

Five RCSD schools would close under new proposal

No changes will happen without board's approval, with vote in 2022

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle | USA TODAY NETWORK

Rochester School Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small Tuesday presented a proposal for a flurry of school closures and mergers meant to address declining enrollment and realign grade levels.

If adopted by the school board, the district would close the all-boys high school at the Charlotte campus, Leadership Academy for Young Men and temporarily vacate the former Jefferson High School building at Edgerton Park and the Freddie Thomas campus on Scio Street. Five schools would close in total, all of them on various state sanction lists.

- RISE Community School 106 would vacate its current building on Kodak Park and move into the newly renovated Virgil Grissom School 7 building on Dewey Avenue. School 7 would close.
- Adlai Stevenson School 29 would move into the Dr. Charles T. Lunsford School 19 building on

See **PROPOSAL**, Page **6A**



Rochester International Academy, the sole current program at the Jefferson campus, would move to Wilson Magnet High School. JAMIE GERMANO/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

The proposal marks the latest in a jolting series of school closures in the city, a concession to an inexorable downward trend in enrollment. The K-12 student body is now 23,865, down 14% over five years and 22% over 10 years.

Seward Street. School 19 would close, though its students could merge into School 29.

- Montessori Academy School 53 would vacate the Freddie Thomas campus on Scio Street and move into the Flower City School 54 building on Otis Street. School 54 would close.
- The other school at the Freddie Thomas campus, Nathaniel Hawthorne School 25, would also leave, moving into the current Andrew J. Townson School 39 building on Midland Avenue. School 39 would close.
- Northeast College High School would move from the Frederick Douglass campus on Fernwood Park to the Charlotte campus. It would replace Leadership Academy for Young Men, which would close, and would develop a social justice focus.
- Rochester International Academy, the sole current program at the Jefferson campus, would move to Wilson Magnet High School and would lose two grade levels, going from 7-12 to 9-12. Wilson Magnet would eventually become an “international high school” — not to be confused with Rochester Early College International High School, which stands several blocks north on Genesee Street.

Myers-Small said the changes would allow more equitable access to academic and extracurricular offerings to all students, and would bring the total available building capacity to actual enrollment.

“We have a challenging time in our district; we have a lot going on,” she said. “But we need to start the conversations.”

The proposal would mean evacuating four buildings: Jefferson, Freddie Thomas, School 29 and the former RISE Community School and School 41 on Kodak Park. They would not be formally abandoned and turned over to the city of Rochester, however, but rather kept for use as swing space during the anticipated next phase of building renovations.

Leadership Academy for Young Men is the district’s only single-sex school. When Charlotte High School closed in 2016, the hope was that Leadership would expand to fill the space. Instead it is under-enrolled, Myers-Small said.

The slate of changes would mark a further deterioration of Rochester International Academy. Just three years ago it was seen as one of the district’s bright spots and earned national recognition for acclimating refugee students in grades K-12.

Former Superintendent Terry Dade in 2020 closed grades K-6, pointing opaquely at state concerns over student retention as a rationale. Now it will lose two more grade levels and also move away from the Edgerton Park neighborhood, where many refugee families live and receive services. Myers-Small said it fills only 5% of the Jefferson building’s physical capacity.

No changes will happen without the board’s approval, most likely in February 2022.

Myers-Small’s proposal marks the latest in a jolting series of school closures in the city, a concession to an inexorable downward trend in enrollment. The K-12 student body is now 23,865, down 14% over five years and 22% over 10 years. Four elementary schools and several programs closed in 2020. Overall since 2001 there have been 30 school closures, and now potentially five more. Some schools have opened to take their place, and then been closed in turn.

The proposal would also simplify the existing range of grade level configurations across the district. There are currently nine different configurations in different buildings, making school choice complicated. The new goal is to have three types of school, with some exceptions: PK-5, 6-8 and 9-12.

“There really need to be consistent entry points so there is consistent outreach messaging and connection points with families,” Myers-Small said.

According to the superintendent, none of the schools proposed for closure drew more than 5% of applicants in the most recent placement lottery. As part of the changes, the attendance boundaries for several of the schools would stiffen, with students living across town required to find another school near where they live.

There will be a public hearing on the plan and more information for students now attending one of the schools that may close.

The district at the same time is considering changes to its student placement policy, with important implications for transportation.

Also Tuesday, the school board agreed to pay the Rochester Police Department to monitor outside secondary schools at arrival and dismissal time for the next month. Beatriz LeBron voted against the measure and Ricardo Adams, another persistent critic of a police presence, was absent.

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

[Copyright © 2021 Democrat and Chronicle 11/11/2021](#)
[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)
