



## RCPEP SPOTLIGHT: Issue #4

*School Board meetings are important sources of information. However, sometimes additional data and context is useful to understand the topics discussed at any one meeting. Below RCPEP has drafted a summary and provided additional data and analysis regarding the most substantial items discussed at the school board meeting on January 14, 2020 at the district office. For the full video of that meeting, click [here](#). The complete minutes of that meeting have been posted [here](#). Click [here](#) to view previous RCPEP Spotlights.*

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE JAN. 14th BOARD MEETING

- The Board approved Commissioner Harris as the Parliamentarian.
- School calendar options are now available and posted.
- The Board approved 5 new mental health counselors from Columbia Area Mental Health, bringing the total number of mental health professionals in schools to 14. It is always good to see an increase in the number of counselors serving students; however, 14 CAMH counselors serving 24,000 students at over 50 schools still seems low.
- Commissioner King raised concerns about the use of board money for gifts for Board members. Commissioner Devine said that these gifts were to allow the Commissioners to represent the district at public events.
- Commissioner King raised questions about the Richland One Foundation and asked for more information. The commissioners agreed to get more information at a future meeting. Commissioner Harris said that this information should clear up any questions or concerns about the foundation.



## **THIS WEEK'S SPOTLIGHT: The Budget Process**

Richland 1 is in the midst of its this year's budgeting process. Over the next month, officials will be gathering input from various stakeholders. District officials will discuss where they are on this year's budget and solicit input into the coming year's budget. The budget calendar can be found [here](#). Public input will be permitted at the meetings listed below:

- February 10<sup>th</sup> at 6pm, Sandel Elementary
- February 24<sup>th</sup> at 6pm, Horrell Hill Elementary
- March 9<sup>th</sup> at 6pm, Satchel Ford Elementary

### **The District has three areas for focus in their budget:**

- 1) Expand the language immersion programs;
- 2) Increase the number of pre-K classes, and;
- 3) Increase teacher salaries.

Budgets are generally aligned tightly to strategic planning priorities. These three priorities can be found within the District's strategic plan, found [here](#). There are other important strategic planning areas that are not included in these three focal points. For example, one of the district's "actions for improvement" is to provide more behavioral and academic support for students. This action step is certainly one for which we find a lot of support among teachers and school administrators. Indeed, one of the most common concerns we hear is that there are not enough non-teaching adults in a school to help address the issues students bring to the classroom every day. So, one question that seems legitimate is how will the new school budget reflect this. We also think it important to review the above three focal areas in light of the data RCPEP has provided in prior Spotlights detailing test and career-readiness results throughout the district.

### **Budget Transparency**

A budget process for a school district ought to be transparent and open and truly consider the voices of a mix of stakeholders. Doing so requires transparency into what is being considered and the policy implications of these decisions. A quick comparison of other districts suggests that our district could provide more information to the public. See, for example:



- 1) [Montgomery County Public Schools](#)—another district with rural, urban, and suburban schools, huge student diversity (race and class), and a very active parent population.
  - a) Their website provides the data and information that is driving budget decisions;
  - b) The website provides opportunities for community members to provide input, in person and via email, and;
  - c) Reports outline clearly what the money will be spent on and also identifies spending increases and decreases.
- 2) [Chicago Public Schools](#)—you can see the clear focus on equity laid out in their budget materials.
- 3) [Lexington One](#)—less comprehensive than the two above but still provides the answers to a number of questions and the rationale driving their budget.

Compare the [Richland One Budget](#) information and process. To be clear, the districts listed above are exceptional in terms of the amount of information they provide to the public. And we should applaud the district for being clear and up front about the process. A number of other South Carolina districts have not even begun to gather public input for 2020-2021. However, the districts above remind us that the district could provide much more detail to stakeholders so that they can better engage in the process each year.