

# OVERVIEW



# Code of Conduct

Adopted June 16, 2016

The Board of Education adopted a new Code of Conduct for the 2016-17 school year, developed through a collaborative effort involving parents, students, teachers, District staff and community members. Its goal is to make our classrooms and schools safe, supportive, and joyful environments for teaching and learning.

The Code of Conduct in its entirety is available in the main office of every school, the District's Central Office and on the District's website, [www.rcsdk12.org/codeofconduct](http://www.rcsdk12.org/codeofconduct). What follows is an overview of the Code and how it was developed, with page-number references to specific sections.



## A New Code was Necessary Because the Previous System Wasn't Working For Us

Nearly every District stakeholder can agree that the structures in place to encourage proper behavior and deal with misconduct have not served their interests well.

- Students feel they are often treated like criminals who receive major punishments for minor offenses.
- Teachers feel like too many students exhibit out-of-control behavior that threatens their ability to manage the classroom, if not their personal safety.
- School administrators lack a road map for creating a positive learning environment that reduces behavior issues and for ensuring that discipline is fairly and consistently applied.
- Family members see thousands of children getting suspended each year with little or no improvement in student achievement and school climate.
- The community suffers when suspended students become alienated from education and make poor behavior choices outside of school. This creates a school-to-prison pipeline that harms neighborhoods, public safety and the economic vitality of our City.

A new Code of Conduct by itself will not solve all these problems or change all these perceptions. However, as the foundation document that defines behavior expectations and disciplinary consequences, it is an important place to start.

## Restorative Practices Foster Safe and Supportive School Climates

The previous Code of Conduct defined standards of behavior and disciplinary consequences for failing to meet them. In contrast, the new Code defines rights, responsibilities and expectations for students, parents, school staff members and District leadership. It applies to these groups as well as visitors and other people on school property or attending school functions.

The Code promotes the teaching of positive behavior and provides recommendations for maintaining a healthy learning environment. It is based on restorative practices, which means that members of the school community are expected to build personal relationships and to hold each other accountable for maintaining proper behavior and resolving conflicts.

*See pages 15-21 of the Code for rights, responsibilities and expectations of students, parents and staff. See pages 6-9 for guiding principles and pages 58-61 for detail on restorative approaches.*

## A Discipline Matrix Defines Consistent, Progressive Responses to Inappropriate Behavior

Based on the restorative approach, the Code defines the purpose of discipline as “to understand and address the root causes of behavior, resolve conflicts, repair the harm done, restore relationships and re-integrate students into the school community.”

It employs progressive discipline, with a matrix of potential responses to inappropriate behaviors. In most cases, the matrix requires the use of “guidance interventions” that teach positive behavior—helping students to analyze the causes and impacts of their actions at the classroom or support-team level—before employing stronger interventions or harsher punishment.

*See pages 23-39 for the full matrix, or the separate summary document on the Code’s approach to discipline.*

## Student Suspensions Are Limited, and Families Are Entitled to Due Process

The matrix reserves student suspensions for cases where guidance interventions have not worked, the safety of students or staff is threatened or the ability to continue the educational process is at risk. It defines four types of behaviors that require an intervention or discipline.

<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Uncooperative/ Noncompliant Behavior</b>	<b>Classroom Interventions; Student Support Team Interventions</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Disorderly/ Disruptive Behavior</b>	<b>Intensive Support Staff; Administrator Interventions and Responses</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Aggressive or Injurious/Harmful Behavior</b>	<b>Referral Interventions; Suspension Responses</b>
<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Seriously Dangerous or Violent Behavior</b>	<b>Referral Interventions; Extended Suspension Responses</b>

Except for prolonged or repeated actions, students are not removed from a classroom for Level 1 behaviors and are not suspended for Level 1 or 2. They may be removed from the classroom for Level 2, 3, or 4 behaviors and be suspended for Level 3 and 4.

This is not a “zero suspension” policy, where students must remain in school regardless of their behavior. However, neither does the matrix allow a “zero tolerance” approach where almost any student misbehavior can result in students being removed from school. Removal of a student doesn’t address the issue or conflict that caused his or her behavior. At best the suspension delays dealing with the problem until the student returns to school; at worst it creates a negative cycle where one suspension leads to another until the student disengages from school completely.

The Code states that arrests are to be used only as a last resort when there is a serious, actual threat to safety. The matrix defines circumstances under which reports to law enforcement can be considered or are required.



**The Code promotes the teaching of positive behavior and provides recommendations for maintaining a healthy learning environment.**

Every effort must be made to contact a student's parent as soon as possible for actions that could involve a criminal investigation.

Before being suspended, students are entitled to due process—which means an incident is investigated first, students have a chance to tell their side of the story and both students and parents are notified. Longer suspensions require more due-process steps, and there are special protections that apply to students with disabilities.

*See pages 23-29 for the full matrix. See pages 40 and 41 of the Code for basic information. See pages 61-70 for detail on due process and referrals to law enforcement. See pages 71-73 for detail on due process for students with disabilities.*

### **The District Is Adding Social and Emotional Supports, But a Positive Climate Is Everyone's Job**

The 2016-17 District budget supports the shift to a new Code by continuing a multi-year trend of investing to help schools meet the social and emotional needs of their students.

- It maintained at least one full-time social worker in every school, along with art, music and sports programs that provide important physical and emotional outlets for children.
- Every K-8 and secondary school, along with a handful of elementary schools, will continue to have an in-school suspension (ISS) or Alternatives to Suspension (ATS) room.
- It added funds for up to 13 "help zones" so that every K-8 and secondary school can have one. These are rooms where students who have engaged in disruptive behavior can work with a professional to "recover, reflect, repair and return" to the classroom.
- Ten schools will adopt restorative practices this year, joining 13 others that began adoption of these practices in 2015-16 or before.
- Services for students with disabilities will expand with more than 50 additional staff members, including eight more psychologists and a behavior support specialist.
- The District is providing extensive training to help staff members better understand and build relationships with their students despite cultural differences.

However, no resources are required for an adult in school to show kindness and understanding to a child, or to another adult. Children can do the same with no investment beyond the teaching and modeling of good behavior. For the Code to achieve its potential, school communities must develop a mindset of supporting each other and growing together. Success is not dependent solely on dollars invested in new social and emotional supports, but also on our own personal behaviors and actions.

*See pages 11 and 12 for a description of supports for the new Code.*

### **The Code Was Developed Through a Collaborative Process of Community Consideration**

Development of the new Code began in 2014, when the District asked Rochester Area Community Foundation (RACF) to convene a task force focused on behavior and discipline issues in schools. The Community Task Force on School Climate brings together more than 50 individuals with a stake in helping Rochester schools to do better. Students, parents, teachers, school staff members, school and District-level administrators, and community organizations all are represented.

To support initial work of the task force, the District engaged the Advancement Project, a national civil-rights organization that has helped other urban school districts improve Codes of Conduct—including Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and numerous Florida cities.

In July of 2015, the Community Task Force published a first draft of the student section of the new Code. It collected feedback via online surveys, public meetings and focus groups. In response to concerns raised by teachers and school administrators, the task force delayed the planned timeline by about six months and conducted in-depth focus groups with 10 school communities before a revised Code was submitted in April 2016 to the Board of Education. The Board conducted additional public hearings before unanimously approving the new Code on June 16, 2016.



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### **The Code Takes Effect Immediately, but Improving School Climates Will Take Time**

The Board's approval makes the Code of Conduct a new District policy that must be followed by students and adults at all facilities and events this year. Fully transforming school climates with restorative practices will take years, but we have examples that the change can be powerful.

- East Upper and Lower Schools reduced total student suspensions in 2015-16 by 65 percent compared to the previous year, largely through the use of restorative practices as part of its Educational Partnership Organization agreement with the University of Rochester
- Northeast College High School and Northwest Junior High on the Douglass campus, which also employ restorative practices, reduced suspensions by more than 25 percent across all grade levels (7 to 12) in 2015-16 compared to the previous year

**“We will learn as we put this Code into action. We will push toward the aspirations within it, even as we strive to assure the supports needed are in place. We will make changes and develop sections that need further work based upon our learning, and we will assess our progress ongoing in order to achieve the goals of keeping students safe, in school, and flourishing.”**

*- Rochester City School District Code of Conduct, page 1*

**For the Code to achieve its potential, school communities must develop a mindset of supporting each other and growing together.**

