



Coalition forms to improve city schools

By: [Velvet Spicer](#) March 4, 2019

Roc the Future, an alliance of more than 60 leading Rochester institutions, on Monday launched a new initiative to transform the Rochester City School District.

Our Children, Our Future is a community partnership committed to working with the state's Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and the Board of Regents to develop a process of engagement designed to improve the school district.

"We understand that the voices of children and families, community, civic, business and nonprofit leaders must be represented and engaged at all essential decision-making tables," said Roc the Future Director Jackie Campbell. "Roc the Future steps forward to actively assure that these voices are represented during the months ahead."

In a letter to Elia and the Board of Regents, Roc the Future addressed the Distinguished Educator's Report that was handed down last fall suggesting that, among other things, RCSd improve relationships among all stakeholders by establishing a community engagement team to review pertinent data, including chronic absenteeism rates, and develop an action plan to address any areas that need improvement.

"The Distinguished Educator's Report describes and focuses the attention of essential stakeholders and decision-makers on the irrefutable breakdown of public education in Rochester," the letter states. "The system is broken and must be replaced. Its cumulative failures have evolved over decades. They are systemic failures; certainly not failures of our children, nor of any one leader, teacher or board. They are failures that combine to perpetuate inequality based on race and income in our city and region. Systemic and transformational change is needed now, and into the future. The Distinguished Educator's Report and your call to action compel us all to reflect upon how we can best serve the children entrusted to our care, and to take action on their behalf."

Roc the Future Chairman Ajamu Kitwana on Monday said the conveners and institutional partners recognize that their success is tied to the success of the community's children.

"We are asking for the commissioner's help to end the decades-long treadmill of finger pointing, revolving door leadership and consistent, unacceptable outcomes for our children," Kitwana said. "We need a chance to stop the cycle and take the time to work with our school district, teachers and administrators, parents and students to co-create a solution, then share accountability for excellent results."

A petition asking the community to join Our Children, Our Future in support of a new governance structure that can “transform Rochester’s schools” is available at Roc the Future’s [website](#).

“Quality education is fundamental to our children’s success—and right now, we are failing them,” said U.S. Rep. Joseph Morelle, D-Rochester, who took part in Monday’s event. “We need bold action to address the crisis in our city schools. We can only accomplish this by working together as a community, and that is why I am so proud to partner with ROC the Future, Mayor (Lovely) Warren and leaders throughout Rochester to strengthen our schools and put our students on the path to success.”

Warren said Roc the Future is best positioned to help the community quickly determine how to transform the city schools.

“Our children are not just our future, they are our right now,” Warren said. “We can’t afford to wait. We can’t lose another generation of our children to a broken system.”

Separately, on Friday, state Sen. Robert Jackson, D-Manhattan, joined RCSD officials and parents for a fact-finding tour of Rochester schools, part of a statewide tour that aims to document student needs and school funding inequities in preparation for the state budget.

The tour is a collaboration between Jackson and the Alliance for Quality Education. Currently, the state owes RCSD \$97 million, or \$2,900 per student. The Board of Regents and the Alliance for Quality Education have called for a \$1.66 billion increase in Foundation Aid this year, and a three year phase-in of the \$4.1 billion in Foundation Aid owed under current state law, which is targeted to high-need school districts like Rochester, officials said.

The Foundation Aid formula was designed to ensure that all schools statewide have the resources needed to ensure every student receives the “sound, basic education” that New York’s constitution guarantees. Gov. Andrew Cuomo is proposing a \$338 million increase in Foundation Aid and opposes a full phase-in of the funding.

“Through these visits to schools across our state, I am finding in each instance that the paltry \$338 million in Foundation Aid that Gov. Cuomo’s budget offers is truly an insult to our children,” Jackson said in a statement Friday. “These districts are not getting the resources they need from the state. My colleagues in the Senate and I will continue fighting until our schools statewide are given the \$4.1 billion they are owed to ensure a quality education for all New York children.”

Alliance for Quality Education Legislative Director Jasmine Gripper said districts like Rochester “are exactly why New York State needs to renew its commitment to funding the Foundation Aid formula.”

“High-need communities are dependent on state aid to meet the educational needs of students,” she said. “When state aid falls short, these students are the ones who suffer most. Every year the Foundation Aid goes unfunded is another year of systemic educational neglect. We have to break this harmful cycle by enacting a state budget that fully funds our schools.”

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