

RCSD selects parent ombudsman

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The Rochester City School District has hired veteran educator and attorney Yolanda Asamoah-Wade as its chief ombudsman and compliance officer, an effort to ensure that the city's most vulnerable students are not left behind.

Asamoah-Wade's primary responsibility will be communicating with the families of students with disabilities and those who do not speak English. More generally, she will help address student and parent concerns relating to the new Code of Conduct; which de-emphasizes suspensions in favor of restorative practices.

She has worked in the Rochester, Gates Chili and Churchville-Chili school districts and more recently, as an attorney in private practice.

Her hiring is a step toward addressing the district's persistent problem with ensuring an equitable education for students with disabilities and those who do not speak English well.

A 2014 *Democrat and Chronicle* investigation showed that the district failed to educate Latino students with disabilities in many ways. Earlier this year, the nonprofit Empire Justice Center threatened a class-action lawsuit on behalf of students with disabilities.

Special education director Chris Suriano recently left the district after instituting some systemic improvements. The new code of conduct is of particular interest to families of students with disabilities, who are suspended at a disproportionate rate. Of the district's 28,000 students, 13 percent don't speak English well and 19 percent have a disability.

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