

## KEY RCSD HIRES MUST PLAY CATCH-UP ON CERTIFICATION

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The Rochester City School District until recently was hiring leaders who lack the certification required by state law.

The district still has key job vacancies it needs to fill, but its attempt to hire for those positions has been impeded by a simultaneous need to come into line with the certification mandate.

To address the issue, the district has adopted a policy that it will not put people in leadership positions without the proper certification.

People serving in district-level leadership positions are required to have School District Leadership certification. Until very recently, the district did not take that regulation very seriously, instead hiring people and then asking them to gain certification afterward.

Two school chiefs, Toyia Wilson and Elizabeth Mascitti-Miller, only recently received provisional certification as they fulfill the rest of the needed coursework.

Special education director Petrina Johnson, a former school principal, lacks district-level certification here or anywhere else. She was hired in July 2017 on the condition that she obtain that certification within one year.

Kisha Morgan, the new interim special education executive director, moved to Rochester last year from Georgia, where she has district-level certification, and now possesses a five-year temporary certification in New York until she takes the coursework needed to transfer credentials.

Karl Kristoff, RCSD's chief counsel, had a front-row seat when a very similar scandal in Buffalo Public Schools contributed to the resignation of its superintendent, Pamela Brown, in 2014. He was serving as a consultant to that district when two top administrators were dismissed for lacking district-level certification.

RCSD's prior practice of hiring district administrators before they gained certification was "not consistent with best practice," he said.

"The law's relatively clear," he said. "And as a board member once shared with me, the law isn't always right, but it is always the law."

The first person hired under the new policy is current School 34 principal Carmine Peluso, whose elevation to school chief is being delayed until July so he can gain his district-level certification in the meantime.

While certification is a state standard, directors of the administrative certification programs at two local teaching colleges said problems such as RCSD's are not necessarily cause for alarm.

"In my opinion (the difference between district-level and building-level certification) is not a big deal at all," said Andrea Cutt, director of the K-12 school leadership program at the University of Rochester's Warner School of Education. "If I were a superintendent of a school, though, it isn't something I'd take lightly, because it's a state requirement."

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**Karl Kristoff, RCSD chief counsel, talks to members of the press at a news conference where school district officials admitted fault in the Trevyan Rowe death. MAX SCHULTE/@MAXROCPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**