



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

www.rcsdk12.org



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

**Dr. Demario Strickland,
Interim Superintendent Rochester City
School District
January 29, 2025**



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.

This year, the District launched Invest in Tomorrow, a comprehensive school reconfiguration plan designed to enhance learning and extracurricular opportunities for students with highly qualified staff and diverse programming. This initiative aims to meet the varied interests of our students while addressing the enrollment decline we have experienced for over a decade. Additionally, we are excited to embark on Phase III of the Facilities Modernization Program. This multi-million-dollar initiative will deliver modernized, state-of-the-art facilities for our students and staff.

Rochester is one of the school districts with the highest needs in New York State, and the following are several key priorities that the Board of Education and I have outlined for this year.

We are grateful that the Executive Budget reflects an increase in our Foundation Aid allocation. As you are well aware, the funds are used 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. Additionally, these funds will support the professional development for our educators in implementing research-based reading strategies.

We implore you to place a moratorium on adding charter schools and expanding current schools. Currently, 29% of public school students in the City of Rochester attend charter schools. This year, we will pay more than \$141 million in charter school tuition. Furthermore, the disproportionate number of special needs and 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. 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.

We ask that the Facilities Modernization Program timeline be expanded and that the funding allocation for Phase III is increased. The current schedule is overly compressed, and concerns surrounding adequate labor and rising supply costs pose significant challenges. This adjustment is critical to ensuring the successful implementation of plans to modernize and

optimize district facilities, providing students with access to safe, state-of-the-art learning environments. Expanding the timeline and increasing funding will allow the District to address the unique challenges of the program comprehensively while maintaining the

quality and scope necessary to support students' success. In the coming years, we must enhance and expand our technological resources and formally request another round of funding through the Smart Schools Bond Act. This includes updating and increasing the funding, which has remained stagnant since 2007 at \$24.20 per pupil for hardware and \$14.98 per pupil for software. It is also vital 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.

We also request the expansion of Special Services Aid for Career and Technical Education. The funding cap of \$3,900 per student requires an increase and must include 9th-grade students in the allocation. Additionally, as we prepare our students for tomorrow's workforce, we ask that you consider future funding for middle school programming.

The current Transportation Aid mileage limitations are not aligned with the conditions in our State's urban districts like RSCD. While the state has acted in the past to address this issue, no action was taken to afford students in large cities the same protections. It is imperative that the State address this issue by providing reimbursement for school transportation below the current 1.5-mile limit in instances where the State Education Department deems there is a safety issue.

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

