

State Ed rescinds RCSD 'educator'

Eastwood

The stated reason is inability to reach terms

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The state Education Department has pulled the name of Kenneth Eastwood as distinguished educator for the Rochester City School District after the two sides were unable to reach contract terms. "While this is extremely disappointing, Commissioner (Mary Ellen) Elia and Chancellor (Betty) Rosa determined it is in the best interests of Rochester's students to rescind the appointment at this time," said a statement from the state Department of Education.

School board president Van White,

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meanwhile, said the board and Eastwood had been negotiating for less than a week and had not reached an impasse.

"State Ed is the one that made the decision," White said. "There was nothing to indicate to me things weren't moving along in a good way."

White said that when Elia informed him of the decision, he asked her whether the board had done anything wrong and she responded that it had not. Elia, through a spokesperson, agreed that the board did nothing wrong.

The state Board of Regents created the "distinguished educator" program in March 2011. The statutory purpose is to help "districts and schools that are experiencing extremely serious academic challenges and ensure the appointment of qualified individuals to assist low performing schools."

The withdrawal of Eastwood's name does not mean Rochester no longer will get a distinguished educator. Instead, state Education Department spokeswoman Emily DeSantis said in an email that the department would conduct a nationwide search for another person.

RCSD had budgeted about \$200,000 for Eastwood. White said the differences between the two sides were not necessarily financial.

“We have a responsibility to negotiate all contracts — we can’t just hand out money,” he said. “We can’t just say, ‘whatever conditions you want, you’ll get.’” Eastwood recently retired as superintendent from the Middletown City School District. He had previously applied for the RCSD superintendent job and has family in Rochester.

In response to a request for comment, Eastwood emailed the following statement, which echoed the official Education Department statement: “I fully understand the Commissioner’s decision to rescind my appointment as Distinguished Educator, assigned to the Rochester City School District, given the differences in potential contractual items. I believe that a change in Distinguished Educator could be a renewed opportunity for the Board of Education to appreciate the byproduct of an outside analysis of current student performance, curricular and organizational practices and efficiencies.

“Such an analyst could have a fresh view of district problems, student performance and graduation rates, culminating in a set of recommendations that could dramatically improve student outcomes.

“The children of Rochester need and deserve such a commitment from their educational system.”

Eastwood’s time in Rochester was remarkably tumultuous considering that he never actually worked here.

The school board and administration first felt blindsided by his appointment last month. School board member Natalie Sheppard included his name and salary in a diatribe against the state of affairs in the district; she was not the only board member to question whether he was the right solution for Rochester’s problems.

It then emerged that Eastwood had applied for the superintendent job that eventually went to Barbara Deane-Williams in 2016. People in Rochester said he’d been dismissed from the running early, while Eastwood said he’d pulled his own name from consideration. Elia said she hadn’t known that wrinkle when she first named him.

Elia and Rosa then had a series of one-on-one meetings with the school board members in Rochester; the state Education Department promised to keep those “concerns and hopes” in mind in searching for the next candidate. No timetable for that has been announced.

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