

# Rochester area business leaders are behind schools chief Brizard

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Last Thursday, Rochester teachers made a highly publicized “no confidence” vote in Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard. Just three days earlier, the state Board of Regents reported that only 5 percent of Rochester students who entered high school in 2005 graduated ready for college or a career. Less than half received a diploma at all.

What more evidence do we need that city schools must make major changes if we want a better future for Rochester’s children?

Yet it is because he is proposing change that Brizard is being attacked by the teachers’ union. He has proposed a detailed, five-year strategic plan centered on improving student outcomes. Treating “every child as a work of art,” the superintendent’s plan would improve results by holding school leaders accountable; rewarding teachers based on performance; modernizing school facilities; and preparing students to succeed in college or a career of choice. The proposed reforms are based on models that have worked in other cities.

I have been responsible for implementing successful changes in the educational setting in a leadership role as the former president of two universities, and in consulting roles to K-12 systems in four urban districts. The reforms that Brizard is proposing are consistent with the recommendations of the 2004 Blue Ribbon Task Force on improving Rochester schools, which I was proud to chair.

My experiences have taught me how difficult it is to implement educational reform. But as a citizen who loves Rochester, I also believe that it is essential, a moral obligation that our community owes to its children. As a lifelong educator, I believe that the changes Brizard is proposing will give our city’s students a better chance of success.

A “no confidence” vote says more about union leaders than the superintendent. They argue that his leadership style isn’t inclusive enough, and his proposed reforms can’t work. But instead of proposing meaningful alternatives to improve student outcomes, the union is simply

fighting to protect the status quo.

That's unfortunate because the overwhelming majority of Rochester teachers are highly trained, hardworking and professional. They will benefit from a system that encourages innovation, demands accountability and rewards excellence as Superintendent Brizard is proposing. Instead of public demonstrations and "no confidence" votes, we need constructive suggestions to improve the education of Rochester students and work with the superintendent to make the changes happen.

*Simone, former president of Rochester Institute of Technology, wrote this piece on behalf of the Rochester Business Alliance.*