

SUNY Geneseo agrees to partner with city School 19

School 19

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The State University College at Geneseo has signed an agreement to work with Rochester's Dr. Charles T. Lunford School 19 in a partnership similar to the one between the University of Rochester and East High School, pending New York state Education Department grant funding.

The agreement is spelled out in a letter accompanying the School Improvement Grant (SIG) application the Rochester City School District submitted for School 19. If the grant is awarded next month, the partnership could begin midway through the school year.

"We believe the partnership with SUNY Geneseo has the potential to jump-start your school's progress and dramatically increase the level of support your children receive," Board of Education President Van White and Interim Superintendent Linda Cimusz wrote in a letter to parents Thursday.

As at East High, the college would become the educational partnership organization (EPO) of School 19, functioning as the superintendent of the building under

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the ultimate control of the school board. In other respects, however, it would differ significantly.

The School 19 partnership would be significantly smaller in scope. It would include a Geneseo education professor, Jane Morse, assigned full-time to working with teachers; an influx of Geneseo teacher students who could serve as student teachers or tutors; and an expansion of extracurricular opportunities for the school's 370 students.

East was in a more precarious situation when it latched on with UR; the state had given it just a few months to make drastic changes or close. By contrast, School 19 is on the state's "priority" list but does not face the same sort of ultimatum.

The partnership is also contingent on School 19 receiving the five-year, \$2.5 million state grant. There are about 18 grants available for several dozen qualifying schools; Rochester applied for 12 of them. The letter signed by White and Geneseo President Denise Battles makes clear that "all costs associated with the EPO and operation of the school will be RCSD's responsibility, even if such costs exceed the (grant funding)."

The partnership between the UR and East High was developed through negotiations at the highest levels of both entities. By contrast, Geneseo's involvement at School 19 began with the work of four teachers there who reached out to Geneseo as they sought an increased role in decisionmaking.

Those discussions about teaching and other building-level concerns eventually trickled up to leaders at the college and the district to develop a more formal partnership.

"This model for a teacher-led community school really resonates with us because it elevates the teacher profession," said Anjoo Sikka, dean of Geneseo's School of Education.

Like most local colleges, Geneseo already has strong ties to Rochester schools. It runs a two-week STEM program for city children in the summer, and many of its education students do their student teaching or find internships in the district.

Many of the details of the proposal would be fleshed out in community meetings this fall if the grant money comes through. But Sikka said one key element would be the use of integrated coteaching, where a general education and special education teacher share a classroom and place particular emphasis on joint planning. The district made a momentous switch away from a version of integrated co-teaching for its students with disabilities two years ago, angering some teachers.

As at East High, the district's four labor unions would need to come to terms on an agreement separate from their district-wide contracts.

School 19, on Seward Street, serves some of the most at-risk students in the city. Ninety-five percent are economically disadvantaged and 21 percent have disabilities.

Attendance has been improving; chronic absenteeism dropped five points last year, to 25.4 percent. Fewer than 5 percent of students, however, were judged competent on the 2015 state English and math tests. The school will have new leadership next year with or without the grant. Principal Eva Thomas was promoted to serve as the district's senior director of youth development and family services. She will be replaced by Margaret Brazwell.

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SUNY Geneseo President Denise A. Battles

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