

# 100-Day Plan: SCHOOL CLIMATE

Recommendations to the Superintendent January 12, 2017





Every student by face and name. Every school, every classroom. To and through graduation.



# Superintendent's Focus Areas

Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams coached each project team, provided research expertise and supported development of the plans. She has laid out five areas of focus that guide this process and her work as Superintendent.

# Prioritizing educational equity:

"It is critical that we create a District where every person, in every department, is responsible and accountable for the education of all students at every school. We must be devoted to eliminating the opportunity and education achievement gaps for urban youth. We can do this by adhering to a theory of action that ensures strong dynamic interaction between great educators, rigorous and cognitively demanding content, engaged students and families, and community partners that bring coherent supports matched to the specific needs of Rochester children."

# **Building relational capacity:**

"By building shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect, we will improve learning. We will increase engagement and motivation. Recognizing every person's experience as unique, we can connect to each other through a deep understanding and acknowledgement of race, ethnicity, and culture. This will ensure that we are mindful, respectful, and inclusive."

# **Nurturing innovation:**

"We need to consider fresh ideas, and help our schools, leaders, teachers, and students customize solutions for their unique needs. Innovation and customization are essential to ensure that every student gets to grade level, that we accelerate their learning, and get them to graduation."

# **Creating coherence:**

"Fragmentation gets in the way of serving our children, our parents, our teachers, our schools or our community. The "system" needs to be coherent and user-friendly. Coherence does not mean we all must do the same things. It does mean that our work must produce powerful learning for all youth, with equitable and strong outcomes."

# Accountability for action:

"The talent is here. The answers are in Rochester. But there's a fifth element of my role as your superintendent. It starts with me holding myself accountable. Holding ourselves accountable for action, and working with a strong sense of urgency."

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### Introduction

During her first four months in the Rochester City School District, Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams initiated a 100-day listening and learning process to identify thoughtful and effective solutions to the challenges most important to Rochester students, families, staff, residents and businesses. She spent time engaging her Cabinet in the principles of Design Thinking as a method for listening and learning, and looking at opportunities to improve the District.

Superintendent Deane-Williams charged her Executive Cabinet team to build coherence by listening and learning from the community and District stakeholders. She specifically charged her Executive Cabinet to build a shared understanding and plans that target improvement of five critical areas that quickly emerged during the first few weeks of her listening and learning.

- Central Office Services
- ♦ Communications and Engagement
- ♦ District Finances
- Instructional Data
- ♦ School Climate

The School Climate Team is one of five listening and learning project teams. The overarching objective of the School Climate Team is to provide equity and access to all students and work to eliminate opportunity gaps within our current structure that are evidenced by achievement data, suspension data and attendance data. It is our hope that this work is a call to action for all of us to recognize that we must act together in relationship to establish equity.



## **Executive Summary**

The Rochester City School District suffers from and perpetuates inequities as evidenced by disparities in academic achievement, graduation and suspension rates. Triangulated school climate focus groups conducted with students, parents and staff cite lack of respectful relationships as a core source of inequities. Systematic and institutionalized racism as well as individual racial and social conditioning are concrete barriers to respectful relationships. The foundation of creating equity within the District must therefore begin with addressing racism. The relationship model developed by Dr. Joy DeGruy and adapted by the District is designed to address racism and instill respect and appreciation for students' families, history, heritage and culture. Once this foundation is established, restorative practices can be employed to proactively create a welcoming school climate and culture and also restore harmony when that climate and culture is breeched. The Code of Conduct, or Policy 1400, codifies the school climate measures that make progressive discipline possible, including the relationship model and restorative practices.



#### **Theoretical Foundation**

Dr. Joy DeGruy, Ph.D.

About Dr. Joy DeGruy



"Dr. Joy DeGruy is a nationally and internationally renowned researcher, educator, author and presenter. She is an ambassador for healing and a voice for those who've struggled in search of the past, and continue to struggle through the present. Dr. DeGruy is the acclaimed author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* — *America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. Dr. DeGruy holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Communications; two master degrees in Social Work and Clinical Psychology; and a Ph.D. in Social Work

Research. With over twenty years of practical experience as a professional in the field of social work, she gives a practical insight into various cultural and ethnic groups that form the basis of contemporary American society."

Dr. DeGruy's work has deeply influenced the District's School Climate Team to publically acknowledge that dialogue about race and relationships must be cultivated and engaged as a matter of social justice. The "Relationship Model" has helped provide a framework to begin the work. http://joydegruy.com

#### **Advancement Project**



Advancement Project is a next generation, multi-racial civil rights organization that uses innovative tools and strategies to strengthen social movements and achieve high impact policy change. The District has relied upon the data and research the Advancement Project led in a report released, "Breaking Rochester's School-to-Prison Pipeline" to use as an opportunity to examine how we respond to students' social emotional and behavioral

needs in a more culturally responsive manner. This report was highly publicized and outlined the disproportionate number of students of color, students with disabilities and students of color with disabilities who are suspended from school and ultimately enter the School-to-Prison Pipeline.

http://www.advancementproject.org

International Institute for Restorative Practices



The International Institute for Restorative Practices is dedicated to the advanced education of professionals at the graduate level and to the conduct of research that can develop the growing field of restorative practices, with the goal of positively influencing human behavior and strengthening civil society throughout the world.

As part of the emerging recognition that traditional punitive forms of discipline are not serving anyone well, the District

is working to shift towards restorative practices.

The IIRP provides national research and resources that are a framework for the District.





# Strengthening School Climate: Equity & Relationships, Relationships, Relationships Contents

The 100-day process was designed to engage key stakeholders in innovative thinking that will lead to equity within the Rochester City School District and greater community. This process is necessary to ensure that all of our students are provided access to high quality instructional programs and that we address the "haves and have nots" perception that some buildings are afforded more resources than others. Our aim is to eliminate opportunity gaps within our current structure that are evidenced by achievement data, suspension data and attendance data. Our 100-day team has engaged multiple stakeholders that reflect the voices of Rochester in order to create solutions. We have taken the time to listen and learn about some of the key climate concerns facing our families and have provided the data and research. It is our hope that this work is a call to action for all of us to recognize that we must act together in relationship to establish equity.

**Team Leaders:** 

Amy Schiavi

School Chief, Lead

Ruth Turner

Executive Director of Student Support Services, Lead

Sylvia Cooksey

Acting Executive Director of Professional Learning

Jerome Underwood

Director of Family Initiatives

Lori Baldwin

**Director of Security Operations** 

Theresa Woods

Acting Executive Director of Specialized Services

Kirstin Pryor

Office of School Innovation

Banke Awopetu-McCullough

Consultant, Concrete Rose Publication

Savaria Calloway-Downs

Director of Initiatives and Outcomes (Project Manager)

## **Background:** | Our Starting Point

In 2014, there was an outcry from District leaders and the community regarding the disproportionate number of African-American students who face extreme disciplinary consequences for minor offenses in the Rochester City School District. In response, The Advancement Project, Metro Justice, AQE and Teen Empowerment, in collaboration with the District, released a report titled "Breaking Rochester's School-to-Prison Pipeline." The report publicized the disproportionate number of students of color, students with disabilities and students of color with disabilities who are suspended from school and ultimately enter the school-to-prison pipeline.

Upon further examination, including dozens of focus groups with students, parents, staff and all four unions, it became apparent that suspension data was reflective of an overall breakdown in school climate. A collaborative process was employed and conducted primarily through the Community Task Force on School Climate (CTF)— an organization comprised of students, parents, building level staff, Central Office officials, members of all bargaining units and committed community practitioners in child and youth development, mental health, juvenile justice, racial justice and restorative practices, to get to the root of the issue regarding school climate. The CTF's overarching recommendation was simple, yet nuanced—positive relationships must be restored and built between all members of the school community, within Central Office, and between Central Office and school buildings.

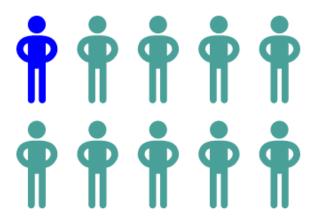
Relationship building and the subsequent acknowledgement of harm and restoration must happen first in order for the Rochester City School District to achieve any substantial academic gains. The CTF developed six recommendations regarding social-emotional health and connected relationships as essential building blocks for successful learning communities. Three of the main recommendations— the adoption and implementation of a new Code of Conduct, restorative practices and anti-racism work— were already ongoing in the District and benefitted from the concentrated community support. The Code of Conduct, restorative practices and anti-racism were seen as separate projects, yet intersect frequently as they cumulatively lay the groundwork for relationship repair and edification.



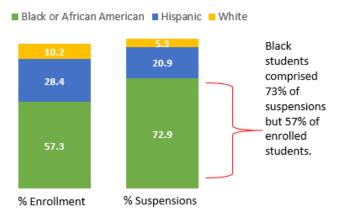
#### Listening & Learning | What do we know, and how do we know it?

During the fall of 2016, the 100-Day Project Team synthesized the work done to date on school climate, informed by students and families, school leaders, faculty and staff and community partners. We know that school climate varies widely from school to school, which is evidenced by the contrasts seen in school review, survey and qualitative data sources. Here, the aggregate data justify the headline—that the District is poised for much-needed and real shifts in our approach to school climate and discipline.

15-16: One out of every 10 RCSD students was suspended



2015-16: DISPROPORTIONATE SUSPENSIONS

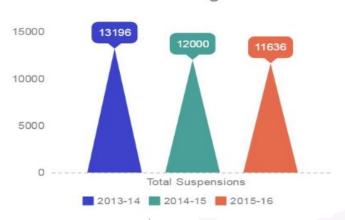


#### Who informed this work?

The last 18 months have involved ongoing work with—and ongoing feedback from—many, stakeholders, as the District and community have lifted and begun to shift the tenor of school climate. Throughout this report, you will see quotations, survey results and synthesis of what we have heard. Given the real-world, embedded feedback, we cannot quantify all the voices that contributed. However, included in the data are the following specific sources:

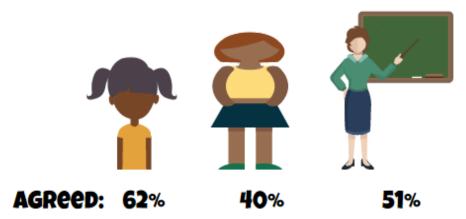
- ⇒ 334 students from 22 schools, 186 parents from 9 schools and 192 staff from 11 schools participated in formal focus groups, led by the CTF
- ⇒ Responses from 1,255 certificated building-based staff (49% response rate) and 5,801 students (33%) in grades 3-12
- ⇒ Principals' assessments and comments at Principals' meetings

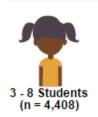
Total Suspensions: High but Declining



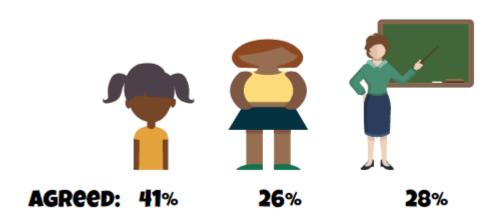
## Survey says...

"Staff and students in my school listen to each other."





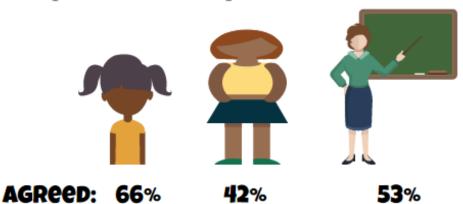
"Students treat each other with respect."



9-12 Students (n = 1,393)

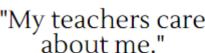


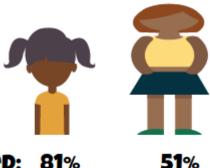
"In this school students can give their opinion and help make decisions."



# Survey says...

"My teachers care





AGREED: 81%

" I feel welcomed and part of my school."



"Our school has positive and upbeat school culture." AGREED: 55%

"We have an effective system for developing & building student social-emotional health."

AGReed: 52%



# 87% of RCSD youth report at least 1 traumatic event

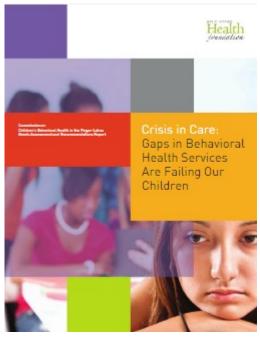


# 40% have experienced more than 3 traumatic events

Source: 2014-15 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

### Other sources say...

The 2015's Commission on Children's
Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes report
Crisis in Care: Gaps in Behavioral Health
Are Failing Our Children highlights the
severity of the issue in our community. It
finds 1) high levels of mental health needs
with increasing prevalence; 2) insufficiencies
in quantity, quality and cultural competence
of, and access to, care; 3) increased



understanding about the toxic stress caused by poverty, structural racism and community violence; 4) an under-prepared, under-resourced and uncoordinated system of response, including schools.

One teacher's wish: That all staff understands how toxic stress affects students' brains, learning and behavior...at which point they can implement different strategies in the classroom to create success.

#### Overheard...

Schools and the staff working in them need supports in the form of resources, materials, programs, including programs and materials that were effective in the past and have been lost. Two additional separate but related themes received much emphasis from staff and parent participants: a. Additional certified teachers, including team teaching, smaller class sizes, enough staff to truly differentiate and meet student needs; and b. Additional specialized staff of various types from support staff to counselors, behavior specialists, mental health professionals, safety officers and others. The need for mental health services was a very strongly articulated need in some schools.

Rochester Association of Paraprofessionals President Angelina Rivera said her members are never included in meaningful professional development activities, despite their front-line role in the support of students.

Amidst calls for better communication from school
staff about their students,
one parent advised staff to
"take time to understand
past 'bruises' inflicted upon
parents" in order to build
trust and move forward.

In the high schools, cultural responsiveness was a consistent issue, and seen as a barrier to authentic communication.

Source: Executive
Summary, RCSD Parent &
Staff Focus Groups on School
Climate. Community School
Taskforce, pending publication.

"Nobody wants to talk about race. Racism is the single most important problem in the Rochester City School District." —Parent

#### Overheard...

Two-thirds of Principals tagged "youth voice" and "physical environment" as the areas most in need of improvement for school climate.

"This school does not do a good job at helping with problems...they just give us long-term or ISS and that doesn't help cause all we do when we come back is start more problems."

"Our school makes sure each student feels comfortable in this school." "The teachers here put extra help into kids who need help. And there are people here watching us to help us not do bad things."

"I feel welcomed in the circle...it helps us calm down."

"The thing that
would help me do
better is maybe a
bigger source of
inspiration, sometimes i give up."



"Nothing my school does well, it's crazy."

#### "Justification"

Urban school systems require a deliberate and thoughtful examination of the context for teaching and learning.

Urban school districts are frequently marked by higher concentrations of poverty, greater racial and ethnic diversity, larger concentrations of immigrant populations and linguistic diversity and more frequent rates of student mobility.

Urban school systems tend to have specific structural challenges that impede their ability to effectively educate the most vulnerable students. While these structural challenges may be evidenced across all types of educational contexts, they are perhaps most potent in urban settings. They include 1) persistently low student achievement, 2) a lack of instructional coherence, 3) inexperienced teaching staff, 4) poorly functioning business operations, and 5) low expectations of students.

# "Relationship Model of Educational Intervention" Dr. Joy DeGruy

"It is important to recognize the complex realities facing urban school systems that challenge the effective development and implementation of AIS. The structural concerns of persistent low achievement, limited teacher and leader capacity, poor data and data inquiry infrastructures and low expectations of students are not new phenomena but, rather, are historic conditions in urban schools. Additionally, the cultural challenges of teacher and leader perceptions about race and class as limiting conditions and producing intellectual deficiencies, and consideration of culturally responsive pedagogy in policies and practices, are bound to macro societal conversations of race and class." (*Dr. Joy DeGruy*)

According to the Minority Reporter: (Rodney Brown May 25, 2016)

The workshops offered by Dr. Joy DeGruy are based on creating culturally responsive and appropriate models that are inclusive, and that include folks who have been historically, traditionally, and disproportionately, left out. As a result, she said, the models address what can be done to promote change, and equality, in school systems.

"When there's a preponderance of evidence you can no longer deny, it causes a paradigm shift, and you never return. There's a preponderance of evidence on the issues surrounding education, such as the intersection of racism, and structural inequalities. It's not like people don't know. We have rooms full with data from years of research."(Dr. DeGruy, 2016)

According to DeGruy's model, the "village," which includes both family and community, is the most important component the District must develop, in order to revive and maintain a provision of cultural continuity and ecological health within the student.

"We want to know why Johnny can't read?" she asked. "What does Serial Force Displacement (SFD) have to do with why Johnny can't read? It started with segregation. And then you had redlining, and, after that, urban renewal, and federal sanctions, and, finally, gentrification. Research from those years tells us, when people are serially interrupted, it produces interpersonal and structural violence. We want to say this has nothing to do with this, and it has everything to do with this."

"The book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* addresses the residual impact of trauma on African descendants in the Americas.

Cohort I: School #5, School #39 & School Without Walls

### **Current Landscape of Race & Relationship in the District**

The Rochester Community Learning Initiative is a joint initiative supported by community members, teachers and administrators of the Rochester City School District. The purpose of the effort is to support an approach for reaching common understandings about factors and practices that support authentic student and community engagement.

The Community Learning Initiative grew out of the necessity for responding to students' needs for a school experience that fosters identity development, adult relationships, self-affirming learning ex-



periences and historical knowledge. Individual and community *healing* is the major focus of Dr. DeGruy's work and research on post-traumatic slave syndrome. The concept identifies and seeks to remedy the consequences of generational enslavement and second-class citizenship on Black communities by acknowledging and appropriately responding to typically unrecognized injuries that are surfacing in our community and schools.

#### **Tentative Sampling of Professional Development:**

- Introduction to African History and Culture
- Teaching Children of Color: Seven Constructs of Effective Teaching In Urban Schools
- RTA/RTC Imaging Ourselves: A Documentary Film Series and Critical Commentary
- RTC Parent/Teacher & Community Education Forums
- Dr. Joyce King, Academy for Diaspora Literacy, Inc. (Keynote Speaker)
- Dr. Adelaide Sanford (Keynote Speaker)
- RTC Looking at Teacher Work
- Math Clinic: Math and Movement with Family Math Nights
- Kemetic (Socratic) Seminars RTC Institute on Teaching and Learning Informed By Cultural Knowledge
- Dr. Noma LeMoine Day Keynote—Language Acquisition and Lin-guistically Responsive Pedagogy

#### **Restorative Practices**

As part of the emerging recognition that traditional punitive forms of discipline are not serving anyone well, the District is working to shift toward restorative practices. Restorative Practices provide a framework, a way of thinking and a set of tools that are used to strengthen relationships and school climate, to collaboratively respond to conflict in ways that repair harm, hold each other accountable for our behaviors and strengthen relationships. The use of restorative justice as a productive way of repairing the harm associated with committing a crime is part of many cultural traditions and has been demonstrated to be effective on the international scale. In recent years, Restorative Practices has come to schools, with large urban schools and districts across the country overhauling discipline, reducing suspensions and increasing attendance, engagement and morale.

When someone breaks a rule, traditional thinking has us asking, "Who's to blame?" and "What's the punishment?" Restorative thinking shifts us toward asking, "What happened?" "Who was impacted?" and "What do we need to do to make it right?" Restorative justice uses these questions, and a circle process to bring people together to:

- Express emotions, reflect and take responsibility;
- Build understanding and empathy as to how others were impacted by actions;
- Jointly create a way forward that remedies the harm done.

#### Punitive Approach Restorative Approach o People and relationships are A School Rule is Broken harmed o Justice is focused on · Justice identifies needs and establishing guilt (WHO?) responsibilities of all impacted Accountability = Punishment · Accountability = understanding impact & repairing the harm Justice focused on offender Victim, offender, and school community have a role in justice · Rules and intent outweigh Offender responsible for behavior whether outcomes is and repairing the harm, working positive/negative toward positive outcomes

When students (or any people) have voice in designing the way to repair the harm, they are more motivated to change the behavior in the future.

Restorative practitioners know that building a positive school community means intentionally fostering the relationships between and among adults and students. They know that when a school designates time, space and protocols to nurture relationships, reflection and self-regulation, students and adults are more mindful of their behavior, and more equipped to resolve inevitable conflicts. The theory is that if this type of climate is built proactively, the formal restorative justice is more effective when you need it, and you'll need it less often.

### **Current Landscape of RP in RCSD**

Many schools, staff and community members have been "doing" restorative work for years, whether they formally used this language or not. Now, we are working to assemble the **resources**, **supports**, **structures** and **practices that promote a restorative philosophy and positive school climate in every school.** 

The first cohort of schools began participating in a Professional Learning Community, **ROCRestorative**, in the 2015-16 school year, joined by a second cohort this year. ROCRestorative schools access formal trainings and onsite support. In keeping with the restorative way of "doing with, not to or for," and in recognition of the fact that restorative practices are a mindset, not a program, each school's journey is taking a different path as they enter the 2016-17 school.

# **Current Landscape of Restorative Practices in the District**

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#### Bright spots are emerging already!

#### **ROCRestorative Schools**

#### **Cohort 1 (15-16)**

#3, #17, #19, #22, #29, #39, #41, #45, #50, #58, Northeast & Northwest @ Douglass, Monroe, Wilson

#### **Cohort 2 (16-17)**

#5, #10, #12, #16, #23, #35, #42, Wilson Foundation, Edison, Integrated Arts & Tech, Leadership Academy for Young Men, Vanguard

#### OVERHEARD...

"With a more restorative model, our attendance is up, our middle school kids want to come to school.

They know we're listening."

—Principal

"We are seeing a tremendous shift in students taking responsibility, with the restorative questions."

—Principal

"I didn't know teachers feel the same things I do in my heart." —Student

"I shove the table right out of our way, we just sit in circle...it takes away the barrier, you can see the body language, you can see the emotion, feel the compassion." —Principal

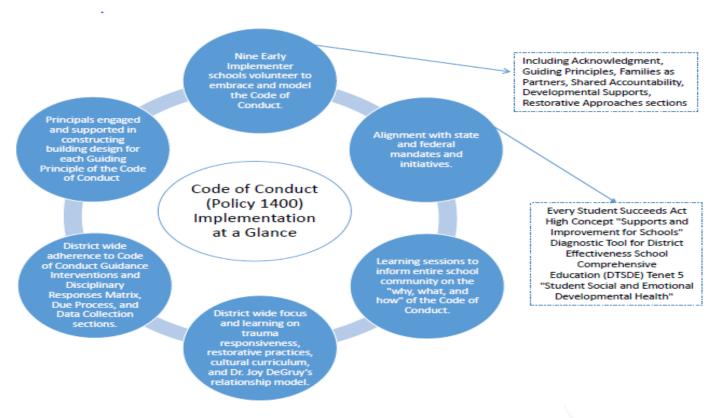
"I was blown away by the students' insights and empathy for each other...it's helped me become more empathetic with some of my more challenging students."

—Teacher

### **Code of Conduct, Policy 1400**

Policy 1400, the new Code of Conduct, is the product of a collaborative effort by parents, students, teachers, District staff and community members seeking to make classrooms and schools in the Rochester City School District safe, supportive and joyful environments for teaching and learning. The Code of Conduct strives to reach this goal by building upon the work of the relationship model and restorative practices through shared accountability. Shared accountability distributes ownership, responsibility, rights and value evenly to every member of the school environment so that all members are empowered and invested in contributing to school climate.

The Code of Conduct codifies the necessary philosophical framework to establish positive relationships and school climate. While certain sections require compliance, such as the Matrix for Guidance Interventions and Disciplinary Responses (better known as the "Matrix") and due process procedures, most of the Code allows for interpretation. Code of Conduct implementation therefore does not dictate to professionals exactly what to do, but rather provides a structure that allows professionals to collaborate and cocreate an implementation plan. This approach allows for both District uniformity and differentiation at the building level as all move in the same direction together while determining for ourselves which methods best fit our specific situations.



### **Current Code of Conduct Landscape**

Many schools adopted, adapted and implemented progressive discipline and guidance interventions before Policy 1400 was passed. Early implementer schools were pooled from buildings that were trained in restorative practices and/or the Dr. Joy DeGruy relationship model. Now the District seeks to increase Districtwide awareness and readiness for Code of Conduct implementation by creating a continuum that:

- 1) Creates an expectation and opportunity for continuous learning
- 2) Provides tangible supports to the schools that are proactively implementing the Code of Conduct
- 3) Shifts hearts and minds and creates an eager want for Code of Conduct implementation by show-casing the school climate improvements in the early implementer buildings

# Code of Conduct Early Implementer Cohort 1 (2016-2017) schools

•#5, #17, #22, #35, #39, #52, School Without Walls, Leadership Academy for Young Men, and P-Tech

#### **Discoveries**

The majority of Principals and staff do not feel well-equipped to support students and build a positive school climate, within current levels of student need, resources, structures and fragmented messaging of District supports. School climate varies greatly across schools.

The philosophical aspects of culture and race, and of institutional racism and implicit bias, have not been recognized and/or acknowledged, and therefore do not inform District and/or school practices.

Schools do not have a valid, consistent tool (e.g., climate survey, online referral system) to monitor and improve school climate.

Too often, our responses to trauma are inadequate.

Systems and resources in each building are not yet adequate to implement progressive discipline as outlined in the "Matrix for Guidance Interventions and Disciplinary Responses Matrix," better known as the "Matrix."

School leaders' reports and disciplinary data from the first quarter of the 2016-17 school year suggest that the work done thus far on restorative practices, and the momentum of the Code, are having a positive effect.

#### Recommendations

Champion a coherent message about restoring relationships as the bedrock of school climate. Develop and implement a unified Professional Development strand that engages all District staff over the next three years. This PD should support the Code through a focus on understanding ourselves and our students (implicit bias, cultural relevance, trauma) and restorative practices. Working title: "Equity Through Relationships: Together We Can!"

Resource schools with a restorative practice coordinator and flexibly deployed staff/contract to operate a Help Zone setting.

Provide structures and resources to enable ongoing training and side-by-side support as schools make the shift to implement Restorative Practices, relationship model and progressive discipline.

Conduct a school climate survey annually, and utilize the results.

Equip all schools with a universal social-emotional learning curriculum.

Support schools in creating master schedules that promote relationships and community building.

#### **OVERHEARD...**

"Allow building leaders some ability to shift re-sources to meet their school's needs. The volume and intensity of need is so high—being responsive requires additional, flexibly deployed staff." —Principals

"We need to find ways to help students selfregulate their behaviors." —Teacher

"I agree completely with the code of conduct but I do not see needed supports in place." —Principal

"More tools ...would help create a better environment. Also, bolstering a more positive, proactive rather than reactive environment would help." —Teacher



We submit that a new lens or framework is needed to improve school climate in the Rochester City School District. This lens is building and restoring relationships.







# Rochester City School District

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