

## Cutting violence is tough issue for schools

### Justin Murphy

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Rochester School Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small Wednesday pushed back against union demands for a firmer response to violence in city secondary schools, instead laying out a series of incremental solutions within a “nurturing environment of equity.”

Most notably, Myers-Small did not endorse a return of Rochester police officers to RCSD secondary

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schools. They now are monitoring student arrival and dismissal outside secondary buildings; the school board will decide Tuesday whether to continue that arrangement.

“Over the past few weeks, a narrative about our schools has been created that depicts our schools and our scholars negatively,” Myers-Small wrote in an open letter. “Disruptions happen in schools, and while they are not acceptable, the way in which we speak about our students has a lasting impact on them, our families, and this community.”

Instead, Myers-Small listed a series of steps the district has taken in the areas of student conduct and violence, social-emotional supports and staffing shortages.

Among them:

- Revisiting individual school security plans and dismissal procedures at several district secondary schools, including the presence over the past two weeks of uniformed police officers.
- Installing “lockdown buttons” in several schools. The buttons “alert students and staff to follow lockdown procedures” and also place an automatic call to 911.
- Providing written resources to staff and the community, including a social-emotional learning guide and student support services resource guide.
- Redoubling recruitment efforts in key areas, including the introduction of incentives for bus drivers.

Others were more vague, even in critical areas. For example: “Aligning resources to provide targeted support to schools, students, and the community, and professional development to staff, while expanding multi-tier support services.”

Myers-Small also asked the public to attend a “community action initiative” from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at Franklin High School.

### Unions publicizing incidents

The Rochester Teachers Association and the district’s other bargaining units have made increasingly urgent calls in the past two weeks for a return to police officers in schools and harsher discipline for violent students. They have publicized a number of instances of violent altercations, many at Franklin.

On Sunday, RTA President Adam Urbanski requested that Myers-Small place any student who acts violently in remote learning.

“This would also protect the right of all other students to learn in a safer environment and would diminish the likelihood of further injury to students and school staff,” he wrote.

Myers-Small responded by saying the suggestion would “violate educational law (and) student privacy rights.” The school board tabled a vote on further RPD presence at its meeting last week.

A coalition of local progressive groups, meanwhile, urged Myers-Small to reject the unions’ suggestions. “We believe it is possible to create and sustain a healthy school culture without exclusionary discipline and police tactics,” they wrote.

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**Myers-Small**

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