

What a distinguished educator means for RCSD

Educator

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The New York State Education Department announced Tuesday that Kenneth Eastwood, the retired superintendent from Middletown, Orange County, will serve as “distinguished educator” in the Rochester City School District. Here are answers to some common questions about Eastwood and his role in Rochester.

What is a distinguished educator?

The state Board of Regents created the “distinguished educator” program in March 2011. The statutory purpose is to help “districts and schools that are experiencing extremely serious academic challenges and ensure the appointment of qualified individuals to assist low performing schools.” People qualifying as distinguished educators must meet a variety of experience and credential qualifications and should have some experi-

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ence in a district with similar demographics as the district to which they’re appointed.

Kenneth Eastwood, the Rochester distinguished educator, was a longtime superintendent in Oswego and Middletown and has a doctoral degree in education.

What will he do?

Eastwood’s first responsibility is to conduct an “intensive review of district and school systems, structures, operations and facilities,” and to develop a large-scale action plan. He will then work with administrators to put it into effect, and report back quarterly to the state on the progress.

In Buffalo, that action plan included nine areas of focus and dozens of specific deliverables. The distinguished educator there, Judy Elliott, was very candid in her reports back to the state regarding the district’s cooperation.

How much will he be paid, and who pays it?

The 2018-19 RCSD budget proposal contains about \$200,000 for Eastwood’s salary and expenses, Chief Financial Officer Everton Sewell said. The two parties have to come to an agreement before Eastwood begins work April 25.

State regulations require the district to pay “consulting fees and reasonable and necessary expenses.” A salary at that level would make Eastwood the fourth-highest paid person in the district, behind School 33 Principal Larry Ellison, Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams and East High Superintendent Shaun Nelms.

How was he chosen?

According to state regulations, there is supposed to be a pool of prequalified candidates to serve as distinguished educators throughout the state, and the names in that pool are supposed to be posted on the state Education Department website. There is no list on the website. The regulations say that no one can be appointed to the job without first having their name in the pool.

Eastwood retired from the Middletown City School District Jan. 31 and said then he intended to move to Rochester to be closer to his family. That availability certainly played a role in his choice.

It is a somewhat similar situation with state-approved receivers. There are only two in the entire state who are preapproved for that more expansive role.

Is this the first step to a state takeover of the district?

Both a distinguished educator and receivership are state-sponsored doghouses for underperforming districts and schools, but a distinguished educator is a bit more commodious. A distinguished educator is essentially a consultant who works with the existing district hierarchy and reports back to the state. Eastwood has no direct authority on spending or personnel decisions; technically he will be a non-voting member of the school board. An independent receiver is more like a new superintendent, but with greater decision-making power. That is more like what the University of Rochester is doing at East High School. Getting a distinguished educator is not a step toward receivership or a state takeover of city schools. If anything, it is intended as a step back from that more drastic intervention, especially since Eastwood will be in Rochester for anywhere from one to three years, based on Buffalo's experience.

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