

## Rochester teachers contract approved

### Contract

#### DISCIPLINE ISSUE ADDRESSED

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The Rochester School Board on Thursday approved a three-year contract with the Rochester Teachers Association, adding a clarification regarding a controversial point about student discipline.

The contract, which was approved Wednesday by 98 percent of union members, calls for a 3.6 percent pay increase, a study of stand-alone middle schools and extra time for teachers to do joint planning. Negotiators on both sides said their work was amicable.

There was some controversy, however, over a clause having to do with the consequences for students who hit teachers or do anything else that could be considered criminal.

“Crimes committed in schools will be pursued as crimes committed elsewhere, to the extent the district has the right to press charges for those crimes,” the new contract states. “In all other events, the district will fully support the teacher who chooses to press charges on his/her behalf.”

The first half of that clause is already part of the existing contract, and some school board members were unclear on the intent of the new language.

After the proposal came out, the district and the union reconvened to spell out what it means exactly for the district to “fully support” a teacher. It will be limited to providing evidence, such as video or docu-

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mentation, when the police request it.

“We didn’t want to be dismissive of the good work the committee on school climate has done,” said school board President Van White.

That committee has been tasked with moving the district away from reliance on suspensions and toward a more restorative model of addressing student behavior problems. Some of its members and supporters had bristled at the language regarding crimes in schools.

In a widely circulated post, teacher Brandon Jones called on colleagues to reject the contract.

“We already disproportionately suspend (black and Latino) kids for minor infractions,” he wrote. “Imagine how much more malpractice will happen with a clause that provides carte blanche for some of our colleagues (who) subjectively label our students’ behavior as criminal without an objective process of determining the validity of the accusation.”

Protesters at Thursday's meeting made the same point, but the school board approved the contract. Board members Cynthia Elliott and Mary Adams voted against it.

"While I do believe our teachers and staff should be safe, at the same time, if you can't work in an urban environment, go work in the suburbs where this kind of thing doesn't happen," Elliott said. "If you're afraid to work in this community, don't be here."

All four of the district's bargaining units now have current contracts.

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**Board member Cynthia Elliott**