

Terry Dade, still RCSD superintendent, is absent

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Shortly after Terry Dade's new employer, the Cornwall Central School District in Orange County, publicly announced his hiring, Dade wrote a short letter to his soon-to-be-former employer, the Rochester City School District.

"I remain committed to supporting (the board) and the entire district as we work collaboratively to adopt a balanced budget," he wrote. "I will continue to provide the leadership and planning necessary to support our students and families through this challenging pandemic."

Instead, as the district fights to the end of perhaps its most challenging budget season in history, Dade has been absent.

Seven district sources said that Dade, who remains superintendent through the end of the school year, has not attended top-level leadership meetings or returned their phone calls since his surprise resignation Thursday night. He also has not been seen in district headquarters on West Broad Street, where he previously had been working despite quarantine measures. The six people spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid retribution.

The breach is being filled by his small circle of trusted advisers: Chief of Staff Annmarie Lehner, Deputy Superintendent Lynda Quick and Chief Financial Officer Robert Franklin. They and others have been working feverishly to revise the budget proposal to present to the school board Tuesday night.

RCSD spokesman Carlos Garcia declined to comment on Dade's presence or lack thereof.

In a text sent Monday afternoon after this story was published, Dade denied he had stopped working. He said he had started work early Monday and had attending Zoom conference meetings with senior cabinet members as well as the New York State Education Department.

the day before resigning, Dade bristled at it being called "his" budget — has deep cuts for special education and social workers, along with closing four schools permanently and another temporarily.

School board members pushed back against elements of it, even as they acknowledged the impossible dilemma of finding more than \$80 million in cuts. But, School Board President Van White said, Dade never told them he felt he and the board were at an impasse, nor that he was terminally unhappy in his job.

"He's never talked to the board about his reasons for leaving or the fact that he felt like he had to leave," White said.

Tuesday's budget meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m. and will be shown at www.rcsdk12.org/youtube.

White protested Dade's assertion that the board has been defiant. He noted that it approved his most controversial measure, laying off teachers in the middle of the school year, despite furious community opposition.

White wouldn't say what Tuesday's budget presentation will hold — how closely it would hew to Dade's vision, or where else it might cut to make restorations the board demanded.

Dade's annual salary is \$250,000, meaning he will earn about \$46,000 from his resignation last week until June 30, if he remains formally employed for that long.

He did not respond to a message left on his personal cell phone.

Contact staff writer Justin Murphy at jmurphy7@gannett.com.



Among the meetings Dade missed locally was a joint conference between the school board and City Council Friday to discuss the budget. The current district spending proposal — in a round of interviews