**Supporting Youth Mental Health in Schools**

*Recommendations for the RCSD Budget*  
May 2022

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**The Need**

Children and youth are facing a mental health crisis that was building for years and deepened during the pandemic. Success in school requires that students’ mental health needs be met through a mix of clinical supports, relationship building and constructive outlets.

Thousands of RCSD students returned to in-person learning after 544 days, having experienced prolonged periods of:

- social isolation
- food insecurity
- homelessness
- death of loved ones/caregivers
- surge in community violence
- ongoing trauma

Prior to the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found [1 in 5 children](#) had a mental health disorder, but only about 20% of those children received care from a mental health provider.

Mental health-related emergency department visits increased 24% for children 5 - 11 years old and 31% among adolescents 12 - 17 years old during the first 8 months of the pandemic.

Last fall the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children’s Hospital Association declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health.

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**The Solution**

RCSD’s approved spending plans for the $300+ million in pandemic relief money show promising investments in student mental health, restorative practices, anti-racism professional development, and educator diversity. The Children’s Agenda strongly supports these priorities.

We want to see the district go even further with an additional $5 million in supports for restorative practices and student mental health.
Students and Parents Know What Works

Rochester residents signed petitions and sent letters to the Superintendent and Commissioners on the Board of Education asking for greater investment in mental health supports.

Rochester parents met with each of the Commissioners on the Board of Education asking for greater investment in mental health supports.

Students and Parents Want:

1. **Restorative Practices:**
   Invest $30M in restorative practices including 20 restorative coaches over the next four years.

2. **Help Zones:**
   Invest $5M each year for spaces where trained staff offer support, referrals and guidance and alternatives to suspensions.

3. **Mental Health Supports:**
   Invest $5M in more social workers, counselors, and stress reduction supports.

4. **Peace Circles:**
   Institute the preventive practice of peace circles facilitated by trained staff, parents and students.

5. **Representation:**
   Invest in efforts to ensure new staff and service providers reflect the racial and ethnic backgrounds of students.

Some of these strategies have been partially funded in the RCSD budget. However, the structure of the budget book does not make it clear precisely how much has been invested and at which schools. We demand greater transparency.