

## State appoints consultant for RCSD

### RCSD

Goal is boosting low student achievement

#### Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The state Education Department has appointed a “distinguished educator” to the Rochester City School District, an unprecedented local intervention based on stubbornly low student achievement.

Kenneth Eastwood, the former superintendent in the Middletown and Oswego school districts, will join the district April 25 as a mandated consultant, tasked with “an intensive review of district systems, structures and operations with the goal of helping the district ... develop an action plan to support district improvement.”

He does not replace Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams but

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**Eastwood**

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will work alongside her, with special attention on the district’s “priority” and receivership schools.

In a statement, Deane-Williams wrote: “I welcome the participation of Dr. Eastwood in addressing the fiscal, operational, and instructional challenges facing the district. While I am confident of the direction in which the district is currently proceeding, I also know that there is additional urgent work to be done to serve Rochester’s children and their families. Our children deserve the very best and I remain deeply committed to serving this community.”

Among the reasons cited by the Education Department in making the move:

- RCSD has the greatest percentage of schools identified as “priority” (54 percent) of any district in the state.
- Its test scores are worst in the state at the elementary level and secondworst at the secondary level.
- The district has been cited by state and federal authorities for failing its students with disabilities and, the state disclosed, soon will face a similar requirement for English language learners.

The district's graduation rate, on the other hand, has been creeping up the last several years, to 51.9 percent in June 2017, or 57 percent including summer school.

Eastwood's salary will be paid by RCSD, and there is no end date for his appointment. He is required to submit quarterly reports to the state, among other responsibilities.

He retired from the Middletown City School District on Jan. 31 after 13 years. He was planning to move to Rochester anyway to be closer to his children and grandchildren, according to the *Times Herald-Record* in Middletown.

"For far too many years, the Rochester City School District has struggled to address a myriad of issues relating to instruction and student support that have created impediments to student learning," Education Commissioner Mary-Ellen Elia said in a statement. "The appointment of Ken Eastwood as a distinguished educator underscores the commitment of the Board of Regents and the state Education Department to partner with the Rochester community to create a new, brighter future for our RCSD students."

Rochester is the third district to have a distinguished educator assigned to it. Buffalo Public Schools had one from August 2012 until July 2015, and the Hempstead Union Free School District on Long Island was assigned one last September.

The board and administration got no advance notice of the department's decision; Board President Van White said he'd been speaking with Elia 45 minutes before the announcement, and she didn't mention it.

He said the board has some concerns about the cost as well as the utility of the concept in general.

"We're going to spend \$170,000 on a distinguished educator, and the concern of the board members is whether it will add value," he said.

"If it doesn't — as seems to be the case in Buffalo — we'll be wondering why."

In fact, Chief Financial Officer Everton Sewell said he expects the cost to be closer to \$200,000.

If nothing else, the district has been amassing an tremendous amount of reading material on its problems. Eastwood's will be the third current major review of district policies.

A board-appointed committee is developing special education recommendations upon pain of lawsuit, while the state Attorney General's Office is leading an investigation into the death of School 12 student Trevyan Rowe.

That is in addition to Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams' comprehensive Path Forward studies and, last spring, a major special education review and a scalding state audit of its financial controls.

The school board met Tuesday night to hear the administration's 2018-19 budget proposal and has a business meeting Thursday when its members surely will hear more about Eastwood's role.

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