

School district gets lukewarm progress report from Aquino

Aquino

Quarterly update notes some positive steps, but 'culture of fear' remains in place at central office

RCSD

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The Rochester City School District has taken some steps toward enacting the recommendations in Distinguished Educator Jaime Aquino's report, Aquino wrote in his first quarterly report, but has struggled to change the mindset of at least some decision-makers.

The quarterly update, required by state law, is another in a flurry of reports and public documents relating to the district over the last two months. It is separate from state Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia's unenthusiastic review of the school board's response to Aquino's initial report.

Among the positive steps that Aquino observed from November to January: ■ The school board temporarily suspended committee meetings and instead is having business meetings twice a month in an effort to do business more efficiently.

■ The district created a plan to have its own teachers grade all state exams by 2020 rather than hiring contractors to do so.

■ It also began the process of choosing a districtwide curriculum and re-established its curriculum council.

■ Annual special education reviews are now spread throughout the year rather than being grouped together in the spring.

■ There is a draft plan to revise the special education continuum of programming.



Jaime Aquino, distinguished educator, wrote that the Rochester City School District has taken steps toward enacting recommendations in his first quarterly report. The update is required by state law. SHAWN DOWD/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE FILE PHOTO

School district gets lukewarm progress report from Aquino

Aquino

school safety, at least five children have temporarily gone missing in the last three months, including escaping from school buildings or getting lost in the transportation process.

Continued from Page **1A**

At the same time, Aquino noted slow or stalled progress on a number of fronts. In particular, he said, a 'culture of fear' remains in place at central office and beyond.

'These behaviors encourage a culture that depresses staff morale, inhibits innovation, delays projects, and saps energy,' he wrote. As an example, board members sometimes share concerns directly with staff rather than going through the superintendent. And generally speaking, Aquino observed, 'the board's divisions continue.'

He observed that the district is creating a principal preparation program intended to strengthen the leadership pipeline and is moving forward on 'an aggressive timeline.' But, he wrote, 'it is not clear whether all key stakeholders are vested in the program.'

Perhaps most troubling, Aquino found that while the district has taken steps to improve

'If proposed changes are to become sustained and meaningful, during the next six months it is imperative for the district to engage key stakeholders' support and commitment for implementation of the Action Plan,' Aquino concluded, referring to the plan created in response to his report.

He will continue to issue quarterly progress reports for as long as he is in Rochester. In the meantime, Elia will soon give the district more specific feedback on the deficiencies she found in its action plan.

At the same time, ROC the Future is advocating for a change in governance, four board seats are up for election in the June Democratic primary and the district is looking for a superintendent.

JMURPHY7@Gannett.com