

Bilingual Proposed Budget – Need to Know

Overview

The Rochester City School District's (RCSD) 2018-2019 proposed budget adds significant numbers (45.6 Full Time Equivalent) of bilingual staff, the most being special education teachers. The Superintendent has made a clear commitment to improving bilingual education through the Path Forward initiative and her budget priorities. The Children's Agenda applauds these efforts, and will be watching closely to make sure positions are filled and implementation receives adequate support. However, the bilingual education department still lacks stability, and the newly created Bilingual Language and Literacy Academy is not officially a program school in the budget.

Positive Changes for 2018-2019

- Edison Tech will become a bilingual high school for the 2018-2019 school year;
- The 2018-2019 proposed budget adds 45.6 bilingual staff (FTEs), across 21 different types of positions, a 20 percent increase over the current year;
- The biggest staffing increases are in special education, adding 19 bilingual special education teachers a 53 percent increase over the current year;
- The school district has also proposed adding 15.55 ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers.

Concerns for 2018-2019

- The Director of Bilingual Education remains an unstable position;
- The Bilingual Language and Literacy Academy has not officially been made a program school, all the positions for the academy are listed under the School Chiefs Budget;

Recommendations

These recommendations are from the Latino/a Education Taskforce, and fully supported by The Children's Agenda:

Stabilize Bilingual Education - Our research has clearly highlighted that the Department of Bilingual Education is unstable. The Director's position has had tremendous turnover and is currently filled by an Acting Director. **A permanent director must be hired with the Bilingual Council's support, at a higher Association of Supervisors & Administrators of Rochester grade, and with a department budget.**

Permanent Newcomer Program for Latina/o Students- Latina/o students are not the focus of the Rochester International Academy. Over 560 students have already arrived in Rochester from Puerto Rico this school year after the devastation of Hurricane Maria. Our largest schools have become placement centers for newcomer Latina/o students with no programs to address their unique needs. **The District needs a permanent K-12 Latina/o newcomer program, modeled on the Rochester International Academy.** The newcomer program should have appropriate bilingual staff to student ratios, including bilingual social workers and counselors to address the deep trauma these students experienced.

Strategic Plan for Latina/o Achievement Alignment- The significant and authentic needs of Latina/o's make it imperative that we have an aligned plan in Latina/o studies and Bilingual Education. A strategic plan to add structure and direction for both across the district should be created. We have seven elementary bilingual schools feeding into one high school, creating overcrowding, and limits the academic opportunities for those students. With the influx of 560+ newcomer students from Puerto Rico, there are now not enough seats at the elementary level.

Students need additional bilingual seats at all levels. We applaud the expansion of bilingual education to Edison Career and Technical High School, and will be watching to make sure those positions are filled before September 2018.

Positive School Climate Proposed Budget – Need to Know

Overview

Since the new Code of Conduct was passed in June of 2016 there has been a consistent commitment to reducing suspensions and implementing restorative practices in the Rochester City School District. However, much work remains to be done, and only a small amount of resources has been devoted to implementing the new code of conduct and supporting positive school climate.

Positive Changes for 2018-2019

- 3.71 Additional School Social Workers
- 1.5 Additional Bilingual School Social Workers
- 0.8 Additional School Counselors
- 0.5 Additional School Psychologists
- 1.25 Additional Response to Intervention Teachers
- 2 New Bilingual Response to Intervention Teachers
- 10 Additional Behavioral Specialists

Concerns for 2018-2019

- 1 Additional In-School Suspension Teaching Assistant
- 5 Additional School Sentries and 4 Additional Bilingual School Sentries – school security is a reactive approach that does not address the root causes of school safety issues

Recommendations

Increase Use of Restorative Practices – As the “My Brother’s Keeper” grant phases out, it’s important to develop a sustainable plan to implement restorative practices in every building.

Convert Remaining In-School Suspension Rooms to Help Zones – There must be greater coordination of best practices and professional development for converting in-school suspension rooms to help zones and alternatives to suspension rooms.

Expand Student Voice and Parent Engagement – Resources devoted to parent engagement have been largely ineffective. The roles of parent liaisons and home school assistants should be reimagined to create stronger connections between parents and schools. Student leadership roles should also be expanded at the high school level.

Special Education Proposed Budget – Need to Know

Overview

The Specialized Services Department (Special Education) has been in crisis this school year. Three top leaders have left the department and the director positions have been completely restructured. The reduction of dozens of Coordinating Administrators of Special Education (CASEs) disrupted an already strained Committee on Special Education (CSE) meeting process. Then the school district was threatened with a lawsuit for being out of compliance with state and federal law.

In the middle of this turmoil a boy with special needs drowned.

Trevyan Rowe's tragic death should remind us of our responsibility to care for every child, especially those with special needs. The proposed 2018-2019 budget restores and expands important positions for special education. It is essential that these additions are approved and are quickly filled. There are no easy fixes for special education. However, with greater transparency, stability, and the best use of resources, we will make serious improvements for Rochester's children.

Positive Changes for 2018-2019

- Restoration of 11 Coordinating Administrators of Special Education (CASEs), bringing to total to 37, a complete reversal from the budget approved last year;
- 10 Behavioral Specialist positions have been added bringing the total to 17;
- 19 additional Bilingual Special Education Teachers;
- 4.7 additional Special Education Teachers;
- 5.9 additional Speech and Hearing Teachers, and 2.5 additional Bilingual Speech and Hearing Teachers;
- 4.4 additional Special Education Teacher Assistants, and 6 additional Bilingual Teacher Assistants.

Concerns for 2018-2019

- 9 Bilingual Special Education Paraprofessionals have been cut;
- 22 of the 1 to 1 Paraprofessional positions have been cut, (117 to 95);
- Major reductions in special education staffing should be clearly explained to parents and consistent to with their students' individualized educational programs (IEPs). It is possible the addition of special education teachers is an improvement over the use of 1 to 1 paraprofessionals, however, these changes must be well understood and properly planned for months in advance.
- Reorganization of the Specialized Services (Special Education) Department is constant, ongoing, and not well understood by the community. Some of these changes include:
 - New Associate Director of Special Education replaces Director of External Special Education position;
 - New Associate Director of Special Education Compliance replacing the Special Education Compliance Officer;
 - There is a new Associate Director of Related Services position;

- Zone Directors reduced to 3 positions from 4;
- Chief of Special Education and Student Support position remains unstable;
- Project Manager role is unclear.

Recommendations

Align Continuum of Services – Programs and services that best meet students' needs should be consistently available across school buildings. Every program or building change for a student with disabilities is disruptive to the learning process. To align different programs for so many students across such a large school district is very complicated. This requires a comprehensive multi-year plan with parent and community input. While all programs cannot be available in every building, there should be a good faith effort to make program availability more predictable and consistent.

Consistent Mandatory Professional Development – Issues with compliance, student placements, and the quality of instruction are all impacted by a lack of consistent professional development. Every staff person interacting with students with IEPs should have the proper training to support those students.

Address Disproportionality in Suspensions – Students with disabilities continue to be suspended at higher rates than their general education peers. Suspensions are harmful to a student's academic progress and should only be used as a last resort. It is important that all suspensions of students with disabilities are reviewed to ensure those students are not being removed from the classroom for behavior consistent with their disability. More work must be done on the prevention side, including proper placement of students, social-emotional supports, and training of staff.

Early Childhood Education Proposed Budget – Need to Know

Overview

The Rochester City School District's (RCSD) 2018-2019 Early Childhood proposed budget is largely similar to the prior year's budget. Rochester's Pre-K program is a partnership between the Rochester City School District and a number of community-based provider organizations. Rochester's early childhood programs are seen as a bright spot for the District, and reliable evaluations conducted by the Children's Institute over many years have shown that children enrolled in Head Start, Expanded Pre-K, and Universal Pre-K experience a substantial improvement in kindergarten readiness through their participation in these programs. The district plans to operate 28 Pre-K programs directly in 2018-19, and we expect that community providers will manage another 37 sites throughout the community.

Positive Changes for 2018-2019

- The District is adding 7 FTE Parent Group Leaders or Liaisons, including several bilingual positions;
- The 2018-2019 proposed budget anticipates increased spending on permanent salaried positions rather than substitutes and hourly staff;
- The District's high performing Pre-K program is stable amidst many other changes within RCSD. This allows a consistent approach to early childhood education;
- The district is continuing its commitment to Preschool Special Education by devoting \$500,000 in general funds toward evaluation services for preschool children where there is a concern about a delay in healthy development.

Concerns for 2018-2019

- Several schools with Kindergarten programs continue to lack Pre-K, limiting the ability of the District to effectively transition children from Pre-K to Kindergarten in the same school;
- While bilingual staff were added in the current school year, there appears to be no anticipated expansion of bilingual Pre-K teachers and paraprofessional staff, despite an influx of Spanish-speaking Pre-K students.

Recommendations

Pre-K to Kindergarten transition - Despite high quality Pre-K programs, RCSD early elementary students too often fall behind, struggling to learn to read by 3rd grade. One cause of this dynamic is that the transition from Pre-K to K can be challenging for a young child. To address this, the District should collaborate with the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) and other experts to develop evidence-based strategies and practices around early childhood transitions, and should ensure that the K-2 curriculum helps create a smooth transition from Pre-K to elementary grades.

Unmet need for developmental services - Inadequate New York State reimbursement rates are causing a shortage of providers of Preschool Special Education services (e.g., Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy). Young children with developmental delays are waiting for weeks or even months for crucial services that are vital for school readiness. These delays can result in later, costlier special education placements. Because these reimbursement rates are largely set at the state level, the District should continue to partner with advocates, parents, providers and other community members to advocate in Albany for increased reimbursement rates for providers of Preschool Special Education services.

Summer learning for Pre-K students - The District has provided financial support for summer programs for K-12 students, including transportation, for 8 years. The positive impact of high quality summer programs on young children is well documented in programs initiated by the Greater Rochester Summer Learning Association. Rigorous assessments of these local programs demonstrate increased competencies on Approaches to Learning, Social-Emotional Development, and Physical Development and Health. We urge the District to extend its support of summer programs to Pre-K students, who can benefit greatly from these high quality programs that help them retain and build on the progress made in Pre-K experiences.