

APPENDIX 22:
School Climate Advisory Committee Recommendations



School Climate Advisory Committee Recommendations

Recommendations for Improving School Climate In the Rochester City School
District

Presented to the Board of Education on 09.13.2018

2017-18 School Climate Advisory Committee Members:

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Executive Summary

The School Climate Advisory Committee (SCAC) was formed through the establishment of Board Resolution No. 2016-17: 854. This resolution charged the group with providing recommendations for improving school climate in the Rochester City School District within a year of formulation. In addressing this charge, the Committee formed three subcommittees with different focuses: (1) partnerships in support of the whole child; (2) the needs of the whole child in relation to school atmosphere; and (3) accountability methods to track school climate efforts in support of the whole child.

These recommendations do not take the place of the original recommendations from the Community Task Force, but are additional to those previously set forth and included in this report.

Below are highlighted recommendations from the three sub-groups that made up the school climate advisory committee:

Highlighted Recommendations from Each Group:

Partnership Recommendations

1. Establish a “Collaborative Engagement Policy” that fosters authentic dialogue and seeks out established networks/ associations/ partnerships, and interested community members to contribute to key educational decision making
2. Implement collegial circles, multi-directional training and professional development for district staff, parents, students and community members on effective collaborative processes and civic engagement
3. Include an assessment of “local student, parent, and community engagement” in all administrators’ annual performance reviews
4. Connect interested and potential student, parent, and district leaders with opportunities for further leadership skill development.

REFLECT: A commitment to “authentic partnership” in the District budget

Atmosphere Recommendations

1. Expand student success beyond academics through the emphasis of life skills and social-emotional learning
2. Enhance the development of culturally responsive school environment
3. Collaborate with students, parents and staff through consistent programming and support for constituent-generated initiatives with emphasis on dynamic engagement
4. Create and uphold a safe, welcoming and supportive physical environment for students and adults

REFLECT: A commitment to funding priorities for school atmosphere in the District budget.

Data Recommendations

1. Complement the data points tracked in the Roc 3D key performance indicator with a uniform referral process, extracurricular activities, attendance and restorative practices
2. Support accessibility, transparency and accountability in data collection and dissemination
3. Increase the utilization and functionality of existing data systems and resulting analysis.


REFLECT: A commitment to data transparency and accountability in the District budget.

Introduction

School Climate is widely recognized as a central element in student achievement and school improvement. School climate “refers to the school's effects on students, including teaching practices; diversity; and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students.” Closely related, is also school culture, which “refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share.” Having a positive school climate and school culture is crucial for the promotion of student learning (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), 2018).

Partnering with students, families, and their communities is essential for improving school climate. Having recognized this, and in an effort to support continued community representation and partnership with the district, the Rochester City School District (“RCSD”) Board of Education called for the formation of the School Climate Special Committee, otherwise known as the School Climate Advisory Committee (“SCAC”). Through Board Resolution No. 2016-17: 854, the Board sought to create a structure and mechanism whereby community members with an interest in improving school climate could interact with district personnel and share recommendations to the Board. This work both reaffirms the 2014 recommendations of the Community Task Force on School Climate (CTF) and takes them to the next level. Formed in September 2017, the SCAC was charged with providing the Board with written recommendations on improving school climate by September 2018.


The current committee is comprised of district administrative staff members, East High administrative staff members, representatives from the Parent Advisory Council, Bilingual Education Council, the Special Education Advisory Council, and several community members nominated through the CTF Facilitators Group. Throughout the course of the year, Committee members shared their varied perspectives, knowledge, and expertise to review current RCSD data and processes in order to improve school climate. The group approached this charge by centering the whole child within the context of the community. In doing so, the group formed three subcommittees with different focuses: (1) partnerships in support of the whole child; (2) the needs of the whole child in relation to school atmosphere; and (3) accountability methods to track school climate efforts in support of the whole child.



Discussions that led to the recommendations herein were dynamic and grounded in both today's realities and the school communities we aspire to realize. The reader will find areas where the Committee did its best to reconcile challenges imbued with more dissonance, either through compromise and/or through multi-staged action with further engaged study.

In addition, the Committee benefitted from work accomplished by associated efforts, namely:

- The Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality (TAC-D) professional development and strategic planning, which is an intervention in response to the NYS Attorney General's sanction on RCSD for disproportionate suspensions and special education classification of young male students of color. TAC-D carried out over 40 hours of sessions led by facilitators from New York University's TAC-D group, with more than 60 participants, including district and building level leadership and staff, parents, a student and community partners. The approach emphasizes engaging local stakeholders in finding solutions together through shared definitions of the problem in the context of research and an analytical lens for examining and problem-solving local practices--both individual and structural.
- Bright Spots assessments in several schools, in conjunction with Roc Restorative, MK Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, Eagle Rock School and Teen Empowerment, which spent a full day in each school with a team of at least 8 volunteers who split up and documented positive markers of school climate and shared them with building level administrators in real time.
- While we work to understand our local realities, we also learn from and contribute to the national project that is taking shape in districts like ours to shift urban school culture away from perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline and toward communities where we love to teach and learn. To assist in this effort, SCAC called upon invaluable advisement from the Advancement Project as we learned through and improved implementation of our living Code of Conduct.



Lastly, in the midst of the School Climate Advisory Committee's (SCAC) work, the Board of Education (BOE) invited the Committee to urgently review several policy questions and concerns. As a result, the Committee worked diligently to provide the BOE with recommendations that were eventually accepted. It is important to note that the Committee also provided timely recommendations for the proposed 2018-19 Budget during the budgetary process. We want to thank the BOE for their foresight in using this committee's expertise to inform the decisions made. All previous and ongoing recommendations on school climate have been included in the addendum section of the report.




The Recommendations

The Importance of Authentic Partnerships in School Climate

School climate is a reflection of the communities we build together. The community aspect of school climate refers to the quality of relationships within a school and also includes the school's connectedness, respect for diversity, and partnerships with other members of the community. School and community must work together, relying on one another to successfully cultivate safe, healthy learning environments. To get there, RCSD and the Board of Education must establish intentional structures that facilitate pathways and remove barriers to authentic community partnerships.

In accordance with the above principles, we propose that the Board will:

1. Establish a "Collaborative Engagement Policy" that fosters authentic dialogue and seeks out established networks/ associations/ partnerships, and interested community members to contribute to key educational decision making. This policy would ensure:
 - That the value of parent, student, and community collaboration is a priority and is evident in practices throughout the district
 - That the district, in conjunction with **authentic participatory community involvement**, establishes goals and metrics to ensure that student, parent, and community dialogue is integrated into decision-making at the district and at the school-level. We recommend:
 - Organized, grassroots student, parent, and community input by those who interact in the life of the school. Invite and value local input on local school operations, including structural changes and curriculum implementation
 - Continuity of community engagement to build on efforts of past and current recommendations, initiatives, and committees that extends beyond district administration turnover
 - Assess the functioning of "school-based planning teams" (SBPT) in stakeholder representation and practice at each school building.

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- Provide training, tools, accountability measures (including and exceeding minimum Title 1 requirements) that assure meaningful, shared involvement of all stakeholders, including students and parents who tend to be under-represented and/or under-heard.
2. Implement collegial circles and multi-directional training and professional development for district staff, parents, students and community members on effective collaborative processes and civic engagement. Specifically:
 - Provide train-the-trainers skills for students to train RCSD leadership, staff and other students.
 - Provide additional training for parents to engage and train other parents/families and to engage staff in relationship-building.
 - Create space for staff to lead collegial circles within and between school buildings.
 - Include peer-led and constituent-led trainings on the Code of Conduct (guiding principles, rights and responsibilities and use of intervention matrix), restorative practices, trauma-informed engagement, collaborative leadership and other tools.
 - Work with local leadership partners with distinct areas of expertise
 - More systematically utilize tools already created through collaborative district-community generated work and already paid for by RCSD funds, such as the Code of Conduct training and promotional videos.
 3. Connect interested and potential student, parent, and district leaders identified through these processes with opportunities for further leadership skill development
 4. Include an assessment of “local student, parent, and community engagement” in all administrators’ annual performance reviews. Where prior efforts have developed existing assessments, re-engage a team of students, parents, and community members with administrators to review and/or amend and then create a plan for implementation of the assessment process
 5. Reflect a commitment to “authentic partnership” in the district budget

The Importance of Atmosphere in School Climate

Students, parents, and school professionals each have a unique role in creating a safe (physical and emotional), caring and engaging environment that nurtures social, emotional, civic, and academic growth for all students. Today, school administrators and teachers alike recognize and embrace the fact that we need to support the whole child in order to embed a love of learning that will be transformational in an individual student's life. As well, our schools are a primary building block of strong communities where students, families and educators can grow together, feel connected, supported and interdependent in preparing each generation to confront the world's challenges and share its opportunities.

The physical attributes of a school building, individual attitudes about the school and education, and the quality of communication and relationships in the building, all affect school climate. A nurturing school environment will feel welcoming to students, parents, and school professionals, and make students excited to learn.

In accordance with the above principles, we propose that the Board will:

1. Expand student success beyond academics through the emphasis of life skills and social-emotional learning ("SEL"):
 - Increase trauma-informed school cultures through training, coaching, and adequate staffing. Expand restorative practices with fidelity in order to repair relationships and create a positive school climate
 - Expand social-emotional competency development through intentional SEL strategies and positive adult modelling
 - Ensure adequate personal and professional supports for those impacted by vicarious trauma (i.e., those working with persons impacted by traumatic events)

2. Enhance the development of culturally responsive school environments through:

- Culturally Relevant Education: We support the prioritization of culturally relevant education for K-2 and urge expansion into other grades
- Continuing the work of developing and implementing Dr. Joy DeGruy's relationship model of education (e.g., Victorious Minds Academy)
- Reviewing hiring and retention policies to grow a professional body that is reflective of the communities served by RCSD.
 - Include proactive inspirational pathways to recruit RCSD students to become teachers and counselors.
 - Work to retain these students once they have joined our staff through continued investment and support. Potential retention strategies should include the revision of seniority policies, and open discussions with unions regarding contract decisions that lay off newer teachers of color and interrupt opportunities to build tenure when layoffs do occur
- Continue and expand training of all school staff in the anti-racism field of study, implicit bias, Code of Conduct principles and application, school climate and community building tools, skills and restorative practice.
- Collaborate with students, parents, and staff through consistent programming with emphasis on dynamic engagement, such as:
 - Youth-led school orientation/welcome program
 - School-level annual meetings to establish school-wide norms, expectations, and vision to create shared understanding in each building
 - Supporting and encouraging students and school staff to envision and collaboratively set up in-school or after-school clubs and activities

- Creating and disseminating brief, user-friendly and living versions of the Code of Conduct (Policy 1400) specific to each group to establish shared accountability and power
 - Encourage and provide support (in the form of resources, non-instructional time, incentives, etc.) for parents, students and building staff to do regular internal assessments of their own school's climate and carry out initiatives in response to their findings
3. Create and support safe environments for success through a balanced understanding of different approaches to school safety. Acknowledge that studies show how enforcement apparatus is prone to having a harmful impact on both the quality of school climate and on increased risk of arrest for student behaviors. Heightened concerns for school safety have brought about approaches that are more punitive in nature at the expense of school atmosphere. Thus, we recommend that RCSD must:
- Address how the first point of contact sets the tone for the day by training staff on the use of metal detectors and include how to make the focus a positive experience while ensuring the safety of all. Although the use of metal detectors is a current policy, we recommend that the Board of Education conduct a study to evaluate the practice for impact on School Climate and Safety and necessity moving forward (e.g., "Weapon Possession" measure in annual VADIR data)
 - Recognize that the most effective way to ensure safety in schools is through the development of positive, healthy relationships between students and adults, which includes School Security Officers ("SSOs") and School Resource Officers ("SROs"). As a reflection of the national and local discourse, we recognize that police in schools are perceived both negatively and positively. To minimize potential damage and promote positive relationships with law enforcement officers in our buildings:
 - Encourage proactive engagement of SROs with students and staff to develop positive relationships. While the use of SROs is a current policy, we recommend that the Board of Education conduct a study to evaluate the practice for impact on School Climate and Safety, particularly in the school discipline context, and necessity moving forward

- Articulate the differences and the interdependency of the working relationship between SSOs and SROs to secure the safety of school buildings. The role of a district-hired SSO should be more strategically used to intervene proactively during incidents so that City Police Department SROs are not the first responders
 - Increase regular training in youth development, restorative practices, trauma-informed care, and other skills necessary for working effectively with students to both SSOs and SROs (which needs to be included in union and RPD contracts).
4. Create physically welcoming and supportive environments for students and adults through:
- Board liaisons conducting walk-through activities twice a school year with school staff, parents and students to identify and assist in addressing (i.e., advocate for at the Board level) the following physical conditions in school buildings:
 - Welcoming, clean bright entrance ways throughout the day
 - Conditions of halls and walls, signage, decorations and art work
 - Playground conditions and recess facilities
 - Cleanliness and functionality of water fountains
 - Cleanliness and functionality of student bathrooms (i.e., stall doors, sinks, toilets, soap dispensing, feminine hygiene products)
 - Proper lighting and placement of security cameras in blind areas
 - Appropriate adult monitoring of bathrooms, stairwells and where students congregate outside of instructional times
5. Reflect a commitment to improve school atmosphere in the district budget

The Importance of Data Accountability and Transparency in School Climate

Publicly sharing school climate data increases transparency and encourages community buy-in for school climate growth. Data driven school climate measures assist in establishing a shared definition of “School Climate.” Shared data also helps drive use of a “continuous improvement” model of evaluation through Practice—Measure—Improve—and Repeat.

There are three central questions regarding data accountability and transparency: (1) how will the district measure the climate of its schools; (2) how will those measures be readily available to staff and community; and (3) how will the data be used towards quality improvement in school and district climate?

We applaud the district’s pending rollout of the ROC 3D Key Performance Indicator Dashboard. In addition to this existing framework, we recommend the inclusion of measurements that more comprehensively track efforts and define school climate.

In accordance with the above principles, we propose that the Board will:

1. Complement the data points tracked in the ROC 3D Key Performance Indicator with the following:
 - Uniform Referral Process – Roll-out and consistently use the uniform, district-wide, electronic referral system per the Code of Conduct (Policy 1400) that captures all of student time away from formal instruction (e.g., a computerized tracking form). Per the Code of Conduct, the information gathered from the tracking process will be used to inform teachers and administrators about students and staff who are in need of support, as well as the effectiveness of applied strategies and supports
 - Extracurricular Activities – Track student participation in areas of extracurricular involvement, such as arts, STEM, athletics and interest clubs. Learning occurs at anytime and anywhere and should be captured holistically


- Attendance – Consistent, positive student-adult relationships is key. All staff attendance at the building level should be reported on the attendance dashboard, while maintaining the requisite personnel confidentiality
 - Restorative Practices – Maintain a data-driven mechanism to monitor the expansion and implementation per school. This mechanism must be determined in conjunction with the Designated Restorative Practices Coordinator
2. Support accessibility, transparency, and accountability in the data collection for a truer picture of school climate in each building. Data dissemination should engage students, parents, staff, and community partners while being mindful of requisite confidentiality concerns. Accordingly, it is recommended that:
- School data reports must be available in multiple languages, particularly the dominant languages spoken in RCSD
 - Users must be able to access school climate data (including suspensions and other indicators) on a single dashboard as well as its own designated tab on the main RCSD website and be available by individual school. School Climate data should ideally encompass:
 - Overall school climate score
 - Student attendance
 - Teacher attendance
 - Staff attendance
 - Achievement
 - Survey participation and/or results
 - Restorative practices
 - Non-instructional time/ time spent out of class
 - Suspension (not overall suspension rate but the specific “disruptive, defiant, disrespectful” parameter that indicates positive/negative interactions between staff & students)
 - A formal observation analysis

- Enrollment and withdraw
 - Student engagement as measured by extracurricular participation
 - OPE complaints
 - Ensure that data collection is monitored as reports are made available per their required intervals
 - Per the SRO contract between the City and the School District, the safety and security data collected must be disseminated in the aggregate to the public at the end of the second and fourth quarters. Because of the impending *Raise the Age* law, tracking appearance tickets will be of utmost importance
3. Increase the utilization and functionality of existing data systems and resulting analysis:
- Increase the number of responses from students, parents, staff and community members to the school climate survey
 - Provide periodical data summaries of Gaggle and Speakout information gathered per building (i.e., the nature of interventions used and complaints received)
 - Educate families on the utility of the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) complaint process. Improve RCSD internal process for documenting DASA complaints so that it can be a valuable school climate indicator
4. Reflect this commitment in the district budget

Conclusion and Next Steps

During the course of the assigned year, School Climate Advisory Committee worked diligently to identify facets of the school environment, which if improved, would better support the district's students. The Committee agreed that a positive school climate is one that intentionally involves the community and embraces the whole child in a safe and supportive atmosphere. Additionally, data must be transparent and empower relevant members of the local community to hold the district accountable in order to establish a shared definition of School Climate. The aforementioned recommendations are intended to help support an improved, positive school climate in the Rochester City School District. The School Climate Advisory Committee requests that the Board of Education and Rochester City School District Administration act on the following activities regarding our recommendations:

1. Board assessment of each recommendation to:
 - Accept / Reject / Return for further study
- 2) Arrange for the SCAC to present our recommendations to the RCSD Leadership
 - Suggested target date: end of October
- 3) Have RCSD leadership assess each recommendation to:
 - Provide high-level steps to implement (e.g., the "SMART" goals framework used for District Improvement Plans)
 - Estimate timing to implement
 - Identify the RCSD lead for accountability purposes
- 4) Superintendent will identify an RCSD staff person to oversee the implementation of each approved recommendation
 - Suggested target date: mid-November

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- 5) The Superintendent (or designee) to report back on implementation plans to the Board of Education
- Suggested target date: end of December/ January

The Code of Conduct

As noted in its acknowledgement, the Code of Conduct (CoC) or Policy 1400:

“is the product of a collaborative effort by parents, students, teachers, District Staff and community members seeking to make classrooms and schools in the Rochester District safe, supportive, and joyful environments for teaching and learning” (p. 1).

In essence, the CoC is “a living document” that fosters school climate and propels it throughout the District. As such, part of the assigned charge from the Board of Education (BOE) to the School Climate Advisory Committee (SCAC) in 2017 was to review this document. Thus, SCAC assessed the CoC for its impact on school climate, and provided several recommendations for the Code’s improvement. The next two featured documents present edits and suggestions for the amendment of the the Code of Conduct:

1. Policy Recommendations

These are specific to “Appendix C” (pp. 66-69) of the Code of Conduct, specific to the management and adjudication of long-term suspensions. Highlighted segments indicate where change recommendations have been made.

2. Recommendations for the Matrix and Proposed Changes Based on NYSBBA Updates

At the request of the Board Policy Committee, SCAC provided recommendations on the *Proposed Changes Based on NYSBBA Updates* version of the Code of Conduct, currently being considered. These were presented to the Policy Committee in December 2017. Finally, the document also shows where the Committee has suggested changes to the Code of Conduct Disciplinary Matrix (pp. 28-39). These changes have been suggested via track changes.



Addendums