

Teachers to prioritize wellness Monday, Tuesday

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Teachers in the Rochester City School District will set aside their usual lesson plans Monday and Tuesday and instead lead students in “wellness activities,” part of the district’s ongoing attempt to address children’s social-emotional needs after a year away from school.

In an email Thursday night, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Kathleen Black asked teachers and administrators to use the two days to create “opportunities for students to socialize, engage in cooperative games, create arts and crafts, and have extended free time within their classrooms.”

She continued: “Classroom observations should be focused on capturing the joy, laughter, and smiles of our students across the district and in every school. Artifacts of learning should include positive stories, memories, and pictures of our students being together to support being ‘well’ within our schools.”

Together with the three-day Thanksgiving holiday, the new plan means a week away from the standard academic schedule. The goal, Black said, is “to reinforce the conditions we need to create for our teachers, students, and families to actively engage with each other and our schools.”

The district, like the city around it, has been beset by violence this fall. Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small contracted with the Rochester Police Department to have officers stationed outside secondary schools during arrival and dismissal but has resisted calls from the unions and others to take stronger steps, including putting officers inside schools again.

The Rochester Teachers Association has publicized a number of instances of teachers being injured by students and earlier this week announced an overwhelming vote of no-confidence in Myers-Small’s handling of the situation.

At the same time, parent and student groups have requested more socialemotional resources for students rather than more disciplinary measures.

At Thursday’s school board meeting, Student Leadership Congress President Aaniyah Simmons, a student at World of Inquiry, said the majority of student leaders oppose the reintroduction of police to schools.

“Students feel ... that services to support and help the emotional and mental needs of themselves and their peers would bring a greater and more impactful service,” Simmons said. “We are asking for the district and school administrators to support students in their request for more mental services such as physical spaces to go, counselors to talk to, and an emphasis on mental health in curriculums.”

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Melissa Sample, an English as a new language teacher, greets Leilani Harold as Harold and her mother arrive at Rise Community School No. 106 in this file photo. Teachers will set aside their usual lesson plans Monday and Tuesday and instead lead students in “wellness activities,” part of RCSD’s ongoing attempt to address children’s social-emotional needs after a year away from school.
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