

## **‘Distinguished educator’ applied for RCSD position**

### **Eastwood**

Eastwood was passed over for superintendent job

### **Justin Murphy**

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Kenneth Eastwood, appointed Tuesday as “distinguished educator” for the Rochester City School District, applied in 2016 for the district’s superintendent job, which ultimately went to Barbara Deane-Williams.

That history — described off the record by four people in a position to know, and confirmed by state Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia — could complicate the relationship between Eastwood and the school board that

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**Kenneth Eastwood PROVIDED PHOTO**

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declined to hire him two years ago.

Elia, in a phone interview Wednesday, said she had not known about Eastwood’s job application before appointing him as distinguished educator and was “kind of surprised” when she found out.

The revelation does not change her confidence in Eastwood’s suitability for the position, though, she said.

Eastwood declined an interview but, through the state Education Department, confirmed he had applied but said he “withdrew his name from consideration of that position early in the process.”

The search that ultimately resulted in Deane-Williams' hiring was closed to the public. It later emerged that the board had been close to hiring Ithaca City School District Superintendent Luvelle Brown but could not agree on the terms of a contract.

Eastwood retired Jan. 31 as superintendent of the Middletown City School District in Orange County. He begins work in Rochester on April 25 and still must agree to a contract with the district. The district expects to spend about \$200,000 on his salary.

He had been planning to move to Rochester anyway for family reasons, something Elia said was a factor in his selection for the position.

More generally, Elia said there was no single tipping point in her decision to appoint a distinguished educator to Rochester, including the death of Trevyan Rowe.

"If you look at the work that has been done in Rochester to this point, they've been struggling to address issues related to instruction and student support and figuring out exactly what seems to be holding up student learning," she said. "Something is not happening in Rochester and we have to figure out what it is. ... This has gone on too long."

Rochester is just the third district to receive a distinguished educator since that designation was created in 2011. The first was Buffalo in 2012, before Elia became commissioner; the second was Hempstead in September 2017.

The model in Rochester and Hempstead is significantly different from what happened in Buffalo, she said, namely in having a person embedded in the district with a broader mandate and more direct communication with the state Education Department.

Buffalo's receiver, Judy Elliott, did not live in New York and generated significant travel expenses in flying there regularly.

Jim Sampson, the Buffalo school board president at the time, said Elliott was hamstrung by the very same internal discord she was supposed to help resolve.

"She came into a pretty hostile environment with a superintendent and board majority that didn't really want her there, and fundamentally she didn't have any direct power," he said. "If it's a hostile environment, making a change becomes kind of difficult."

Eastwood's appointment does not represent a vote of no confidence in Deane-Williams or anyone else, Elia said.

"This is not meant to be in any way a negative on the people of Rochester, but I'm telling you, we aren't doing what we need to do for the children of Rochester," she said. "They're at a crisis point and there's no question (we) needed to do something."

Deane-Williams and Board President Van White both said Tuesday that they had received barely any advance notice of Eastwood's appointment, and no input into the decision.

Elia acknowledged as much: "I did call ahead of time, (but) I did not call ahead of time and ask anyone if they wanted it. That is not the job of the commissioner of education of New York state."

Referring to the district's lowly performance on various state measures, she continued: "I'm not making these numbers up. They're in front of us. ... I would hope everyone would see this as an opportunity."

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