

RCSD program evacuated for lack of documentation

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A program for at-risk teenagers in the Rochester City School District was forced to evacuate its subleased space at the former Blessed Sacrament School building last week because the space lacks a certificate of occupancy, district officials said Monday.

The district knew the site lacked the proper paperwork when school began in September but placed the New Beginnings program there anyway. Chief of Operations Mike Schmidt and Center for Youth Executive Director Elaine Spauld said there were no safety concerns, just bureaucratic hurdles in providing documentation of the building floor plans and other minor items to the state Education Department.

“Honestly, it’s an exit sign that’s not bright enough — that’s what we’re talking about,” Spauld said. “We have to get a few lights up, some windowsills need some priming, and that’s it.”

On Thursday, though, the state decided enough time had gone by and informed the district it could no longer use the building without a certificate of occupancy. The 15 or so students in question instead reported to district headquarters on West Broad Street on Friday and Monday and will be there for at least another day or two until the district can obtain a certificate, Schmidt said.

Spauld said Monday afternoon that a certificate was about to be issued, and that the young men would be back at the Oxford Street building Tuesday.

A statement from Doug Mandelaro, director of communications for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, said that the parish applied for a certificate of occupancy earlier this month, a scheduled inspection took place Monday and that “preliminary indications are that a certificate will be issued.”

The New Beginnings program is for teenagers who have had some contact with the criminal justice system. It has been in several locations over the years, but the Blessed Sacrament location is convenient because it is a short walk away from Center for Youth

“It’s somewhere my staff and I can go and where the guys feel like a family,” Spauld said.

The district agreed in May to sublease the space from the Center for Youth for \$1,200 a month. There was a fire inspection over the summer, Schmidt said, and other basic safety items were taken care of.

Deputy Superintendent Beth Mascitti- Miller said she wasn’t sure who was responsible for any work that needs to be done, but conceded it is “not acceptable” for Rochester students to be learning in space that lacks a certificate.

Part of the complication, Spauld said, was that the building had served as a school in the past without a waiver of some state documentation requirements.

This is the second time in two years a district program has been moved hastily in the middle of the school year. In December 2017, All City High as well as Rochester Prep High School, a charter school, left 690 St. Paul St. over concerns of lingering industrial pollution. The district said the site was safe but nonetheless moved the students to another space on Hart Street.

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New Beginnings program classes were hastily moved to RCSD’s central office this week. JUSTIN MURPHY/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

on Monroe Avenue, where those students get other services.