

Rochester Community Schools, All Smoke and Mirrors

Rochester Community Schools look good on the outside. Our MEAP scores are elevated, houses are in neat rows, and every realtor raves about how you can't go wrong with any school in the district. But then the smoke clears.

I urge every community member, tax payer, and parent to see what is becoming of our school district. The Rochester School Board Members are systematically dismantling the infrastructure of what makes Rochester Community Schools stand out above and beyond surrounding districts.

In the past week the board has proposed and approved many cuts that have a direct effect on student safety and learning in Rochester. A few of the cuts implemented were, the positions of Dean of Students, Media Assistant's and Paraprofessionals. Cutting these positions will affect students in every building at every level in Rochester.

The Dean of students is a job that supports the principal and vice principal in the high schools. Without the dean of students, 1,700 kids needs, behavioral, academic and otherwise will be addressed by only 2 people. With this cut, there will be many missed opportunities for supportive interventions at a developmental level where students need it most.

Media Assistant cuts are going to affect students at each level. With the loss of manpower comes a limited access to, media center's, reduced services for technology and additional supports for all school staff (ordering of supplies, developing calendars, website management/mail outs, etc.) Due to the cuts, media centers will not be open before or after school hours. During the day, the media centers will have to close periodically while the specialist is instructing other classes or assisting with technology in classrooms. With this change, technology support in the classrooms and in the media center will likely no longer be a top priority addressed in a timely manner. Consequently, cutting media assistant's can directly impact additional extracurricular services provided by media workers like, Authors in April, adopt a book, book fairs and news broadcasts. These will all take a back seat to instruction and have to be handled from district providers at the board office (not specific to buildings) or volunteers.

Last the paraprofessional cuts will be devastating. The board approved to force 50-80 full time workers to part time positions so they don't have to pay those employees benefits. All of the training that has been done for instructional, behavioral, and medically managed students will have to begin again with paraprofessionals that are placed in positions they are not trained for. The restructuring of these positions will directly affect special education programs, student learning, and the Response to Intervention (RTI) efforts that our district has been working toward as "Best Practice" to meet all needs of every student.

There were other cost savings proposals made that could have saved these jobs but the members on the board had a plan and they were not veering from it. It was disheartening to sit at the board meeting on June 13th and hear one board member say, "Can you tell me how eliminating the media assistant's, or reducing paraprofessional support will affect the schools and kids?" The naiveté behind their decisions scares me.

The reputation, quality, and education of our children in Rochester are at stake. When you take away the very tools and interventions that make the Rochester Schools superior, PEOPLE, then you are contributing to the smoke cloud currently surrounding Rochester's education. I urge anyone who reads this to stay informed, get involved and use your voice to advocate for students.

Dawn Schultz
RCS Special Education Teacher