

Comprehensive education reform requires parent leadership

By **DEMORAH HANMER**

Over the last month, I have had the opportunity to hear from parents across Rochester. These parent voices are unified in one very clear way—keep the conversation focused on what is best for our children. The voices, from a group that many times goes unheard or is dismissed, are powerful. These parent voices combined with what we are understanding from our children, most clearly articulated last month by the State of the Students, express the forward-looking and comprehensive changes the community needs to see in our schools.

This is a community-wide challenge. We are one Rochester and we are in it together. We are all focused on the biggest system in our community that impacts our children, cousins, neighbors, etc. Whether our children attend RCSD, charter schools, private schools or homeschools, we all care deeply about the education of children in Rochester. Our combined parent voice has an urgent and clear demand—improve learning outcomes for our children and develop a school culture that communicates respect to our children and families.

Transparency and Accountability. The system is not transparent and thus not accountable to students and families. Parents have questions about why administrators at their child's school cannot or will not address certain issues and feel like they are not getting straight answers. Parents feel like it becomes a full-time job to “navigate the system” at Central Office and wonder why the system does not change to be more transparent and accountable to the

needs in each particular building and community.

The Choice System. Parents have many questions about the current choice system. The system has established enclave schools, confusion between PK and K-12 options, and “choices” based on being able to get transportation. There is a desire for neighborhood-based, community schools especially at the elementary level. Parents (and teachers) want the ability to form relationships and truly partner. It is time to revisit this model with parents around the table at the start of the conversation.



GUEST
OPINION

A divide exists between our community and our educators.

Our city is amazing, but our region is racially segregated. We must rebuild trust between our teachers who are mostly white and our families who are mostly black and brown. Trust is the foundation of any relationship and relationships are the foundation of a strong school community where children learn and grow. Many parents highlight that most teachers in the city do not live in the city. Parents and teachers thus do not bump into each other in the grocery store, at church, in the park or at the library. Systems must change to encourage re-building this community—and there are policies like tax incentives, employer-assisted housing programs, housing grants and

down payment assistance that can incentivize and support teachers to live in Rochester.

We want results. Anytime we discuss education in Rochester, someone begins to quote poverty statistics as if to excuse poor educational outcomes. This focus distracts from the conversation about the comprehensive reform needed at the school and district level to strengthen teaching and learning. We have examples of high-poverty cities around the country and schools in our community that deliver results for students consistently. We know that where poverty exists, we need to provide a variety of interventions and supports so that students can access learning. That is not up for debate. Poverty, however, is not an excuse for consistent low performance. We want our leaders and this community to be bold in thinking and brave in speaking honestly about new ideas that disrupt the status quo. We want individuals who do not believe our children can learn due to poverty to step aside.

There are many serious conversations emerging among student leaders and parent leaders that you should join that are focused on systems change. We are encouraging parents to get registered to vote, reach out to your school's parent group or join the School Based Planning Team, attend Board of Education Meetings (or watch online) and talk to other parents at your child's school. Follow Greater Rochester PLTI on social media for information and to keep in touch with what student and parent leaders are doing in the community to craft a vision for change.

Deborah Hanmer is Initiative Director at Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute.

US workplaces are nowhere near ready to contain a coronavirus outbreak

By **KAREN SCOTT**

The new coronavirus has spread rapidly around the globe since its discovery late last year in China. It has now infected more than 20,000 people world-

wide and killed over 400, prompting travel bans, citywide quarantines and mass hysteria.

To combat its spread in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has offered some seemingly straightforward advice: “Stay home when you are sick.”

That's easier said than done for the tens of millions of workers in the United States who don't have paid sick days or who operate in a “tough-it-out” workplace culture. This gap is a big problem when a disease like the coronavirus can be spread with as little as a cough.



Scott

As someone who researches work, I've been wondering: Do these workplace norms and policies help our companies cope with a contagious virus — or do they accelerate its spread?

Working while sick

The U.S. is one of only two Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries that do not universally guarantee paid leave for sick workers. And 39 states leave it up to employers, meaning that approximately 1 in 3 workers in the U.S. have zero paid sick days.

Sure, there is the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, which offers job protections for taking time for certain health reasons. Yet these protections only cover a subset of employees, with stipulations around job tenure and employer size. Importantly, the act does not cover illnesses such as the flu — even in a pandemic — unless complications arise.

These conditions create a near-guarantee that workers will defy public health warnings and trudge into their workplaces, regardless of symptoms. In

this way, a manageable health crisis can spiral out of control.

We saw this happen during the last outbreak of H1N1 swine flu in 2009. One estimate found that at least 3 in 10 workers in the private sector did not take time off from work when sick with the virus, which led to up to seven million additional infections and may have extended the outbreak.

The CDC blames H1N1 and related complications for 12,469 deaths in the United States in 2009 and 2010.

On the front lines

It's particularly concerning that those who are more likely to go into work when sick are service workers, since their jobs are usually impossible to do from home.

Fewer than half of service workers have any paid sick days, and the proportion declines with pay.

These are the people who prepare food in restaurants; take care of the young, sick and elderly; and keep workplaces clean. Many also play a vital role in maintaining public health as the first line of defense against contagion. Yet that role is undermined by their lack of access to policies that allow and encourage them to stay home when they are sick.

Norovirus, for example, is the leading cause of food poisoning in the United States, infecting at least 20 million Americans a year. And yet, the CDC has found that 1 in 5 food service workers say they work “while sick with vomiting or diarrhea,” in direct contradiction of guidelines.

This disturbing statistic should be enough to prompt consumers to ask about paid sick leave policies at their favorite restaurants — and for employers in the food industry to review their paid sick leave policies and workplace culture around taking time



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 The ROCHESTER BUSINESS JOURNAL RBJ (ISSN 0896-3274) is published weekly for \$99 a year print and digital access or \$79 a year digital-only access by Rochester Business Journal, 16 W. Main St., Suite 341, Rochester, NY 14614.
 Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.
 POSTMASTER: Electronic ACS Service requested. Send address changes to: Subscription Services, PO Box 1051, Williamsport PA 17703-9940



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“Having folks around me that hold a mirror in front of me and say ‘no, you can’t,’ is probably one of my biggest challenges.”

— Fabricio Morales, president and CEO, Intivity