

# Monitor tells RCSD to foster confidence

Academic plan suggests three tiers of schools

“intractably unresponsive” posture in recent years.

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Rochester City School District Monitor Shelley Jallow gave a preview of her state-commissioned academic improvement plan Tuesday, recommending the re-establishment of middle schools throughout the city and another re-ordering of cabinet-level leaders.

Neither idea is new to the city, but Jallow said the muddle of grade configurations and poor outcomes in special education demand immediate change.

She noted, too, what board member Willa Powell called the district’s

“You have got to build up your schools so people feel confident that the school down the block from their house is a school where their child can get a good education,” Jallow said.

shuffling the reporting structure beneath newly appointed Chief Academic Officer Kathleen Black. In Jallow’s vision, Black would oversee much of special education and services for English language learners.

“We’ve trying to figure out a better portrait of a graduate and what academic success looks like in Rochester,” Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small said.

Jallow’s job description requires the production of a fiscal and academic plan by Nov. 1. She referenced her fiscal recommendations last week, saying the district needs a significant downsizing in terms of both personnel and buildings.

Distinguished Educator Jaime Aquino in 2018 recommended a chief of special education reporting directly to the superintendent. The person in that job now, Kisha Morgan, is on administrative leave, the apparent result of a murky state investigation into special education.

Deputy Superintendent Genelle Morris said the district’s recent overreliance on local diplomas “signified problems with instructional rigor, absence of support and lack of access to challenging work or materials.” Her concern, she said, was that students were being shunted away from the highest-level education.

On the academic side, she pointed at the profusion of grade configurations in various schools, the wreckage of decades’ worth of school closures and district reorganizations. Students can enter new secondary schools in

“It comes back to the vision of the district and the core priorities outlined ... in the strategic plan,” Jallow said.

That is a bit of a sore spot in the district, where the local diploma graduation rate has risen steadily over the last few years while the Regents rate has been nearly flat. A report released earlier this year showed RCSD’s use

sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth grades, depending on where they go.

Instead Jallow recommended three tiers of schools: K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. That would be advanced through a task force that would report back by the end of 2020.

If that were to happen, it would be the third time that district has attempted to maintain junior high schools in the last 50 years. Both previous times, the idea was jettisoned due to concerns about disciplinary issues in the schools and unconvincing academic returns.

Jallow also recommended

### Strategic plan adopted

Earlier in the meeting, the board approved a new strategic plan for the district, intended to be in place until 2023.

Much of the discussion between the board and administration had to do with fi nding new and better ways to assess students as they graduate. Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small said she is eager to explore avenues to graduation that don't rely heavily on tests.

She pointed to School Without Walls, which has a state exemption from Regents exam requirements in favor of a portfolio model.

of one particular sort of local diploma is wildly disproportionate compared to other large districts in New York.

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