

Great Schools for All Regional Planning Work Group Background Paper and Proposed Action Steps

The Great Schools for All Regional Planning Work Group was tasked with looking at issues and recommending changes relating to the possible governance, structure, and financing of regional schools that may be created in Rochester and Monroe County.

Assumptions and Background

- The City of Rochester and Monroe County share an inter-dependent relationship; that is, the County cannot be economically and socially healthy without the City, as its core, also being economically and socially healthy, and vice versa.
- Without substantial improvements in educational outcomes for city school students, the economic competitiveness of the Rochester region will remain stagnant and urban revitalization will not occur.
- RCSD graduation rates and other educational benchmark measurements indicate that systemic changes are needed. Given already high levels of funding on a per student basis (see Appendix 1), RCSD offers students, families, and citizens a very low educational “return on investment.”
- Notwithstanding the adequacy of school funding from federal, state, and local sources, social science research generated over the last 50 years has consistently demonstrated that public schools are likely to fail when they do not have an acceptable threshold of socioeconomic balance. *Given this reality, any proposed new educational structure(s) should be designed to increase socioeconomic diversity and minimize concentrations of poverty in our schools, with a target that no more than 40% of the students attending a public school shall be low-income students eligible for Free and Reduced Price breakfasts and lunches (FRP status).*
- Increases in funding for schools have been insufficient to overcome the deleterious effects of socioeconomic imbalances in schools. Indeed, Rochester City School District (RCSD) funding and expenditures per pupil are among the highest not only in New York State (NYS), but also in the US, and long term academic progress results still are at unacceptable levels.
- In addition to high levels and concentrations of poverty (see Appendix 2), RCSD is not racially and socioeconomically diverse, and can no longer satisfy its educational mission alone; inter-school district solutions are required. Most suburban school districts also lack racial and socioeconomic diversity.
- There are some successful school programs, and many successful students in RCSD schools, and these programs and students should be publicized, celebrated, and replicated.
- The New York State Constitution, as interpreted by the New York Court of Appeals in the *Levittown*, *CFE*, and *Paynter* court cases, has allowed the State to meet its obligation by providing funding for “minimally acceptable” educational facilities, equipment, and resources. The Court has determined that if the State provides “adequate funding,” it has been deemed to satisfy its constitutional promise to provide a “sound basic education,” even though student performance remains substandard. This is not satisfactory in today’s complex global society.

- There is a moral, as well as legal, imperative to provide justice and equity for all children, including an education that equips them to take their place as responsible citizens in our local and global societies and equips them for the workplace of tomorrow, both locally and globally.
- Although consolidations or mergers of the RCSD with suburban school districts may create economies of scale and achieve desired socioeconomic integration, it is likely that there is a lack of support for such consolidations or mergers in Monroe County at this time. In the absence of intentional, legal (“*de jure*”) segregation by suburban school districts, it is highly unlikely that a court would order any such mergers or consolidations to take place. This is despite the fact that segregation is likely the result of housing and transportation policies.
- In this context, the public school structures that will be the most effective for the foreseeable future will be those that draw material numbers of students on a voluntary basis from across city and suburban school districts (voluntary school choice solutions). Educational and financial incentives should be put in place to achieve this result. New public school structures should include elementary, middle, and high schools.

Research and Analysis

At the November 10, 2014 GS4A Education Summit, Professor Kara Finnigan from the University of Rochester’s Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development suggested four policy options for school change in Rochester/Monroe County:

- 1) Make improvements to schools within the RCSD,
- 2) Adopt place-based (on-site) approaches such as improving health and social services within schools and neighborhoods (wrap-around services),
- 3) Strengthen cross-district collaborative options, and
- 4) Create countywide/regional strategies to address county-wide issues like educational equity, but which may maintain school district boundaries and autonomy.

While school improvements are needed across all four of the Finnigan policy options, *the work of the Regional Planning Work Group was tasked to focus on the last two—strengthening inter-school district collaboration and creating county-wide or regional strategies*. This is where systemic change will likely occur in RCSD and Monroe County schools. Given this focus, the group’s tasks were to:

- Research US urban areas that have attempted to implement effective systemic change in their public school systems, examining their structure, governance, financing, incentives, and reasons for their changes; and
- Examine the landscape in New York State to determine how, if any, those experiences might be relevant here and/or if there are other NYS examples already existing that might have relevance.
- Finally, the group reviewed other regional planning groups in the Rochester/Monroe County area to look for groups and/or models which might have relevance to broader-based educational planning.

A 2013 paper by Jennifer Holme and Kara Finnigan provided a useful overview of educational reform efforts in a variety of US cities (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Metropolitan Reform Efforts
Adapted from Holme & Finnigan (2013)

Government Consolidation Programs:	Examples
1960's Metro-Governments	Jacksonville/Duval County (includes schools)
	Nashville/Davidson County (includes schools)
	Indianapolis/Marion County
	Louisville/Jefferson County
1970's Court-Ordered Consolidations	Louisville/Jefferson County Schools
	Wilmington (4 pie-shaped school districts)
Voluntary Consolidations	Raleigh/Wake County, NC
	Durham/Durham County, NC
	Memphis, TN (abolished center city school district and absorbed by Shelby county)
	Montgomery County, MD
Mobility Programs:	
Housing Mobility Programs-Housing Vouchers	Chicago, Boston, NYC, Baltimore and Los Angeles
Inter-District School Mobility Programs	Rochester, NY--Urban Suburban
	Minneapolis, MN—Choice Is Yours (CIY)
	East Palo Alto, CA—Tinsley Program
	St. Louis, MO—VICC
	Hartford, CT—Open Choice
	Boston & Springfield MA—METCO
	Milwaukee, WI—Chapter 220
	Omaha, NE—Metro Area Learning Community of Douglas & Sarpy Counties
New Regionalism/Metropolitan Programs:	
Voluntary Inter-Local Agreements	NY BOCES
	Detroit/Eastern Michigan University Education Achievement Authority
COGs/MPOs/A-95 Regional Councils	Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council and Genesee Transportation Council
Federated Regional Governments	Portland, OR—Metro Service District (not schools)
	Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN—Metro Council (not schools)

	Omaha, NE—Metro Area Learning Community of Douglas & Sarpy Counties
Other Known Programs:	
Examples of County-Wide School Districts	Montgomery County, MD Raleigh/Wake County, NC
Regional Charter HS	Syracuse & Utica, NY—Academies of Science
Pathways to Technology Early College HS	Brooklyn, NY— P-TECH
Regional Public HS	Albany, NY—Tech Valley HS of Capital Region

The Regional Planning Work Group sought further information on a number of these school reform efforts, with particular attention to the inter-district mobility and New Regionalism programs which seemed to offer the most promise for systemic change in Rochester/Monroe County. In New York State, the group identified two significant examples of collaborative educational programming - Tech Valley High School in the Capitol Region and the state-authorized BOCES programs, designed to enable districts to collaborate in providing educational programs and services beyond the what they could do alone.

Figure 2 provides a summary of some of the information we discovered relevant to our task of designing a possible collaborative vehicle for use in our community.

FIGURE 2

Profile of Researched Cities with Inter-District Collaboration

City/Program Name	Governing Structure	Funding	Trigger/Incentive
Inter-District School Mobility Programs:			
Minneapolis, MN—Choice Is Yours	Governed by the Joint Powers School District: 11 members, 1 from each of the 11 school districts and 1 Superintendent.	State funding moves with the student to choice school	State Court Order
Hartford, CT—Open Choice	Governed by the CT Department of Education School Choice office.	State funded as part of the state budget and follows the student to suburban non-magnet schools.	State Court Order/Legislation
Regional Programs:			
Omaha, NE—Metro Area Learning Community of Douglas & Sarpy Counties	The Learning Community Coordinating Council consists of an elected 21	Funded through a common levy tax sharing mechanism that takes the property wealth	State Legislation/Threat of Court Order, Possible Annexation

	member regional governing board and a non-voting advisory council of the eleven superintendents from each of the participating school districts.	from all the districts combined and redistributes it according to need, giving greater weight to poverty and ELL status.	
Montgomery County, MD—One County-Wide School District	Governed by 7 school board members and 1 student (non-voting) member elected through a county-wide election.	Funding is comprised of 65% county and 27% state funds, 3% federal grants, and 3% enterprise funds. Half of county budget spent on education.	Court Order
Raleigh/Wake County, NC— One County-Wide School District	Nine member county-wide school board with some at-large and some by district members and many advisory committees.	Only \$7,400 per capita spending vs. \$19,800 for NY. No Unions, the State pays teachers and local residents pay capital costs at county level.	State Legislation/Threat of Court Order
NYS Programs:			
Albany, NY—Tech Valley HS of Capital Region	Board of Directors comprised of 5 reps from Capital Region BOCES, and 5 Questar III BOCES reps. (Questar III is a BOCES covering three counties in Hudson Valley). As a BOCES sponsored HS, it does not include membership or representation from Albany CSD	Home district for each student provides funding as well as transportation, textbooks, computer software, library materials and health examinations. Funding is also provided by the state and grants by private-sector sources, including the New Technology Foundation.	State Legislation
NYS BOCES Program	NYS defined 37 BOCES regions.	Funding is provided by component	1948 NYS law to enable small rural

	<p>Each BOCES has its own Board of Education, Superintendent and other management and administrative staff. A BOCES Board of Education is normally comprised of individuals nominated by their component district Boards of Education. School districts within each region can elect to become a “component school district.”</p>	<p>school districts (whose source of funds is primarily real estate taxes) and state aid. Member districts share administrative costs. On annual basis, districts choose services to purchase from BOCES, such as curricular offerings and purchasing. Big 5 school districts may purchase certain services if approved by State Education Commissioner.</p>	<p>school districts to pool resources. The five “big” cities not authorized to participate as members.</p>
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Key Findings re: Collaborative Approaches in Other Communities

1. **Significant incentivizing or causal event is necessary.** In all but two of the cities we studied the specific event leading to change was a court order, a threat of a court order, or a threat of urban annexation of suburban areas. The two exceptions are the NYS BOCES legislation and Tech Valley High School of the Capital Region (NYS).
2. **Stakeholder buy-in, community consensus, and political will are paramount to successfully aligning diverse interests.** There are a number of groups that, absent a court order, have near “veto power,” including urban and suburban communities, school leaders, elected officials, etc. Convincing them of the need for collaboration and keeping them on board will require systemic, concerted effort.
3. **Robust magnet schools are essential to a voluntary program.** As opposed to a court-ordered or mandatory program, we need a mix of voluntary, robust, attractive elementary, middle, and high schools located throughout Monroe County to attract families.
4. **Socioeconomic goals must be explicit.** The mix and location of programs needs to be designed and monitored to insure that no school has more than 40% of its students eligible for free and reduced price lunch.
5. **A balance between local control and regional collaboration is critical.** As a long-term strategy, a model of “federated regionalism” that strikes a balance between local control and regional collaboration should be explored.

Key Findings re: Regional Planning for Education in Rochester and Monroe County

The group’s review of regional planning groups in the Monroe County area can be found in Appendix 3. None were found that seemed particularly relevant to our work, although it was

determined that the Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council might conceivably be a place where an education agenda might be furthered.

The group also discovered a 1971 CGR report entitled *A Proposed Model for a County Federation of School Districts* which provides a very detailed analysis of many of the issues we are currently addressing.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Propose New York State Legislation to Create “Great Schools Academy”

The State Legislature should be asked to enact legislation authorizing the creation of regional magnet schools under the umbrella of an organization to be called (as a *placeholder name* for now) the “Great Schools Academy” (the “*Academy*”).

1. The enabling legislation for the Academy should be as flexible as possible, and authorize the creation of one or more elementary, middle, and high schools throughout Rochester and Monroe County, whose enrollment shall be designed to reflect the socioeconomic diversity of Monroe County, inclusive of the City of Rochester.
2. Academy schools would also have socioeconomic integration as a stated goal within each grade, and shall endeavor to maximize opportunities for students of low-income families, but shall establish targets such that not more than approximately 40% of the student body in a given school shall qualify for FRP.
3. The Academy could be a subsidiary of Monroe #1 BOCES and/or Monroe #2/Orleans BOCES, or could be formed as an organization that has “BOCES-like” qualities. The local BOCES are well respected and seen by most local districts as a helpful partner. Some of the existing administrative arrangements could facilitate design of the Academy.
4. RCSD would be specifically authorized by the enabling legislation to be included as a BOCES component school district, or as a member of a new “BOCES-like” organization, for the purpose of the operation of the Academy, and would be authorized to purchase educational services provided by the new magnet schools.
5. The Academy would be governed by a Board of Directors. This could be a BOCES board, or a new board, which includes representatives of the RCSD and the participating school districts (the “*Academy Board*”).
6. Children living in any participating school district will be eligible for admission to any school in the Academy. The criteria for admission would not be limited based on intellectual ability, academic achievement or aptitude, or athletic aptitude. Admissions procedures could use lottery systems to ensure that enrollment in an Academy school will achieve socioeconomic diversity and integration.
7. The Academy would establish annual and five-year capital and operating budgets for each school. Each participating school district would pay their respective shares of capital and operating budget requirements, based on a formula to be determined (generally, either in accordance with ratios derived from the numbers of student attending Academy schools from each school district, or fixed tuition amounts to be determined).

8. The “home” public school district for any student would be obligated to provide transportation for that student, without regard to any mileage limitations, consistent with district policies.

Desirable Characteristics and Potential Enhancements for the Academy

The following are desirable characteristics and potential enhancements to the Academy, and should also be considered, but would not be required as part of a legislative authorization.

1. Each school within the Academy should begin operating by phasing in grades over a period of several years.
2. Academy school facilities should be located in new or updated existing facilities, which are commensurate with the curriculum and high-quality educational objectives of the Academy, and owned by BOCES, RCSD or a participating school district.
3. The Academy should consider the viability of public/private partnerships with business entities and foundations, in support of curricular and extra-curricular activities, facilities and equipment.
4. Each school in the Academy should have an advisory board consisting of business and community members, for consultation and support on curricula, project based learning, mentoring, etc. Each such advisory board would be appointed by the Academy Board, and advisory boards should be socioeconomically diverse and represent a broad range of business and community interests.
5. Each Academy school should have on-site wrap-around services, and offer curricula such as STEM, language immersions, the arts, or other disciplines and concentrations that are timely, draw on resources and assets in the Rochester region, and should be designed to give students a comparative advantage in preparing for higher education, or their place in the workforce.
6. With State support, the Academy should undertake a proactive campaign to educate parents of city and suburban children of the significant benefits that accrue to students by attending diverse schools, so as to encourage them to consider enrolling their children in a school operated by the Academy. Care should be taken to assure that all students are provided with this opportunity and all parents and guardians are aware of this opportunity, perhaps through personal invitations. Elements of this campaign should include that students will experience higher likelihoods of success in gaining acceptance to, and succeeding in, institutions of higher learning, as well as in the workplace.
7. The Academy should seek federal and state funds, and foundation grants to fund the start-up of Academy schools. Funding through the Federal “Invest in Innovation” and Magnet Schools Assistance program and New York State Socioeconomic Integration Pilot Program should be considered.

Action Steps to Move Ahead on Recommendation #1

1. Visit Tech Valley High School of Capital Region.
2. GS4A should assemble a task force on finance and transportation, and/or fund a consultant to:

- a. Explore the procedures, methods, and sources of financing the Academy, including a consideration of the potential for multi-year commitments from funding sources.
- b. Garner understanding of the financial incentives and/or safeguards necessary to encourage and enable all school districts to participate.
- c. Analyze transportation issues and costs.
3. Continue ongoing outreach to key constituencies (BOCES and other school superintendents, etc.) to assure that their issues are being addressed and that their support is obtained.
4. Work with local and state representatives to craft and advocate for legislation.
5. Develop community support to advocate for legislation.

Recommendation #2: Moving from Collaboration to Regionalism

1. The Regional Planning Work Group believes that further consideration of a more comprehensive governance structure that has the characteristics of “federated regionalism” for all public schools in Monroe County should be the subject of further study, and is potentially a long-term solution that would provide benefits to public education in the Rochester region.
 - a. A 1971 CGR report, *A Proposed Model for a County Federation of School Districts*, provides a possible starting point; funding should be sought to update and reconsider this report.
 - b. The sections of the Education Law that authorize the creation of BOCES could be amended to allow RCSD to become a component school district member for all purposes.
2. Due to the interrelationship between housing and education, policies and practices that encourage socioeconomic integration in schools should be connected to policies and practices affecting housing and transportation.
 - a. Actions items could include collaboration with existing regional planning groups, such as the Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council to encourage municipalities in Monroe County to enact incentive programs to foster increases in the development of affordable and workforce housing in Monroe County towns and villages.
 - b. Zoning laws and regulations could be amended to allow for density bonuses, expedited approvals, and other inducements to developers for the development of such housing.

References

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- Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) website: <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/>
- NYS Charter School Act of 1998:
http://www.nyccharterschools.org/sites/default/files/resources/NYSCharterSchoolsActof1998_with2014amendments.pdf
- NYSED Ed Management Services BOCES Primer:
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/boces/primer.html>
- Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties Website:
<http://www.learningcommunityds.org/>

Reference Manual Appendix 7: BOCES:

http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/accounting/referencemanual/2014ReferenceManual/RefMan_2014_Appendix7_BOCES.pdf

Regional Academy Legislation: (not available online)

Rochester City School District (RCSD) District Profile website:

<http://www.rcsdk12.org/domain/8>

Tech Valley High School legislation:

<https://nysosc9.osc.state.ny.us/product/mbrdoc.nsf/0f9d113765ae06b58525666700653b6d/94cbb67e8cb8525a852570bb004c3aa3?OpenDocument>

Tech Valley High School website: <http://techvalleyhigh.org/>

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West Metro Education Program (WMEP) website:

<https://sites.google.com/a/wmep.k12.mn.us/wmep6069/>

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Overview of School District Finance and NY State Aid Shortfalls

[Paper by Work Group Member Mark Foerster]

Generally, suburban (central) school districts in New York State are funded through real estate (real property) taxes, NY State aid, and Federal grants and aid. Unlike their suburban/central counterparts, city school districts do not have the power to levy taxes, and receive local financial support from their city, via aid. In that respect, city school districts in NYS are described as being “fiscally dependent.”

Below is a top-level comparison of revenues for the Pittsford and Rochester (RCSD) school districts. It is commonly known that the Pittsford CSD is a highly ranked NYS public school system, and RCSD is ranked poorly. See for example, <http://www.schooldigger.com/go/NY/districtrank.aspx>, and <https://k12.niche.com/rankings/public-school-districts/best-overall/s/new-york/>. The sources of funding these two districts, however, is vastly different.

Highlights of Revenue Projections in 2015-2016 Draft Annual Budgets

District	Total Rev	RE Tax	RE Tax%*	State Aid%*	Sales Tax%*	Other%
Pittsford	\$122.6MM	\$95MM	77%	15.4%	4%	3.6%**
Rochester	\$788.8MM	\$119MM***	15.1%	64.4%	NA	20.5%**

Real Estate (RE)

* Percentages of total revenue

** In case of Pittsford, includes miscellaneous revenue, Interest income, reserves; in case of RCSD, includes Grants and Special Aid, Race-to-the-Top, School Food Service, Local Revenue, Reserves, Federal Medicaid

*** This is in the form of City Aid

Some Observations from a Review of Draft Budget Presentations, March 2015

1. ***Pittsford’s real estate tax revenue is nearly 80% of the value of the City aid provided to RCSD. Aggregate assessed value in Pittsford is \$3.416 billion. Aggregate in City is \$8.538 billion.***
2. RCSD has excess school building capacity; 22% or space for 8,400 students
3. RCSD student/teacher ratio is 8:1, with teachers defined as teaching staff, librarians, social workers, counselors, psychologists and instructional coaches.

Summary of NY State Aid Shortfalls

Shortfalls in NY state aid to public schools have occurred due to the failure to complete two notable funding commitments.

1. The CFE Case and Foundation Aid

Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE): The CFE lawsuit was brought against the state of New York by New York City parents, claiming the state underfunded the city’s public schools and therefore denied its students their constitutional right to a “sound basic education.” The case made it through all levels of the judicial system, several times over 13 years. In 2006, the NYS Court of Appeals ruled in CFE’s favor and found that New York State is violating students’ constitutional right to a "sound basic education" by leaving schools without the necessary funding. The Court of Appeals left the state with the option to create a statewide solution for all school districts.

Foundation Aid: In 2007, the governor and the legislature settled the case on a statewide basis by committing to provide \$5.5 billion in new Foundation Aid, a form of classroom operating aid, over a four year phase-in, in addition to other expense based aids. The new classroom operating aid was to be distributed through a needs based formula called Foundation Aid. The Foundation Aid formula replaced more than thirty existing categorical aids, in order to create an equalizing and transparent funding stream. Funding was to be distributed based on student need factors. Foundation Aid takes into consideration the level of poverty in a district, the number of students that are not proficient in English, the number of students with disabilities, the regional cost, and the income and property wealth in a district. The four-year phase-in was essential to providing enough resources to outpace inflationary costs and fund improvements.

The formula and the implementation of Foundation Aid have been substantially delayed. Today, the amount of Foundation Aid owed to schools is \$4.9 billion according to the State Education Department data. High need districts are owed \$3.8 billion in Foundation Aid which represents 78% of the total unpaid Foundation Aid.

2. The GEA

Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA): In 2010 and 2011 Governors Patterson and Cuomo cut \$2.7 billion from state aid to schools with the commitment that it would be reinstated at a later date. These two years of cuts comprise the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA).

These cuts were much larger to poor districts than to wealthy ones. To this day \$1.1 billion is still owed to districts across the state.

Findings and Conclusions

1. New York State owes its public schools \$5.9 billion in Foundation Aid and Gap Elimination Adjustment funding. Advocates warn that systemic underfunding is leaving a generation of students in high need schools without access to the “sound basic education” which is their constitutional right.
2. The amount of Foundation Aid and Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) funding owed per pupil is 2.3 times greater in high need districts than in wealthy districts. For high need small cities and suburbs, the amount owed is 3.3 times that of wealthy districts. For the “Big Four” cities (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers) the amount is 2.8 times larger and it is double for New York City and high need rural districts.
3. The Big 4 are owed \$406 million in Foundation and GEA funding.

4. Rochester D&C reported on Mar 27, 2015 that RCSD is owed \$85.5 million under GEA alone.
5. The shortfalls that have occurred in the aftermath of the court mandate in CFE have occurred simultaneously with severe criticisms on how Foundation aid was spent in NYC. According to Michael Rebell, who was executive director of CFE until 2005 and is now the director of the Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, the money given to the New York City school district was not distributed effectively. The city dispersed the new funding widely and left it to school principals to decide how to use the funding allotted to their school. Principals were only required to report how they intended to use the funds not how they actually spent them.
6. In 2009 an opinion article in the Village Voice labeled the CFE campaign as a "failure," in part due to lack of strategic spending of Foundation Aid, a lack of agreement on priorities, and a lack of accountability.

Sources:

1. Billions Behind, Report by the Alliance for Quality Education, August 2014:
<http://www.aqeny.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/REPORT-NY-Billions-Behind.pdf>
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3. deMause and Green, The Campaign for Fiscal Equity Lawsuit Was the Best Hope for City Schools. It Failed, Village Voice, Jan 21, 2009, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2009-01-21/news/the-campaign-for-fiscal-equity-lawsuit-was-the-best-hope-for-city-schools-it-failed/>

APPENDIX 2

Poverty Trends in the Rochester City School District

[Paper by Work Group Member Dan Ross]

The extent of poverty in the Rochester area is well known; Edward Doherty's report "Poverty and the Concentration of Poverty in the Nine County Greater Rochester Area" (Prepared for the Community Foundation and ACT Rochester) documents that:

- Rochester has the 5th highest poverty rate (31.1%) among the central cities of the 75 largest metropolitan areas.
- When compared to a set of benchmark metropolitan areas, poverty in the Rochester area is among the most highly concentrated in the central city.
- And more than almost any other metropolitan area, Rochester's poor people are further concentrated in extremely poor neighborhoods.

The impact on child poverty is also clear:

- The city's child poverty rate is the second highest among U.S. cities with a population of 200,000 or more, behind only Detroit, a *Democrat and Chronicle* analysis found.
- The city saw its child poverty rate climb 6 percentage points to 55.2 percent as the national rate of child poverty fell for the first time since 2000. (Rochester Democrat and Chronicle. September 19, 2014).
- The Rochester City School district has the highest poverty rate among the New York State big 5 districts. (For schools the percent of students receiving free or reduced price lunch is used as the poverty measure.)
- Twenty two percent (22%) of the schools in the RCSD have 90% or more of their children living in poverty.

This represents a major change within the last few decades of the 20th century. In 1970, near the beginning of the school nutrition program, 12.8% of the elementary school children in the district received free or reduced price lunches. By 1980 it had risen to 22.8%. Between 1980 and 1990 it mushroomed to 72.1%! Recently it has tended to cluster in the low 80% but has been as low as 77.4 and as high as 88.4%.

What caused the huge increase between 1970 and 1980 is not clear. Changes in federal guidelines may have played some role; one obvious possibility is that it was a change in eligibility standards for the lunch program. That is clearly not the case. **Between 1980 and 1990 the percent of RCSD students receiving free and reduced price lunch more than tripled while the national number declined slightly.**

Historical Data on Poverty in Rochester City School District and Nationwide

Year	RCSD Percent Free & Reduced Price Lunch *	National Number Free & Reduced Price Lunch **
1970	12.8	4.6 M
1980	22.4	11.9M

1990	72.1	11.5M
2001	81.4	15.5M
2010	88.4	20.6M

*June 1991 Report, RCSD Department of Student Data, Testing, and Records. 1970-1990 data are for elementary students which tend to be somewhat more accurate and a bellwether for later years. For the 2000—2013 period, various RCSD documents and on-line district profiles show a range from 77.4% to 88.4% with no clear trends apparent.

**United States Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program; Participation and Lunches Served

Many factors could have contributed to this increase. An increase in the population of poor children in the city or a decrease in the number of non-poor in the city due to parents moving or choosing alternative schooling are among the possibilities. *It doesn't matter.* What is, is. The real question is, “Can we imagine this school district succeeding?” We know that there are some relatively successful schools in the district but is it even possible to imagine the district succeeding given what we know about the impact of concentrated poverty on education. If so, what would it take to make it happen? If not, are there any alternatives to abandoning thousands of children every year?

Income is not the same as race. Segregation that is the “unintended” result of public policies is not the same as segregation enforced by law. Nonetheless we must ask: did the Supreme Court get it mostly right in *Brown v Board of Education*? In their words: “We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.”

Notes: I have taken the finding that poverty has a contextual effect (i.e. that the composition of a school has an effect over and above the individual effect on children) as given. The literature and reports from other districts suggest that there is a tipping point at about 40% poverty. Although the eligibility for free or reduced school lunches is higher than the official poverty level it is widely used as a surrogate for poverty and economic distress.

APPENDIX 3

Review of Existing Regional Planning Groups in Rochester/Monroe County

[Paper by Work Group Member John Thomas]

Background:

The issue with cross-district school educational services in Rochester/Monroe County is **no entity is responsible for planning, let alone the provision of such services**. Great Schools for All (GS4A) is a strong, advocacy, citizen-based group for such a view, but as Holme and Finnigan (2013) stated, there is **no educational/government group** responsible for such planning. This is not totally true because the Rochester/Monroe County area does have several structures in place which do provide cross-district services—BOCES and the Urban-Suburban program. But both of these programs are limited—BOCES because large center city school districts are, by New York State law, precluded from BOCES programs and Urban-Suburban because of its one-way outbound focus and the limited number of students in the program. However, with expansion of their scopes, these programs could become the nucleus of full-fledged cross-district education services as envisioned by GS4A. Another option to be considered—federated regional governments.

Holme and Finnigan (2013) state the most promising policy strategy to overcome school fragmentation is cross-metro cooperation, especially the “federated regionalist” strategies. These are **regional planning solutions**. They list three cases—Portland, OR Metro Service District and Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN Metro Council, which provide regional tax base sharing and provision of *non-educational* services. The third, Omaha, NE Learning Community actually provides educational services with a cross-district tax structure. Holme and Finnigan’s federated regionalist strategies also include Council of Governments (COGs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Curiously, A-95 (now Executive Order 12372) Regional Planning Councils are not mentioned. Also not mentioned are Health Systems Planning Agencies and Regional Transit agencies, perhaps because these have little to do with schools. However, consideration of all of these organizations as regional models for a cross-district school structure has merit. What would/could these “federated regionalist” governments look like in Rochester/Monroe County? What regional agencies already exist in our area and what could be enacted beyond these existing agencies to provide a more-robust regional school structure?

Analysis:

Rochester already has many existing regional agencies as shown in Figure 1. Those are the Monroe County Council of Government (COG), the Genesee Transportation Council (Metropolitan Planning Organization or MPO), the Genesee Finger-Lakes Regional Planning Council (former A-95), the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency (health planning), and the Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Transportation Agency (transit planning). In addition, many Monroe County functions could be considered “regional” as they cross both City and town boundaries.

FIGURE 1

Regional Agencies in Rochester Area

Name	Goals/Function	Public/Private
Monroe County Council of Governments (COG)	Cost effective government services	Public
Genesee Transportation Council (Metropolitan Planning Organization)	Transportation Planning and Policy	Public
Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council (A-95)	General regional planning and policy	Public
Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency	Health planning and policy and preventive health services	Private 501(c)3
Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Agency	Transit planning and services	Public
Monroe County	General government services	Public
MC Pure Water Authority	Sewer service	Public
MC Water Authority	Water service	Public
MC Parks	Parks facilities	Public
MC Dept. of Transportation	Traffic engineering services	Public

Council of Government (COG):

The Monroe County Council of Governments is operated out of the Monroe County Department of Planning and Development. The structure and mission statement of the MCCOG (taken from their web page <http://www2.monroecounty.gov/planning-planning.php#COG>) is:

The Monroe County Council of Governments [MCCOG] is a voluntary organization of municipal governments, which is comprised of the Monroe County Executive, the City of Rochester Mayor, town supervisors and village mayors, a representative designated by the Board of the Monroe County Council of School Superintendents from among the Council’s membership; and a representative designated by the Board of the Monroe County School Boards Association from among the Association’s membership. The Council provides a forum for intergovernmental cooperation on issues of common concern to governments in Monroe County. The goal of the Monroe County Council of Governments is to examine opportunities for further intergovernmental cooperative actions and provide cost-effective governmental services.

As a county-wide organization, MCCOG serves an area population of 750,000. While the Monroe County School Board Association representative serves on the COG, **education is not one of the self-selected issues for the COG--but it could be.**

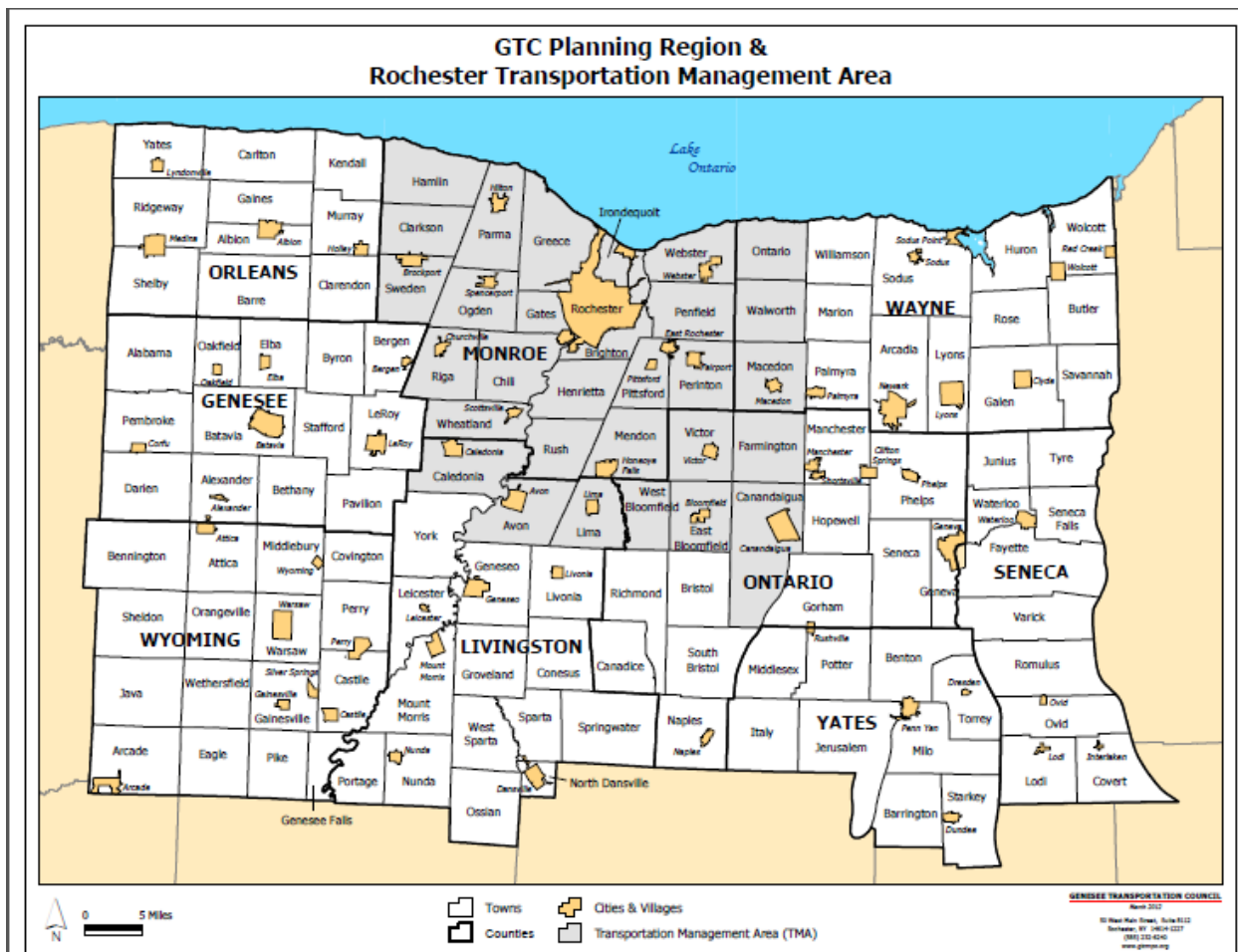
Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO):

By federal transportation law, MPOs are required in all metropolitan areas with a population over 50,000, and in our area the Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) fulfills this requirement. GTC focuses **solely on transportation planning, policy and investment decisions** in a nine county region (Monroe, Genesee, Livingston, Orleans, Wyoming, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, and Yates). GTC’s mission is to: “maximize the contribution of the transportation system to the social and economic vitality of the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region” (<http://www.gtcmop.org/AboutGTC/Overview.htm>).

Map 1 shows the boundaries of the GTC region. Of particular note is the Metropolitan Planning Area shown in purplish gray on the map. This important sub-regional area will be discussed later.

MAP 1

GTC Region



With only a few exceptions, GTC **does not implement transportation projects**; it only provides planning and policies for those projects. One of several methods for transportation policy is the development of a regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This is a regional five year Capital Improvement Program. Any federal transportation funds coming into the region **MUST** be contained in the TIP. This gives the agency great power to “force” localities to consider transportation from a regional viewpoint. While GTC could not get involved in regional school issues (other than transportation issues), GTC could provide a model for such a regional school structure.

MPOs also provide an important “balance of power” which could be relevant to any inter-district, regional school model. When it comes to the selection of federal-aid transportation projects in their region, MPOs **provide local governments with another voice** vis-à-vis strong state department of transportations. This is especially true in states with heavily centralized leadership like New York. In GTC’s case, local governments have another advocate as they work with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). With such a model schools would have another voice as they work with the New York State Education Department. While there is much cooperation between GTC and NYSDOT, part of this cooperation is because of GTCs existence itself which is established by federal law. Even when local governments may dislike regional government structures, they do provide another voice of advocacy at the state level. It is a decide-it-locally rather than have the state-decide-it-for-you mentality. In this respect, many find regional government to be more advantageous.

Another aspect of GTC could be relevant to a regional school structure—the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA). While GTC serves a nine county region with a population of 1, 200,000, the focus of GTC is on a much smaller area—that of the MPA shown on Map 1 (in purplish gray). The MPA consists of Monroe County **and surrounding developed areas** in Livingston, Ontario, and Wayne Counties. Seventy-two to seventy-eight percent of the region’s population reside in this area. Any regional school structure might want to consider the developed area beyond Monroe County, and the MPA could be a model for such a school structure. The MPA allows a multi-county regional agency such as GTC to focus on the developed area of a much larger region. In the Rochester area, this would be the abutting areas of Livingston, Wayne and Ontario Counties.

Executive Order 12372 (former A-95) Regional Planning Agency:

The Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council (G-FLRPC) is a former A-95 regional agencies. It is one of nine regional planning agencies in New York State. It covers nine counties—Monroe, Genesee, Livingston, Wyoming, Orleans, Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, and Yates with a population of slightly more than 1.2 million people. Unfortunately its boundaries do not match the MPO regional boundary (Seneca and Yates Counties are included in the Syracuse MPO). The Council's primary goal is to enhance the economic, environmental, physical, and social qualities of the region. Its major functions are land use planning, economic development, water resources and data collection (it is the official US Census Data Affiliate for our area). Its main role in school issues is in providing future population estimates to local school districts and in gathering statistics on student enrollment and other factors across the region. (See

http://www.gflrpc.org/Publications/RegionalAtlas/CountyProfiles/Education/Maps/Map%2017-%20School%20Districts%202013_400DPI.png for a digital map of all school districts in the region. This may also showcase the fact that school districts in Monroe County and abutting school districts do not always follow the Monroe County boundaries.)

As of this time, G-FLRPC does not involve any cross-district school planning or even have a focus on the issue of poverty. **But it could**, and its Executive Director is willing to explore the possibility. The strength of the agency is that it is existing and no new government structure would be required. Its weakness is its large area of coverage. If we would want to use G-FLRPC for inter-district school planning, some form of a smaller Monroe County focus area similar to the MPO's Metropolitan Planning Area would need to be created. This could be of benefit if we wanted an inter-district school structure to go beyond Monroe County.

Health Planning and Transit Planning Agencies:

There are other existing regional agencies in the Rochester/Monroe County area. Two of the largest are the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency (FLHSA) and the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Agency (RGRTA): The FLHSA, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, serves health needs in communities in a nine-county Finger Lakes region of Chemung, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne, and Yates counties. This is an unusual regional service area that does not match other regional agencies (GTC or G-FLRPC). Through data analysis, FLHSA experts identify the most pressing health needs facing the region, and then bring together hospitals, insurers, physicians, consumers and other partners to find solutions (www.flrha.org). With a staff of 50 people FLHSA also provides many preventive health programs. Presently, FLHSA provides no inter-district school services—**but it could**.

The Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Agency (RGRTA) provides transit planning and transit services in a seven county area (Monroe, Genesee, Livingston, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne and Wyoming). Services are provided through nine subsidiaries in each county with the Regional Transit Service (RTS) being the largest provider with an annual ridership of 18 million riders. Monroe County has both fixed route and paratransit services for the elderly/handicapped community. RGRTA's enabling legislation allows the provision of many transportation services, though it limits itself to public transit services. It does have a Board with weighted voting that allows the City of Rochester to hold four Board positions which could be an interesting model for any regional school governance structure. Presently, RGRTA is not involved in any school planning or services other than providing transit service to the Rochester City School District.

Monroe County as a "Regional" Government

Compared to 19 separate school districts, Monroe County itself could be considered a "regional" government. It provides services across City and Town boundaries. Several County Departments in particular act as regional agencies—the Monroe County Water Authority, the Monroe County Pure Waters District, the County Parks Department and the Department of Transportation. In some instances these agencies go beyond Monroe County borders. The

County could provide inter-district school programs, especially in planning for such schools and for implementing broader anti-poverty programs.

Federated Regionalism: Stronger Models

Holme and Finnigan (2013) mention three strong regional governments as a policy alternative to fragmented school districts—the Portland, OR Metro Service District and the Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN Metro Council, which provide regional tax base sharing and provision of *non-educational* services. And the third, Omaha, NE Learning Community which actually provides educational services with a cross-district tax structure.

Full-fledged metropolitan government similar to Portland or Minneapolis-St. Paul is unlikely to be well-received in Rochester at the present time. Despite the possibility of many economic and social benefits. Hopefully, this form of government will be reconsidered sometime in the future, especially as an economic development tool, a tax saving tool, and as a way to place our many regional governments under one roof. But, similar to our belief that school consolidation is politically impossible, this type of metro government structure is not considered possible at present for our inter-district school reform efforts here in Rochester.

On the other hand, the Omaha, NE regional school structure offers another vision. It focuses solely on school reform and not on a broad array of other government services. In effect, such a new regional school structure might be more widely accepted than the broader federated regionalism, metro government structure. The Omaha regional structure is defined in more detail under the report section on other school reform models mentioned above. Omaha is mentioned in this section of the report because of its unique federated regionalism model which is similar to the federated regionalism structures of Portland and the Twin Cities area.

Recommendation: Seek funding to further explore the Omaha Learning Communities model.

Findings and Recommendations:

- Most of the regional agencies in the Rochester vicinity have limited value in school reform. They are either special purpose agencies not involved with schools or they are concerned with very large regional areas and not focused on Monroe County.
Recommendation: Absent a regional agency focused on education, BOCES would appear to offer the most efficient vehicle to meet short-term goals.
- The Genesee Finger Lakes Planning Council is the one regional agency that could aid in school reform, at least for school planning (not implementation) issues. However, if GFLRPC were selected to be involved with school reform, a smaller “School Management Area” similar to GTC’s Metropolitan Planning Area should be established to focus on Monroe County. Similarly, a state incentive (requirement) should be established where all state school funding coming into the region should be approved in a regional “School Improvement Program” (SIP) similar to GTC’s TIP. This would incentivize regional school cooperation.
Recommendation: Further explore this strategy.
- All of the regional agencies could be involved in schools to some degree or more broadly in poverty, planning, research, and reforms. Every agency could provide tutors, attend

career days, and work with magnet schools closely aligned with their functional area. Health affects schools, transportation affects schools, and other government services affect schools. Schools can become another focus for their work in some manner, no matter how small.

Recommendation: Encourage all regional agencies to include school improvement in their mission statements.