

Dr. Lesli Myers-Small, RCSD Superintendent
Van White, RCSD Board President
Cynthia Elliott, RCSD Board Vice President
Ricardo Adams, RCSD Commissioner
William Clark, RCSD Commissioner
Beatriz LeBron, RCSD Commissioner
Amy Maloy, RCSD Commissioner
Willa Powell, RCSD Commissioner

October 2021

Dear Superintendent and Commissioners,

I am writing to urge you to invest in the mental and social-emotional health of Rochester students. The pandemic left thousands of students with inadequate academic, physical, occupational, nutritional, and social-emotional support for months. Now that schools are once again a consistent resource for students, they must offer a menu of services and programs to help students recover from the trauma caused by COVID-19 and the social, racial and economic turmoil that accompanied it.

The Rochester City School District has the revenue to provide what students need. The federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) includes \$196.5M in direct aid to RCSD. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) provides an additional \$87.5M in aid to RCSD. While this is time-limited revenue, there will be additional ongoing annual revenue provided to the district through State-funded Foundation Aid increases to be phased-in over the next two school years.

We join with Rochester parents, students, school staff, and community members in calling for ***investments in School Climate, Students' Mental Health, and Healing from Trauma. Specifically we recommend:***

1. \$30M investment in restorative practices that research has shown reduce violence and suspensions in schools and lessens racial disparities in discipline through building relationships, repairing harm and facilitated communication. Twenty restorative coaches (up from current 6) should be hired over the next four years. All staff should be engaged in professional development on restorative and trauma-informed practices, and stipends should be paid to building level staff, parents and students to promote restorative work in their buildings.
2. \$5M every year for help zones (rooms where trained staff offer support, referrals and non-judgmental guidance to troubled students) and alternative to suspensions in every building.
3. \$5M in additional mental health supports for students, including more social workers and counselors. These should include non-traditional mental health and stress reduction supports through art and music therapy as well as yoga, dance, and drama.
4. Institute the preventive practice of holding peace circles led by trained school staff, parents and students for young people to talk about what they are going through at home or school, honestly share their feelings and gain support from adults and peers.
5. Extensive efforts should be undertaken so that new staff and service providers come from racial and ethnic backgrounds that reflect the students with whom they are working.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Rochester's children.

Sincerely,