Understanding Rochester’s Challenges

University of Rochester Presidential Symposium

Dr. Bolgen Vargas, Superintendent of Schools
February 4, 2014
Concentrated Poverty is Our Challenge

- Fifth poorest city in the nation
- Third for neighborhoods in extreme poverty
- Poorest urban school district in New York
Our Children Have High Needs

• 29,000 K-12 students in 54 schools
• 86% free or reduced-price lunch
• 16% special needs
• 11% limited English proficiency
Priorities That Will Create Success

- **Student Achievement and Growth**
- **Parental, Family and Community Involvement**
- **Communication and Customer Service**
- **Effective and Efficient Allocation of Resources**
- **Management Systems**
Poverty in Rochester is a fact.

It is not an excuse for low achievement. We must mitigate poverty by closing the opportunity gap.
More and Better Learning Time

• No early dismissal Wednesdays (30 hours)

• 13 schools with optional extended day (200 hours)

• 5 TIME Collaborative schools (300 hours)

• Up to seven more next year
• Attendance – 2% increase K-3 in target schools
• Pre-Kindergarten–800 more full-day students this week
• Eliminate summer learning lost for all Pre-K to 3 students
• More reading teachers with better data analysis tools
• Improved literacy instruction through training
• Low-income children are less likely than middle-income children to participate in high-quality early childhood and pre-kindergarten programs that prepare children to succeed in school.
• Nationally, only about 47% of 3 and 4-year olds are enrolled in a preschool program of any kind.
Art, Music, Sports, Extra-curricular Activities

• More art and music instruction
• 700 new sports programs
• Prevention strategy for social/emotional needs, student retention
• Improved parent engagement
Providing Our Students Middle-Class Opportunities

• Reading by third grade
• More and better learning time
• Improved instructional quality
• More art, music, sports, extra-curricular activities
Our Children Will Succeed With Community Help

• Addressing barriers to school attendance by closing the opportunity gap
• Providing summer programs for city students
• Making early literacy a community effort
• Improving health and nutrition for very young children
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