



# Planning for Purpose

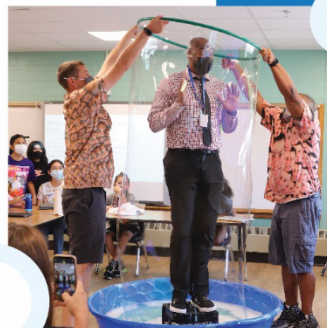
Rochester Public Schools Strategic  
Action Plan 2022-2025

Prepared by

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# A Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

The Rochester Public Schools (RPS) Strategic Action Plan is a complex document. It includes 26 strategic initiatives that are grouped together in six strategic focus areas and that are aimed at achieving 15 broad objectives. That level of complexity is necessary and appropriate for a strategic plan that will guide the work of an 18,000 student school district for the next three years. But that kind of complexity could also be a barrier to the success of the plan, as people struggle to understand and remember how all of those initiatives and objectives are connected to each other and how they add up to more than the sum of their parts.

It is often said that organizations need to “keep the main thing the main thing” in order to achieve their objectives, and so what is the main thing of the RPS Action Plan?

For me, the main thing is *purpose*: purpose for students and purpose for educators.

Researcher Heather Malin of Stanford University defines purpose as, “a source of drive in our lives that integrates meaningful and future-minded goal setting, beyond-the-self motivation, and action to accomplish goals.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, purpose is a combination of setting goals that matter, reaching beyond the self to achieve those goals, and taking action to put those goals in motion.

Studies have shown that when students have a sense of purpose for their learning in school and for their lives, in general, they are more likely to work hard, persist through difficulties, perform well academically,



and develop strong social and emotional skills.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, research has shown that adults who feel that their lives have purpose are more likely to be healthy, happy, and economically successful.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, one recent study found that only 24% of U.S. high school seniors have identified and are working to achieve a purpose in their life – a figure that is even lower in the younger grades.<sup>3</sup>

A wide array of initiatives in the RPS Strategic Action Plan are aimed at helping both students and educators recognize and realize their purpose in school and in life. For example, the plan calls on us to help all students develop a positive vision of their future and powerful plans for postsecondary education and a career. The plan also puts in motion the development of multiple tiers of academic and social-emotional support within our schools to ensure that all students are able to achieve their goals.

The RPS Strategic Action Plan also launches initiatives to make the work of educators and other staff in Rochester Public Schools more purposeful and rewarding. The plan will push us to reinvent our school improvement planning process to proactively address the biggest challenges and take advantage of the biggest opportunities facing our schools. The plan will also enable us to strengthen the cultures of our schools and our district to promote authentic collaboration and to create environments in which all staff and students feel they belong and can be their best selves.

Purpose means something different to every person who is a part of the Rochester Public Schools community. For some people, purpose focuses on a career while, for others, it focuses on a cause, and for still others it focuses on a community. But wherever people focus their purpose, having a purpose enables people to be proactive rather than reactive. Purpose also empowers people to prioritize what is really important and to avoid being drawn into debates and distractions that take them temporarily or deeply off track.

I hope you will join me in making ***purpose*** the north star that Rochester Public Schools will look to when we encounter the twists, turns, and roadblocks that inevitably lie in our way as we work together to implement the RPS Strategic Action Plan in the challenging and promising years ahead.

Sincerely,



Kent Pekar, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to the RPS community for your engagement and feedback throughout the development of the Strategic Action Plan. A special thank you to the action working group members who spent many hours guiding the plan's development, and to the students, parents/caregivers, staff, and community representatives who participated in focus groups and responded to surveys.

We are grateful for the RPS staff who served as content leads on the action working groups and Hans Xu, a high school senior who served on an action working group and reviewed relevant research literature.

A high level of engagement from school board members in the action working groups also contributed to the development of a comprehensive final plan. Also, thank you to the Director of Strategic Planning, Denise Moody, and Superintendent Kent Pekel for your engagement and partnership during this process.

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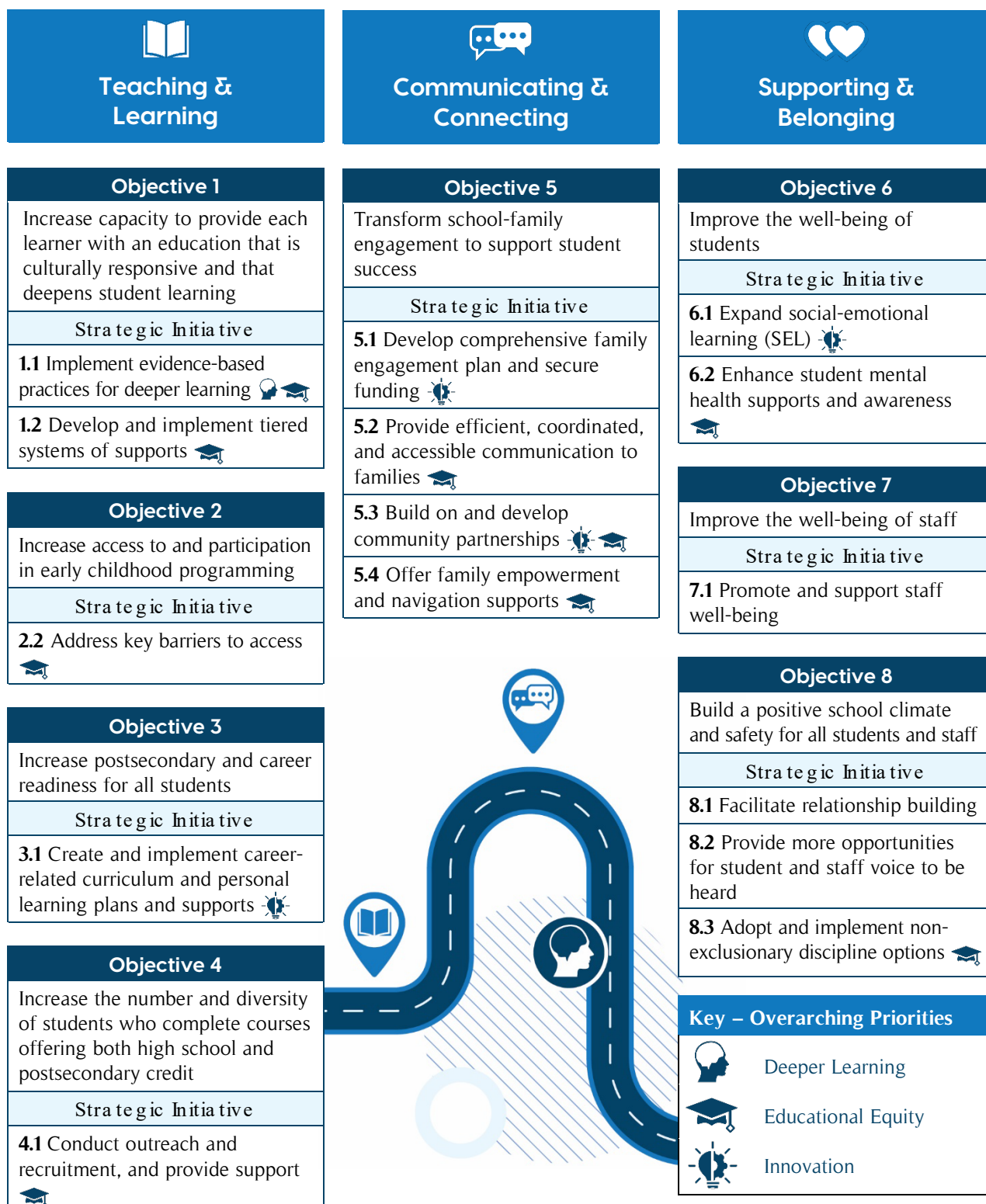
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# Contents

Planning for Purpose Road Map: RPS Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025 .....	1
Introduction .....	3
Planning for Purpose: RPS Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025 (long-form).....	11
Strategic Focus Areas .....	12
 Teaching & Learning .....	12
 Communicating & Connecting.....	15
 Supporting & Belonging.....	17
 Accountability & Progress Monitoring .....	20
 Staffing & Capacity .....	22
 Financial Stability & Resource Allocation .....	24
Next Steps: Implementation .....	26
Appendix .....	28

# Planning for Purpose Road Map: RPS Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025





 <b>Accountability &amp; Progress Monitoring</b>	 <b>Staffing &amp; Capacity</b>	 <b>Financial Stability &amp; Resource Allocation</b>
<b>Objective 9</b> Improve the quality, consistency, and use of data for informing key audiences, making informed decisions, and developing new approaches <b>Strategic Initiative</b> <b>9.1</b> Create a district research office  <b>9.2</b> Build data dashboards  <b>9.3</b> Strengthen school improvement and innovation processes  <b>9.4</b> Facilitate community engagement around data and decisions 	<b>Objective 11</b> Attract and retain staff <b>Strategic Initiative</b> <b>11.1</b> Develop pathways for staff recruitment and retention  <b>11.2</b> Enhance the induction program  <b>Objective 12</b> Increase racial diversity of staff <b>Strategic Initiative</b> <b>12.1</b> Develop and implement innovative strategies to recruit, retain, support, and advance staff who are BIPOC  	<b>Objective 14</b> Increase funding and public support for RPS <b>Strategic Initiative</b> <b>14.1</b> Plan and implement a referendum <b>14.2</b> Seek other funding sources  <b>Objective 15</b> Ensure equitable and efficient funding to meet student needs <b>Strategic Initiative</b> <b>15.1</b> Develop and implement a process for allocating funding that allows more discretion by sites 
<b>Objective 10</b> Integrate educational equity into all RPS policies <b>Strategic Initiative</b> <b>10.1</b> Review and revise policies and systems for educational equity 	<b>Objective 13</b> Recruit and develop transformative leaders <b>Strategic Initiative</b> <b>13.1</b> Develop a strategy and process for recruiting and developing leaders 	<b>Key – Overarching Priorities</b>  Deeper Learning  Educational Equity  Innovation





## Introduction and context

We are pleased to present *Planning for Purpose, the 2022-2025 Rochester Public Schools Strategic Action Plan*. This document is the culmination of a lot of hard work by many Rochester Public Schools (RPS) staff, students, parents/caregivers, and community members over the past six months.

Wilder Research was contracted by RPS to facilitate the strategic planning process and to develop the strategic plan, in collaboration with school district leadership, for school board review and approval. We used a highly engaged and data-informed process to develop this strategic plan, including input from 75 people in 26 action working group meetings between September 2021 and April 2022.

We want to thank the RPS community for the invaluable information and ideas you provided to inform where RPS is right now, where you need to go, and what you need to do to get there. The following sections of this document describe the context, the process, and the plan.

However, before we dive into the strategic plan and what RPS is going to do to put it into action, it is important to understand the context in which this plan was developed and will be implemented, which is what is covered in the following sections.

### What is a strategic plan?

A strategic plan is a roadmap to guide decisions and development across the district over the next three years. It communicates what the district wants to achieve and a plan for getting there.



## Who lives in the Rochester Public School District?<sup>4</sup>



**128,647**

total population  
in the district



**22,000**

school-age  
children



**31%**

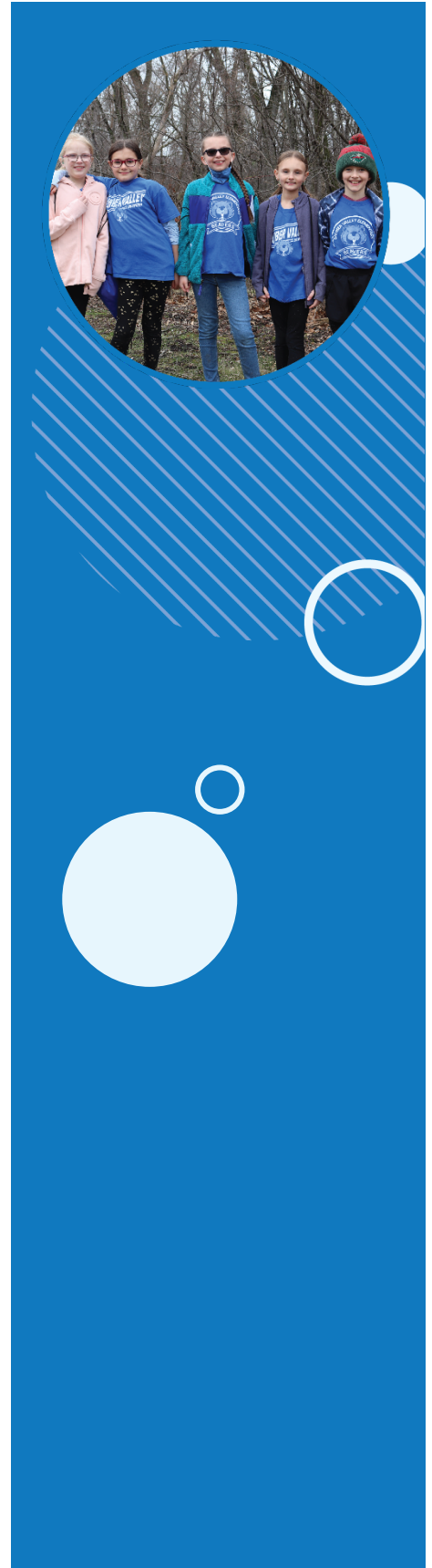
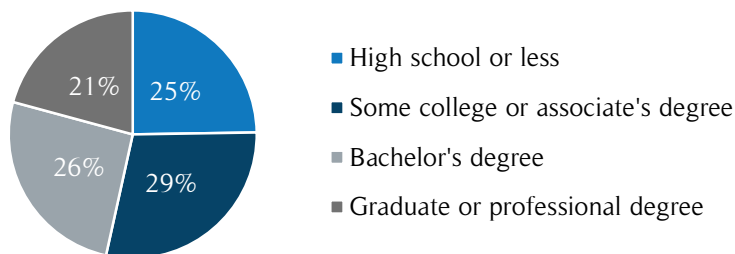
households with  
children under 18

Rochester Public School District includes the City of Rochester and part or all of surrounding communities, including Cascade Township, Haverhill Township, Marion Township, City of Oronoco, Oronoco Township, and Rochester Township, plus other smaller communities.

Of the 52,124 households in the Rochester Public School District, the median household income in the district is \$75,418. More than one out of five households in the district (22%) have household incomes below 200% of the poverty line, and about one-quarter (23%) of households are cost-burdened (paying more than 30% of their income for housing costs). Twelve percent of children age 17 and younger who live in the school district are from households with annual incomes below the poverty line. Two out of five households (37%) have an annual income of \$100,000 or more.

The adult population living in the Rochester Public School District has a mix of education levels. Twenty-six percent of adults age 25 and older have a bachelor's degree, and one-fifth (21%) have a graduate or professional degree. On the other hand, one-quarter (25%) of the population has a high school degree or less education. The unemployment rate of adults living in the school district is just 3%.

### 1. Education level of RPS residents



Looking at Rochester Public School District residents, three-quarters are White (77%) and about one-fifth (19%) are people of color, including 7% of the population who are Black or African American and 7% who are Asian or Pacific Islander. Less than 1% of the school district's population is American Indian and 3% identify as two or more races. Six percent of residents are Hispanic.

Sixteen percent of households in the school district speak a language other than English at home, and 13% of school district residents are foreign born.

## Enrollment<sup>5</sup>

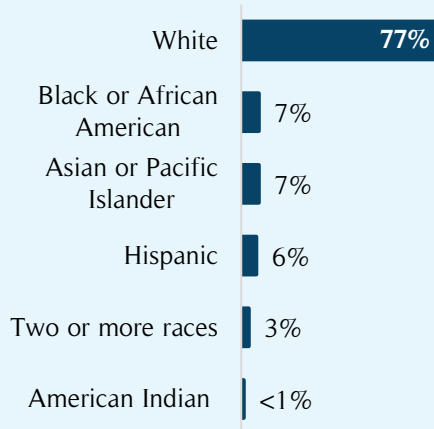
Since 2010, the student enrollment in RPS has grown about 8% and is currently at 17,800 students.

Over one-third (36%) of RPS students have qualified to receive free or reduced price school lunch (due to their families being low-income).

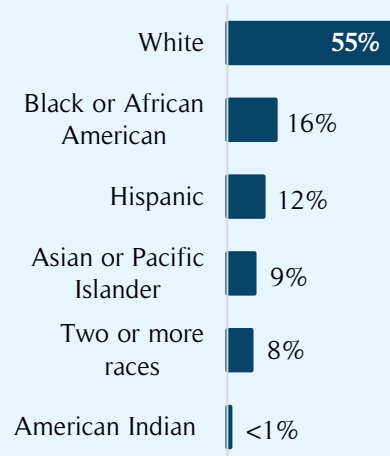
Nearly one out of five RPS students (18%) is eligible for special education.

The RPS student body is 55% White, 16% Black or African American, 12% Hispanic, 9% Asian or Pacific Islander, and less than 1% American Indian; 8% of RPS students identify as two or more races. Ten percent of RPS students are classified as English Language Learners.

### 2. Race/ethnicity of RPS residents



### 3. Race/ethnicity of RPS student body

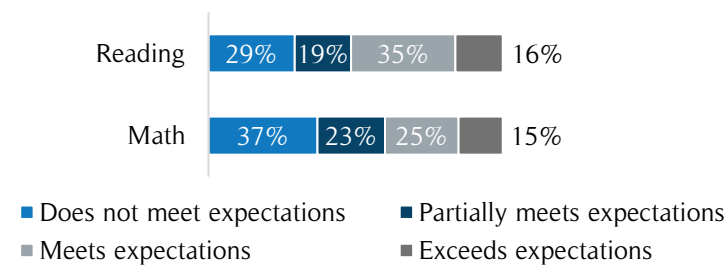


Note: Hispanic includes residents who may also identify their race as White, or Black, or Asian, or American Indian for RPS resident data only

## Recent trends in student outcomes

In 2021 (the most recent year for which data are available), 25% of RPS students met and 15% exceeded expectations for their grade level in math. In the same year, 35% of RPS students met and 16% exceeded grade level expectations for reading. The proportion of students meeting grade level expectations in RPS is slightly lower than the statewide average, and has decreased slightly since 2019.<sup>6</sup>

### 4. 2021 MCA results for RPS students



For the class of 2021, 84% of RPS students graduated in four years. The RPS graduation rate has decreased slightly in the past several years and is currently the same as the statewide graduation rate.<sup>7</sup>

Just under three-quarters (72%) of RPS graduates enrolled in an institution of higher education within 16 months of graduation, which is similar to the statewide average (71%).<sup>8</sup>

## Budget deficit

RPS is facing a budget deficit of \$23 million, which can be attributed to lower than average property tax revenues for a district of this size as well as overspending on staffing partially due to mandates the district is required to implement that are not fully funded and the extra cost to open new school buildings.



In February 2022, the school board approved a strategy to begin making reductions to the RPS spending budget in school year 2022-23, with the longer-term plan to bring the budget back into balance within three years.

Part of the focus of this Strategic Action Plan is to help RPS “work smarter, not harder.” This Strategic Action Plan aims to increase the district’s efficiency and effectiveness by using proven approaches and focusing in on the key areas that we know will make the most difference in staffs’ and families’ experiences and students’ outcomes.

## Property tax base and other funding issues

RPS is surrounded by smaller school districts that serve a somewhat different student population that perhaps has lower needs and, therefore, is less expensive to serve, compared to the student population of RPS.<sup>9</sup> When the RPS executive director of finance compared RPS to other school districts in Minnesota that have a similar size and student demographic mix (including Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan, Osseo, Elk River, Wayzata, and Mounds View), they found that while RPS receives similar per student funding from most sources, including the state and federal government and local non-tax sources, the district falls significantly below these other districts in terms of the per student revenue from local taxes. In fact, RPS’s per student funding from local taxes is about \$1,000 less than the median for these comparable districts.

If RPS were to gain an additional \$1,000 per student in funding through an increase in local tax revenue, this would provide about \$18 million in additional revenue, and would help to substantially reduce the \$23 million budget deficit the district is currently facing.

The last time Rochester Public School District passed a tax referendum was in 2019.

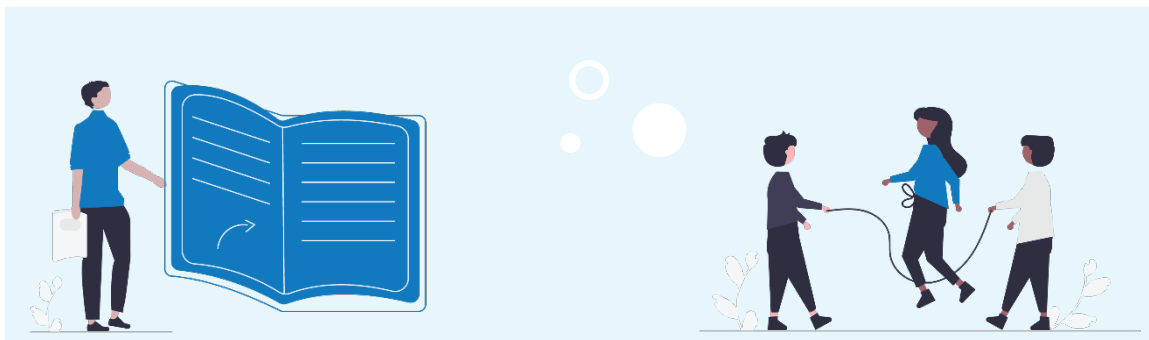


## Corporate, nonprofit, and government entities

RPS is fortunate to be located in and deeply involved with an education-focused community and, as a result, has developed partnerships with local corporate, nonprofit, and government entities that positively impact students. For example, in addition to partnerships with the United Way, Mayo Clinic, private companies, government agencies, and nonprofits, RPS is a key partner in Cradle 2 Career, a collective impact initiative that is part of the national StriveTogether network. This initiative "brings together people and groups across the community to eliminate education disparities, eliminate racial inequities, and advocate for systems-level change" (<https://c2cmn.com/>).

Similarly, RPS is involved in a number of cross-sector collaboratives working toward better outcomes for children. The Coalition of Community Health Integration, for example, convenes health care providers, insurers, county public health, and nonprofits to address prioritized community health issues through the lens of social determinants of health. Also, the Communities Coordinating for Healthy Development - Early Childhood Task Force led by Brian Lynch of Mayo Clinic, includes a broad array of service providers that work with families with young children, including RPS early childhood services. The goal of this group is to work collectively on issues facing families with young children, including systems issues (e.g., streamlining service applications, trauma-informed services). Additionally, the Bridges to Careers initiative of Mayo Clinic, Workforce Development, and Rochester Community & Technical College has involved the RPS adult literacy program to support adults in building skills they need to advance on their career pathway and address workforce shortages.

There is a wide array of youth development organizations in Rochester and the surrounding communities that partner with RPS to provide out-of-school-time programming for youth, including the Boys & Girls Club, the YMCA, and many smaller organizations, including culturally specific providers. Meadow Park is a place-based initiative between Family Service Rochester, United Way, RPS, and other organizations to serve the children and families of a particular public housing complex.





Rochester Public Library is a nationally recognized library system that offers a range of excellent resources and programs to the community, including, notably, the Rochester Reading Champions. This award-winning innovative program matches highly trained volunteers with underserved youth and adults who struggle to read. RPS works directly with the Library to identify and serve RPS students who could benefit from this program.

There are also several higher education providers in Rochester serving a range of postsecondary interests and adult needs, including Winona State University, St. Mary's University, the University of Minnesota, and Rochester Community and Technical College.

Lastly, Rochester is home to significant corporate investment and, thus, future employment opportunities for RPS students. For example, Mayo Clinic's Destination Medical Center is bringing in a range of corporate interests and industries to Rochester which may provide a range of career choices. In 2021, the City of Rochester won the 2021 Bloomberg Philanthropies Global Mayors Challenge \$1 million award to focus on the economic mobility of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) women through careers in the built environment and construction industries.

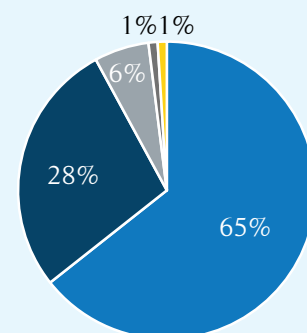
## COVID-related concerns

It goes without saying that the COVID pandemic has significantly impacted students, staff, and the entire community. We conducted a survey of parents/caregivers, staff, and community members during this strategic planning process and asked about the impacts of the COVID pandemic on students' academic performance, social-emotional health, mental health, and well-being (more information about these surveys can be found in the Appendix).

Parents/caregivers most frequently mentioned impacts on students, such as lack of in-person contact with others to socialize and maintain peer relationships, the decline in or lack of student academic progress, and poor or declining mental health and well-being. Staff also observed the decline in or lack of social-emotional skills and learning among students.

Nearly all RPS staff feel their job is either “a lot harder” (65%) or “a little harder” (28%) than it was before the COVID pandemic.

### 5. Perception of difficulty of job since COVID among RPS staff



- A lot harder
- A little harder
- Similar
- A little easier
- A lot easier



# Strategic action planning

## Key themes

Key issues that emerged from surveys and focus groups conducted:

- Students' academic performance is below expectations; academic disparities exist
- Staff and students need to feel a sense of belonging, connection
- Staff and students' mental well-being is a priority
- Concerns about safety, discipline, and overall school climate
- Need for better communication, more information for families, responsiveness
- Desire for more accountability and transparency

For more information about input collected from students, families, staff, and community members, see summaries of findings from the surveys and focus groups in the Appendix.

## The process: Data-informed, with intensive engagement from the RPS community

From October 2021 to April 2022, Wilder Research facilitated a strategic planning process that incorporated a high degree of collaboration and engagement from the RPS community, allowing for a wide variety of voices and input from various perspectives. Six action working groups organized around critical topics met frequently to brainstorm and provide input on priority areas that the district needs to address and potential strategies for addressing them. Working groups were defined by the following topics: Economic Engine, Family & Community Engagement, Improvement Systems, Organizational Culture, Outcomes & Measures, and Coherence. Action working group members represented a broad range of perspectives, expertise, and roles within the district. For more detailed information about action working group topics and participants, see the Appendix.

Action working group members used data to inform the strategic focus areas, objectives, and strategic initiatives. Specifically, members engaged with data and information from district experts through presentations; summaries of relevant research literature; findings from surveys conducted with parents/caregivers, staff, and community members; and focus groups with students, parents/caregivers, staff, and city/county representatives. Wilder Research updated drafts of the Strategic Action Plan between working group meetings based on meeting notes. The process was highly iterative and involved consultation and feedback from district leadership along the way.

# Planning for Purpose: RPS Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025 (long-form)

**Strategic Focus Areas** – Major issues that need to be addressed by RPS in the next three years (2022-2025).

**Objectives** – Major outcomes that the Strategic Action Plan is intended to achieve. Attainment of each objective will require successful implementation of various strategic initiatives across multiple strategic focus areas.

**Strategic Initiatives** – Projects and ongoing activities that will be implemented to achieve the objectives.

**Overarching Priorities** – Deeper learning, Educational equity, and Innovation are three overarching priorities that are interwoven throughout the plan. Strategic initiatives have icons next to them to indicate the priorities they address.



**Deeper learning** is “the higher-order thinking skills, learning dispositions, and collaboration skills needed for students to succeed in 21st century work and civic life. Deeper learning competencies promote the ability to transfer learning and apply to new and complex situations in an ever-changing global environment” ([deeper-learning.org](https://deeper-learning.org)).



**Educational equity** is the condition of justice, fairness, and inclusion in systems of education so that each student has access to, meaningfully participates in, and has positive outcomes from high quality learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group memberships (Adapted from Minnesota Department of Education and Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center; Rochester School Board Policy 105 – Equity Policy).



**Innovation** is a way of thinking that creates something that is new or better, either coming from invention (something totally new) or iteration (a change of something that already exists).

# Strategic Focus Areas

**Objective: What we will do**

**Strategic Initiative: How we will do it**



## Teaching & Learning

### Objective 1

**Increase capacity to provide each learner with an education that is culturally responsive and that deepens student learning**

#### Strategic Initiative

**1.1 Deeper learning:** Implement evidence-based practices across all levels of the district to deepen learning for all students:

- Ensure curricular coherence and conceptual mastery
- Strengthen intercultural competence and cross-cultural communication skills among all RPS staff through individual and group development opportunities
- Improve culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices

**1.2 Tiered system of supports:** Develop and implement a system of evidence-based interventions that provide additional support when students need it; monitor equity of implementation and outcomes, and make adjustments as needed

### Objective 2

**Increase access to and participation in early childhood programming**

#### Strategic Initiative

**2.1 Address key barriers to access:** Identify and address key barriers, including, but not limited to, transportation for families who are under resourced

Objective 3
<b>Increase postsecondary and career readiness for all students</b>
Strategic Initiative
<b>3.1 Career-related curriculum and personal learning plans and supports:</b> Create and implement career and postsecondary-related curriculum, and support the development of personal learning plans for secondary students 💡

Objective 4
<b>Increase the number and diversity of students who complete courses offering both high school and postsecondary credit</b>
Strategic Initiative
<b>4.1 Outreach, recruitment, and support:</b> Conduct outreach and recruitment, and provide information and navigation support for students and families regarding enrollment in courses that offer both high school and postsecondary credit 🎓

## Rationale

Student learning and professional development supports for educators were identified as major issues in the district based on survey and focus groups findings. Nearly 4 in 10 parent/caregiver survey respondents (38%) reported that students' academic performance being below expectations is a key issue to address through the Strategic Action Plan. Both staff and parents/caregivers shared significant concerns about a decline in or lack of academic progress among students as an impact of the COVID pandemic.



Nearly 4 in 10 parent/caregiver survey respondents (39%) also reported that strong academics (classes and programs that help their child get ready for college and careers) is one of the most attractive characteristics about a school. To inform school enrollment decisions, more than one-third (35%) of parent/caregiver respondents said they use school rankings from the Minnesota Department of Education and over one-fifth (22%) use test scores. Additionally, research evidence suggests that rigorous academic environments and career-based classes attract parents to schools.<sup>10</sup> On our survey, over

half of parents/ caregivers of secondary students (53%) reported getting good career preparation or work experience as a top indicator that their child will be successful in school.

Several of the initiatives that we included in the strategic plan to address teaching and learning objectives are supported by research evidence as contributing to improved academic performance, including strong tiered systems of support, cultural competence, and strong culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. Equitable approaches to education go beyond just the presence of diversity; instead, they respond to student diversity and address systemic barriers that they have experienced. Equitable education practices value students' life experiences as part of the learning process, especially if these life experiences differ from those of the dominant culture—for example, by choosing curriculum that is grounded in and affirms students' cultural backgrounds, or by using teaching pedagogy that involves reflection on systemic barriers that students face and how they can be addressed.<sup>11</sup>



## Communicating & Connecting

### Objective 5

#### Transform school-family engagement to support student success

##### Strategic Initiative

**5.1 Comprehensive family engagement plan and funding:** Secure funding and develop comprehensive site-specific plans (co-created with students, families, staff, and leadership) that emphasize relationship building and ways for the entire school community to play a role in student success 🌟

**5.2 Efficient, coordinated, and accessible communication to families:**

- Identify gaps in district and school communications due to language and technology access, and build appropriate services and supports to address communication gaps 🎓
- Provide additional types of communication and dialog with families 🎓

**5.3 Community partnerships:**

- Build on and develop new partnerships with community organizations and businesses to provide integrated student supports
- Build on and develop more postsecondary and career-readiness opportunities for students and resources for families 🎓

**5.4 Family empowerment and navigation supports:** To empower families to advocate for their students at key transitions, provide learning opportunities and navigation assistance regarding school and program options 🎓

## Rationale

Focus group findings indicate that parents/caregivers and staff would benefit from improved communication from the district. Staff identified a lack of communication between the district, building-to-building, and from school and district leadership. They also expressed a need for non-English communication materials and interpreters to help them better communicate with all families.



Perceptions of student and family engagement among parent/caregiver survey respondents varied across schools. At a couple of schools, more than one-third of parents/caregivers rated the school's engagement as "poor" or "terrible." In focus groups, parents/caregivers expressed the desire for more open and proactive communication from teachers and school staff, particularly about their child's academic performance and progress. Parents/caregivers also appreciate student support services and other resources that are accessible to their children through community partnerships.

Research evidence suggests that hybrid and personalized approaches to communicating with families may be necessary to best serve all parents/caregivers in a school community. Differences in families' resources, employment, cultural backgrounds, and home language are important considerations as common challenges parents/caregivers experience in connecting with their child's school. Factors include inconvenient meeting times, inflexible work schedules, lack of child care, English-only language capacities among teachers and schools staff, and a desire not to interfere with how education professionals do their jobs.<sup>12</sup>






## Supporting & Belonging

### Objective 6




#### Improve the well-being of students

##### Strategic Initiative

**6.1 Social-emotional learning (SEL):** Expand SEL supports and programs for students and integrate those supports with core curricular and instructional strategies:

- Identify a research-based framework of SEL competencies, and support teachers and other school staff in integrating those competencies into curriculum, instruction, and formal and informal classroom activities
- Collaborate with high school students to co-design and implement a youth leadership initiative that contributes to improvements in schools and communities and builds the SEL competencies of students who participate 

**6.2 Student mental health supports:** Increase awareness of and access to mental health supports to meet students' needs:

- Assess and determine areas for improvement in the current mental health service delivery model 
- To support students experiencing mental or emotional difficulties, expand a model of peer support at the secondary level to raise awareness of resources and reduce stigma 
- Expand use of group interventions to address mental health concerns 

### Objective 7

#### Improve the well-being of staff

##### Strategic Initiative

**7.1 Staff well-being:**

- Create an organizational structure that promotes the holistic health of staff
- Support staff in understanding and practicing the skills to care for their well-being
- Build psychological safety throughout the organization

Objective 8
<b>Build a positive school climate and safety for all students and staff</b>
Strategic Initiative
<b>8.1 Build relationships:</b> Provide students and staff with time and resources to create close connections that help all students develop positive identities, agency, and a commitment to community
<b>8.2 Student and staff voice:</b> Listen to students and staff by providing opportunities for them to voice their perspectives and share their experiences, give input on decisions that impact them, and be heard
<b>8.3 Discipline disparities:</b> Adopt and implement a range of non-exclusionary discipline options, monitor equity of implementation and outcomes, and make adjustments as needed 🎓

## Rationale

Among staff, students' mental health and staff well-being were identified as key issues to address. In focus groups, students talked about how valuable mental health supports are, but noted a lack of awareness among students about what is available. Action working group members discussed the well-being of staff as crucial, often referring to the analogy of flying on an airplane and being advised in the event of an emergency to put on one's oxygen mask first before putting on the oxygen mask of one's child. Among staff survey respondents, nearly half (47%) felt that they "very much" belong in RPS, 40% felt they "somewhat" belong, and 13% felt they belong "not very much" or "not at all." BIPOC staff were less likely to report feeling "very much welcomed" by their colleagues compared to White staff (55% compared to 67%).



Fourteen percent of parent/caregiver survey respondents reported that they disagree at least "a little" or "don't know" if their child has at least one adult who they trust at school. Students voiced that engagement and individualized attention from teachers and school staff helps them feel connected to their school.

School safety is a reason why some parents opt out of public education. The desire for a safe environment is the primary reason why parents homeschool their children. A national study showed that in 2017, "a higher percentage of public school students ages 12-18 than of private school students in the same age group reported knowing of a gang presence at school (9 vs. 2 percent), seeing hate-related graffiti at school (25 vs. 6 percent), and being called hate-related words at school (7 vs. 4 percent) during the school year."<sup>13</sup> Among RPS parent/caregiver survey respondents, one-quarter (25%) reported that they do not feel that their child is safe from bullying and violence at school and 9% said they "don't know." Among parents/caregivers and community members survey respondents, safety and students' mental health were identified by the largest proportion of respondents as key issues that should be addressed by the RPS Strategic Action Plan.

Research supports school discipline policies that include elements such as a code of conduct developed with input from students, implementation of social-emotional learning curricula reinforced by multiple staff across a variety of settings, and development opportunities for teachers and schools staff.<sup>14</sup> Another study recommended that "districts can and should play a role in shaping district-wide norms and priorities for equity for all schools, including central supports for justice-centered and anti-racist approaches to equity".<sup>15</sup>





## Accountability & Progress Monitoring


### Objective 9

**Improve the quality, consistency, and use of data for informing key audiences, making informed decisions, and developing new approaches**


#### Strategic Initiative

**9.1 District research office:** Create a research office, conduct a comprehensive review of the district assessment program, and develop a plan to increase the quality and use of data to promote innovation and improve student outcomes 

**9.2 Data dashboards:** Build data dashboards for monitoring district progress across key indicators related to student social-emotional and academic outcomes and staff well-being and collective efficacy outcomes, and for communicating and demonstrating accountability 

**9.3 School improvement and innovation process:** Strengthen processes for setting goals, developing solutions to problems of practice, and measuring progress toward improving student outcomes 


**9.4 Community engagement:**

- Develop a Data Advisory Board including internal and external stakeholders to provide guidance on the data that should be collected, reported, and utilized by the district 
- Increase transparency and communication with all audiences regarding data and decisions

### Objective 10

**Integrate educational equity into all RPS policies**

#### Strategic Initiative

**10.1 Policy and systems change:** Review data and revise school district policies, as needed, to ensure that students from historically underserved and marginalized communities have the opportunities and support they need to thrive in school and beyond 

## Rationale

Action working group members reflected on the district's use of data for progress monitoring and determined this as a major area for improvement. In focus groups, parents/caregivers expressed the desire for more transparency and information from RPS schools and the district, including school and district-level student outcomes data. While the district has a lot of data, the perception among action working group members is that it is not effectively used or shared for progress monitoring or accountability purposes.



During the strategic planning process, RPS hired a Director of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation to spearhead efforts to improve the use and communication of district-wide data for use by RPS staff, families, and the broader RPS community.

The Outcomes & Measures working group worked with the new director on the visioning for a data dashboard that will be informed by an advisory board. This dashboard will be used as a tool to communicate with the community about the status and progress of the district.




## Staffing & Capacity

### Objective 11

#### Attract and retain staff

##### Strategic Initiative

**11.1 Recruitment and retention of staff:** Develop pathways to recruit, hire, train, and retain staff in hard-to-fill positions 

**11.2 Induction program improvements:** Enhance supports and professional development for new paraprofessionals and off-schedule staff 

### Objective 12

#### Increase racial diversity of staff


##### Strategic Initiative

**12.1 Increase the number of BIPOC staff:** Develop and implement innovative strategies for recruiting, retaining, supporting, and advancing staff who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color  

### Objective 13

#### Recruit and develop transformative leaders

##### Strategic Initiative

**13.1 Recruitment and development of leaders:** Develop a strategy and process for recruiting and continually developing the knowledge and skills of leaders and providing them with feedback and ongoing support 

## Rationale

A recent study linked teacher leadership to increased job satisfaction, improved problem-solving among teachers, improved curricula and instruction, increased parent engagement in schools, and improved engagement and achievement among students.<sup>16</sup> Survey data from RPS show that nearly one-quarter of staff (23%) are dissatisfied with their job. Also, staff capacity/lack of staff was identified as one of the top three key issues the strategic plan should address.



Lack of staff diversity was identified as a key issue by nearly one-quarter (24%) of BIPOC staff, a greater proportion than White staff (7%).





## Financial Stability & Resource Allocation




### Objective 14

#### Increase funding and public support for RPS

##### Strategic Initiative

**14.1 Referendum funding:** Plan and implement a referendum in 2023 that reflects the Rochester community's needs and aspirations and will sustain the implementation of the RPS strategic plan and ongoing operations


**14.2 Other funding sources:** Explore ways to increase funding and seek new funding sources:

- Increase enrollment - Evaluate and, as needed, adjust the mix of school structures, thematic and curricular focus areas, and support services such as transportation to attract new families 
- Philanthropic and corporate resources - Develop a process to generate funding from philanthropic and corporate sources to advance the school district's work, starting with the priorities of this strategic plan 
- Advocacy - Conduct advocacy activities with local and private entities and at the Minnesota Legislature 

### Objective 15

#### Ensure equitable and efficient funding to meet student needs

##### Strategic Initiative

**15.1 Funding allocation process:** Develop and implement a process for allocating funding and other resources from the central administration level to RPS school and program sites that allows more discretion by sites to equitably and efficiently meet the needs of all students 

## Rationale

The district is facing a projected operating budget deficit of up to \$23 million for the 2022-2023 school year. The research literature offers several strategies the district might consider to increase enrollment, such as adjusting thematic and curricular focus areas.<sup>17</sup>

Other ideas for improving the financial outlook of RPS were brainstormed by the Economic Engine action working group after hearing presentations from RPS's Executive Director of Finance on the projected budget deficit, enrollment options and projections, five-year forecast, and the funding allocation process from the district administration to schools. Action working group members discussed the perception of inequitable resource allocation from the central office to schools and program sites by some, which prompted an initiative proposed by the Superintendent to develop and implement a system to ensure resource allocation is equitable and efficient.



## Next Steps: Implementation

Strategic plans often sit on shelves and websites after they are created. The agendas for improvement that they articulate are often overtaken by the press of everyday events and sometimes by crises that nobody could have seen coming.

Rochester Public Schools is committed to ensuring that the RPS Strategic Action Plan does not meet that fate. Following the Rochester School Board's final review and approval of the plan in June 2022, the district will launch a process of implementing the plan that will be as inclusive and transparent as the process through which the plan was developed. The district will convene cross-cutting implementation teams that create realistic project plans that include clear deliverables with deadlines and benchmarks for progress. The progress of the entire plan will be monitored through indicators that will be continuously reported on a dashboard that will be accessible to the entire Rochester community.

Implementation of the RPS Strategic Action Plan will also be guided by these and other principles, developed by the Superintendent:

1. Set priorities: if everything is important, nothing is important
2. Involve the people who will be involved in implementation in the design of the initiative from the outset
3. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the initiative and ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for what
4. Continually engage in two-way communication both vertically (between the central office and schools and programs) and horizontally (across schools and programs)
5. Assume good intent
6. Encourage people to raise questions and concerns and never “shoot the messenger” who is the bearer of bad news
7. Embrace diversity in all its forms as an asset in our work
8. Continuously use data and evidence to guide implementation and check assumptions
9. Decide and disseminate what needs to be “tight” and what needs to be “loose”: When do schools and programs have autonomy and when do they need to adhere to districtwide strategies and structures?
10. Explain how and why a decision was made

11. Welcome critical questions and constructive feedback and don't take either personally
12. Make meetings efficient and write down the conclusions from the meeting to ensure that everyone is on the same page and so the information can be shared with people who were not in attendance
13. Celebrate early wins and small steps forward
14. Encourage innovation and embrace failures and mistakes as opportunities to learn
15. Share what works: Identify effective practices and disseminate them across the district, but adapt them to meet the needs of students in each school or program

As we begin implementation of the RPS Strategic Action Plan, our implementation teams will review and suggest revisions or additions to this list of guiding principles. We will use the final version of the principles to guide not only our implementation of the RPS Strategic Action Plan, but all of the work we do for and with students in Rochester Public Schools.

# Appendix

## The strategic action planning process

### Action working groups

Rochester Public Schools recruited members from the RPS community, including students, parents/caregivers, staff, principals, and community members to participate in six action working groups. The opportunity to be involved was shared via a message to all families that have opted in to receive messages from the district, through a press release to local media outlets, and was publicized on the district's website and social media accounts. Those interested submitted a brief application describing their interest, experience, and role(s) in the RPS community. Working group members were invited to participate based on the following information:

- Response to the application questions regarding interest, experience, and personal connections to the work
- Residence in Rochester
- Parent/caregiver of a RPS student
- Representation of organizations or communities
- Racial and ethnic identity
- Expertise relevant to the focus areas of the working groups
- Combination of building level staff (administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals), central office staff, school board members, parents/caregivers, community leaders, and students

Selected participants brought a diversity of experiences to the action working groups. The following demographics were reported by action working group members who chose to respond. Please note these data are not representative of all working group members.

- 84% are the parent or caregiver of a past, current, or future RPS student
- 22% are or were RPS students themselves
- 87% work with students, other than their own children, in some capacity
- 58% have a significant relationship with a child who has a disability and/or received special education/504 services
- 62% work with students with a disability

- 20% learned a first language other than English
- 34% speak a language other than English, including Spanish, French, Chinese, Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, German, Portuguese, and Somali
- 20% are immigrants or the child of immigrants
- 14% have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual
- 31% identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and/or Hispanic

Superintendent Kent Pekel drafted working group topic areas and a draft charge statement for each of the group members to respond to and make their own. The charge statements were updated based on feedback from working group members. Each group included a district staff member with relevant institutional knowledge about the working group topic.

Committees were organized by the following topics and associated task:

**Coherence** - Monitor the progress of the five working groups and facilitate communication and alignment across the groups to ensure that the elements of the RPS Strategic Action Plan compliment rather than contradict each other and that the school district has the capacity to implement them effectively.

**Economic Engine** - Identify strategies for increasing enrollment in Rochester Public Schools and other steps that the school district can take to ensure that RPS achieves its educational mission in financially sound and sustainable ways.

**Family & Community Engagement** - Identify strategies that Rochester Public Schools should implement to successfully engage all parents and caregivers in helping their children succeed in school and strategies for building effective partnerships with community organizations.

**Improvement Systems** - Identify the structures and/or processes that should be created or improved to enable Rochester Public Schools to continually improve teaching and learning and other important aspects of the educational process.

**Organizational Culture** - Identify strategies that Rochester Public Schools should implement to create and sustain environments in which all students and staff feel they belong to and can succeed in the RPS community.

**Outcomes & Measures** - Identify the educational outcomes that Rochester Public Schools should focus on helping students achieve through implementation of the RPS Strategic Action Plan.

Action working group members participated in meetings facilitated by Wilder Research from October 2021 to April 2022. During meetings, members participated in brainstorming activities and discussions, and engaged with relevant data to identify the most pressing issues in the district and produce key objectives and initiatives to achieve those objectives over the next three years. Each committee met four times with two optional cross-committee meetings. Meetings ranged in length from 90 minutes to three hours. Members were offered compensation for their time and participation.

Wilder Research facilitated activities and discussion and incorporated informational presentations from RPS staff based on requested information from the working groups. Examples include a presentation from John Carlson, RPS Executive Director of Finance to the Economic Engine committee on RPS enrollment options, five-year forecast, and funding allocation from the central office and a presentation on discipline data and practices to the Organizational Culture committee from Chris Lingen, RPS Director of Elementary and Secondary Education.

To inform decisions made by the action working groups and to ensure that the final plan effectively addresses what is most important to the Rochester community, Wilder Research conducted data collection via focus groups and surveys and compiled relevant literature for the committees. These data, however, may be useful for purposes beyond this process as well.

## 6. Summary of action working group meetings

Schedule	Content
October	Welcome, development of group norms, update working group charge, discuss issues in the district
November	Identify biggest issues to be addressed in strategic plan
January	Cross-committee session to refine drafted objectives and brainstorm strategic initiatives, development of data dashboard
February	Review findings from data collected (surveys, focus groups, research literature) to inform draft Strategic Action Plan, further brainstorming for data dashboard
March	Refine and finalize strategic plan, planning for data dashboard, and brief reflection on the process and plan
April	Final reflection and acknowledgement of accomplishments

## Data gathering to inform decisions

In December 2021 and January 2022, Wilder staff conducted three surveys with parents/caregivers, RPS staff, and community members and 13 focus groups with students, parent/caregivers, RPS staff, and representatives from city/county government and community organizations. Two additional parent/caregiver groups were conducted in February to increase participation from Black or African American parents/caregivers. Wilder Research designed the survey and focus group questions to address questions and issues raised during the first two meetings of the strategic planning process and to align with the working group charge statements. The surveys were administered online. The survey was sent to all staff and parents/caregivers via email, and the community survey was advertised through various channels. Eleven of the 15 focus groups were conducted virtually. The findings from these data collection efforts were shared with the action working groups and can be found in the Appendix.

In addition to primary data collection, Wilder Research compiled key findings from relevant literature based on issues and potential initiatives brainstormed by the committees. The key findings from specific articles were presented to the action working groups for consideration as they helped to develop and provide feedback on drafts of the Strategic Action Plan.



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# Rochester Public Schools Strategic Action Planning

## *Key Findings from Focus Groups with Caregivers, Students, and Staff*

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# Key findings

This section presents overall key findings from the focus groups and important points from caregivers and representatives from city and county government and community organizations, students, and Rochester Public Schools (RPS) staff. Key themes from each group type can be found in subsequent sections.

## Overall key findings

### Communication and transparency

Respondents from all groups expressed a need for improvement in communications and development of new, transparent, efficient communication systems from RPS.

- Caregivers of RPS students, especially those with middle school and/or high school students, would like more communication from the district particularly around their children's academic progress, bullying, discipline, and emergency incidents. Caregivers would also like more transparency and information from RPS schools and the district, particularly around school discipline policies, academic curriculum, grading, school outcomes data, and technology.
- RPS students expressed the desire for more communication and engagement from school staff, stating that it helps them feel like they belong at RPS. Students also said that engagement and encouragement from school staff helps them feel supported at school.
- RPS staff believe there is a lack of communication between the district, building-to-building, and leadership. RPS staff also expressed a need for non-English communication materials and interpreters so they can communicate with all families.

### Belonging and connection

- Caregivers thought that RPS needs to do a better job at helping students who are not part of the dominant (White, middle class, etc.) culture feel a greater sense of belonging or connection to their school. Caregivers pointed out that it is important for teachers and staff to represent the diverse community of students at RPS. Some caregivers also expressed concern about movement toward larger schools in the district and how that would affect academic and disciplinary outcomes as well as school climate.
- RPS students say engagement and individualized attention from teachers and school staff helps them feel connected to their school. Additionally, Alternative Learning Center (ALC) students reported that it's important to them to feel like school staff treat them with respect and understanding. Students who are English-language Learners (EL) expressed the value of having a connection to a teacher or other staff within their school. Students also reported that participating in extracurricular activities helps them to feel connected to their school and peers.

## **School climate and culture**

- Caregivers and RPS staff reported that there are increased incidents of violence and behavior issues in RPS schools and are particularly alarmed by it. Most of the caregivers of non-RPS students who attended the focus group said their child experienced bullying when they attended RPS, which was their rationale for switching their child to a school in a different district. Some caregivers and staff report that this is due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and that there needs to be more staff in general and support for staff to deal with these issues.
- RPS students had mixed perceptions of safety. ALC students reported feeling safe at their ALC, but unsafe at their prior school. EL students said they feel safe if they stay away from fights. Several students talked about the role of resource officers at their school, but that they are not always close by or able to quickly get to the location of a fight and that teachers and other school staff are not well-equipped to handle these situations. Recent RPS graduates focused on safety in terms of the threat of a shooting or intruder and had mixed feelings about the preparedness of their school to handle that sort of situation, should it arise.
- RPS staff of color reported feelings of isolation at their schools at times. In some cases, they felt their school culture is unwelcoming. Some staff of color described instances where other RPS staff are disrespectful to them, and students, therefore, feel they can also treat these staff members poorly. Additionally, they felt that lack of support or buy-in from a team can make them feel less effective in their work.

## **School discipline**

- RPS staff and caregivers are concerned about discipline disparities at RPS, particularly for students who receive special education services and students of color. Both caregivers and RPS staff suggest that RPS staff should receive professional development around discipline disparities. RPS staff specifically call for more clarity and improved discipline policies, better data practices, and more training around school discipline, such as restorative practices.
- RPS students shared that they do not perceive discipline as handled fairly at their school and highlighted perceived differences in how students are disciplined based on racial identity. ALC students perceive discipline practices as fair at the ALC, but do not feel that it was handled fairly at their previous school.
- Some students and RPS staff felt that there are not enough staff in the school equipped to deal with discipline issues.

## **Student mental health**

- RPS students highlighted the benefits of having and being aware of mental health support available in their schools. Students also talked about other resources, such as school counselors, that are not always available when they need them or can be difficult to get an appointment with. Students also referenced several different supports available for students who are struggling emotionally and how these are important for schools to have. They also expressed a desire for confidentiality in accessing these services and resources (both from their parents and other students). Students highlighted the need for increased awareness around availability of these resources and how to access them.

## **Professional development and support**

- RPS principals and staff expressed a need and desire for more professional development opportunities, mentorship, and support. Caregivers also suggested more professional development for RPS staff around discipline disparities and how to address this issue.

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Caregivers and community members.....	1
Communication.....	1
Transparency and parent education .....	4
Availability of services, student supports, and community partnerships.....	6
Inequality .....	7
School discipline.....	8
Belonging, connection, and school culture .....	9
Caregivers of students who attend school outside the RPS district.....	10
Input from representatives from city and county government and community organizations .....	12
Students.....	14
Important aspects of belonging and connection.....	14
Most helpful for student success.....	15
Feedback on academics.....	17
Most helpful things school staff can do .....	18
Perceptions of discipline practices.....	18
Sense of safety .....	19
Ability to serve racially diverse population .....	20
RPS staff .....	21
Communication.....	21
Professional development, collaboration, and mentoring.....	22
Financial resources and partnerships .....	23
Staffing.....	24
Curriculum .....	25
School climate and culture.....	25
Discipline policies.....	27
Inequities.....	28

## Contents (continued)

Appendix A .....	30
Respondent demographics .....	30
Appendix B .....	34
Caregiver of RPS Students Focus Group Protocol .....	34
Caregiver of non-RPS Students Focus Group Protocol .....	37
City and County Government and Community Organization Focus Group Protocol ..	40
RPS Student Focus Group Protocol .....	43
ALC Student Focus Group Protocol .....	46
EL Student Focus Group Protocol .....	49
RPS Administrator and School Staff Focus Group Protocol .....	52

# Introduction

Rochester Public Schools (RPS) is currently engaged planning process to develop a 2022-2025 strategic action plan for the district. As part of this process, RPS contracted with Wilder Research to facilitate focus groups with caregivers, students, RPS staff, and representatives from the city and county government, and community organizations. The summary below outlines the key findings and illustrative quotes from respondents. Participant demographics and protocols used for each focus group type can be found in the Appendix.

Wilder Research conducted a total of 15 focus groups: six groups with parents and caregivers, four groups with RPS staff, four groups with students, and one group with representatives from city and county government and community organizations. A total of 141 people participated in these discussions. Please keep in mind that these findings are representative of the focus group participants and are not representative of all RPS community members.

## Caregivers and community members

This section highlights key themes that emerged from focus groups conducted with caregivers and representatives from city and county government and community organizations. Some key quotes from participants are included to illustrate each of the key findings. Some quotes have been edited for clarity and brevity.

### Communication

- Overall, caregivers of **elementary-aged students expressed greater satisfaction with communication from their child(ren)’s school(s) compared with caregivers with children in middle and high school.** Caregivers appreciate the weekly newsletter they receive from their child’s school (SMORE) that provides updates on what is going on. A few caregivers noted that they liked the Step Into Learning conference at the beginning of the year. A few caregivers talked about the mode of communication and the need to use methods other than email more often (e.g., text).

*My elementary school has been using SMORE for newsletters. I really like that. The teachers do one and we also get a weekly email from whole school, which is really helpful.*  
—Caregiver of an RPS student

*I think what has been super helpful at the elementary level is the change they’ve made in the last couple of years with Step Into Learning at the beginning of year. We get a one-on-one meeting with the teacher, and I think that’s really helpful to have that introduction and get some face-time with the teacher. I feel more comfortable emailing the teacher if I have a concern, or if I have a question about something I’m seeing at home, I feel a little bit more comfortable if we’ve already had a conversation from day one about who my child is, and what their strengths and areas for development are.* —Caregiver of an RPS student

*We get a weekly update of academics, but also how they're doing socially and emotionally with each other. For example, my son always talks about how they use clips and they get down to the bottom of the chart for good behavior, managing themselves in class, and being kind, and all of that stuff. And then they get rewarded and we get updates on that from his teacher on that as well as academically and where they are unit-wise. I really like that she balances not only where my child is academically, but also where he is socially.*

—Caregiver of an RPS student

- Caregivers want **more open and proactive communication from teachers and school staff, particularly around academics**. Specifically, caregivers want to know more information about their child's academic performance and progress. Some caregivers noted they have to put in a lot of effort to find this information and sometimes experience barriers from school staff in obtaining it. They also want to know more about what their kids are being taught at school including class curriculum/materials, activities, etc.

*I was never told he was put in special reading in kindergarten. I found out in first grade he was placed in that class, which, I mean, kids fall behind. I understand it. But then it was [framed to me that this was] goal oriented that he had to meet these goals before he could transition out of the special reading program. Despite meeting those goals, he never transitioned out. From what I've heard from other parents is once you're in the program is you'll never get out of it. You're in it for good, which I didn't understand. There were things that I asked [his teachers] as to how I could help him work on this at home, and I got no help from that.*

—Caregiver of a non-RPS student

- Caregivers would like **more direct communication from RPS schools, especially from middle and high school staff**. In these upper grades, caregivers said they often heard information directly from their students rather than from the school. This was especially concerning for caregivers in instances where there have been behavioral or safety problems in the school.

*I would say that there is not a lot of proactive communication from the school. I felt that I am always the one who reached out to them first. Sometimes it is very hard to find the person because the website is not very good. I just ran into that today. I tried to print out the copy of the course registration guide and cannot find the right person.*

—Caregiver of an RPS student

*Anytime there's ever been an injury at school, an accident at school, a behavior at school, we are personally contacted [by our new school]. I can speak for when my kids went to RPS for the first two years that never happened. My kid would come home with something and I would be like, 'What happened?' He would tell me [about the incident] and then I would message the school. And I will give the teachers credit, they did respond back, but I shouldn't have to find out from my child that something went wrong versus a teacher that had something happened.* —Caregiver of a non-RPS student.

*Participant 1: I have a student who receives special education services. They [the school] send a daily email. But for school-wide announcements, those often just go to the student, but I don't often hear the information.*

*Participant 2: I would echo that. I have a middle schooler with autism. If my older child didn't tell me something that was happening I wouldn't know.* —Caregivers of RPS students

*If I could pick one thing to change, it would be safety-relevant information on a day-to-day basis. There have been incidents at both schools and we learn about them later, and I would like there to be some sort of system so I'm aware that something is happening. You know, if they're on lockdown or whatever, so I'm aware and I can be ready to respond if I need to.*

*—Caregiver of an RPS student*

*I think that's the hard part—there is more regular communication and established relationships in elementary school. It's the same teacher all day long. Now that my daughter is in middle school, she has different teachers for every hour of day. I don't really know—does anybody know her well? Does anybody know how she's doing?* —Caregiver of an RPS student

*That middle school disconnect is what I'm struggling with as well. They use the same app for their weekly newsletter, but it feels like it's mostly the same information every week and I don't feel like there's a whole lot that necessarily applies to my kid.*

*—Caregiver of an RPS student*

*I hear stories about how there is only one bathroom open at Willow [Middle School] because kids are tearing apart the bathrooms, or about bad behaviors that are going on. But I'm not hearing any of that from the school; I'm hearing it filtered through my kid. I think it would be good for the parents to have a little more information from the school on that.*

*—Caregiver of an RPS student*

*There have been some safety incidents and even some lockdowns [in the schools]. They are not communicated in real time. I only found out later, sometimes from my kids. I think the school should have a really communication system to let parents to know so they can be prepared to take action if they need to. I would like to see metal detectors in school so a gun can't make it past the front door.* —Caregiver of an RPS student

- A few caregivers with students who attend a school outside of the RPS district noted that they like being part of a smaller district because the communication is more personalized. They also noted they receive and like the newsletters from their schools.

*I would say, being in a smaller district, we are known. I have emailed the superintendent more than once in our new district over the last two and a half years, and I received personal communication back from her. That's also true for both principals at the two schools that my children attend. They not only know my children, but they know us as a family, and that's really important to be known and to be felt like you're heard by your district.*

*—Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*I think it's every month if not more often newsletters with pictures of the kids in the classroom, and explaining works they're working on. And I'm on a first-name basis with the entire administrative staff and all the teachers, and that's something that they facilitate. That's something that they welcome, as much parent involvement as possible and communicating with parents as much as possible.* —Caregiver of a non-RPS student



## Transparency and parent education

- **Caregivers want more transparency and information from RPS related to discipline policies, academic curriculum and offerings, grades and grading systems, academic outcomes compared to other schools/students, information about how to correctly use Google Classroom and/or Skyward, and about school events.** A few caregivers who have students who do not attend RPS schools suggested that an online portal that houses school and student outcomes and information would be helpful for caregivers who are thinking of sending their child(ren) to RPS and want to know more about the options.

*I would like more specific info about individual students from their teachers like what they are working on, what they are teaching in the classroom. I understand that some of these classrooms have 35 kids and I get that. It is not fair to us as parents/caregivers when we don't even know what our students are doing in school. They need to find a way to communicate about the individualized student. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*We had a bullying problem. We worked with the school and the teacher, but they wouldn't give us any information on whether they were following their [school] policy, saying it's a privacy issue for the other student [who was doing the bullying]. I think they should be able to tell us if they're following the policy and what they're doing [to address the bullying], because we're all supposed to be following that policy. Then I need reassurance as a parent to know if the bullying policy is being followed. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*It would be nice if there was a(n) [online] portal that we can go and see assessment of the schools, and outputs, or even one thing would be RPS, the other thing would be each individual school have that information accessible to the parents so you can make a decision. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*I think one thing kind of [other participant] had mentioned was having something like a portal, where I think every parent or someone who is looking at moving to the town has the ability. Yes, Rochester has a website that talks about the schools, yet I think something as far as what their student ratios are, who the contact people are, what the expectation of each day is going to be like, in addition to what the disciplinary action is, like everybody gets a code of conduct but how much is that really followed? I think just really truly being transparent with what is going on at each school, identifying that you have a safety officer there. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*They have a newer grading system that I've experienced. The grades are: "not yet," "approaching," and "met the expectation of growth." While that seems straightforward, sometimes as a parent I see that my kid is "approaching." Well, what does that mean? Are you feeling like we're on track? If we're not yet on track when I get the trimester grade, what can I do as a parent to supplement and help him get on track? Somewhere in that communication with grading, I feel like there's a little bit of a disconnect on yeah, the teacher knows what that means, but do I really know what that means and what they're getting and what they're not with just a simple "NY" [not yet] or "AP" [approaching]? That's a bit of a struggle for me, and thankfully I can communicate with his teacher and she does a good job of talking with me, individually. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*Participant 1: That's one of the things I like about the Google [Classroom] reports that we get. Just to clarify, I don't really have to do anything other than sign up and then I just get an email every week.*

*Participant 2: I get a blank email every week. We need to connect so you can teach me how to do this, because it basically says nothing in it. I have to go to Skyward to see all the things he's missing. —Caregivers of RPS students*

*I think that's another weakness of RPS is really having and giving parents a voice and giving them all the information they need. I think it was [says other participant's name] that said you have Google Classroom and know how to operate it pretty well, but how many schools are giving parents the education/opportunity to learn about how to operate Google Classroom? —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*One thing I've struggled with is Skyward. Once they're in middle school, it's not always updated. If there are missing assignments I want to know that they're actually missing rather than the teacher not having uploaded it yet. A middle schooler is going to say they turned it in and sometimes that's true, but maybe it's sitting in their backpack and they forgot. Don't put it into Skyward unless you're ready to put in the grade. [I'd like to see] accurate grades or where they're at would be helpful for me. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

## Availability of services, student supports, and community partnerships

- **Caregivers like the student support services** (such as the special education team), honors and gifted programs, and, if they are available to them, the partnerships with community entities such as the Mayo Clinic or Quarry Hill Nature Center.

*Lincoln School is doing a really nice job of exactly what we're talking about. And I bring it up not to brag, but to wonder out loud how that would look if it were expanded. Even the kindergartners are doing observations on the zebrafish project and were watching the science progress as the little ones get bigger. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*My elementary schooler has had some chances to go to Quarry Hill this year, which they [child's school] partner really well with Quarry Hill. He comes back excited and says he's learned something new about science. But I feel like other than that, I don't know a lot about how our schools are partnering with the community and Rochester. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

- Caregivers shared that they know there are resources available to help support their child(ren), but they are **not sure what the resources are**. Caregivers feel there is a need to raise awareness of the resources available and encouragement for or proactive efforts to get families to utilize them.

*I think there are some available resources. Most kids don't utilize those resources. If the schools can raise awareness about those resources and encourage them to use them when needed. With the area of mental health, my high schoolers talk about their friends that they cannot open up to share about it. If they can improve and encourage those kids, that would be very helpful. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*I don't know what support at the high school level that he's getting. Neither of them [participant's children] tell me a whole lot about how they are learning at school. They'll tell me what they're learning, but I don't really know the details of how that's going. My son does need some support, he's always missing assignments. I just don't know what I can do on my end to make sure he's getting them done while he's in school. That's kind of hard. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*It might be helpful if they could advertise better the services they offer [at each school]. I didn't know that Fernbrook had counselors in the school. Having those kinds of things with communication about what is available to the students for support [would be helpful]. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

# Inequality

- RPS offers a wide variety of learning opportunities where students can choose the educational experience they prefer. Some caregivers perceive this as having led to **self-selection and disparities in the schools based on income and race**. Caregivers talked about the ability of some families to send their child(ren) to the “better” schools even though they do not live in the neighborhood, while other families may not be able to do that based on income and end up sending their child(ren) to their neighborhood, which then starts to be labeled as a “bad” school.

*It's ridiculous. We put the future of our kids in a lottery, and so if you are lucky you go to a good school. If you are not, you get your neighborhood school and you should be happy. Or, if you have the money, you can afford go to the private school. It's very unfair, and it's creating more gaps to our community. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

- A few caregivers discussed **perceived inequities in the district with district-wide options**, particularly when it comes to accelerated academic opportunities and partnerships with the Mayo Clinic or other community organizations. Participants emphasized that access to resources really depends on the school—that some have more than others. They are concerned that some children get these opportunities while others do not. Some caregivers noted that the district should provide more education to caregivers about these opportunities to ensure all children are able to participate.

*With those opportunities that [other participant] mentioned, of course it's good for her. But it's unfortunate that not every kid gets the same opportunity. Although those kids are willing to do [the work] and are smart. If for some reason you take the [gifted] test and you don't qualify [for that program]. I thought that would be an opportunity to provide them with those extra academic opportunities. If they did well, then this would continue, but if they don't do well, then you should go back [to regular academic curriculum]. That's how I felt. Because then you are prioritizing a specific group of students, and you're not giving an equal opportunity to other kids. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*I always hear about the partnership with Mayo [Clinic] and Lincoln. They partner for some science things. That sounds amazing, if your kid's lucky enough to go to Lincoln. We've lost that lottery twice. I wish they had more of those sorts of partnerships, and not just with a district-wide school but maybe with one of the neighborhood elementary or middle schools. I think that's a pretty amazing partnership. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*The district as a whole has a lot of resources, but because there are so many buildings it's spread too thinly. Some schools get more than others. Some of it is [based on] school size, but it really puts kids at a disadvantage based on what building they're in. When my student was at the ALC, I was amazed at what my student had access to. They have everything in the same building. Then we have others where we just have a school social worker that's full time. No speech therapist or partnership with [other services], we don't have a full-time reading interventionist. Other schools, because of their funding, have everything. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*I think there's such a disparity between the [choice and neighborhood] schools that the goal would be, how do you make it accessible for everyone? For the kid who goes to a [neighborhood school] and not just the kids who, I guess, are more special or... I don't know how you phrase the kids who get into those choice learning environments. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

## School discipline

- Caregivers are aware of and expressed **concern about discipline disparities** within RPS, particularly for students who receive special education services and students of color. Caregivers suggested that **teachers should receive training** to learn about how to reduce discipline disparities.

*This is one of the areas where I feel like, personally, my children had gone through sad experiences. There are a lot of data out there about student discipline disparities. Again, professional development in that area [is needed]. I have been advocating for many years to bring training around discipline disparities. Teachers need to know when it happens. It is urgently needed. —Caregiver of an RPS student*

*Both of my kids are African American. I heard stories about discipline issues from them based on skin color. My kids themselves have not been subjected to that yet. I don't know if my kids fully understand what they saw. I probed them a bit and make them realize what it is. It definitely happens to a kid with disability. One of my kids told me about this story of kid with disability. When that student walked into a school, that student heard their teacher talk to another student about them. It is very demoralizing. My kids never ever have Black teachers. They are middle-schoolers. —Caregiver of RPS students*

*Our discipline disparities amongst kids of color, but also amongst kids on IEPs, which we don't talk about enough, is ridiculous. Over 58% of the referrals to law enforcement last year were kids on IEPs. 58%, 60%. They represent 20% of the district. They were referred to law enforcement three times more. It is because we are using discipline as a way to get around IEP protections. I think we need to use [special education] professionals more, to have enough special education supports to avoid some of the things that are ending us up here. It's an area that's just very close to my heart and very frustrating to watch as a parent and as a community member. And I think we could do better, but we're not going to do better without more supports and without more special education staff. And we are short in every building on paraprofessionals, in every program, particularly in our EBD Level Threes and Level Fours. —Caregiver of RPS students*

*I just don't know if bias training actually works, but I do think it's worth coming up with [some training] to help teachers figure out how to work through that stuff. And making sure that teachers are talking about it and know how to talk about it. But to me, that's the biggest priority, is not being a place that has a school-to-prison pipeline. And I think that's why I said, the student support services being the biggest deal. I would way rather spend all my time focusing on making sure that school is the place where we're learning and not setting kids up on these disparate paths. —Caregiver of RPS students*

## Belonging, connection, and school culture

- Some caregivers also expressed **concern about movement within the district toward larger schools** and how that will affect academic and disciplinary outcomes as well as school climate.

*One of the things I have concerns about is the move to these really large schools. We've been in small schools. Our middle school is smaller and I just think that allows for a better sense of community and for the teachers/students to know each other. It's better for safety. It's easier to recognize who might be struggling and to know who is having behavior/violence problems. I worry about how that translates into a bigger school where it's not possible for the teachers to know everybody. It's not possible for the students to know everybody. I think it's easy for students to slip through the cracks and not get the help that they need.*  
—Caregiver of an RPS student

- Caregivers feel that **schools need to do a better job at helping students who are not part of the dominant culture feel a greater sense of belonging or connection** to their school. According to caregivers, this could be as simple as learning a few words in their student's language, if not English, to providing more culturally specific foods for lunch. Muslim parents talked about wanting teachers to respect the choice to fast during Ramadan and for the district to provide a holiday break for students who celebrate Eid and celebrate it in the schools. A few caregivers noted the importance of staff diversity, including more male teachers and teachers of color.

*When they see a teacher who looks like them, it helps students feel they belong. Both of my kids never had teachers who look like them. It is sad. I know that there are clubs for them to join after school. There are opportunities for kids to feel connected like clubs, bands. For my kids, the lack of people of color in the staff is a big issue. School nutrition, speaking of culture, RPS's school lunches are pizza, hotdog, and chicken tenders. They rotate it over time and it is all American food. I look at other schools and they have cultural/ethnic food. Not only does this gives cultural kids a reflection of their own food, but it also opens up other kids and staff about other food.* —Caregiver of RPS students

*For me, children need to feel connected. They need to see their culture reflected somehow. Sometimes it doesn't take a lot. I have shared with the school district before about my son. He said that he really liked her because she knows Arabic. She knows how to say 'thank you' in Arabic. So it can be as small as this little thing. For parents, it is similar to the children. If they don't feel welcome and when they try to reach out to teachers, it is so difficult to talk to them.* —Caregiver of RPS students

*I was more focused on who are the people that are greeting the young people at our school and do they share characteristics [of our student body]? And I've got little boys and we see... I think there are two or three male teachers. And I think we lost our one teacher of color. So I don't even think there are any in that way. So I think it would be more welcoming and inclusive if we had a teacher force that represented more closely, the young people that go there, which I know is probably what everybody says everywhere, but there it is.*  
—Caregiver of RPS students



# Caregivers of students who attend school outside the RPS district

Caregivers with students who attend a school outside of the RPS district were asked about why they chose to send their children to schools outside the district even though they live within RPS district boundaries.

## Issues with bullying

- Most of the caregivers who attended the focus group said their child experienced bullying at school when they attended RPS and changed districts due to that issue.

*We now are in a small district, and I will tell you the biggest reason why we left was, in his second grade year he was on the playground, and he was attacked more than once by two other children unprovoked, and the school district did not do anything. And I don't know the rationale behind the lack of punishment, but I knew that I had to get my child out. We were moving homes at the time, so we knew that over the summer we'd be moving. So it was the question of RPS versus the small district. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*But one was, obviously the transparency kind of... coming off of what some of the other parents said, my oldest, we spent the first two years in public school. He was bullied by a variety of kids. It started actually on his second day of school, of kindergarten. He was approached by a fifth grader asking to do a challenge on the schoolyard. He came home in tears. My neighbor witnessed it. This happened for three days in a row, and when I had emailed the principal and his teacher just stating, what do we do about this? And they're like, 'Well, we'll have a meeting.' Obviously my question was whether or not that kid was being bullied, because typically and statistically, kids that bully are kids that are bullied themselves, and nothing came of it. There was no reprimanding of anything, there was no accountability for it, and then later on that year a kid in his classroom on multiple occasions had hit him, punched him, kicked him in the stomach, pushed him over in the school. Not one of those situations was ever passed on to me. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

## Overcrowding

- A few caregivers from this group also mentioned concerns with overcrowding at RPS schools and some said this was a reason they switched to another school district.

*We went to the small district first for a tour, and fell in love with the building, the principal, the atmosphere, and then we immediately followed it with the new RPS district's school. It was chaotic, it was stressful, and the principal that was leading us around literally said to us, 'Well, we have to take you because you're now in our district, but we're overcrowded.' And I will tell you that I left there feeling... I knew what I was going to do, and I was really discouraged by RPS, the lack of care that was given by the [RPS] school and then [compared to] the way that I was treated at the other school. I knew immediately that I would never send my children back to RPS, and that was why. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*So I went to go check it out myself, and was walked around, and was told that there were 31 children in the first grade class. And what I saw was a very, very chaotic kindergarten room, where the kids were all being led out of the kindergarten room for their breakfast, and their breakfast was like maybe a six inch diameter chocolate cake, and they were all also being given fruit, but they were just dropping the fruit back in the basket and eating chocolate cake at 8:30 or 9:00 o'clock in the morning, and then freaking out and running all over the room. And then the first grade classroom was those 31 kids staring straight ahead at the PowerPoint, and every head turning as we walked past. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*For us, [the reason we switched schools] was a lot to do with the teacher and student ratio. The school at my daughter is right now, there's never been more than 15 kids in the same class. They have personalized attention, allows them to grow as kids, have inquiry and develop without the stresses of behavior disturbances. So that was one of the key things, was that ability to have a more personalized approach. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

## Curriculum

- A few caregivers felt that RPS school staff did not seem knowledgeable about the curriculum overall and their child's academic progress. One parent said they want their child to have curriculum offerings such as foreign languages or other enrichment classes that are not available within RPS.

*Her teacher [at an RPS school] was asking her which group she was in for [academic] things, and we were like, 'Well shouldn't you know which math group she's in, and which reading level, and things like that?' So we were just a bit surprised that the teacher didn't know where she was placed. So we found out more information from our daughter than we did from the teacher about what was going on, and there were just several students that were kind of the squeaky wheels in class and so they got all the attention. So she was just kind of falling in the tracks and not getting attention she needed because she was a quiet one. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

- Of note, one parent said her child returned to RPS after seven years because their student was selected to be in a choice school, or a district-wide option. Other caregivers agreed that they liked the choice schools and said they would consider going back to the district if their student was selected to attend a district-wide option school.

*We came back this year, in I think it was six or seven years, and it was because of the choice school. So that one, I think they only have 20 kids in each class, so that was a huge reason for us to even consider sending our daughter back. So yeah, the smaller class size is why we chose to go back. And then you had mentioned partnering with somebody else, and I know that they partner with Mayo Clinic [which was another reason we returned]. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*The choice schools are really a good opportunity because of the ratios and the curriculum that they offer, so we considered going back for that. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*

*My older children that did go to RPS were in choice schools in kindergarten through eighth grade. It was incredible and the partnership with Mayo Clinic was amazing. They had a very different experience in RPS compared to my younger child, and I agree with everyone, the choice school is almost like a private school. It is a different world. I don't know how Rochester could create that unless they start working on that administrative cost. —Caregiver of a non-RPS student*



## Input from representatives from city and county government and community organizations

Below are some key themes that emerged from the focus group with representatives from city and county government and community organizations in Rochester.

- RPS schools are an integral part of the community not only in providing services and supports to families of children who attend the schools, but also as a driving economic force in Rochester.

*RPS is a major employer. Significant facility management and ownership – all of the property they manage in the community. Connection to families, k-12 and community education – the reach into community is stronger than any other institution. —Community representative*

*I think the hub of a lot of families interactions with how they perceive the community is the school system. For instance, one thing that comes to mind is immediately when we started anticipating impacts with COVID-19 the immediate reaction was how do we reach families? A lot of nonprofits had that connection, but in terms of government connection to families to help build stability throughout the community with food responses and distance learning capabilities... I thought the school system just exhibited this really impressive ability to mobilize and to get out to families that I don't see being parallel really by any other organization or community. —Community representative*

- Representatives from city and county government and community organizations also offered varying perspectives on topics such as community school models, choice schools, and how RPS should examine data disaggregated by sites.

*I have two kids that go to the Spanish immersion program, so I probably have a unique, in some ways, even a disqualifying perspective. But I think it does two things—one I love that my kids have that option and that opportunity to learn a different language and learn skills that I can't teach them. So, to be able to do that has been wonderful. I think the community school model works. It's a great opportunity to really become a hub of a neighborhood more so than just a school, and that's the whole concept behind it. I think community schools are something that we need to look at more. I think we need to look at more partnerships within our schools. —Community representative and caregiver of an RPS student*

*I think one is like the kind of emergent situations, where having a choice school near a place of work can help a lot with the logistics of kind of morning habits. I actually have a significant problem with them, and I don't know how to solve it... so I'm just going to out the problem and not be helpful. The idea that they're equal access to everyone in the district is like a complete fallacy, like it gives people a lot of comfort. My family who sends our kids to Washington, that's one of the choice schools. We can make that decision because we're able to afford to have my wife not work full time. That for us, is like a slam dunk decision. But there's a lot of families who don't even know that there are choice schools to be perfectly honest with you. I have those conversations constantly and so I am really actually interested in the like demographics of the families who attend the choice schools relative to our other schools. —Community representative and caregiver of an RPS student*

*...understanding building by building, what is the scenario and the environment, at each individual building. When you look at statistics across the district as a whole, it's like our schools are very different from one another, demographically, and I would guess that behavior data was different across schools as well, and so really a school-by-school approach to understanding the data, rather than just district wide is going to gain a lot more insight. —Community representative and caregiver of an RPS student*

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# Students

The following bullets summarize key themes identified across multiple groups with RPS students and recent RPS graduates.

## Important aspects of belonging and connection

### ■ Connection to or positive relationship with teachers or other school staff.

Engagement and individualized attention and care from teachers (e.g., checking in, a friendly wave, help with school work) is what helps students most to feel connected to their school. Students want to know that school staff care about them beyond their academic success. Specifically, ALC students spoke about how important it is to feel like school staff treat them with respect and understanding. EL students also expressed the value of having a connection to a teacher or other staff within their school. Several EL students felt particularly supported by their EL teachers.

*I would say type of staff [is what helps me feel connected]. The staff here, from what I experience going to a mainstream high school, cares a lot more about how we are outside of school, like our mental health, instead of just how you're doing in school. It's not just about how you're feeling about the school work, it's about your whole life. —ALC student*

*I have a teacher that talks to me a lot. I tell him everything. My other schools didn't help me a lot and were disrespectful to me. I like seeing more color. I didn't at my other school. So when I moved schools I felt better, teachers help me a lot. When I'm not feeling well, he takes me out and talks to me. —EL student*

*I feel like when they talk to you and they ask how your day's going, it really shows that they appreciate you and want to get to know you more. — Student school board member*

*It can just be something as simple as the teacher just showing that they care, like just asking how someone is if they obviously maybe don't feel the best that day, or being willing to help them out with something that maybe most people got but they're having trouble with. Just simple stuff like that I feel like really makes a connection with teachers. —Student school board member*

*For me personally, with my teachers, I was very fortunate to have a very solid group of teachers throughout the years. They cared, and they were available outside of class, which helped very much. — Recent RPS graduate*

*But I think in terms of having adults who you are closer to is good. I was definitely very close with some of my teachers. I think that helped me feel a lot happier with how I was doing in school and things like that. —Recent RPS graduate*

- **Participation in extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities, such as sports and student clubs, help students feel connected to their school and to their peers. Some students, however, talked about challenges they experience accessing these opportunities, especially for new students starting at a new school in the middle of the year or part way through high school. Recent RPS graduates referenced the importance of extracurricular activities in helping students to explore their interests and figure out what they might want to do after high school.

*I'm on student government and I made that connection with my advisors and things like that through that activity. So, just so kind of those outside of class type of situations that you can also kind of make that connection, I think, definitely helps. —Student school board member*

*In terms of being connected to students, I was a part of a lot of extracurricular activities, which I think helped with that quite a bit. —Recent RPS graduate*

## Most helpful for student success

- **Mental health supports, other support staff, and resources are critical.** ALC students talked about the benefit of having and being aware of the mental health professionals available in their school. Students from other groups talked about utilizing resources, such as school counselors, but shared that they are not always available when they need them or that they can be difficult to get an appointment with. Student school board members referenced several different supports available for students who are struggling emotionally (e.g., Help Me Button, Teens Offering Peer Support, and other supports offered outside of the school building). Students talked about these options as important for schools to have given pervasive stigma around mental illness and seeking help. Students expressed a desire for privacy, not wanting other students or their parents to know that they are talking to counselors or what they are talking about. Having these resources is important, but making sure students are aware of and know how to access them is equally important and oftentimes lacking.

*[The ALC has] more connection and support in general. They have connections with anything a person could need if they were having troubles in their lives. —ALC students*

*At my old school, if I wanted to go to a therapist, I had to schedule at least a week out. If you came to the office and said 'yeah I need to speak to someone now' you would have to wait a long time, because there is no one there to talk. I didn't even know the other staff there—we didn't have... here I know all of the staff. I am very close to [staff person], if I ever need to talk to her I would be able to talk to her pretty quickly. I don't need to make an appointment. —ALC student*

*My counselors were the most helpful. They helped me get into college and stuff. The fact that they were ready to talk to me and take their time was really encouraging. —EL student*

*I wish there would've been a lot more mental health support while I was in high school. Specifically my junior year, there was someone who had committed suicide, and the student body really struggled with that. —Recent RPS graduate*

*For my school, mental health was something that was always talked about, that like we need to... I don't want to say invest in it, but we need to expand it or we need to look into it more, things like that. It was always talked about by administration and some student groups. But in terms of actually getting off the ground, it was extremely slow, and by the time anything got going, it was relatively unknown to most of the student body what it was or how to access it. —Recent RPS graduate*

*I think, in general, a lot of [mental health resources] just aren't advertised enough. Most people know about just general counseling in terms of classes and preparing you for the future and things like that, but a lot of the mental health and more of the other kind of supportive branches, I guess, weren't necessarily as advertised. So only if you really, really searched for them could you find them, which I thought wasn't super helpful. —Recent RPS graduate*

- **Importance of conducive learning environments.** Students discussed the importance of the environment in which they are learning. ALC students appreciated the windows in their building, both to see outdoors and into other classrooms. They benefit from an environment that feels orderly and calm. A student school board member talked about the importance of having time outside during the day and other students agreed.

*I'd like to increase the amount of time that we go outside. I know at Friedell we don't have recess. So maybe during that advisory class, if there's no SEL lesson or social-emotional thing that we need to do, we could go outside. —Student school board member*

*I feel like the environment helps people focus more. It'd feel crowded here if the windows were shut, the fact that we open all the windows here in every classroom [is good]. —ALC student*

- **Opportunities to explore interests through school (e.g., cooking, gardening).** Students expressed an interest in and desire for opportunities to explore topical interests and their passions through school. ALC students, specifically, shared their appreciation for the various opportunities that are provided by their school to explore their interests, including through partnerships with local organizations. Recent RPS graduates talked about the value of being able to explore their interests through a variety of classes and other opportunities to prepare them for what comes after high school.

*I also think that there should be more and better resources for students that want to do more. Maybe to practice something, practice math more, or look deeper into a history project, more resources for that. —Student school board member*

*I think, in terms of extracurricular activities and how that can influence the direction someone might go in and their college applications or something, different opportunities to get students interested in what they actually want to do. —Recent RPS graduate*

## Feedback on academics

- **Critiques and compliments of Grading for Learning.** Students expressed that they understand the idea behind Grading for Learning, but reported some unintended consequences. While they like the reduction in the amount of “busy work” they are asked to do, they feel like this approach puts more pressure on testing, quizzes, and projects and can result in less motivation to do assigned homework. Some students felt that the approach has some benefits (e.g., taking tests more seriously), but noted that the implementation could have been improved. Specifically, students experienced inconsistent grading practices across their classes (i.e., some teachers grading homework and some not), making it difficult to keep track of what gets graded and what does not. One student noted that one benefit of Grading for Learning is that it does a good job of emulating what college is like and therefore helped her be more prepared for that transition.

*I agree with what other people have said about the Grading for Learning where it's good in theory as far as, I guess, rewarding kids... Or I guess it's not rewarding, but taking more time to actually learn the material. But I do think there is some issues with it as far as it's just tests and quizzes and projects and stuff that is your grade. At least for my classes, there's less busy work, which is good and bad, but I feel like it stresses a lot of people out more when you take the tests and when you take the quizzes, because that's the only thing that's in your grade. So if you mess it up on accident, then there's not a lot you can do about that. I agree with the idea, but I think there needs to be some more work on it as well.*  
—Student school board member

*Personally, for me, I think I was fine with that method (Grading for Learning), but I think for other people, it didn't motivate them to actually do other work outside of just the projects and assessments, like homework or stuff like that. I think that really ended up affecting them when they did end up having to do those tests and stuff.* —Recent RPS graduate

*I like the way they're doing grades this year. Instead of all the homework and stuff, now it depends. If you know the stuff, you don't have to do the homework. It's just [important to do the homework] if you need more help.* —EL student

- **Need for differentiated instruction and learning.** Members of the student school board talked about the challenges they experience in their classes related to students learning at different speeds and the need to receive instruction in a variety of ways. Several groups discussed the varying needs of students and the desire for flexibility and variation across classes and instruction to try and meet the needs of individual students, both those who are excelling and those who are struggling.

*I think something that helped in one of my classes is at the beginning of the year, a teacher took a survey asking how people learned the best. I think that really helped her figure out what projects would be the best or what assignments to assign. Same topic, but different ways to do it. So the people who like writing essays can do that, and the people who like working in group projects can do that. So they're learning the best that they can in the way that they learn best, instead of, 'This is the way we're doing it. Some of you are great at this and some of you can't learn that way.' I think that really helped.* —Student school board member



*In some of my classes, we had the choice to either work independently or we can work with a group. Or just little things like that that maybe don't seem like a big deal, but I can tell has made a big deal for some of the students and has improved how much they work on something. Some people don't like working by themselves, and if they work in a group, then they're more willing to do whatever the project is. I think that's been helpful.*  
—Student school board member

- **Need for more variety in advanced course options.** Recent RPS graduates expressed appreciation for the number of Advanced Placement (AP) classes offered through their high school and some students wanted even more variety among AP classes. One student talked, specifically, about the need for more class options that fall in between general and AP classes (e.g., honors classes).

*I would like to see more AP classes, possibly AP World History or even like AP Studio Art, things that allow students to branch out more than just the typical just sciences or typical just history, something a little more varied than that. Because although we did have a really good selection, I feel like the school support in terms of the arts and in terms of some of the other humanities subjects could have been a little more developed.* —Recent RPS graduate

## Most helpful things school staff can do

- **Desire for compassionate, cooperative, and communicative staff.** Students expressed the desire to be understood by school staff and shared appreciation for staff who take time to talk with them about issues either related to their experience in school or in their personal lives.
- **Encouragement for students.** Students expressed an appreciation and desire for encouragement and emotional support from staff and administration. A couple students noted a lack of motivation in their classes and the need for more encouragement from school staff.

*Our principal can be way more helpful. In the past we had principals that were really encouraging, come to your classes and stuff, this year I don't even know who our principal is.*  
—EL student

*I think that counselors probably could have done more in terms of college readiness and specifically with providing more resources and promoting a wider range of universities and programs instead of just having visits from the same five Minnesota universities all year. I feel like there was a lack of encouraging students to think big.* —Recent RPS graduate

## Perceptions of discipline practices

- **Students (with the exception of ALC students) do not perceive discipline as handled fairly at their school.** Recent RPS graduates highlighted perceived differences in how RPS staff discipline students based on their racial identity or handle issues involving race (e.g., calling someone a racial slur). ALC students said they do feel that discipline is handled fairly at the ALC, but was not at their previous school. Students described school staff as quick to jump to suspension before fully

understanding what happened during an incident. Some students felt that there are not enough staff in their school who are equipped to deal with discipline issues and that they usually arrive late to an incident. One student referenced the use of no contact clauses and felt that this intervention is ineffective. Overall, students felt that their school's approach to discipline is not working and needs to change.

*So you can kind of see that process has never worked because at schools I feel like the same problems that people have still occur and they either get worse or there's things that happen. Then there's only animosity towards administration because stuff is never effective, and it just creates a lot of conflict. So I think the overall way that discipline is approached should definitely be changed. —Recent RPS graduate*

## Sense of safety

- **Perceptions of safety are mixed among students.** ALC students described feeling safe at the ALC, but unsafe at their prior RPS school. Most EL students said they feel safe as long as they stay away from fights. While several groups referenced fights that occur in the hallways, the student school board members, largely middle school age students, talked about pushing and other unsafe behaviors that happen frequently in crowded hallways at their school. Several students talked about the role of resource officers at their school, but noted that they are not always close or able to get to the fight and that teachers and other school staff are not well-equipped to handle these situations. Recent RPS graduates focused on safety in terms of the threat of a shooting or intruder and had mixed feelings about the preparedness of their school to handle that sort of situation, should it arise.

*At Mayo, we constantly have a resource officer there that will just kind of walk around the building, make sure everyone feels safe, knows that they're safe, and check in during classes, things like that. [They also reach] out to students who might actually voice that opinion of not feeling safe, just to check in, see what's up, why they don't feel safe. So that way, they can address that and possibly fix whatever the problem is or things like that. So I definitely think that that's always been a really good kind of idea. —Student school board member*

*I don't have an idea on how to improve this, but at my school, I know that hallways and the staircases are a big problem with pushing. And in sixth grade, they actually had it at the end of the day you could only go down the center staircase, which I think helped a little bit. —Student school board member*



## Ability to serve racially diverse population

- **Student perception of the district’s ability to serve a racially diverse student body varies by school and staff.** Recent RPS graduates felt that there were some staff who are more skilled at interacting with racially and culturally diverse populations than others and that some schools were better equipped than others, particularly schools that have more staff of color and more resources to help students feel connected to the school.

*[Reflecting on his role as a classroom helper.] Because the elementary school, it is located in an area that serves low-income families especially, they were... School staff is made aware and trained in how to address conflicts within the school and things like that. There's a lot more counselors and specialists and paras even within the school that are there specifically to address conflicts or sit down and discuss issues with students.*  
—Recent RPS graduate

# RPS staff

## Communication

Several participants across the staff focus groups discussed needed changes in communication between the district and schools, among schools, and between the district, schools, and families. RPS staff especially want more resources to facilitate communication with families who are English language learners.

- **Principals would like to give more input on district level decisions and communication plans.**

*The district says 'here's a big decision that's been made' and it doesn't feel fleshed out and principals say to them 'what about this, what about this?' and then the refined decision comes out. So why aren't you including us in conversation? I'm in charge of [X number] of students, and you roll out big things and you don't ask me or someone like me any questions about how I think it might go. There should be someone close to a building and who is doing this work to inform these decisions. —RPS principal*

- **There is a lack of communication across the district between buildings and staff.** Many staff members do not know where to go for what they need or who does what in RPS. Additionally, staff do not have the knowledge about resources RPS provides due to the lack of communication.

*The communication between buildings and what is located where and sometimes who does what and where can I find this help, isn't there. —RPS staff member*

- **RPS staff and principals noted challenges communicating with caregivers, especially those whose primary language is not English.** There are gaps in staff understanding of how to do this in addition to a lack of resources to make those connections with families. Staff would like more resources and a better understanding of how to work with translators and interpreters so that they can communicate with non-English speaking families.

*More knowledge about interpreters and how to build relationships with families would be great. —RPS staff member*

*What would be beneficial is more access to translated materials. We just have English. It would be great to have a system that everything goes through instead of helter skelter trying to translate later. —RPS principal*

*The more diverse your school is, the more challenging it is. We have many languages and some don't have interpreters for all of them. In a diverse school community, the options are so limited. How can you reach out with a phone call if you can't speak to them? Can you bring them all together for a meeting maybe or maybe not? There might be one person in the district who speaks the language [which is difficult]. —RPS principal*

*I've had a lot of families [who don't speak English as a first language] actually say, 'I don't know how my child is doing in school.' I get messages that [are not in English] and I don't know what they say. And I think, 'it's almost 2022.' Our voicemail should be in different languages. I think it's small, but it would make a big impact [on all of us] and we haven't done them yet. —RPS staff member*

## Professional development, collaboration, and mentoring

RPS staff and principals reported a need for more mentoring, collaboration with their colleagues and schools, and professional development.

- **Principals would like a mentorship or feedback process** so they can improve and build their leadership skills.

*Does it exist? [asking if feedback and mentoring for building leaders exists, if there are any programs that have this]. You sink or swim or find a friend, if [support] doesn't exist...There's breakdown in communication, how to support each other, the people in leadership roles [district leadership] don't know differences between leadership roles, like director versus principal. I came into leadership, not knowing who can help. —RPS principal*

*There could be a better system when you are trained. There's a lack of HR training. Some sort of orientation and ongoing mentorship [would be helpful]. —RPS principal*

- RPS staff advocated for **more time to collaborate with their colleagues**, especially by grade level. For example, just kindergarten teachers or just eighth grade teachers versus lumping the elementary school staff together for professional development that is only applicable to one grade level. Staff indicated a need for **more time, in general, for things like collaboration and communication with their colleagues to address academic and behavioral issues, and to execute long-term goals for new curriculum**. Additionally, if staff are given more tasks/responsibilities due to budget cuts they need more time to focus on those things.

*Something I hear around our building, and from a lot of elementary school colleagues, at least, is [the desire for] more time for planning and collaborating. Right now, a lot of our morning planning is used for meetings, and while that's also important, there is not a lot of time to individually plan and plan with our team. —RPS staff member*

*If we want to do the most effective reading intervention we need to know what is happening in the classroom and need to know what the teachers are doing to support those kids. Teachers' time is so precious, so it's hard for us to get time with them. —RPS staff member*

*[I] really feel heard with this new curriculum. I really feel like they listened to what we needed. We started to implement last year and I really like it and feel heard which is good. Been told that it's okay if we don't get through everything and that's the first time I've heard that in nine years, which is a huge relief, and it is appreciated. —RPS staff member*

*We need time to prepare to have a good conversation. To have a data-driven conversation, we need time and resources to prepare. So, not just to have a PLC (professional learning community) to have one, because they are good and we were told to have one, but it's not going to be effective if we don't have time to prepare to do those things. —RPS staff member*

*I want to see more RPS staff trained on restorative practices and full circle on how to prevent discipline issues in the future by coming back and learning [from what was done]. Administrators and classroom teachers [should have this] too as they are in the thick of it every day. —RPS staff member*

## Financial resources and partnerships

- RPS staff said that **money is a huge factor to be able to make schools function** in a way that is beneficial for both staff and students. For example, one staff member shared that the librarian at their school is split between all three high schools, and referenced that when a paraprofessional calls in sick, that the library would simply close for the day.

*If the district wants to do this better and invest in kids, which has proved to be effective that students do well and do better when they have the resources available to them at school, then they need to pony up the money. —RPS staff member*

*Take a step back, admin, and decide whether it is important for the district and find the money for it. If not, then be more transparent if that's not something they want to put the money into. —RPS staff member*

- Staff believe that RPS needs to **pay staff and teachers more** if they hope to achieve growth and retention among staff in the district.

*[It's] not a magical fix, but we have to pay people more. That's all teachers everywhere. Across the country we are at a crisis point. [People] don't want to enter that profession anymore for all the reasons we talked about here: top heavy, top down, not enough time, low-income housing, housing crunch in Rochester. Such a straightforward answer: pay people for time, hard work, and expertise. —RPS staff member*

- RPS staff suggest creating **district-wide partnerships with local businesses like Mayo Clinic** who can provide resources the schools don't have access to or can't afford.

*[My idea is to] partner with Mayo Clinic and have them help us to fund things. They're sitting on millions of dollars and investing overseas and that trickle down [in our community] doesn't happen at all. They should look at us [RPS] as a nonprofit they should support. It would help us fund projects and help kids. —RPS staff member*

*Just at the elementary level, I think there's a lot of opportunities, but then there's a disparity in opportunities where some schools have access to the Mayo Clinic to run programs, but not all schools have that. So, it's great that we have those opportunities. —RPS staff member*

## Staffing

- RPS staff report a **lack of racial diversity among administrators, staff, and teachers.**

RPS staff of color feel that the small number of diverse staff are expected to do a lot of the work around racial equity and to “fix it” in the schools.

*Off top of my head, can think of 10 people in Marshall who are folks of color. We talked about this last week. A lot of them are our house staff. They are administrators, specialists, case managers, who are in leadership. The other piece, hall staff of color and those who are not of color, but not at the table. They feel devalued. People are not having real conversations about what is happening, so staff of color are left out. I feel staff of color are carrying a lot of things on their own (burdens; how to fix things of our students of color because we are of color) and don't feel that they can necessarily talk with White or other coworkers about this.*  
—RPS staff member

- RPS staff suggest the **need for more transparency and support** from the district and school leadership to show that they are valued. A part of those supports would be offering resources and direction to support staff.

*Trust is such a huge thing [for me to do my job effectively]. I've gone through two administrators and head principals. One was very lacking in trust of staff and the other is amazing. Along with that, trust is transparency. They are pulling staff together when we are having issues [with a student] and asking, 'what's your intake and input since you're in the classroom? We are dealing with students one-on-one but you are actually dealing with students in the classroom.' Trust and transparency is huge.* —RPS staff member

*When I go visit school, sometimes I don't have a place designated for me. So, I literally have to go sit in the lunchroom or the library or the hallway. So then it's kind of like, I truly feel sometimes that my role was created to literally just check off a box....at certain schools, I don't have admin that tell me, I need help with this, this and that. I mean, it's not the kids' fault. So I still go in and I try to figure it out that out myself. But even if I do that, I have nobody following up with me. So I'm like, oh, okay. So, I do all this work. I talk to all these kids and then I just keep it to myself.* —RPS staff member

## Curriculum

- RPS staff participants expressed a **need for new curriculum materials as the current ones are outdated**. Participants from the Employees of Color Resource Group said **there is a need for more appropriate and engaging materials and curriculum that cater to student's age, culture, and ability**.

*It's been a hunt to kind of find things that will be engaging to students that are also culturally responsive. So, that's something that, I think, if we could work toward building a curriculum or finding more resources that are age appropriate, culturally responsive and geared for special education, that would be great. —RPS staff member*

*Many of our resources extremely outdated and not current for science, social studies, and health. It's left up to teacher creation but also no time to create. We need funding and plans to keep our materials current and engaging for all of our students. —RPS staff member*

## School climate and culture

- **RPS staff of color reported feelings of isolation at their schools. In some cases, there is an unwelcoming culture in the schools where they work.** Some staff of color described instances where other RPS staff are disrespectful to them, and students therefore feel they can also treat these staff members poorly. Additionally, they felt that lack of support or buy-in from a team can make them feel less effective in their work.

*I feel like even though it's a middle school, the staff doesn't need to act like middle school kids and have cliques and not make us feel welcome. And I know I've talked to [participant] about this, like we'll say hi to staff members and they'll just totally ignore us. So I'm like, how do you have this culture like that? You behave like that as adults, but then you want the kids to act better? And it comes from you first. So, that's the number one thing that I see that's a big problem to make anybody really like, is that school culture and it's...I don't know. It's pretty bad. —RPS staff member*

*I think I heard here more than once, staff [aren't] always feeling welcome and included and safe. So, how is that going to impact their students? I think it will be parallel that they're not going to feel welcome, safe and included either. And it is somewhat about creating a culture. And I've heard here today too, from some of you too, that it can sometimes be influenced individually by the school, by the specific school. And that's a district's problem I think. It shouldn't be influenced by the leadership of the individual school. —RPS staff member*

*RPS is like, we hired you. That's what we do. And then the rest of it is on you. —RPS staff member*

*It's just having that support from your colleagues. It makes a world of a difference. And now that I'm new here to the area, I'm really feeling it, not having that [support]. —RPS staff member.*

*I feel as a staff member that I'm very much on my own because I'm the only one that is teaching this subject. So, I'm the only one. I don't have a team in the school. So, as many of us here, we feel disconnected. —RPS staff member*

- Also, due of the lack of diversity, one staff person mentioned they often feel unable to provide feedback through things like surveys, because of fear of being identified or tokenized.

*I hate when that survey comes out at the school I'm at, and the question is, 'do I feel like I'm treated differently because of my race?' I'm one of a few people of color at my school. So, I don't even do the survey because if I say how I feel, everybody knows it's me.*  
—RPS staff member

- RPS staff are particularly alarmed that there **is an increase in violence this year in the schools**. Staff report there is a **lack of consistency in reporting behavior problems across RPS schools**. Staff shared that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on student behavior. Due to staff being overwhelmed, students are not receiving the supports they need to deal with mental health, and managing behavioral issues.

*I've worked in education for 30 years. I have never seen behavior issues like I've seen this year, and that includes from when I worked in a setting IV program. This year blindsided everyone. There are so many needs, and not enough people or resources to help where and when the kids need help.* —RPS staff member

*Part of [the problem] is accurate assessment [and reporting] for behavior problems. For years, some teachers wouldn't even fill out [a discipline] form because they don't think anything will happen. Then, it is undocumented and we don't have an accurate picture about how things are going in one school compared to another school. It's not going to be an equal comparison because of the processes that happen in each school individually.*  
—RPS staff member

- RPS principals said they would like **fewer administrative duties (such as contact tracing and paperwork) so they can concentrate on building a better school culture and improving morale**.

*How can we empower other staff? As building leaders, in the time we take to track COVID cases we can't do anything else. Thank goodness we have instructional coaches. We can't lead a culture when we are rustling through those things. What is our role? What should my time be spent doing? It has to be an admin person to deal with those things [i.e., setting the school culture].* —RPS principal



## Discipline policies

- RPS staff believe that **discipline policies could be improved** by teaching kids how to behave, rewarding positive behavior, and consequences and accountability for students who exhibit problematic behaviors. Some are also confused about the discipline policies at their school and believe there should be more clarity and more training around what they are and how to implement them.

*My experience going through the district [as a student] was punishment than rewards for positive behaviors. [But we weren't really taught] why it was wrong or what to do that was right. If do it [good behavior], that's good, if not, you're in trouble. It would be great if there was more support for those who do positive things. Sometimes, we have situations where one person ruins it for the whole class, and that could be focused on as well as finding ways to educate them if are having [behavioral] issues to help. —RPS staff*

*The hardest piece I have seen is more fights. I find myself in those meetings coming after [the fight], it's a family and student coming in and being told, 'don't do it again and go to class.' They're not giving them information or the skills they need to not do it again. Look at information: are they being referred to a school counselor? I'm not seeing anything done to keep it from happening again. There's just a lot of talk. The adults are just assuming these kids will get it without teaching them the skills they are lacking. —RPS staff member*

*There is not enough accountability for some kids. I feel there is no accountability for kids really ripping toilets out of the floor. So we have to close bathrooms because there is so much destruction. Fights, throwing food. I don't know if the current policies are working. —RPS staff member*

*It feels like we've ebbed and flowed with discipline; we had autonomy then not. It feels confusing about what exactly we are supposed to do at times, what direction we're going. Where are we going? What's guiding us? The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) report was part of that, I don't know if it felt like a direction guide. It can be tricky to navigate. —RPS principal*

*We say words like 'we wish we were doing like restorative practices.' We hope people are doing those things, but we haven't put time into training or making sure the happen. Our documents don't come close to following the practices. For the level 2 [discipline procedure] I can't say we did a restorative circle: we literally can't mark that, as I haven't made the push to make it happen. There are lots of words, but no action. —RPS principal*



# Inequities

- RPS staff expressed **concerns about inequity and disparities** that exist within the district. In particular, staff called out **inequities around general resource allocation among RPS schools, opportunities for gifted and talented education, transportation, and other resources**. Staff also noted that there are concerning **discipline disparities and inequitable practices**, especially for students of color, and that these are pervasive across the district.
- RPS staff from the Employees of Color Resource Group pointed out that there are **inequities in how the district accommodates and provides opportunities for those with different learning abilities**. For example, one staff member pointed out that gifted and talented learners often have more opportunities and ways to engage in school compared to those who struggle in school or are in special education classes.

*A simple example would be like transportation opportunity. If you have a high end student [gifted and talented] at the high school, there is transportation for them to do internships downtown at Mayo Clinic or elsewhere within the community. But if it's a student who is receiving special education services, on the other end of that continuum, there's no creative opportunity to try to get them out and about and engage in the community in different ways. And so on the high end, I think it's quite good [opportunities available], but being creative and solution focused and providing equitable opportunities on the other end of that continuum, I would say, are a weakness. —RPS staff member*

- RPS staff felt that there are **inequities regarding student discipline**. Staff mentioned that students of color face more disciplinary action compared with White students who commit similar infractions.

*I can have one kid (student) punch somebody, bloody a nose and it's like, 'well, you're just going to miss recess' and I can have another kid [of color] do something less, throw a chair and maybe gets sent home. There's a lot of just disparities [in discipline], it's inequitable and it doesn't really make any sense at all. —RPS staff member*

- RPS staff expressed **concern about how students are chosen to be part of the English Language Learning (ELL) programs** in the district and the policies that dictate how these students are chosen. For some staff, there is no clear reason why some students are chosen for ELL and some are not. This concern was shared by a parent who had a similar experience. According to staff, there is a perception that many ELL students are automatically put in special education classes.

*I struggle because I feel that some students, I don't know how they just end up in ELL, even though they don't speak another language. I feel like they just end up there just because they have a different kind of last name that's not White enough. Because I met students who just speak English and they are put in ELL and I have a hard time understanding that. It just doesn't make sense to me sometimes. —RPS staff member*

*One year my child was put in a ESL class, but she was born here and we think it was because her last name was [last name] and we spoke up and corrected that decision the teacher and principle had made and held them accountable. – Caregiver of an RPS student*

*In my house we speak Spanish, but my kids don't speak Spanish. For my child, the school wants to put them in ELL. And they keep insisting and insisting and insisting, and I'm like, 'Stop. No, I don't want them in there.' And my child is already in special education. So it's like, my child is never going to be in the regular classroom. And then I feel like there's this little chain where they put kids in ELL, and they're in ELL for so long when they shouldn't be and then they get to this point where, okay, we want to exit them out [of the program], but you're not ready to be in a regular classroom so we're going to put you in special education. —RPS staff member and caregiver of an RPS student*

*When students exit ELL, they have to take a super hard test that even native speakers would struggle with. And I try to tell my students all the time, they'll ask me, 'Why am I an ELL student? Why am I in here?' They think they're lower than everyone else. And I try to explain to them, you have two languages in your brain so we're just trying to help you differentiate the two. You're doing more work than your other peers. So, you're hardworking and you're a bright student, intelligent. You're doing so much more work than they are, which will help you in the long run. I try to tell them that, and then they take that test every year. To get them prepared for it is just crazy, because it is such a difficult test. I want to give it to native [English] speakers and see how well they do. —RPS staff member*

# Appendix A

## Respondent demographics

The section below provides information about respondent demographics. Figure A1 outlines the specific groups for each of the categories and the number of attendees for each group. A key limitation of the study is that, despite efforts, RPS was not able to successfully recruit caregivers for a focus group with Somali and Spanish-speaking caregivers as intended.

### A1. Focus group population and attendance

Focus Group Population	Date	Type	Attendance (N)
Black or African American	12/13/21	Caregivers	3
Black or African American	2/28/22	Caregivers	15
Black or African American	3/1/22	Caregivers	10
General: Group 1	12/9/21	Caregivers	10
General: Group 2	12/15/21	Caregivers	6
Non-RPS Students	12/20/21	Caregivers	8
<b>Total number of caregivers who attended a focus group<sup>a</sup></b>			<b>52</b>
City/County government and Community organizations	12/2/21	Community members	10
<b>Total number of community members who attended a focus group</b>			<b>10</b>
Employees of Color Resource Group	12/14/21	RPS staff	10
General	12/15/21	RPS staff	10
Principals	12/1/21	RPS staff	11
Rochester Education Association (REA)	12/7/21	RPS Staff	11
<b>Total number of RPS staff who attended a focus group</b>			<b>42</b>
ALC students with experiences in other RPS school settings	12/7/21	Students	8
Students who are English-language learners	12/7/21	Students	8
Students who are on student school board	12/8/21	Students	10
Recent RPS graduates	12/20/21	Students	11
<b>Total number of students who attended a focus group</b>			<b>37</b>
<b>Total number of focus group attendees</b>			<b>141</b>

<sup>a</sup> Note that one participant attended two groups as they are a caregiver of students that attend RPS schools and schools outside of the district.

Figures A2, A3, and A4 outline respondent demographics for each of the specific types of focus groups. Focus group participants who did not provide a response are not included in the analysis below. Of note, we did not include demographic information for county, city, and community organization representatives due to the small N.

## A2. RPS caregiver focus group participant demographics (N=52)

	N	%
<b>Gender (N=50)</b>		
Female	32	64%
Male	16	36%
<b>Respondent age (N=21)</b>		
22-34	2	10%
35-47	17	80%
48-60	2	10%
<b>Race/ethnicity (N=50)</b>		
Of color	31	62%
White	18	36%
Another response	1	2%
<b>Sexual orientation (N=35)</b>		
Heterosexual	35	100%
<b>Identify as having a disability, or had an IEP/504 plan while in school (N=38)</b>		
Yes	12	32%
No	26	68%
<b>Identify as having a relationship with a child who has a disability and/or receives special education/504 services now or in the past (N=38)</b>		
Yes	21	55%
No	17	45%
<b>Identify English as their first language (N=42)</b>		
Yes	31	74%
No	11	26%
<b>Immigrant or child of an immigrant (N=29)</b>		
Yes	14	48%
No	15	52%

### A3. RPS student focus group participant demographics (N=37)

	N	%
<b>Gender (N=35)</b>		
Female	21	60%
Male	9	26%
Another way	5	14%
<b>Respondent age (N=31)</b>		
11-15	10	32%
16-18	16	52%
19-21	5	16%
<b>Race/ethnicity (N=36)</b>		
Of color	16	44%
White	19	53%
Another response	1	3%
<b>Sexual orientation (N=20)</b>		
Heterosexual	8	40%
Bisexual/Gay/Lesbian/Pan	7	35%
Another response	5	25%
<b>Identify as having a disability, or has/had an IEP/504 plan while in school (N=31)</b>		
Yes	7	23%
No	24	77%
<b>Identify English as their first language (N=33)</b>		
Yes	28	85%
No	5	29%
<b>Immigrant or child of an immigrant (N=31)</b>		
Yes	7	23%
No	24	77%

#### A4. RPS staff focus group participant demographics (N=42)

	N	%
<b>Gender (N=42)</b>		
Female	30	71%
Male	12	29%
<b>Respondent age (N=31)</b>		
22-34	9	29%
35-47	11	35%
48-60	11	35%
<b>Race/ethnicity (N=42)</b>		
Of color	11	26%
White	31	74%
<b>Sexual orientation (N=34)</b>		
Heterosexual	32	94%
Gay/Bisexual	2	6%
<b>Identify as having a disability, or had an IEP/504 plan while in school (N=39)</b>		
Yes	3	8%
No	36	92%
<b>Identify as having a relationship with a child who has a disability and/or receives special education/504 services now or in the past (N=36)</b>		
Yes	22	61%
No	14	39%
<b>Identify English as their first language (N=40)</b>		
Yes	32	80%
No	8	20%
<b>Immigrant or child of an immigrant (N=38)</b>		
Yes	9	24%
No	29	76%

## Appendix B

### Caregiver of RPS Students Focus Group Protocol

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I use [she/her] pronouns. I work for Wilder Research. I will be asking questions and moderating today's group and \_\_\_\_\_ is here to take notes. Rochester Public Schools is partnering with Wilder Research for in their strategic planning process. Our goal in working with RPS is to help create an action plan that will guide the work of the school district from 2022-2025. The action plan will help to focus and coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders in Rochester Public Schools to achieve the district's mission and vision.

We're talking to groups of students, families, RPS staff, and community members to get their thoughts and ideas about what RPS should include in this action plan in order to best serve our students and help them to be successful in school. The purpose of today's group is to learn more about your experiences as a caregiver of an RPS student [or caregiver of a child who does not attend RPS] and get your ideas and perspectives of how RPS can improve. RPS is going to use information from all of these groups, as well as a survey caregivers and RPS staff, to put together an action plan for how the school district can move forward in meeting their goals. Results will be used to inform the strategic action plan that will be presented to the school board.

Before we get started, I'd like to propose a few guidelines to follow for this discussion. First, there are no right or wrong answers, so we hope you can share your honest opinions and thoughts. We also ask that you be respectful of the thoughts and opinions of others. The purpose of this discussion is to get different perspectives and points of view. Second, please take turns so everyone gets a chance to talk. Third, I'd like everyone to agree that you will not repeat what you hear in this group to anyone outside of this group. To maintain your confidentiality, when we report what was learned in this group, we will do so by summarizing what was shared. We will not report any names or other information that will identify you.

Also, your decision to participate or not participate in this group today does not affect any current or future services you may be receiving from Rochester Public Schools or any of their partner organizations.

With that said, we would like to record today's discussion in case we miss anything in the notes. The recording will be deleted after the notes are finalized. Is that okay with everyone? **[If yes, push record]**

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started.

**INTRO Q:** Tell us your name, how long you've lived in Rochester, and one thing you're looking forward to in the New Year. (Facilitator can say their name, pronouns, and give an example.)

First, I'm going to ask about communication from your child(ren)'s school.

1. What do you like about how your child's school communicates with you? What could be improved?
2. What type of information would you like to receive to help you understand how well the district is serving your child(ren)?
3. Next, we are going to talk about several topics that are important to the strategic planning process. What is RPS or your child(ren)'s school do well in these areas? And what are weaknesses in these areas?

(FACILITATOR: Go quickly through each item asking about strengths then weaknesses for each)

- Academic curriculum
  - Student supports and resources (PROBE: academics, social/emotional learning, mental health services, etc.)
  - School discipline policies (In what ways can RPS make sure that all students are being treated fairly as far as discipline? What are you seeing or hearing from your child(ren) about discipline in the school? What do you think are some solutions to address discipline disparities for students of color, students who are low income, and students who have a disability?)
  - The RPS community (PROBE: community support of the schools, support from other organizations (businesses and nonprofits), etc.
  - School climate and culture (e.g. a place/overall culture that is supportive, welcoming, and inclusive of all students and their families, staff, and the various communities they serve)
  - School safety (e.g., COVID-19, and other issues)
  - Grades, report cards, testing, and making other types of progress (PROBE: For example, how students are evaluated and measuring their progress?)
4. What are some reasons students might not think they belong or are not connected to their school? What are some reasons parents/caregivers might not feel connected to their child(ren)'s school?
    - What can teachers, principals, and school staff do to help students and their families to feel like they are part of their school?



### *Wrap up and closing*

5. In one sentence, what is the most important thing the Rochester Public School District can do for the youth in your community?
6. Is there anything else the RPS strategic action planning committees should consider that we haven't already asked about?

### *Closing*

Thank you very much for your time today. We really appreciate the feedback you've provided as it will help to drive the action planning process for RPS. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Moody at [demoody@rochesterschools.org](mailto:demoody@rochesterschools.org).

**REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT THE INCENTIVES WILL ARRIVE IN THEIR EMAIL WITHIN THE NEXT TWO DAYS.**

# Caregiver of non-RPS Students Focus Group Protocol

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I use [she/her] pronouns. I work for Wilder Research and will be asking questions and moderating today's group and \_\_\_\_\_ is here to take notes. Rochester Public Schools is partnering with Wilder Research for in their strategic planning process. Our goal in working with RPS is to help create an action plan that will guide the work of the school district from 2022-2025. The action plan will help to focus and coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders in Rochester Public Schools to achieve the district's mission and vision.

We're talking to groups of students, families, RPS staff, and community members to get their thoughts and ideas about what RPS should include in this action plan in order to best serve our students and help them to be successful in school. The purpose of today's group is to learn more about your experiences as a caregiver of an RPS student [or caregiver of a child who does not attend RPS] and get your ideas and perspectives of how RPS can improve. RPS is going to use information from all of these groups, as well as a survey caregivers and RPS staff, to put together an action plan for how the school district can move forward in meeting their goals. Results will be used to inform the strategic action plan that will be presented to the school board.

Before we get started, I'd like to propose a few guidelines to follow for this discussion. First, there are no right or wrong answers, so we hope you can share your honest opinions and thoughts. We also ask that you be respectful of the thoughts and opinions of others. The purpose of this discussion is to get different perspectives and points of view. Second, please take turns so everyone gets a chance to talk. Third, I'd like everyone to agree that you will not repeat what you hear in this group to anyone outside of this group. To maintain your confidentiality, when we report what was learned in this group, we will do so by summarizing what was shared. We will not report any names or other information that will identify you.

Also, your decision to participate or not participate in this group today does not affect any current or future services you may be receiving from Rochester Public Schools or any of their partner organizations.

With that said, we would like to record today's discussion in case we miss anything in the notes. The recording will be deleted after the notes are finalized. Is that okay with everyone? **[If yes, push record]**

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started.

**INTRO Q:** Tell us your name, how long you've lived in Rochester, and one thing you're looking forward to in the New Year. (Facilitator can say their name, pronouns, and give an example.)

First, I'm going to ask about communication from your child(ren)'s school.

1. What do you appreciate most about the school or school district your children are a part of?
2. What do you like about how your child's school communicates with you? What could be improved?
3. Why did you choose to send your child(ren) to school in a district outside of RPS?
  - What information is most important to you when deciding where to send your child to school? Where do you get your information (e.g., word of mouth/friends/family, data on student academic achievement)?
4. When deciding on where to send your child(ren) to school, which issues are the most important to consider for your family? (Facilitator – read the list and let people respond. You can copy and paste the list in the chat)
  - Academic curriculum
  - Student supports and resources (PROBE: academics, social/emotional learning, mental health services, etc.)
  - School discipline policies
  - The community (PROBE: community support of the schools, support from other organizations (businesses and nonprofits), etc.
  - School climate and culture (e.g. a place/overall culture that is supportive, welcoming, and inclusive of all students and their families, staff, and the various communities they serve)
  - School safety (e.g., COVID-19, and other issues)
  - Grades, report cards, testing, and making other types of progress (PROBE: For example, how students are evaluated and measuring their progress?)
5. What do you think the biggest factors are that make families want to stay in RPS?
6. What are the biggest factors why families want to leave?
7. What, if anything, could the RPS district do to encourage families like yours to attend school in RPS?
  - What type of information would you like to receive to help you understand how well the district is serving students?

### *Wrap up and closing*

8. In one sentence, what is the most important thing the Rochester Public School District can do for the youth in our community?
9. Is there anything else the RPS strategic action planning committees should consider that we haven't already asked about?

### *Closing*

Thank you very much for your time today. We really appreciate the feedback you've provided as it will help to drive the action planning process for RPS. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Moody at [demoody@rochesterschools.org](mailto:demoody@rochesterschools.org).

**REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT THE INCENTIVES WILL ARRIVE IN THEIR EMAIL WITHIN THE NEXT TWO DAYS.**

# City and County Government and Community Organization Focus Group Protocol

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I use [she/her] pronouns. I work for Wilder Research. I will be asking questions and moderating today's group and \_\_\_\_\_ is here to take notes. Rochester Public Schools is partnering with Wilder Research for their strategic planning process. Our goal in working with RPS is to help create an action plan that will guide the work of the school district from 2022-2025. The action plan will help to focus and coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders in Rochester Public Schools to achieve the district's mission and vision.

We're talking to groups of students, families, RPS staff, and community members to get their thoughts and ideas about what RPS should include in this action plan in order to best serve our students and help them to be successful in school. The purpose of today's group is to learn more about your experiences as a community member/service provider and get your ideas and perspectives of how RPS can improve. RPS is going to use information from all of these groups, as well as a survey of families and RPS staff, to put together an action plan for how the school district can move forward in meeting their goals. Results will be used to inform the strategic action plan that will be presented to the school board.

Before we get started, I'd like to propose a few guidelines to follow for this discussion. First, there are no right or wrong answers, so we hope you can share your honest opinions and thoughts. We also ask that you be respectful of the thoughts and opinions of others. The purpose of this discussion is to get different perspectives and points of view. Second, please take turns so everyone gets a chance to talk. Third, I'd like everyone to agree that you will not repeat what you hear in this group to anyone outside of this group. To maintain your confidentiality, when we report what was learned in this group, we will do so by summarizing what was shared. We will not report any names or other information that will identify you.

Also, your decision to participate or not participate in this group today does not affect any current or future services you may be receiving from Rochester Public Schools or any of their partner organizations.

With that said, we would like to record today's discussion in case we miss anything in the notes. The recording will be deleted after the notes are finalized. Is that okay with everyone? **[If yes, push record]**

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started.

**INTRO Q:** Tell us your name, how long you've lived in Rochester, and one thing you're looking forward to in the New Year. (Facilitator can say their name and give an example.)

1. How would you define the role of schools in the Rochester community?
2. How would you measure the success of the Rochester Public Schools? How would you know they are accomplishing their goals?
3. What are the strengths of the Rochester community when it comes to community support of the schools? How about support from other organizations (like businesses and non-profits)?
  - Where do you see the RPS community experiencing the most challenges regarding community support? How about support from other organizations? How can these challenges be addressed?
  - What changes would you like to see in the RPS community regarding community support? How can these changes be made?
4. What needs of families have emerged during the pandemic that need to be addressed?
5. How can RPS collaborate with local government, businesses, and non-profit organizations in order to help meet student and family needs? How can these entities best partner with RPS in order for our students to succeed?
6. What are the strengths and drawbacks of the following options to generate non-enrollment funding for the district:
  - Tax referendum/levy
  - Securing additional funding for special education and other student groups
  - Private funding/donors
  - Selling advertising on athletic fields, school busses, etc.
  - Others?
7. How can RPS continue to build trust with all communities they serve, especially for communities of color, immigrant communities, and others? From your perspective, what has worked and what has not worked?
8. Like many districts, RPS has disparities in discipline for students of color, students who are low income, and students who have a disability. Similar rates of disparities are present in Rochester within rates of incarceration and child protection cases. In what ways could partnerships be developed to address these disparities?

Now I'm going to ask about your perception of two school models. The first is community schools. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. They are organized around four pillars: integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative

leadership and practices. RPS currently has a community schools model at Gage Elementary, Riverside Central Elementary, John Marshall High School, Phoenix Academy and the Rochester Alternative Learning Center.

9. What is your perception of community schools and the benefits they offer to the Rochester community?

District-wide schools are schools or programs located within the Rochester Public School District that may deliver the curriculum in a different manner than neighborhood schools. RPS currently has five DWO schools:

- Longfellow 45-15 which operates on a modified calendar that allows for less time off during the summer and more breaks during the year
- Washington Elementary uses a curriculum called Core Knowledge
- Gage Spanish Immersion provides 90% of instruction in Spanish
- Lincoln K-8 offers 1 school option through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and has a focus on science and technology
- Franklin at Montessori uses a Montessori approach to learning
- Friedell has previously been a middle school but is closing for the 22/23 school year

10. What is your perception of district-wide options schools and the benefits they offer to the Rochester community?

### *Wrap up and closing*

11. What could Rochester Public Schools do to build a sense of trust and confidence within the community?
12. Is there anything else the strategic action planning committees should consider that we haven't already asked about?

### *Closing*

Thank you very much for your time today. We really appreciate the feedback you've provided as it will help to drive the action planning process for RPS. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Moody at [demoody@rochesterschools.org](mailto:demoody@rochesterschools.org).

**REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT GIFT CARDS WILL BE SENT VIA EMAIL WITHIN TWO DAYS.**

# RPS Student Focus Group Protocol

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I use [she/her] pronouns.

I work for an organization called Wilder Research. I will be asking questions for today's group and \_\_\_\_\_ is here to take notes. Rochester Public Schools is working with Wilder Research to come up with goals and plans for the next three years. We're talking to groups of students, families, RPS staff, and others to get their thoughts and ideas about what RPS should do to help students be successful in school. The purpose of today's group is to learn more about your experiences as an RPS student and get your ideas about how to make the school district better. RPS is going to use information from all of these groups as well as a survey to put together a plan to meet their goals.

Before we get started, I'd like to propose guidelines for this discussion. First, there are no right or wrong answers, so we hope you can share your honest opinions and thoughts. We also ask that you be respectful of the thoughts and opinions of others. The purpose of this discussion is to get different perspectives and points of view. Second, please take turns so everyone gets a chance to talk. If you just shared or have shared a lot already, please pause so that someone else can share. Third, I'd like everyone to agree that you will not repeat what you hear in this group to anyone outside of this group. When we report what was learned in this group, we will combine answers from each of the groups together. We will not report any names or other information that will identify you.

Also, your decision to participate or not participate in this group today does not affect your relationship with Rochester Public Schools or anyone else.

With that said, we would like to record today's talk in case we miss anything in the notes. The recording will be deleted after the project is done. Is that okay with everyone? **[If yes, push record]**

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started.



**INTRO Q:** Please say your name and your favorite thing about winter. (Facilitator can say their name, PRONOUNS, and give an example.)

1. [Skip for RPS alumni] How is your school year going? What has been good? What has been not so good?

[Facilitator: For RPS alumni, rephrase questions to ask in past tense.]

2. Do you feel connected to your school—to other students, teachers, or other staff there? Why or why not?
  - What are some things that help you feel connected to your school or help you feel like you belong there?
  - If you needed help, do you feel like you have a trusted adult in the school that would help you? What can teachers, principals, and school staff do to help students to feel like they are part of their school? (FACILITATOR – for RPS alumni, talk about this in the past tense)
  - What are some reasons that you or other students might not feel they belong or don't feel like they are part of their school?
3. Next, we're going to ask about parts of student life at your school to get your opinions about strengths, challenges, and things that need to be changed.
  - Academic engagement – What do you like about your classes? What do you not like about your classes? To what extent do they help you to identify/explore your interests? To what extent do they align with your interests? How challenging are the classes for you?
  - Student support services – For those students who get support (academic or emotional) from someone at the school who is not their classroom/primary teacher, like from a counselor, social worker, student resiliency specialist, community site facilitator, or an equity specialist), do you think those types of supports are helpful? Why or why not?
  - Disciplinary fairness – Do you think discipline at your school is fair? Why or why not? (PROBE: From your experience, do you think RPS staff are culturally competent to serve a diverse student body? Why or why not?)
    - What could school staff do better to respond to student behavior that disrupts learning?
  - School safety – Do you feel safe when at school? Why or why not? (PROBE for health-related safety and violence-related safety.)
  - Grades, report cards, and testing – Do you feel like you're being graded on the right things at your school? Why or why not?
4. [Facilitator – skip if short on time] What do you like most about RPS (e.g., what are the strengths)? What are the areas that need most improvement?

5. From your experience, what would help ensure that all students have what they need to be successful? What can be done to make sure all students have access to opportunities and experiences available through the school?

### *Wrap up and closing*

6. [Facilitator – skip if short on time] What is the most important thing the Rochester Public School District can do for the youth in your community?
7. [Facilitator – skip if short on time] Is there anything else the RPS district should know about for their planning process that we haven't already asked?

### *Closing*

Thank you very much for your time today. We really appreciate the feedback you've provided as it will help to drive the action planning process for RPS. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Moody at [demoody@rochesterschools.org](mailto:demoody@rochesterschools.org). [Facilitator – put Denise's information in the Chat]

**REMIND PARTICIPANTS OF THE \$30 TARGET E-CARD THAT WILL ARRIVE IN THEIR EMAIL WITHIN THE NEXT TWO DAYS.**

# ALC Student Focus Group Protocol

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I use [she/her] pronouns. I work for an organization called Wilder Research. I will be asking questions for today's group and \_\_\_\_\_ is here to take notes. Rochester Public Schools is working with Wilder Research to come up with goals and plans for the next three years. We're talking to groups of students, families, RPS staff, and others to get their thoughts and ideas about what RPS should do to help students be successful in school. The purpose of today's group is to learn more about your experiences as an RPS student and get your ideas about how to make the school district better. RPS is going to use information from all of these groups as well as a survey to put together a plan to meet their goals.

Before we get started, I'd like to propose guidelines for this discussion. First, there are no right or wrong answers, so we hope you can share your honest opinions and thoughts. We also ask that you be respectful of the thoughts and opinions of others. The purpose of this discussion is to get different perspectives and points of view. Second, please take turns so everyone gets a chance to talk. If you just shared or have shared a lot already, please pause so that someone else can share. Third, I'd like everyone to agree that you will not repeat what you hear in this group to anyone outside of this group. When we report what was learned in this group, we will combine answers from each of the groups together. We will not report any names or other information that will identify you.

Also, your decision to participate or not participate in this group today does not affect your relationship with Rochester Public Schools or anyone else.

With that said, we would like to record today's talk in case we miss anything in the notes. The recording will be deleted after the project is done. Is that okay with everyone? **[If yes, push record]**

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started.

**INTRO Q:** Please share your name, preferred pronouns, and your favorite thing about winter. (Facilitator can say their name, PRONOUNS, and give an example.)

We understand many of you may have attended schools prior to ALC that were within the Rochester School District. When answering these questions, please feel free to talk about your current experience at the ALC and also reflect on previous experiences in other schools.

1. How is your school year going? What has been good? What has been not so good?
2. Do you feel connected to your school—to other students, teachers, or other staff there? Why or why not?
  - What are some things that help you feel connected to your school or help you feel like you belong there?
  - If you needed help, do you feel like you have a trusted adult in the school that would help you? What can teachers, principals, and school staff do to help students to feel like they are part of their school?
  - [Facilitator: skip if already covered] What are some reasons that you or other students might not feel they belong or don't feel like they are part of their school?
3. Are there things that work at the ALC that could be added or changed at your previous schools that would help students be successful?
4. What didn't work for you at your previous school? What is different at ALC that has allowed you to be successful?
5. If you could make one change at your previous school that would make it better, what would you change?
6. Next, we're going to ask about parts of student life at your school to get your opinions about strengths, challenges, and things that need to be changed.
  - Academic engagement – What do you like about your classes? What do you not like about your classes? To what extent do they help you to identify/explore your interests? To what extent do they align with your interests? How challenging are the classes for you?
  - Student support services– For those students who get support (academic or emotional) from someone at the school who is not their classroom/primary teacher, like from a counselor, social worker, student resiliency specialist, community site facilitator, or an equity specialist), do you think those types of supports are helpful? Why or why not?
  - Disciplinary fairness – Do you think discipline at your school is fair? Why or why not? (PROBE: From your experience, do you think RPS staff are culturally competent to serve a diverse student body? Why or why not?)
    - What could school staff do better to respond to student behavior that disrupts learning?

- School safety – Do you feel safe when at school? Why or why not? (PROBE for health-related safety and violence-related safety.)
  - Grades, report cards, and testing – Do you feel like you’re being graded on the right things at your school? Why or why not?
7. From your experience, what would help ensure that all students have what they need to be successful? What can be done to make sure all students have access to opportunities and experiences available through the school?

### *Wrap up and closing*

8. [Facilitator – skip if short on time] What is the most important thing the Rochester Public School District can do for the youth in your community?
9. [Facilitator – skip if short on time] Is there anything else the RPS district should know about for their planning process that we haven’t already asked?

### *Closing*

Thank you very much for your time today. We really appreciate the feedback you’ve provided as it will help to drive the action planning process for RPS. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Moody at [demoody@rochesterschools.org](mailto:demoody@rochesterschools.org).

**DISTRIBUTE \$30 TARGET CARDS AND HAVE THEM COMPLETE SIGN OUT SHEET.**

# EL Student Focus Group Protocol

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I use [she/her] pronouns. I work for an organization called Wilder Research. I will be asking questions for today's group and \_\_\_\_\_ is here to take notes. Rochester Public Schools is working with Wilder Research to come up with goals and plans for the next three years. We're talking to groups of students, families, RPS staff, and others to get their thoughts and ideas about what RPS should do to help students be successful in school. The purpose of today's group is to learn more about your experiences as an RPS student and get your ideas about how to make the school district better. RPS is going to use information from all of these groups as well as a survey to put together a plan to meet their goals.

Before we get started, I'd like to propose guidelines for this discussion. First, there are no right or wrong answers, so we hope you can share your honest opinions and thoughts. We also ask that you be respectful of the thoughts and opinions of others. The purpose of this discussion is to get different perspectives and points of view. Second, please take turns so everyone gets a chance to talk. If you just shared or have shared a lot already, please pause so that someone else can share. Third, I'd like everyone to agree that you will not repeat what you hear in this group to anyone outside of this group. When we report what was learned in this group, we will combine answers from each of the groups together. We will not report any names or other information that will identify you.

Also, your decision to participate or not participate in this group today does not affect your relationship with Rochester Public Schools or anyone else.

With that said, we would like to record today's talk in case we miss anything in the notes. The recording will be deleted after the project is done. Is that okay with everyone? **[If yes, push record]**

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started.

**INTRO Q:** Please say your name and your favorite thing about winter. (Facilitator can say their name, PRONOUNS, and give an example.)

We understand many of you may have attended other schools in the Rochester Public School District prior to the school you're currently at. When answering these questions, please feel free to talk about your current experience and experiences at other schools in the district.

1. How is your school year going? What has been good? What has been not so good?
2. Tell us about your experiences as a student who was learning English. What was good about your experiences in school? What was hard? What would you change? (PROBE: Academics? Student supports? Discipline policies? Student evaluation and measuring their progress? any other supports, services, or help)
3. What could schools do to help your parents/caregivers understand your school experience or be more informed about how to support you in your education?
4. Did you (do you) feel like you belong in school? In what ways do you feel connected to your school (PROBE: Through friends? Teachers/administrators/other school staff? Activities?) In what ways could your school help English language learners feel more connected?
5. Next, we're going to ask about parts of student life at your school to get your opinions about strengths, challenges, and things that need to be changed.
  - Academic engagement – What do you like about your classes? What do you not like about your classes? To what extent do they help you to identify/explore your interests? To what extent do they align with your interests? How challenging are the classes for you?
  - Student support services– For those students who get support (academic or emotional) from someone at the school who is not their classroom/primary teacher, like from a counselor, social worker, student resiliency specialist, community site facilitator, or an equity specialist), do you think those types of supports are helpful? Why or why not?
  - Disciplinary fairness – Do you think discipline at your school is fair? Why or why not? (PROBE: From your experience, do you think RPS staff are culturally competent to serve a diverse student body? Why or why not?)
    - What could school staff do better to respond to student behavior that disrupts learning?
  - School safety – Do you feel safe when at school? Why or why not? (PROBE for health-related safety and violence-related safety.)
  - Grades, report cards, and testing – Do you feel like you're being graded on the right things at your school? Why or why not?

6. From your experience, what would help ensure that all students have what they need to be successful? What can be done to make sure all students have access to opportunities and experiences available through the school?

### *Wrap up and closing*

7. [Facilitator – skip if short on time] What is the most important thing the Rochester Public School District can do for the youth in your community?
8. [Facilitator – skip if short on time] Is there anything else the RPS district should know about for their planning process that we haven't already asked?

### *Closing*

Thank you very much for your time today. We really appreciate the feedback you've provided as it will help to drive the action planning process for RPS. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Moody at [demoody@rochesterschools.org](mailto:demoody@rochesterschools.org).

**DISTRIBUTE \$30 TARGET CARDS AND HAVE THEM COMPLETE SIGN OUT SHEET.**



# RPS Administrator and School Staff Focus Group Protocol

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I use [she/her] pronouns. I work for Wilder Research. I will be asking questions and moderating today's group and \_\_\_\_\_ is here to take notes. Rochester Public Schools is partnering with Wilder Research for in their strategic planning process. Our goal in working with RPS is to help create an action plan that will guide the work of the school district from 2022-2025. The action plan will help to focus and coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders in Rochester Public Schools to achieve the district's mission and vision.

We're talking to groups of students, families, RPS staff, and community members to get their thoughts and ideas about what RPS should include in this action plan in order to best serve our students and help them to be successful in school. The purpose of today's group is to learn more about your experiences as an RPS staff member and get your ideas and perspectives of how RPS can improve. RPS is going to use information from all of these groups, as well as a survey of caregivers and RPS staff, to put together an action plan for how the school district can move forward in meeting their goals. Results will be shared with the strategic action planning committees and be used to inform the strategic action plan that will be shared with the board in the spring.

Before we get started, I'd like to propose a few guidelines to follow for this discussion. First, there are no right or wrong answers, so we hope you can share your honest opinions and thoughts. We also ask that you be respectful of the thoughts and opinions of others. The purpose of this discussion is to get different perspectives and points of view. Second, please take turns so everyone gets a chance to talk. Third, I'd like everyone to agree that you will not repeat what you hear in this group to anyone outside of this group. To maintain your confidentiality, when we report what was learned in this group, we will do so by summarizing what was shared. We will not report any names or other information that will identify you.

Also, your decision to participate or not participate in this group today does not affect any current or future services you may be receiving from Rochester Public Schools or any of their partner organizations.

With that said, we would like to record today's discussion in case we miss anything in the notes. The recording will be deleted after the notes are finalized. Is that okay with everyone? **[If yes, push record]**

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started.

**INTRO Q:** Tell us your name, the school you work at, and one thing you're looking forward to for winter break. (Facilitator can say their name, pronouns, and give an example.)

## General

1. What is one thing that would help you the most to be more effective in your job at RPS?
2. What factors make it easier or harder for you to be effective as an individual staff member? And what factors make it easier or harder for you to feel that your team will be effective at helping all students in your school to be successful?
3. What do you value most as an employee of RPS?
4. Next, we are going to talk about several components, systems, and practices of the Rochester Public School District. What are the strengths of RPS in the area of \_\_\_\_\_? What about the weaknesses in this area?  
(FACILITATOR: Go quickly through each item asking about strengths then weaknesses for each)
  - Academic curriculum and learning
  - Student supports and resources, including academics, social/emotional learning, mental health services, etc.
  - Support systems for teachers and staff, such as professional development, systems to support students who need extra help, curriculum
  - Discipline policies
  - The RPS community's support of the schools, including support from other organizations (businesses and nonprofits), etc.
  - Connecting and communicating with all students, families, and communities at RPS?
  - climate and culture, including creating a space that is supportive, welcoming, and inclusive of School all students, staff, and the various communities they serve
  - School safety around COVID-19 and other issues
  - Using data to make informed decisions such as the MCA, panorama survey, PBIS/MTSS, etc.
5. [PRINCIPALS ONLY] In what ways can RPS improve leadership development for administrators and staff in the district? (PROBE: Such as communication, proactive approaches, etc.)
6. In what ways can RPS provide more leadership development opportunities for school non-administrative staff, such as teachers and support staff? How can leadership in these roles be

developed? (PROBE: Do you have any examples of things that has worked well in your building? In the district?)

7. How should RPS work with community partners to ensure the needs of students and families are met?
8. [Skip if short on time] We know right now that teachers and other staff at RPS do not reflect the diversity of the student body and the community. In what ways can RPS recruit and retain staff that is representative of the community (i.e., staff of color, staff from a variety of cultural communities, etc.) and make it a welcoming, inclusive environment for them?

### *Wrap up and closing*

9. [Skip if short on time] What is the most important thing the Rochester Public School District can do for the youth in your community?
10. [Skip if short on time] Is there anything else the strategic action planning committees should consider that we haven't already asked about?

### *Closing*

Thank you very much for your time today. We really appreciate the feedback you've provided as it will help to drive the action planning process for RPS. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Moody at [demoody@rochesterschools.org](mailto:demoody@rochesterschools.org).

**REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT THE \$30 TARGET E-CARD INCENTIVES WILL ARRIVE IN THEIR EMAIL WITHIN THE NEXT TWO DAYS.**

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank everyone who participated in the focus group discussions and offered their candid experiences and perspectives to help RPS improve education for students. We particularly appreciate the time and energy shared despite the challenging context of this year given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you to Denise Moody and any other RPS staff who worked together to recruit participants for these discussions.

Wilder Research, a division of Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, is a nationally respected nonprofit research and evaluation group. For more than 100 years, Wilder Research has gathered and interpreted facts and trends to help families and communities thrive, get at the core of community concerns, and uncover issues that are overlooked or poorly understood.

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# Rochester Public Schools Strategic Action Planning

## *Survey Results: Parent/Guardian, Community, and Staff Surveys*

*Rochester Public Schools (RPS) is currently developing a strategic action plan for 2022-2025. Wilder Research was contracted to facilitate this process, which involves multiple stakeholders participating in six strategic action planning committees that are meeting several times between November 2021 and March 2022. This summary provides results from three surveys—with parents/guardians, staff, and community members—completed in January 2022.*

- All three surveys—for parents/guardians, community members, and RPS staff—were designed by Wilder Research to address questions and issues raised during the first two meetings of the RPS strategic action planning committees.
- The surveys were administered online via Wilder Research’s tool, Acuity. Rochester Public Schools provided email contact information for staff and parents/guardians and advertised the community member survey through various channels.
- Overall, there was a very good response to the survey:
  - 3,557 parents/guardians completed the survey for a response rate of 24%
  - 1,654 staff members completed the survey for a response rate of 59%
  - 285 community members completed the survey (we are not able to calculate a response rate since this was an opt-in survey)

Please see the Appendix for more details about respondent demographics for each survey.

- The survey results and key findings are highlighted in the following sections and are intended to be used by the RPS strategic action planning committees to inform the final strategic plan and especially the strategic initiatives that will be recommended to the RPS School Board in spring 2022.

## Key findings

The following sections of this summary report provide key highlights, including charts and tables, for the topics that were covered in the parent/guardian, staff, and community member surveys. Throughout this report, for the parent/guardian and staff surveys, we note whenever there was a percentage point difference of 10% or more between White and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) respondents, and we provide data for each racial/ethnic group with 20 or more respondents (that is, Asian or Asian American respondents, Black or African American respondents, Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and White respondents). Please note that for Figures 7, 8, 13, 15, 18, and 19 we present findings by racial/ethnic group (rather than including differences in narrative form) because strategic planning committee members were particularly interested in seeing these findings disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

## Key issues Rochester Public Schools should address in its strategic plan 2022-2025

We asked all groups of respondents what they feel are the three key issues that should be addressed in the RPS strategic plan 2022-2025. Figure 1 shows the percentage of each respondent group that chose various key issues; we highlighted in green any issue that 30% or more of respondents selected as a key issue for RPS to address in its strategic plan.

There were relatively high levels of agreement between parent/guardian respondents and community respondents, with both groups indicating that below-average academic performance among students and safety within schools should be addressed by RPS's strategic plan. Parent/guardian respondents also prioritized students' social-emotional learning and skills. Notably, all three respondent groups agreed that students' mental health is a key issue for RPS. Lastly, higher percentages of RPS staff indicated that staff well-being and lack of staff capacity were key issues that the strategic plan should address.

### 1. Key issues RPS should address by respondent group

Key issue	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,520)	% community respondents (n=285)	% staff respondents (n=1,646)
Students' academic performance below expectations	38%	42%	29%
Students' social-emotional learning and skills	36%	26%	26%
Students' mental health	35%	36%	37%
Safety (fights, violence, etc.)	37%	39%	29%
Students not being challenged academically	25%	24%	8%
RPS staff well-being	21%	24%	39%

Key issue	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,520)	% community respondents (n=285)	% staff respondents (n=1,646)
Staff capacity, lack of staff	18%	19%	36%
Opportunity and achievement gap by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status	15%	11%	14%
School engagement with students and families	11%	10%	10%
Transparency and accountability to the community	11%	19%	4%
Funding for schools	10%	8%	15%
Discipline disparities by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and special education status	7%	6%	7%
Data-informed decision-making	6%	6%	5%
Lack of staff diversity	5%	4%	8%
District-level leadership	4%	5%	7%
School-level leadership	2%	3%	4%
Collaboration with community organizations	2%	1%	3%
Something else	7%	4%	13%

In regards to key issues for RPS, in the parent/guardian survey, a higher proportion of White respondents said that the following should be key issues for RPS as compared to BIPOC respondents:

- RPS staff well-being (24% compared to 14% of BIPOC respondents); among BIPOC respondents, 18% of Asian or Asian American respondents, 16% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and 5% of Black or African American respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.
- Staff capacity, lack of staff (21% compared to 11% of BIPOC respondents); among BIPOC respondents 13% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, 12% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 9% of Black or African American respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.

Among BIPOC parent/guardian respondents, the below key issues had the highest ratings. While these findings did not differ between BIPOC and White respondents by 10 percentage points or more, some committee members asked for them to be disaggregated by race/ethnicity:

- Students' social-emotional learning (39% compared to 37% of White respondents); among BIPOC respondents, 45% of Asian or Asian American respondents, 33% of



Black or African American respondents, 32% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents said this should be a key issue for RPS.

- Students' academic performance below expectations (37% compared to 38% of White respondents); among BIPOC respondents, 41% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, 36% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 36% of Black or African American respondents said this should be a key issue for RPS.
- Safety (concerns about fighting, violence) (37% compared to 36% of White respondents); among BIPOC respondents, 41% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, 39% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 30% of Black or African American respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.

In the staff survey, a higher proportion of BIPOC staff respondents said that the following should be key issues for RPS as compared to White staff respondents:

- Opportunity and achievement gap by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (30% compared to 14% of White respondents); among BIPOC respondents, 49% of Black or African American respondents, 26% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 23% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.
- Lack of staff diversity (24% compared to 7% of White respondents); among BIPOC respondents, 40% of Black or African American respondents, 30% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 14% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.
- Discipline disparities by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and special education status (16% compared to 6% of White respondents); among BIPOC respondents, 23% of Black or African American respondents, 21% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and 4% of Asian or Asian American respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.

Among White staff respondents, a higher proportion prioritized the following issues:

- Staff capacity, lack of staff (38% compared to 24%); among BIPOC respondents 27% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, 26% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 14% of Black or African American respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.
- Students' academic performance below expectations (31% compared to 19%); among BIPOC respondents 23% of Black or African American respondents, 22% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 18% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents said that this should be a key issue for RPS.



# Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic, social, emotional, and mental health and well-being of students

We asked respondents in an open-ended format to comment on the one or two biggest academic, social, emotional, and mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. Among parent/guardian respondents, the top three responses included: 1) the lack of in-person contact with others to socialize and maintain relationships; 2) the decline in or lack of student academic progress; and 3) poor mental health or a decline in overall emotional well-being.

*Our child's grades were unusually poor the first semester of the 2020-21 school year and their mental health was extremely poorly affected. –Parent/guardian respondent*

*My child transitioned [to a new school] during the pandemic—during the 2020-21 school year. He didn't form connections or relationships with teachers or classmates that first year. He's just now starting to make other friends and feel some connection to [the new school]. The lost time negatively impacted his connections to his new school.*

*–Parent/guardian respondent*

Among staff and community respondents, the top three responses included: 1) the decline in or lack of student academic progress; 2) poor mental health or a decline in overall emotional well-being; and 3) the decline in or lack of social-emotional skills and learning among students.

*We are definitely trying to make up for lost ground academically. The achievement gap has certainly widened because of the pandemic and how connected students have been with their teachers. Students that were already struggling are having an even tougher time trying to close the gap. There are also some pretty big social consequences being seen in our kids. They don't interact with as much kindness, compassion, and respect as they seem to have done in the past and its straining relationships between students, their teachers, and sometimes parents. –Staff respondent*

We also asked staff about their perceptions about how much harder or easier things are compared with pre-pandemic times (Figure 2). A large majority of staff respondents said that their work is at least a little harder than before COVID-19, with close to 2 in 3 staff respondents (65%) who said that their work is a lot harder than before COVID-19.

## 2. Level of ease or difficulty of work compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic

Response	% staff respondents (n=1,650)
A lot harder than before COVID-19	65%
A little harder than before COVID-19	28%
Similar to before COVID-19	6%
A little easier than before COVID-19	1%

<b>Response</b>	<b>% staff respondents (n=1,650)</b>
A lot easier than before COVID-19	1%

## Enrollment decisions

Based on the interests of the RPS strategic action planning committees to address decreasing enrollment in RPS, we asked parents/guardians questions about what factors would make them want to change their child's school, what factors are encouraging them to keep their child at their current school, and what sources of information they rely on about school options.

Figure 3 displays parent/guardian responses regarding attractive school characteristics. More than half of respondents (54%) said that a positive school climate was an attractive school characteristic, followed by responsiveness of teachers and school staff and the proximity of the school to where they live (41% of parent/guardian respondents) and strong academics like classes and programs that get their child ready for college and careers (39% of parent/guardian respondents). Lastly, a higher proportion of White respondents said that the following characteristic was important for them when making enrollment decisions as compared to BIPOC respondents: the other students and families who attend the school (27% compared to 17%). Among BIPOC respondents, 19% of Asian or Asian American respondents, 15% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and 12% of Black or African American respondents said that this characteristic was important to them.

### 3. Most attractive school characteristics

<b>School characteristics</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (N=3,395)</b>	<b>% who said this was the <i>most important</i> characteristic</b>
A positive school climate (caring staff, minimal behavior issues)	54%	23%
The responsiveness of teachers and other school staff	45%	10%
The school is located close to our home	41%	19%
Strong academics; classes and programs that help get my child ready for college and careers	39%	21%
The school or program helps my child with things they need help with	26%	10%
The other students and families who attend the school	25%	6%
COVID-19 safety protocols	12%	3%
The school's hours or schedule	11%	2%

<b>School characteristics</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (N=3,395)</b>	<b>% who said this was the <i>most important</i> characteristic</b>
Our family is engaged with the school community	7%	1%
Another reason	7%	5%

In regards to where parents get information about RPS schools, more than half of respondents (51%) said that they get information via word-of-mouth, such as talking with other parents or seeing other parents' posts on social media (Figure 4). A higher proportion of BIPOC respondents said that they use the following source of information when making enrollment decisions as compared to White respondents: school rankings from the Minnesota Department of Education (online or print) (50% compared to 37%). Among BIPOC respondents, 54% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, 53% of Asian or Asian American respondents, and 40% of Black or African American respondents said that they use school rankings to make decisions about their child's school.

Compared to BIPOC respondents, a higher proportion of White respondents said that they use the following source of information when making enrollment decisions: word-of-mouth, what other parents say or post on social media (59% compared to 49%). Among BIPOC respondents, 52% of Asian or Asian American respondents, 51% of Black or African American respondents, and 38% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents said that they use word-of-mouth or what other parents say or post on social media when making enrollment decisions.

#### 4. Sources of information regarding school enrollment decisions

<b>Source of information</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,189)</b>
Word-of-mouth, what other parents say or post on social media	51%
School district and school website	39%
School rankings from the Minnesota Department of Education (online or print)	35%
Test scores	22%
Other sources of information	20%

*Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one option.*

The survey also asked parents/guardians about the most unattractive school characteristics (Figure 5). Nearly 2 in 5 parent/guardian respondents (39%) said that they do not have any reason to want to move their child out of their current school. After that, nearly 1 in 3 parent/guardian respondents (32%) said that bullying and fighting and other concerns about their child's safety was an unattractive school characteristic, while more than 1 in 4 parent/guardian

respondents (28%) said that a negative school climate, such as a lack of caring staff, was an unattractive school characteristic.

Lastly, a higher proportion of BIPOC parent/guardian respondents said that they have no reason to want to move their child out of their current school as compared to White respondents (50% compared to 39%). Among BIPOC respondents, 53% of Asian or Asian American respondents, 48% of Black or African American respondents, and 46% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents said that they have no reason to move their child out of their current school.

## 5. Most unattractive school characteristics

School characteristics	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,339)	% who said this was the most important characteristic
I do not have any reasons to want to move my child out of their current school	39%	32%
Bullying or fighting, concerns about your child's safety	32%	18%
A negative school climate (lack of caring staff, lots of behavior issues, etc.)	28%	8%
Other students being disruptive to your child's learning	23%	6%
Your student is not being challenged academically	16%	7%
COVID-19 safety protocols	12%	6%
Your student can't get the help they need	12%	5%
Teachers and other school staff are not responsive	12%	3%
Other students getting in trouble (skipping classes, alcohol or drug use, etc.)	9%	1%
The school's hours or schedule	7%	3%
You do not feel connected or engaged with your child's school	7%	1%
The school's size	6%	1%
The school location is far away from your home	5%	2%
Another reason	8%	6%

More than half of parent/guardian respondents (55%) said that it is very unlikely that they will change their child's school before December 2022, with 11% of respondents saying that a school change is likely or very likely for their child (Figure 6). This finding supplements the finding in Figure 5—that many parents do not have reason to move their child out of their current school.

Lastly, a higher proportion of White parent/guardian respondents said that it is very unlikely that they would change their child's school before December 2022 as compared to BIPOC

respondents (60% compared to 50%). Among BIPOC respondents, 56% of Asian or Asian American respondents, 48% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and 40% of Black or African American respondents said that it is very unlikely that they would change their child's school before December 2022.

## 6. Likelihood of changing your child's school before December 2022

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,334)
Very unlikely	55%
Unlikely	19%
Unsure	15%
Likely	4%
Very likely	7%

## Satisfaction

We asked respondents about a range of topics that the RPS strategic action planning committees wanted more information about.

### Discipline

About 1 in 3 parent/guardian respondents (33%) said that they didn't know whether students of all races and backgrounds are treated fairly when being disciplined in RPS schools (Figure 7). Overall, more than 2 in 5 (43%) of respondents agreed at least a little that students of all races and background are treated fairly whereas about 1 in 4 respondents (24%) disagreed at least a little.

A higher proportion of BIPOC respondents agreed a lot that students of all races and backgrounds are treated fairly when being disciplined as compared to White respondents (34% compared to 25%). Among BIPOC respondents, 38% of Asian American respondents, 36% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and 25% of Black or African American respondents said that students of all races and backgrounds are treated fairly when disciplined. Importantly, however, a higher proportion of Black or African American respondents (44%) disagreed a little or a lot with this statement compared with 24% of White respondents, 14% of Asian American respondents, and 19% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents.

## 7. Perceptions of fair discipline by race/ethnicity

Response to the statement, students of all races and backgrounds are treated fairly when being disciplined	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,129)	% Asian or Asian American respondents (n=233)	% Black or African American respondents (n=121)	% Hispanic or Latinx respondents (n=105)	% White respondents (n=2,221)
Agree a lot	27%	38%	25%	36%	25%
Agree a little	16%	22%	18%	15%	16%
Disagree a little	13%	8%	12%	9%	14%
Disagree a lot	11%	6%	32%	10%	10%
Don't know	33%	26%	12%	31%	36%

In regards to staff perceptions of discipline, 3 in 4 staff respondents (75%) said that they felt at least somewhat supported by their supervisor and RPS leadership in dealing with behavior or discipline issues with students (Figure 8). Almost 1 in 10 staff respondents (7%) said that they didn't feel at all supported in this respect.

## 8. How supported do you feel by your supervisor and RPS leadership in dealing with any behavior or discipline issues that may come up with students?

Response	% staff respondents (n=3,129)	% Asian or Asian American respondents (n=233)	% Black or African American respondents (n=121)	% Hispanic or Latinx respondents (n=105)	% White respondents (n=2,221)
Very much supported	40%	57%	40%	43%	42%
Somewhat supported	35%	17%	40%	32%	35%
Not very much supported	18%	17%	14%	18%	17%
Not at all supported	7%	9%	6%	7%	6%

### Staff self-efficacy – individual and collective

High percentages of staff said that they feel effective as an individual staff member and that their team or school is effective at helping RPS students succeed (Figures 9-10). Regarding individual effectiveness, 9 in 10 staff respondents (90%) said that they feel at least somewhat effective. A higher proportion of BIPOC staff respondents said that they feel very much effective as compared to White respondents (54% compared to 44%). Among BIPOC respondents, 62% of Black or African American respondents, 55% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and 35% of Asian or Asian American respondents said that they feel very much effective. Regarding team or school effectiveness, more than 9 in 10 staff respondents (93%) said that they feel their team or school is effective at helping RPS students achieve their goals.

## 9. How effective do you feel as an individual staff member?

Response	% staff respondents (n=1,625)
Very much effective	44%
Somewhat effective	46%
Not very much effective	8%
Not at all effective	2%

## 10. How effective do you think your team or school is overall at helping RPS students to be successful?

Response	% staff respondents (n=1,630)
Very much effective	46%
Somewhat effective	47%
Not very much effective	6%
Not at all effective	1%

### Responsiveness and engagement of school staff

The large majority of parents/guardians said that the staff at their child's school care about the students and that they are satisfied with how their child's school responds when they contact them with a question or concern (Figures 11-12). Nearly 9 in 10 respondents (89%) said that the staff at their child's school care about the students; more than 4 in 5 parent/guardian respondents (84%) said that they are satisfied with the response from their child's school when they contact them.

## 11. The staff at my child's school care about the students

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,177)
Agree a lot	64%
Agree a little	25%
Disagree a little	5%
Disagree a lot	2%
Don't know	4%

## 12. When I contact my child's school with a question or concern, I am satisfied with how they respond

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,199)
Agree a lot	56%
Agree a little	28%
Disagree a little	8%
Disagree a lot	4%
Don't know	4%

### Feelings of welcoming and belonging

Figures 13-14 display findings about parents/guardians feeling welcomed at their child's school and the degree to which their child fits in at their school. Nearly 9 in 10 parent/guardian respondents (88%) agreed at least a little that their child's school is welcoming for them and their child. Likewise, nearly 9 in 10 respondents (89%) said that their child fits in at their school.

## 13. My child's school is a welcoming place for my child and family

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,129)	% Asian or Asian American respondents (n=222)	% Black or African American respondents (n=122)	% Hispanic or Latinx respondents (n=104)	% White respondents (n=2,241)
Agree a lot	59%	75%	52%	60%	62%
Agree a little	29%	19%	33%	30%	28%
Disagree a little	7%	3%	8%	6%	7%
Disagree a lot	3%	1%	3%	1%	2%
Don't know	2%	2%	4%	4%	1%

## 14. My child fits in at school

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,196)
Agree a lot	56%
Agree a little	33%
Disagree a little	7%
Disagree a lot	3%
Don't know	2%



Figures 15-16 display findings regarding staff feeling welcomed by their colleagues and the degree to which they feel like they belong in RPS. More than 9 in 10 staff respondents (94%) said that they feel at least somewhat welcomed by their colleagues while more than 4 in 5 staff respondents (87%) said that they at least somewhat belong in RPS. A higher proportion of White staff respondents said that they feel very much welcomed as compared to BIPOC respondents (67% compared to 55%). Among BIPOC respondents, 57% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, 54% of Black or African American respondents, and 39% of Asian or Asian American respondents said that they feel very much welcomed by their colleagues.

#### 15. How welcomed do you feel by your colleagues?

Response	% staff respondents (n=3,129)
Very much welcomed	65%
Somewhat welcomed	29%
Not very much welcomed	5%
Not at all welcomed	1%

#### 16. How much do you feel you belong in Rochester Public Schools?

Response	% staff respondents (n=1,634)	% Asian or Asian American respondents (n=23)	% Black or African American respondents (n=35)	% Hispanic or Latinx respondents (n=44)	% White respondents (n=1,287)
Very much belong	47%	48%	37%	43%	49%
Somewhat belong	40%	30%	40%	43%	40%
Not very much belong	11%	22%	17%	14%	10%
Not at all belong	2%	--	6%	--	1%

### Safety

The parent/guardian survey asked about perceptions of safety at RPS schools (Figures 17-18). A little less than 1 in 3 respondents (32%) agreed a lot that their child is safe from bullying and violence at school, and 1 in 4 parent/guardian respondents (25%) said that they disagree at least a little that their child is safe in this regard. In regards to COVID-related safety, more than 4 in 5 parent/guardian respondents (82%) agreed at least a little that their child's school uses appropriate COVID protocols to keep their child safe.

## 17. My child is safe from bullying and violence at school

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,197)
Agree a lot	32%
Agree a little	34%
Disagree a little	17%
Disagree a lot	8%
Don't know	9%

## 18. My child's school uses appropriate COVID protocols to keep my child safe

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,129)	% Asian or Asian American respondents (n=222)	% Black or African American respondents (n=121)	% Hispanic or Latinx respondents (n=104)	% White respondents (n=2,241)
Agree a lot	56%	65%	57%	63%	58%
Agree a little	26%	25%	22%	20%	27%
Disagree a little	7%	5%	9%	7%	7%
Disagree a lot	6%	2%	5%	2%	5%
Don't know	5%	4%	7%	9%	4%

The staff survey also asked about feelings of safety in regards to COVID-19 (Figure 19). About 3 in 4 staff respondents (78%) said that they feel at least somewhat safe in their school, with 17% saying that they didn't feel very safe and 5% saying that they didn't feel safe at all in regards to COVID-19 protocols in their school.

## 19. How safe do you feel at work with regard to COVID protocols that are currently in place?

Response	% staff respondents (n=1,643)	% Asian or Asian American respondents (n=23)	% Black or African American respondents (n=35)	% Hispanic or Latinx respondents (n=44)	% White respondents (n=1,291)
Very much safe	32%	17%	29%	16%	33%
Somewhat safe	46%	65%	46%	59%	47%
Not very much safe	17%	17%	20%	21%	17%
Not at all safe	5%	--	6%	5%	4%

## Trusting relationships

More than 4 in 5 parent/guardian respondents (85%) agreed at least a little that their child has an adult at their school who can they can trust (Figure 20). It should be noted that nearly 1 in 10 parent/guardian respondents (9%) said they didn't know whether their child had at least one trusted adult at their school.

A higher proportion of White respondents agreed a lot that their child has at least one trusted adult at school as compared to BIPOC respondents (68% compared to 55%). Among BIPOC respondents, 61% of Asian or Asian American respondents, 52% of Hispanic or Latinx respondents, and 46% of Black or African American respondents agreed a lot that their child has at least one adult at school who they trust.

### 20. My child has at least one adult who they trust at school

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,195)
Agree a lot	63%
Agree a little	22%
Disagree a little	3%
Disagree a lot	2%
Don't know	9%

## Feedback about specific schools

We also asked parents/guardians and community members for feedback about the specific RPS schools, including the quality of the academics, school climate, and student and family engagement. See Figures 21-23; in green, we highlight the schools that 85% or more of parent/guardian respondents rated as “excellent” or “very good” in regards to these three criteria (quality of academics, school climate, and student and family engagement).

In regards to quality of academics, 85% or more of parent/guardian respondents rated the following schools as “excellent” or “very good:” Hoover Early Learning Center, Bishop Elementary School, Folwell Elementary School, Longfellow 45-15 District-Wide Elementary School, Washington District-Wide Elementary School, Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School, and Friedell District-Wide Middle School (Figure 21).

### 21. Perceptions among parents of quality of academics at specific schools

School	Excellent	Very good	OK	Poor	Terrible	Don't know
Hoover Early Learning Center (n=86)	42%	44%	9%	1%	--	4%

School	Excellent	Very good	OK	Poor	Terrible	Don't know
Mighty Oaks Early Learning Center (n=47)	60%	21%	11%	2%	--	6%
Bamber Valley Elementary School (n=248)	29%	42%	22%	4%	1%	2%
Bishop Elementary School (n=151)	46%	42%	11%	1%	1%	--
Churchill   Hoover Elementary School (n=160)	29%	43%	24%	1%	1%	1%
Elton Hills Elementary School (n=110)	25%	45%	24%	5%	--	3%
Folwell Elementary School (n=175)	46%	44%	9%	--	--	1%
Franklin Elementary School (n=129)	21%	39%	30%	5%	1%	4%
Gage Elementary School (n=146)	15%	36%	34%	9%	2%	5%
Gibbs Elementary School (n=271)	35%	49%	13%	2%	<1%	1%
Jefferson Elementary School (n=232)	33%	49%	15%	1%	<1%	2%
Longfellow 45-15 District-Wide Elementary School (n=127)	60%	35%	6%	--	--	--
Montessori at Franklin District-Wide Elementary (n=93)	52%	30%	12%	4%	1%	1%
Pinewood Elementary School (n=111)	29%	48%	20%	3%	1%	--
Riverside Central Elementary School (n=98)	24%	36%	19%	15%	2%	4%
Sunset Terrace Elementary School (n=143)	20%	55%	20%	4%	--	1%
Washington District-Wide Elementary School (n=157)	53%	41%	3%	1%	1%	1%
Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School (n=184)	52%	38%	7%	1%	--	2%
Friedell District-Wide Middle School (n=227)	57%	32%	10%	1%	--	<1%
John Adams Middle School (n=340)	8%	28%	39%	16%	6%	4%
Kellogg Middle School (n=410)	21%	42%	30%	5%	1%	2%
Right Fit Middle School (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Willow Creek Middle School (n=345)	7%	26%	44%	17%	4%	2%
Century High School (n=416)	26%	48%	20%	3%	2%	1%
John Marshall High School (n=324)	14%	42%	36%	4%	1%	3%
Mayo High School (n=481)	20%	47%	26%	4%	<1%	2%
Rochester Alternative Learning Center (n=46)	20%	35%	30%	9%	2%	4%
Phoenix Academy (n=25)	4%	40%	28%	8%	12%	8%
Launching Emerging Adults Program (LEAP) (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
C-Tech/P-Tech (n=26)	54%	42%	--	--	--	4%
Rochester Academy for Independent Living (RAIL) (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
RPS Online (n=54)	30%	35%	19%	11%	--	6%

Note: Data are suppressed for schools about which less than 20 respondents said that they knew enough about to provide feedback.

In regards to school climate, 85% or more of parent/guardian respondents rated the following schools as “excellent” or “very good:” Hoover Early Learning Center, Might Oaks Early Learning Center, Bishop Elementary School, Folwell Elementary School, Gibbs Elementary School, Jefferson Elementary School, Longfellow 45-15 District-Wide Elementary School, Washington District-Wide Elementary School, Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School, Friedell District-Wide Middle School, and C-Tech/P-Tech (Figure 22).

## 22. Perceptions among parents of school climate at specific schools

School	Excellent	Very good	OK	Poor	Terrible	Don't know
Hoover Early Learning Center (n=85)	46%	40%	7%	4%	--	4%
Mighty Oaks Early Learning Center (n=47)	64%	21%	9%	2%	--	4%
Bamber Valley Elementary School (n=246)	35%	42%	14%	5%	2%	2%
Bishop Elementary School (n=152)	56%	33%	9%	1%	1%	1%
Churchill   Hoover Elementary School (n=160)	41%	41%	13%	1%	2%	2%
Elton Hills Elementary School (n=108)	32%	48%	15%	3%	--	2%
Folwell Elementary School (n=175)	66%	28%	5%	1%	--	1%
Franklin Elementary School (n=124)	28%	44%	19%	2%	5%	2%
Gage Elementary School (n=145)	15%	41%	26%	9%	4%	5%
Gibbs Elementary School (n=272)	42%	43%	11%	2%	2%	2%
Jefferson Elementary School (n=230)	49%	37%	11%	2%	<1%	1%
Longfellow 45-15 District-Wide Elementary School (n=124)	64%	28%	7%	1%	--	1%
Montessori at Franklin District-Wide Elementary (n=93)	52%	28%	13%	3%	1%	3%
Pinewood Elementary School (n=109)	37%	40%	18%	4%	--	1%
Riverside Central Elementary School (n=97)	33%	24%	26%	9%	5%	3%
Sunset Terrace Elementary School (n=145)	23%	43%	28%	3%	1%	1%
Washington District-Wide Elementary School (n=155)	56%	35%	7%	1%	--	1%
Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School (n=182)	52%	34%	10%	1%	1%	3%
Friedell District-Wide Middle School (n=224)	54%	32%	10%	4%	--	--
John Adams Middle School (n=338)	3%	13%	27%	30#	24%	2%
Kellogg Middle School (n=412)	12%	37%	35%	10%	3%	2%
Right Fit Middle School (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Willow Creek Middle School (n=342)	4%	8%	31%	32%	23%	2%
Century High School (n=411)	11%	42%	33%	8%	3%	3%
John Marshall High School (n=322)	8%	34%	38%	13%	5%	3%
Mayo High School (n=478)	16%	36%	38%	5%	2%	3%

School	Excellent	Very good	OK	Poor	Terrible	Don't know
Rochester Alternative Learning Center (n=43)	26%	40%	21%	5%	2%	7%
Phoenix Academy (n=25)	16%	28%	36%	4%	12%	4%
Launching Emerging Adults Program (LEAP) (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
C-Tech/P-Tech (n=25)	40%	48%	--	--	--	12%
Rochester Academy for Independent Living (RAIL) (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
RPS Online (n=53)	45%	30%	13%	--	--	11%

Note: Data are suppressed for schools about which less than 20 respondents said that they knew enough about to provide feedback.

In regards to student and family engagement, 85% or more of parent/guardian respondents rated the following schools as “excellent” or “very good:” Bishop Elementary School, Longfellow 45-15 District-Wide Elementary School, and Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School (Figure 23).

### 23. Perceptions among parents of student and family engagement at specific schools

School	Excellent	Very good	OK	Poor	Terrible	Don't know
Hoover Early Learning Center (n=84)	30%	33%	21%	1%	2%	12%
Mighty Oaks Early Learning Center (n=47)	40%	26%	17%	2%	4%	11%
Bamber Valley Elementary School (n=246)	32%	34%	22%	4%	2%	6%
Bishop Elementary School (n=151)	50%	38%	8%	1%	1%	1%
Churchill   Hoover Elementary School (n=160)	33%	42%	17%	3%	1%	5%
Elton Hills Elementary School (n=108)	26%	37%	23%	7%	--	7%
Folwell Elementary School (n=173)	47%	32%	12%	3%	--	7%
Franklin Elementary School (n=126)	29%	33%	21%	8%	2%	7%
Gage Elementary School (n=144)	17%	40%	28%	5%	1%	9%
Gibbs Elementary School (n=269)	29%	42%	20%	3%	2%	4%
Jefferson Elementary School (n=228)	34%	42%	16%	3%	<1%	4%
Longfellow 45-15 District-Wide Elementary School (n=123)	50%	42%	7%	--	--	1%
Montessori at Franklin District-Wide Elementary (n=92)	47%	26%	14%	4%	1%	8%
Pinewood Elementary School (n=109)	27%	45%	20%	3%	--	6%
Riverside Central Elementary School (n=97)	33%	27%	21%	8%	3%	8%
Sunset Terrace Elementary School (n=144)	20%	39%	31%	5%	--	6%
Washington District-Wide Elementary School (n=155)	54%	30%	10%	1%	--	5%
Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School (n=182)	51%	35%	8%	1%	1%	4%

School	Excellent	Very good	OK	Poor	Terrible	Don't know
Friedell District-Wide Middle School (n=224)	36%	32%	21%	6%	<1%	5%
John Adams Middle School (n=337)	4%	16%	36%	22%	9%	13%
Kellogg Middle School (n=408)	9%	31%	38%	12%	2%	8%
Right Fit Middle School (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Willow Creek Middle School (n=342)	2%	13%	37%	27%	7%	14%
Century High School (n=409)	7%	31%	37%	13%	3%	9%
John Marshall High School (n=322)	7%	28%	38%	10%	4%	14%
Mayo High School (n=478)	12%	30%	37%	9%	2%	10%
Rochester Alternative Learning Center (n=43)	19%	26%	28%	7%	5%	16%
Phoenix Academy (n=25)	12%	16%	20%	24%	12%	16%
Launching Emerging Adults Program (LEAP) (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
C-Tech/P-Tech (n=25)	20%	20%	20%	8%	--	32%
Rochester Academy for Independent Living (RAIL) (n=suppressed)	--	--	--	--	--	--
RPS Online (n=52)	21%	29%	19%	8%	2%	21%

Note: Data are suppressed for schools about which less than 20 respondents said that they knew enough about to provide feedback.

## Staff satisfaction

Staff were also asked about their overall job satisfaction (Figure 24). Less than 1 in 3 staff respondents (30%) said that they were very satisfied with their jobs, with nearly half of staff (48%) saying that they were somewhat satisfied, nearly 1 in 5 staff (18%) saying that they were somewhat dissatisfied, and 5% of staff saying that they were not at all satisfied.

### 24. RPS staff overall job satisfaction

Response	% staff respondents (n=1,650)
Very satisfied	30%
Somewhat satisfied	48%
Somewhat dissatisfied	18%
Not at all satisfied	5%

## Indicators of success

We asked parents/guardians to indicate the top three indicators that help them to know if their child is going to be successful in school (Figure 25). The most popular indicators among

parent/guardian respondents included that their child likes school, that their child is happy, and that their child has one or more good friends.

## 25. Top indicators that my child will be successful in school (all students)

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,154)
They like school	43%
They are happy	42%
They have one or more good friends	38%
They attend school regularly	29%
They get good grades	25%
They have a trusting relationship with one or more adults at their school	23%
They have good problem-solving skills	23%
They have balance in all aspects of their life, from school to family to friends to community	23%
They are confident	21%
They are able to work well with others	13%
They are doing well on standardized tests like the Minnesota Comprehensive Achievement (MCA) tests	7%
They are engaged in positive community activities when they are not in school	5%
Other things that are important to you or your family	3%

The parent/guardian survey also asked respondents with older students about the top indicators that their child will be successful in school (Figure 26). The most popular indicators included that their child is on track to graduate, that their child is getting good career preparation or work experience, and that their child is ready for college as demonstrated by the ACT, SAT, or other similar assessments.

## 26. Top indicators that my child will be successful in school (secondary students)

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=1,471)
They are on track to graduate	55%
They are getting good career preparation or work experience	53%
They are ready for college as demonstrated by the ACT, SAT, or other college readiness assessments	40%
They are taking rigorous coursework like Advanced Placement classes	33%
Other things that are important to you and your family	27%



## Appendix: More information about the survey methods and participants

Between January 5-16, 2022, Wilder Research sent email invitations and up to three reminders to parents/guardians and RPS staff for whom RPS had a valid email address asking them to complete the survey online. The parent/guardian survey was translated into Spanish and Somali.

- The parent/guardian survey was sent to a total of 14,905 parents/guardians for whom email addresses were available (out of a total list of 16,707 parents/guardians), and 3,557 responded for a 24% response rate.
- The staff survey was sent to all 2,792 RPS staff via their official RPS email address, and 1,654 responded for a 59% response rate.
- The community member survey was advertised by RPS and received a total of 285 responses.

Survey respondents were asked to provide some basic demographic information to help us learn more about who is represented (and who is not represented) in these survey data. Figures 27-36 provide more information about the survey respondents.

Some limitations for these three surveys should be noted. The survey administration period was just over 10 days, whereas it is common for web surveys to be administered over the course of 3-6 weeks. Another limitation was that these surveys were only available to complete online, meaning that parents/guardians, staff, and community members with unreliable internet or no internet at all at their homes could not readily complete the survey. Lastly, the community survey was a convenience sample and had a low number of completes as compared to the parent/guardian and staff surveys. While it is important to list these limitations, it is also important to note that they sprang from the short timeline by which RPS needed these surveys completed. We feel that the data and findings in this report is the best representation possible of parent/guardian, staff, and community member input considering the short timeline to complete the surveys.

### 27. Child's current grade in school

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,504)
Early childhood/pre-kindergarten	2%
Kindergarten	7%
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	9%
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	7%

<b>Response</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,504)</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	7%
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	7%
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	7%
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	8%
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	8%
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	8%
9 <sup>th</sup> grade	8%
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	9%
11 <sup>th</sup> grade	8%
12 <sup>th</sup> grade	6%

**28. My child currently attends... (for respondents with multiple children, think of the child whose birthday was most recent)**

<b>School</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,475)</b>
Hoover Early Learning Center	1%
Mighty Oaks Early Learning Center	1%
Bamber Valley Elementary School	5%
Bishop Elementary School	3%
Churchill   Hoover Elementary School	3%
Elton Hills Elementary School	2%
Folwell Elementary School	3%
Franklin Elementary School	2%
Gage Elementary School	2%
Gibbs Elementary School	5%
Jefferson Elementary School	4%
Longfellow 45-15 District-Wide Elementary School	2%
Montessori at Franklin District-Wide Elementary	2%
Pinewood Elementary School	2%
Riverside Central Elementary School	1%
Sunset Terrace Elementary School	2%
Washington District-Wide Elementary School	3%
Lincoln K-8 District-Wide School	4%
Friedell District-Wide Middle School	4%

<b>School</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,475)</b>
John Adams Middle School	6%
Kellogg Middle School	8%
Right Fit Middle School	--
Willow Creek Middle School	5%
Century High School	10%
John Marshall High School	8%
Mayo High School	12%
Rochester Alternative Learning Center	1%
Phoenix Academy	<1%
Launching Emerging Adults Program (LEAP)	--
C-Tech/P-Tech	<1%
Rochester Academy for Independent Living (RAIL)	<1%
RPS Online	1%

## 29. Does your child have an IEP or receive special education services?

<b>Response</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,487)</b>
Yes	16%
No	82%
Don't know	1%
Prefer not to answer	2%

## 30. How do you identify your gender?

<b>Response</b>	<b>% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,095)</b>	<b>% community respondents (n=209)</b>	<b>% staff respondents (n=1,596)</b>
Male	24%	17%	20%
Female	68%	67%	71%
I describe my gender as...	<1%	6%	<1%
Prefer not to answer	7%	10%	8%

### 31. How do you consider yourself...

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,064)	% community respondents (n=208)	% staff respondents (n=1,583)
Straight	84%	73%	82%
Lesbian or gay	<1%	2%	1%
Bisexual	<1%	3%	2%
Queer	<1%	1%	<1%
Don't know	<1%	<1%	<1%
Prefer not to answer	13%	21%	14%

### 32. What is your age?

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,094)	% community respondents (n=209)	% staff respondents (n=1,591)
24 or younger	<1%	4%	2%
25-29 years old	2%	5%	7%
30-39 years old	31%	35%	23%
40-49 years old	45%	26%	25%
50-59 years old	14%	10%	23%
60-69 years old	1%	6%	9%
70 years old or older	<1%	3%	<1%
Prefer not to answer	7%	11%	11%

### 33. What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,097)
8 <sup>th</sup> grade or less	<1%
Some high school	<1%
High school graduate or GED	3%
Some college/vocational/technical/trade school	8%
Completed a vocational/technical/trade school	3%
Associate's degree (2-year degree)	9%
Bachelor's degree (4-year degree)	34%
Graduate or professional degree	38%
Prefer not to answer	5%

### 34. Are you currently...

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,089)
Employed for wages	77%
Self-employed or farmer	8%
Unemployed or out of work	1%
Unable to work because of a disability	1%
A home-maker or stay-at-home parent	10%
A student	3%
Retired	1%
Prefer not to answer	6%

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one option.

### 35. Which of the following do you consider yourself?

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,064)	% community respondents (n=201)	% staff respondents (n=1,584)
White	74%	69%	82%
Black or African American	4%	3%	2%
Asian or Asian American	8%	4%	2%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%	2%	1%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<1%	1%	<1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	4%	2%	3%
Other	1%	4%	1%
Prefer not to answer	11%	21%	12%

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one option.

### 36. What language do you primarily speak at home?

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,062)	% community respondents (n=200)
English	90%	84%
Arabic	1%	1%
Khmer/Cambodian	1%	1%
Somali	<1%	1%
Spanish	3%	3%
Another language	6%	3%
Prefer not to answer	6%	15%

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one option.

### 37. Total household income in 2021 (all earners, all sources)

Response	% parent/guardian respondents (n=3,049)	% community respondents (n=198)
Less than \$20,000	1%	3%
\$20,000-\$29,000	2%	2%
\$30,000-\$39,000	3%	3%
\$40,000-\$49,000	2%	6%
\$50,000-\$59,000	3%	3%
\$60,000-\$69,000	4%	6%
\$70,000-\$79,000	4%	7%
\$80,000-\$89,000	5%	4%
\$90,000-\$99,000	5%	7%
\$100,000-\$149,000	21%	15%
\$150,000-\$199,000	12%	15%
\$200,000 or more	18%	6%
Prefer not to answer	21%	24%

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#### For more information

This summary presents the results of surveys of Rochester Public Schools parents/guardians, staff, and community members that were administered by Wilder Research in January 2022 as a part of a strategic planning process.

For more information about this project, contact Anna Granias at Wilder Research, [anna.granias@wilder.org](mailto:anna.granias@wilder.org).

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MARCH 2022

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## End notes

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