

# Vargas asks state to weaken principal tenure

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Rochester School District Superintendent Bolgen Vargas Tuesday asked the state Legislature for drastic changes to the way school administrators earn and keep tenure, sinking him even lower in the eyes of already incensed city principals.

He asked for a change to state law that would make administrators wait seven years, not three, to gain tenure. Tenure would then be up for review every three years, based on performance. And he asked for people in management positions in the district's central office to be removed from union affiliation.

"I ask for the same authority to manage the district that most private and public sector CEOs have," he said, according to a transcript of his testimony provided by the district. "Inflexible rules and contractual constraints prevent the kind of evidence-based educational reform we need to improve outcomes for Rochester students."

Vargas has frequently complained about administrators cashing in weeks' worth of unused vacation time at significant expense to the district. He also has denied tenure to probationary supervisors at a higher rate than any of his predecessors.

The Association of Supervisors and Administrators of Rochester, which represents principals and others, voted no confidence in Vargas last January and has been working under a lapsed contract since July. ASAR President Sandy Jordan said tenure "is there to protect good employees, not to protect bad employees." She accused Vargas of failing to communicate with school leaders and said there have been no negotiation sessions over a new contract.

"If he wants to do something with a group of people, please, come and let's have a conversation," she said. "The (bargaining) unit wants to negotiate. And negotiating means giving and taking — it does not mean taking."

Gov. Andrew Cuomo is seeking support for a similar change in teacher tenure, extending the probationary period from three years to five years. Vargas also used his time in Albany to ask the Legislature for a \$36 million increase in funding from last year, largely to pay for East High School and district priorities like reading by third grade and extended learning time.

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