

# Rochester Business Alliance urging city school voters to polls

The posters all carry a dramatic message, illustrated by pictures of minority children and adults with duct tape covering their mouths.

"The system is failing me," one reads.

"I want to believe in our schools," states another.

"I can't do this alone."

The posters, urging voters to let their voices be heard during this year's school board election, are part of a campaign the Rochester Business Alliance plans to kick off today in an effort to get people to the polls in November.

Dixon Schwabl Managing Partner Howie Jacobson said the pictures from the forthcoming campaign are part of RBA's effort, which will also include billboards, radio and television spots and a voter registration drive at the Public Market.

Jacobson said RBA will announce the campaign at a press conference at 10 a.m. today.

RBA spokeswoman Ellen Rosen said the

group would not discuss the effort before today's news conference.

A notice the alliance sent out Tuesday said that a representative from Rochester Faith Ministries and Deputy Mayor Leonard Redon will also be speaking.

Four of the seven school board seats are up for grabs this year, with three incumbents coming out on top in last week's Democratic primary.

While the primary has historically decided school board races, Jacobson said RBA wants to shift the emphasis to the November election.

"The issue is trying to get away from how this has been historically," he said. "People need to vote on voting day. That is really when things are determined."

Many other races will be decided in November — including seats on the City Council and the County Legislature — but the campaign RBA is involved with targets

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the school board, Jacobson said.

"It gives a **focus**," he said.

RBA leaders have been critical of the school board in recent years, helping push for mayoral control of the district and questioning the board's leadership after the departure of former superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard. At that time, RBA President Sandy Parker suggested the group might try to influence change during election season.

"It's going to take the community to make some change," Parker said at the time. "I would hope that conversation will happen as we go into the fall election. "

School board President Malik Evans, who received the most votes in the Democratic primary, said that while he supported any effort to get people to vote, said he wondered about the motivation and timing. He also criticized the campaign's images.

"I'm just not big on black kids being thrown up on billboards with duct tape over their mouths," Evans said. "It's offensive to me. It sends the wrong message."

"I don't know what it's all about," he said.

"It's interesting to say the least. I think it will be judged on whether it sustains itself. The key test will be whether they do it in 2012 and 2013."

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