

School discipline ideas released

District task force offers 6 recommendations

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The Task Force on School Climate, tasked with reforming discipline practices in the Rochester School District, released six initial recommendations Thursday that it hopes can be implemented this year. The six are:

Ongoing professional development on recognizing and fighting racism, conducted by local experts, as well as renewed focus on “culturally informed curriculum and instruction.”

A college-style “Office of Student Life” at each high school that would help develop youth leaders, among other things.

Restorative practices to be introduced at all schools in place of reliance on suspensions. Teachers to be trained in de-escalating conflicts. No suspensions for dress code violations or students using cell phones.

Better communication with students before and after suspensions.

Streamline the Office of Parent Engagement, Parent University and other parent-oriented programs into one more user-friendly office.

Create a “Help Zone” with a trained staff person in each primary school where students can go, at their initiative or a teacher’s, to avoid an escalating problem.

“Creating a culturally responsive environment that is attentive to the socialemotional needs of our children and youth can go a long way in mitigating trauma and creating an atmosphere where children love to learn and teachers love to teach,” said Melanie Funchess, director of community engagement with the Mental Health Association and a member of the task force.

The task force, convened by the district and the Rochester Area Community Foundation in response to startlingly high suspension rates at city schools, is working on the larger project of revamping the district code of conduct.

The direction of the task force has been clear from the beginning: rely less on harsh discipline to deal with behavioral problems, but rather work to engage students and make them feel cared for at school.

A first draft of part of that final document was released in July; the task force is still hoping to elicit more community input before Sept. 19. A survey is available at rscdk12.org/codeofconduct.

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