



TO: RCSD Superintendent

RTA President

RCSD Board of Education

RE: **Collective Impact Parent Public Statement**

Position on Racial Trauma Across the Rochester City School District

DATE: June 2022

ROC the Future Alliance is a cross-sector alliance of over 60 community institutions, organizational partners, and parent leaders focused on improving outcomes for children and families in the City of Rochester. The Parent Engagement Collaborative Action Network (PECAN) has organized collective parent voice organizations, including: New York Charter School Association; BIPOC PEEEEEEK; Parent Leadership Training Institute; and other parent-led organizations around Monroe County to encourage individual and organizational action to collectively drive change that is transformative and sustainable.

Regrettably, we find ourselves again making national news for the wrong thing. The actions reported last month by some families at, but not limited to, School of the Arts (SOTA) are far from meeting the standard of what any parent would expect within a classroom. The incidents happening within RCSD classrooms in short are unprofessional, violent and emotionally and spiritually traumatizing for children and families. As parent leaders, we understand that one of the key duties of educators is to protect the emotional and physical safety of the children in their care. We find that this responsibility rests not only with the teachers and administrators but with every paid employee of the Rochester City School District. There has to be accountability for the actions of adults in these spaces.

Inflicting racial violence against children within RCSD is not isolated to SOTA. The American Academy of Pediatrics recently issued a policy statement that “Directly and indirectly, racist systems and policies contribute to health conditions that can impact a child for life. When children are targets of racism, they experience chronic stress and are flooded with stress hormones like cortisol, leading to inflammatory reactions.” Dr. Erica Lee, a psychologist at Boston Children’s Hospital, noted that “Racism can feel deeply personal for a child. Children may experience it in the form of racial slurs. They may encounter adults who treat them as racial stereotypes, not as individuals. They may see their parents slighted or



treated with disrespect. “Children can internalize harmful stereotypes. Over time, experiencing or witnessing discrimination can negatively impact a child’s identity and self-esteem.”

That said, we collectively write this letter since we all share the same belief that the social-emotional health of our children is paramount to their ability to thrive inside and outside of school. We can not tear down their self-esteem with microaggressions and direct racist interactions and expect good outcomes.

We do not view this as an isolated incident because as parents in this district we know it is among many other incidents. We want to see policies and practices change alongside the firing of Mr. Rausch for his violence against students.

How many more incidents like these go unreported? While preparing this letter, the urgency of this matter was only reinforced with the despicable behavior of educators at School 17 and the language used to describe our scholars. As parents, we are terrified that adults who think or speak in this manner work with children. We understand that teaching is a stressful profession but when the stress causes thoughts and behaviors like the two incidents of note here at SOTA and School 17, then those teachers need to find a different profession.

We are prepared and well positioned to take action that supports parent engagement and leadership within the district and would like to make these recommendations to take further action. These actions include:

- Educating parents and the community on NYSED policies and practices that allow the application of teacher discipline, such as Section 3020-a of the NYS Education Law, regarding the Teacher Discipline Process, **and** the Moral Character Actions (Part 83).
- Sharing information with parents and the broader community on appropriate teacher practice, cultural responsiveness, and teacher diversity efforts, as well as teacher discipline standards, including policies that impede swift and consistent action.
- Engaging policy makers and our state delegation to meet with parents and family members on these policies, and to hear firsthand perspectives from students and families on this issue.
- Partner with Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute to report on and share data on the impact of lack of teacher diversity and culturally responsive curriculum on students and teachers led by RtFA Teacher Pipeline Initiative.
- Support the activation of the National Parent Union, organizing parents to become trained leaders to amplify and bring additional attention to changing state legislation to increase parents' rights to information about teacher transfers and systems of accountability to protect our children within classrooms.

We encourage RCSD to stand with us to increase understanding within the community on our collective power to hold and create change. We must work together to support equity and excellence in education, promote antiracist practices, and proactively protect children,

For the Children,

Collective Impact parent groups that have signed on in agreement of this public statement are:

RtFA: Parent Engagement Collaborative Action Network
Parent Co-Chairs: Maurice Haskins / Nahmese Becot



Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute

BIPOC PEEEEEEEEK

Parent Mental Health Advocate: Sara Taylor

