

**ORIENTATION
FOR
SCHOOL-BASED PLANNING
TEAMS**

**December 1988
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**CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK**

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ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE MANDATE FOR CHANGE

Background

In 1985, Superintendent Peter McWalters prepared an assessment of the productivity of the Rochester City School District, using indicators of student performance as the measure of the District's success. The assessment identified deeply-rooted problems of student achievement, manifest in excessively high failure rates in core academic courses, low Regents placement and graduation rates, disproportionately high rates of suspension, local program placement and Special Education placement among minority students, and severe problems of achievement, attendance and behavior at the early secondary grades -- leading to a disturbing rate of student loss before graduation, and a low percentage of graduates advancing to college.

The assessment led to discussions in which the school community struggled to clarify the causes of performance problems and to propose solutions. During these discussions, staff and community acknowledged that student achievement problems persisted in part because the school system had not accepted responsibility for each student, regardless of academic readiness, aptitude, background and motivation. Linked to this absence of shared responsibility for the education of the city's children was the school system's failure to demonstrate a capacity for collective action, a systemwide collaboration that would enable the District to direct energy to the root causes of student failure.

In response to the needs assessment, the Superintendent outlined and the Board of Education endorsed a series of beliefs that should characterize the work of the Rochester schools. These beliefs contend that all students can learn, regardless of socio-economic background or pre-school experience, and that schools have the capacity to counteract disadvantage. The beliefs also acknowledge the importance of the relationship between teacher and student, and point to the responsibilities that student, teacher, administrator, parent and community member hold in creating successful schools. In the context of this statement of mission, the Board then directed the Superintendent to design a program that would change the structure of the school system on behalf of improved achievement: change in attitudes, roles, focus of authority, allocation of resources, and methodologies.

The Structure of Change

The Superintendent's plan for change sets two goals for the City School District: improved student performance, and development of an accountable school system. These goals are defined as follows:

- Improved student performance: higher levels of student achievement, at individual schools and districtwide, that cut across socio-economic lines and ethnic distinctions. Course failure rates, grade retentions, Special Education placements, and suspension rates that disproportionately include minority students and students from lower-income families are not acceptable in the Rochester schools. Belief in all students' ability to achieve and in the school's capacity to support students' success challenges this type of profile.
- Accountability: the capacity to respond to problems of student performance, whether these are represented in individual students or documented districtwide. In order to achieve this capacity, the District must define responsibilities clearly in the context of instruction as the primary work of the school system, and join all roles in an effort to respond to assessments of need.

In order to meet these goals, the District has entered into an improvement program that emphasizes and supports the individual school's capacity to respond to problems of student performance. By increasing authority at the level of the school, the District acknowledges that the largest proportion of its resources and creativity resides in the schools, and that the most important interactions in the system take place daily between teachers and students. In the context of the District's definition of accountability, this means that the work of the schools must become increasingly centered on identification and address of achievement problems, making best use of a collaboration that includes student, teacher, administrator, parent and community member.

Rochester's program of school improvement proceeds within districtwide parameters: standards of student performance, coordination of roles, expectations for school-based planning, and measurement of progress toward the goals of excellence and equity. Within these parameters, the District encourages variations in the schools' approaches to improved performance.

1988-89 PLANNING REQUIREMENTS

PLANNING PROCESS

The 1988-89 Guidelines for School-Based Planning outline the elements of the planning process (page 7):

- (1) **ASSESSMENT:** Using school and student performance information to improve student success.

Annually, schools are provided with student performance information with which to conduct their assessment, develop goals and evaluate progress toward their goals. Much of the information is included in the District's Data Base and School Profiles, which provide a portrait of District and schools in areas such as:

- Attendance.
- Behavior (short-term and long-term suspensions).
- Student performance on the California Achievement Test (CAT) and State tests (PEP, PCT and RCT).
- Separate item analysis of the CAT, State tests, and District exams for the total school as well as for LEP, Special Education and MAP students.
- Description of the student population by enrollment, mobility, Chapter 1 services, enrollment in Regents, local and MAP courses, dropout and graduation rates, and handicapped referrals.
- Item analysis and grade distributions of student performance on final examinations in core academic subjects (secondary schools).

A sample of the Data Base has been provided as a separate document.

- (2) **GOAL SETTING:** Setting goals consistent with needs identified by the school, District priorities, and the District's 1988-89 Accountability Plan.

Goals should be a natural outcome when planning teams interact with a well developed and formatted data base. A goal statement should imply the means of measuring that goal. The goal should be stated in precise language, have realistic outcomes, and be based on sound statistical principles where statistical outcome is implied by the goal.

Goals could also be planning goals. For example: a school might set a goal to research introducing better supplemental reading materials, but plan to introduce them in a later year. This goal would be self-reporting when evaluating the results.

Each school's 1988-89 improvement plan will, at the minimum, include goals in the following areas:

Elementary Schools

- Attendance.
- Student performance in language arts and mathematics, with emphasis on important areas of knowledge such as problem-solving, comprehension, and written/spoken communication.
- Identification of and support to "at-risk" students.

Middle Schools

- Attendance.
- Behavior (reduction of disciplinary referrals and suspensions).
- Student performance in core academic subjects (English, mathematics, science, social studies).
- Identification of and support to "at-risk" students.
- Home Base Guidance program and home-school communications.
- Student participation in extracurricular activities.
- Student placement in Regents classes (beginning in 1989-90, as a goal shared by high schools and middle schools).

High Schools

- Attendance.
- Behavior (reduction of disciplinary referrals and suspensions).
- Attainment (reduced percentage of drop-outs, increased graduation rate).
- Student performance in core academic subjects (English, mathematics, science, and social studies).
- Identification of and support to "at-risk" students.
- Home Base Guidance program and home-school communications.
- Student participation in extracurricular activities.
- Student placement in Regents classes (beginning in 1989-90, as a goal shared by high schools and middle schools).

All Schools

Schools are encouraged to set goals that extend beyond the areas listed above. As examples, the school improvement plan might include goals for:

- Improved school climate.
- Enhanced linkage with the community.
- Increased parent involvement.

(3) IMPLEMENTATION: Planning activities to accomplish goals.

The activities and strategies that are chosen to accomplish goals will differ from school to school. In developing their plans, schools are encouraged to consider:

- Choosing an instrument, such as a survey or questionnaire, to assess school climate.
- Designing a staff development program to support improvement goals.
- Designing interdisciplinary approaches to the delivery of instruction.
- Directing resources such as time, budget and staff toward priority goals of the plan.
- Designing an exercise through which a collective vision for renewal/restructuring of the school is developed.
- At the elementary level, designing strategies for implementing the Step Up to Learning program (grades K-3) as part of improvement goals in language arts and mathematics.

(4) MONITORING/EVALUATION: Closely monitoring the plan and evaluating the extent to which its goals are reached.

(5) ACCOUNTABILITY: Accepting responsibility for presenting the plan and reporting the results to the school community.

The school community includes school faculty and staff, parents, students, and community and business leaders.

PLANNING FORMAT:

Forms for the completion of the school improvement plan (formerly called the school report) are available from the following persons:

- Elementary Schools: Line Supervisors (R. Elmer, S. Moore, A. Weintraub).
- Middle Schools: Director of Middle Schools (J. Slattery).
- High Schools: Line Supervisors (M. Bell, D. Phillips).

1988-89 PLANNING CYCLE

Since school-based planning teams were not formed until late in the fall, the 1988-89 planning cycle will differ from a typical planning cycle that is based on the school year. The minimum planning requirements for each school will be the development of a school improvement plan (formerly called the school report) that sets goals in the areas outlined in the previous section (Planning Requirements). School improvement plans should be completed and submitted to the Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction by the beginning of the second semester (January 30, 1989).

Before submitting plans to the Deputy Superintendent, the planning team should review their plan to:

- Ensure that school goals are measurable, and to establish a data base against which progress toward goals can be measured.
- Verify that each school's goals address issues identified in the assessment process, as well as District requirements for planning.
- Ensure that they have consulted with the appropriate District departments and personnel wherever their goals relate to District programs, procedures or regulations.

Before plans are submitted to the Deputy Superintendent, each planning team should present its plan to the school faculty and staff. In accordance with the definition of accountability, each school planning team must also present its improvement plan to the school community. Presentation of plans should take place before spring recess (March 24th).

The last phase of the planning cycle is evaluation, which cannot be completed until student performance information for 1988-89 is available to schools (usually in August). Once the school has evaluated its success in meeting the goals of its plan, the results should be summarized in a report that is forwarded to the Deputy Superintendent before it is presented to the community. The school's "report card" to the community should be presented no later than the time that the 1989-90 plan is presented. (It may be desirable to present both at the same time.)

Questions about the planning cycle can be directed to:

- L. Johnson, Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction (ext. 2300).
- J. Scully, Supervising Director of School Improvement (ext. 2307)

1988-89 PLANNING PARAMETERS

WAIVERS

The School District is governed and operated by a myriad of federal and state laws, regulations, Board policies, administrative regulations, contractual agreements, and other agreements.

Plans to improve student performance developed and forwarded by school-based planning teams may refer to the need for an existing regulation, policy, or agreement to be waived.

A process for responding to buildings' requests for waivers will be developed by the end of the first semester and communicated to all teams. Waiver requests will be addressed by appropriate governing bodies.

BUDGET

It is expected that the current school budget will be shared with all members of the planning team. The principal should also review with the team existing guidelines for managing the budget.

A series of workshops regarding existing guidelines for managing the budget will be offered in spring 1989.

Because the development of the District's budget and the allocation of resources to schools continue to be governed centrally, budget development and the criteria for resource distribution will not change significantly in the next school year (1989-90).

In the future, however, policies and procedures must change in order for the District to implement school-based budgeting. A task force will be formed to determine the changes that must occur, and to develop appropriate recommendations to achieve the objective of school-based budgeting. The work of this task force will be one component of the larger goal of decentralized decision-making (school-based management). It is generally agreed that this will be an evolutionary, multi-year task, with a target achievement range of three to five years.

The 1989-90 line item budget for each school will be similar to the line item budget that now exists. Currently, certain line items can be adjusted within existing allocated amounts. If building improvement plans call for reallocation of resources, this may be done consistent with existing budget management guidelines. Additional funds or resources from the local budget will not be allocated once the budget has been established for each school (spring 1989 Budget Process). Plans must be developed within the existing allocated budget and resources.

PERSONNEL/STAFFING

The District's hiring and transfer practices are currently guided by contractual agreements, administrative regulations, Board policies, state and federal regulations, legislation and other existing contracts or agreements.

1) Transfers

The contractual agreement between the District and the Rochester Teachers Association contains the following statement with regard to school-based planning:

Section 24

- 8 b. Voluntary transfers effective for the school year 1989-90 shall be contingent upon recommendation and approval of a mutually agreed upon building-based screening committee. The makeup of this committee and its review procedures shall be agreed upon no later than January 1, 1989. Implementation of this provision is contingent upon successful development of a mutually acceptable school-based planning model.

In addition, transfer agreements regarding teachers affected by restructuring of secondary schools extends through July 1990. This agreement, unless amended by the District and the RTA, remains in effect and supercedes procedures that may be developed by a school-based planning team.

2) Hiring

In several schools, teachers and other individuals have been involved in screening, interviewing and recommending staff to fill bona fide vacancies. During 1988-89, school-based planning teams may review current building practices with respect to screening, interviewing and recommending candidates to fill teaching vacancies, and may revise or initiate new building procedures. Procedures for the selection of administrative and other staff are currently under review, and it is expected that guidelines will be developed and available for school teams by May 1, 1989.

TRAINING

Full Planning Teams

The December 1988 and January 1989 orientation meetings will provide team members with information about the planning process, and about technical assistance available to assist them in developing, implementing and evaluating their improvement plans. Additional training will be provided in response to individual requests from school teams (i.e., training in specific areas such as decision-making, problem solving and group dynamics). Teams interested in additional training should contact the Office of Staff Development or School Improvement.

Parents

An orientation workshop specifically for parents is currently being planned by the Office of School Improvement, in conjunction with the Parent Negotiator and the Office of Parent and Community Involvement. The workshop is planned for late January or February 1989. Additional workshops may be offered later this year, based on the interest expressed by parents who serve on school teams. Requests for parent workshops should be directed to the Parent Negotiator, Office of Parent and Community Involvement, or Office of School Improvement.

Students

The Office of School Improvement is planning an orientation in February 1989 for students elected to the high school planning teams. Questions or requests for additional training should be directed to the Office of School Improvement.

For assistance please contact:

- Thomas Banister, Parent Negotiator (ext. 2307).
- Samuel McCree, Office of Parent and Community Involvement (ext. 2390).
- Ann Delehant, Office of Staff Development (ext. 2359).
- Joanne Scully, Office of School Improvement (ext. 2307).
- Jean Banister, Office of School Improvement (ext. 2536).

COLLABORATION WITH THE NATIONAL CENTER ON EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY

A committee comprised of teachers, parents, principals, central office administrators, and the senior associate of the National Center on Education and the Economy is currently designing a workshop on site-based management, with these goals:

1. Provide an opportunity for participants to develop team-building skills, including consensus building, decision-making, role clarification, the art of negotiation, etc.
2. Provide for the application of these skills, through a sequence of activities leading to the development of the framework for a school plan by the site-based team.
3. Provide time for team members to meet as teams and in "role alike" groups in which they will participate in discussions that will link them with colleagues in the District, as well as with consultants.
4. Provide key members of the central administration the opportunity to listen to the direction proposed by the teams, and to begin to map out a strategy by which their departments may provide support vital to the success of school initiatives.
5. Structure an opportunity for the members of the Rochester City School District Board to participate in discussions as the teams move into development of school plans. The purpose of this activity is to assist Board Members in framing their thinking regarding Board policy which would support the direction taken by school teams.

It is expected that the workshop will be offered several times during the remainder of the school year and summer 1989 to give all teams who wish to participate an opportunity to do so. All workshops that are scheduled will address the first three goals stated above.

The first scheduled workshop will also address goals four and five. As a result of this workshop, participating school teams will develop plans or proposals for the Board of Education's consideration in developing or changing policy that will govern school-based management in the future.

Questions or suggestions for these workshops should be directed to:

Sonia Hernandez, Senior Associate of the National Center on Education and the Economy (546-7620).

Joanne Scully, Workshop Committee Chairperson, Office of School Improvement (ext. 2307).

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOL-BASED PLANNING TEAMS

There are numerous persons in our schools, at central office, and in the local community who can provide technical assistance to school-based planning teams, in areas such as group dynamics, group facilitation, assessment, data analysis, problem solving, planning and evaluation. The Office of School Improvement has prepared a document that lists some of the District departments and personnel who can either provide direct assistance to planning teams, or help them locate the resources they seek. School teams may call Joanne Scully (ext. 2307) for a copy of this document.

