

City schools to accept suburban kids

JUSTIN MURPHY

@CITIZENMURPHY

For the first time in decades, students in suburban Monroe County school districts will have the option to attend some Rochester schools beginning in the fall.

As part of a rewrite of the rules for the Urban-Suburban program, the Rochester School District is accepting applications for students to attend its elementary schools as well as four high schools: Wilson Magnet, Edison Tech, the PTECH program on the Edison campus and the Leadership Academy for Young Men on the Charlotte campus.

Just as suburban districts decide their own criteria for which Rochester students to admit through Urban-Suburban, the city school district will decide which suburban applicants to accept. Officials have promised not to displace any Rochester children, which is why the over-subscribed School of the Arts was not included as an option.

The idea came not only from discussions among suburban superintendents, but also as a result of a \$3.75 million state integration grant the city school district received last December.

Adele Bovard, the Rochester deputy superintendent for administration and former Webster superintendent, said special emphasis has been put on attracting suburban students to the dual-language HOLA program at School 12 and the prekindergarten program at School 50, near the border of the West Irondequoit school district, as well as Wilson and P-TECH at the secondary level.

“We want to start small, then grow it,” Bovard said. Neither she nor Jeff Crane, the West Irondequoit superintendent and chairman of the Urban-Suburban governance committee, would venture a guess as to how many students might participate in the first year.

The city school district also will use the grant money to push cross-district collaborations that stop short of enrollment — for instance, Bovard said, a Spanish class in a suburban school could join with the HOLA students at School 12 for an after-school field trip to a Latino cultural event.

A host of suburban districts have joined the Urban-Suburban program over the last two years; at the same time, several of them have asked for an opportunity to place their own students in some of the specialized programs that only a district of Rochester's size can offer.

Wilson Magnet has the International Baccalaureate program; Edison Tech offers a combination of core subjects and career and technical training; the PTECH program lasts six years and culminates in a (free) associate's degree; and Leadership is an all-boys school that is expanding as Charlotte High School is phased out.

The smallest local district is Wheatland- Chili, with 663 students from prekindergarten to 12th grade. By comparison, School 33 on Webster Avenue, one of three dozen Rochester elementary schools, has 1,074 students from prekindergarten to sixth grade.

Wheatland-Chili Superintendent Deborah Leh said she believes some of her students would be interested in

the chance for a specialized course of study in a larger school.

“Being a small district, we offer certain opportunities for our students ... but if you have a student who’s interested in a career and technical area that’s offered there at Edison, it can really be a good option,” she said. “When Urban-Suburban was originally designed, the whole notion of an exchange program was on the table, and as time goes on we’ve had more of those conversations.”

Suburban students in particular circumstances occasionally attend city schools — for instance, new immigrants and refugees may attend the Rochester International Academy when they first arrive. But it has been at least 20 years since the Urban-Suburban program was fully reciprocal.

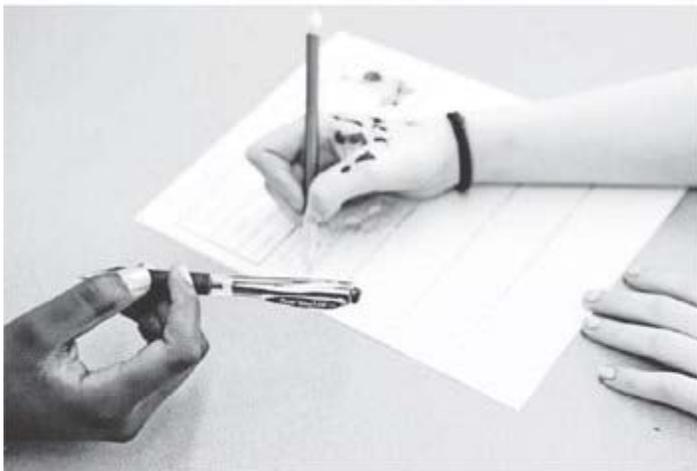
About 700 Rochester students are enrolled in suburban schools through Urban- Suburban this year, up from 587 in 2014-15. Crane said he expects that number to reach 1,000 within a few years.

Urban-Suburban’s governance committee also recently finalized a change to its mission statement, which now reads: “To voluntarily decrease racial isolation, deconcentrate poverty and enhance opportunities for students in the Rochester City School District and in the suburban districts of the Greater Rochester Area.”

That wording opens the door for white Rochester children to apply for spots in suburban schools; until this year, it was available only to minorities.

The application to participate in the program in either direction is at www.monroe.edu/urbansuburban; the deadline for the 2016-17 school year is Feb. 12.

JMURPHY7@Gannett.com



About 700 Rochester students are enrolled in suburban schools through Monroe County’s Urban Suburban program this year, up from 587 in 2014-15.

MAX SCHULTE/@MAXROCPHOTO/STAFF FILE PHOTO