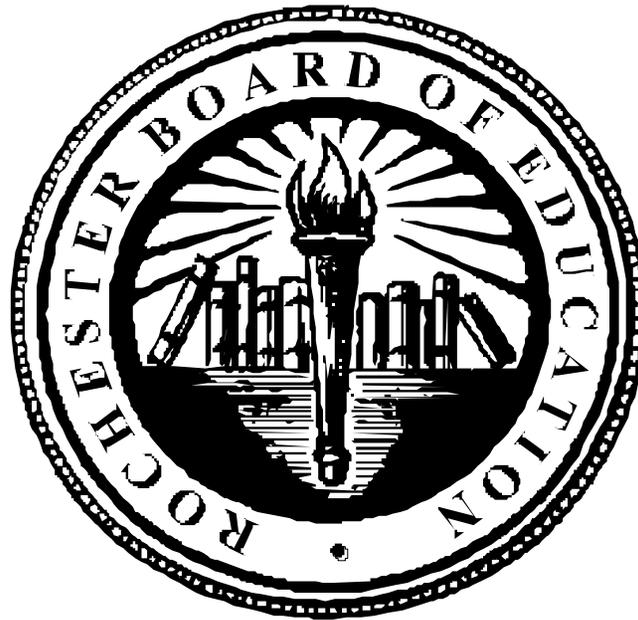


# OFFICE OF AUDITOR GENERAL



## Student Behavior and Suspension Audit Report

June 2014



# Office of Auditor General

## Student Behavior and Suspension Audit

### **OBJECTIVE**

To evaluate operating protocols and procedures for Student Behavior Management and Suspensions.

### **BACKGROUND**

The District's Code of Conduct Policy 5300 provides high level student disciplinary penalties. Superintendent Regulations of Intervention and Discipline 5300-R provide guidance regarding possible disciplinary responses for infractions. Education Laws for Student Discipline provide standard guidelines that must be adhered to when providing discipline for students that violate the District Code of Conduct. A new Deputy Superintendent was hired in 2014-15, who is now responsible for overseeing Student Discipline.

Long-Term Suspension Hearings are performed by one Hearing Officer. Suspension decisions are approved a designee of the Superintendent. In the 2012-13 school year, there were 6,425 suspensions reported and in 2013-14, 13,217 suspensions were reported. According to management, the increase in suspensions over the prior year is due to Principals recording more suspensions in the Student Management system.

### **SCOPE**

We evaluated the Suspension process including the effectiveness of operating protocols and procedures, consistency of performance, and accuracy of reporting across the District. Student infractions and disciplinary responses were evaluated to ensure progressive, fair and consistent penalties are imposed. We assessed the District's due process procedures to ensure compliance with Education Law. Incident reporting was analyzed to ensure compliance with Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting (VADIR).

### **CONCLUSION**

Significant opportunities exist to improve student behavior and the general school climate amongst both adults and students. We noted a lack of; understanding, clear administrative protocols, intervention, remediation, due process and formalized expectations. Improved compliance with the Education law regarding student discipline must occur. Evidence of parent communication and required notifications could not always be substantiated. Evidence handling and chain of custody procedures are not formalized. Suspension penalties at schools are neither consistently imposed nor monitored for reasonableness. Procedures for ensuring that all students received instruction and class assignments while suspended are lacking. The amount of time some students were out of their academic program was concerning. Lastly, procedures are not in place to ensure the accuracy and completeness of Suspension data in the Student Management System for VADIR reporting.



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### Student Behavior and Suspension Audit

Rec #	Recommendations
1	<p><i>Develop and implement district-wide comprehensive written policies, protocols and procedures for short and long-term suspensions. Prescriptively document the procedural expectations with guiding documentation to facilitate consistent performance across schools. Communicate to schools and enforce compliance with the protocols and procedures. Procedures should include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>A. School-based actions that must occur prior to suspension.</i></li> <li><i>B. Required documentation to substantiate a long or short-term suspension decision.</i></li> <li><i>C. How incidents should be reported in SMS and student records.</i></li> <li><i>D. Education Laws relating to suspensions.</i></li> <li><i>E. Standards for parent notification and documentation.</i></li> <li><i>F. Expectations regarding instruction and providing student work during a suspension.</i></li> <li><i>G. Approval and documentation requirements to authorize a suspension.</i></li> <li><i>H. Transition process after an offsite suspension has been served.</i></li> </ul>
2	<p><i>Research, document and communicate all required legal aspects, as noted in Education Laws regarding student discipline. Ensure documentation clearly specifies student rights regarding informal hearings, questioning witnesses, obtaining evidence, participation in hearings and including advocates.</i></p>
3	<p><i>Establish standard deadlines throughout the entire short or long-term suspension process for key components in the process, including but not limited to, notification to the parent regarding the incident, scheduling the hearing, notification of the hearing date to the parent and school, and notification of the decision. Ensure adherence to the established deadlines by establishing reporting and monitoring.</i></p>
4	<p><i>Develop and implement protocols and criteria for handling and maintaining evidence and performing student searches.</i></p>



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Rec #	Recommendations
5	<p><i>Establish and implement protocols that require formal school-based interventions to change negative student behavior. Protocols should include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>A. Providing sample intervention strategies for common concerns.</i></li> <li><i>B. Providing counseling and behavior intervention workshops to all students.</i></li> <li><i>C. Establishing methods to ensure interventions are being performed to change negative student behavior.</i></li> <li><i>D. Maintaining documentation in student records to support interventions performed.</i></li> <li><i>E. Documenting the outcomes for the intervention utilized.</i></li> <li><i>F. Staff training to change the mindset for student discipline.</i></li> </ul>
6	<i>Provide focused counseling and behavior intervention workshops to all students residing in discipline programs.</i>
7	<i>Develop and implement a preventative behavioral asset model for all District students to improve student behavior.</i>
8	<p><i>Establish and implement procedures to ensure parent contact consistently occurs during the short and long-term suspension process. At a minimum, should include procedures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>A. Documenting and retaining school contact with parents using a contact log.</i></li> <li><i>B. Providing and retaining written notice to parents of proposed suspensions.</i></li> <li><i>C. Informing parents of their right to evidence and an informal conference within 24 hours of an incident occurring.</i></li> </ul>
9	<i>Establish and implement monitoring procedures to ensure that all students receiving behavior related discipline that results in more than 5 days of alternative instruction receive due process procedures and a long-term suspension hearing.</i>
10	<i>Establish/update standard short and long-term suspension forms to facilitate compliance with supporting documentation standards. These forms should include: required descriptive information of the incident, student history, attendance and evidence, preparer and approval signatures. Add a disclaimer to the form to state that the Impartial Hearing Officer's recommendation may differ from the Principal's recommendation.</i>
11	<i>Establish review standards for School Chief approval of out- of-school suspensions. Ensure School Chief approval is retained for all out-of-school suspension referrals and expedited transfers to PM School or LyncX.</i>



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Rec #	Recommendations
12	<i>Document protocols and procedures for the Hearing Office to ensure consistent performance during staff absences. Include at a minimum, standard letter timeframes, recordkeeping standards and reporting, use of the recording device, and how to store hearing information.</i>
13	<i>Validate responsibility for review and approval for hearing materials. Review hearing documentation prior to proceeding with the long-term hearing process and return/reject incomplete suspension packets.</i>
14	<i>Establish and Implement a contingency plan to ensure that all Superintendent Suspension hearings take place within 5 days and notification of the suspension decision consistently occurs timely.</i>
15	<i>Establish District reporting to document, summarize and communicate all suspension hearings and related results. Include a brief description of the incidents, school, student demographics and related suspension decisions.</i>
16	<i>Monitor and trend suspension incidents, penalties and durations across the various schools for common infractions to ensure that penalties are consistent. Create reporting to document common themes across the District.</i>
17	<i>Develop and implement a District-wide attendance reporting procedure for both elementary and secondary level students to ensure all students' attendance for discipline is accurately recorded in SMS. Procedures should include: In-school Suspension, Out-of school suspension, PM School and LyncX Academy.</i>
18	<i>Establish a monitoring procedure to ensure students with disabilities that receive suspensions are appropriately receiving modified instruction and related services in compliance with their IEP.</i>
19	<i>Establish, Communicate, and Implement a District-wide process for the manifestation determination and pattern determination processes for suspensions. Ensure documentation standard are established to support the review. Develop, communicate and implement a process for performing the functional behavioral assessment and a behavioral intervention plan to make modifications to the student's IEP, as appropriate, when a behavior pattern has been recognized.</i>



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Rec #	Recommendations
20	<i>Establish a District-wide monitoring process to ensure manifestation determinations are completed in ten day increments. Utilize PowerSchool reporting to monitor suspensions for students with disabilities. Develop a communication process between the Administrators and the CASEs to heighten awareness of suspensions for students with disabilities.</i>
21	<i>Update the manifestation determination questionnaire to include instructions, signatures and dates.</i>
22	<i>Ensure the timely retrieval of academic assignments for students given in-school and out-of-school suspension. Confirm completion of the assignments to ensure the students are receiving the required alternative education in the in-school suspension room.</i>
23	<i>Ensure instruction in the in-school suspension rooms (ISS) for elementary and secondary buildings comply with laws surrounding equivalent instruction and supervision. Ensure that resources in the various content areas are identified and available to support students in ISS.</i>
24	<i>Develop a formalized process for communicating to the in-school suspension teachers when a student has been assigned and include the details of the suspension and duration.</i>
25	<i>Develop a District process for transitioning students from suspension, back to their traditional school environment. Incorporate the incident that caused the suspension into the transition process to ensure the behavior does not recur.</i>
26	<i>Develop and implement a process to ensure the accuracy and completeness of incident and behavior data in SMS. Record all incidents in the system of record. Ensure the data entered into SMS aligns with the student files. Establish a protocol to specify the level of detail necessary to be reported in SMS for student behavior.</i>
27	<i>Develop a standard timeframe in which incidents must be reported in SMS. Ensure compliance with the established timeframe.</i>
28	<i>Develop accurate VADIR reports in SMS. Automate the annual VADIR reporting process and minimize or eliminate the manual process of preparing the State reporting.</i>



## Office of Auditor General Student Behavior and Suspension Audit

Rec #	Recommendations
29	<i>Develop the ability to perform a complete data extract of the incident details from SMS and compare the data extract to the automated reporting to assess completeness and accuracy of the VADIR reporting to the State.</i>
30	<i>Ensure the accuracy of incident and behavior data in SMS. Ensure the data entered into SMS aligns with the student files. Establish a protocol to specify the level of detail necessary to be reported in SMS for student behavior.</i>
31	<i>Develop accurate exception and monitoring reports for incident data. Establish an automated monitoring process utilizing exception and monitoring reports in SMS to ensure the data integrity of VADIR reporting to the State.</i>