be interesting to hear their answers? What would it be like? I wonder... I wonder... And how are the children? Working together, may all our children be well."*³⁸

³⁸ Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer. *How are the Children?* staffwww.fullcoll.edu/clamm/howarethechildren.doc

As the District seeks to fulfill its mission of providing quality education for all students so they can become productive citizens, district staff are encouraged to constantly ask, “And how are the children in Rochester?”

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS³⁹

AREA	TIMELINE	RECOMMENDATION
Governance	December 2018	Implement a system by which the Board holds the Superintendent accountable.
Governance	December 2018	Implement a system of induction for new Commissioners.
Governance	December 2018	Have the Board President play an active role in managing the Board as a whole
Governance	May 2019	Reassess Board policy pertaining to Advisory Committees and Taskforces and encourage the Board whenever possible to have such committees and task forces report to and be overseen by the superintendent.
Governance and District Leadership	May 2019	Promote a culture of respect, trust, and collaboration that focuses on the students’ best interest.
Governance	May 2019	Ensure the Board has a clear understanding of its role as a governing body.
District Leadership	May 2019	Develop a multi-year strategic plan to serve as a road map guiding work throughout the system. Components of the plan should include: Teaching and Learning, Interventions, Support for Special Populations, Human Capital, Parent and Community Engagement, Socio-Emotional Support, Building System Capacity, Intelligent Accountability, Operations, Funding and Sustainability.
District Leadership	May 2019	Provide professional development and support to the superintendent and cabinet.
Teaching and Learning	February 2019	Review the K-2 curriculum to determine its alignment to state standards, its quality, and plan for implementation.
Teaching and Learning	February 2019	Implement a system to ensure that students have all the materials needed to engage in the learning process.
Teaching and Learning	April 2019	Create and implement a vision of best first instruction, including differentiation, to support and enhance the learning of all students.

³⁹ This prioritization is just a sample. Following the submission of this report to the Commissioner, the District’s current superintendent announced that she will retire at the end of January 2019. The District will need to consider this new development as they prioritize the recommendations. Timelines may need to be adjusted to reflect prospective leadership changes.

Teaching and Learning	April 2019	Adopt a common curriculum in core subject areas, especially literacy and mathematics, by implementing a rigorous curriculum selection process. Prioritize English Language Arts.
Special Education	December 2018	Ensure the Superintendents plays a more active role in monitoring the Department.
Special Education	December 2018	Ensure all staff take collective responsibility for educating Special Education students. The District should consider including specific accountability measures in the goal setting process for principals.
Special Education	December 2018	Ensure that the Special Education Department is supported, resourced, and held accountable for district implementation of the Special Education Strategic Action Plan and the Consent Decree.
English Language Learners	Within two months upon receipt of the report	Develop a coherent implementation plan to comply with the New York State Education Department’s Corrective Action Plan recommendations.
English Language Learners	January 2019	Ensure provision of proper translation services.
English Language Learners	June 2019	Develop Master Plan (Handbook) for the education of ELLs.
English Language Learners	June 2019	Provide a coherent, instructionally aligned curriculum system for ELLs.
Organizational Structure	December 2018	Improve meeting structures.
Organizational Structure	January 2020	Evaluate the effectiveness of each central office department.
Accountability	May 2019	Create and implement a professional development plan to equip all District staff in the use of data to drive decisions.
Accountability	May 2019	Implement a protocol whereby supervisors support, coach and hold direct reports accountable for progress in meeting academic and department goals.
Human Capital	February 2019	Establish a robust hiring process to produce the best candidates and select the most competent and qualified candidate based on pre-established criteria.
Human Capital	April 2019	Develop a coherent yearlong professional development program to help principals and assistant principals lead for instruction.
Human Capital	May 2019	Provide professional development in project management.

Human Capital	April 2020	Create a leadership academy to prepare staff members throughout the District for key leadership positions at the central office.
Finances	December 2018	The District must develop a long-term financial plan aligned to District instructional priorities and fiscal reality.
Finances	January 2019	Have the Chief Financial Officer work with the Chief Communications Officer to prepare a clear, coherent presentation to show stakeholders what needs to be done to ensure the District’s long-term financial health.
Finances	May 2019	Address District’s finances as an entire body, not by committee.
Finances	May 2019	Have the Board participate in training aimed at providing better fiscal oversight.
Finances	May 2019	Require Board resolutions to be accompanied by a cost analysis determining the financial implications of adoption.
Parent Engagement	May 2019	Set consistent expectations while defining the job responsibilities of the parent liaison.
Parent Engagement	May 2019	Restructure the PAC to increase transparency and parent participation.
Parent Engagement	May 2019	Develop a comprehensive parent engagement plan.
Operations	May 2019	Conduct an in-depth assessment to develop strategies to solve the student transportation problems that emerged at the beginning of the school year.
Operations	May 2020	Have all departments document their standard operating procedures in writing and make them easily available.