

RCSD likely to start high school remotely

Bus driver shortage cited as the reason

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The Rochester City School District announced Friday a plan for students in grades 9-12 to start the year remotely because of a shortage of bus drivers, bringing tears and howls of frustration from students and parents at an emotional emergency school board meeting.

The district is short 78 bus drivers with no available substitutes, with more resignations coming in each day. It has already adjusted school start times and asked parents to opt out of busing voluntarily, but neither idea served to solve the problem, which exists across the country.

Under the proposed plan, the period of remote learning would only be temporary until the district can hire more drivers, Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small said, though it's far from clear how long that might take. Districts across the country have offered significant cash incentives for new drivers, or even for parents to bring their children to school themselves.

High school students usually take RTS buses, not yellow buses, but during the pandemic many have been taking yellow buses, meaning those drivers can be freed up for younger children.

The first day of school for all students would be pushed back to Thursday, Sept. 9. Wednesday would be a training day for all staff.

"It's not because COVID-19 is preventing us from (reopening)," Myers-Small said. "We just have this crisis that is really crippling us in our ability to do what we need to do."

The school board's approval is required for the changed start date. Myers-Small said she would take the feedback from Friday's meeting and finetune the plan for adoption at another emergency meeting before Tuesday.

Board members Beatriz LeBron and Bill Clark called for school to be delayed for two weeks while the

and that schools are scrambling to adjust to new bell times or risk losing buses.

"It's simply not the case that charter students are getting all of the transportation while district students aren't," she said.

East High School Superintendent Shaun Nelms sought to tamp down the suggestion that his school was receiving preferential treatment. He said East was willing to work with the district on solutions, but not to keep all its students remote.

"This is not about East having something other schools do not," he said. "We are going to continue to work with the district not to have any inequities. But the solution cannot be that, if some kids can't go, no kids can go."

RCSD has responsibility for transporting Urban-Suburban students to and from the four corners of Monroe County each day. Rebecca Hetherington, a member of the Parent Leadership Advisory Council, asked whether they could temporarily take up the cost themselves to help the district.

Leaders of several participating suburban districts did not respond to a request for comment on that idea.

RCSD's high school students would be the only students in the Rochester area to do so involuntarily. Myers-Small framed it as a civil rights issue and called on community partners, including the city and county, to help.

She said the district has been fielding offers for help from outside entities but did not elaborate. Mayor Lovely Warren declined to comment.

Students and parents left the twohour meeting frustrated.

"Everybody knows remote learning sucks," Parent Leadership Advisory Council President Kenyon Binns said. "We've been talking about this for a year. It's not going to work."

Contact staff writer Justin Murphy at jmurphy7@gannett.com.

district finds a better solution. One idea was to solicit volunteers in all grades to move to remote instruction.

Y'Sland Seymore, a student at School of the Arts, said she was at volleyball practice when she heard about the potential move. She and her teammates stopped playing, sat in a circle and prayed it would not come to be, she said.

Like other students, she described a year of slipping grades, motivation and mental health last year during remote learning.

“We can’t possibly be put out into this world and expected to do great things and succeed if we cannot succeed now,” she said.

The audience was particularly galled to hear that, for the moment, buses will continue to carry Rochester students to charter and non-public schools, to Urban-Suburban placements and to East High School, which is administered separately from the rest of the district.

RCSD is required to provide the same level of transportation to outside entities that it does for its own students. Myers-Small said there is a chance the district could “re-evaluate” the transportation it provides to 9-12 students going to other places.

Northeast Charter Schools Network CEO Anna Hall said Friday evening that more than 1,000 charter students already have been denied transportation,



Under the proposed plan, the period of remote learning would only be temporary until the district can hire more drivers, Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small said, though it’s far from clear how long that might take. In this photo, students arrive for classes at Edison Career and Technology High School on Colfax Street in Rochester, Jan. 5.

TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/ROCHESTER
DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

[Copyright © 2021 Democrat and Chronicle 9/5/2021](#)
[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)
