

New coalition backs mayoral control

Nestor Ramos • Staff writer • June 11, 2010

A new group of parents, union leaders, public officials and others announced its support Thursday of a measure that would give administrative control of the Rochester School District to the mayor.

At a press conference outside School 33 on Webster Avenue, founding members of Rochester Kids First Coalition — 18 in all — affirmed support for a bill introduced this week in the state Legislature.

The announcement came just hours after the Conference of Big 5 School Districts released a statement denouncing the legislation.

Many of those involved in Thursday's announcement had already expressed support of a change in governance that would eliminate the city's elected school board.

Now, as Mayor Robert Duffy's candidacy for lieutenant governor calls his future as mayor into question, members said the proposal isn't dependent on Duffy.

"It never was about Duffy," retired City Council President Lois Giess said of the proposal that began when the mayor announced his intentions in December.

Bill Destler, president of Rochester Institute of Technology, spoke in favor of the change. He announced that the RIT initiative to offer free tuition to any City School District student who takes a "college ready" course load had added only 12 students to the number attending the college this fall, from 27 to 39.

"That number seems to me to be an indictment of the status quo," Destler said.

And while several labor unions have opposed mayoral control of schools, Robert Brown, business manager of Laborers International Union, Local 35, spoke in favor of the proposal.

"I believe we are 20 years behind the times," said Brown, who recently had a new high school named for him by the school board — the Robert Brown High School for Construction and Design.

Other members of the coalition include school board members Cynthia Elliott and Allen Williams, Rochester Business Alliance President Sandy Parker, three city councilors and the Rev. Marlowe Washington of Baber A.M.E. Church.

Just hours before, the coalition of the state's five largest school districts released a statement opposing the change, even though New York City, one of the group's members, is a mayoral control district.

The statement called the legislation "ill advised," adding that "there is no evidence to suggest that transferring authority for the school district to the city would enhance student performance or improve accountability."

But Franklin Montessori School parent Joshua Bauroth urged others to join the new Kids First Coalition. "We're tired of studies and reports," Bauroth said. "We're looking for a change."

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