

Rochester and local partners plan to coordinate services for students, families and the community at School 17

A BEACON IN JOSANA

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At most schools in Rochester, the traditional academic day is already a thing of the past.

◆ Some students are at school eight hours a day or longer, eating three meals and getting extra tutoring and recreation. Some get free health care and school supplies, or access to mentors and top-notch arts education. ◆ School 17, off Jay Street in the JOSANA neighborhood, already has most of those things in place.

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Sheleyana Tores, 10, of Rochester practices her step-dance moves in the gymnasium at School 17 on Orchard Street.

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Beacon

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Now, the district, the city of Rochester and several other local partners plan to push the envelope even further.

They plan to make School 17 the city's first Beacon School — the next generation of community school, where different services are not only in the same building but actively coordinated for students, their families and the rest of the community.

"We see ourselves as a service point for other agencies to do their core work," principal Caterina Leone-Mannino said. "We're not

assuming (the responsibility), but we're recognizing we're the easiest access point."

For example: School 17 now has extended learning time that lasts until 5 p.m. The city then has an on-site recreation program, including dinner, that begins at 5 p.m. and lasts a few more hours.

The two parts of the day are now run separately. Under the Beacon School model, though, the city could provide some programming during the school day, tying into what the students are learning. In theory, it wouldn't cost either side any extra money (financial details have yet to be fully developed).

"Typically, we've had people come to the table because we pay them and they have a contract," Leone-Mannino said. "This is more of a partnership. ... It's getting beyond a shared space agreement to more of a case management approach."

There are a number of different models for community schools in cities across the country, where policymakers have converged on the aim of wraparound services for children in poverty. The Beacon School is based on programs in place in Cincinnati, Ohio and Portland, Oregon.

The school will offer building space and access to consumers to community agencies providing health care, social services and other programs. Those programs in turn will be asked to relocate some of their offerings to the school building and collaborate on how best to align them with what students need.

When School 17 was renovated in the first phase of a massive state-funded capital project, such collaboration was kept in mind. There are spaces connecting the city rec center, the school, the Unity Orchard Street Medical Center and the University of Rochester's Eastman Dental clinic.

The dental center has four dentists who see about 300 of the school's 700 students, according to its practice manager, Tequila Wright. They get pulled out of class when their appointment comes up, saving their parents the task of picking them up and bringing them to an office.

Another JOSANA landmark, the Charles Street Settlement House, is not intimately involved in the current planning but hopes to eventually work with School 17 on adult literacy in a building it owns near the school campus, according to its president, Scott Benjamin.

"It takes everyone pulling in the same direction, and I think people are trying to do that," he said. "Each entity involved has its own regulations and policies, or a viewpoint about what's going to work, so it's not an easy thing. What makes it a viable plan for School 17 is some of the work has already been done."

Mayor Lovely Warren was an early supporter of the concept and made the first public announcement of the School 17 plan at an event Oct. 16.

Her top deputy on education, Allen Williams, said the overarching project will eventually be managed by an appointed site coordinator whose salary will come from a variety of sources, public and private.

Other potential partners include Habitat for Humanity, which has built dozens of houses in the neighborhood; Foodlink, which currently donates some meals; and Center For Youth, which provides emergency services and conflict resolution training for students. Some of those partnerships are already in place and others will be developed over the next year.

"The core services are the same, but we're beginning to blur the line between school and community services, with children and families at the heart of it rather than who's (providing) it when," Leone-Mannino said.

Another key factor is drawing more students from the neighborhood itself. The district lacks the authority to mandate that students attend local schools, and the state only pays for busing for students who travel more than 1.5 miles to school.

As a result of that regulation, many Rochester students choose a fartheraway school, regardless of quality, to avoid a mile-long walk twice a day, especially if their parents can't drive them.

The district tried twice to get state legislative approval for a pilot program at School 17 where even students living nearby could catch a bus. The Legislature never approved it, so this year the district is paying for it from its own budget.

The result is that 44 percent of kindergartners and first-graders are from the neighborhood, compared to about 20 percent of older students. That proximity makes the collected services at the school even more appealing to the students and their families.

Yuleana Rivera, a seventh-grader, lives near the school and often stays there in the evening to play basketball.

"It's very useful because I get to do more things," she said. "They help you with homework and stuff. ... If I was at home, I'd just be on my phone."

The JOSANA neighborhood, long plagued by poverty and violence, has made strides lately in organizing different community groups and advocating for safety, housing, education and jobs. Its leaders see the school as central to that effort.

"The school's vision has always been that we're a beacon at the center of an urban village," Leone-Mannino said. "Now it's all starting to line up."

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Zeaquan Walker, 12, of Rochester loses his headphones, but not his concentration, as he practices his layups Monday in the gymnasium at School 17 on Orchard Street in Rochester.

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Maniah Tores, 9, of Rochester eats a dinner provided by FoodLink during the after-school program Monday at School 17 in Rochester.

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