

State: RCSD's distinguished educator leaving, Elia silent on district's future

Brian Sharp and Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia announced Friday that Distinguished Educator Jaime Aquino is leaving, further clouding the future of the city school district.

The abrupt announcement — Aquino's last day will be next Friday — came with a vague statement from Elia that, "while Dr. Aquino's contributions have been significant, we know our work is far from done in Rochester."

Aquino was brought in by the state last summer to conduct an intensive review of RCSD and help the district address its myriad challenges and lowperforming schools. He issued a report in November calling for a complete reset of the district. Elia has been critical of the district's response, calling it "unrealistic" and lacking in a coherent vision.

Aquino expressed further doubts about the district's future in his final report, also released Friday.

The state Department of Education, announcing his departure in a twoparagraph news release, said Aquino was leaving "to pursue another professional opportunity." But Aquino said, via text message, that he has no set plans and is returning home to explore different options.

No decision has been made on whether to appoint a successor, said T. Andrew Brown, vice chancellor of the state Board of Regents.

Elia was silent on a proposal backed by Brown and endorsed by Mayor Lovely Warren for a temporary state takeover of the school district. That concept would replace the elected school board with an appointed, five-member interim board for at least five school years.

"We remain committed to the children of Rochester and will continue our endeavors to ensure they get the high quality education they deserve," Elia's statement concluded.

Another plan in the works

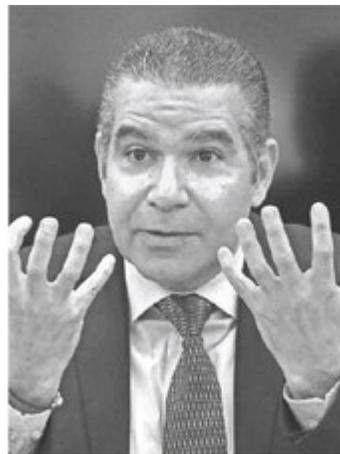
School Board President Van White declined to comment on the news.

Aquino, a former administrator in several large districts, emerged as one of the few leaders in the field of local education to garner nearly unanimous respect. While some board members, including White, took issue with parts of his initial report, it nonetheless served as the consensus cornerstone for the wildly swaying edifice the community is in the process of building.

BDSHARP@Gannett.com



State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia discusses the Rochester distinguished educator's report with the media. JAMIE GERMANO/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE



Jaime Aquino talks about the changes needed in RCSD during his meeting with the Democrat &

Brown indicated last week that he expected the state to put forward something different than the temporary takeover, and anticipated he would not agree with whatever was proposed. Warren has said that anything short of the takeover plan would not be putting the interest of city children first — a position she reiterated this week.

Chronicle editorial board in 2018. SHAWN DOWD /
ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

In his final quarterly report, Aquino noted continued, overarching concerns within the district that were hampering progress, including an ineffective school board, and “a culture of fear and intimidation” that “pays little attention to teaching and learning.”

“It is not clear how the limited progress outlined in this report will lead to systemic transformation of the district’s ability to improve student outcomes,” Aquino wrote.