

RCSD board called to private meetings with state officials

Each member will have 30-minute meeting

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The top two education officials in New York state will be in Rochester on Tuesday for an unusual series of private sit-down meetings with each member of the Rochester City School District Board of Education, apparently to smooth over tension related to the appointment of a “distinguished educator.”

State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and Board of Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa have asked each board member for a private, 30-minute meeting at the airport Holiday Inn, according to four sources in a position to know. The board members do not yet know the topic of the meeting.

A state Education Department spokesman declined to comment or to confirm the meetings are happening.

Elia and Rosa did the same thing, though, after appointing a distinguished educator in the Hempstead school district on Long Island.

“We are aware of the changes that need to occur and we want to make sure that the trustees are equally as seriously concerned,” Elia said then.

That was several months after distinguished educator Jack Bierwirth had begun his work in Hempstead and had already issued an initial report. Here, on the other hand, Ken Eastwood won’t even arrive for another three weeks.

The accelerated timeline may be an attempt to tamp down on local dissent before Eastwood begins. Board member Natalie Sheppard forcefully criticized the plan last week as an intrusion on local control of schools, and a number of community members in attendance jeered at the \$200,000 the district expects to spend on his services.

Elia made clear in an interview last week that she believes time has run out for Rochester to solve its educational problems on its own.

“These students in RCSD are not receiving what they need to be successful,” she said. “Whatever that is, however that comes about, we have to move the district to the point where they are focused on that.”

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Betty Rosa was elected chancellor of the New York Board of Regents in March. MIKE GROLL/AP