

## Rochester students feel disconnected

Last time I checked, 287 Rochester City School District employees were making more than \$100,000 a year. Despite this investment, 93 percent of kids in the district failed last year's reading and math tests.

After becoming superintendent, Barbara Deane-Williams asked many of these wellpaid educators to join teams to make plans to remedy this travesty. On Thursday they shared their work, including recommendations like this: "Articulate a Theory of Action and establish cross-functional 'Network Teams' providing direct support to schools through articulated systems and processes to strengthen teaching in our classrooms by July 31, 2017."

About seven teenagers came to watch the presentation. As the finance work group discussed its recommendations for the formation of a multi-disciplinary work group, a focus group and another work group, the kids started to disappear.

"It was so repetitive and boring, I just walked out," said Kiara Johnson, a sophomore at the School of the Arts. She said that too often she experiences a similar lack of connection in her school. "They sometimes forget they are working with human beings."

Some of the presenters tried to introduce humanity to the systems talk and education jargon. "Our recommendation is love," said Jerome Underwood, director of family initiatives. And Deane-Williams has called on district employees to know every student "by face and name."

But overall, the presentations were what you would expect from a bureaucracy that swallows up \$800 million a year while educating a tiny, tiny fraction of its students. Liberals blame poverty. Conservatives blame the parents. Both sides should agree that for \$800 million, more than 7 percent of our students should be reading and doing math at grade level. Deane-Williams seems committed to figuring out how. Sadly, former superintendents have said that under the district's current structure and constraints, the task would be too great for Jesus. One problem is that the district is locked into paying many people \$100,000 a year till they retire, whether they are effective or not.

Deane-Williams' first task will be to close a \$65 million budget gap. She said plans to go through the budget line by line to find waste and redirect it toward things that help kids learn. I don't know whether cross-functional network teams will end up being part of her plan. We can only hope that fresh eyes will lead to some improvement.

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**Kiara Johnson and Je'Carl Hill attended Thursday's meeting at the Rochester City School District.**

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