



**Rochester City School District**  
**131 West Broad Street**  
**Rochester, NY 14614**

[www.rcsdk12.org](http://www.rcsdk12.org)

**Budget Testimony Before NYS Joint  
Legislative Public Hearing on the Executive  
Elementary & Secondary Education Budget**

**Dr. Carmine Peluso, Superintendent**  
**Rochester City School District**

February 1, 2024



Thank you for the opportunity to address you and discuss our priorities for the Executive Budget and its impact on our District. I want to extend a special thank you to the Chairs of these committees, the Rochester Delegation, and the entire Legislature. I am grateful for your unwavering commitment to meeting the unique needs of the RCSD.

I am excited to share that the District has launched Invest in Tomorrow, a comprehensive school reconfiguration plan to provide students with better learning and extracurricular opportunities in modernized facilities with highly qualified staff and programming to meet the diverse interests of our students. Invest in Tomorrow aims to address the decline in enrollment we have experienced for more than a decade. ***Rochester is one of the highest-needs school districts in New York State, and the following are several key priorities the Board of Education and I have outlined for this year.***

We are pleased that the Executive Budget maintains the commitment to the Foundation Aid phase-in and strongly urge the State to enhance the Foundation Aid formula's transparency, predictability, and inclusivity. The formula must be adjusted to effectively address the unique needs of students, particularly those with special programming. This adjustment will ensure that educational resources are allocated appropriately, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. We believe that by making these changes, the Foundation Aid formula can better serve the diverse needs of our student population, ultimately contributing to a fair and equitable distribution of resources.

We implore you to place a moratorium on the addition of charter schools and the expansion of current schools and that you implement a cap on the percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools. Currently, over 7,800, or 28% of public school students in the City of Rochester attend charter schools. In 2023-24, RCSD will pay out more than \$135 million in charter school tuition and associated costs. The pupil demographics in charter schools do not mirror that of our District, leading to an imbalance in the allocation of resources. Furthermore, the disproportionate number of special needs/ELL students our District serves contributes to higher costs associated with their education. It is important to highlight that this situation creates an uneven playing field. While our enrollment is down, the cost to serve students has increased, exacerbating the financial strain on the RCSD. This inequity requires immediate attention to ensure a fair and sustainable education system for all students. We request that you limit charter school saturation in urban centers and designate the New York State Board of Regents as the sole charter authorizing entity.

With the expiration of federal stimulus funds in September, school districts must scale back on staffing and services used to support students and learning coming out of COVID. One area of critical need is the mental health and emotional state of our students and staff. Since the onset of the pandemic, we have witnessed a distressing rise in mental health challenges among our young people. Depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders have become prevalent, hindering our students' academic progress, social interactions, and overall well-being. This crisis demands our urgent attention, as it has far-reaching consequences for the future of our community. The RCSD provides valuable health services to our students, both physical and mental health services, outside of the regular school day. We urge you to reinstate the \$1.2 million Rochester School Health

Services Grants funds removed from the Governor's budget. These services provide additional targeted school health funding to assist with increased demands.

In the coming years, the District faces an ongoing need to enhance and expand its technological resources for students and the increasing reliance on digital tools for effective learning. We formally request another round of funding through the Smart Schools Bond Act that includes updating and increasing the funding for software and hardware aid (last set in the 2007/08 year), which has remained stagnant at \$24.20 per pupil for hardware and \$14.98 per pupil for software. The current rate is not enough to support initiatives that continue to provide access to devices and software for students. It is also important that the SMARTBond be expanded to include essential software, subscriptions, and services necessary for cyber security and the ever-evolving threat against our student and staff data.

With the recent influx of migrant students and families who were relocated to Rochester from New York City, adequate funding is crucial to address their needs and provide the necessary support for a smooth transition. Notably, Rochester is the sole Big 5 District to receive migrant families outside New York City. Funding is essential to meet the needs of these families seeking asylum. This entails a comprehensive approach, including allocating resources for additional bilingual teachers, translators, and support services. By investing in these vital resources, we can ensure that migrant students and their families receive the necessary assistance to navigate the educational system and community.

We request the expansion of Special Services Aid for Career and Technical Education (CTE) in our District. The existing CTE programs have proven impactful, offering increased opportunities for students post-graduation. The funding cap of \$3,900 per student based on the formula under Special Services Aid for CTE requires an increase, and reimbursement adjustments are necessary to better align with current programs, specifically to include 9th-grade students in the allocation.

***Thank you again for supporting the Rochester City School District and prioritizing student needs.***

