

Vargas to take more control

14 city schools deemed 'struggling'

JUSTIN MURPHY

@CITIZENMURPHY

A long-awaited list of schools deemed to be struggling includes 14 in the Rochester School District, granting Superintendent Bolgen Vargas expanded powers in attempting to turn around student achievement there.

The four persistently struggling schools are East, Charlotte and Monroe high schools and School 9. Another 10 were designated as struggling. The assignments were based on how well the schools have performed relative to state accountability standards over the last several years.

A new plan with the University of Rochester is already in place at East High School, and Charlotte High School is scheduled to be closed. At Monroe and School 9, though, Vargas will assume the power to change the length of the school day or year and to allocate funds and staffing, among other things. Most of those duties normally belong to the school board.

New state education commissioner MaryEllen Elia, in Rochester on Thurs

See **SCHOOLS**, Page **14A**

Article Continued Below

[See SCHOOLS on Page A14](#)

Schools

Continued from Page 3A

day to meet with district leaders and staff, promised the change would come with additional help from the state.

"It gives opportunities for the superintendent to make some changes that up to this point he might not have been able to make," she said. "(It allows for) a number of things to put it on a better footing to have a strong foundation to move forward. ... It's not an overnight process, but it needs to occur as quickly as possible because it affects the lives of students."

Under the receivership regulations, the superintendent gets one year of expanded authority, which can then be extended with state approval. If there is not fast improvement, the district must appoint a state-approved outside receiver who would have similar powers.

Vargas said one of the changes at Monroe could be starting the school year in August, since attendance drops in the winter when many students go to visit family in Puerto Rico or abroad. He recently announced the upper grades of the Boys Academy at School 9 will be moved to the Leadership Academy for Young Men on the Charlotte campus.

"This approach is another reminder to us that we don't have much time," he said. "It gives the superintendent more flexibility ... for principals to come to me and make specific requests, and I don't have to negotiate (them)."

Overall, 144 schools in 17 districts were designated as either struggling (124) or persistently struggling (20). Sixty-two of them are in New York City, 25 are in Buffalo and 18 are in Syracuse.

At the schools receiving the lesser designation, the superintendent gets two years to start rather than just one. In Rochester, those schools are Northeast and Northwest College Prep high schools as well as Schools 3, 8, 17, 22, 34, 41, 44 and 45.

Also during her visit to Rochester, Elia promised to elicit more teacher participation in crafting new state tests, acknowledging there were "some things in the Pearson contract that caused constraints in our testing system, and problems."

Pearson is a Londonbased testing giant, which recently was dropped by the state Education Department; Questar Assessment will now develop New York's standardized exams for students in grades 3-8.

After hundreds of thousands of students in grades 3-8 refused to take state math and English tests this spring, Elia said the state is working now to determine whether it can draw meaningful data from the results it did get.

"We're looking at all the data now on the students and their prior history in testing," she said. "There's no question, particularly in some certain areas, it will affect the overall outcomes for that particular area or school or district. We're not sure the extent yet."

JMURPHY7@DemocratandChronicle.com



State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and Rochester Superintendent Bolgen Vargas visit a summer school class at the Frederick Douglass campus Thursday.

JUSTIN MURPHY/@CITIZENMURPHY/ STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

UP TO **70%** OFF *home décor*

Joss & Main

SHOP NOW

Powered by **TECNAVIA**

Copyright © 2015 Democrat and Chronicle 07/17/2015