

## Urbanski responds to Aquino's education report

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Rochester Teachers Association President Adam Urbanski responded to distinguished educator Jaime Aquino's report on the Rochester City School District earlier this week, saying that it should be taken seriously and built upon by the district administration as it attempts to improve the district. Aquino, a state-appointed consultant tasked with reviewing the district's inner workings, released the 61-page report Nov. 14. In it he found that the district needed a complete reset and that it was plagued by unsteady leadership.

Among other recommendations, Aquino stated that the school board should better understand its policymaking and budgetary roles and should cut down on interference into day-to-day district operations. He also said communication within the district needs a full overhaul.

Last week the school board pushed back against Aquino's findings and signaled that it was unlikely to heed the report's findings on the board's role.

There's nothing in the report that the school or teaching community doesn't already know, Urbanski said, but that doesn't diminish the report's gravitas or the need to make changes in the district.

"The fact that (Aquino) is articulating it in a direct and candid way hopefully will increase the likelihood that the issues that he identifies receive some serious attention," said Urbanski.

While some of Aquino's language, such as the need for a "reset," may be useful to underpin the weight of his findings, said Urbanski, it doesn't adequately describe what should occur to bring change.

"Not only is it impossible to push a reset button, there's no such button, no such possibility," said Urbanski. "The smart thing to do would be to build on the successful initiatives and schools that we have, and to phase out and eliminate that which isn't working."

Each and every recommendation should be examined and prioritized by the district, said Urbanski. Administrators and Board of Education members should then determine whether the board should be further involved in improving children's readiness for learning outside school, which can concern getting help for their families, or health services, he said.

"So I think the school board should do two things — take very seriously what Dr. Aquino has pointed out in this report ... (and) couple that with paying adequate attention to connecting social health services for the children and families that need them," he said.

Aquino's report also found that while the district's "Teachers Union contract was once seen as promoting innovative reforms to benefit students, ... now the majority of stakeholders interviewed feel that the Teachers Union and its contract are a major roadblock to improvement."

Aquino said that all stakeholders must take advantage of an open current opportunity to renegotiate the existing contracts to ensure better outcomes for students.

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