

Who could run RCSD?

No clear list of options for governance model

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There's no clear list of options from which to choose an alternative governance model for the Rochester City School District.

What is a state takeover, exactly? What powers might the mayor assume in mayoral control? What does it mean to dissolve a school board?

Most importantly: is there reason to believe any of these ideas might work?

It is ultimately state Education Commissioner Maryellen Elia who decides — and to be clear, she has not publicly mentioned an intention to overturn the current governance structure. The local coalition ROC the Future is asking for substantial involvement in her decision-making, and Mayor Lovely Warren wants a prominent seat at the table as well.

Here is a taxonomy of options and some places where they've been attempted. Many of them would require action by the state Legislature, which is conspicuously absent in the ROC the Future coalition.

“Takeover” is a loaded term. The state instead could choose a more incremental approach, as indeed it already has through the appointment of the distinguished educator, Jaime Aquino.

A “receivership district.” Warren in 2016 proposed lopping off the lowestperforming schools and creating a “receivership district” she would oversee. Such an entity would immediately become the poorest and most segregated “district” in New York, and likely the nation, but could then be targeted with special resources.

Elia responded coolly when Warren first floated the idea. The state of Tennessee did something analogous on a statewide level, grouping the worst-performing schools in Memphis and Nashville into an Achievement School District. So far, research shows the model has not delivered on its turnaround promises.

but to the extent ROC the Future is included in Elia's decision-making process, collective impact could become an even more prominent concept in Rochester.

Takeovers — who can do it?

The mayor. This is the most clear-cut scenario, in part because Warren's political godfather, Assemblyman David Gantt, perennially introduces legislation that spells it out.

Under Gantt's bill, the mayor would appoint the majority of a nine-person school board and would oversee the superintendent as well as the budget process. There would be several advisory councils but no elected legislative body.

Many cities have experimented with versions of mayoral control, notably New York City, Chicago and Boston. One 2013 study showed that the strategy led to a wiser use of resources — more money for instruction, smaller class sizes — but uneven results in terms of substantially narrowing student achievement gaps. Smaller cities such as Cleveland and Yonkers have not seen major gains despite years of mayoral control.

The state. This looks different from case to case, but generally, a state dissolves or disempowers the elected school board and appoints someone in its stead — either a state-controlled monitor or board or an outside entity.

Distinguished educator Aquino (or someone in a similar position) could be given an indefinite extension. That would be, essentially, a long-term state monitor. Elia mentioned this in January as a hypothetical possibility.

Schools in Newark, New Jersey, were under the control of a state-appointed superintendent for 22 years until 2018. U.S. Sen. Cory Booker summed up the period: “I don't think the record of state control can be heralded as a success in New Jersey.”

Perhaps the best-known state takeover was in Detroit, a city that mirrors many of Rochester's social and racial problems on a larger scale. State control

A monitor with a narrow mandate.

For instance, East Ramapo for several years has had a fiscal monitor over its budget process, but that person has no say over curriculum or other things. In Rochester, this position could focus on the budget process or special education, among other areas.

Collective impact model. ROC the Future is part of a national umbrella group called StriveTogether that touts what it calls the “collective impact” model. In short, it calls for a wide swath of local stakeholders to agree on a common set of goals and put their resources toward them in a coordinated way.

The concept is somewhat tangential to the idea of a state intervention,



From left, state Education Commissioner Marjorie Elia, Jaime Aquino and Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A. Rosa. JAMIE GERMANO/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

there took many different forms between 1999 and 2017 — indeed, confusion over who was in charge at some points was an obstacle to improvement, and the effort never yielded lasting improvements.

Gary, Indiana, is embarking on a similar plan now.

Someone else. Often, a state takeover means handing control to a third party — a local university, a nonprofit organization or a charter

school network.

In theory, Elia could ask the University of Rochester if it could extend its work at East High School to encompass the entire district. That is what happened in Muncie, Indiana, for instance, where Ball State University was enlisted to run the troubled school district.

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