

Review of the Proposed 2011-12 City of Rochester Budget



6/2/2011

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepared by



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JUNE 2011

The Children's Agenda is pleased to present our analysis of the City of Rochester's proposed 2011-12 budget, our fourth such review. The analysis looks at sections of the budget where expenditures affect the health and well-being of children in Rochester and identifies those areas in which City resources are serving children well and those in which additional resources, financial or otherwise, are needed.

The proposed 2011-12 budget had to overcome a funding shortfall of \$30 million, due in part to rising pension and benefit costs. Nonetheless, the Mayor's proposed budget protects quality-of-life services; necessary to a thriving community.

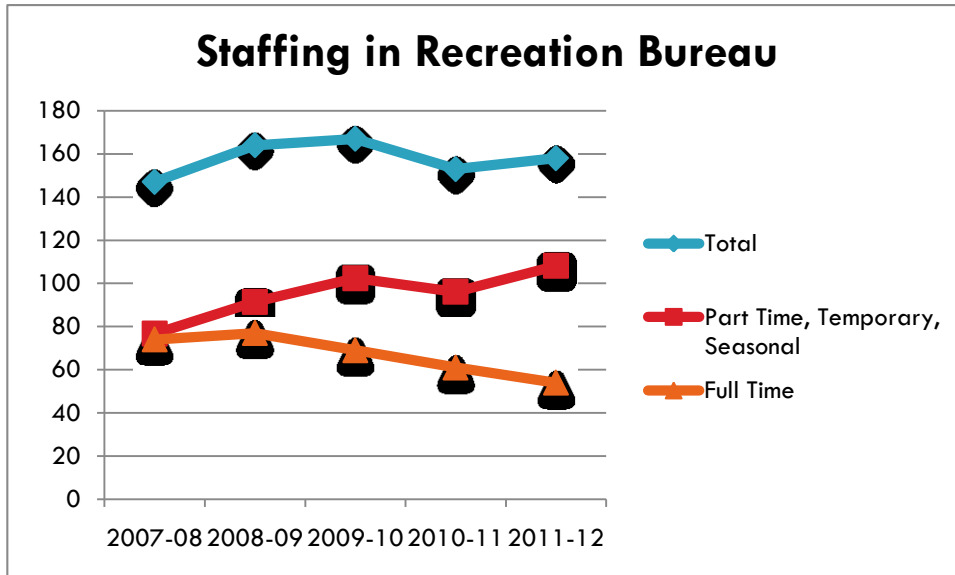
With respect to the 2011-12 budget, we reviewed five areas that affect Rochester children:

1. Recreation Services
2. After-School Programming
3. Library Services
4. Summer Foods Program
5. Youth Policy

RECREATION SERVICES

In a climate that only recently was discussing closing down some recreation centers altogether, we commend the Mayor for preserving all sites and all hours in order to maintain continuity of services for children and families. In addition, we support the City's plan to expand some successful programs, including Recreation on the Move, which brings recreation services into neighborhoods to engage youth and families in positive physical activity and connect them to their closest recreation center. Thanks in part to financial support from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, Rec on the Move is able to add a second van in 2011-12 in order to reach more citizens.

We are disappointed, however, at the gradual erosion of the City's financial commitment to recreation and youth services. In the last four City budgets, recreation and youth services have sustained disproportionately high cuts each and every year. For example the Bureau of Recreation's budget decreased 12% between the 2009-10 and the proposed 2011-12 budget (~\$1M, from \$8.6M to \$7.6M).



In addition, the 2011-12 budget continues the trend of transitioning from a full-time workforce at recreation centers to a part-time workforce. This year the Bureau of Recreation loses another 5 full-time staff, saving \$196,900. Quality of service is put at risk in a part-time staffing structure because these staff turn over more frequently, continuity of knowledge and training is compromised, and the pool of applicants is generally less qualified. These factors impact on the relationships that can be fostered and maintained between staff and youth, yet those relationships may be the most critical aspect of recreation services in terms of child outcomes. The City must ensure the quality of the services that are delivered in recreation centers. The savings that result from cutting full-time staff, seen in reduced pension and medical benefit costs, are undercut by the harder-to-quantify but very real cost of lost mentoring opportunities, which we expect will be seen in the safety of the community and the outcomes that our youth are able to achieve.

Recommendation: Reverse the trend in Recreation cuts and staffing. For 2011-12, reinstate dollars for the three full-time recreation leader positions that would otherwise be eliminated.

PATHWAYS TO PEACE

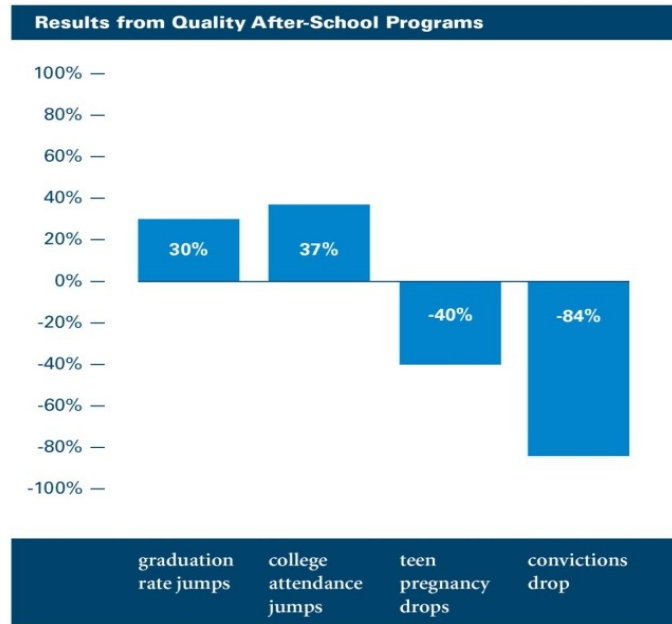
This year's budget calls for the elimination of one full-time and two part-time Pathways to Peace positions, at a savings of \$117,600, due to the expected completion of a Federal grant. Pathways to Peace is a street-level team of outreach workers that channels young city residents toward an array of community resources to prevent youth violence. It focuses on important on-the-scene relationships with kids on the street in the moment of trauma. It has both supporters and detractors but does not have scientifically evaluated outcomes, making return on investment impossible to assess.

Recommendation: In the next grant application for Pathways to Peace, allocate money for a scientifically based evaluation to track the outcomes of this work.

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

The Children's Agenda appreciates the leadership already demonstrated and committed to in the 2011-12 proposed budget with respect to after-school programming. Specifically, we commend the Mayor's support and DRYS leadership in responding positively to the Wallace Foundation's offer to apply for funding for

after-school systems building support to create necessary additional infrastructure. As shown below, after-school programming produces multiple, life-impacting outcomes for children:



The Mayor’s proposed budget, however, cuts funding (\$76,800) for the after-school program at School 28, which currently serves more than 50 children. This program incorporates key components – recreation, academic support, coping skills, snacks and breaks – to provide children with a place to go after school that impacts how they develop as students and citizens. The City’s support, through local tax dollars, provides an important example of the City’s commitment to comprehensive after-school programming for low-income children and families. In addition, the City’s investment leverages private investment in the program from the Community Foundation (roughly \$22K contributed for a full year program) that could be lost if this program is defunded.

Although we realize that School 28 is slated to close for renovations in the 2012-13 School Year, eliminating the program this year would leave more than 50 children, who are currently being served, without a safe, productive after-school environment. While some families may be able to make alternative after-school care arrangements for their children, many affected families will not be able to afford fee-based care.

Recommendation: Restore funding for the School 28 after-school program for the 2011-12 School Year, and continue to work with the Wallace Foundation planning team to help bridge gaps and serve additional kids in the community.

LIBRARY SERVICES IMPACTING CHILDREN

Libraries are a critical component in the patchwork of safe activities that families put together for their kids during the time that they are not in school. The Children’s Agenda is glad to see the Safe to be Smart programs maintained. Safe to be Smart provides library-centered, after-school activities for youth with dedicated space and staffing at eight library branches. This program and others benefit from dollars

provided by the Rundel Library Foundation. The Mayor's proposed budget also maintains the literacy aides program, which provides stipends to older youth to work with young children and youth on their reading skills.

The proposed budget reflects a \$700K cut to the Central Library (from \$7.9M in 2010-11 to \$7.2M in proposed 2011-12), savings that come as a result of reduced hours (12 fewer hours per week) at the Central Library and the elimination of nine staff positions. This year's proposed cuts include a small reduction of hours and staffing in the Children's Center and the Teen Center at the Central Branch.

Hours at the Sully branch are cut more than 40% – from being open 72 hours per week to just 42 hours per week – and staff are reduced by two part-time employees. Branch staff analyzed traffic and usage of the library to ensure that, within these reductions, the most popular times were protected.

The City Library's bookmobile is cut completely in the 2011-12 proposed budget. The goal of the bookmobile was to conduct literacy outreach with childcare centers and preschools: Rochester's youngest will bear the full impact of this cut.

Recommendations: Reductions in staffing and hours at both the Central and Sully branches may impact the ability of the libraries to serve as safe, productive environments for youth during out-of-school time. These reductions will hit right at the beginning of the summer, when safe, productive environments for kids are in high demand at all hours. We ask that the Library continue to track use, especially during the summer months, and possible impact of the staffing and hour reductions to drive future decision-making.

SUMMER FOODS PROGRAM

This year's budget reflects a reduction of \$149,000 in the Federal allocation that the City receives for the Summer Foods Program. The budget cites reduced participation at summer food sites, with an expected decrease of 29% of meals consumed (184,000 breakfasts and lunches in 2010-11 compared to 130,500 in 2011-12). 82% of the children in the Rochester City School District are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch at school during the school year. Certainly the majority of these children also need food services during the summer. However, data from Healthi Kids indicate that Summer Foods Program usage is less than half of what the usage is of the Reduced and Free Lunch Program during the school year. It's possible that some of these children have access to sources for food during the summer that they don't use during the school year, but it is unlikely, given the City's poverty rate of adults and children, that most children are getting what they need.

Recommendation: Food insecurity has serious impacts on how children grow and learn. This program is funded by federal dollars and based on use: more children participating does not have a local cost and does have a huge local benefit. We understand the City, the School District, Foodlink, and Healthi Kids are partnering to begin to address this challenge. **We urge the City to be a leader at this table, to investigate the barriers to children accessing free-food through the Summer Foods Program and to create a plan that will be more successful in meeting the needs of our hungry children.**

YOUTH POLICY

In past years, The Children's Agenda has called for a city-wide youth policy. We commend City Council members for taking the lead on this effort and incorporating a broad focus. We agree that the City has a critical leadership role to play in strategic planning for youth in the community. City programs serving our children support a higher quality of life and help meet critical needs. We urge our city leaders, both at the level of the Mayor and his staff and within City Council, to clearly define their position and articulate a

cogent and compelling Youth Policy to delineate priorities for Rochester's children, particularly our school-aged youth. The future of our community literally relies on their ability to become successful, healthy adults.

Recommendation: We urge Council to continue to move this work forward and report out in 2012 on work accomplished.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Download this report at www.thechildrensagenda.org or contact Carolyn Lee-Davis, Policy Analyst, at (585) 256-2065 for more information.

The Children's Agenda is an independent, non-profit organization in Rochester, New York. We serve as an objective, passionate voice for Greater Rochester's children and youth by promoting evidence-based policies and programs.