

# CSD board trying to reform

**DAVID RILEY**

STAFF WRITER

Van White openly admits that the Rochester Board of Education hasn't always done its job well.

"I can't fool anybody," said White, the board's president, in an interview Monday with the *Democrat and Chronicle* editorial board. "It would be ridiculous for me to say we've done a great job. The outcomes don't suggest that."

But White said the school board admits its past mistakes and is now seeking greater accountability from district leaders.

Board members now meet every Tuesday morning with school principals and ask for hard numbers to measure progress on student attendance, graduation rates and performance in English and math.

For the first time, the board also will evaluate the superintendent on concrete goals in many of the same areas, White said. This does not represent micromanaging, he said, but the board meeting its responsibilities for oversight.

"The degree to which the board is now focused on defining very specifically what accountability looks like, and how success in terms of outcomes will look like — we've never done that before," White said.

There is evidence that this approach is yielding results, he said — the district predicts that its dismal four-year graduation rate will tick upward this year, from 51 percent to 55 percent.

## **State takeover?**

White struck an optimistic tone about the challenges that the district faces.

Among them may be a new program for the state to take over underperforming schools included in a state budget deal reached Sunday between Gov. Andrew Cuomo and leaders of the state Legislature.

There are four city schools on the list.

White said he wasn't familiar with specifics of the state plan, but he wasn't concerned about it. He said he was confident the district can show progress that will prevent a state takeover.

"We are on a path to avoid that," he said.

## **Tension with Vargas**

White acknowledged a dispute between the school board and Superintendent Bolgen Vargas over Vargas' hiring and firing powers.

The board earlier this month modified parts of Vargas' job description and passed a resolution that could lead to removal of some employees in Vargas' top-tier, non-union Superintendent's Employment Group. In response, Vargas filed legal action against the board.

White said the board simply wanted to clarify which employees belong in the top-level administrators' group and that he was working hard to resolve the matter. He said the dispute has not hurt day-to-day district business and that he still talks to Vargas by phone or email about four times a week.

The difference of views is not personal, White said, but he acknowledged it isn't good for the community.

"It's not healthy," White said.

## **Leadership**

Why should parents trust a board whose president admits it fell short of its responsibilities in the past?

White said accepting one's shortcomings and evolving are signs of leadership.

"I think people get confidence from that — the ability to humbly accept where you're at and say this is where we need to be," he said.

[DRILEY@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:DRILEY@DemocratandChronicle.com) [Twitter.com/rilzd](https://twitter.com/rilzd)

**ENTERTAIN THIS!** YOUR DAILY DOSE OF OMG. [GET IT](#)  
POWERED BY USA TODAY LIFE



**Rochester Board of Education President Van White says the board is seeking greater accountability from school leaders.**

Powered by [TECNAVIA](#)

Copyright © 2015 Democrat and Chronicle 03/31/2015