

RCSD: LeBron tops school board field in fundraising, but will return some cash

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Last week, I wrote about the Rochester City School District's decision not to proactively post the campaign finance disclosure forms that the 10 candidates for school board were supposed to file for next month's Democratic primary.

Instead the district required a Freedom of Information request, a step I argued was an unnecessary check on transparency in an important election. At the same time, I did submit my Freedom of Information request and got the documents back Friday afternoon.

Six of the 10 candidates met the Wednesday filing deadline: incumbents Judith Davis, Beatriz LeBron and Willa Powell and challengers Ricardo Adams, Robert Hoggard and Amy Maloy.

LeBron raised more than twice as much as any other candidate, the result of strong support from the charter school sector. She got \$1,000 from the Coalition for Public Charter Schools PAC, \$1,971 from Rochester Prep board Chairman Geoff Rosenberger and \$394 from two other prominent local charter school backers, Bryan Hickman and Joe Klein.

She received that money before getting the endorsement and financial backing of the Rochester Teachers Association, which is stridently anti-charter school. She said Tuesday she will return the charter-affiliated money.

"I don't want (the RTA) to feel like I don't support them," she said. "Because I'm running for a public school board seat, not a charter school seat."

LeBron said the PAC money came from Aaron Gladd, state director of the Northeast Charter Schools Network and an unsuccessful candidate in 2018 for the 43rd State Senate District in the Albany area. She said she thought the money would come from Gladd's campaign account rather than the charter school PAC.

At the same time, she said she never had discussions with Rosenberger, Gladd or anyone else regarding her position on charter schools.

"I don't accept anybody's donations with any understanding that I have to do something for it," she said. "They've never asked me to do anything."

Regarding her general position on charter schools, LeBron said: "I think there are bad charter schools and they should be closed. I also think there are some that are doing good things. ... But as a board member, we don't have any say in charters."

Rosenberger said he appreciated that LeBron "is someone who is willing to rattle the cages and demand change." He did not tie that to direct political support for charter schools, though he noted the district has generally been a willing partner with local charter schools on the many areas — transportation, special education, enrollment, school nurses — where they work together.

"For the most part, when it comes to relationships with charter schools, RCSD is really the poster child for how it's supposed to work," Rosenberger said. "You hear horror stories in other cities about how the district is horrible to work with, and that is not the case here."

Four candidates — Andria Bryant, Howard Eagle, Clifford Florence and Anthony Hall — failed to meet the deadline.

Eagle said he, Bryant and Florence would submit their reports Tuesday, and that none had raised or spent more than \$500, the reporting threshold.

Hall said the person responsible for filing his report had a death in the family, but that it would be filed shortly.

He said he'd raised about \$1,600, including \$1,000 from the non-educational staff union BENTE, and had spent about \$600.

Bryant, Eagle, Florence and Judith Davis, who are running as a slate, were essentially inactive financially. Only Davis exceeded the \$500 reporting threshold, but she listed just \$2,000 from herself and \$142 carried over from her 2018 campaign. Her single listed expense was \$40 in bank fees.

The primary election is June 25, with four seats on the seven-person board up for grabs.

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Beatriz LeBron lashes out at critic and school board candidate Howard Eagle during the May 7 RCSD board meeting. RCSD