

RCS D and unions downplay threat of teacher strike Friday

Leaders do not expect widespread involvement

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School district and union leaders in Rochester said this week they are doubtful a proposed wildcat strike will come to pass Friday, despite planning by a newly established educator caucus.

The Rochester Organization of Rank and File Educators, an unofficial activist group spanning three of the district's bargaining units, announced Feb. 20 it was seeking a one-day strike on March 6 — a half-day for students — to protest layoffs and demand that the district and Rochester Teachers Association push harder for more state funding.

Group leaders hoped 75% of employees — more than 4,000, given the combined membership of the three bargaining units — would stay home. They have been circulating petitions in buildings protesting past and future layoffs, but denied passing around “strike sign-up sheets.”

Claire Labrosa, a RORE organizer, said Tuesday the group would not comment in advance of Friday's planned action.

The district, meanwhile,

said it had “conducted a threat assessment and determined there is no viable threat for a coordinated strike.”

In a memo to principals Monday, it said: “Any request for personal days on March 6, received after February 20, should only be honored if the requestor presents extraordinary circumstances for the request and the timing.” Requests for sick days would need to be accompanied by a doctor's note.

Rochester Teachers Association President Adam Urbanski said Tuesday he expected no more than five or six people would be absent Friday because of the strike. Similarly, Dan DiClemente, president of the non-educators union BENTE, said he was not aware of any of his members who were involved.

“This idea is ill-conceived,” DiClemente wrote in a letter to members. “We will fight against further eroding a workforce that is already stretched thin. We simply disagree that this is the way to go about it.”

Both unions, along with the Rochester Association of Paraprofessionals and the district, reminded members that they stand to lose two days' pay for one day's absence.

When asked directly about the possible strike last week, Superintendent Terry Dade said he preferred to “leave it to union leadership and our teachers to come up with a plan,” and did not criticize the activist teachers directly.

eye, I know they have the best interests of our students in mind,” he said. “I know those same educators are not going to do anything that's going to be detrimental to our students in the long run.”

School board member Natalie Sheppard went further, praising “RORE members who are willing to put the needs of RCS D students above their livelihoods.”

RORE is modeled after social justice-oriented teacher caucuses in other major cities. It points to funding inequity as the primary driver of the district's current budget crisis and also calls for more anti-racism work in schools.

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