

UR, district submit East High proposal

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The University of Rochester and Rochester School District submitted their final proposal for governance of East High School Monday, just hours before the state deadline of July 1.

If it is approved by the New York State Education Department, as expected, the plan will put Rochester's largest university and employer in charge of the city's largest high school. Warner School of Education professor Steve Uebbing, the former superintendent of Canandaigua Central School District, would have ultimate responsibility.

At a press conference Monday, UR President Joel Seligman called the submission "the end of the beginning." UR will implement some aspects of its plan this September when students return, then submit a more detailed proposal for full implementation in the 2015-16 school year.

The state education department in March mandated a change at East, which for years has reflected both the city's large proportion of poor and im

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migrant children and its struggles to educate them properly.

The turnaround goal is ambitious: according to the plan provided to the district, UR expects to double the graduation rate to 84 percent within seven years.

Both sides of the partnership recounted Monday that the university turned down several requests for help from the district before finally agreeing to take East over.

The change of heart came after leaders at the Warner School had time to consider what their role might be and to take stock of the resources at East and in the community, Seligman said.

"Over time as we thought about the enormous consequences of the potential closure of East High School, we got to the point where we were comfortable proceeding," he said. "That took a while to gel."

According to the proposal, UR wants to split the students into three sub-schools: the Lower School, for grades 7-8 or possibly 6-8; a Freshman Academy; and the Upper House, for grades 10-12. At each level, students would be grouped into "student families" of 5-9, under the care of one dedicated adult staff member, administrator or volunteer.

School days would be lengthened, there would be a full-time counselor and social worker for each grade level and professional development would be strengthened.

UR hopes to have about 180 students at each grade level, with preference given to those living near the school. By comparison, according to the most recent state data, there were 267 seventh-graders, 461 ninth-graders and 253 12th-graders in 2011-12. All sides agreed Monday that the school will only succeed by building on its current strengths and recruiting help from the community. "Does anyone really think East High School will change just because the UR is coming in?" Uebbing asked. "The change will come from the teachers, staff and kids who are already there ... and the community supporting them."

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