

Ideas and Concepts for RSCD Strategic Plan

A new strategic plan to restart the Rochester City School District on a path to success needs to be undertaken. Some aspects of the plan (Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles) simply need to be declared by the superintendent and Board of Education. Frankly, that is their leadership responsibility. Once the core aspects are in place, then open invitations can be extended for participation and contribution. What follows is a possible example of what could be stated and why it might restart the larger community on a path to rebuild a broken and failing institution. What if:

Vision:

Rochester will become a city where its children safely learn and grow, becoming adults whose aspirations and talents enable them to lead fulfilling lives.

- The vision statement in the 2009 RCSD Strategic Plan was a wonderful expression regarding each child being a work of art. However, it did not inspire a wide-range of stakeholders to invest time, effort and resources to realize that vision. The vision statement should be a call-out where the larger community can be challenged and inspired.
- The vision statement needs to express something larger than education. Of course, growth of the individual and her/his personal aspirations and talents (the self) must be incorporated. This is not just the responsibility of the RCSD to accomplish. Everyone needs to and can play a role. The vision should inspire the city to take pride in what it can collectively do for its youth.

Mission:

The RCSD will create the right conditions for learning for every child.

- The mission needs to be one that every person employed by the RCSD will feel they have a real role to play in its accomplishment ...because they do!
- Use of the word “right” in the mission statement is a dynamic term. It should be defined based upon context. The real leadership challenge is to get the RCSD mission focused, and all of those who have an interest in it to have a shared commitment . The circular finger-pointing must cease.
 - The Board needs to state its three commitments to create the right conditions for learning. The new superintendent needs to do the same.
 - Each union needs to be asked to declare three commitments they would provide to create the right conditions for learning. Not a list, but three clear public declarations of how they will contribute to the mission.
 - The SED needs to be asked to state its three commitment(s) to accomplish the mission. Instead of identifying failure, start identifying what they will do to enable success.
 - City Council needs to be asked what three commitments they would make to create the right conditions for learning. The same for the RPD.
 - Every organization seeking to contribute their efforts needs to be asked what commitment(s) they are willing to make to create the right conditions for learning.

Build a consensus!

Guiding Principles: The RCSD...

1. Will not let poverty be an excuse for failure.
2. Believes equity requires the distribution of resources based upon demonstrated need.

3. Will hold every employee accountable for their contribution to the success of its students.
4. Requires sound fiscal management throughout the system.
- The actual Guiding Principles can be developed through dialog with various stakeholder groups. The key is they must be absolute uncompromising expressions that will subsequently guide all decision-making.

With a core like the example above in place, the RCSD can move on to identifying clear goals for growth and improvement. This is where the true “what if” options can be explored and ultimately prioritized into goals. The plan should not outline through its goals a polishing of the status quo. This is the place where real change can not only be discussed, but identified and outlined as strategic actions.

Community expertise, outside agencies and stakeholders committed to student success should have their opportunity to contribute ideas. Because plans can overwhelm resources for change, no more than three strategic goals should be identified. Ongoing operational objectives and needs should be addressed through sound day-to-day management.

The Board can use the planning process as a true opportunity to engage the larger community in building the educational system the City deserves and its children require. Arguments over governance, Board member bickering, SED finger-pointing, and adult self-interests are distractions that continue to fuel discord and contempt. Rochester is a city that has tremendous, as yet untapped, resources to build something very special. It’s time for everyone to roll-up their sleeves and serve a higher purpose.