

SCHOOL 41 REMAKE BEGINS IN EARNEST

RISE

But will new RISE framework make a difference to its staff and students?

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The first day of school is a big deal for Jacelle Taylor, who will be starting kindergarten at RISE Community School. It's also a big deal for the school, which is the pilot of a new model of school transformation for the Rochester City School District. RISE opens Wednesday to replace School 41, which was closed in June due to low test scores.

At the orientation, Jacelle had mixed emotions. When asked whether she were excited, she grew thoughtful. "I don't know," she said. "I think I am."

Her school has been planned through a new process, or framework, that the district is calling Rochester Innovation Schools Empowered. Since 2002, the Rochester City School District has closed 26 so-called failing schools, including School 41. Most of these schools were replaced

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Kanyia William, 6, who is going into first grade at RISE Community School, had the opportunity to visit some of the classrooms before the start of the school year. JAMIE GERMANO/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

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with schools that were not much better and, in some cases, were worse.

The New York state Education Department and the RCSD say they aim to break the cycle with RISE Community School, the first school to be planned through this RISE framework. Here are six features of the new school.

Independent monitor

Rochester has created many promising plans to open new schools, said Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia. The problem has been execution. "Plans have been done that have not been followed," she said.

day, giving them the opportunity to collaborate based on their individual strengths.

"I think that's awesome," said Jasmine Taylor, Jacelle's mother. "We didn't have five teachers growing up."

Creative block

RISE Community School has a science, technology, engineering, art and math theme. It also has a 7.5-hour day, which is one hour longer than the standard school day.

This extra time allows the school to include a creative block. Every 10 weeks children will have the opportunity to select a different creative block activity. Options might include coding, Lego league, art, theater or a physical activity. This was appealing to Sharod Fuller, whose daughter Sha'moir will be a RISE Community School kindergartner. "It's good for them

To ensure compliance, the Education Department installed Frances Wilson as an independent monitor overseeing the opening of RISE Community School. Wilson, a former community superintendent and school turnaround specialist from the Buffalo Public Schools, has been on site overseeing preparations for the first day and beyond.

A former elementary school principal, Wilson has been praised for her role in turning around Buffalo's struggling Hamlin Park School 74. During her tenure, this school's performance improved to the point that it was removed from the state's list of Schools Under Registration Review, which it had been placed upon due to persistently low test scores.

In her position overseeing principals, Wilson helped get 13 other Buffalo elementary schools off the SURR list. Wilson shies away from the term "turnaround expert" but says, "I could certainly be called a person with a lot of experience."

Principal Christine Caluorie-Poles says that the relationship has been one of assistance, rather than surveillance. Wilson has made good suggestions about how to connect with families, for example, and helped connect the school with resources that might help it succeed.

Wilson says that successful schools have a vision and mission that is truly shared by the entire school community. Progress should be monitored on a daily basis. "You are making sure that students are demonstrating evidence that they achieved the learning of the day. If not, where is it lacking?"

She provides biweekly reports to the state about the school's progress. So far, so good, she says. "What I have seen working with new RISE Community School is a high level of commitment and enthusiasm and a desire to work as a unit to provide what is best for kids," she said. "It's an exciting opportunity. I think they are making all of the right steps."

Experienced principal

The Education Department required that the RISE Community School hire an experienced principal. The district selected Caluorie-Poles, who has 26 years of history in the RCSD and was most recently secondary school principal at Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School.

After graduating from college, Caluorie-Poles got a job teaching Spanish at Frederick Douglass Middle School.

to have exercise and extracurriculars," he said. "Get them running."

Culturally responsive teaching

All of the teachers at RISE Community School were required to read neuroscientist Zaretta Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Academic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*.

Hammond writes about how the human brain is wired for "groupism." Dominant cultures in race-based societies create "out-groups." In such societies, dominant groups have unconscious programming that cause them to treat members of the "out-groups" in ways that make teacher-student relationships difficult.

She provides teachers with ways to rewire implicit biases by creating connections and affinities around similarities between teachers and students who may come from wildly different backgrounds.

RISE Community School teachers also attended seminars by Joy DeGruy and Noma LeMoine. Degruy is the author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, a book that "addresses the residual impacts of generations of slavery and opens up the discussion of how the black community can use the strengths we have gained in the past to heal in the present."

LeMoine says that literacy instructors must account for the fact that many children have spent their formative years learning variants of English — African-American English, Native American English, Hawaiian English — that don't quite match standard English that is taught and tested in classrooms.

"We're constantly testing their ability to speak, read and write in Standard American English but we have no systemic programs to facilitate the acquisition of that language," she writes. "They have a linguistic competence in place; the problem is the competence they have does not match the competence teachers expect to hear."

Coaching

RISE Community School will be fully staffed on the first day of school and all teachers are teaching in areas for which they are certified. Sadly, this is not often the case, said Elia.

Several teaching coaches have been hired to help teachers with challenges they may face. They include a

She later served as a teacher, administrator and principal at Thomas Jefferson High School and principal of School 8.

She said she jumped at the opportunity to start a new elementary school in the district.

“It’s an awesome opportunity,” she said. “You are talking about innovation and you are talking about people who are willing to jump in and look at things differently.”

Pod structure

The school will be organized into “learning pods,” which are made up of 60 students, five teachers and three classrooms. Students and teachers will move back and forth between the classrooms according to student need and teacher strength. This is a pilot model in the district, designed to help students form strong relationships with more than one teacher. “Teachers and staff will KNOW YOUR CHILD,” reads a poster for the RISE Community School.

District leaders say that models that encourage children to form relationships with several adults, rather than just a single grade-level teacher, are a common feature in the district’s most often selected schools. Pod teachers will have common planning time every

language arts coach, a math coach, a project-based learning coach, a special education coach and a socialemotional support coach.

“Strong coaches help strong teachers,” said Deputy Superintendent of Administration Beth Mascitti-Miller. “You can’t just say, ‘Go do it.’ It doesn’t work that way.”

All of this sounded good to Taylor, Jacelle’s mother. She said she especially liked the pod structure and has high hopes for RISE Community School. “I like the fact that it’s a new form,” she said.

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Christine Caluorie-Poles, principal at RISE Community School, welcomes students and parents to an open house. JAMIE GERMANO/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE