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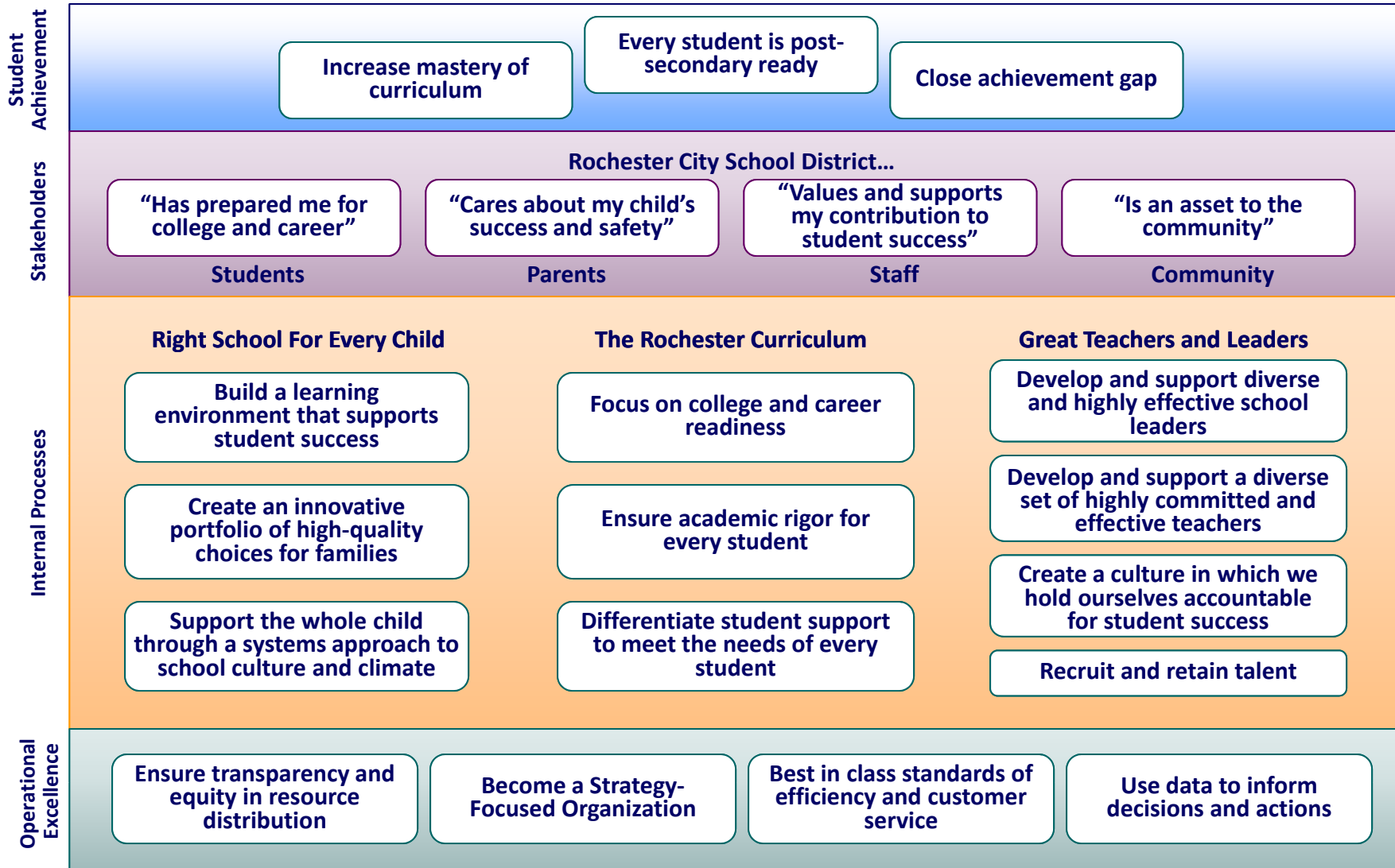
The Role & Contributions of Independent Research in Improving Urban Education

Jean-Claude Brizard

Chief Executive Officer
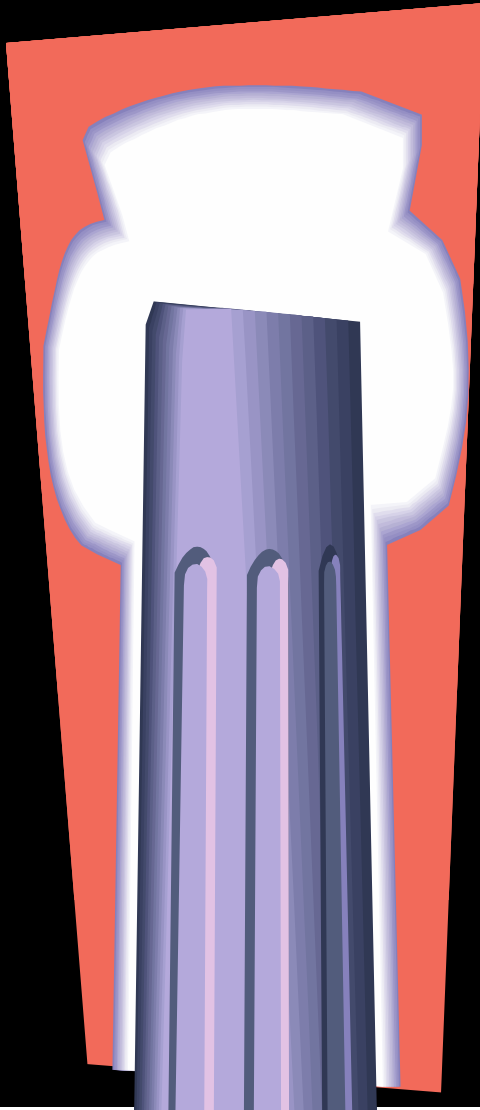
7/26/2011

RCSD Strategy Map

Student Achievement

| Increase mastery of curriculum | Every student is post-secondary ready | Close achievement gap |

Stakeholders

Rochester City School District…

| "Has prepared me for college and career" | "Cares about my child's success and safety" | "Values and supports my contribution to student success" | "Is an asset to the community" |

| **Students** | **Parents** | **Staff** | **Community** |

Internal Processes

Right School For Every Child

- Build a learning environment that supports student success
- Create an innovative portfolio of high-quality choices for families
- Support the whole child through a systems approach to school culture and climate

The Rochester Curriculum

- Focus on college and career readiness
- Ensure academic rigor for every student
- Differentiate student support to meet the needs of every student

Great Teachers and Leaders

- Develop and support diverse and highly effective school leaders
- Develop and support a diverse set of highly committed and effective teachers
- Create a culture in which we hold ourselves accountable for student success
- Recruit and retain talent

Operational Excellence

| Ensure transparency and equity in resource distribution | Become a Strategy-Focused Organization | Best in class standards of efficiency and customer service | Use data to inform decisions and actions |

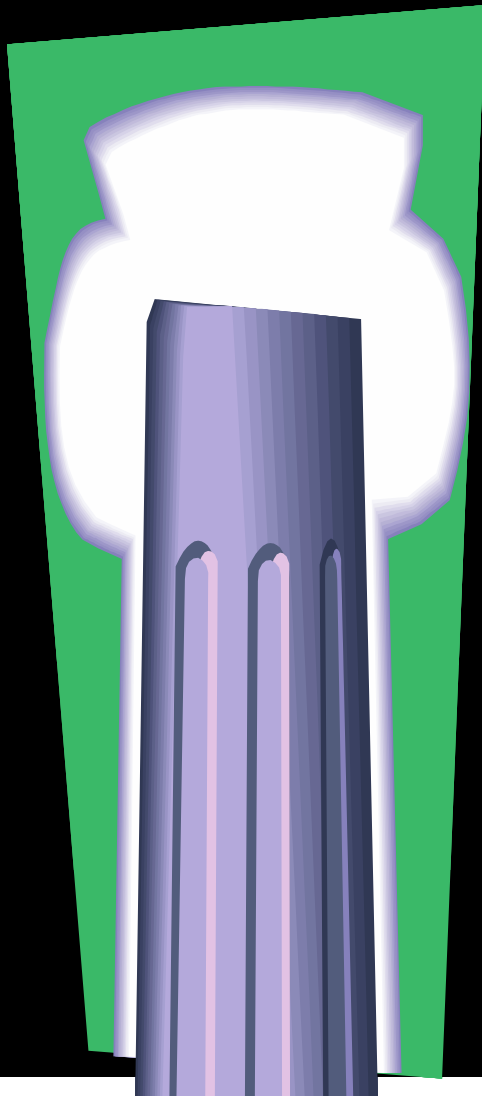ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Right School for Every Child

"The Portfolio Plan*'s bold approach sends a message to students, parents, school staff, and the community that failing schools are not acceptable."*
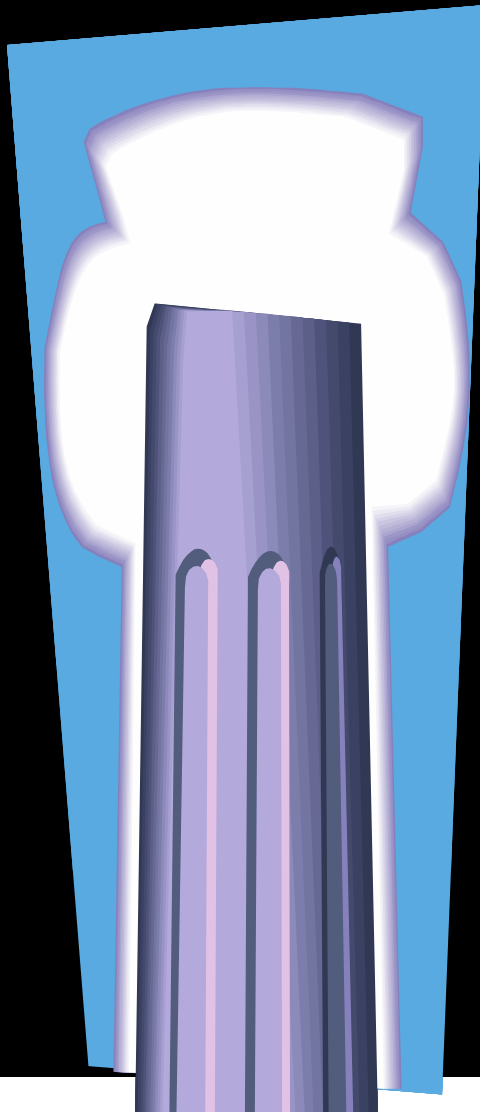
– Center for Governmental Research

The Rochester Curriculum

"The experience of urban districts and schools that are 'beating the odds' and closing achievement gaps reveals a pattern of using common curriculum and benchmark assessments to drive a focus on teaching and learning."

– Center for Governmental Research

Great Teachers and Leaders

"Common curriculum and assessments alone will not improve student learning — effective teaching will."

– Center for Governmental Research

Navigating Internal Access With Our Outside Partners

- CPS has partnered with the Consortium on Chicago School Research for 20 years.

- Trust: important in a relationship like ours
  - Trust that researchers are working to improve schools and not embarrass them
  - Trust that the school system is willing to use research to drive improvement

Preserving Objectivity in the Partnership

- The backbone of the relationship is the data-sharing agreement that allows researchers to be curious and go where the data takes them

- Commitment to setting "agendas" aside from both parties

- A civic community that recognized the value of this partnership and provides the funding to maintain it

Who Owns the Research?

- CPS realizes that the researchers need to own their work in order for it to have a full impact
  - The public may doubt results if the researchers do not have full editorial control

- The District also wants data to be used responsibly

Reporting the Research

- We have created structures that maintain relationships between practitioners and researchers
    - In 2007, the Board of Education entered into agreement with outside researchers
        - The researchers evaluate the effectiveness of implementation and outcomes of district programs
        - If a program is not working, the outside research can help the District properly allocate resources—impacting the greatest number of students

What is Research?

- A mix of quick-hit, short-term projects along with longer-term, more complex studies
  - Short-term projects gives the District solid information fast
  - Researchers are responsive, nimble and up-to-date on the latest challenges practitioners are facing
- The complex problems require rigorous, long-term studies
  - These studies allow us to attack some of the most pressing problems in urban education

What Should be Researched?

- Everything?
  - Important to target core strategies – aligned to improving most important units – schools and classrooms

- Find more evidence about the classroom-level factors that impacts student learning

Sustainability

- It is important that we make education an evidence-based profession

  - Giving meaning to "best practice" – what is actually working vs. what people "feel" is working

- The partnership between CPS and research institutions plays an important role in attaining that goal

Using Independent Research: Freshman On-Track

- CPS plans to continue to use outside, independent research to help us shape our policies, initiatives and curriculum

Using Independent Research: Freshman On-Track

- Using research like this, CPS will continue to structure our policy towards high school graduation; focusing on initiatives which will increase not only our graduation rate, but also college enrollment rate

- One exciting metric is the Freshman On-Track to Graduate

Using Independent Research: Freshman On-Track

- Using research from the Consortium on Chicago School Research; freshman year course performance is crucial to future academic success

- Students who are on-track at the end of ninth grade are three and a half times more likely to graduate than students who are not

Using Independent Research: Freshman On-Track

- A freshman is on-track if
  - He/she has not failed more than one semester of a core course
  - Has earned a minimum of 5 credits by the end of freshman year
- This metric can be calculated early in a student's high school career, yet it has been found to be highly correlated with future high school outcomes, including graduation.
  - The measurement of the On-Track indicator is consistent across schools and looks at course grades and credits in the first year of high school.

Using Independent Research: Freshman On-Track

- Equipped with this information, the district can continue to tailor policy and curriculum to raise the On-Track rate for Freshman
  - Programs for freshman have focused on attendance and providing extra supports to help students pass core courses
  - Our summer program, Freshman Connection, has helped more than 11,000 8th graders transition to high school by getting to know their new school and meet new friends
    - Students take academic courses from their 9th grade teachers
    - Participate in social-emotional skill-building to help them adjust to high school life
    - Rising freshmen are paired with upper-class mentors to build relationships and get a head-start in considering colleges and careers

Chicago School Reform Timeline

Era 1 Decentralization 1988-1995	Era begins with the passage of the first Chicago School Reform Act which established Local School Councils and ushered in a period of decentralized decision-making.
Era 2 Accountability 1996-2001	Under CEO Paul Vallas, the district gains stability in leadership, union negotiations, attention to facilities. New promotion policies are enacted in elementary grades (first 8th, then 3 and 6). Poor performing schools face probation; several high schools are reconstituted.
Era 3 Diversification 2002-2009	CEO Arne Duncan focuses attention on transforming high schools and launching 100 new charter, contract and performance schools by 2010. The No Child Left Behind Act requires changes in testing inclusion. District encourages data use through 9th grade and postsecondary data systems.

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