



Strengthening Outcomes at RHCSD

Perspectives & Recommendations from Rush-Henrietta Parents for Change



Background

Long before the recent budget vote, members of our group were already attempting to raise recurring concerns around student safety, stakeholder communication, special education, and teacher/staff retention.

Over time, we became increasingly concerned that these experiences were not being fully surfaced within the systems used to inform District leadership and the Board.



District Experience: The Catalyst for Our Concern

In this meeting, we would like to share with you the perspectives that have been shared with us.

We did not think it was appropriate to air these concerns during budget forums, so we outlined a proposal which communicated the recurring themes across concerns.



Student Concerns

"I would like everyone to hold their breath—literally not metaphorically—take a deep breath and hold it. When the average high school student enters the bathroom we are greeted with smoking, vaping, and phones recording. You are currently holding your breath because this is what we do every time we enter the bathroom due to the intense vape smoke and smell. Often times we are glared at for using the restroom because it interrupts TikToks that are being filmed. Fix the bathrooms- something as small as using the toilet should not be a luxury. And in 10, maybe 15 years, we will see the effects of vaping and an entire generation struggling to breathe."

"I cannot get on the bus because I don't feel safe, Mom."

"If I stayed in the bathroom longer than a minute to pee, I would probably get high because of all the vaping. You can literally see a cloud of smoke above the stalls. They closed a bunch of the bathrooms, so I don't have many options on where to go. "

"A student in class got upset and threw stuff around the room – she was removed from the classroom, but came back in right after. It was uncomfortable for everyone else."

"Teachers prepare the classes for when the superintendent and district employees visit, making sure the kids are ready to share what they're learning about etc. Feedback on how visits went: "Dr. Mullen walked around and stared at us then left without saying anything" and "the man sat in the back on the carpet on his Chromebook and typed- then he left".

Teacher Concerns

"They created instructional leadership teams with the guise of more voice and help from teachers, mental health etc to help with instructional practices in building, but then tell the teams what they need to be doing. Terrible book study choices... creating terrible GLEAM lessons/slides which we were forced to use and were not allowed to modify for specific building purposes."

"We have switched to a top-down micromanaging approach. You have a plethora of knowledge and resources within district, but they are not being utilized. Principals are being bombarded with books to read, day long meetings, when they should be in the building working with kids, teachers and families. "

"I'm most concerned about the district not prioritizing the developmental needs of primary students. 15 minutes of recess (including transitions) is nowhere close to what kids need (especially with the sit and get style of CKLA instruction.) There is not time or space for students to develop social and emotional skills as needed at this age."

"It's honestly sad to watch what is happening and I'm watching from the inside. Our professional voices are silenced. Teachers know what needs to happen but for some reason we are ignored. I don't get the 'agenda' they are trying to achieve."

Teacher Concerns

"I know this district is not alone with special ed concerns, but we're able to hire teachers, we just can't retain them. I don't need a district recruitment and retention administrator to tell me why that is. When you have four self-contained teachers in the last three years quit mid year, that should be a red flag, yet nothing is addressed or acknowledged. This leaves us hiring brand new teachers out of college that don't have the experience to manage the needs of these classes."

"If people ask me about applying to RH for special ed openings, I tell them to not apply. The salary at RH is below most other districts. We just offered 2 social workers and 2 speech teachers jobs for next year, and they turned us down because of the salary."

"A teacher who is a single mom was turned down for a home loan unless she had a co-signer. Teachers should not need 2 jobs to make ends meet."

"The problem is not building level administration, it's district office. Dr. Mullen doesn't like dogs so we can't have a therapy dog program. Free social emotional support that the district has turned down because of personal feelings. I am told the dog handlers carry the insurance and pay for all the certifications. The district asks you to pay more taxes each year but here is a free program with a ton of research showing the benefits. SO many other districts have dogs in schools all day! Our "policy" says the dog can't be in school more than 4 hours, can't be in a classroom, school counselors can't have one because they might be called to an emergency. Basically no staff member can bring their therapy dog to school."

"Dr. Mullen is rarely in the school buildings or her own office for that matter. She is busy "making connections" for RH. Whatever that is supposed to mean. She is not committed to RH... It would be nice to feel like we are supported and seen. This BOE and administration does neither."

Parent Concerns

"In a two-day period, I heard from two educators and one staff member across three different schools that they could only advocate so strongly because they had not yet earned tenure. This points to a system that not only fails to fully support the students these educators serve, but also discourages faculty and staff from exercising their professional judgment and doing their jobs effectively."

"We'll see how the vote turns out. It's unfortunate, but when parents feel that rejecting the school budget is their only way to be heard, that points to a much deeper issue in the district than just a lack of transparency."

"I was not properly informed that my student would be going back and forth between their 12:1:1 room and a general education classroom. There are too many transitions for my child. My child shares a para and if the other student gets upset, what is my child supposed to do?"

Parent / Volunteer Concerns

"The Instructional Space Committee was stopped with no explanation. When parents ask about the committee, we are told that it's a Superintendent committee and the Superintendent can get rid of it at any time. When asked what is being done about the space issues, specifically at Burger and Vollmer, parents are told that it is being worked on behind the scenes but get absolutely no update on progress. It again feels like community stakeholders are being silenced and left in the dark."

"The district survey seems meaningless now. We used to have a chance with parents and staff from across the district to review results and talk about concerns and what we were doing well. Many parents no longer fill it out because it feels like no one really is reading it."

"I have spent a ton of time on two PTO's over the last several years raising money and doing so much for not only students, but the staff as well. Somehow our Parent groups were deemed unimportant and dismissive. That is not OK."

"DPAC has become such a joke this past two years. I could say much more but never felt that anyone would 'hear' me... I feel like Melissa is sort of like a puppet insofar as representing the district but [she seems to be] screaming inside to say something else as a parent. Not an easy position. "



What We Learned From Reviewing the District Materials from Dr. Mullen

The District clearly has substantial strategic planning infrastructure, implementation systems, progress monitoring, instructional alignment processes, and continuous improvement work underway.

The measurement approaches we found described include:

- Walkthrough systems
- Coaching systems
- Calibration processes
- Stakeholder communication platforms

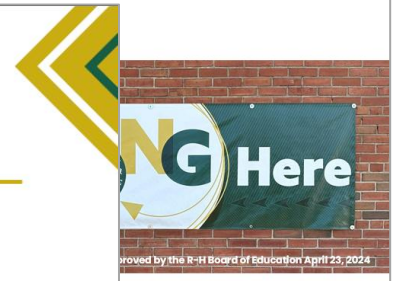
We also considered the existing Board policies shared by Dr. Mullen, which codify an operating model in which the Board must maintain a degree of separation from the day-to-day administration of the District, which falls to the Superintendent.

The deeper question is whether the current measurement architecture and operating model is capturing the insights needed to accurately reflect stakeholder outcomes.



The 2024 - 2028 District Plan

District Improvement Plan





Where we have questions

Does RHCSD Track Strategic and Functional Results?

In other sectors outside of Education, large organizations have two sets of objectives:

- **Functional objectives** – aka, their “day job”
- **Strategic objectives** – future-focused initiatives that are layered on top of baseline responsibilities

They generally measure progress against these objectives in two ways:

- **Implementation activity** – what is being done
- **Measurable outcomes** – changes affected through the implementation

Functional objectives and measurable results are typically the primary focus; strategic initiative rollout tends to be secondary.





What this looks like in other sectors

Objective Type	Implementation Activity Measured	Measurable Outcomes Measured
Functional Objectives ("Day Job")	Healthcare: Protocols implemented, screenings expanded, staffing models deployed Nonprofit: Programs launched, outreach completed, services delivered Private Sector: Operational processes executed, systems deployed, customer initiatives launched	Healthcare: Patient outcomes, readmission rates, safety events, patient trust Nonprofit: Families housed, people placed into jobs, meals delivered, recidivism reduced Private Sector: Revenue growth, customer retention, employee retention, market share growth
Strategic Objectives ("Future-Focused Initiatives")	Healthcare: Population-health initiatives launched, digital transformation programs implemented Nonprofit: Long-term prevention initiatives, partnership development, advocacy campaigns Private Sector: Innovation projects, strategic growth initiatives, transformation programs	Healthcare: Long-term health improvement trends, reduced chronic disease burden Nonprofit: Sustained community improvement, systemic reductions in need Private Sector: Expanded market position, long-term profitability, strategic differentiation

Here is the primary concern that surfaced as we reviewed these materials:



Activities and efforts do not guarantee outcomes.

Measuring activity primarily tells us whether we implemented the strategy.
It does NOT necessarily tell us whether the strategy itself is working.

Our Measurement Is Only As Good As The Dimensions Being Measured

If We Measure...	But Not...	We Risk...
Communication frequency	Communication trust	Stakeholders perceiving communication as performative, inauthentic, or disconnected from their lived experience
Safety procedures implemented	Whether students and staff actually feel safer	Credibility gaps when official reporting does not align with day-to-day student and staff experience
Participation rates	Post-participation adoption or impact	Mistaking attendance or involvement for genuine engagement, trust, or organizational buy-in
SPED students served	SPED relationship quality, trust, and procedural consistency	Compliance without confidence — where families technically receive services but still experience frustration, conflict, or instability
Teacher and Staff engagement	Psychological safety, burnout, and retention pressure	Staff disengagement, rising frustration, and eventual turnover that surfaces too late for meaningful intervention
Stakeholder workshops conducted	Whether stakeholder feedback meaningfully influences decisions	Community perception of “workshop theater” — engagement processes viewed as symbolic rather than impactful





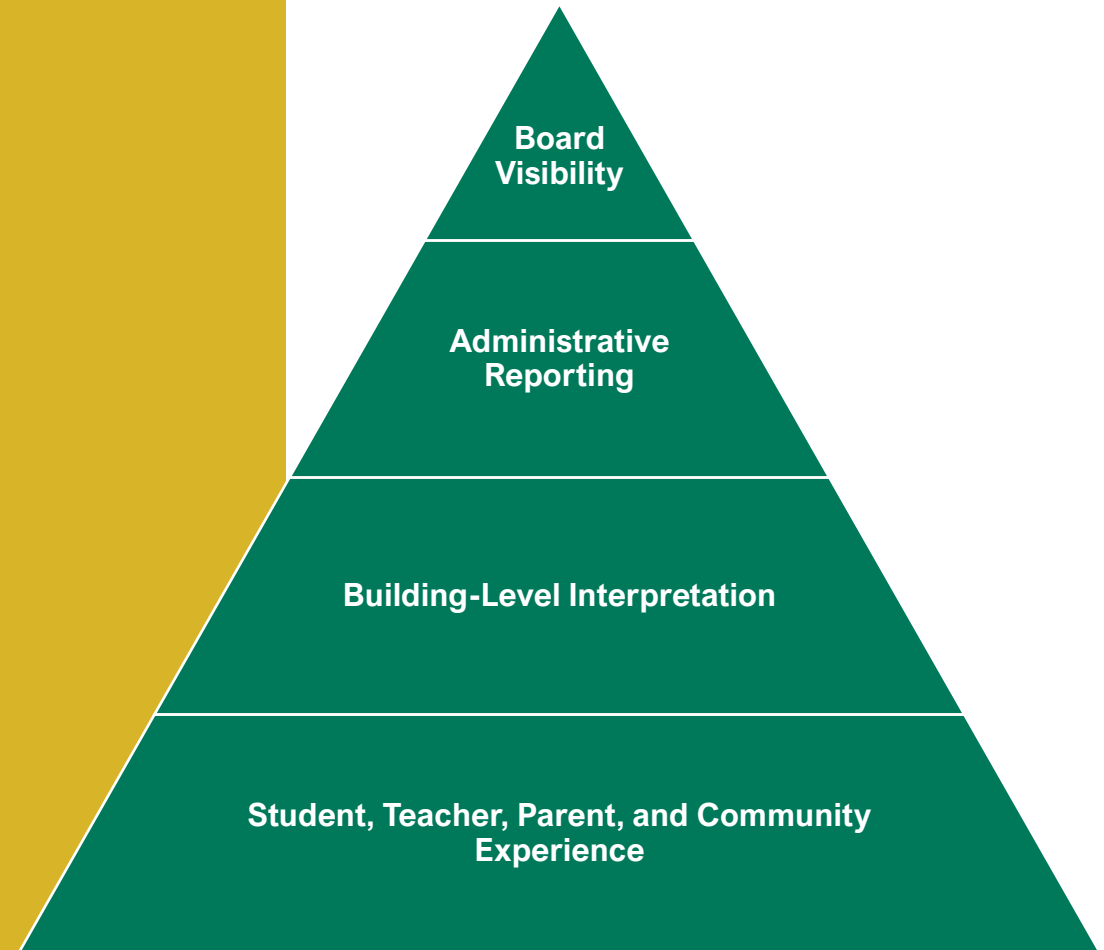
How Visibility Gaps Naturally Form

Information naturally becomes filtered, normalized, compressed, and reinterpreted as it moves upward through large organizations. This is both expected and necessary.

Measurement rubrics - even widely accepted ones (e.g. SuperEval) - are typically applied at the highest levels of aggregation.

As a result, pockets of acute underperformance can be structurally “averaged out” within the foundational layers of measurement.

This means that reporting done with the best of intentions can systematically fail to surface critical issues – unless we use additional sources of independent verification.





This is a barrier to the District achieving its stated mission, vision, and values:

MISSION

*The mission of Rush-Henrietta Central School District is to **diligently serve the diverse educational needs of each student** by **providing an inclusive and nurturing environment** where everyone is enabled **to fulfill their full potential in school and after they graduate.***

VISION

*Rush-Henrietta envisions our district to be a place where **every learning environment is equitable and student centered** and individual growth and potential is cultivated **through supportive and engaging educational experiences for each student.***

VALUES

*Rush-Henrietta Central School District is a **safe and welcoming** learning **community** centered around **compassion, integrity, respect** and a culture of **continuous improvement.***



Why This Matters

Operational distress often becomes visible to stakeholders before it becomes visible inside dashboards or strategic reporting systems.

Examples include burnout, distrust, disengagement, communication breakdown, withdrawal, and fear of speaking openly.

How Our Proposal Addresses These Structural Gaps

Our proposal attempts to strengthen operational visibility, independent validation, and direct Board connection to stakeholder experience.

Structural Gap	Proposed Improvement	Why Board-Measured?
Filtered visibility	Board-administered feedback	Board requires independent visibility
Limited validation	Third-party review	Reduces blind spots
Weak operational sensing	Climate & listening systems	Pain surfaces before indicators shift
Declining trust	Engagement structures	Trust requires direct connection

The concerns repeatedly surfacing across students, teachers, special education families, and community stakeholders suggest a growing need to rebuild trust, strengthen communication, improve operational visibility, and refocus organizational attention on lived stakeholder experience.

These are not isolated complaints. They are signals. And signals require visibility.



Strong systems require strong visibility.



We are not arguing the District lacks systems or effort.

We are not saying that District leadership does not care, and is not investing their own time and resources to support our community.

We are encouraging the Board and Superintendent to refocus more attention on the operational pain points affecting students, families, teachers, and staff today — and to rebalance time, resources, and measurement toward efforts that will directly improve stakeholder outcomes in real time.

Ultimately, strategic implementation only matters if it produces meaningful improvement in the lived experiences of the people the District serves.



Thank you!

On behalf of our students, we appreciate your time and consideration.